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The Education Cringe:

How The United States Institutionalizes an Intelligence Hierarchy

By Nina Dobratz

Mentor: Dr. Bryant Creel

Spring 2008

Dedicated to Dr. Bryant Creel for his persistent and kind mentorship through the stages of idea formation and revision, and to my mom who has been a loving voice of reason when I needed it most.

Introduction

Any assessment of public education in the United States must be based on objectivity and logic, but considerations of education's human impact cannot overlook the guidance provided by the emotions. It was on an emotional level that I first became aware of certain disturbing realities in our education system, but I subsequently applied objective observation and reason in an attempt to clarify what I sensed. What originally alerted me to the power of schools was not the influence of tests, teachers, or even knowledge itself; it was understanding what a powerful impact a federal institution can have on the formation of a child's mind. Considering schools in this way brings to mind a conversation that I recently had with a friend:

"You know how people can be so awkward and uncomfortable until they are doing that one thing that they're good at?"

I knew what my friend meant, but I didn't understand what the point was. I answered, "yes…"

"I call that 'their element.' Like, if someone is really good at field hockey, but you've only seen them do school work and play basketball, you would never really know how alive they could be until they were 'in their element'!"

"I get it. Like singers may be awkward in science class, and intellectuals may be uncomfortable dancing in a club, and a hiker may hate being inside…"

"Exactly. I think the key to getting to know people is finding their element. Until you know what makes them come alive, you don't really know them."

After this conversation about "being in your element" with my friend, I realized that our casual conversation had broad significance: what makes people come alive is essential both to their feelings of self-worth and to their being appreciated by others. Throughout history, people have strived to become more productive, more successful, and more fulfilled. Those who accomplish those goals are the ones who have found "their element." Throughout history it has also been the case that society has imposed some preferred "element" or way of life on certain groups. To the extent that such an event involves coercion, the outcome can be unnatural. What happens when people are forced to conform to desires, actions, values, and thoughts that are not their own? They cease to be productive, successful, or fulfilled. The dominant society becomes oppressive and those who have been forced to conform become defenseless and dependent. Sadly, this type of coercion occurs frequently, within relationships, within politics, within nations—and within the education system.

The imposition of one group on another creates a hierarchy; a dangerous system in which one group arbitrarily gains power over another. Although this state of affairs is frequently encountered in relations between cultures and races, it may seem out of place to use the model of a hierarchy to assess education. The consequences of maintaining a structure of hierarchy are as dangerous in the realm of education as they are in the relationships between different cultures and different nations. My objective in this essay is to show that the United States, through the mandate of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), is institutionalizing an intelligence hierarchy similar to the cultural hierarchy that existed

in Australia after British colonization and that led to the emergence of A. A. Phillips's theory of "the cultural cringe." The cultural cringe is a type of inferiority complex that encompasses the feelings of vulnerability and self-doubt that can emerge in marginalized groups and individuals and the disunity that the entire society faces as a result (Phillips 2). I wish to reveal that this psychological reaction, which can be likened to physical cringing, can be displayed in different intelligences as well as in different ethnicities. Using Howard Gardner's work as a basis for the claim that there exist multiple intelligences (his current list includes eight distinct types of intelligence that are defined and rationalized by specific conditions), I propose to show that NCLB, through its stringent assessment styles, produces students of limited intelligences. NCLB's systematic filtering of intelligences within schools and society creates an intelligence hierarchy that results in what I characterize as "the education cringe."

To understand the birth of the cultural cringe, it will be necessary first to establish certain background elements of the history of Australia, beginning in the 1700s when what is now Australia was colonized by Britain. The significant transformative effects of Europe's imperialistic quest to modernize the people of Australia created the symptoms that led to "the cringe." We will note these evidences of "the cringe," focusing on A. A. Phillips's original essay and ideas. After recognizing individually, socially, and nationally such harms of this specific cultural hierarchy, we will address the theory of multiple intelligences. This view on intelligence was made prominent through the publications of Howard Gardner, and an analysis of his ideas will allow us to consider intelligence as a multifarious domain in which "different can still be equal." Once we understand the distinct intelligences that Gardner defined, we will turn to the No Child

Left Behind Act. Outlining the basic tenets of NCLB in these perspectives and exposing some of its practical consequences will show that this government-instituted Act is honed on two specific intelligences, thereby devaluing the others. By comparing the U.S. government's conditioning of a set person with set talents to the deliberate actions of the British settlers in forcing modernization on the Aboriginals, we will be allowed to consider the issue of whether the United States is performing an act of educational imperialism by stringently requiring a specific set of standards and practices of all students.

Before continuing, I wish to make clear that this essay hinges on my view that people possess different types of intelligence, that genius can be manifested in a variety of ways, and that the individuality of minds can be quite different yet of equal value. If one believes that all minds and therefore all types of intelligence are of one sort, one will not agree with this major premise of my argument and will naturally doubt my hypothesis that many intelligences are left underdeveloped and underappreciated, thus leading to the reinforcement of a type of hierarchy in our nation.

The possibility that over half of Gardner's defined intelligences are not being cultivated in schools translates directly to the possibility of creating generations of inchoate citizens. This potential significance of multiple intelligences in the field of education is understandable; however, references to the history of Britain and Australia in the present discussion of American education may seem out of context. Just as Britain's quest for modernization created a cultural dysfunction that appeared in the tendency of Australians to neglect their natural way of life and live within the element of another culture, so a similar dysfunction can also be found in the system of American education.

In the six-year wake of the No Child Left Behind Act, education in the United States has received much negative attention. There is an abundance of articles, websites, and organizations[1] that, with anecdotes and statistics, outline problems of this legislation, yet in practice nothing really changes. This embarrassing disconnect of attention and action is certainly one of the most alarming aspects of NCLB, and is the motivation for more extended discussion in this essay.

