

Max Horwich
A New Curriculum

In his 1956 book *The Power Elite*, sociologist C Wright Mills posits that the individuals who hold the highest positions in the dominant institutions in the US (politics, economics and the military) first start forming their tight-knit circles of power in high school, mostly at elite east coast private schools. One of the schools he mentions by name is Kingswood Oxford, a small private day school in West Hartford, CT that, for a time in the early 90s, was the most expensive day school in the country. Their motto, “Vincit qui se vincit,” translates to “one conquers by conquering oneself.”

I attended Kingswood Oxford from 1997 to 2004, starting in sixth grade. Anecdotally, I can say it was a more progressive environment than Mills makes it sound. There was a strong emphasis on community service; my tenth grade history teacher assigned passages from *A People’s History of the United States*; and on Martin Luther King Day, when all the other schools had the day off, we had a day of special assemblies and workshops on diversity and tolerance.

Still, there was a hidden curriculum that I’m still struggling to fully identify fifteen years since graduation. A small, insular community of mostly privileged white students, whether intentionally or not, will internalize and recreate the power structures under which they were raised. It’s hard for me to say how much of this is endemic to this specific school and how much this is just high school in general, because I had very little outside context, and that’s no small part of the problem.

Privilege Illustrated



As with many students, sophomore year was the year I started “becoming myself,” gaining a clearer sense of my strengths and weaknesses that allowed me to double down on my greatest skills in a way that would look appealing on a college application (the very thing for which “prep school” is supposedly “prepping” students).

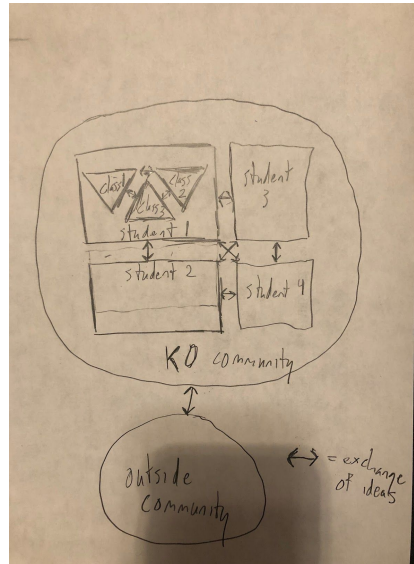
I believe there is a threefold way to lean into this transformation happening among students at this age, emphasising each student’s place in the community (both within the school and beyond) and how to better serve that community in a manner that is both interdisciplinary and intersectional.

1. Emphasise how various classes and disciplines inform one another. How can math inform a student’s understanding of music and art? How can their experience on the football team improve their ability to craft a well-reasoned argument? How can students approach community service as both the pursuit of justice and the betterment of oneself? In addition to making the experience of a high school education more interesting and enjoyable, it will give students fresh inroads to material they may have otherwise written off as “not for them,” thus producing more well-rounded students.

2. Encourage students to help each other. Whether it’s academic, artistic, athletic, or extracurricular, each student has an area where they excel. One requirement for sophomore year will be to lead a workshop or extra help session on a topic of their choosing for their peers (with faculty supervision as necessary).

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3. Reach out beyond the confines of the school (and the prep school circuit). Work with students from public schools in Hartford in a way that feels mutually beneficial and enriching. Organize roundtable discussions with students from public schools about shared topics in the tenth grade curriculum or issues affecting their lives. Encourage meaningful reflection on privilege among KO students, but in a way that doesn't frame the whole enterprise as charity work, but rather a valuable opportunity to have access to alternative perspectives.



All of this can be implemented with little disruption to the typical sophomore year course work. Chemistry, Trigonometry, US History, *Macbeth* and *The Great Gatsby* all work just fine within this curriculum. All it requires is a slight shift in focus, a slightly broader and more creative take on individual subjects, and a slightly broader and more honest look at the community at large. Rather than learning to conquer, they can learn to emancipate. To whatever extent future generations still have a "Power Elite" as described by Mills, we would all be better off if they were trained in emancipation over conquest.