

# *A Personal Account on Developing Evaluative Judgement and a Reflection on Why it Can Be Used to Challenge the Deficit Model*

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*This paper offers a student perspective on the self-efficacy that is associated with the development of evaluative judgement, observed through the course of a foundation year programme. This reflective account focuses in particular on the way feedback was received at different points in the programme, and how guided thinking has had a significant positive impact on the learning process.*

## **Introduction**

This paper will consider my personal experience of developing evaluative judgement and how it has had an impact on my reception of, and reaction to, feedback on assessments. I will be looking at some of the practicalities of how this skill set was actually developed and I will also discuss how this relates to the wider literature. The aim of the paper is to portray evaluative judgement, and the self-orientated learning that it promotes, and to consider how it enables students to challenge the assumption that the deficit model (implicitly or explicitly) is the way to think about student needs within Higher Education.

Evaluative judgement is defined as ‘the capability to make decisions about the quality of work of self and others’ (Tai, 2018, 471). A student who has developed effective evaluative judgement is able to work independently of explicit external direction from teachers or tutors whilst still taking into account all of the relevant information and feedback available to them. This is in direct contrast to a student defined by the deficit model as lacking in skills, proficiencies, knowledge, and/or cultural capital. According to Tai (2018, 469), it is the ultimate goal of Higher Education to develop students with the skills required for evaluative judgement.

In terms of the practicalities of enabling students to develop evaluative judgement, these skills take time. The reason I was able to invest in this development was because I had the benefit of participating in a foundation year which created the perfect environment for growth. As I came to the end of that year, I noticed that I was responding to the feedback from my tutors very differently from how I had been at the start of the year. The main indication of this was the fact that at the end of the year I reread a piece of feedback I’d received at the start and it read totally differently.

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## Personal Account

When I initially read the first piece of feedback of the year, I found it impossible to access. I was unable to gain information or benefit from it. I was trying to read it so as to get instructions on what to do to improve, instructions on the skills that I was deficient in, but there were none to be found. What I failed to understand was that the feedback was not meant to be offering me instructions; it was offering me information that, had I the skills, I could have used to improve my writing far beyond what mere instructions would have offered. This was because the feedback informed me of the *idea* of the work, and the context in which that idea needed to exist.

### ***Evaluative Judgement Components***

Context is the first 'evaluative judgement component' determined by Pandero, et al. (2018, 5, 6), and it 'refers to the adequacy of the performance relative to what is required'. This is essentially how good the work is, compared to how good it is meant to be. When I started the year the contexts of the assignments I had in my head were very different from the actual context. This meant that whilst knowing the work would not get full marks, I was unable to see how and where to bring about improvement. This determined how I then responded to the feedback on that piece of work and meant that I was unable to identify the contextual indicators that were telling me why the work was the way it was. By the end of the year, however, I was able to relate to these cues much more easily.

In the modules over the year, we were presented with sets of checklists for each task which, at first, seemed like to-do lists to make sure we completed the work set. Over time, however, these helped us to understand the importance of cues and how they help us to create an idea of the bigger picture of the work and what needs to be done to produce a piece of the required quality. This helped us understand the role of such checklists in self-regulated assessment. Over the year, these lists became a way of performing quality control on my work without having to submit my work and receive feedback, something that I was unable to do at the start of the year. This understanding of 'quality and standards', the second component determined by Pandero et al., allowed me to begin to extract more meaning from feedback, and to be able to extract information and apply it to the specific part of my work, something that merely understanding the context had not allowed me to do.

My understanding of these checklists and the required standards became, in time, what can only be described as internalised assessment criteria. At no point did I ever attempt to learn any criteria, but it was through this concept of continuous cue learning that these 'maps' or schema formed in my mind. This, I think, is at the heart of how I have learned to respond to feedback. They allowed me to start to develop an understanding of what the work should be, which in turn allowed me to develop an understanding of what the work is. This idea of internalised criteria has also been described in detail and is referred to as a mental schema by Pandero et al. (2018, 5) who suggest that 'evaluative judgement requires the student to be able to reflect about a performance and, based on their mental schema, make a judgement about the quality'.

It is crucial, though, that these criteria are internalised, and not simply memorised due to a deficit of knowledge, because as Rolison et al. (2016, 192) found in their work on positive and negative cue learning (positive cues being those which make an outcome seem more likely and negative cues being those which make an outcome seem less likely), 'positive cue learning taxes working memory resources less heavily than negative cue learning'. If we then apply these positive and negative cues to evaluative judgement in Higher Education, then positive cues

would be those that a student could use to evaluate how to improve the standard of their work. If this holds, then it follows that attempting to get a better grade taxes working memory less than trying to remember how to avoid things that lead to lower grades and then attempting not to make those mistakes.

### ***Using Evaluative Judgement***

This description mirrors my own experience. On initial reading of my first piece of feedback, the only way I was able to utilise it, as with many other pieces of feedback over the year, was to try to avoid these mistakes by assuming there was a skill I did not have and trying to learn it. However, by the end of the year after the development of my independent learning skill set, I was instead able to see in the feedback advice guiding my thinking on how to move forward and progress more generally. This was often by making small thought process or attitude changes rather than learning skills or knowledge that I lacked. It was at the point during the year where I began to notice these changes and began to implement them that my grades started to improve. Not only did I notice a difference at the end of the year in comparison to the start, but I also picked up on changes during the year.

The changes during the year manifested themselves much more subtly and I would not necessarily have been able to explain what was happening at any given point. But what I did notice was that feedback was becoming more and more accessible to me and I was more able to apply it retrospectively, as well as beginning to be able to apply it referentially. It even got to the point where I was able to think critically about whether I needed to take questions to my tutors in reference to my feedback, and if so, to be able to go with specific questions about certain aspects rather than vague blanket queries. These changes came from having had the opportunity to 'construct actively an understanding of them [feedback messages] before they can be used to regulate performance' (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2007, 201).

As well as encouraging self-efficacy, I have found that there are considerations that may apply to the development of evaluative judgement such as mental health and mental wellbeing, with the issues surrounding these things coming more and more to the fore at universities across the country. If you are constantly thinking about the mistakes you are making, or skills you do not have, even in terms of avoiding or improving them respectively, your entire mindset and way of thinking becomes negatively orientated. But by using evaluative judgement, I found that I was able to positively orientate the way I thought by being encouraged to use techniques such as positive cue learning. This helped me to motivate myself and engage to a much higher level and I think that these ideas would translate very effectively to students in general.

## **Conclusion**

My foundation year allowed me to expand my own self-efficacy through the development of evaluative judgement by creating internalised self-assessment criteria. This led to a deeper understanding of the feedback I was receiving and instead of 'mistakes' seeming negative, they could be viewed as positive opportunities for development.

Many of the patterns I found within my own journey into developing evaluative judgement became evident through guided thinking, and when I began reading more of the literature I noticed that my journey was not unique. What my tutors and I saw in my progress was the norm when people are exposed to these types of guided self-orientated learning techniques, the benefits of which are many and multi-faceted. Having the opportunity to develop these skills is not only leading to real and lasting improvements in my results, it has also

given me a higher appreciation of the intellectual journey I am on. It has enabled me to challenge my assumption that I was somehow 'deficient' and this has freed me to take my learning to new and higher places.

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