

'From intelligence to wisdom: the need of age',

York St John University: inclusion and diversity conference

Monday 20 June 2022

Dr Gurnam Singh,
Associate Professor of Equity,
Office of Teaching and Learning, Coventry University
Twitter: @gurnamskhela

 York St John
University

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Problematizing intelligence?

The idea of human 'intelligence' (and associated concepts such as 'bright', 'clever', 'smart', etc) appears to be relatively benign, but discourses of who is and who is not 'intelligent' are deeply implicated in historic and contemporary forms of racism and colonial violence.

The idea of 'intelligence' has played a key/specific role in judgments about human worth and rights over at least the past 300 years.

Classifying people in general and classifying them as being less or more intelligent, is deeply implicated in public policy and forms of physical and psychological violence, up to and including genocide.

Policies to erase or assimilate Indigenous peoples in colonised lands by European imperialists were rooted in white supremacist worldviews based on social Darwinism.

We need to recognise the inherent capacity of all human beings to be thinkers and producers of knowledge
To enable this, we need to completely re-imagine our perception of the learner, what we teach, how we teach and how we assess.



Some audience participation – Guess the institution?

1. This institution has a policy where 57% of students are admitted on academic merit.
2. The other 47% are included because of sporting prowess, parental income, children of existing employees, or executive power exercised by the Dean of school.

Harvard University, USA.

- 47% percent of white students are recruited through the 'athletes', 'legacies', 'dean's interest list' and 'children' of Harvard employees (ALDCs).
- 70% of all 'legacy' applicants at Harvard being white.
- Despite criticisms about 'affirmative action' policies being a form of reverse racism, wealthy white students are the ones who most benefit from such policies.

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Opinion
Harvard University


Wed 17 Nov 2021 11:19 GMT

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Turns out, Harvard students aren't that smart after all

Tayo Bero


A whopping 43% of white students weren't admitted on merit. One might call it affirmative action for the rich and privileged



People walk past an entrance to Widener Library on the campus of Harvard University.
Photograph: Steven Senne/AP

Ever wondered what it takes to get into Harvard? Stellar grades, impressive extracurriculars and based on a recently published study, having deep pockets and a parent who either works or went there. Those last two are pretty important for Harvard's white students because only about 57% of them were admitted to the school based on merit.

In reality, 43% of Harvard's white students are either recruited athletes, legacy students, on the dean's interest list (meaning their parents have donated to the school) or children of faculty and staff (students admitted based on these criteria are referred to as 'ALDCs', which stands for 'athletes', 'legacies', 'dean's interest list' and 'children' of Harvard employees). The kicker? Roughly three-quarters of these applicants would have been rejected if it weren't for having rich or Harvard-connected parents or being an athlete.



Harvard University will divest its \$42bn endowment from all fossil fuels

[Read more](#)



Some more audience participation
– Guess the institution?

- It was part of a movement to establish new universities in England.
- From its inception this institution had a reputation for widening participation.
- Awarding it a university charter was initially blocked by Oxford and Cambridge, parliament, the Church of England and the Medical Profession.
- It was disparagingly described by the elites at the time as a “cockney university”

Answer: London University (now UCL)





Some more audience participation –
Guess the institutions?

