Discourse and disadvantage:

Studying the gender dimensions of educational disadvantage

Rob Gilbert and Pam Gilbert

School of Education

James Cook University of North Queensland


Discourse and disadvantage:
Studying the gender dimensions of educational disadvantage

This paper argues that the concept of discourse offers productive ways of understanding the process of disadvantage in education. The discussion reviews conventional approaches to the study of educational disadvantage, and points out important inadequacies in their approach, especially in their neglect of the concept of difference. It then shows how a concept of discourse offers perspectives on disadvantage which go some way to resolving the conventional difficulties.

The argument is illustrated in evidence gathered in a research project on gender and educational disadvantage (Gilbert, P., Gilbert, R. and McGinty, S., 1994). The project, conducted on behalf of the
Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training as part of their program in Gender Equity in Curriculum Reform focused on the way in which various forms of educational disadvantage and risk are experienced by girls, and compounded or modified in the discourses of femininity/masculinity which define family, school and other social relations.

Identifying and analysing disadvantage

The standard approach to this issue is to identify indicators of disadvantage applying to groups defined by some characteristic of the students or their social or cultural location, and to measure the success of these groups in terms of access, retention, participation and attainment. For instance, Mortimore and Blackstone (1982) list three overlapping groups identified by forms of disadvantage:

- those denied access to educational opportunity in terms of type of school, resources, teachers, or curriculum (such as girls' access to non-traditional subjects, courses or careers);
- those who, despite performing well in school, leave at the earliest opportunity - the issue of retention rates;
- those who underachieve or who perform less well than they might because a variety of social and environmental factors result in their being unable to take full advantage of educational opportunities.

A similar approach is taken in the National Action Plan for the Education of Girls, which aims to 'create and refine processes which ensure equal educational outcomes for girls and boys' (AEC, 1993, p. vii), and specifies a series of system level indicators as criteria of the plan's success in the various priority areas. These include indicators that the policy is being implemented in school provision, organisation, staffing, etc., as well as indicators of the intended outcomes for girls which the policy is meant to produce (with more of the former than the latter).

Student outcome indicators are listed in the following priority areas:

(a) 'Improving the educational outcomes of girls who benefit least from schooling', (Aboriginal (sic) and Torres Strait Islanders, girls from non-English speaking background, girls who have a disability, who live in rural and remote areas, or who live in poverty), where among the system level indicators are 'retention rates and attainment levels over time by group' (p. 17).

(b) 'Reforming the curriculum', where 'Participation rates and
attainment levels over time of girls and boys, by group, across the curriculum' is an indicator.

(c) 'Broadening work education', which includes 'Participation rates or school leavers, over time, in entry-level employment, further education and training, by group' and 'The attainment levels of girls and boys in relation to key employment-related competencies'.

Access, retention, participation and attainment are the chief focii of the policy, and are clearly centrally important in assessing the effectiveness of schooling for any group. However, while such an approach is an important way of demonstrating the existence of disadvantage, it offers few insights into how this disadvantage operates. In fact, when applied to the performance of social groups defined by race, class or gender, the group indicator approach can be a definite barrier to understanding, for three main reasons:

• it can disguise the complexity of intragroup and individual experience by focusing on potentially stereotyped group characteristics,
• it can be seen to blame school failure on some kind of group pathology rather than on the relationships among family, group culture, social and economic conditions and the school,
• it rests on an explanatory model which fails to deal directly with practice in a way which is oriented to action,
• it ignores the subjective concomitants of disadvantage – how girls make sense of and respond to the exclusions, domination and constraints which constitute disadvantage.

Each of these issues will be discussed in turn.

Group definition

The first difficulty with the group indicator approach is connected with the tendency to deal with groups defined by a single criterion. A number of problems arises here, the main one being the dangers of essentialism and stereotyping of the defining characteristic. For instance, culture and ethnicity can be taken to be determined by birth, rather than differently constructed through life in a variety of contexts and with a variety of results. Stereotypes become the first resort in decisions about 'minority groups' and 'race and ethnicity become something only minority groups have' (Pettman, 1992, p. 13).

A second problem is the neglect of diversity within groups. For example, a focus on a single factor like non-English speaking background overlooks the diversity within this category, in which the relative success of some NESB groups may disguise the disadvantage of others (Kalantzis and Cope, 1988).
Further, defining groups in this way gives no guidance on how the defining characteristics relate to each other, and can in fact erase certain groups from attention. For instance, when people speak of racism, they may think first and predominantly of black men; when they speak of sexism, they may think of white women. The consequence is the erasure of black women.

