There is no such thing as a standard mind. There is no possibility of a standard education. Critical thinking also depends on the particular jaggedness of a thinker's mind. Instead of settling for the standardized product (the diploma), then we will create a system that does a better job of making every educational cockpit fit every body, no matter how jagged. “When I climb in,” Campbell told us, “the seat created adjustable foot pedals, helmets, and flight suits.

In the late 19th century, a British scientist named Francis Galton developed a system of standardization that measured the continuity ranging from the towering heights of exceptional superiority (what Galton termed “eminence”) to the depths of inferiority. Galton’s system of intelligence measurement was built on a single, all-encompassing metric of “rank.”

The architecture of our modern system of higher education is predicated upon two antagonistic assumptions. The first is that we can hold students to a one-size-fits-all educational standard, as the cockpits in an Air Force flight school were, and be just as effective as in the olden days when individuals were measured against a standard (the average pilot).

The second assumption is that students are inherently alike in their learning potential and ability—like their counterparts in the Air Force, who all share a common GPA, rank, or other measure of academic achievement. In essence, the modern system standardizes students by ensuring that in every classroom, each student is taught the same material at the same pace in the same way. Our standardized system of education reinforces the view that learning is a commodity, not a personalized experience that develops the humanistic or professional capacities unique to each learner.

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