STREAMING: AN ANALYTIC CRITIQUE FROM THE AIM OF EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE.

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Abstract
The imperative to foster democratic culture in new democracies necessitates reflections on those practices within educational institutions that can mitigate against the development of democratic values. Indeed, Dewey regarded all genuine education to be education for democracy. Furthermore, streaming/tracking continues to generate debate among educators all over the world. This makes it necessary to reflect on streaming/tracking which seems to foster values that appear contrary to educational aims and the development of democratic practices and values. This article therefore, is a reflection on streaming/tracking based on the author’s experiences as a secondary school student, a high school teacher as well as a teacher educator in Zimbabwe which experience may not be different to those of other teachers working in learning environment characterised by streaming/tracking. The discussion in this paper proceeds on the basis of research and experiences elsewhere as expressed in literature and the experiences of the author in Zimbabwe. The philosophic method that is utilised in this paper is the analytical critical approach which interrogates arguments for and against streaming while arguing for inclusion as the more appropriate way of organizing pupils for learning in schools. The discussion thus explores the justification often proffered for streaming as a way of organizing pupils in school. It is argued in this article that the justification offered does not pass muster. Streaming, it is argued runs contrary to the aims of education and the inculcation of those values that promote tolerance, respect for self and others as well as the promotion of democratic values. If among the aims of education is the development of democratic orientations, inculcating values of equality and justice, developing self-esteem and positive self image in the learners, then, mixed ability grouping based on the philosophy of inclusivity appears the better approach to organizing students in secondary schools not only in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa but in other parts of the world where the ideals of democratic governance are part of the aims of education especially in developing countries.

Keywords: Education, Holistic education, Inclusive, Mixed ability grouping, Streaming/tracking.

INTRODUCTION
While streaming has remained a contentious issue the world over, it appears to have become the most dominant way of organizing pupils for learning in secondary schools in Zimbabwe. Loveless (2013), Sukhmander and Lee (1998) observed that there is a resurgence of ability grouping and tracking in other parts of the world such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom. In Zimbabwe, this view is substantiated by the fact that in all the secondary schools I attended as a student and worked as a teacher streaming was the only way of organizing learners and allocating them to different classes. As a teacher educator, I visit student teachers on teaching practice (practicum) and in all the schools I have been to for the last twenty years, students are allocated to classes on the basis of ability. In other words, one can safely claim that, in many schools in Zimbabwe streaming has become normal practice. Those schools that do not stream appear to be doing the unusual. Furthermore, the Education for All Global Report (2012, 229) points out that in developing countries’ education systems the risk of reproducing or reinforcing inequalities is very high because of streaming. Because the education systems in these countries are based on streaming, they prepare some learners for early employment while others are prepared for further education on the basis of academic ability and interest. This paper therefore, through critical analysis of arguments proffered in support of streaming, seeks to interrogate this controversial concept and practice and examine whether or not it is compatible with the aim and purpose of education. In other words, the method followed is philosophical as the paper is in the area of philosophy of education and pedagogy. This means analysis and argumentation permeate the whole paper. Indeed I quite agree with the observation made by Themane and Osher (2014:1) that:

Children and youth need safe and supportive schools if they are to succeed in school, to develop in a healthy manner, and to thrive. ….

Schools can keep students safe by providing a supportive, respectful, and a caring environment, where students are both secure from physical harm and emotional toxicities (such as bullying, and prejudice), and nourished by community connections to caring teachers and students.

It will therefore be argued that if the theoretical assumptions on which streaming is based are in line with the aim of education, and enable all learners to thrive then streaming has justification. However, if the foundations are incompatible with the concept of education and result in some learners being alienated from school, then, streaming has no justification. If it has no justification, then there is no basis for its continued existence in schools in general and Zimbabwean secondary schools in particular. As indicated above, while I draw from my experiences as a secondary school teacher and a teacher educator in Zimbabwe, I make use of available literature on streaming in other countries. In order to interrogate streaming, it is essential to define it so that we are clear what it is that we are talking about: “is a practice that evokes extreme opinions, ardent support, and vociferous condemnation” (Mahapatra & Sharma, 2005:41).

