

## Haunted by a Fearful Phantom of Being Unintelligent

*Peter Moddel*

We have been educated to believe a ghost inhabits our bodies and most of us, it seems, stand in awe and terror of it. It is what arises when, particularly in public, we come face to face with non-understanding. The presence of the ghost is felt not in the loss of an opportunity to understand, but in the fear of being stamped a reject, i.e. unintelligent. Being found unintelligent, in the eyes of others and in our own, is the curse from which we flee.

And our classrooms are ever haunted by this phantom. The teacher is afraid of being shown to harbor it, and the pupils are led to feel it is lurking there ready to nab them with their every move.

Many of the students choose not to move, to be silent whenever possible so as not to tempt the ghost, but without moving they can only learn very slowly. Others take up arms and fight with it only to be thrown down again and again and be shown that they are inhabited by it and in dearth of the ineffable something called intelligence.

Then there is the pupil who beats down the enemy by making the called-for moves, by getting it right, and is subsequently attributed the sanction of intelligence. So the pupil becomes one of the chosen few who need only respond when they know and with what they know. They can become like teachers who, by nature of the role thrust upon them, profess intelligence. At every moment these persons must be on the lookout for hidden recesses where the ghost may be lurking and the ubiquity of the title of intelligence bestowed upon them can be punctured, the protection it affords rescinded.

So it is that the classroom is haunted. The children, the teacher, even the parent who comes to speak with the teacher – all are characters in a senseless ghost story.

The assumption is that intelligence has to do with understanding a question, with having accumulated knowledge, with having forethought, with not losing one's track, with being able to spell, with remembering facts and names... the list is long. In some cultural contexts certain abilities escape the curse, for example true-to-life drawing may be excused from the prerequisites for intelligence.

Who in heaven's name ever conjured up such a declaration of dependence? Have we really been stupid enough to edify this constitution of human nature? Does the above list of assumptions refer to anything at all, to any constitutive entity that inhabits a person? The ghost we have harnessed is most certainly an ethereal ghost built on hearsay. A rumor was put out and we're all taken in.

But when a belief has been installed, go try and exorcise it! Try to tell people that there isn't really a ghost in the house believed haunted. Try telling them the ghost is merely the manifestation of our fears.

Today, while neuroscientists explain that the human brain has as many cells as there are stars in a medium sized galaxy – *and that is everyone whatever your school marks are* – while they speak of myriad structures found in each brain cell, of the macro-nets of linked cells and the micro-tubules which may propel the mind into a quantum context where neither time nor space as we know them function, they also say they have no inkling as to where the great potential of the mind is required. This all gives reason to the feeling many have that something is dreadfully wrong and unjust in the attribution of non-intelligence to the school child and to our peers.

One way of approaching a solution seems to be: divide and conquer. This may explain the appeal of the call for multiple intelligences and for emotional intelligence.

Yet we must ask what it is we need in order to free ourselves from the hold this term has over us, in order to let go of what we are naming intelligence.

Fundamentally, it takes just two realizations, neither of which is surprising or new.

1. The realization that intelligence is innate to the species. People, for example, have the intelligence of the human species. Everybody, by virtue of being human, is bequeathed with this potential.
2. The realization that what has commonly been referred to as intelligence, is some aspect of the actualization of our potential. The enactment of intelligence is dependent on specific mental procedures, that is, on the manner in which information is being processed and a task is being formulated in the mind.

These two simple statements have far-reaching implications for we are in the habit of believing that talent and intelligence are innate – something special that some have and others lack, some abstract entity which has its carrier somewhere on the DNA double helix. Could readjusting the procedure by which human potential is enacted, significantly change the ability to perform tasks commonly used as measures of intelligence?

The research of Antoine de la Garanderie, published in French in over a dozen books and numerous articles, gives strong evidence of a positive response to this question. He has traced the process of the enactment of an individual's intelligence when faced with specific learning tasks. This can be accomplished by observing how the mind structures meaning. He has shown that through careful questioning, it is possible to observe the structures of our own thinking and consider how appropriate or inappropriate they are to the task at hand. It has been shown that individuals can accomplish major shifts in their ability to perform intellectually and artistically by readjusting the mental procedures employed to accomplish these tasks.

The study of the mind of a learner in the act of cognition is known under the term *gestion mentale*. In opening out this field, Antoine de la Garanderie has redefined what is most central in pedagogy.

We can let go the ghost now. As soon as we free ourselves of the need to scare those in the classroom with the ridiculous threat of being less intelligent than they actually are, most surely the phantom of non-intelligence will disappear into thin air.