

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of Study

Education has long been viewed as one of, if not the most, important factors that determine the improvement of the human race. The need to have better lives can be satisfied first and foremost by having a good education, as individuals, and by having a good educational practice, as a community of the world. In the history of humanity, educational practices have always been influenced by their philosophical beliefs. Christian education has its own place influenced by both the philosophy of the world as well as the beliefs of Christianity. Along the way, there is one issue that until now is still debatable, both in secular and in Christianity education: the practice of grouping the students based on their ability, called streaming, or tracking.

The first time I was made aware of the term and the practice was about three years ago, in the first year of studying to be a teacher, although, I was actually in a system of so-called tracking or streaming when I was in high school. Being made aware of it, I understood streaming or tracking as a system where students in one grade level are distributed to groups based on their ability, be it the ability in all of the subjects, or the ability in certain subjects that are valued as the most important, which often means mathematics and science. I took it for granted when I was still a high school student, accepting it as the way it is. As a beginner teacher-to-be, I was told that tracking or streaming is not acceptable to some Christians because among other things it destroys students' motivation and self-worth, which will further distort their worth as *imago dei*. Again, I took it for

granted, believing that the list of reasons of such statement is true, and so no need to ponder more upon it. Then came the time when I have to face the issue as a teacher, or more precisely, student teacher.

I was placed as a student teacher who worked under a mathematics teacher as my mentor, in a school located on the edge of one of the large cities in Eastern Indonesia. The school was a Christian school, which has a high school fee, thus it is attended by mostly students who came from rich families. Comparing with other schools from the same area, this school has noticeably better facilities, and practices a curriculum that is slightly different from the national curriculum. One of the differences that the curriculum in this school has with national curriculum, is the system of 'leveling' in Mathematics and English, that is being practiced from grade 7 to grade 10 for Math, and grade 7 to grade 12 for English. I was able to observe and even teach some of the 'leveled' classes in Math, since that is my area of study anyway.

In a Math team meeting which was held early on before the students come back to school, the team discussed about the pre-test that would be held to determine the level the students will enter, as well as dividing the job among the team about which teacher will be assigned to which grade and which level. That was then, when I realized that streaming or tracking is being practiced in this school. Having been told that this system is not compatible with Christian worldview as well as being a naturally skeptical person that I am, I was cynical about the system, despite all the support it has from almost all the teachers. However, since I was merely a student teacher who has very little say upon

matters such as defining a particular system to be done, I tried not to underestimate the system and decided that I would look at it more carefully.

Fortunately for me, I was able to observe and teach the different tracks or 'levels', as they call it in the school, and I was able to talk with a fellow student teacher and some of the teachers about this matter. I came across some interesting, and slightly disturbing discoveries that made me stop and think more about it. Among other things, my own experience when I had to teach two different classes from different grade levels and different tracks is the one that made me decide I want to learn more about the issue. I discovered that most of the students in the lowest track tended to be reluctant to do anything that had anything to do with Math, and some students in the highest track could easily get trapped into arrogance and a self-important attitude because they were in the highest track and they had little respect to teachers and fellow students. There is an informal understanding, that the highest track students are all the saints of the grade level and on the contrary, that the lowest track students are all the troublemakers. The fact that this understanding seems to be accepted by the whole school community made me uncomfortable. My way of facing and even valuing the students, which happened to be different toward different tracks, also disturbed me.

As a Christian who is being prepared to be a teacher, I had always been told that the students ought to be viewed as how God views them: His precious children. Applying tracking in a school is done upon a good intention which is to put the students into their own level so that they can be assisted accordingly, which in a way is also compatible with Christian's worldview that each child is unique with different set of gifts and needs. However, when I see what tracking

was doing to the students, the teachers, and the class community as a whole, I became confused as to how I would respond to this, and what is my personal standing upon the issue. The discrepancy between the good intentions and what actually happens, in my opinion, calls for further analysis and study.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background of the study above, the study questions can be concluded as:

1. Is the practice of tracking or streaming in Mathematics compatible with Christian's value and worldview?
2. Where do I stand as a future Christian teacher regarding the issue of tracking or streaming in Mathematics?
3. Where and how can we place the practice of tracking or streaming in Mathematics in transformational education?

## 1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to find out the compatibility between the practice of tracking or streaming in Mathematics with Christian's value and worldview, which in turn will determine where I as a future Christian teacher stand in regard to the issue. At the end, the study aims to find the place of tracking or streaming in Mathematics in transformational education.

#### 1.4 Significance of the study

The study will hopefully:

1. Help me to find my standing regarding the issue of tracking or streaming in Mathematics based on Christian's values and worldview in the effort to have a transformational education.
2. Provide insights and help readers to understand better the implementation of tracking or streaming in Mathematics based on Christian's values and worldview in a particular social and cultural context.

#### 1.5 Definition of Terms

These are definitions as discussed in Chapter 2.

**Tracking:** a method of placing the students in one grade level into different groups based on their perceived ability or past performance in certain subjects (e.g. Mathematics or English)

**Track(s):** the group(s) of students that is formed based on the ability

**CAR:** Classroom Action Research, the type of research methodology which combines action and research together to solve problems in classrooms.

**Homogeneous grouping:** the groups of students in which the students have similarity in one or more areas, such as ability, vocational intention, cultural and economical background and so on

**Heterogeneous groups:** the groups in which the students have wide range of differences in all the areas