Strategies for nurturing evaluative judgement by design students

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Developing students’ evaluative judgement – the capability to make decisions about quality in their own work and that of others – is increasingly recognized as a key skill; this applies both to their time at university and in an increasingly complex and evolving employment landscape, in which creative initiative and adaptability are significant attributes (1). This paper presents two strategies for nourishing such judgement which are particularly relevant to design programmes. In debating the pros and cons of each, the strategies are used as a means through which to discuss and contextualize a number of wider pedagogic implications.

The first is peer review, where students become critics in lieu of their tutors. Discussion focuses on the value, strengths and weaknesses as identified by Architecture students involved as reviewers and reviewees in a primary research project. This provides understanding of what students take from peer review, in relation to feedback and developing their critical thinking, and demonstrates that conducting evaluative judgements of the work of others deepens the same process in their subsequent own work. The second strategy is presenting exemplar work to students, such as examples of
previous submissions or analogous work, as a medium through which to discuss standards and dimensions of quality. Issues discussed here include nurturing deep as opposed to superficial engagement, and the challenge of student-tutor power dynamics in the consideration of quality and the articulation of judgements about it.

Challenges and methods for appraising students’ evaluative judgement using these strategies are also discussed. It is argued that nurturing evaluative judgement should be an explicit learning objective in higher education, and that students should have repeated opportunities to be active participants in the formulation of such critical judgements.


• Author Biography:

Dr Smith is Reader in Creative Pedagogies at Liverpool John Moores University’s School of Art and Design. His research interests focus on learning and teaching within creative programmes, and in particular on assessment and feedback, and the student experience. He has published his work on numerous pedagogic research projects, including: formative feedback methods in creative programmes, student-directed learning, problem-based learning in creative curricula, students’ critique of the design crit, and student retention and the early student experience.

In the Architecture programme at LJMU he teaches design across the undergraduate and postgraduate courses, and he has played a crucial role in the design and development of new programmes in the School. Dr Smith has presented his pedagogic research at numerous national and international education conferences, and he contributes to evolving the learning, teaching and assessment experience at School, Faculty and University levels. In 2014 he achieved recognition as a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, and in 2016 he was presented with an Individual Teaching Award, acknowledging his outstanding, transformative and inspiration impact the education of students at LJMU.