

The Life Cycle of a Postmodern Paradigm: Social Ecology as a case study in second-order cybernetics

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Abstract: This paper examines the interdependence between paradigms and pedagogy. This relationship is explored by looking at the lifecycle of a transdisciplinary academic program, called Social Ecology. A number of intellectual themes emerge from the exploration, and their influence on pedagogic organisation and practice is discussed. The themes include the process of paradigm formation; the relevance of transdisciplinary courses (as against disciplinary or interdisciplinary courses) of study under postmodern conditions; and the appropriateness of second-order cybernetics in validating and organising transdisciplinary courses. The process of transdisciplinary paradigm formation and the differentiation of such a paradigm from a traditional Kuhnian perspective is discussed. The paper concludes with the proposition that a knowledge of second-order cybernetics would create a much more liberal climate in the academy, where the self-organising and changing nature of a complex, transdisciplinary, pedagogic paradigm, like Social Ecology, could be recognisable and thinkable.

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