

## **Wishing on a North Star**

Have you been out star gazing lately? Our newest telescopes have given us an ever greater and more infinite look at the vast horizon of space.

One of our most universal symbols, Polaris, is commonly known as the North Star. Its impact on human perceptions has proven poetic, pervasive, and sustainable over the centuries.

As a result of its alignment with Earth's axis, this star gives the illusion of remaining in a fixed position while the other stars in the constellation Ursa Minor change positions around it.

This juxtaposition offers sailors, hikers and even nightbirds a nocturnal compass. The enslaved peoples of the American South watched for the seasonal positioning of the North Star, singing coded songs about the Drinking Gourd to direct their pathway to freedom.

Long before that, Confucius encoded a system of social norms, naming integrity as the "North Star" that stays in place as specific social commitments position themselves around it. The symbology of the North Star has thus suggested a destination of high ideals across continents and centuries.

In the world of research, setting one's North Star to 'improving life' can generate a pattern that allows for the

flexibility of the research conditions, yet insists upon the integrity of the essential question.

*Whatever* the subject, how might the research increase the quality, length, or meaning of life for humans or other species? How can this North Star bring greater personal meaning and altruistic impact across transdisciplinary fields of study?

Rudger Bregman, in his book *Humankind*, cited the many cases in which researchers' own cynicism prevented them from advancing ideas about human altruism. His North Star led him to evidence of the human potential for social cohesion. For example, he identified a group of Tongan boys truly shipwrecked at the time when the dystopian novel *Lord of the Flies* became mandatory reading in schools. He countered popular attempts to prove the dark side of humanity rather than to present a schematic for uplifting the *possibilities* for humanity.

Quietly around the world, people in every field are seeking a star of hope, a star of impact in their work.

Ryan Campbell documented the number of engineers who choose humanitarian projects, when given a choice, writing, "... technical solutions are not the values-neutral panaceas we might imagine them to be. If we engineers are unaware of the values driving our efforts, we are unlikely to create lasting solutions to the problems we hope to address." [4].

In Colombia researcher, Pirroni started a paradigm shift among scholars not just to find ways to provide jobs but to

enhance the dignity of work and the sense of capability for work that promotes positive social action.

Among African nations striving to meet the UN goal of Education for All, Ash Hartwell courageously asked that smaller, complementary learning systems become part of the equation. Instead of recreating the status quo, he asked that nations reassess the impact of large systems—or lack of impact—and then self-correct, to improve life among families, communities, and nations.

More than a century of Nobel prize winners, along with engineers, inventors, farmers, writers, social scientists, and creative thinkers in every field have tried to improve our world because they hitched their north star to a dream that would help their human family.

To find our own North Star, as so many have done, we must learn to see the end from the beginning.

We must also do this in the field of education. As a new teacher, the key question you can ask yourself is, What do I wish for the next generation? How will my work help to achieve this?

Perhaps some of the perspectives you've find in this course will help you expand on your answer to that question, but first, stop and find a paper and pen—a page you can keep on your desk, where it will continually challenge and inspire you.

Try writing, in 25 words or less, what you most wish for today's generation of learners. Stop the video to do so. Then return and look at this wheel graphic. What parts of the wheel will you need to fuse together to accomplish that outcome? Write your wish near each component you will need to infuse into your teaching approach.

Do you work or learn with a teaching team? If so, stop the video again and text, call or meet with your co-educators to ask them the same question. Write their responses to the question. Record these responses on the outside circumference of the wheel, near the educational components that will best help them achieve that outcome. Talk together about the need to connect academic learning with social norms and to use community needs as the motivation to apply those skill sets in ways that promote peace and connectedness.

Imagine that together, you will achieve your collective vision, through an integrative approach to instructional design. The ownership and expertise and collaboration you each bring will be necessary to accomplish this collective vision.

Next, think about society's future. What do you think the world will look like in 25 years if you are able to construct an education system that incorporates your joint wishes? How will you change society? How will your learners change society?

In reaching for your own North star, together, you will have created a constellation. Do not settle for less. For the sake of future generations, please see far into the distance—and *plan* for it.