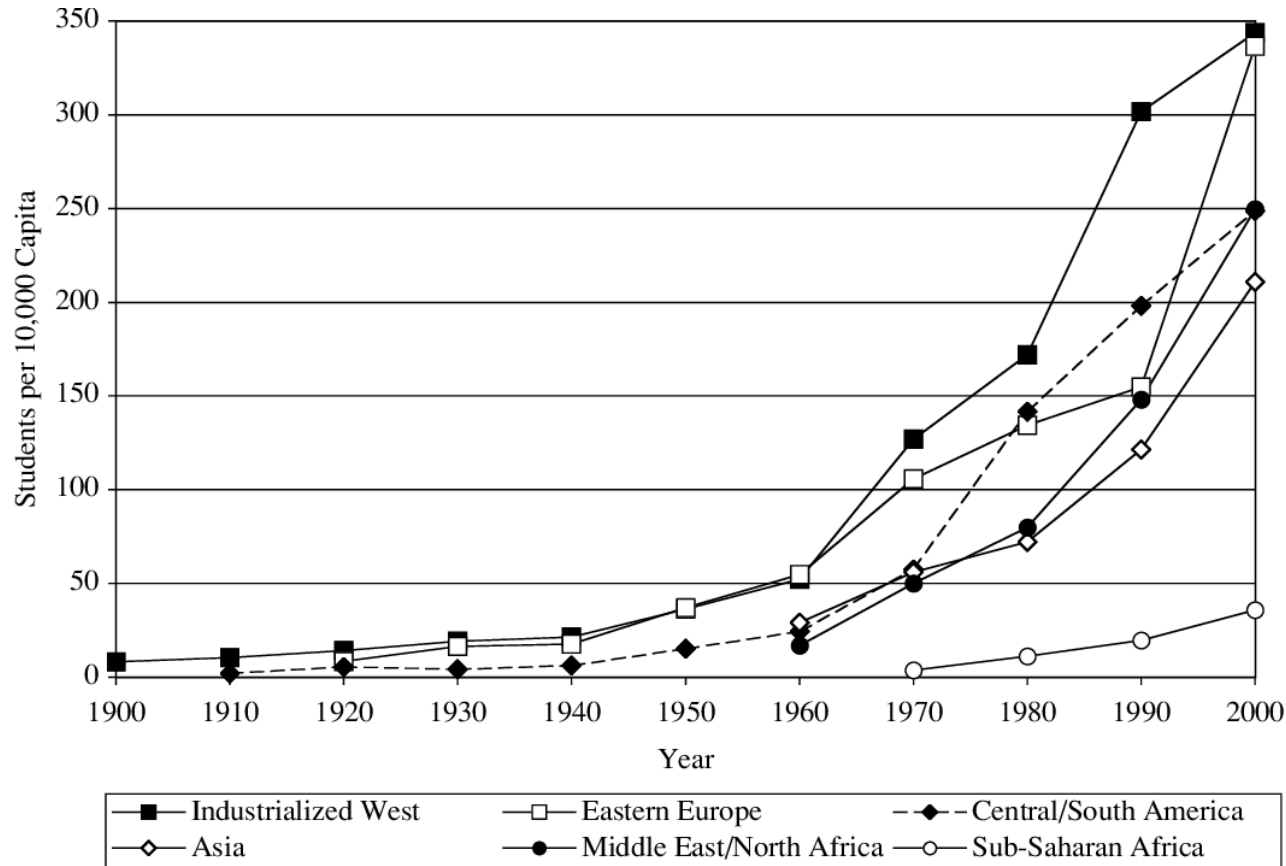
- These two universities were described as institutions where students get a degree in “making jam” because of their emphasis on vocational education and degrees.

The Universities of Liverpool and Birmingham.



Source: Colini, S (2012) What are universities for. Penguin Books, UK.

The Higher Education Revolution



- New Universities have unfairly been characterised as second-class institutions; There is a long history of such disparagement with each period of expansion.
- But a revolution has been taking place over the past 100 and humanity will look back at this period as one of the most exciting and critical periods of human development
- Technology has opened up the possibility that anybody on the planet can have some access to material that can support higher learning,
- The advent of online communications and artificial intelligence is accelerating this process
- The key challenge is how we integrate/embrace these new possibilities as well as develop appropriate literacies and skills for learners to make use of this.
- This is all very disruptive!!

How can we define human intelligence?

Standard definition

“A mental quality that consists of the abilities to learn from experience, adapt to new situations, understand and handle abstract concepts, and use knowledge to manipulate one’s environment.”

(Encyclopedia Britannica)

Critical definition

“we make some people smarter than others, by rewarding the smartness of some people and ignoring the smartness of others. We make some people smart, in short, just by choosing to call them that.”(p26)

Hayman, R. L., Jr. (1998). *The smart culture: Society, intelligence, and law*. New York University Press.

Intelligence, symbolic violence and imposter syndrome

- Two-thirds of female scholars experience frequent or intense feelings of being an “impostor” in academia,
- 95 per cent of 1,326 women in HE from across the world admitted characteristics showing at least moderate levels imposter syndrome
- 46 per cent identified as having frequent feelings of imposter syndrome,
- 20 per cent suffered intense and recurring fears of being exposed as an intellectual fraud,
- Impostor syndrome was just as likely to affect women with tenured faculty positions as those doing PhDs or filling postdoctoral research roles,
- There was no difference in the level of imposter syndrome experienced by women in different types of institutions, be they community colleges, teaching-focused universities and elite research-led institutions.



