Book Review

Boud, D., Ajjawi, R., Dawson, P. & Tai, J. (eds.) (2018) *Developing Evaluative Judgement in Higher Education: Assessment for Knowing and Producing Quality Work.* Routledge.

Stephen Merry

Visiting Research Fellow, Staffordshire University

Corresponding author: s.merry@staffs.ac.uk

Anyone who has been shopping knows that evaluative judgments are not always easy. Yes, the process is straightforward when you know exactly what you want, but how do you judge the quality of unfamiliar products? For example, without being an IT expert, how do you know if it is worthwhile to buy the latest PC? Of course, you could talk to an IT expert, but would you really understand their jargon?

This book has two overarching messages. Firstly, that students' ability to make evaluative judgements is an essential prerequisite for the development of the self-regulated 'lifelong' learning required within their subsequent post-graduation professions. In other words, without the ability to judge their own learning a student will always be chronically dependent on the guidance of others. The second message is that enabling students to make evaluative judgements is not a simple task; the tutor's role is analogous to that of the IT expert described above. There is no point in the tutor simply providing ever more detailed learning outcomes, assignment guidelines and assessment criteria because appreciating academic quality requires making complex holistic judgements that are difficult to articulate fully. Just as the value of the latest PC only becomes apparent to the novice through trial and error during

use, students will only develop their appreciation of academic quality if they are given the opportunity to trial and discuss assignments alongside the tutor's various guidelines and criteria. Put simply, learning to make evaluative judgements is a social constructive process that requires time and attention.

This book is divided into four sections: conceptualising evaluative judgement; theoretical perspectives on evaluative judgement; developing evaluative judgement; and evaluative judgement in practice. There are 19 chapters written by a total of 36 academics based mostly in Australia. It is also worth noting that the international reputation of the first editor, David Boud, will ensure that the book will have a wide readership amongst educational researchers.

In the first section, Chapter 1 defines "evaluative judgement" as the "capability to make judgements about the quality of work of self and others" (p. 1), and this, together with the subtitle of the book, makes it clear that the text is primarily an investigation of the type of learning that occurs through peer and self-assessment. That being said, other approaches are also considered such as the use of exemplars and student-derived assessment criteria. Later chapters in this initial section explore, firstly, the use of digital technology to expose students to a wide variety of assignment exemplars that differ in both quality and approach, and, secondly, the need for a flexible approach concerning professional evaluative judgement because quality is both time- and context-dependent.

Section 2 of the book considers how evaluative judgement is perceived from a variety of perspectives. Notably, the tension is highlighted between the need for flexibility in making evaluative judgements and the universality of higher education quality standards; this is an important reason for the inherent ambiguity typically found within higher education assessment criteria.

Additionally, the point is made that individual evaluative judgement within complex environments is the basis for creativity; a graduate attribute which may not be recognised within a rigidly designed syllabus. A related point is that evaluative judgements involve both intuitive and analytical processes, and it is the accuracy of their, often unarticulated, intuitive processes that distinguishes experts from novices. For this reason, novice students should be encouraged to adopt more analytical approaches to making evaluative judgements, and to use these judgements to question their intuitive processes. In this section the role of digital environments in supporting students' evaluative judgements in real time is also explored.

Section 3 of the book considers a variety of different approaches for developing students' capacity to make accurate evaluative judgements. The chapters typically consist of some theoretical background followed by case studies. While the theoretical backgrounds sometimes overlap, the chapters concern diverse topics including peer and self-assessment, scaffolding to reduce cognitive load, tasks within digital environments, and the use of exemplars. Notably, dialogic feedback, reflection and reflexive action form key aspects of all these teaching approaches and important observations were that sometimes students' focus on awarded marks or on structural aspects of assignments distracts them from engaging in more holistic judgements of their learning; a situation that requires tutor intervention. A further point made is that the multiple nested iterations required for the development of evaluative judgement mean that fostering the capability cannot be confined to a single course unit; it needs to be spread in a coordinated way throughout whole programmes of study and co-ordinated using institutional-scale data management systems.

The final section of the book considers the pedagogy of evaluative judgements. Peer feedback discussions concerning a piece of work or task

feature prominently within this section with, in Chapter 15, the *critique* within arts and design disciplines particularly praised for allowing students to engage in peer assessment where they also learn the standards and accepted norms of their discipline. Here, students are taking part in an *authentic* assessment which contributes to the development of their professional identities. Later chapters illustrate that peer feedback discussions can take place in both formal and informal settings suggesting that at least some of students' evaluative judgement development may be unrecognised. More broadly, consideration is also given to facilitating evaluative judgements in the workplace as a key component of vocational education and subsequent professional development. It is also stressed that peer feedback discussions should a) occur from the beginning of courses to develop good learning habits when students' learning curves are steepest, b) consider both positive and negative aspects of tasks and c) make reference to students' formal or informal self-assessment to enable the reification of quality standards. A final important point was that we should not assume that students' recognition of quality automatically enables them to produce high-quality work; students need to be active learners if their own work is to benefit from an expertise in making evaluative judgements.

Overall, this book is a welcome and useful addition to the higher education literature; the authors' thoughts are clearly expressed and the emphasis is well placed on co-ordinated curriculum-wide reform to develop students' evaluative judgement capabilities. While the topic of evaluative judgement is not new and some of the ideas will be familiar to readers, the focus of this book on learning rather than on pedagogy is refreshing. It is not another 'how to teach' book, rather a source of ideas that academics, managers and educational researchers can develop and test as part of their ongoing practice. Despite the predominantly Australian authorship, the ideas have worldwide applicability.

Finally, you might wish to know that this review was written using a twelve year old word processing programme. My PC may not be state of the art, but it is much used and I understand its qualities.