Furthermore, it is a controversial issue because research by scholars from other parts of the world has not been conclusive on whether it
facilitates or hinders students’ achievement (Houghton, 2013, Sukhhandan & Lee, 1998). Indeed, the view that streaming is a controversial issue is also expressed by Viar (2008), Crosby, and Owens (1993). Yet the cultivation of democratic ethos is imperative in developing countries as much as it has been in developed ones.

**Operationalising Streaming**

**Survey of Views on Streaming**

As pointed out above, streaming and its cognate terms have been understood and interpreted differently by different authors in different countries. The cognate terms that also require definitions are ability grouping, tracking, and setting. The confusion in the discussion of grouping students is compounded by some authors who use ability grouping, tracking and streaming as synonyms while others argue that they are completely different terms. Houghton (2013) and Loveless (2013) use *ability grouping* to designate the placement of students into small groups within a single classroom [my emphasis] on the basis of academic performance. Sukhhandan and Lee (1998) describe this phenomenon as within-class grouping. While sharing the same view, Viar (2008: 1) elaborates that ability grouping results in the creation of ‘blue birds’ and ‘red birds’ with instructions targeted to each group’s level within the same class. While Houghton (2013:2) defines *tracking* as “segregating students into different classrooms [my emphasis] based on their academic ability”, Viar (2008:1) defines it as grouping learners “between classes, offering courses in academic subjects that reflect different students’ prior learning”. In Viar’s view, students may take different courses in classes other than their own. Benn (2011:1) defines *setting* as “the grouping of children into different classes for different subjects”. It would appear that while in the United States of America the preferred term for streaming is tracking, in the United Kingdom the term that is used is setting (Sukhhandan & Lee, 1998). In this discussion I use streaming which is the popular term in Zimbabwe. Mahapatra and Sharma (2005: 41) define ‘streaming’ as “selecting homogeneous groups [of learners] by both age and intellectual ability” based on the belief that “putting a pupil with his intellectual peers makes teaching more effective and learning more acceptable”. Giving a somewhat different emphasis for streaming, Lunn (1970:11) argues:

A streamed school is one in which the allocation of each yearly intake to classes is on the basis of ability or attainment, so that the most able are assigned to the top or A stream, the less able to other lower streams.

On his part, Benn (2011) defines streaming as “the wholesale allocation of children to groups on the basis of a fixed, single ability label.” Echoing the same idea, Banks (1976) and Kelly (1974, 1978), present streaming as characterized by the classification and placement of school pupils into two or more groups on the basis of some measure of ability or aptitude. The learners are clustered on the basis of academic ability. It is also argued that in streaming: the entire school population is assigned to classes according to whether the students’ overall achievement is above average, normal, or below average. Students [supposedly] attend academic classes only with students whose overall academic achievement is the same as their own (Tracking; Education).

A much more inclusive view of streaming is given by Swor (2002) who says pupils have been streamed on the basis of age, gender, race, socio-economic status, ability, curriculum preference, random selection, teacher assignment, and scheduling error. But most of these criteria were called into question as a result of democratic principles. As a result streaming on the basis of race, gender and socioeconomic status are no longer popular. However, from these views on streaming, we can say that streaming refers to the division of a group or groups of students and allocating them to different classes according to one or a variety of ways including among other things children’s ability and intelligence or age. In some schools, once the students are streamed, no more sorting and shifting of students is done till the end of the circle.

