

Can Bernstein deliver relevant and responsive Health Education curricula for Indigenous girls?

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Recent debates in the Australian media and Government policy initiatives (e.g. Closing the Gap) have reinvigorated the 'educational disadvantage' perspective on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) education. Debates such as these focus upon the social, material and cultural circumstances of students as the explanation for educational achievement (or lack thereof), where Indigenous students are defined more by what they 'lack' than what the Western schooling system fails to deliver (Nakata 2007). This paper is an attempt to focus the analysis of Indigenous education in Australia upon the power and control relations operating within schools, rather than external social relations, using principles of pedagogic discourse from Bernstein (1975, 1990, 2000). Some theorists have argued that Basil Bernstein's work did not examine issues of gender or culture, and tended to focus solely on explaining class reproduction. Therefore, this paper examines the usefulness of Bernstein's theoretical framework in analysing micro-level school curriculum politics within an Indigenous community setting. It also suggests how Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational researchers can build on Bernstein's curriculum theorising to address ongoing issues in education for Indigenous people.