British Conquest of Australia

To understand the inspiration for Phillips's 1950 essay, we must first trace the history of Australia back to the years of British conquest. In 1770 James Cook, an explorer for Britain, claimed the eastern Australian coast for his country. After that initial act of declaring ownership, the forces of British imperialism continued to keep their dominant hold on Australia for centuries; "from 1788 to about 1960, Great Britain was the most influential country in the history of Australia" (Docherty 56). The cultural geography of Australia would never be the same, for its citizens now succumbed to the influence of modernization and "improvement."

Ideas from the Enlightenment movement were evident in the actions and beliefs of the British colonists. These modern ideas brought with them hopes of human unity, and the belief that all human beings could improve. The British perceived the Aboriginals

[1] See for example: *The Shame of the Nation* by Jonathon Kozol; *Schools In* by Paul Manna; *Standards-Based Reform and the Poverty Gap* edited by Adam Gamoran; "Leaving No Child Behind" from *American Conservative*; "NCLB: Too Destructive to Salvage" from *USA Today*; nochildleft.com; edaccountability.org (Forum on Educational Accountability website); nea.org (the National Education Association website).

and their natural way of life as savage and repulsive, and they considered it their God-given duty to do their best to help these people rise to become better. A European governor, upon visiting Australia in 1814, described in his journal the "noble" European goal: "to bring these poor unenlightened people into an important Degree of Civilization, requiring the fostering hand of time, gentle means, and conciliatory manners . . . to instill into their minds, as they gradually open up to reason as reflection, a sense of duty they owe to society" (Anderson 92). The view that people accumulate value as a direct result of their contributions to society is not an unfamiliar idea.

Often there are an elite few who determine what will be presumably most beneficial to the whole, and then they enforce this ideal through specific mandates, the elimination of alternatives, or forced indoctrination of those who don't comply. The latter was the case in the British influence on the Aboriginals. The Europeans began resolvedly "weaning [the Aboriginals] from their barbarous habits, and progressively introducing civilized customs among them . . . teaching them habits of dress, settled life, prayer, work, education and morality" (Anderson 98). The purpose of such systematic and selective education was to "improve" the people of Australia through modernization; the British were attempting to do the Australians a "favor" by aiding them in their enlightenment. At first, the Australians were blatantly disinterested in anything the settlers had to offer. The resistance of the Aboriginals to the European ideal of improvement led some British intellectuals to conclude: "this particular savage problematizes the very premise of improvability" (Anderson 143). The bold rationale was that since the Australian did not form themselves into the mold of the Enlightened ideal, they were <u>incapable of improvement</u>.

Gradually, the influence of the English became more palpable, as it was evidenced in art, dress, education styles, writing—almost all aspects of perennial life in Australia. The Europeans were inclined to patterns of "classifying, ordering, controlling, and mastering nature" (Anderson 72). The tendency to develop hierarchies and classifications by means of comparison began as a way to keep order, but turned into an infective presence across the continent, changing the way the Australians looked at themselves. This new perspective of the Australians would shape the following decades in questionably progressive ways.

With the turn of the century (1800s-1900s), "an awkward doubt, bred of the colonial habit of comparison, began to nag at the literate Australian mind . . . writers began to scuttle to the shelter of imitativeness" (Philips33). A. A. Phillips was a well-known Australian writer and professor in Sydney, and he was particularly irked by the tendency of his literate peers to mimic styles of English writing. Always desiring to fit into a style of prose that was not theirs, Phillips noticed that writers displayed symptoms that were perhaps manifestations of a nation-wide disease. This irritation of his is what eventually became expressed in his seminal article, "The Cultural Cringe." This work was first published in one of Australia's leading literary magazines concerned with cultural affairs, *Meanjin*. Later, the article was reprinted posthumously with other of A. A. Phillips's works in a book entitled *A. A. Phillips on the Cultural Cringe.* It is from this book, along with five articles also printed in *Meanjin* in the year 2000 that deal directly with Phillips's original article, that I have gleaned my information on the Cringe.

The Cultural Cringe

The word “cringe” comes from the Old English verb “cringan” which means “to give way” or “to become bent;” more modern definitions include “to shrink, bend or crouch, especially in fear or servility,” “to behave in a servile way,” “to show submission or fear” (dictionary.com). I give these literal definitions because they are useful in understanding Phillips’s idea, which is rooted in submission and fear. Sandra Dolby, an anthropologist from Indiana University, refers in one of her books to the cultural cringe. She evokes the effects of the cringe by suggesting the image of an entire nation cringing as an individual would (Dolby 68). If we understand an individual cringing to involve bending down, cowering back, or shrinking from fear and submission, we can understand the cultural cringe as a culture-wide mental effect that is very similar.

The conscious or unconscious servility of one culture towards another—the cultural cringe—is described by Phillips in his original article as having two effects. The first “appears in the tendency to make needless comparisons” (Phillips 2). In the case of the Australians, they might wonder what opinions someone more cultured, specifically an Englishman, might have of whatever they are doing, reading, or saying. Phillips believed that “the core of the difficulty is the fact that, in the back of the Australian mind, there sits a minatory Englishman, and subconsciously the educated Australian feels a guilty need to placate this shadowy figure” (Phillips 8). The Australians were vulnerable to this phantom superior force; they were unable to become confidently certain and

autonomously proud in their original ideas and works. Contrarily, they found themselves self-doubting, and outwardly seeking approval.