On an historical note, Crosby and Owens (1993:1) trace the roots of streaming in the United States of America to Social Darwinism arguing, that it “led to the development of various ways of sorting and classifying children” in schools. Houghton (2013:2) traces streaming in the USA to the turn of the 20th century when there was concern with preparing learners for the world of work. This necessitated the identification of A stream students to be given “a rigorous education with the goal of training those students to be white collar labor of the work force”. Those identified to be of low ability were assigned to vocational education to prepare them for blue collar labour. In a similar manner, Sukhhandan and Lee (1998) trace the origin of streaming in Britain to Victorian times in which teachers were paid according to the number of pupils they were able to push to the next grade. The teachers therefore concentrated on ‘average’ pupils so that they could push as many pupils as was possible. The development in industrialisation led to demand for skilled labour force. This led to the establishment of more grammar schools and scholarships being made available for bright pupils. With the end of the payment by results system, teachers shifted to focusing on assisting the most able pupils secure a free grammar school place. Streaming at secondary school was formalized by the Butler Education Act of 1944 which ensured that secondary education was to be available to all “according to their age, aptitude and ability” (Sukhhandan & Lee, 1998:7). Pupils were to be channeled into either grammar school, technical or secondary modern schools. There was an increase in streaming throughout the 1940s and 1950s as a result of competition for grammar school places. Thus in both the USA and Britain, the demand for labour had an impact on the development of streaming. It is important to note that Zimbabwe’s education system was to a large extent influenced by the British education system.

In Zimbabwe, the dominant mode of streaming is between class grouping with differentiated curriculum. The classes cover distinctly different curricula across subjects leading to different destinations on graduation (Hindriks, Verschelde, Rayp & Schoors, 2010). Pupils are allocated to classes at Form One level on the basis of academic performance in either Grade 7 results or school based entrance tests. Once the students are allocated to classes at Form One level, they are locked to that stream or class up to Ordinary Level. There is hardly any educational intercourse between or among the various classes even though they may be in the same Form or Level. This means it is in very rare occasion that a student in one stream can take a subject or course in another class.

**Interrogating the Theoretical Foundations of Streaming**

In addition to the historical origins of tracking, Kelly (1974:6) succinctly summarizes the rationale for streaming when he argues that streaming is based on the reasoning that: *intelligence or intellectual ability is a relatively fixed and static quality which can be measured successfully; that if we group students according to their measured intelligence we will produce homogeneous teaching groups; that the main, if not the sole, concern of the school is with the development of children’s cognitive abilities; that this can best be attended to by means of the class lesson, the presentation of the
same material at the same level and pace to the whole class; and that this approach will be the most effective means to securing the educational progress of all pupils – the less able, no less than the gifted.

This appears to be the gist of arguments proffered in favour of streaming though as we have seen from definitions above there may be slight variations from one author to another. Indeed, the basis for streaming presented by Kelly is reiterated by Crosby and Owens (2003:1) though in a somewhat different manner when they argue that the practice of streaming developed along three different goals: 1) To raise the academic achievement of students beyond what it would be in mixed ability classes; 2) To help students feel better about school and themselves as learners; and 3) To help teachers to be more effective.

It is these views given by Kelly and Crosby and Owens that I seek to engage on the basis of my experiences, available literature on streaming in the United States of America and the United Kingdom and the aims of education as presented by a few selected philosophers of education. Regarding the question of intelligence (which I am aware to widen and take various forms), I share Kelly’s (1974) view that very few educationists and psychologists still argue for a "simple concept of intelligence". It is now generally accepted that intelligence is not a fixed or static entity that one can measure with absolute certainty. Rather, it is best conceived as fluid, being influenced a great deal by the environment (nature) and the culture (nurture) children find themselves in and other crucial factors like heredity. In other words intelligence is largely culturally determined and therefore relative. Indeed, Singer (2011) draws attention to the difficulty inherent in trying to determine what intelligence is. General discussion among educationists often refers to Intelligent Quotient (I.Q) which has also remained a controversial issue (Suzuki & Aronson, 2005). The difficulty of defining IQ has resulted in some psychologists defining intelligence as “what intelligence tests measure” (Singer, 2011:29) which is not helpful at all. This means the question of attempts to measure intelligence and use the results as the basis of streaming are ill-informed due to its controversial nature as well as the fact that pupils come from diverse cultural backgrounds. Thus, it is clear that the first claim on which streaming is founded at least appears not strong enough to justify its being the basis for streaming in schools as there is no consensus on what intelligence is and that it can easily be determined and measured.

