

# Overview

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## Learning With and From One Another

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In the last six months, the ASCD editorial staff has been through a major change. Instead of editing in the time-honored way with colored pencils, we now use computers.

Learning word processing reminded me of how exciting and unsettling it is to learn anything difficult. When we had our first group lesson, I did whatever the instructor said, although I was mostly just going through the motions. Later on, when I forced myself to write with the computer, I was frequently frustrated when I couldn't get the machine to do what I wanted. But I kept trying, and now I feel reasonably proficient.

Besides trial and error, and consulting the manual, one of the more satisfying ways my colleagues and I learned was by asking one another. When I couldn't figure out how to store a file, I called Jo Ann on a Sunday afternoon. When I decided to try using "save-get," Fran said, "Show me what you're doing and I'll help you get straightened out."

Across the country, teachers are learning new skills the same way. Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers (1980) were among the first to call this collegial activity "coaching" because of its similarity to athletic instruction. In this issue (p. 12), Joyce comments on what he has learned from years of getting teachers to coach one another. For one thing, he says, make it fun. When people's egos are on the line, it helps if they can laugh about it.

Joyce threatens a few egos himself. For example, he advises principals and supervisors not to coach unless they are prepared to develop "a very high level of competence." The reason is plain: "Supervisors or principals who don't practice as much as the teachers won't be able to help teachers as much as the teachers can help each other" (p. 16).

The growth in coaching is a positive trend but, as Joyce observes, adequate time and support for staff development are available to relatively few American teachers, and the proportion engaged in substantial coaching is probably even smaller. Numerous obstacles impede wider use. To visit a colleague's classroom, teachers may have to sacrifice a preparation period or have a substitute take their class. And many teachers associate observation with evaluation, which they want no part of.

Perceptive leaders are aware of these concerns. Recognizing the value of professional interaction, they manage the logistics, lend moral support, and set an example by welcoming feedback themselves. As Terry Wildman and Jerry Niles (p. 4) remind us, learning to teach takes at least a lifetime. Some prefer to go it alone, but most of us find solace and intellectual stimulation in a collaborative environment. □

### Reference

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

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