

COMPLEXITY AND 'FUZZINESS' IN DYNAMIC SOCIAL SYSTEMS

Patrick J Lees

Abstract

Human identities and relationships are constituted in and by social discourses, even as they help shape those discourses, and are in constant flux as they react to and affect the different social worlds in which they exist. Processes of *feedback* between human identities (beliefs, traits, desires, fears), relationships (between people, places and things), and discourses (personal, public, moral, political, etc) constitute the dynamic social systems in which we live, work and play. Understanding the diverse, complex, ever-changing, and co-constructed nature of dynamic and interrelated social systems (such as schools, families and communities) is vital to sophisticated, innovative and productive/useful social research, effective and equitable public education (pedagogy and management), and inclusive, socially 'just' policy making.

In this paper, I focus on what it is we might mean when we say that something is 'complex' (things such as 'society', 'research', 'social systems', 'institutions', 'identities', 'equity' and 'social problems'). I explore aspects of 'complexity' in terms of human identities and relationships (which are 'relationships of power': Foucault). I also reflect on some of the implications for social research and government policy making from more sophisticated and inclusive conceptualisations of 'human experiences' and 'meaning making'.