Explicit in the rationale summarised by Kelly (1974) is that it is possible to come up with homogeneous classes that will be easy to teach as the learners will be at the same level of intelligence and absorption of whatever it is that they will be taught. But from the argument in the preceding paragraph it appears impossible to come up with homogenous classes as long as the pupils come from different cultural backgrounds and have different hereditary mapping. Indeed, Davies (1975:32) argues; “Children are individuals highly idiosyncratic and unpredictable to allocate to distinct groups for teaching purposes in the hope that each group will move at the same pace, along a prescribed educational path.” In other words, no two individuals are the same. This means that any class of pupils will always have pupils with different levels of intelligence. Even if at the beginning they may appear to be at the same level, as time progresses they will end up at different levels. This implies that it is never possible to come up with a strictly homogeneous teaching group of pupils in terms of intelligence. It can be surmised therefore, that any claim to homogeneity in teaching groups will always be suspect. Thus, like the previous argument, the second one does not pass muster.

But why was it deemed essential to have homogenous teaching groups? It is often argued that, streaming is done in order to identify the less gifted children so that they can be given special attention as a collective (Gamoran, 2002). My experiences as a teacher have demonstrated that, on the contrary this is not what occurs in schools. I have observed that most teachers detest teaching slow learners. The teachers have low expectations from children in low streams to the extent that they give the pupils less work for they think that pupils in low streams are not able to master the quantity and quality of work mastered by the ‘A’ streams (Keddie in Haralambos, 1995). These observations prompted Crosby and Owens (1993:3) to argue that streaming results in “inequality of educational opportunity” as the quality of education given to different streams is no longer of the same quantity and quality. From staffroom discussions with colleagues I became aware that generally, teachers tend to miss lessons with these pupils giving the pupils the opportunity to make meaningless noise. When the teachers go to these classes for lessons, the teachers take this lesson time as an opportunity for them to relax and crack jokes without getting into discussing the serious business of what is supposed to be learnt. Consequently very little learning takes place in these classes (Shepherd, 2012). An example of such practice is what I witnessed at one of the schools that I observed where there was a shortage of classroom space. At this school pupils were streamed from class ‘A’ to class ‘F’. The slowest class, Form 1 ‘F’ (one F) had no classroom base in which they could sit and learn. They would move up and down every lesson looking for an empty classroom that they could use. These pupils missed a lot of lesson time due to these movements. Teachers in most cases also failed to locate them and at times they found them after a thorough search having lost time looking for the class. The pupils, being labeled as dull and having accepted that they were dull and considered as dull did not make an attempt to inform teachers of their whereabouts. To worsen the situation teachers went on to call this class “squatter class”. This demotivated the pupils very much to an extent that more than half the class were very naughty and did not take school work seriously. This experience is similar to the one observed by Jackson (1964) where the ‘A’ stream was taught in the classroom, the ‘B’ stream in the dining room and this class used to miss lessons as meals were being laid out. The ‘C’ streams were taught outside in the play ground in a concrete hut. All this bias is a result of streaming. Hence streaming cannot be justified on the grounds that it is the most effective means of securing progress for all pupils.

It therefore ceases to be clear how giving less intellectually gifted pupils less or little work can be regarded a teaching strategy that can help the less gifted child to do better. This therefore creates disparity between the quality and quantity of education given to the ‘A’ stream and the lower streams. My experience is that, what is claimed as justification for streaming in theory does not happen in practice. This is supported by research findings in a study done in Zimbabwean schools by Chisaka and Vakalisa as discussed by Mapolisa and Tshabalala (2014: 3), that “no special attention from teachers either in the form of additional assistance or remedial teaching” was offered to the lower streams they studied.

