



A Note on the Use of Peer Learning to Support the Development of Professional Judgment During Work-Based Learning

JOSEFIN BRODIN

SANDRA EINARSSON 

**Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article*

RESEARCH NOTE

VIRGINIA TECH.
PUBLISHING

ABSTRACT

There are guidelines and laws to regulate many of the daily decisions professionals take at work. However, some situations do not have an obvious solution and cannot be solved with the help of an instruction manual. Work-based learning offers an important opportunity for students to engage in a setting of relevance for their future profession and there be exposed to various situations. This learning environment has great potential to aid the development of professional judgment but could also be an obstruction if supervisors and students are not given the right tools and instructions. The authors of this research note are course managers in work-based learning for a healthcare education program in a Swedish higher education institution, and here we seek to address some important considerations when using peer learning to facilitate and support the development of professional judgment during work-based learning.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Josefin Brodin

Department of Food, Nutrition
and Culinary Science, Umeå
University, SE

josefin.brodin@umu.se

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Brodin, J., & Einarsson, S.
(2025). A Note on the Use of
Peer Learning to Support the
Development of Professional
Judgment During Work-Based
Learning. *Journal of Peer
Learning*, 16(1): 3, 1–4. [https://
doi.org/10.21061/jopl.119](https://doi.org/10.21061/jopl.119)

Work-based learning (WBL) in higher education includes supervision within a setting of relevance for students' future professions. During WBL, students engage in a context regulated by guidelines, recommendations, and laws, yet they also face situations where such regulating documents do not give them all the answers (Coles, 2002). Hence, students need to develop a capacity for professional judgment so they are able to act in occupational situations relying on their own judgment and not on regulating documents and theoretical knowledge alone (Bornemark, 2017). When seen through the lens of how knowledge was described by Aristotle (Saugstad, 2002), focus should not be put on *episteme* (scientific knowledge) alone without acknowledging the importance of *phronesis* (practical wisdom). In fact, practical wisdom and knowing how to act in a given situation is what defines professional judgment (Bornemark, 2020). Students should, in addition to their WBL, frequently be given opportunities to consciously train their professional judgment during their education. To some extent, this training can be done during lectures by using ethical dilemmas, cases, or role play. However, the importance of WBL cannot be ignored as it gives students the opportunity to face different situations in a real setting. It is through real experiences that students form a basis for their professional judgment (Coles, 2002).

During WBL, the learning process is built around the concept of scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976). One model for supervision during WBL is the 1:1 model with one student and one supervisor. During peer learning (PL), students support each other in the learning process (Topping, 2005). When PL is used in WBL, a 2:1 model can be applied, involving two students at the same academic level and one supervisor (Currens, 2003). Hence using PL within WBL expands the process of scaffolding by involving more than just the supervisor. Vygotsky & Cole (1978, pp. 84–81) describes the difference between what the students can learn on their own and what they learn by interacting with others as “the zone of proximal development.” Within PL, the “others” are the fellow students and the supervisors, with supervisors having a guiding role and the fellow students being partners for discussion and reflection.

DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL JUDGMENT THROUGH PEER LEARNING

Judgment is something that can be built by sharing experiences, having conversations, and reflecting with others (Coles, 2002). According to Gray and Coombs (2018), reflecting on actions and decisions develops professional judgment and understanding of how to act in future situations. During PL, reflection can take place before, during, and after action (Sandars, 2009). Unlike the 1:1 supervising model, PL enables more opportunities for reflection by having fellow students available as reflection partners in addition to supervisors. In this way, PL builds a learning situation where students together develop readiness for future situations.

When reflecting before action, students can jointly discuss upcoming situations. They can further draw conclusions from previous similar situations and experiences and should not be afraid of discussing their feelings about their upcoming situations (Gray & Coombs, 2018). Different types of key questions can be helpful for students as a starting point, especially if they are new to the concept of peer reflection. In person-centered care, questions about thoughts, concerns, and wishes are used (Deveugele et al., 2005). In our work as teachers, we find these types of questions helpful for students to use in reflection before action to raise awareness of their own beliefs, fears, and expectations.

By looking back on situations, students can explore their own actions and emotional reactions. Jonna Bornemark (2020), a Swedish professor in philosophy, argues that professional judgment develops during conversations where real problems are highlighted and when feelings related to different situations are considered. It is therefore important to discuss not only theoretical knowledge and good examples, but also to discuss ethical problems and one's own setbacks and dilemmas. When reflecting after action, students should be encouraged to describe feelings and lessons learned to transfer into similar future situations. We suggest using a set of key questions or a reflective framework (such as Gibbs, 1988) to mediate student reflection and discussion during this phase.

Most of the reflection during PL takes place among the fellow students, and research supports the notion that it may be easier for students to reflect more freely with no authorities present (Stenberg & Carlson, 2015). This research also reports that supervisors feel that student reflections can be more in-depth after students have first reflected together. Hence, student reflection without supervisors is important. However, this is not to diminish the role of supervisors: involving more experienced supervisors in discussion and reflection is another important component in the development of professional judgment (Bornemark, 2020).

BUILDING AN ENVIRONMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

WBL is particularly demanding because students interact with unfamiliar people in new environments that usually have their own cultures and hierarchical structures (McCarthy et al., 2018). This context matters because a positive environment is critical to PL's success. Previous studies have described situations where collaboration between students during PL becomes competitive (Currens, 2003; Stenberg & Carlson, 2015). Further, the experience of having less knowledge than a fellow student can be stressful (Stenberg & Carlson, 2015). In contrast, psychologically safe environments are those where you are allowed to make yourself heard, share your concerns, and make mistakes without the risk of being humiliated or punished (Edmondson, 2018). Being able to trust fellow students, to feel mutual respect, is a prerequisite for PL to successfully develop professional judgment.