Aboriginal women, for example, experience sexism in some ways differently from other Australian women, and racism in some ways differently from Aboriginal men; and they also experience sexism and racism differently according to their class and job, dependence on welfare, age, disability, sexuality and so on. (Pettman, 1992, p.55)

When the starting point for thinking about disadvantage is a set of groups defined by single criteria, the way these forms of disadvantage are related in real social contexts is not adequately considered, and must then be brought together, usually in some simple additive model. Further, this model of disadvantage is typically institutionalised through funding programs, staffing and school administrative practice, creating additional problems of how the complex connections among the forms of disadvantage can be dealt with.

Group pathology

Definition in terms of class or cultural or gender group can focus attention exclusively on the group – the 'blame the victim' syndrome. A typical example is offered by Byrne (1985), who believes that a concentration on group indices has sustained stereotypes of, for instance, the working class family defined by father's occupation which is unwilling or unable to support their child's education. Byrne argues that this ignores the frequent working class commitment to education, and perhaps more significantly the role of the mother in contributing to the educational aspects of the home environment.

In pointing to the diversity of levels of performance among ethnic minority groups, Kalantzis and Cope (1988) warn that:

It is critical, however, that this phenomenon of uneven distribution is not put down to cultural pathology, but to the complex overlay of class (homeland and immigrant) and ethnicity, in which, in all probability, class is the more critical variable, albeit frequently expressed through cultural-ethnic identity and aspirations. (p. 48)

A parallel problem is that a focus on cultural difference among minority groups can distract attention from problems such groups face in the wider community, racism and sexism being obvious examples. It may be difficult for school personnel, however enlightened, to comprehend the extent of racism or sexism in the community, and the
impact this might have on the school related attitudes and relationships among girls. This is not to suggest that schools are free of racism or sexism themselves, for schools will reflect the mores and practices of their society. Rather, it is to suggest that the school is not sealed off from the relationships its students have beyond the school walls, which are part of the experience from which they interpret and respond to schooling.

Another relevant point here is that an analysis restricted to the relationships between groups and school indicators can overlook wider social and economic conditions, conditions which if taken into account may show matters in a different light. Kalantzis and Cope (1988) argue for instance that using school retention as a measure is not necessarily an indication of success or satisfaction, since school retention rates, which may be high in a period of high unemployment, disguise HSC results and university entrance, where inequalities for non-English speaking and working class students become serious.

The tendency to pathologise difference makes the term 'disadvantaged' itself problematic, as it carries patronising connotations, and can distract from the faults of the system which produces the disadvantage. For instance, many Aboriginal people see the label 'disadvantaged' as a distraction from the reality that they have been systematically dispossessed, and argue that what they need is not welfare policies to ameliorate their disadvantage, but the handing over (back) of the entitlements which are their right.

Disadvantage also carries a stigma. Almost none of the girls interviewed in the project reported in this paper identify themselves as disadvantaged, and the term (and the compensatory policies which it implies) fails to acknowledge the strengths and resources (usually personal or derived from social networks) which the girls use to cope and sometimes succeed in dealing with schooling.

Explanatory models

Models used to explain how the forms of disadvantage combine tend to mathematical and spatial metaphors, the most obvious being the additive model, where the effects of class are seen to be added to those of race and then gender (Pettman, 1992, p. 55). Another metaphor is Fine's (1991, p. 119) suggestion that the separate elements of disadvantage can be seen to be 'braided' together, forming a single strand.

The most common model used in depicting this issue is the 'dimensions metaphor'. Here, the defining group characteristics become dimensions in space, which are seen to 'intersect' or 'interact' in particular locations, biographies, events. Like the other physical metaphors, this is an abstract, deterministic and static model, and cannot reflect the processes of change, conflict and negotiation which characterise the
way disadvantage occurs in particular social practices and sites. Nor does it consider the way disadvantage is discursively constructed as an experience by those who suffer it. We need a more contextualised and dynamic notion if it is to be useful for understanding processes of disadvantage in particular contexts in a way which will help in making decisions in educational practice.

