

# Overview

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October 1982

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Volume 40

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Number 1

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ISSN 0013-1784

"I'm really not a good teacher," a sixth grade teacher told me wearily. As we talked, I found she had been to an inservice meeting that afternoon.

Her school district is known for its staff development program. Many of the inservice sessions she attends are excellent presentations—too good, in fact. An expert gives a carefully planned talk or demonstration, the lesson goes smoothly, and the teachers leave feeling guilty because their lessons aren't nearly as well organized or successful. Even worse, they don't feel able to do what they were shown.

Some staff development may legitimately have other purposes, but much of it should focus squarely on skill development. It should assist teachers to become more capable and flexible professionals. More important, it should lead to classroom application.

The chances for that are much greater, say Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers, if the teachers are coached. In an earlier article in *Educational Leadership*,<sup>1</sup> Joyce and Showers identified five components of training: presentation of theory, modeling or demonstration, practice under simulated conditions, feedback, and coaching. They also listed four levels of impact: awareness, knowledge, principles and skills, and application and problem solving. From a review of 200 research studies they concluded that inservice activities, especially those aimed at mastery of a new approach, are more likely to reach the fourth level—application—if they include all five components, especially coaching.

Other factors besides training techniques affect implementation including the attitudes and capabilities of those being trained and the nature of the changes.<sup>2</sup> Other things being equal, however, coaching seems to be the most powerful way for some teachers to learn complex new practices.

In this issue, Joyce and Showers elaborate on the concept of coaching. They even interview a football coach, who points out that athletes learning a new skill usually get worse before they get better. Feeling clumsy and awkward, athletes are tempted to retreat to old habits, but with practice—and with coaching—their performance improves.

Joyce and Showers point out that teachers' problems are even more complex. When they shakily try a new method, their students may be critical or unresponsive, which makes the teachers even more insecure. Without support, they are likely to give up, saying, "I tried that but it didn't work."

David Berliner has reached a similar conclusion from his experience applying the research on teacher effectiveness. In an interview for this issue, he contends that coaching is the only way to get substantial classroom change.

When Berliner talks about the observation-feedback-goal setting process, he calls it "consultation." Supervisors may see it as "clinical supervision." No matter how it is described, the key factor is the occasional presence in the classroom of another adult who knows enough about teaching to be helpful. If inservice had less presenting and more practice, feedback, and coaching, teachers would have more professional skills—and probably more self confidence.

<sup>1</sup>Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers, "Improving Inservice Training: The Messages of Research," *Educational Leadership* 37 (February 1980): 379-385.

<sup>2</sup>George G. Mohlman, "Assessing the Impact of Three Inservice Training Models," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, N.Y., March 1982.

**At the 1982 Annual Conference in Anaheim, the Board of Directors adopted a resolution calling for increased attention to critical social issues. In response to that resolution, we invited Alex Molnar of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee to prepare the survey on pp. 41-42. Please express your opinion about the school's role in teaching about social issues by completing the survey and mailing it to ASCD.**

**The survey may inspire you to write a brief statement about some aspect of social issues in schools. It might be a description of a curriculum, an account of an activity at your school, or your view on what educators should do about one of the issues. Statements should be brief—a page or two may be enough—and double spaced. Send to ASCD by January 1.**

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