Among the reasons for streaming cited by Crosby and Owens (1993) is that pupils’ morale is stimulated as the classes are made up of pupils who are more or less of the same intellectual capabilities. Indeed, Mapolisa and Tshabalala (2014) expressed the view that the
less able in their own class do not feel sidelined, or frustrated by being compared with their gifted peers while the gifted do not feel being held back or slowed down by the less gifted pupils and progress at their own pace. All the students are therefore supposed to feel better about the school and themselves. Jackson (1964), noted that in this way streaming is deemed beneficial to all pupils since it enables them to progress at their own pace. So, the streamed pupils are happy, it is argued. From my experiences, this argument applies only to the teachers who will be teaching the ‘A’ streams. The morale of the ‘A’ stream was always high as they were labeled and viewed as superior to lower streams. In schools where I was a teacher the ‘A’ streams were always allocated the most highly qualified, experienced and hard working teachers. This point is also noted by Gamoran (2002:1) who argues, “the more experienced, qualified teachers are commonly assigned to higher sets where more challenging material is used and where there is greater emphasis on discussion and interaction with students”. Indeed Hargreaves (1967) observes that it is only the ‘A’ streams that are motivated by streaming. As evidence of high motivation, Hargreaves (1967) observes, as a result of his research that 90% of the pupils in ‘A’ streams liked school and 10% disliked school. In the lower streams 52% liked school and 26% disliked it. These results show that streaming can make pupils in low streams detest schooling.

Hargreaves (1967) also found that ‘A’ streams were far more committed to school and wanted to advance with school than any other stream. The study showed that in the ‘A’ stream 72% wanted to stay in school and only 28% wanted to leave school. In the ‘D’ stream 70% wanted to leave school and only 30% wanted to stay in school. In the lower stream a bigger number wanted to leave school and only a small percentage had an intention of staying in school. He also observed that in the ‘A’ stream 90% showed that they wanted to further their education and only 10% were against the idea of furthering their education. In lower streams, only 32% wanted to further their education (Hargreaves, 1967). These observations show that the higher the stream the greater the degree of commitment to school because of positive reinforcement associated with being in the ‘A’ stream. So streaming leads to low motivation for those in lower streams and consequently leads to lower achievement (Gamoran, 2002). Indeed, Crosby and Owens (1993:3) observed that research findings provide evidence that streaming results in more dropouts among the low streams as the students “show progressive retardation as they progress through school”. Consequently, it appears streaming does not benefit all learners.

Sim (2010) maintains that if individuals are labeled, others see them and respond to them in terms of the label and tend to assume that they have the characteristics normally associated with such labels. The labeled also tend to act in fulfillment of the label. Indeed, Haralambos (1995:764) observes, “The self fulfillment prophecy theory argues that predictions made by teachers about the future success or failure of pupils will tend to come true because the prediction has been made” Due to this prophecy teachers tend to expect work of high standard from the pupils labeled bright and pay more attention to such pupils (Crosby & Owens, 1993). They tend to neglect those pupils they would have designated low achievers. On their part, pupils will act according to the label given by the teacher thereby fulfilling the expectations of the teacher. Indeed, Young, quoted in Kelly (1978:32), argues, “there are other aspects of A, B, C, D which led to inevitable difficulties. The matching disciplinary patterns were also self- fulfilling prophecies, ‘A’ to ‘D’ in ability synchronized almost exactly with ‘A’ to ‘D’ behaviour”. The result of such as system as is argued by Sim (2010) is the development of the ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality as the lower streams tend to be alienated from the school system. In this case, streaming cannot be said to raise the academic performance or ensure educational progress of all learners beyond what it would be in inclusive settings.