The self-imposed abasement of the Australians led them to belittle and reject their country, instead opting to identify with their colonizer, England. This re-association of identities is related to the second effect of "the cringe" that Phillips describes: the "estrangement of the Australian intellectual" (Phillips 3). The more educated and accomplished Australians were prone to identify themselves with the cultivation of the Englishman rather than the "crudeness" of their own people. Ironically, the truth was that their feeling of intellectual inferiority had no basis: in reality the Australian was reading and producing more articles and books per capita than any Anglo-Saxon community (Phillips 6). Regardless of the literary successes of the Australian population, these intellectuals still felt ashamed of their own country. This paradox proves that despite reasonable evidence in favor of a society's success, there can still be strong tendencies to self-subjugate.

Why were the Australians so eager to disown themselves from their native country, give respect and honor to their colonizers, and fall into an inferior role? Few scholars have referred directly to Phillips' original essay in the fifty plus years since its publication in order to answer these questions. Ivor Indyk, a professor of Australian literature at the University of Sydney is one of five authors who responded to Phillips's essay and his idea of the cultural cringe in a 2000 issue of *Meanjin*. Indyk talks about "the cringe" as a preference towards the known of the past instead of the unknown of the future; he believes "it is before our past that we cringe, when the present falters – [the past] beckons us with a masochistic allure" (Indyk 31). It is simpler to fall into a

submissive role to the dictations of the past, or to go along with the structure of living that an imperialistic power has created, than to step courageously or even rebelliously into the future. Granted, it is difficult to realize when we have slipped into the "masochistic allure" of living within the traps of the past. Natasha Cho, another author who published in the journal *Meanjin*, notes that cringing Australians sometimes do not even realize that they are "infected" (Cho 36). If we consider the state of cringing as a disease you can "catch," then what are the traits we can look for to identify its contraction?

Let us first look at Phillips's original essay and what he had to say about the symptoms of a cringer. He primarily saw its effects in Australian writers, as that was his professional field. He describes an "intimidating shadow of the giant Anglo-Saxon communities" whose work led Australian authors to be "exposed to comparisons too unreasonable to be stimulating," with the result that they were "tempted always to imitation . . . edged towards either an inhibiting humility or the raucous bravado of the consciously inferior" (Phillips 13). The most important theme within these symptoms is the blistering insecurity, awkward self-consciousness, and fear-based vulnerability that arises once one begins to cringe. Beginning as an "infection from English cultural sources" (Phillips 30), this disease that lures one "to nestle for comfort into tradition" (Phillips 61) ultimately becomes a trap for unoriginal thought and repetition of the past. Nothing is a greater impediment to healthy, organic growth than clinging to the past; the future requires courage, risk-taking, confidence, and transformation, attributes one does not find in a cringer.

One who cringes displays the uncomfortable characteristic of feeling like an outsider in his or her land. Indyk takes this principle one step further by suggesting, "one of the consequences of oddity is the sense of inferiority" (Indyk 30). Not only did the Australians feel atypical in their country, they came to believe that they were actually inferior to the British population across the sea. Whether or not they were aware of this self-abasement, it was a prime example of "self-betrayal and cowardice" resulting in a "loss of self respect" (Indyk 28). Adrian Martin, a film critic from Sydney, also analyzed Phillips's idea of the cultural cringe and poignantly expressed that Australians were "crippled in their natural expression by the unshakable sense of a looming, older, superior, disapproving, nation-state 'other' located over the sea." (Martin 32). From the input of these Australian scholars, an image begins to form of a person tangled with feelings of inferiority, self-rejection, and paralysis of expression. This is a dangerous combination, whose affects are magnified when they are culture-wide.

Looking at Australia as a whole, one can observe patterns that signal a detriment to national pride and progress. Cho describes the effects on the population as a general trend of "a loyalty to the status quo, a reluctance to accept the new, and a favoring of the established rather than the emerging" (Cho 37). This depiction is consistent with the idea of preference for the past over the future, a clinging to tradition. Visible as a "period of stagnation" (Indyk 31) in national growth, citizens in a country going through cringing may not even realize that they are preventing themselves from optimal development. Brian Castro, an Australian professor, claims that "the cringe" "manifests itself as a blind-spot" (Castro 38), implying that people were unable to see the regressive nature of their actions and were failing to take reigns of their future. This "blinded" condition left

citizens susceptible to outside influence. Cringers came to accept a style of living that mimicked those who colonized them, neglecting their native peculiarities and transmuting themselves into more "modern" citizens. These manifestations of "the cringe" are twofold: an inclination to identify with the safety of the past, and a tendency to imitate a culture that claims to be progressive. Clinging to the comfort of tradition and rejecting one's own cultural background in favor of another may appear to be contradictory actions, but they share a common denominator: a negation of one's present identity and circumstances. To reiterate, in an overview of the cultural cringe we find there is both a proclivity to the past associated with a superior other—that which is traditional and established—and a tendency to imitate another culture—that which is "modern" and "advanced." The underlying theme of these symptoms is a rejection of the present. Without an understanding of the present there is no hope for the future, and with no sense of possibility for the future, citizens cannot engender the inspiration that their liberation requires. It is a sobering truth: "when the culture fails to go forward, fails to open towards the future, it falls prey to the past (Indyk 31). This unsound structure of tradition over change and imitation over uniqueness will be seen to be comparable to the education system in the United States. However, there is no useful application of this comparison until the solution is also analyzed.

