

***The Reactionary Use of Concepts of Secularism, Pluralism and Free Expression:
Implications for Education Studies***

Reactionary (racist, homophobic and transphobic) social movements have been gaining ground in ostensibly liberal democracies. Their gains are achieved not necessarily by using hateful language (Nash and Browne 2020), but by drawing on secular and/or quasi-legal arguments. In education settings, these arguments include claims that freedom of speech is under threat, or that the state may be failing to protect private belief in education. But the force behind these arguments in part comes from longstanding liberal apathy towards deep inequalities (Mondon and Winter 2020).

Further problems are evident in the ways ideals of educational pluralism remain tied to the outcomes of parent school choice and to expectations that minorities must assimilate.

Using case studies from the UK and Ireland, Karl Kitching argues Education Studies needs to move beyond the assumption that concepts of secularism, pluralism and freedom of expression carry self-evidently progressive meaning in education policy and political discourse. He urges education scholars to be unequivocal in their rejection of the mobilisation of these concepts to damage collective solidarity, and outlines principles for deep engagement with plurality in education that are radically democratic in nature.