



Reading summary

Schulz, S., Rigney, L.-I., Zembylas, M., Hattam, R., & Memon, N. (2024). Affect and the force of counter stories: Learning racial literacy through thinking and feeling. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 32(5), 1307–1324. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2023.2173276>

Australia's student population is growing ever more culturally diverse at the same time as neoliberal policy reforms intensify disadvantage and establish whiteness as a norm. This article considers racial literacy education as a strategy to counter this disadvantage and to value students' cultural diversity. Racial literacy is a pool of discursive tools for identifying and talking about racism whilst developing collective drive for anti-racist action.

Racism is a serious issue in contemporary Australia, and it is rooted in colonisation and the ongoing denial of Indigenous sovereignty, frequently causing discomfort for white teachers. Drawing from affect theory, this article sees counter stories – stories told from racially minoritised viewpoints – as channels for exploring racism while eliciting pedagogically useful emotions. The specific focus is the 2019 documentary *The Final Quarter*, which focuses on three key events that showcase racism, and responses to allegations of racism, in the Australian Football League (AFL). The article brings counter stories and affect together to develop an affective-discursive lens for analysis.

Layer one of the analysis explores how liminal spaces like the AFL establish 'ideal' or 'amenable' bodies that conform to official histories and national scripts, but where there are also competing discourses that establish points of resistance. Historically Australian football was a space where racism, sexism and other social exclusions were concentrated in the reproduction of a glorified image of white Australian masculinity. Later Aboriginal players were gradually included and celebrated in the AFL, as long as they did not threaten the racial order. Aboriginal players who called for more than inclusion were seen as a threat to mainstream stability, which triggered white discomfort.

Layer two is a filmic analysis, which provides insights into Australian racism as well as cinematic techniques that offer an affective learning experience. It discusses how the film *The Final Quarter* uses perception-images (what is seen) and affection-images (expressions of feeling), icons, affective bonds, and juxtapositions between Aboriginal players and white 'experts', highlighting white practices of denying or minimising racism while openly inciting it. As a cultural text, the film offers a way of developing racial literacy through learning to read Australian race relations. Opportunities for learning about Australian racism are affectively intensified by filmic techniques that establish tension, show multiple viewpoints and create emotional investment.

Teaching anti-racism must go beyond the limits of language and use embodied/emotional forms of knowledge precisely because racism denies logics vested in language. Establishing affective bonds through film can engage learners in productive discussions about emotions – both individual and collective – and how guilt or anger shape capacities to learn from or 'hear' others. This offers a vehicle for building racial literacy through solidarity.

Take-home messages

Racism and affect: Logical or verbal arguments against racism are not enough – racism is enacted through affective relations that are pre-linguistic.

Affective tools for racial literacy: Racial literacy education can use affective tools, for example such as film, to show how the shared feelings facilitated by spaces like football or online platforms are entangled in racist structures.