

International Conference

Technology, Artificial Intelligence and Education Towards the Future of Learning

26 and 27 February 2026 - Link Campus University

Organised by RN24/SSTNET – Sociology of Science and Technology Network & RN36 – Sociology of Transformations: East and West.

PEER REVIEW AS A COLLABORATIVE METHODOLOGY FOR QUALITY AND LEARNING IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

**Concetta Fonzo
and Laura Evangelista**

INAPP,
EQAVET National Reference Point
ITALY

Introducing Peer Review in Education & Training



Peer Review in Vocational Education and Training (VET) is a structured process of quality assurance and improvement in which teachers and trainers evaluate each other's practices through observation, evidence collection and professional feedback.



Peer Review starts from a guided self-evaluation, followed by peer observation and a structured feedback phase, and leads to concrete improvement actions at classroom and organisational level.

Unlike traditional inspection models, Peer Review is grounded in a collaborative and professional logic: teachers are not only evaluated but actively engaged as producers and users of evidence about their own practice. In this way, it creates a context where data, reflection and professional dialogue are directly connected to daily teaching decisions.

Developed within the EU EQAVET quality framework, Peer Review in VET aims to improve training quality, support teacher professional development and strengthen organisational learning, contributing both to institutional accountability and to continuous pedagogical improvement.

Introducing Peer Review in Education & Training



1. Peer Review and the Contemporary Scientific Debate



Peer Review in E&T is increasingly positioned at the intersection between quality assurance and professional learning. In the literature, it bridges accountability-based approaches centred on indicators and reporting with collaborative, improvement-oriented models that emphasise practitioners' use of evidence (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Datnow & Park, 2018).



Today, Peer Review acts as a hybrid device: it preserves rigour and traceability while enabling teachers/trainers to become active users of data in their daily work.

Within the broader debate on teacher/trainer professionalisation and evidence-informed practice, Peer Review responds to the gap between system-level data and practice-proximal evidence by supporting the production and reuse of classroom-based data and micro-level pedagogical knowledge. It aligns with research on data use in schools (Mandinach & Gummer, 2016) and on collaborative inquiry as a driver of instructional improvement (Coburn & Turner, 2011). Peer review has significant social, institutional and economic relevance.

1. Peer Review and the Contemporary Scientific Debate



Peer review contributes to improving teaching quality and reducing early school leaving, in line with European QA frameworks, while strengthening organisational learning and integrating evaluation with professional development processes.



From an economic perspective, it supports human capital development by enhancing teachers' competences and the effectiveness of training systems (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020).

Disciplinarily, Peer Review is rooted in the sociology of education and organisations (e.g., professional recognition, collective efficacy, institutional coordination), while intersecting with psychology (self-efficacy, feedback, psychological safety: Bandura, 1997; Edmondson, 1999), pedagogy (instructional improvement and assessment), economics (efficiency and skills acquisition) and political science (governance and accountability regimes).

It also has a transdisciplinary dimension, linking policy frameworks such as EQAVET, technological infrastructures for data use, and organisational practices such as mentoring and professional learning communities (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018).

2. Peer Review and theoretical background

- From a theoretical perspective, Peer Review draws on several explanatory models:



First, organisational learning theory (Argyris & Schön) explains how structured feedback cycles support double-loop learning and change in professional routines.

Second, communities of practice and collaborative professionalism (Wenger; Hargreaves & O'Connor) frame Peer Review as a collective knowledge-building process embedded in shared work practices.

Third, data use and data literacy models (Mandinach & Gummer) interpret Peer Review as a context in which practice-proximal evidence is generated, interpreted and translated into instructional action.

Finally, social-cognitive theory (Bandura) and psychological safety (Edmondson) explain the role of feedback, self-efficacy and trust conditions in enabling teachers/trainers to engage in authentic observation and improvement processes.

Key referenced authors and traditions therefore include: Argyris & Schön (organisational learning), Wenger (communities of practice), Hargreaves & O'Connor (collaborative professionalism), Mandinach & Gummer (data literacy), Coburn & Turner (data use in schools), Bandura (self-efficacy) and Edmondson (psychological safety), together with the European EQAVET framework for quality assurance in VET systems.

3. Research questions and objectives

- The research is guided by the following Research Questions (RQs):

RQ1. How does Peer Review influence teachers'/trainers' professional practices and reflexivity?

RQ2. What types of practice-proximal data are generated through Peer Review and how are they used by teachers/trainers?

RQ3. Under what organisational and psychological conditions does Peer Review lead to effective improvement processes?

RQ4. How does Peer Review contribute to quality assurance systems and policy goals in VET and school contexts?