Now that we have explored the problems and characteristics of "the cringe," let us look at what Phillips believed would be its redemption. In addition to disposition mandates for individuals, Phillips lays out a healing plan for society, one that involves the government. Before the society is ready to stand up to its government, it must be a strong army of individuals. After pointing out that individual—and, concomitantly, national—

change comes gradually, Phillips applauds “the most important development” in the strengthening of our character: “progress in the art of being unselfconsciously ourselves” (Phillips 9). The implications of this phrase are enormous: to fully be ourselves, without being constantly aware of ourselves. If while we are acting and thinking, we wonder if we are acting and thinking as we should, we are still acting consciously, and liable to still be under the influence of an outside force. Indyk commands, “we must have confident acceptance of being ourselves—in our peculiarity . . . not in our sameness to each other” (Indyk 31). Thus, the response to feelings of timid vulnerability is confident acceptance, recognizing the negative, imposter voice in your mind and silencing it. The purpose of our confident acceptance is to allow our natural talents to evolve—and what comes naturally does not require incessant evaluation and comparison. Phillips warns us not to travel to the extreme of self-realization: “the opposite of the Cringe is not the Strut, but a relaxed erectness of carriage” (Phillips 9). If we are acting “unconsciously ourselves” we will be exactly where we need to be, contributing most effectively to our society. We will possess a “freshness, originality and vigor” (Philips 50) that is unique to those who—as my friend would say—are in their element.

A nation that is in its element will contain communities that are productive and alive because they are composed of individuals who are confident in their peculiar talents and have governments that give opportunity to this diversity of talent. Mary Kalantzis, a professor whose focus is multiculturalism, addressed the need for “civic pluralism and productive diversity” (Kalantzis 42) in her evaluation of the cultural cringe. She reminds Australians not to neglect completely the influence of Britain while liberating themselves, because their influence—bad or good—helped create what they have become. Cho agrees

that it is necessary “to engage in more introspection and more dialogue about national identity” (Cho 37). Similar to individual liberation, liberation for a nation will involve stepping boldly into a future of a new understanding of identity, without neglecting the cobblestoned path of the past that led them there. Social rejuvenation “requires us to relinquish some of our loyalties to tradition . . . more people need to be more brave; more risks need to be taken with the new. We must encourage innovation” (Cho 38). Fueled and motivated by a government that provides opportunities for, and encourages the practice of, diversity of talent, individuals will be able to learn the art of being unconsciously themselves.

Multiple Intelligences

A necessary component to a thriving community is an organic mix of diversely talented citizens. As early as 360 BC, Plato recognized the productive possibility of citizens performing different tasks for a society (wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato's_Republic). In *The Republic*, Plato posits that “we are not all alike; there are diversities of natures among us which are adapted to different occupations . . . we must infer that all things are produced more plentifully and easily and of a better quality when one man does one thing which is natural to him and does it at the right time, and leaves other things” (Plato 369C). If people are constituted to contribute in varying ways to their society, it follows that they would be trained and educated differently. Since Plato, many scholars, educators, and philosophers have ascertained that children learn differently and are best edified through individual curricula. Pat Guild, a teacher and lecturer working to promote

different learning styles, explains “when we accept diversity as the norm we recognize that some things that work extremely well for some students, for some teachers, and for some administrators will not necessary work best for others. This is a fundamental change in thinking. It is a change that leads us to celebrate and use the diversity within schools rather than to ignore or attempt to eliminate it” (Guild 23). The diversity to which Guild is referring is diversity of learning styles, and she further postulates that there is no universal “right” way to teach, because styles will always be evolving and mutating depending on the students (Guild 23). Another promoter of different learning styles is educational philosopher Nel Noddings; she argues for “diversity in curriculum and for earlier specialization” (Noddings 7). Her idea of specialization implies earlier discovery of a child’s unique intelligence and individual tailoring of curriculum to enhance their intelligence.

The pivotal work of Howard Gardner in the field of multiple intelligences is especially valuable for the purpose of this essay. Gardner’s expertise is a result of his decades of study in pedagogy, school reform, and intelligence (howardgardner.com). His carefully presented ideas and meticulously researched claims provide a basis for the argument against current educational practices in the United States. Before addressing the curriculum in question of No Child Left Behind, let us first understand how Gardner defines intelligence, and how from this definition he is able to identify distinct intelligences.

The definition I will use to explain intelligence includes specifications for the individual and for the culture. Gardner recognizes a traditional understanding of intelligence followed by his own conceptualization:

> "In the classic psychometric view, intelligence in defined operationally as the ability to answer items on a test of intelligence. The inference from the test scores to some underlying ability is supported by statistical techniques . . . It is an inborn attribute or faculty of the individual . . . Multiple Intelligence theory, on the other hand, pluralizes the traditional concept. An intelligence is a computational capacity—a capacity to process a certain kind of information—that originates in human biology and human psychology . . . An intelligence entails the ability to solve problems or fashion products that are of consequence in a particular cultural setting or community" (Gardner, "Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons" 6).[2]

Of significance in this definition is the idea of capacity. Intelligence is not something that necessitates proof, results, or test scores; it is an individual's capacity to contribute to society. The second aspect of this definition worth noting is the role of the culture; unless an intelligence is "of consequence" within a society, it is not valued and cannot be of use. After defining intelligence for the purposes of his theory, Gardner presented specific criteria that serve as a base for the constitution of what can be deemed "an intelligence."

The criteria for intelligence are gathered from multiple disciplines: biological sciences, logical analysis, developmental psychology, and traditional psychological research (Gardner, "Intelligence" 35). The criteria are: "the potential of isolation by brain

[2] Many of Gardner's books contain slightly varied definitions of intelligence; I chose to cite his most recent book because it is his most complete and evolved definition.

damage," "an evolutionary history and evolutionary plausibility," "susceptibility to encoding in a symbol system," "a distinct developmental history, along with a definable set of expert 'end-state' performances," "the existence of idiot savants, prodigies, and other exceptional people," "support from experimental psychological tasks," and "support from psychometric findings" (Gardner, "Intelligence" 36-40). It is not necessary to my argument to discuss the reasons behind each criterion, but noting the specificity Gardner used in his choice of intelligences will highlight how within the context of their basic constitution all the intelligences are equal. The benefit of his criteria is its capability to continue to discover new domains of intelligence. As the following intelligences are explored, it should not be assumed that this list of eight is the end result of Gardner's work on the multiple intelligence theory.