(Vaughn. A, Taasoobshirazi. G & Johnson. M (2020) Impostor phenomenon and motivation: women in higher education, *Studies in Higher Education*, 45:4, 780-795, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03075079.2019.1568976?journalCode=cshe20>)

Intelligence and elitism

- "People with advantages are loath to believe that they just happen to be people with advantages. They come readily to define themselves as inherently worthy of what they possess; they come to believe themselves “naturally” elite; and, in fact, to imagine their possessions and their privileges as natural extensions of their own elite selves (p14).”

(C.Wright Mills, (1956/2000) The Power Elite, Oxford)

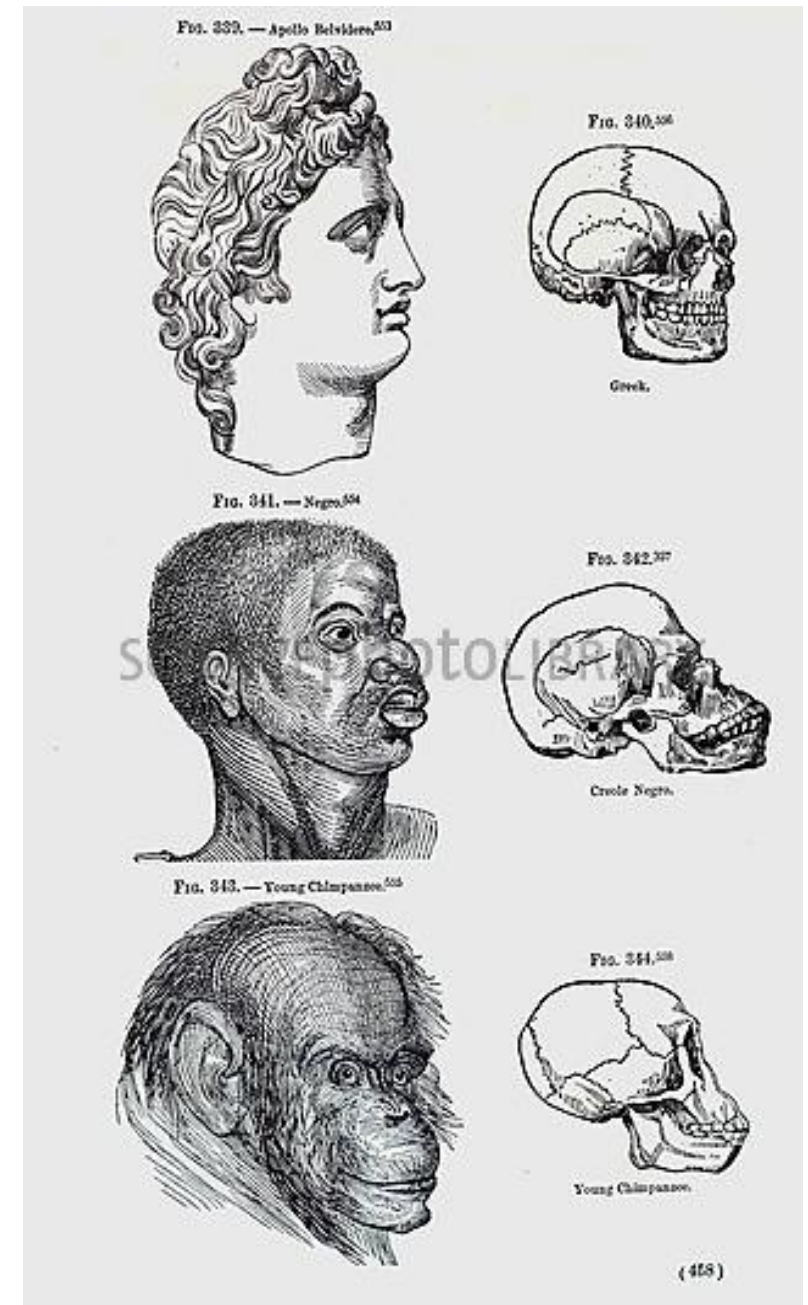


A brief history of human intelligence

- The idea of intelligence as commonly understood within educational regimes is a very recent invention.
- 2300 years ago, the Aristotle made our first reference to something *close* to the idea of intelligence, which he called “reason.”
- Reason, according to Aristotle, was about humans’ ability to reign in their passions, i.e., our ability to resist the urge of our instincts. This was what separated us from the animals: humans had reason, beasts did not.
- In the modern period we see the idea of the ‘thinking or knowledgeable’ man becoming associated with the capacity to exercise certain rights.
- From 17th Century, several moral and political philosophers, such as Hobbs, Hegel, Kant and Rosseau, linked human intelligence to the notion of the ‘social contract’,