Based on the conceptual framework presented in the study, the main hypotheses are that:

- (1) Peer Review enhances teachers'/trainers' data literacy and professional self-efficacy;
- (2) Peer Review increases collective efficacy and organisational learning when supported by coordination and methods;
- (3) Peer Review improves the alignment between formal QA systems and classroom practices, reducing the gap between system-level indicators and everyday teaching decisions.

The study has a primarily exploratory and explanatory purpose, with a complementary evaluative dimension aimed at assessing the conditions under which Peer Review becomes an effective and sustainable improvement device in education and training systems.



4. Research design and methodology



- The study adopts a qualitative, practice-based research design, with elements of evaluative and exploratory inquiry.
- Instruments and data sources include structured self-evaluation reports, peer observation protocols, field notes from classroom observations, feedback reports, teaching artefacts and short reflective documents produced by teachers/trainers during improvement cycles. These tools are designed to ensure traceable evidence; triangulation of sources and operational feedback oriented to practice improvement.
- The study scope involves pilot implementations of Peer Review in VET institutions and, in some cases, schools.
- Sampling follows a purposive and voluntary participation logic, selecting institutions engaged in quality assurance processes and teachers/trainers willing to participate in peer observation cycles.
- Selection criteria include organisational readiness, availability of coordination roles, and the presence of minimum conditions such as time allocation and shared protocols.
- Data analysis procedures are based on qualitative content analysis and thematic coding of observation notes, feedback reports and reflective materials, with attention to recurrent patterns related to professional practices, data use and organisational learning. Where available, simple quantitative indicators are used for contextual interpretation.

5. Reserach main findings

The analysis shows that Peer Review can function as an effective lever for improving teaching practices and organisational learning when it is designed as a teacher-centred, evidence-informed process. The main findings include:

- 1) It generates practice-proximal data (e.g. classroom observations, artefacts, feedback notes) that are directly usable by teachers/trainers to make micro-adjustments in instruction, materials and classroom management, reducing the gap between formal evaluation systems and everyday teaching decisions.
 - 2) The process strengthens professional competences and motivational dimensions, particularly self-efficacy, reflexivity and professional recognition, as feedback is provided by Peers who share the same professional language and constraints. Under conditions of psychological safety, teachers/trainers are more willing to expose authentic practices and engage in improvement cycles.
 - 3) It supports collective efficacy and organisational learning, especially when supported by clear coordination roles, structured routines and follow-up mechanisms. In these conditions, it contributes to aligning QA systems with classroom practices, improving both reporting processes and actual educational outcomes.
- Overall, findings suggest that PR is most effective when implemented through small, iterative and well-coordinated cycles, with clear rules for data use, dedicated time and integration with professional development pathways.



6. Critical Discussion



- From a sociological perspective, Peer Review emerges as a meso-level governance device that redefines the balance between institutional regulation and professional autonomy, transforming evaluation into a collective practice of knowledge production embedded in teachers'/trainers' work.
- The findings confirm the hybrid nature of Peer Review, bridging accountability and improvement-oriented paradigms by combining traceable evidence with situated professional judgement. They support organisational learning and socio-cognitive models, showing how feedback cycles, self-efficacy and methodological approaches concretely shape professional change.



- At the intradisciplinary level, the study advances understanding of teachers'/trainers' work, professional recognition and collective efficacy.
- At the multidisciplinary level, it connects sociological, psychological, pedagogical, economic and political perspectives.
- At the transdisciplinary level, it highlights the need to align policy frameworks, organisational arrangements and data infrastructures to make Peer Review a sustainable improvement strategy.

7. Conclusions

This study shows that Peer Review can function as a powerful, teacher-centred lever for quality improvement, generating practice-proximal evidence, strengthening professional competences and fostering organisational learning. Empirically, it demonstrates how structured cycles of observation and feedback produce changes in teaching practices, self and collective efficacy. Theoretically, it contributes to the debate by conceptualising Peer Review as a hybrid governance device that connects accountability systems with professional, evidence-informed improvement processes.

Among the main strengths of the study are its strong ecological validity, its grounding in real organisational practices and its integration of multiple analytical perspectives.

At the same time, some limitations must be acknowledged: the pilot and context-specific nature of implementations, the limited scale of cases, and the dependency on favourable organisational and cultural conditions (time, coordination, trust).

Future developments should focus on scaling and sustainability, including longitudinal studies on impact, integration with digital data systems, and stronger alignment with policy frameworks and professional development pathways.

Further research could also explore comparative analyses across institutional contexts and deepen the study of psycho-social mechanisms (motivation, recognition, professional identity) that sustain long-term improvement processes.



Thank you for your attention!

Concetta Fonzo, c.fonzo@inapp.gov.it

Laura Evangelista, l.evangelista@inapp.gov.it

INAPP, EQAVET National Reference Point ITALY
www.inapp.gov.it/eqavet