Practices, discourses and experiences cannot adequately be abstracted from the material circumstances and historical junctures in which they occur; analysis cannot assume a predetermined framework which can simply be applied to any situation. Understanding must be specific to each situation, testing the relevance of general concepts for particular people, times and places, tracing the terms on which social relationships are negotiated and the discourses through which they are constructed.

A common call in recent times has been to acknowledge difference and change rather than group identity as the predominant feature of people and their experiences. In particular, this perspective rejects notions of objective human interest, abstract concepts of morality, and universal modes of reasoning as guarantees of justice, arguing that they lead to exclusionist ideas of justice and how it might be achieved, giving insufficient weight to the experience of inequality as expressed by those who suffer it, and imposing generalised strategies where flexibility and responsiveness are needed.

A difficulty here is how to avoid the extension of difference to individualism. There is in Australian schooling (and elsewhere) a strong ethic and ideology of individualism, and to say that all students are disadvantaged differently, or that forms of disadvantage combine uniquely for each student, is simply to invite the inadequacies of individualism in dealing with this problem. Constraints and the processes of exclusion and alienation are not randomly distributed, but are institutionalised in historically reproduced sets of relationships, producing patterns of inequality and disadvantage which need to be understood in any realistic attempt to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged groups.

Pettman (1992) balances the competing perspectives of recognising structures and patterns of relationships on the one hand, and acknowledging diversity and difference on the other, when she argues the need to

contest the 'naturalisation' of categories and boundaries, especially those imposed on subordinate groups, without denying the validity of identities based on shared experiences and common social location.

(p. 127)
Individualism and infinite difference cannot sustain any form of social project, for the problems of disadvantage, and in this case of sexist practices, are matters of social relationships. Equally, ideals of equality grow out of some general notion of just social relationships and shared values. However, the ideal grounds for these just relationships cannot be identified by abstract rationalism. The necessary balance is illustrated in Benhabib's goal 'to situate reason and the moral self more decisively in contexts of gender and community, while insisting upon the discursive power of individuals to challenge such situatedness in the name of universalistic principles, future identities and as yet undiscovered communities' (Benhabib, 1992, p. 8).

Discourse, disadvantage and subjectivity

The discussion so far has argued that the focus on abstract notions of group difference, the group indicator approach to disadvantage, and the dimensions model of how forms of disadvantage combine, are not helpful in understanding the processes by which disadvantage operates in school contexts. We need an approach which is sensitive to aspects of disadvantage beyond the indicators, and to the negotiation and construction of experience in particular sites. Such an approach must try to take the standpoint of the girls themselves, for only in this way can we arrive at a concept of disadvantage broad yet specific enough to understand how the group characteristics and outcome criteria are manifest in the lived experience of girls themselves.

Take for example the three forms of disadvantage listed above from the analysis of educational disadvantage by Mortimore and Blackstone (1982). They include those students who are denied access to quality education, those who leave early, and those who underachieve because social and environmental factors prevent them from taking advantage of educational opportunities.

But why does the list exclude those who underachieve or who perform less well than they might because of the social dynamics of the school itself, including those flowing from the construction of gender? And should we not also add those who, irrespective of, or indeed as part of their academic performance, learn and come to accept a social positioning which reduces the potential power of their learning? Objective indicators of success in terms of access, retention and attainment cannot grasp the subjective experience which goes along with them, and which is crucial in understanding the subsequent effects of the indicated outcomes on the life chances and life choices of girls.

These points are important in understanding the full force of gender disadvantage, and it is in these respects that the concept of disadvantage needs to be expanded. Access, participation and even achievement may count for little if girls are at the same time learning
to accept positions in the gendered construction of social space which
disempower them, which prevent them from using their learning in
socially powerful ways. These questions may be crucial to
understanding how, despite obvious improvements in access, retention
and achievement, there are still areas of the curriculum where success
is predominantly a male preserve, and why improvements in school
retention and achievement are not producing corresponding changes in
the place of women in powerful positions in society at large. (Yates,
1993)

Discourse and the study of educational disadvantage

Arguments similar to this have been made by Iris Young (1990), who
claims that contemporary theories of justice are dominated by a
distributive paradigm, which tends to focus on the possession of
material goods and social positions. Young argues that

Serious conceptual confusion results, however, from attempting to
extend the concept of distribution beyond material goods to phenomena
such as power and opportunity. The logic of distribution treats
nonmaterial goods as identifiable things or bundles distributed in a
static pattern among identifiable, separate individuals. The
reification, individualism, and pattern orientation assumed in the
distributive paradigm, moreover, often obscure issues of domination and
oppression, which require a more process-oriented and relational
conceptualization.
Young, 1990, p. 8.