- It is this idea of the capacity to make rational choices that determines rights and entitlements
- Within colonial regimes, the idea of ‘intelligence’ and ‘skill’ more generally was woven into exclusionary ideologies and discourses configured around essentialist and deterministic ideas race, caste, religion, class, and gender. e.g. the denial of universal suffrage was justified through ideas that women were not intellectually designed to lead

European Enlightenment - Intelligence as biology.

- Shift from reason and wisdom to ‘degrees of reason’ or what Charles Darwin termed “mental powers”::
- *“I am inclined to agree with Francis Galton in believing that education and environment produce only a small effect on the mind of any one, and that most of our qualities are innate (Darwin, quoted in Barlow, 1958 p. 43).”*



Social Darwinism provided a rationale for Eugenics policies and the 'scientific' assessment of human Intelligence, eugenics and justifications for the systemic genocide of indigenous and colonized peoples

EUGENICS IS THE STUDY OF THE AGENCIES UNDER SOCIAL CONTROL THAT MAY IMPROVE OR IMPAIR THE RACIAL QUALITIES OF FUTURE GENERATIONS EITHER PHYSICALLY OR MENTALLY. THE FEEBLE NATIONS OF THE WORLD ARE NECESSARILY GIVING WAY BEFORE THE NOBLER VARIETIES OF MANKIND.

- FRANCIS GALTON -

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Remains of more than 1,000 Indigenous children found at former residential schools in Canada

By [Mindy Weisberger](#) published July 13, 2021

State-run boarding schools for Indigenous children operated in Canada between 1863 and 1998.

