



## Reading summary

**Hattam, R., & Prosser, B. (2008). Unsettling deficit views of students and their communities. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 35(2), 89–106.**

Recently much attention has been paid to how to improve the middle years of schooling, but the promised reforms have been patchy and there has been little change to pedagogy. Changes to pedagogy and curriculum are now required because the traditional curriculum is increasingly unrelated to students' identities and experiences, and deficit views of groups of students are common.

In recent education policies and the academic literature there has been significant discussion of connecting with students' lives, rather than imposing scripted teaching. Education departments promote only a weak version of connectedness, but stronger versions have been proposed. Some examples, drawing on Freire and Shor, emphasise using themes from students' lives and communities to generate the curriculum. A more recent example is the 'funds of knowledge' approach, in which teachers work with local communities to harness their knowledges and experiences and bring them into the classroom. Variations on this approach have incorporated students' own funds of knowledge.

The literature on middle schooling recognises the importance of identity in the middle years, although some approaches, particularly in policy documents, are limited and decontextualised. In recent years there has been a growth in research that uses narrative identity as a conceptual basis for exploring and unsettling deficit student identities. Teachers can use narrative pedagogies to empower students, especially if they retain a sense of criticality and work to unsettle deficit views. Narrative pedagogies work best if they are written and performed, not individually, but in supportive and collaborative critical communities.

If teachers are to resist pedagogies that are driven by deficit views of students and their communities, then they need to be supported by conceptual and practical resources. Teachers can draw on the pedagogical ideas and resources outlined in this chapter to work against the logic of deficit views of the marginalised and towards more socially just middle schooling in Australia.

## Take-home messages

**Students' lives at the centre:** The lives and identities of students should be at the centre of curriculum design.

**Resisting deficit views:** Teachers should be supported to resist pedagogies that are driven by deficit views of students and their communities.

**Students' funds of knowledge are assets:** Students bring their own funds of knowledge to the classroom, and these should be seen as resources for teaching.

**Narrative pedagogies can improve students' identities:** Narrative pedagogies written in supportive critical communities can help students to challenge deficit views and develop positive identities.