

Isolation of the gifted

Business



Today, schools are helping set up the brightest students in the nation for failure. Why set back the most promising demographic of our youth?

Education systems across the globe have recognized a need to create separate programs for “ gifted” students. These students perform better than their peers academically and these programs enable them to push themselves with more demanding curriculums so they might reach their full potential instead of being hindered by slower courses.

There is an unsavory byproduct to these courses, however. Honors programs inherently insulate students from real-world interactions and experiences.

Koko is a world-renown gorilla currently living in captivity. While other gorillas were raised by their primal parents, Koko was raised from infancy listening to the warm voice of her trainer. She watched as pale, hairless hands waved and shifted around in front of her.

These movements became words, actions, and feelings. Her hands replicated the movements of her trainer’s, and these movements made her trainer respond. Caretakers served her vegetables, chicken, and even candies on a daily basis. Computer screens read out words and TV screens flashed pale, hairless faces. Her trainer even presented her a delicate furry companion that she cared for like a child. Meanwhile wild gorillas focused on bringing back fruits for their hungry children and scavenging for supplies to maintain their groups.

Koko learned more than 2, 000 verbal and signed words. She rose to become the most famous, and educated ape in the world. Are students in advanced courses comparable to an ape? In many ways, yes. Koko lives in a very

enriched environment. But in her natural jungle environment, Koko would never be able to survive.

Honors students find themselves immersed in an enriched environment filled with engaging curriculum, meaningful discussions, and equally motivated peers. However, this does not accurately reflect the real world. In the workplace, employees must work with individuals of all levels of intelligence and motivation. If Koko was released into her natural habitat, the other gorillas would not be able to interpret her sign language and Koko would be at a severe disadvantage. Students in honors programs are used to working with individuals that are highly motivated and like-minded in many ways. This like-mindedness fosters a strong intellectual community, but this type of community does not exist everywhere.

Working with others that might be less motivated or less academically inclined broadens a student's perspective on people. Having an intellectual community also creates an "us vs them" ideology. Joining any community makes it your "ingroup". The students in your AP Calculus class or your fellow peers in your National Honors Society club make up your "ingroup". You identify as a member and support other members.

All other people are part of the "outgroup". This includes the gearheads in automotive class or the girls in the social sorority. Having such a large outgroup makes it more difficult for students to interact with those outside of the honors society. This becomes an issue when they go to apply for a job, play for a sports team, or even start dating, when they find it difficult to

interact with others normally. For my entire high school career, I only enrolled in AP and other advanced classes.

Come senior year, the time came for me to take a PE class. Koko had to leave her home for the first time. I had a good understanding of the barbell so I decided the weight training class would be the best option for me. Their eyes fixed on me, the foreigner, as I entered the locker room. All of the other guys sat talking to each other as if they'd known each other for a lifetime.

After an awkward roll call, we shuffled into the weight room like cattle. The familiar sight of power cages and chalk-stained padded floors welcomed me. The students were not nearly as welcoming. They all cackled at each other's immature jokes while they toyed around with empty barbells. Others heaved medicine balls over their heads to unsuspecting friends.

Some actually lifted, but only with other friends. I loaded my bar and began my workout in solitude. I was alone. The others might not have been doing what they were supposed to, but they were at least enjoying themselves. I ventured out of my rack and asked a guy in a maroon shirt two sizes too small for a spot. He spotted me and we eventually got into a conversation about the Xbox One.

I lifted with him every day after that. As the year went on, I became friends with more and more of the other kids. I would've never known these guys' names had I not taken that class. Weight training became my connection with the people who didn't take the accelerated classes or didn't have an interest in joining clubs. I branched outside of my social circle established by my advanced classes, and the quality of my social life flourished.

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In my situation, I was fortunate enough that my inexperience with this group of people didn't have any real consequences other than some temporary loneliness. Imagine entering a construction site for your first day as a civil engineer and you have to present the plans for the bridge you're going to be working on for the next couple months to the construction group. They've never sat through Engineering 101 or wrote any papers about the differences in methods of surveying. So how do you reach them? An employee needs to understand the needs, skills, knowledge, and background of his/her coworkers to effectively communicate with them. And any employer will tell you the importance of effective communication in the workplace. Effective communication skills can only be developed in a diverse environment, which in an honors program, the intellectual diversity is nearly nonexistent.

With this in mind, it is important to note that honors programs do not necessitate social ineptitude. Many would argue that honors programs allow students to meet like-minded people and become more social. They're right, but only partially. Honors programs make it easy to socialize with other intelligent students, but it is more difficult for students to receive a more holistic social integration with their community. Students need to take on the responsibility to consciously go out and meet others that aren't involved with a specific advanced academic program. Koko didn't need to become unfit for the wild, she could've taken visits to other untrained gorillas, or she could've been raised by another gorilla that was born in the wild.

This responsibility to branch out is often increased by the honors programs themselves. The programs may even have clubs for only those in the honors

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society. In the case of honors colleges, they may even require residency within the college. This further isolates the students from those outside the honors program. The students should have easier access to clubs and organizations that expand their social circles, not just be in more clubs with the same people. The solution to this situation is obviously not to end all honors programs.

Honors programs are a great option for many students and lead many into very successful careers. Koko obviously has a wonderful and fulfilling life all the same. Honors programs simply need to understand that the “us vs them” mentality exists when a student joins an organization and they must work to promote social proliferation among their students.