

Call for Submissions: Special Issue, *Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry (CPI)*

The Politics of Contemporary Education

Guest Editor: Paul A Crutcher (University of Arkansas - Little Rock)

Through scholarly and creative work, this proposed CPI special issue explores central aspects and impacts of the contentious politics of contemporary education.

Acclaimed author Neil Gaiman opens *Trigger Warning*, his 2015 collection of short stories, with an introductory meditation on the contemporary culture. He reacts in particular, to the idea that schools and universities were prefacing and censoring literary experiences. He wonders if literature isn't inherently about surprise and thus, about not being safe. Gaiman's is a reasonable fear, as time and technology have shown us that human history is littered with tensions between ways of prescribing and controlling one's thinking and ways of embracing individuality, imagination, creativity, and human agency in order to become more fully human.

In North American schools, this paradox of control in education is seen in trigger warnings, safe spaces, “microaggression” and “privilege” rhetorics, and more, all extensively covered in journalism and satirized in media (including Season 19 of *South Park*). Trigger warnings are offered in advance of curricular content based on how that content may “trigger” psychological trauma in students; in 2016, the University of Chicago incited continued debate by arguing trigger warnings are antithetical to its intellectual mission, posturing that serious institutions wouldn't coddle students just to follow politically correct cultural trends. Problematically, trigger warnings and these other policies and rhetorics seem to emerge from implementation of a liberal democratic theory of education and from critical theory. The paradox, then—promoting inclusion and equity while censoring speech and truncating or eliminating contentious content.

In working to promote equity in education, how are we stripping curricular content of heart, depth, and meaning? When we ask about power dynamics and privilege, ask about who can use language, and who should write history, shouldn't we also ask whether such educational dishonesty promotes an era of Orwellian “alternative facts” and societal divisiveness? If Gaiman's right, the threat is that as educators, we indoctrinate young people into creating and burrowing into idiosyncratic, individualized fantasies rather than promoting critical, nuanced citizens and thoughtful people. Curricula aren't neutral and schooling isn't objective, but shouldn't committed educators be able to defend their curricula, even if those curricula aren't “safe”?

Proposals are invited which

- take up these and related issues in the politics and economics of education;
- explore effects of political correctness on students;
- show complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty, in a less than perfect world; or
- reflect direct teaching-learning experiences and existing research.

Potential contributors to this special issue should submit a proposal to **Dr. Paul A. Crutcher** (pacrutcher@ualr.edu) **by December 15, 2017**. **Proposals should be single Word or PDF files that include:** (a) a title of up to 150 characters, (b) an abstract of up to 150 words, and (c) a description of the proposed paper or creative work of up to 500 words.