

Address by Professor Howard E. Gardner
Doctor of Education, *honoris causa*

Council Chairman Mr Pang Yiu-kai and members of the Council, President Professor Stephen Cheung Yan-leung, staff, students and friends of The Hong Kong Institute of Education:

Thank you for the singular honour that you have bestowed on Mr Joseph Koo Ka-fai, Mr Lau Ming-wai, Mr Shen Jinkang and me. I am confident that I am speaking for all of us in expressing appreciation for the warm reception that we, as well as our families and friends, have received.

I could not have anticipated it, but the set of honorees constitute a testament to the relevance of the work for which I am best known—the theory of multiple intelligences. However well or poorly each of us did on standardised tests—the tests that measure aspects of linguistic and logical intelligence—we are likely to have drawn on other intelligences. As a composer, Joseph Koo Ka-fai exhibits musical intelligence; as an athlete and trainer of cyclists, Shen Jinkang exhibits bodily-kinesthetic intelligence; as a leader, Lau Ming-wai must draw on the personal intelligences—understanding of other persons, and understanding of one self. I suspect that these intelligences are also shared by others on the platform and in the audience.

For reasons that are understandable, if not fully justified, in the last 100 years, educational institutions around the world have prioritised linguistic and logical intelligences. If one wants to select future scholars, this is a reasonable if not adequate rationale. But there are two provisos:

First, many of the most important roles in a society call on other intelligences, or combinations of intelligences. We can be smart in school and a dunce in life.

Second, every intelligence can be used for benign or for malignant purposes. Both the South African leader Nelson Mandela and the Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic had plenty of interpersonal intelligence—they knew how to persuade people to act in certain ways. Milosevic used his interpersonal intelligence to foment hatred and promote ‘ethnic cleansing.’ Mandela drew on his interpersonal intelligence to bring together long-hostile groups in amazingly peaceful ways.

The work in education for which I’m best known focuses on cognition. But I came to realise—twenty years ago—that cognition, even pluralised, is not enough. And so, with many remarkable colleagues, I have focused on the USES to which intelligences and talents are put. We call our endeavour the Good Project, and we are trying to understand what it means to be a good person, a good worker, and a good citizen.

The idea of a good person is as old as the Bible and Confucius, and I have little to add to that. But both the working professional and the citizen are new roles, which have only emerged in recent centuries. Our studies have revealed the three components of these roles: good workers are individuals who are excellent, engaged, and ethical. They know their craft; they care about it; and they try to carry it out in an ethical way. We believe that the same analysis applies to citizenship. The good citizen knows the laws and regulations; she cares about being an active citizen; and rather than simply pursuing self-interest, the good citizen strives to do what is best for the polity as a whole.

It would be unrealistic to expect schools to develop all intelligences or even the primary intelligence of each child; that is the job of the broader society, including parents, extended family, the media, the political system, and other institutions. By the same token, we cannot burden the schools with the task of single-handedly creating good persons, workers and citizens.

And yet, all over the world, it is a fact that, for young persons, schools ARE the single institutions that are most likely to make the difference between the child whose intelligences are developed and the child whose intelligences are ignored. And the schools ARE the single institutions that are most likely to make the difference between good work, good citizenship, and good persons, and those who become compromised or bad persons, workers, or citizens.

In a word, that is why the work carried out at The Hong Kong Institute of Education is so vital. It is in your hands, more than that of any other societal institution, to educate and nurture teachers and heads of schools and educational institutions that will contribute to a healthy society, with engaged and worthy citizens. From all I know, the Institute is capable of rising to this challenge. On behalf of my fellow honorands, and the many guests assembled here, I thank you for the important—indeed indispensable—work that you do.