The first two intelligences, linguistic and logical-mathematical, are most familiar as valid types of intelligence; this preference is especially noticeable in the practice of standardized testing (an issue that will be addressed later). The linguists among us are talented with spoken and written word. Linguistic intelligence permits one to eloquently use the "rhetoric aspect of language to convince others of a course of action," "to use mnemonic potential to help remember information," and to explain, teach and give instruction (Gardner, "Frames" 78). Political leaders across nations and centuries have proven that proficiency in this domain is given more social esteem and confirm that "rhetorical finesse is part of the upbringing of aristocrats in a traditional castelike system" (Gardner, "Frames" 94). Though the United States would not be described as embodying a "traditional castelike system," it is true that adeptness in the art of rhetoric can be a catalyst for social mobility in ways that other intelligences cannot.

The only intelligence that is competitive with linguistic for being most recognized and most valued in society is logical-mathematical intelligence. Encompassing fields of mathematics and the sciences, this type of person is driven by the desire to explain nature and to solve problems. The qualities of one who is gifted is this domain include “a love of dealing with abstraction,” “the ability to handle skillfully long chains of reasoning,” (Gardner, “Frames” 134), and a “remarkably rapid problem solving” capacity (Gardner, “MI: New Horizons” 12). Their capability of finding solutions to difficult problems that involve multiple variables makes them a commodity in the upper echelons of society, as well as extremely adept at performing well on standardized tests.

I mentioned standardized testing when outlining the previous two intelligences because the remaining intelligences cannot be evaluated in this way. This distinction will be important later in this essay. The next intelligence to discover is musical intelligence, which can be recognized through skill in performance, composition, and appreciation of musical patterns. Those skilled in the musical domain are able to create rhythmic organizations of notes that create an “agreeable impression on the ear” (Gardner, “Frames” 105). Following musical intelligence is spatial intelligence, implying a mastery of three-dimension space. Those gifted with this intelligence have the capacity “to perceive the visual world accurately, to perform transformations and modifications upon one’s initial perceptions, and to be able to re-create aspects of one’s visual experience, even in the absence of physical stimuli” (Gardner, “Frames” 173). For sculptors, pilots, architects, or even chess players, skillfulness in this intelligence is essential.

Also breaking the confines of two-dimensional space is bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. This movement-oriented intelligence involves using one’s body to create

products or to solve problems. Evidencing the relation between cognition and body, Gardner states the potential to "use one's body to express emotion (as in a dance), to play a game (as in a sport), or to create a new product (as in devising an invention)" (Gardner, "MI: New Horizons" 10). The connection of mind and body stems back to the ancient Greeks who worked to perfect their physical condition as fully as their mental condition (Gardner, "Frames" 207). Esteeming physical condition as highly as mental condition is a value that has faded strongly recently; physical education classes are being eliminated from daily schedules to allow teachers more time to cater to the first two intelligences (Wood 42).[3] Without physical education classes it is challenging to strengthen bodily-kinesthetic intelligence in classrooms. Similarly, it is nearly impossible to discover and to develop naturalist intelligence inside classroom walls. Naturalist intelligence involves the ability to distinguish and classify species of plants and animals in the environment; skill here can involve all five of the senses (Gardner, "Frames" 19). Though in western culture the usefulness of this intelligence is not predominant, some cultures are able to survive only because of people who possess intelligence of the environment. Naturalist intelligence was not an original on Gardner's list, but was added in his later work because of its fulfillment of the criteria (Gardner, "Intelligence Reframed" 52). This addition is a testament to the evolution of the intelligences, proving that just because a domain is not currently included, it is not exempt forever.

The final two intelligences included in Gardner's current list were originally listed jointly as "personal" intelligence (Gardner, "Frame" 237). They have split to become interpersonal and intrapersonal and are classified as more emotive in nature than the

[3] Director of The Forum for Education and Democracy George Wood also notes that field trips, recess, and even playgrounds are being removed from schools (Wood 42).

others. Interpersonal intelligence "denotes a person's capacity to understand the intentions, motivations and desires of other people and, consequently, to work effectively with others" (Gardner, "Intelligence" 43). Growing up peacefully requires that we exhibit at least a degree of this intelligence; furthermore, any profession where one must deal with people demands interpersonal intelligence. Intrapersonal intelligence entails one's ability to "access one's own feelings, . . . to instantly discriminate among these feelings and, eventually, to label them, . . . and to draw upon them as a means of understanding and guiding one's behavior" (Gardner, "Frames" 239). Although the mastery of intrapersonal intelligence is individual in its basis form, it allows for better expression, wiser decision-making, and ultimately healthier relationships.

The history of Gardner's work is evidence that classification of the intelligences is an evolving process. Past candidates for his list include existential and moral intelligence (Gardner, "Intelligence Reframed" 45). Due to the more complex nature of these intelligences and their strong appeal to personality, will, and character, Gardner believed that they were defined too differently from the other intelligences and has not included them on the list (he adds, "at least for now") (Gardner, "Intelligence Reframed" 66, 77). The standout feature of Gardner's theory is the <u>process</u> of evaluating new intelligences; he never claims that there is no more to discover. His theory reflects his beliefs on intelligences—more can always be found.