However, not all pupils will act according to the label they are given. Some after being labeled as slow learners can strive and aim at proving the label wrong. For example, Margaret Fuller in Haralambos (1995) studied black girls who were labeled as dull. Instead of conforming to the label, the girls devoted themselves to school work in order to ensure that they pass. However, such cases are rare since “once a student is in a particular track, they stay on that track; and they take the course sequences that are prescribed for that track” (Houghton, 2013: 3). Indeed Wheelock quoted in Viar (2008:3) argues:

Once students are grouped, they generally stay at that level for their school careers, and the gap between achievement levels becomes exaggerated over time. The notion that students’ achievement levels at any given time will predict their achievement in the future becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Thus, on the whole the argument that streaming results in high moral among teachers and pupils cannot be sustained. In fact during my visits to student teachers on teaching practice, it is not uncommon to hear a student teacher say to me before we enter a classroom, “I just want to alert you that the class we are going to is a class of slow learners. They may not be very active because they are not really interested in learning”. Such statements indicate that the teacher is not motivated to teach these pupils and does not expect any enthusiasm for learning from them. It is clear she may not be the only teacher with such an attitude. Most likely the pupils are also not keen to be taught by teachers who have such attitudes towards them.

Streaming can also have negative impact on the morale of the teachers. Young, a headmaster, is quoted by Kelly (1978:31) indicating that in schools that stream pupils, teachers are also streamed:

Like most Headmasters, I also found it necessary to match staff to these requirements. The most imaginative and sensitive teachers for the ‘A’s, almost anyone could teach the ‘B’s. The toughest and most insensitive for the ‘C’ and thank God for volunteers very often indeed the most dedicated ones for the ‘D’s.

Indeed in most streamed schools where I have worked as a teacher I have found the less experienced, the less qualified and less active teaching low streams, while the experienced and most qualified teach the higher streams. In one of the schools where I worked as a teacher, as one of the most highly qualified members of staff with a Master of Arts degree, I was always allocated the ‘A’ streams of the Ordinary Level and the Advanced Level classes. I was also made Head of Department ahead of some of the members of staff I found at that school. In the spirit of fairness, I attempted to rotate staff in my Department in teaching the less gifted pupils so that we all had experience teaching the different ability groups of pupils. But the Head of the school refused to allow this. It dawned on me that when he streamed the pupils this head also streamed the teachers in his allocation of classes. Tapaleao (2008) quotes Professor John Hattie of Auckland University who, as result of his research in schools observed that, “There certainly was a tendency for better-qualified teachers to be assigned to the top classes”. The same point is reiterated by Viar (2008). Indeed, as Kelly (1978) argues, for most teachers, it is a disgrace to be found teaching lower streams and an honour to teach the ‘A’ streams. From my experiences it was quite clear that the process of streaming...
teachers is fraught with difficulties which can cause problems between teachers and school heads especially with reference to the criteria used by heads. The existence of certain streams which are detested by teachers can cause teachers to contribute to the failure in lower streams due lower teacher morale. So, the teachers may not act towards classes of the less gifted in ways which help them learn (Gamoran, 2002). In these circumstances, what will be happening to the less gifted pupils is complete torture. Thus, the argument that streaming leads to higher morale among both teachers and pupils because the classes are homogenous and therefore easy to work with seems to be porous and unsustainable.

What about the claim in Kelly’s (1978) summary that the main concern of the school is with the development of pupils’ cognitive abilities? Indeed, Peters (1967a:3) argues that in the school “a learner is ‘initiated’ by another into something which he has to master, know, or remember”. While the above view by Peters (1967a) may also include, among what is to be mastered, skills, Peters (1967b:31) calls skills “mere know how or knack” implying that he did not value them much. Instead, he is interested in propositional knowledge and argues that among the criteria of what it means to be educated is to have “knowledge and understanding” that also result in the development of a “cognitive perspective”. From this perspective, it is clearly the function of the school to develop cognitive abilities.