Young continues by arguing that the concept of distribution should be
limited to material goods, and that other important aspects of justice
include decision-making procedures, the social division of labour, and
culture. It is clear that these aspects of justice, which Young labels
nonmaterial, include many of the elements of the concept of gender and
gender relations. In such areas, Young argues that oppression and
domination should be the primary terms for conceptualising injustice,
and that this involves identifying five aspects: exploitation,
marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.

Young's characterisation of oppression as nonmaterial is highly
questionable in light of materialist approaches to language and meaning
(Coward and Ellis, 1977). However, it is true that many aspects of
domination, exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural
imperialism and violence take forms that are not amenable to
distributional analysis on the kind of group basis outlined above.
Young's emphasis on a process-orientated and relational approach is an
important one, and one for which the concept of discourse is very well
suited.
The need for such an approach to the process and relations of gender
disadvantage are also apparent in Harding's (1986) analysis of the
three elements of gender. Harding describes gender as a fundamental
category through which meaning is ascribed to everything, a way of
organising social relations, and a structure of personal identity. The
combination of categories of meaning, social relations and personal
identity is the classic triad of the concept of discourse.

As used here, the term discourse refers to the practices through which
people use symbol systems such as language in their everyday activities
and interactions, and how these systems produce, organise and constrain
these practices. Discourse analysis consists of those research methods
and theoretical frameworks which try to comprehend these practices and
relationships. The special focus of discourse analysis is the
connections among meaning, social practices and social relationships.
Put another way, discourse analysis studies how the things we do and
the patterns of events of everyday life are related to the ways in
which those actions and events are represented.

These systems of discourse work in a variety of ways to provide:
1 the meanings through which the world is represented for us;
2 the practices in which this process of representation connects with
social relations, including
   (a) the expectations, rules and conventions by which we interact with
   each other in particular situations; and
   (b) structured patterns of discursive practice which reproduce meanings
   and social relations over time as institutionalised practices;
3 the categories and distinctions by which we construct our identities
   as thinking, feeling individuals — our subjectivity.

In studying educational disadvantage in schools, we need to recognise
that schools are sites in which social relations and people's senses of
themselves are constructed in a range of discourses and other
environmental conditions which are already there. Life in schools is a
constant process of negotiating these relationships and constructing
experience in the circumstances, discourses and other resources
available to members. The negotiations produce pathways among the
range of possible relationships, and the person's experiences and sense
of self are constructed in the process. The diversity of discourses
and contexts means that the terms within which one operates and the
senses of self constructed in the process are also diverse, and usually
contradictory.

Such an approach would focus attention on the meanings girls attribute
to the processes of schooling; how these processes relate to their
developing sense of selves; how the various group characterisations and
the outcomes criteria are experienced and made sense of by the girls
themselves; how they are woven into the stories girls and others
construct to interpret present experience and its significance for their futures; how these stories form a base from which girls construct their sense of themselves, and present and project this sense into their developing relationships with others.

Gender positioning in school sites

In patriarchal societies we cannot escape the implications of femininity. Everything we do signifies compliance or resistance to dominant norms of what it is to be a woman.... (Weedon, 1987, pp.86-7)

Any discussion of the impact and influence of gender on secondary school practices needs to acknowledge Weedon's warning: there is no un-gendered space for young women to occupy in school sites. Their words, their actions, their bodies, their relationships are read by their teachers and other students (both female and male students) not as the words, actions, bodies, and relationships of an un-marked category of 'secondary student', but as that of women - and of "women" as women are constructed within a patriarchal society (see, for instance, Lees, 1993). Policy documents or educational practices that talk about ungendered student categories, or about treating boys and girls all alike, miss this important divide. Those who talk about students as a generic ungendered category will simply not be able to see the gender significance of what is going on. We need to talk about women and men students - not to assume that women or men students are homogeneous groups of subjects, but to mark out how readings of gender provide one of the most important ways in which meanings are attributed to social practice. This initial reframing of secondary school discourses to encompass gender constructed difference must precede any analysis of the impact of gender upon schooling.

