

Keynote Address

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Responding to Indigenous Cultures in Science Education

We are well aware that people of all ages bring prior knowledge, beliefs and understandings with them into the science classroom. Some of these conceptions resonate well with the science we teach while more 'alternative' conceptions have varied resistance to change. Conceptions that arise from cultural conventions may present even more fundamental barriers to learning science.

Some Australians conceive of 'culture' as limited to what happens in an Opera House on a Saturday night, but most would also include food, music, dance and 'strange' practices of 'foreigners' or 'others'. But we are all creatures of culture, and our culture's conventions both inform and constrain our behaviour and thinking.

Consider a classroom group for whom knowledge is owned and immutable; for whom 'why?' is irrelevant and 'what if?' a nonsense - and 'cause and effect' often unrecognisable? For whom physical, spiritual, past and present are a whole, linked to the land; and who have their own science. How would you approach a science program?

In this address I will use examples from various, mainly Australian Indigenous cultures to explore these ideas and propose strategies which can bring Indigenous and Western cultures and Indigenous and Western science into the same room.