

## **Conflicting or complementary realities? – The role of indigenous and “Western” ways of being in the lives of Grahamstown’s township primary school children.**

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In this paper, I explore the role of indigenous and “Western” ways of being in the lives of 10-15 year old primary school children in Grahamstown, South Africa. In 2015, I was involved in a participatory action research study with Grahamstown science teachers and was struck by a potential contradiction that called for further exploration: On the one hand, the teachers stated that their students were alienated by the “Western” content of South African science education. On the other hand, they discussed their learners’ “Westernisation” and lack of interest in anything indigenous. In 2015 and 2017, I conducted seven semi-structured focus group conversations with children from two Grahamstown primary schools. Both schools were situated in townships, one being a public school; the other a private school with a Christian profile. Findings revealed that children’s life realities are far more complex than simple either – or questions. They are neither completely alienated nor fully “Westernised”, but live in realities that comprise elements of both indigenous/traditional and “Western”/modern ways of being. For example, children could talk about their favourite cartoons on TV in one sentence and about the importance to follow their ancestors in the next. For some, these different ways of being did not seem challenging. For others, namely from the Christian school, these differences could provoke identity conflicts in that children were torn between the traditional/indigenous and the modern/Christian world. The connection between indigenous and traditional on the one side and Western, modern and Christian on the other side, was made by the students themselves and can shed light on their perception of being indigenous. The relationship between indigenous and “Western” ways of being in children’s lives has implications for their “*being in education*”. In conclusion, I draw on Bhabha’s (1994) third space and the concept of dialogue between epistemologies (Bredlid, 2013), to outline an education that allows different worldviews to interact constructively in the classroom.