

**Discovering Complexity:  
Teachers' Collective Responses to Change**

**Submitted by  
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This thesis is dedicated to my beloved  
father and mother  
who taught and gave me so much.  
*This is for you*

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**Abstract**

This thesis explores a small number of TEFL teachers' collective responses to an extended change process in their Mexican university context from 1989-2003. The nature of the emergent knowledge arising from this inquiry hinges on the analysis and interpretation by the researcher who is also a complete participant in this educational context of her informants' perceptions from their retrospection, and a reconstruction of the past, in present time.

The methodology I adopted broadly follows interpretative qualitative research principles, including aspects of life history inquiry. The data generation process employed to explore our perceptions of ourselves, as well as our working context, before and during the 1990s, as *we ourselves narrate them*, comprised of: 'conversations with a purpose', critical incident and repertory grid interviews, as well as the concurrent analysis of the data, based on aspects of Grounded Theory. As a result, numerous categories and concepts emerged. These not only helped me to discover the issues that were both instrumental and influential regarding our positive receptivity to change, but also how being involved in a change process changed us, not only as individuals, but also as a culture.

Based on these findings that have led to my deeper understanding of the nature of educational change, I conclude this thesis by positing that instead of adopting a mechanistic paradigm for viewing change, it is necessary, and more useful, to view it through the lens of complexity theory. Finally, this thesis ends by examining the implications that this position and the findings have for change policy makers, managers and change leaders, as well as suggestions for future research.

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