



RESEARCH SEMINAR SERIES – 2012/2013
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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Dr Deborah Osberg is Senior Lecturer and Director of Professional Doctoral Studies in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Exeter, UK and a past editor-in-chief (2008-2011) of *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education*. Her research is primarily conceptual and transdisciplinary, drawing from the sciences, social sciences and humanities and utilising conceptual and theoretical frames inspired by Complexity theory, (e.g., Prigogine), Pragmatism (e.g., Dewey, Mead), Emergentism (e.g., Bergson), Poststructural theory (e.g., Foucault, Derrida), and Political theory (e.g., Arendt, Rancière, Mouffe). For the most part, she uses 'biological' or 'organic' conceptual frames (rather than the 'mechanistic' or 'deterministic' frames) to interrogate the play of power in educational contexts. She has published a number of articles on complexity and education in international journals, addressing educational issues of power from epistemological, political and ethical perspectives and has an edited book (with Gert Biesta): *Complexity Theory and the Politics of Education* (Sense, 2010).

INAUGURAL LECTURE FOR THE NEW CENTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH

Seminar Title: **Authoritative Knowledge & the Question of the Public Role of the University: *How complexity challenges our assumptions & opens alternate possibilities***

In this inaugural lecture for the new Centre for HE Research, Deborah will explore the question of whether the university may still be considered to have a unique public role in society, as distinct from a purely economic role. The question is important because if the university has a merely economic function, this makes it difficult to distinguish its role from that of other knowledge producing/disseminating organisations. In other words it becomes unclear what precisely the university is for and why we should continue to have them. She will approach this topic by exploring the university's unique (but problematic) relationship with the notion of authoritative knowledge in the context of globalisation and postmodernisation, which have exposed the colonising impetus of Western claims to authority through 'critical reason.' More specifically, she will explore the way in which complexity and other 'emergentist' conceptual frames can alter our understanding of the concept of authoritative knowledge, which in turn can help us re-engage with the notion of the public role of the university. Her primary argument is that with an emergentist understanding of authoritative knowledge, the university may again be considered as an institution that offers an orientation for society rather than being one that is orientated by society's market driven, economic needs (and competing with other private institutions to serve these needs). The argument she develops, however, unfolds in a way that does not fall back on old 'Enlightenment' values, but develops a new understanding of these values.