Teenage schoolgirls read their own lives, and in turn are read by their teachers, their male classmates, and other female classmates, in terms of available and accessible discourses on femininity (Roman and Christian-Smith, 1989; Gilbert and Taylor, 1991). The "women" that teenage girls can be - the range of subject positions available - is circumscribed by these discourses, and different school institutions will allow for and support the circulation of different discourses on femininity. There are many ways of living out life as a woman, and religion, class, and privilege will clearly impact upon the construction of gender in secondary schools (see Lesko, 1988; Kenway and Willis, 1990).

Teenage girls are also encouraged to make readings of femininity through their families, their peer groups, and media constructions of gender (Christian-Smith (ed), 1993). The family site emerges as central in the early formulation of legitimate femininity for young women, and is potentially very narrowing. As Weedon (1987, p. 100)
warns, 'the way in which gender is understood and acted upon in the context of the nuclear family is central to the reproduction of the sexual division of labour and current norms of femininity and masculinity'.

The stories by which most young women initially come to make sense of their lives are stories that circulate within the discourses of the family. Family stories are also read alongside the stories about women and men circulating in the media - stories which are far from gender-neutral. While the stories that predominate in the popular culture of teenage young women, and in their homes, their churches and their schools, offer various readings of femininity - and various ways of living out femininity - the important issue is that gender is always there (Roman and Christian-Smith, 1989; Gilbert and Taylor, 1991). The social construction of femininity, albeit in different forms, still lies at the centre of the construction of the social subject (Davies, 1993).

The version of femininity which predominates in primary school years is clearly the version which reads little girls as "schoolgirls": well-behaved, clean, neat, uniformed, obedient, docile and a-sexual female subjects whose feminine bodies and faces are hidden underneath pinafores and bloomers, or masked by plaits, braids and scrubbed-clean faces (Walkerdine, 1990). The good little girl-child construct can easily be accommodated within the good little schoolgirl construct. The compliant female child who has learnt to share, co-operate, act dutifully, and give way to boys, fits easily into the primary school classroom site. Being a "schoolgirl" within this construction is likely to bring rewards in terms of school achievement, teacher favour, and family pride. Because the sexuality of the girl-child is masked by the protective discourse of childhood, the schoolgirl construct can be accommodated within discourses of childhood much more readily than can the schoolboy construct.

However the shift from schoolgirl to woman - to sexual female subject - introduces dynamics that completely alter this balance and this reading (see Mikel Brown and Gilligan, 1993; Moore and Rosenthal, 1993). The schoolgirl who menstruates, or the schoolgirl who has breasts, can no longer be read as child. And the schoolgirl who laughs at - or retells - sexy jokes, or the schoolgirl who kisses schoolboys on class camps, is no longer an ungendered child. The schoolgirl now has to be read as a woman, and yet she is a woman in a social institution which is not organised or structured as a site for adults, particularly in terms of sexuality.

Most noticeably, the schoolgirl is likely to have school toilet and menstruating facilities that a woman would find demeaning and unacceptable. The schoolgirl is likely to have to live with a constant
stream of sexual harassment (often ignored and treated as "schooling as usual" by administrators and teachers) that would be frustrating as well as frightening for an adult woman (Lees, 1993). She daily lives out her life before her male and female peers and her male and female teachers as a gendered social subject: as one who menstruates, as one who can be raped, as one whose body can be the constant object of the male gaze. And yet this seems to happen in a vacuum, unacknowledged. The schoolgirl’s gendered being is made invisible within the school, because the school site has difficulties in dealing with a sexual subject within its institutional practices.

How does the 'schoolgirl' now read her new position as gendered sexual subject: as woman? We have argued that girls seek out stories by which to make sense of, and to order, their worlds, stories constructed in and from the available discourses. Some are more accessible than others, particularly the discourses of femininity which dominate in popular culture. Some stories are brought to life within particular institutions - as in various religious institutions, or particular schooling systems, or types of family settings, or cultural groups. One of the dominant discourses which holds femininity in place is the romantic storyline: the storyline which offers heterosexual love, marriage and childbirth as seductive reward for becoming feminine (see Gilbert and Taylor, 1991).

