

Evaluative judgement as situated practice: a Practice Architectures perspective

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Assessment-for-learning researchers have argued that formative assessment should not be limited to improving students' performance within individual study units, but it should contribute to lifelong learning, and have identified evaluative judgement — or being able to make decisions about the quality of someone's work — as a crucial capability for becoming more independent or self-regulated learners. Researchers have also provided important understandings of what kind of pedagogical strategies can support students' development of evaluative judgment, including the dialogical perspectives on rubrics, exemplars, and feedback as a process rather than discrete acts of delivering information. However, most of this research has come from a cognitively focused perspective, and thus, a growing number of researchers have highlighted the potential of practice and sociomaterial theories for understanding evaluative judgement as it takes place in situated contexts.

This study adopted a practice theory perspective, specifically the Theory of Practice Architectures, to explore how evaluative judgement takes place and develops through students' practices – what they do, say, and how they relate to one another. This theory allows examining how practices are shaped by local discursive, material, and socio-political contexts. The empirical approach was informed by ethnographic research methods and focused on observations of student activities throughout their course and complemented by interviews.

This presentation draws on examples from a group study session and a range of laboratory-related activities to illustrate how students' evaluative judgements are enmeshed in situated contexts. These findings contribute to framing evaluative judgement as a complex phenomenon, shaped by students' social (peers, tutors, and others) and material (tools, resources, and sources of information) contexts, as well as by their previous practices (encounters with people, artefacts, and disciplinary knowledge).

The main implication of this study is that reimagining educational strategies that support students' evaluative judgement requires considering not only specific formative assessment approaches, but also the discursive, material, and socio-political contexts in which students navigate, and how students' practices may exceed the limits of intentional task design. More broadly, in a context of increasing virtualisation, reimagining education needs to consider how student practices are affected by changes in the sociomaterial context they inhabit: what affordances and limitations arise, and what needs to be compensated to support students' engagement in meaningful learning practices?