

SHARED PERSPECTIVES LEAD TO BETTER VISION FOR EVERYONE

I bought my first telescope when I was 12 years old. It was a 90 mm Swift refractor with two eyepieces and a Barlow lens. The Barlow lens doubled the magnification of the two eyepieces. On a cold, clear February night in the early '60s, I slowly increased the magnification until I could see the polar ice cap on Mars. This was the absolute limit of my little scope's capabilities and a stunning moment for me.

My moment of discovery illustrates the fundamental conflict between width of view and resolution. Without

my telescope, I could observe the broad panorama of the heavens all the way down to the horizon. I could see the Milky Way spread across the sky. Through my telescope, I had only a narrow view. That narrow view allowed me much greater resolution of the distant objects on which I trained my little Swift. From my backyard, Mars was a reddish bright star. Through my telescope, I could see details unavailable to the naked eye.

This is a matter of altitude. At great altitude, you have a breadth of view that is incomprehensible to someone closer to the ground. However, the person closer to the ground can see much more detail in the landscape.

The difference in perspective between central offices and classrooms arises from the same conundrum. You have either the wide view that takes in everything yet lacks resolution, or your field of view is very narrow and you have great focus on the details. In some of the districts where I've worked, folks in the central office and in the classroom say the same thing: "They just don't understand!" And I realize that both of them are right.

People working in central offices have a broad view, whatever their job title. Whether they work in grant management or curriculum, they have a view that extends outward into the universe of possibilities in their field. They are generally concerned with events and discoveries that lie

outside of the school, yet that will benefit the school. They seek resources such as grants and innovations that will improve the district's performance. Because they are not located within the schools, they are less likely to see the finer details of the classroom.

On the other hand, the classroom teacher has a view that looks inward into the universe of possibilities that exists in their students. They are focused on the details of student learning. They have a finely drawn view of student abilities, needs, and potential. The closeness of their work and their attention to detail creates a barrier that prevents them from seeing the bigger picture of state and federal mandates and the responsibilities that accompany them. They rarely have the opportunity to look outward.

When these views are held independently, a corrosive force is at work. This polarity is toxic over time and can lead districts and schools into paralysis. Educators in both camps end up frustrated at their inability to make their views understood. One view is broad and all-encompassing, focused on big external issues. The other view is high-resolution and focused on individual children.

What can we do?

What would happen if the folks with the broad view and the folks with the high-resolution view managed to come together and discuss with each other their differences and similarities? Most likely, those who are closely focused on individual children would gain insight into external resources that could help them in their tasks. At the same time, central office staff would gain understanding of teachers' needs and would be able to select resources most beneficial to the schools. While teachers may know their students better than anyone else, the classroom does not operate in a vacuum. Developing the best solutions for all students requires that we develop a shared view that considers the ramifications created by the broader world outside of the classroom and understands student needs to discover and develop what will best promote learning. This can only happen when we all share our unique views of the issues that confront us.

The collaborative approach is already successful in many schools and districts. Only by working together can we understand and address the educational challenges we face. We must access all of the perspectives at hand to increase the ways in which we collaborate for the benefit of all teachers and students. ■



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