A learning situation where students understand the importance of their own and their fellow students' commitment to succeeding is important. This shared understanding helps to create a climate in which students support each other—an environment where it is safe to discuss the things that go wrong. PL has the potential to create student interdependence (Sluijsmans, 2002; van Gennip et al., 2010); Sluijsmans (2002, p. 2) describes this interdependence as “the glue that holds the members together.” However, students might also need help in creating a fruitful learning environment. Letting them discuss expectations around how they should cooperate can be a step toward building an environment where the students dare to challenge themselves and where there is room for mistakes. This way of working can be compared to what the literature describes as “learning contracts” (Boud et al., 1999, p. 422). When developing student contracts for PL, we have been guided by Amy Edmondson's (1999) work, which highlights issues on psychological safety and learning for students to address in teams. Examples of topics for student discussion could include how they can raise and address problems and difficult issues, or how they can value each other's unique skills and talents in the best ways. We have found such discussions useful for helping students explore important concepts related to psychological safety.

CONCLUSION

WBL is a central component of many educational programs in which students face real situations in the context of their future professions. This learning environment has great potential to foster the development of professional judgment, but it could also be restrictive and insecure with the wrong terms and conditions. By using student-to-student interaction, PL also has great potential to further develop professional judgment. However, for successful learning to occur, it is important to let students share experiences and reflect together in an environment of psychological safety.

FUNDING INFORMATION

This work was conducted without financial support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Phil Lyon, affiliate professor, Department of Food, Nutrition and Culinary Science, Umeå University for grammatical proof reading.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Brodin and Einarsson
Journal of Peer Learning
DOI: 10.21061/jopl.119

4

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Josefin Brodin

Department of Food, Nutrition and Culinary Science, Umeå University, SE

Sandra Einarsson  orcid.org/0000-0003-4770-3726

Department of Food, Nutrition and Culinary Science, Umeå University, SE

REFERENCES

- Bornemark, J.** (2017). Neutrality or phronetic skills: A paradox in the praxis of citizen dialogues organized by municipal administration. *Pedagogika Społeczna*, 3(65), 51–66.
- Bornemark, J.** (2020). *Horisonten finns alltid kvar: Om det bortglömda omdömet*. Volante.
- Boud, D., Cohen, R., & Sampson, J.** (1999). Peer learning and assessment. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 24(4), 413–426. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0260293990240405>
- Coles, C.** (2002). Developing professional judgment. *Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions*, 22(1), 3–10. <https://doi.org/10.1002/chp.1340220102>
- Currens, J. B.** (2003). The 2:1 clinical placement model. *Physiotherapy*, 89(9), 540–554. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0031-9406\(05\)60180-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0031-9406(05)60180-0)
- Deveugele, M., Derese, A., De Maesschalck, S., Willems, S., Van Driel, M., & De Maeseneer, J.** (2005). Teaching communication skills to medical students, a challenge in the curriculum? *Patient Education and Counseling*, 58(3), 265–270. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2005.06.004>
- Edmondson, A.** (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999>
- Edmondson, A. C.** (2018). *The fearless organization: Creating psychological safety in the workplace for learning, innovation, and growth*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Gibbs, G.** (1988). *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*. FEU.
- Gray, T. W., & Coombs, C. J.** (2018). Developing professional judgement in surgical trainees: The role of critical reflection. *Australasian Journal of Plastic Surgery*, 1(1), 95–100. <https://doi.org/10.34239/ajops.v1n1.34>
- McCarthy, B., Trace, A., O'Donovan, M., Brady-Nevin, C., Murphy, M., O'Shea, M., & O'Regan, P.** (2018). Nursing and midwifery students' stress and coping during their undergraduate education programmes: An integrative review. *Nurse Education Today*, 61, 197–209. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2017.11.029>
- Sanders, J.** (2009). The use of reflection in medical education: AMEE Guide No. 44. *Medical Teacher*, 31(8), 685–695. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01421590903050374>
- Saugstad, T.** (2002). Educational theory and practice in an Aristotelian perspective. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 46(4), 373–390. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031383022000024561>
- Sluijsmans, D.** (2002). Establishing learning effects with integrated peer assessment tasks. *The Higher Education Academy*. Retrieved February 20, 2023, from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dominique-Sluijsmans/publication/237794992_Establishing_learning_effects_with_integrated_peer_assessment_tasks/links/54bf5d9d0cf2f6bf4e04e68d/Establishing-learning-effects-with-integrated-peer-assessment-tasks.pdf
- Stenberg, M., & Carlson, E.** (2015). Swedish student nurses' perception of peer learning as an educational model during clinical practice in a hospital setting: An evaluation study. *BMC Nursing*, 14(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-015-0098-2>
- Topping, K. J.** (2005). Trends in peer learning. *Educational Psychology*, 25(6), 631–645. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410500345172>
- van Gennip, N. A. E., Segers, M. S. R., & Tillema, H. H.** (2010). Peer assessment as a collaborative learning activity: The role of interpersonal variables and conceptions. *Learning and Instruction*, 20(4), 280–290. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2009.08.010>
- Vygotsky, L. S., & Cole, M.** (1978). *Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Wood, D., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G.** (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 17(2), 89–100. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1976.tb00381.x>

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Brodin, J., & Einarsson, S. (2025). A Note on the Use of Peer Learning to Support the Development of Professional Judgment During Work-Based Learning. *Journal of Peer Learning*, 16(1): 3, 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.21061/jopl.119>

Submitted: 09 November 2024

Accepted: 23 May 2025

Published: 18 June 2025

COPYRIGHT:

© 2025 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Journal of Peer Learning is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by VT Publishing.