Taking a leading role in developing cross cultural communication processes in science communication

Neil Hermes, Questacon, Australia

Questacon is Australia's largest Science and Technology Centre and is taking a leading role in developing cross cultural communication processes in science communication.

In this presentation Mr Neil Hermes will talk about Questacon’s aims to facilitate a two-way sharing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians focussing on science and technology.

Questacon’s Indigenous Outreach Programs aim to overcome the cultural and geographical challenges that arise when sharing information across cultures. In Australia these challenges include:

- Language barriers: A large proportion of Indigenous people living in remote areas have English as a second or third language.
- Distance: Some communities in Australia are thousands of kilometres from major population centres. At present our Outreach Programs are aimed at rural and remote areas.
- Cultural diversity: Today there are hundreds of groups of Indigenous people living in Australia, each with its own distinct knowledge and stories.

Questacon recognizes that many Indigenous Australians still hold their traditional understandings of the world. In the past, education institutions have attempted to replace these understandings with “correct, modern” knowledge causing confusion, uncertainty and some resentment. The cultural identity of the young Indigenous students was also threatened. Questacon acknowledges the socially important Indigenous ways of “knowing” whilst offering alternative explanations for phenomena.

Questacon’s Burarra Gathering: Sharing Indigenous Knowledge exhibition presents contemporary and traditional knowledge and technology of the Burarra people. Burarra Gathering contributes to visitors’ formal and informal learning of Indigenous knowledge. The exhibition was developed through close consultation with the Burarra people and presents a means for their community to preserve their knowledge and culture.

This year a purpose-built online exhibition of Burarra Gathering will be added to Questacon’s website.

Both the Outreach and Exhibition programs are based on a sound understanding of the importance of appropriate cross cultural means of communication.