

Schools, religion, and affect: Unpacking ‘pedagogies of discomfort’ for Australian educators

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Australian education policy clearly expresses a national commitment toward equity and excellence that in principle aspires to draw from the diverse ways of knowing, being and doing of super diverse learners. Research in the areas of equity, inclusion, and cultural responsiveness provide a much-needed reorientation toward the learning needs and funds of knowledge of marginalised learners on the basis of race, class, gender, and ability. However, less is known about the preparedness (or willingness) of educators to engage with the religious identities expressed by some learners when committing to equitable, inclusive, and responsive educational practice. This paper examines the affective responses of educators from four state schools when learner expressions of religious identities arise in classrooms. Participant responses consistently reflect sentiments of discomfort or outright unwillingness, attempts to dismiss and/or redirect, or at best the reduction of religious identities to secular humanistic values. This paper argues that for learners who identify with a religion, national commitments to equity, inclusion, and responsive pedagogies fall short if they fail to disrupt simplistic notions of secular schooling commonly held by educators i.e., that religion has no place in state schooling.