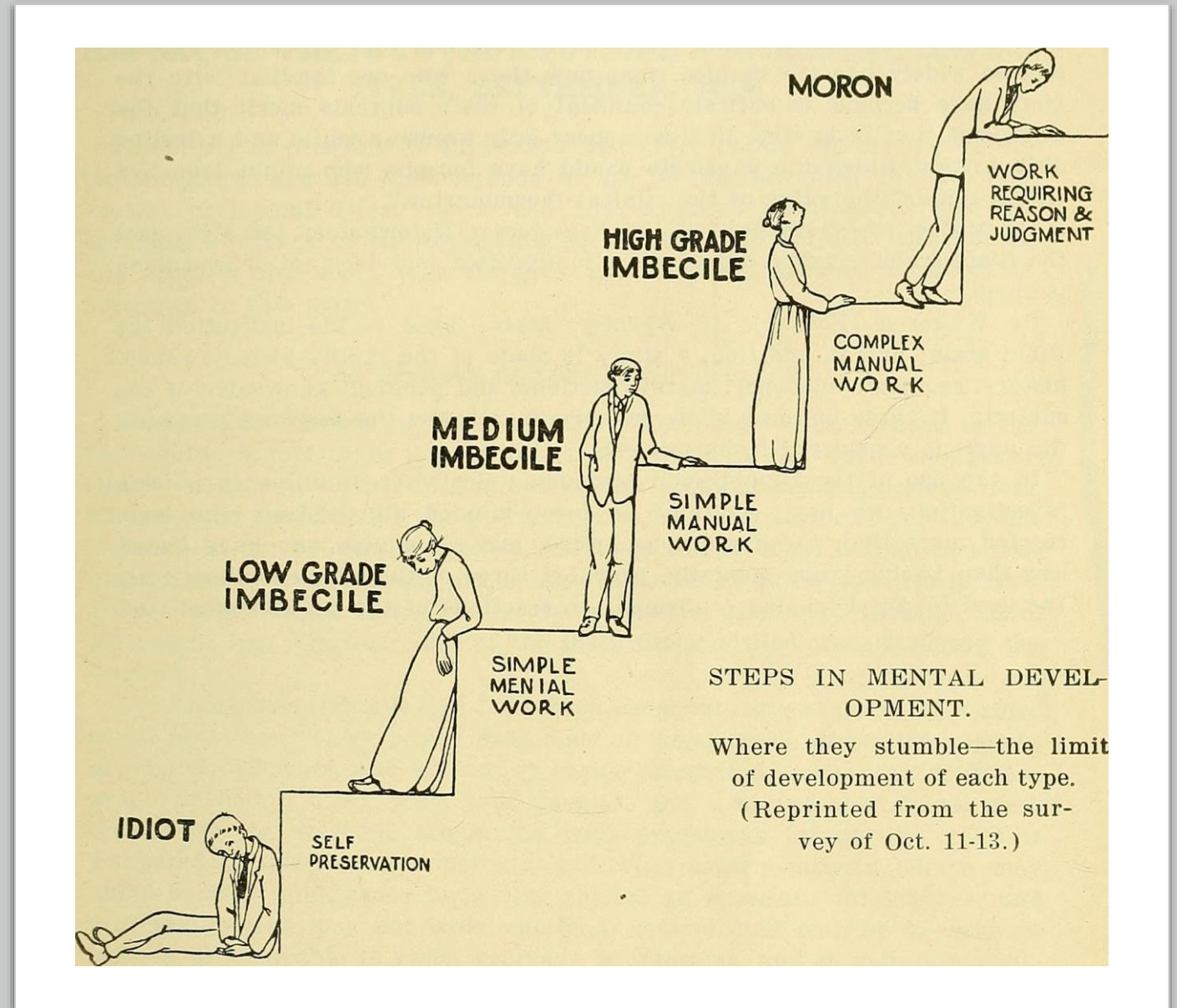


Part of the small memorial honoring the recently discovered mass grave at the Kamloops Residential School. The memorial was in front of Queens Park Legislative building in Toronto. (Image credit: Rick Madonik/Toronto Star via Getty Images)

Eugenics and the Hierarchy of Intelligence.

“The advent of new techniques that measured and reified intelligence, (e.g. intelligence and IQ testing) reinforced the perception of the “mentally defective” as lacking in rational capacities. While in one sense this placed even the most extreme cases on a distinctly human continuum of intelligence, the implementation of these tests allowed certain groups to be picked out and become targets of dehumanizing eugenic practices.”

Carlson, L. (2014, April 29). Subhumanization. Retrieved June 8, 2021, from <http://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/encyclopedia/535eee687095aa000000025e>