However, the development of cognitive abilities is not the only major concern of the school. Equally important, according to Haydon (2006) is moral education. Haydon (2006:24) argues that society expects schools to “make people morally better”, to “promote good citizenship”. He further maintains that schools should “foster a multicultural non-racist society; that it should advance the cause of equal opportunity between the sexes; and that it should promote citizenship in a wider than nationalistic context” (Haydon, 2006:25). In addition, Haydon (2006) argues that schools should foster skills understanding thereby elevating procedural knowledge or know how to the same level with propositional knowledge. Dewey (1943:6-7) argues that we judge the success of the school in so far as it contributes to the learners’ “advance in ability to read, write, and figure, ... growth in the knowledge of geography and history, improvement in manners, habits of promptness, order and industry”. This indeed indicates that education is more than just the development of cognitive abilities. In fact Dewey proceeds to argue that, “All that society has accomplished for itself is put, through the agency of the school, at the disposal of its future members”. In Democracy and Education, Dewey argues that schools should prepare learners for participation in a democratic society. For him schools are “the spearhead of social reform” (Teaching). Along the same line Paulo Freire (1970) argues that genuine education is an education that liberates the learners so they can meaningfully participate in social development. It is an education that enables learners to grapple with the everyday challenges that confront them. Drawing from what all these philosophers of education have written it is clear that to view education as mainly concerned with the development of cognitive abilities is to have a limited view of the function of the school. The role of the school is to provide a holistic experience to the learner. In other words, the school should help develop the intellectual, physical, moral/ethical, aesthetic, emotional, spiritual, social and manual abilities on the learners. To quote Themane and Osher (2014:1):

Effective schools create strong conditions for learning, where students feel and are physically and emotionally safe; connected to and supported by their teachers and the school; challenged by expectations and are engaged in learning; and where their peers and the adults in the school practice good social and emotional skills.

In this way schools contribute to the development of confident and inquiring learners. Indeed according to Crosby and Owen (1993:1) schools are intended to produce or “develop moral, responsible, and educated citizens”. In the process, they “inculcate social values and foster upward mobility” (ibid). Thus, the assumption that schools should focus on cognitive abilities is not in line with the aim of education. It is important to examine the consequences of cognitive centred education.

The thinking based on the view that the main business of the school is the development of cognitive abilities in learners has led to the tendency among teachers to assess children’s intellectual abilities and deliver knowledge they feel a particular stream can assimilate. This results in teachers differentiating a curriculum that is not different. Those considered bright will be given highly evaluated knowledge. The less able ones are deprived of high grade knowledge for teachers believe that they cannot assimilate the data (Keddie in Haralambos, 1995). Indeed it has been observed that “lessons taught in low track classes often lack the engagement and comprehensiveness of the high track lessons” (Tracking (education)). The negative consequence of this has been that those pupils in lower streams are denied access to knowledge that may be essential for examination purposes. It is clear here that in schools that practice streaming there is a tendency of treating pupils in different streams differently. Kelly (1978) is of the idea that pupils should have equal opportunity in acquiring intelligence and it is the possibility of such acquisition that gives scope to the teacher. Streaming deprives pupils of equal opportunity to acquire intelligence. Hence streaming militates against promoting equality since, once pupils are placed in different streams on the basis of ability there is no room for each of them receiving the same amount of instruction.

Another adverse effect of streaming is that pupils are not given the opportunity to choose and do the subjects they think are good for them. Vocationally oriented subjects are allocated to the lower streams while academic subjects are allocated to the higher streams. This results in pupils in high and low streams adjusting their aspirations according to the level of their stream. This shows that in streaming there is legitimation of inequality and the class system in society.

