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”Diversity and inclusion: Challenges for teacher education”
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Diversity
The presentation

Æ How to understand diversity?
Æ Critique of the diversity concept
Æ The complex of diversity
Æ Diversity in education
Æ Challenges for teacher education
How can we understand diversity?

Æ Diversity
Æ Plurality
Æ Diversity = Cultural diversity
Æ A principle underpinning policies
Æ A concept with multiple connotations and interpretations
Critique of the diversity concept

Æ A focus on desirable aspects of diversity, obscures the fact that 'differences' may be a question of inequality
Æ Based on an economic rationale and human capital thinking
Æ Reduced focus on equality and social justice
Æ Simplistic and unreflective use of the concept
Examples of conceptual constructions in current use

(Unesco (2005) Guidelines for inclusion)
The complex of diversity

Æ All kinds of differences: the unique individual
Æ Socio-cultural diversities
   æ Visible differences, ”Natural” diversities?
   æ Structural diversities (in policies):
     æ Immigrant background
     æ Cultural and lingual differences
     æ Religion
     æ Gender
     æ Dis/ability
     æ Other
Æ Socially and culturally constructed differences
Æ Diversity based on people’s identity, experiences and common circumstances
Assumptions underpinning diversity

Æ All human beings are unique, but also complex
Æ Human beings are socially and culturally shaped
Æ Diversity in a particular society or cultural context is ordered or structured
Æ There is an internal plurality within every society or culture
Æ People are not just being different, but are becoming different through different life circumstances, and social and cultural backgrounds
Æ People are not just determined by or accepting their circumstances or backgrounds, but also negotiating, confronting, opposing and changing them
Æ Human beings are not solely characterized by their differences, but also by their similarities
Education as a complex field

- Ethical - existential
- Political - legislative
- Relational-in-practice
- Institutional - normative

Education
Education as a contradictory field

Æ Social welfare and economic motives generally exist side by side in education politics

Æ Contexts for failure and marginalization

Æ Elaborated practices of categorization and labelling, e.g. in order to provide certain benefits, special education provisions etc.

Æ Diversity within specialised discourses: gender, ability, ethnicity, culture, language, class, race, etc.
But…….

Æ The potential of education as one of the major institutions for enhancing progress and preventing unemployment and social exclusion.
Æ The importance of educational institutions as contexts for children and young people to learn to live together across differences.
Æ Quality education can mean a difference for those living difficult lives.
Challenges for teacher education

Æ Recognize reality as plural, complex and dynamic
Æ Teachers are part of that plurality, complexity and dynamic
Æ Start from within: build up understanding among teacher students about themselves, their circumstances and position in a world of diversity
Æ Needs shifting the focus from the differences of individuals to the factors which maintain differentiation and discrimination in social life
Emphasise the promotion of inclusive environments for all children and young people, recognizing that some are particularly vulnerable and at risk of marginalization or exclusion (engaged pluralism [Maxine Greene])

Develop in teacher students a sensitivity towards tensions between diversity and unity
Summing up

Æ Diversity understood in its complexity
Æ Balance diversity and unity
Æ Diversity embedded in a social community
Æ Education
Æ Teacher education
Æ ”As teachers and scholars we seek conceptual frameworks to reshape the curriculum so that it will reflect the diverse reality of the world and the experience of all children, boys and girls, men and women, able and disable” (somewhat modified from Judith Butler)
Conclusion

It has been said that diversity is the fundamental principle that fosters creativity and progress; it is an essential attribute of human development (Pérez de Cuéllar, 1996).

The statement is seductive, and the notion of celebrating and enhancing diversity has been widely embraced, not least in education policies and in schools. However, a general commitment to diversity raises a number of questions that I have reflected upon in this presentation. In order to work constructively towards the enhancement of a more pluralistic, open and inclusive society, we need to face the complex of diversity in the context of education.