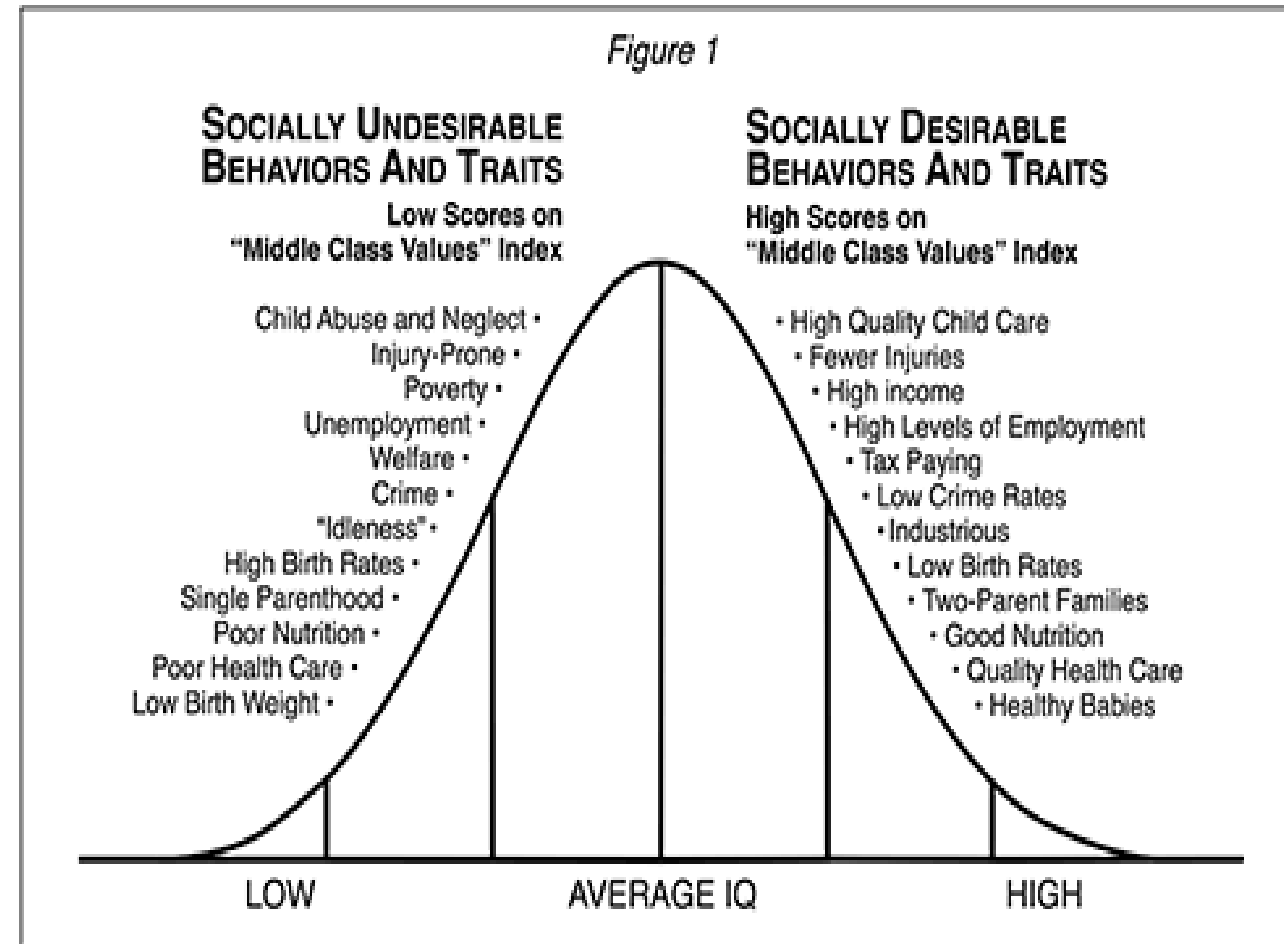
Intelligence and Colonialism

- Ideas about intelligence and mechanisms for gathering 'intelligence' are deeply implicated in the colonial project and systems of regulation, discipline and knowledge generation (research)
- "the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity.

(Smith, L. T. (1999). Decolonising methodologies: Researching and indigenous peoples. p1)

The science of Intelligence and deficit modelling

- In their influential research on class and intelligence, Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein argued that **“Socioeconomic status is...a result of cognitive ability”** (1994,p. 286).
- Would it not make more sense to reverse the causal arrow and hypothesize that poverty and all of its associates cause low intelligence?
- The idea of intelligence itself appears to be placing value on biased interpretation/representation of cultural behaviours.
- Within HE, similar logics of cultural and social pathology have been used to frame disparities in access, participation and attainment.



Murray, C and Herrnstein, R (1994) The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life. Free Press.

Intelligence is not a panacea!