It is my expectation that the outline of Gardner's intricate theory is substantial enough reason to respect and appreciate the diverse intelligences. Any person who displays or even alludes to the potential of an intelligence deserves the cultivation necessary to make their intelligence become ripe for productivity. Likewise, those who

manifest expertise in any of these domains should find themselves met with professional opportunities, financial security, and social respect—regardless of the intelligence in which they excel. Consequently, if these conditions are not being met—if children are not receiving the resources necessary to cultivate their emerging intelligences or adults are not given professional opportunities to practice their unique intelligences—then it is the fault of the school system and of society. If schools produce the citizens that compose society, it follows that schools must be analyzed first. I now will turn to the structure of the current school system, to see if there are failures to address these intelligences.

United States Education

Though No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has become a synecdoche for American education, the act's introduction was not the original catalyst for standardized testing complaints. What is now NCLB is a cumulative result of many decades of federal actions, all with dignified academic intentions. Beginning in 1965 when Lyndon Johnson first took federal action in the academic domain with his Elementary and Secondary Education Act, presidential attention to schools and testing has not been dormant (Rudalevige 1). The Reagan administration released the report *A Nation at Ris*k, which gave momentum to the standardized testing movement; George H. W. Bush followed in 1991 with his "America 2000" proposal, asking for voluntary testing to compare to "world standards;" and in 1994 Bill Clinton signed the "Goals 2000" law that pushed states to create academic performance standards (Rudalevige 1). The No Child Left Behind Act, passed as a law in 2002 under George W. Bush's administration, is a

continuation of the educational push of presidents before him (Rudalevige 6). The role of NCLB in education can be considered representative of the government's role in education because its legislation (now and versions of it since 1965) dictates the praxis of American schools. The nation-wide mandate of NCLB makes it the most accurate reflection of school conditions and therefore is worthy of analysis and reflection.

Central to NCLB is the administration of standardized testing and the accountability implicit in the guidelines of annual yearly progress (AYP). If a school is receiving funding from the federal government, it is required to implement standardized tests in math, reading, and science (added in 2008) annually from third to eighth grade and at least once in high school (Wood 35). The purposes of this testing are to measure the ability of students and to track their progress over years, highlighting the students that need extra attention or supplemental services (Irons 53), and to get an idea of the efficacy of teachers and school districts so that failing schools might be given more financial attention (Irons 41). AYP is essential to the process of these goals: schools are required to submit their yearly scores and, based on an initial testing, they are required to meet or exceed their "annual yearly progress" goals with the intention of hitting 100 percent proficiency for all students by the year 2014 (Kohn 85). Appealing to diversity of students, AYP also asks that the student body be broken down into ten student demographics: total population, special education, Limited English Proficiency, economically disadvantaged, white, African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, Hispanic, and "other" ethnicities (Karp 54). In each of these sub-groups, students must meet their AYP targets. If schools report failure of <u>any</u> group to achieve

these goals, the school is subject to invention in the form of student transfers, replacement of staff, and even federal usurpation of the entire school (Karp 54).[4]

Within the regulations of NCLB emerge many variables that raise heated concerns. I will address two variables—the diversity variable and the proficiency variable—that are capable of representing the general trend of discomfort and discontinuity that surround the act. The diversity variable can be summed up by the "diversity phenomenon" which explains that "the greater the diversity in a school the more likely the school will fail to meet AYP . . . this is because of a specific feature of the legislation which says that if just one so-called sub-group fails to meet the standard, the entire school fails" (Wood 46). Teachers are always the ones who feel the brunt of this failure, and as a result many of the most qualified in this profession seek jobs in areas with low levels of diversity where there is less possibility of failure (Irons 34). Although some flexibility laws have adjoined themselves to the original NCLB legislation to cater the test to special education students (Irons 23), the point remains that it is more of a boon to the fate of the school to focus on "marginally performing students" who still have a chance to pass in place of severely underperforming sub-groups (Jennings 520). Matthew Spring, the director of the federally funded National Center on Performance Incentives notes that "while these marginally performing students are likely to benefit from increased attention, reallocation of instructional attention leads to a tradeoff

[4] Specifically, the corrective action proceeds as follows: after two consecutive years of missing AYP targets, schools are put on a "needs improvement" list and can receive federal money to support student transfers; after three consecutive years, students can be given vouchers to allow them to attend a private school or to receive supplemental tutoring services; after four years the school can be reconstituted and staff members an be replaced; after five years the school can shut down, become privately managed, or be restructured by the state (Karp 54).

whereby the achievement gains of the marginally performing students come at the expense of both the lowest- and the highest- performing students" (Springer 1).

The residual situation is that students near the proficiency line are improving, but those far below average are being neglected. These varying levels of achievement lead to the second mentioned factor, the proficiency variable. As the legislation now stands, it is possible to alter what constitutes proficiency from state to state and from subject to subject (Irons 13). The dissimilarities of definitions stem from "differences in test content, type of test items, test rigor, and differences in how cut-offs were determined" (Irons 13). Thus, NCLB is exposed as a law that seeks to close gaps of achievement across the nation—using the results of a test whose definitions of competency vary from state to state.

These fluctuations of continuity give rise to a plethora of tangential questions, concerns, complaints, and justifications. Piles of figurative dust get kicked up when discussion emotionally escalates from testing practices to financial concerns to school ethics to pages of statistics—it is hard to remember where this educational crisis all started. Let me remind: it starts with the test. This essay is not intended to be a critique of NCLB; by presenting the act in practice I attempt to show the whirlwind of consequences and arguments that arise when we base standards of academic achievement on such narrow guidelines. To justify the use of standardized tests, Secretary of Education Rod Paige uses a football metaphor, "if you want to win the football game, you have to first keep score" (Rudalevige 7). Assuming that football in this comment represents academic achievement, let us turn to another football analogy created by A. G. Rud that might illuminate the ridiculousness of Paige's claim,

No Child Left Behind—The Football Version

1. All teams must make the state playoffs and all must win the championship.

If a team does not win the championship, they will be on probation until they are the champions, and coaches will be held accountable. If after two years they have not won the championship their footballs and equipment will be taken away until they do win the championship.