The feminine/romantic woman recognises that she needs to support the autonomous/masculine man if romance and its seductive desires are to be fulfilled. Female career achievement, female intelligence, female ambition will then need to be read in terms of supporting, rather than challenging or in competition with, masculine career achievement, intelligence, ambition. The woman who follows this storyline will make various choices about how she wants to be read as a gendered "feminine" woman. She will read her own ambition and drive to succeed in terms of maintaining her own acceptability as a woman within this hierarchical construction of gender relations (see Davies, 1993).

This discursive construction is in potential conflict with school discourses which recognise achievement and success without acknowledging the gendered construction of such concepts, and which also read school pupils as ungendered social subjects severed from their discursive social networks with their gendered relationships and pervasive sexuality. The schoolgirl/woman is faced with choices once she is read as a sexual social subject. She can stay on her 'schoolgirl' line of accommodation, and become one of Walker's "accommodators" (Walker, 1985), or she can resist being positioned as a child and take up a position as woman within school institutional practices. As a woman, however, she is a challenge and threat to the school both as a sexual subject, and as an adult subject. Dependent upon the readings of femininity circulating in the site within which
she now has to operate, and dependent upon her own discursive history as a gendered social subject (through class, ethnicity, school-defined achievement), she must take up a position from which to operate.

She might choose to resist the readings of femininity available within the school context: to rail against sexual harassment and denigration. However this may be unwelcome within the school site, where practices that recognise and assert the status of women are unlikely to be in place, and where the versions of femininity that predominate may read her behaviour as that of a woman who doesn't know her place. The irony is that once girls' practices indicate that they want to be treated as adults - that they are adult and therefore sexual subjects - the school is likely to import negative moralistic judgements about uppity women who do not know their place within the patriarchal order.

The schoolgirl might also choose - again dependent upon her discursive history of perceptions of workable alternatives - to take up the sexual subjectivity offered: to join in to the form of gender relations she perceives to be on offer. This might mean accepting a position as the sexual, gendered body that gives pleasure to men and only has a validity if it can attract men. Given versions of femininity on offer through the family, the church, and the media, this might well be seen as a socially condoned position to occupy. But again the school is likely to import negative moralistic judgements about promiscuity and visible female sexuality and to read schoolgirls who take up this position as potential sluts and whores. Young women need to negotiate this accommodation very carefully, if they are not to be positioned as promiscuous. (See Gilbert, P. and Gilbert, R., 1994a)

The romantic discourse and storyline must also introduce various tensions for young women in terms of home and ethnic backgrounds, where the mythology of the romantic heterosexual marriage and family jars with lived family realities, cultures, crises. (See Gilbert, P. and Gilbert, R., 1994b) Given the pervasiveness of constructions of Western female beauty, Western nuclear families, and Western gender relations through the popular media, there is potentially a disjuncture between the cultures of communities and the culture of the school in terms of versions of femininity on offer. The community culture may make it difficult for young women to find any of the positions of femininity on offer acceptable. They may be forced into the compliant schoolgirl position because it accommodates rather than challenges the school institution.

Conclusion

The operation of the dimensions of disadvantage needs to be seen as a process of production of discursive positions and material
circumstances. Given the diversity, contradiction and change which characterize this process, the construction of subjectivity and the negotiation of resources, relationships and personal situation is inherently diverse for each individual. However, the challenges individuals face, the discourses with which they interpret and construct them, and the resources they use in the process are not infinite and random, but are to a significant extent systematically patterned.

Confronting sexuality is a challenge all girls face, however different its cultural and other variants might make it; dominant media images are presented to girls as a group, however differently placed they are in their reading of them; exclusions, domination and constraints arising from racism, isolation, and disability are widespread, however much local and individual circumstances might ameliorate them; regional economies differ in the opportunities they offer, affecting the life chances of whole communities of young people. In no context is this system of exclusion, domination and constraint more apparent than that of the construction of gender and its impact on the school careers of girls. To consider the processes of disadvantage girls without acknowledging these patterns is futile.

Equally, to try to analyse these processes through a static group analysis, or by focusing on distributional questions alone, loses sight of the meanings and relations which are central to the practices which produce the group differences and the distributional inequalities. A discourse approach which connects the elements of meaning, social relations and subjectivity provides a crucial perspective on the practices of gender disadvantage in education.

References

Gilbert, P. and Gilbert, R. (1994a) Gender and educational disadvantage: Teenage girls' access to discourses of desire, power and injustice. Paper presented at the International Conference on
Democracy in Schools, Citizenship and Global Concern, Copenhagen.