What is intelligent design?

An analysis based on multiple working hypotheses and strong inference

Multiple working hypotheses:

H_1: A rich and insightful new research paradigm.
H_2: An effective means for reconciling science and religion.
H_3: Part of a 'vast right wing conspiracy' aimed at imposing a theocracy.
H_4: An argument from ignorance (or from personal incredulity.)
H_5: An important bit of historical context for understanding the origins of Darwin's theories.
H_6: A scientifically sound alternative to Darwinian evolutionary theory.
H_7: An attack on the naturalistic foundations of science.
H_8: A reprise of (neo-)Platonic idealism and its anti-democracy assertions.
H_9: An explanation of otherwise inexplicable phenomena.
H_{10}: An honest and open-minded search for understanding.
H_n: Other possibilities...?

Chamberlin, T.C. 1890. The method of multiple working hypotheses. Science 15: 92-96.
["The moment one has offered an original explanation for a phenomenon which seems satisfactory, that moment affection for his intellectual child springs into existence; and as the explanation grows into a definite theory, his parental affections cluster about his intellectual offspring, and it grows more and more dear to him, so that, while he holds it seemingly tentative, it is still lovingly tentative, and not impartially tentative. So soon as this parental affection takes possession of the mind there is a rapid passage to the adoption of the theory. There is an unconscious selection and magnifying of the phenomena that fall into harmony with the theory and support it and an unconscious neglect of thosethat fail of coincidence. The mind lingers with pleasure upon the facts that fall happily into the embrace of the theory, and feels a natural coldness toward those that seem refractory."]

Jewett, D.L. 2005. What's Wrong With Single Hypotheses: It's time to eschew enthrallment in science. The Scientist. ["During the exploratory phase the factors that influence success are unclear, so the research must proceed by way of hunches, serendipitous observations, and selections based on inadequate information."]

Platt, J.R. 1964. Strong inference. Science 146: 347-353. [Generate an exhaustive list of testable hypotheses and systematically eliminate them until only one or a few remain viable.]