2. All kids will be expected to have the same football skills at the same time even if they do not have the same conditions or opportunities to practice on their own. NO exceptions will be made for lack of interest in football, a desire to perform athletically, or genetic abilities or disabilities of themselves or their parents. All kids will play football at a proficient level!

3. Talented players will be asked to workout on their own, without instruction. This is because the coaches will be using all their instructional time with the athletes who aren't interested in football, have limited athletic ability or whose parents don't like football.

4. Games will be played year round, but statistics will only be kept in the4th, 8th, and 11th game. It will create a New Age of Sports where every school is expected to have the same level of talent and all teams will reach the same minimum goals. If no child gets ahead, then no child gets left behind. If parents do not like this new

> law, they are encouraged to vote for vouchers and support private schools that can screen out the non-athletes and prevent their children from having to go to school with bad football players
>
> (A. G. Rud).

Opposition may arise with the claim that school is not football and academic performance has more application than sports to "real life." However, if we return to the theory of multiple intelligences, we are led to wonder if this testing game we are playing is so different from a football game.

The Education Cringe

Let us now identify the connections I have posited between the cultural cringe, the multiple intelligence theory, and No Child Left Behind, connections that will elucidate the meaning of the education cringe. Australia and the education system of the United States are similar in their methods of measuring as a means to dictate achievement, in their commitment to tradition and the status quo, in their imitation of a dominant culture, and ultimately—and most importantly—in their capacity to instill feelings of inferiority and self-doubt in citizens and students. After explaining these points of similarity, I will make a recommendation for attention to the development of diverse intelligences and the elimination of universal testing.

The Europeans created a scale "using [the aboriginal] as the 'zero for human society,' Enlightenment thought had theorized 'the human' in terms of progressive separation from nature. Such an act of separation was maintained as an achievement"

(Anderson 108). In this example, the dominant culture had a quantifiable system of measurement in which the intention was to improve by rising on a scale towards the ultimate goal of being completely independent from nature. The English colonists demanded only that the aboriginals sought always to improve, just as American schools are asking students to do—always improve, year by year, until you are proficient. Life becomes a series of quantifiable events that cumulatively tally into your worth. Cringers are described as people who are "obsessed with measurement" because of the continual comparison of their work to the work of the British people (Castro 38). Americans exemplify this same obsession evidenced by the necessity to always return to the scores of the standardized test. Using these numbers to rank and categorize our society causes division, but the system remains because it has become an ingrained social mannerism.

When uncertain about where the future may lead, citizens of Australia were led to rely on ingrained patterns of their own past. Although living based on the past is familiar, comfortable, and simple—it restricts growth. Repetition of ideas and methods creates a stagnancy that is a barrier for national progress. The education system in the United States has suffered a similar stagnancy in the last forty plus years. Since federal intervention, universal testing has been central to the United States education system and has been used as a system of organizing students. Categorization is a tidy convenience because it allows one to look at students in groups: "safe cases," "bubble cases," and "hopeless cases" (Springer 1); but inherent in these general classifications is the depersonalization of individuals. Despite evidence and arguments against this academic structure, it persists because change is called too expensive, too lengthy, or simply impossible. Education is stuck in the rut of tradition, and Indyk's insight on the effects of

the Cringe become true of education, “when the culture fails to go forward, fails to open towards the future, it falls prey to the past (Indyk 31). If we leave education in the state it is in, we are relinquishing ourselves to the dictates of the past.

In addition to predilection for the past, another effect of the Cringe is imitation of a superior other. In Australia, the style of living that the British promoted was unnatural to many natives, but if the Australians wanted to rise socially, they had no choice but to comport themselves with the European definitions of success. If students wish to succeed academically they are cornered into a similar position of abandoning their innate intelligences and forging themselves into proficient test-takers. People naturally seek approval, thus they will gravitate towards the domains that offer recognition. When a child feels that their expertise is not naturally in the field of math or language, success is just a masquerade covering their true intelligence. Students’ choice is that of the Australians: “hopeless mimicry or staunch refusal” (Martin 34). To imitate the dominant class can require denying yourself, but to deny the dictations of convention can require submitting yourself to a future of possible depreciation and denigration.

Developing musical, bodily, spatial, natural, personal (and yet discovered other) intelligences is disheartening when attempts are drowned out by the chorus of administrators singing praises to intelligences of logic and linguistics. When schools place academic achievement as the highest goal for young minds, student’s efforts to meet the stringent requisites of the test have the potential to blind them from activities and passions that may enliven their souls. If deprived of the opportunity to discover “native peculiarities,” tendencies for conscious appraisal of every action become hinderingly common because all work is eventually subject to universal measurement.

Within the confines of this pattern, the liberation that A. A. Phillips spoke of—the ability to act "unconsciously ourselves"—will never come. Australian natives were not free to act unconsciously themselves because of the lingering presence of a dominant power that unrelentingly provoked an "awkward doubt, bred of the habit of comparison" (Philips 33); likewise, students are plagued with self-doubt due to persistent evaluation. Excellence in music, sports, creation, environment insight, or personal decorum will be questioned as valuable if it does not produce quantifiable results. The education cringe is a culmination of all of these factors with the underlying tendency being students' vulnerability to undue feelings of inferiority. When only excellence in specific intelligences is recognized as valuable while others are neglected, there exists an intelligence hierarchy.