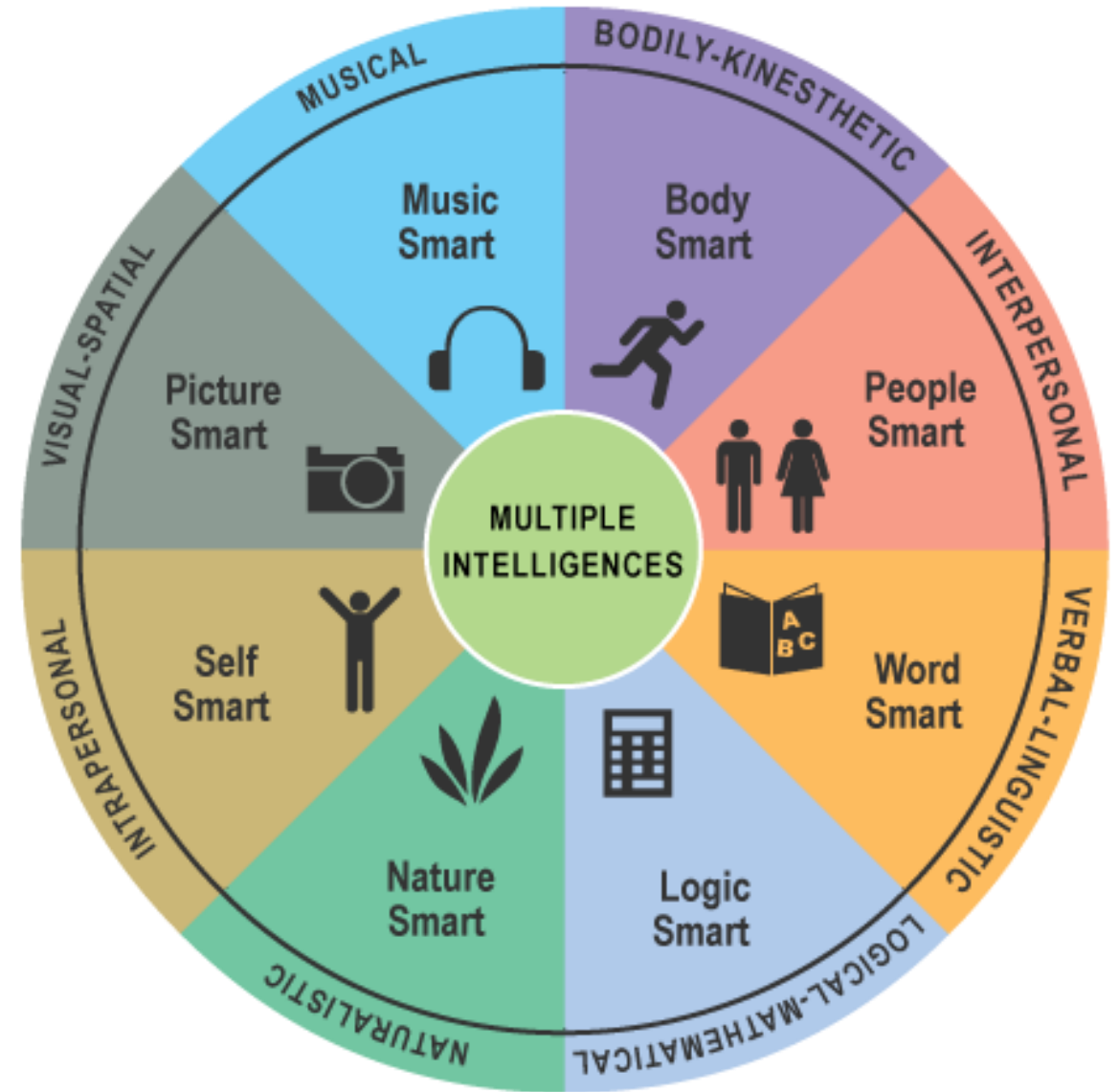
“If intelligence is in part the ability to adapt to the environment, one might hope that increases in average IQ would help to make the world a more harmonious and understanding place...IQ increases may have brought us shiny new technologies such as cell phones and computers and more facile use of them, but if people continue to destroy the world and the people in it, there may not be any people left to utilize the technology. We may have created a world in which people are smart, but not terribly wise.”(p372)

Sternberg, Robert J., and Judith Glück, eds. (2019) *The Cambridge handbook of wisdom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press



Moving beyond intelligence towards wisdom

- Abolish the concept of intelligence!
- Shift from a singular conception of intelligence to 'multiple intelligences' (Gardner) – e.g. (how) do we assess emotional intelligence?
- Move towards a notion of mass intellectuality – to be human is to belong to a species of thinking animals (Homo sapiens).
- Shift the emphasis away from intelligence to wisdom.



What is the differences between possessing knowledge and developing wisdom?



Fruit is the fleshy or dry ripened ovary of a flowering plant, enclosing the seed or seeds.

Thus, egg plant or aubergine, is technically a fruit.

What is wisdom?

- Cultural interpretations – the qualities of a wise person – associated with age!
- Wisdom is often associated with virtues and a way of life.
- It can be differentiated from knowledge, information and data. (DIKW Pyramid)
- Represents holistic thinking.
- Incorporates reflexivity, complexity and systems thinking.



Rowley, Jennifer (2007). "The wisdom hierarchy: representations of the DIKW hierarchy". *Journal of Information and Communication Science*. **33** (2): 163–180.

What has a wisdom based education have to offer?

- In a world dominated by “artificial intelligence” and ‘knowledge ubiquity” we need to reconsider the purpose of education, beyond the traditional emphasis on transmission.
- A focus on wisdom involves using both one’s intelligence and one’s creativity, as well as one’s knowledge base, for a common good.
- Addresses some of the critiques of the limitations and violence's of European Enlightenment Rationalism made by anti-colonial scholarship.
- Offers the possibility of developing new epistemological frameworks that can reconcile ethics and the blind pursuit of knowledge.
- Big question – can we teach wisdom?

