

ABSTRACT

An Analysis of Traditional Practices and Beliefs in a Trinidadian Village to Assess the Implications for Science Education

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This dissertation describes an empirical qualitative analysis of some of the traditional practices and beliefs, with respect to health regimens and marine-related activities, which operate in the daily lives of people in the village of "Seablast," Trinidad and Tobago. The purpose of the investigation was to gain an understanding of these practices and beliefs and the interpretive framework that underpins them and to explore how these might impinge on the learning and teaching of school science in such a context. Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory methodology was used for the empirical qualitative analysis and conceptual amplifications resulted from the application of Kearney's world view theory in the process of supplementary validation.

The investigation reveals that the traditional wisdom in Seablast is a pervasive system, consisting of several concepts and principles, some of which are similar to those of conventional science, while others differ

significantly. There are also some similarities between the interpretive framework/world view of the villagers and that of conventional science. However, the procedures used by villagers to effect these tenets are often quite different from those employed in conventional science.

Science students and teachers who are exposed to the traditional wisdom and who have some level of commitment to it are likely to find that, to some extent, they are required to function in two worlds - the traditional world and the world of conventional science/school science. Current research suggests that the "boundary crossing" between these worlds may be difficult or even hazardous for some people. The recommendation is made that school science curricula for contexts such as Seablast must be fashioned from a cultural perspective, with an emphasis on providing aids for students to effect the boundary crossing successfully. This would put students in a better position to evaluate conventional science and what it has to offer and to make appropriate choices for the conduct of their lives. Science teacher education programmes should be designed to sensitise teachers to this orientation and to assist those teachers who might themselves need help with the boundary crossing.

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