John W. Gardner, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare under President Lyndon Johnson, foresaw in 1961 what is entirely applicable today:

> Extreme emphasis on performance as a criterion of status may foster an atmosphere of raw striving that results in brutal treatment of the less able, or less vigorous, or less aggressive; it may wantonly injure those whose temperament or whose values make them unwilling to engage in performance rivalries; it may penalize those whose undeniable excellences do not add up to the kinds of performance that the society at any given moment chooses to rewards; and it may victimize those who can't fight back, e.g., children (Gardner, "Excellence" 25).

The math- and linguistic- based curriculum and testing that create this intelligence hierarchy suggest influence from the world outside of academia. Paulo Freire, an author with revolutionary ideas concerning the pedagogy of liberation believes that a fact-transmission style of teaching "mirrors oppressive society as a whole" (Freire 59). Due to this parallel between schools and society, I believe the solution will not lie in either schools or society; efforts must be born of a coalition of the two.

Looking Forward

The friend who sparked my original thoughts on learning to discover one's "element" is a national-class athlete. An all-American rower in college with aspirations for the Canadian national team, she was met with the threat of losing her chance to graduate because of near-failure in English classes. Simultaneous with my friend's push for graduation, a basketball athlete from the same university left school two weeks short her own graduation to join a WNBA team. This situation illuminates that being a gifted athlete is not considered a talent worthy enough to gain prestige unless one can excel at the professional level. The level of expertise that is required to succeed in a nontraditional intelligence is far greater than the expertise required for success in a traditional domain; this inconsistency represents the double-sidedness of American values.

Consider a society in which athletic achievement, musical talent, creative endeavors, environment insight, and inter- or intra- personal prowess are recognized and developed as soon as one begins attending school. Acting on this level of awareness,

schools may begin to produce more of the "prodigies" that give such flavor to American life. On a personal note, I am reminded of the third-grade Hispanic girl I tutored who knew no English yet was more proficient in math than most fifth-graders, and the mentally handicapped boy whom I met while interning in a physical education class who could not meet average reading standards but made his peers laugh more loudly and often than anyone else in the class. Students such as these will fail within the confines of our current school structure—and this is disturbing.

Meeting the requirements of core classes poses challenges for students ranging from elementary schools to universities who are in other ways very capable. Though I doubt the prudence of ridding schools of a basic curriculum, I propose that we eliminate the standardized testing practices that emphasize extended focus on logical-mathematical and linguistic intelligences. Building a general knowledge base for young children will entail maintaining traditional subjects (math, science, reading), reinstating classes that have—as a result of No Child Left Behind—been removed from curriculums (physical education, music, art), and supplementing all of these with new classes or activities that appeal to the remaining intelligences (e.g.: construction, discussion, gardening, philosophy, journaling, meditating, hiking, group projects, etc.). Removing testing does not imply that there would be no means of academic evaluation; I suggest a Montessori style of assessment. Montessori schools aim to develop the human potential by inspiring and promoting academic excellence in its many forms and nurturing curiosity, creativity, and imagination, with the ultimate goal being to "waken the human spirit" (montessori.org). Professor and former Montessori teacher, Barbara Thayer-Bacon describes the Montessori method of assessment,

> [Students] are credited when they are taught a new concept or skill (on their chart one side of a triangle is drawn to note what they have been shown), when they work with materials and practice using this new concept or skill (the base of the triangle is drawn on their chart), and they are finally checked off when they master the concept or skill by demonstrating they can consistently use it correctly (the third side of the triangle is drawn symbolizing the learning is complete). Along the way, they receive continual feedback from the material itself as well as from their teachers (adults and peers), and when they have mastered the concept/skill they become teachers to others trying to learn (Thayer-Bacon 2).

This triangle system is appealing because of its three-part process: introduction, practice, and mastery. Every child is able to succeed in such an environment because no one skill, concept, or intelligence would merit "a bigger triangle" (more recognition). Freedom to discover, express, and develop one's unique capacities and intelligences would contribute to the condition that Phillips believed was most important: "being unconsciously ourselves" (Phillips 9).

The focus on individuality and diverse intelligences has the potential to be divisive; as students excel in different domains, hierarchies of capabilities are liable to arise once again. Overcoming human nature's tendency to categorize people will require two actions: federal support of diverse intelligences in the form of academic and professional opportunities, and an unwavering commitment of citizens to unite against oppressive circumstances that lead to cringing.

Phillips instructs that “the group has to find the sense of fellowship, which gives it driving force,” while not allowing small differences to hinder unity, but remaining “tamed by the awareness of external adversaries to be overthrown by collective effort” (Phillips 16). He goes on to caution, “we still sometimes swagger unconvincingly in our moments of rebellion; we still sometimes cast envious glances over our shoulder at the superior maturity of the English (Phillips 18). The English people in this context are analogous to forces in the United States that contribute to students’ feelings of vulnerability and suppression. Expanding the crux of his admonition, we can infer that it is impossible for a significant change in education to be born of timid citizens who still hold to the dictates of tradition and the lure of mimicry. Freire adds, “as long as ambiguity persists, the oppressed are reluctant to resist, and totally lack confidence in themselves” (Freire 50). We cannot give into the myth that education is incapable of experiencing revolutionary change; the grandiosity of the task should bid us not to cringe, but to work single-mindedly in unity.

As Phillips’s ideas were the catalyst for the thoughts behind this essay, it seems appropriate to end with his poignant words: “. . . one of the most propelling forces in administration is the sense of pride in individual professional achievement. We are unlikely to find a better motive power than the unfettered functioning of the human spirit” (Phillips 18). As we look into the future and seek to esteem individual intelligences, let our drive be rooted in nothing less than the desire to bring to fruition the vast potential of the human spirit.

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