

NATIONAL NEWS UPDATE

Tracking Hurts Minority Students But System Can be Altered Says Experts

WASHINGTON, D.C. — An increasing number of education professionals and parents oppose tracking as unfair to minority students, Jeannie Oakes writes in the premier edition of "Issues '88", a new publication of the National Education Association.

The annual magazine, with a circulation of over 1.9 million NEA members and education leaders, debuted in January.

Oakes, a social scientist with the Rand Corporation of Santa Monica, California, says tracking — which segregates schoolchildren by perceived ability level — creates uneven classroom opportunities and unequal access to knowledge.

A disproportionate number of poor and minority students are put in "low-ability" classes early in their school careers, Oakes points out. These students develop a low self-esteem, and the longer they remain in such classes, the further behind they fall.

Students in lower tracks, Oakes explains, are taught mostly by workbooks, kits, and easy-to-read stories, while learning tasks usually consist of memorizing and repeating answers back to the teacher.

Students placed in high-ability groups have far richer schooling ex-

periences than either low-ability or average-ability groups.

"They have access to different types of knowledge and intellectual experiences," writes Oakes. "They are expected to learn vocabulary that would eventually boost their scores on college entrance exams . . . Their teachers tend to be more enthusiastic (and) use criticism and ridicule less frequently than teachers of low-ability classes."

What can be done to eliminate the inequities?

"No ready-made staff-development packages or teaching formulas exist to help schools and teachers move smoothly toward less tracking," notes Oakes, who also acknowledges the difficulty of mixing within traditional competitive classrooms students who have different knowledge levels.

But Oakes does offer some important new recommendations for overcoming the problems inherent in tracking. Schools, she argues, need to take a concept-based approach to curriculum and design active learning tasks rather than passive ones — team activities that require thinking, discussing, writing, and visualizing.

"Classrooms will probably need to be organized far differently, pro-

viding a diversity of tasks and interactions with few 'public' comparisons of students' abilities," writes Oakes.

In these new classrooms, adds Oakes, teachers would "function like conductors, getting things started and keeping them moving along, providing information and resources." Grades would be based on improvement, progress toward a learning goal.

Where tracking isn't immediately eliminated, Oakes recommends that new placement criteria be considered that ensure racial and ethnic balance at all track levels and in special programs for the gifted.

The present system "where the richer get richer and the poor get poorer" is usually vigorously defended by those few who benefit from it, says Oakes, but it can be altered if school staffs and communities work together.

"But unless teachers have the time and the professional autonomy to deliberate about, develop, and experiment with fundamental changes in school organization and classroom practices, alternatives to tracking are unlikely to be intelligently conceived, enthusiastically endorsed, or successfully implemented," she concludes.

Black Soviet Journalist Enjoying America

Yelena Abdulavena Khanga, a 25-year-old reporter for the Moscow Weekly News, is currently on a three-month exchange program working at the Boston-based Christian Science Monitor. Yelena is in most ways a typical Russian, with one exception, however, she is Black. This fact has made her the subject of a lot of news reports recently. She has told numerous interviewers that she is proud of her racial heritage but she considers herself a Russian first. English is her second language. She is granddaughter to a Black Mississippi man who married a White New York woman and moved to the Soviet Union in the 1920's.

FBI Head Denies "Systematic Racism" In Agency

Newly appointed FBI Director William Sessions last week, denied charges that racism is systematic in the FBI. The charges were prompted by the recent revelation that a Black FBI agent was harassed, by White agents in an apparent bid to drive him from the FBI, the nation's highest law enforcement organization. Fewer than 5 percent of the bureau's 9,443 special agents are Black.

PORTLAND OBSERVER
"The Eyes and Ears of the Community"
288-0033

Black History Month 1988

by Norman Hill

Traditionally, Black History Month has been a time when we acknowledge and celebrate Black achievement and Black culture and the many contributions of Black America to this country's character and growth. This election year, however, we must do more than recognize past gains, people and events; we must endeavor to broaden the impact of Black history and the influence of Black America. And this must be done in two important areas: education and politics.

To date, our public schools and universities have, to a large extent, been woefully deficient in incorporating Black history and culture into existing curricula. The de-emphasis on core subjects over the last two decades has served to further relegate Black history to virtual obscurity. How many students, for example, know about Joshua Johnson, the 19th-century Black artist whose work recently sold for \$660,000 in New York? How many have heard of A. Philip Randolph or Bayard Rustin? Or that Admiral Perry, the famous polar explorer, had a Black as his right-hand man? It is little solace that today many American students don't know who Admiral Perry was. The point is that the contributions of Black artists, doctors, scientists, writers, social thinkers and activists are not taught in our classrooms.

Clearly, Black institutions, community groups, unions and parents' organizations need to continue to press educators and the education establishment to revise curricula to include more material on all facets of Black American culture and history. A critical first step in stemming the rising tide of racial polarization and stereotyping in this nation is better education.

Black History Month this year must also be a time when the Black community gears up for the important national election this fall. In the last decade, the Black vote has become a potent force in this nation's political dynamic. Not only are more Blacks being elected to public office, but Blacks are providing the crucial swing vote in close elections, particularly in the South. This growing influence is perhaps the most significant development in contemporary American political life. Therefore, voter-participation must be a top priority for the Black community to further broaden our increasing political clout.

So as we proudly celebrate our accomplishments and our place in enriching this country's development, we must look beyond the past and ensure that, through education and politics, our concerns will be voiced and heard, and our future secure.

Norman Hill is President of the A. Philip Randolph Institute.

More

Never settle for less.

It's got a style all its own.
More looks as cool as it smokes.
And looks don't lie.
It's one beautiful cigarette.



SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Cigarette Smoke Contains Carbon Monoxide.

17 mg. "tar," 1.3 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method.

NOTARY BONDED
J & M TAYLOR & ASSOCIATES
BOOKKEEPING & INCOME TAX SERVICE
LICENSED TAX CONSULTANT

- TAX PLANNING
- PROFESSIONAL TYPING

JOE TAYLOR
Tax Consultant

(503) 248-0023
by appointment

3833 N.E. Killingsworth
Portland, OR 97211
OPEN: 9-4:30 & 6-9:00

Walnut Park Lock & Key
533 N.E. Killingsworth
503-288-6338

8:30-6:00 Mon.-Fri.
10:00-5:00 Sat.

24 hr. Emergency Service

PORTLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Pick an effective learning environment

- Small class sizes
- Experienced instructors

Choose an affordable alternative

- Over 5000 classes.
- More than 60 career fields.
- Four-year transfer classes.
- Save on PCC low tuition rates.

Call 244-6111, extension 4330 or 1-800-634-7999

Watch for your PCC Winter Schedule in the mail this week . . . classes begin the week of January 4. Check the schedule for easy registration by telephone, mail or in-person.

AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, EQUAL OPPORTUNITY INSTITUTION

Take charge of your future