It would therefore appear that streaming is indeed a controversial issue in education. We have noted that it is based on a narrow conception of the role of the school. At the same time by promoting inequality, it goes against the development of democratic societies where individual are treated equally and are accorded equal opportunities. Rather than create a society characterized by cohesion, streaming develops values and attitudes that promote a divided and stratified society. It promotes the provision of fragmented rather than a holistic education. Indeed, Benn (2011:para.13) writing about her findings in the United Kingdom observes that streaming leads to “rigid, know-your-place, limiting hierarchies” which is contrary to the production of critical thinkers ready to work in democratic societies for the good of everyone. This view is also expressed by Zevenbergen (2002:1) who argues that streaming leads to the reproduction of the status quo “which can be detrimental to goals of social justice”. What then is the alternative to streaming?

The inclusive Classroom Option

Hapanyengwi- Chemhuru (2013) argues that inclusive education
implies a paradigm shift resulting in change in the system, the school or the class to cater for all children in the same learning environment without differentiation, grading or categorisation of the learners. While Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru’s discussion was on special needs education, it fits in very well in the present discussion where the major concern is creating learning environments that promote quality learning environments for all learners. The option for inclusivity is premised on the understanding that inclusive classes have the potential to lead to a free atmosphere where no pupils are made to feel inferior because of their abilities or disabilities. In inclusive settings, rather than perceiving the slow learner or the child with disability as the problem, the focus is shifted to the system, the school and the classroom. It is the environment of the system, the school or the classroom that must change to suit the levels of all the learners. Inclusive classrooms, because they are learner-centred create opportunities for co-operation and helpfulness among all school pupils. In inclusive classes, pupils are encouraged to help one another, to share ideas and experiences and develop a strong sense of belonging. Those who appear more gifted than others are engaged in such a way that they are able to assist the less gifted pupils. In the process relationships among pupils and between teacher and pupils are likely to be supportive of learning. There is more pupil to pupil and teacher to pupil interaction in schools where pupils are not streamed. So inclusivity creates environments that are conducive to learning for all learners. According to Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru (2013:212-213), activities in inclusive classrooms are characterised by “cooperation, equality, respect, consideration, assisting each other, empathizing with each other and an acceptance that some of them are different and would require different things” but within the same setting. Inclusive classrooms therefore foster the spirit of belonging that bonds the learners together and prepares them for participation in democratic societies.

Furthermore, in inclusive classes, the less able, the disadvantaged and persons with disability are likely to be happier and better motivated as they are not labeled or identified as dull. Thus, inclusivity or inclusion promotes personal and social development, and the development of a socially cohesive community whereby creating and promoting happiness in class as all the pupils will view themselves as appreciated members of the school hence will be co-operative. Harford (2009) argues that in such classes pupils benefit from having peers who are more intelligent than them in the same class.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion of streaming it can be concluded that:
1) The theoretical foundations on which it is based are not solid and fail to give sufficient justification for continuing the practice of streaming in schools;
2) Intelligence is such a controversial issue that is culture and even social class bound and never static. Consequently, it should not be the basis for school organisation;
3) The difficulty of establishing a stable homogenous class precludes any justification for streaming;
4) If education, as Peters (1967:27) has argued implies “the intentional bringing about of a desirable state of mind in a morally unobjectionable manner” leading to “something that is worthwhile”, it becomes problematic to view streaming as compatible with the aim of education anywhere in the world. If, again as is argued by Dewey, education is an exercise in initiating learners into democratic participation in societal institutions, it becomes contradictory to use streaming as an organising principle in schools;

Streaming appears to run contrary to the aims of education as it leads to the failure to appreciate the intrinsic value in individual learners. Indeed as argued by Benn (2011:para.12) in the end, consideration of streaming is “not just about the quality of learning in our schools, but the kind of school system and society we ultimately want to foster”; and inclusive classrooms, inclusive schools and inclusive societies are ideal to the development of democratic societies in any part of the world. This is especially essential in emerging democracies to strengthen democratic institutions necessary for peaceful coexistence and national development. It is clear therefore that streaming runs contrary to the aims of education and should not be encouraged in societies that seek to built democratic communities.

References