Teaching for Wisdom

- We need to be weary about a whole lot of new age fads associated with wisdom – these do not necessarily represent the wisdom of the ancients, nor do they
- Wisdom is about problem solving but it takes a more holistic perspective on such matters. (e.g. one does not build more roads to solve traffic jams!) – consistent with complexity theory.
- Wisdom based education does not displace science, reason, knowledge and theory, but offers a higher level of skill development. Wisdom can be seen as the product of ‘natural experimentation’.
- Wisdom based education must be grounded in context and history so is appreciative of the fact that ‘theories’ are born out of ‘paradigms’ and contingent reality.
- However, wisdom goes beyond temporal constraints. Why? because wisdom doesn’t age, new insights can be gleaned from past traditions and practices.



What is distinct about wisdom-based education?

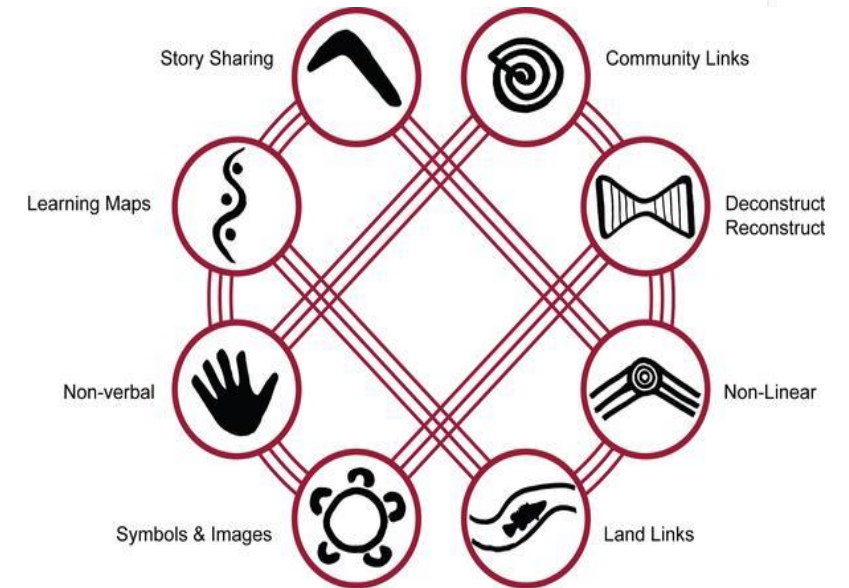
- The underlying philosophical and ethical principles of wisdom-based education need to be reflected in the pedagogical strategy – e.g. principles of *kindness, compassion, co-creation, co-operation, creativity* etc.
- Directly relates to people's life experiences and to society at large. (Newman, Dewey)
- To be questioning and not taking anything on face-value, which in a so-called age of 'post-truth' and 'fake news', is absolutely critical.
- *“the principal goal of education is to create men [and women] who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done – men who are creative, inventive, discoverers. The second goal of education is to form minds which can be critical, can verify, and not accept everything they offered”*

(Jean Piaget, quoted in Seiger-Ehrenberg, 1985).

Learning from other pedagogical traditions

e.g. Aboriginal Pedagogy: <https://www.8ways.online/about>

1. **Story Sharing:** Approaching learning through narrative.
2. **Learning Maps:** Explicitly mapping/visualising processes.
3. **Non-verbal:** Applying intra-personal and kinaesthetic skills to thinking and learning.
4. **Symbols and Images:** Using images and metaphors to understand concepts and content.
5. **Land Links:** Place-based learning, linking content to local land and place.
6. **Non-linear:** Producing innovations and understanding by thinking laterally or combining systems.
7. **Deconstruct/Reconstruct:** Modelling and scaffolding, working from wholes to parts (watch then do).
8. **Community Links:** Centring local viewpoints, applying learning for community benefit.



Concluding thoughts

- We need to accept ‘intelligence’ is a dubious socially constructed idea and that methods to measure it (and its proxies, e.g. gifted, talented, bright etc.) have been responsible for educational exclusion, segregation and violence.
- We need to find ways of seeing the ‘non-traditional student’ not as a threat, or as inferior, but as a ‘thinking, creative being.
- We need to move away from the false binary divide between ‘technical and vocational education’ versus ‘academic education’ – all life is practical!
- We need a paradigm shift towards centering education on nurturing wisdom and virtue.
- The price for failure is nothing less than the destruction of our planet – we must act now and harness the immense power of education for the collective good.