

# Renewed Culture Wars and their Malcontent: How to Engage with a Culture of Disillusionment

Laura J. Hetrick

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

## ABSTRACT

I begin with a brief introduction to the New Culture Wars in the US, which are already socially positioned as a dichotomy of perspectives between traditional and progressive political and moral values. Next, while attempting to neither elevate nor denigrate either side, I aim to explore a shared culture of disillusionment that I posit has evolved on both sides. While the leading causes of disillusionment may be instigated by myriad opposing views, the effects of this social occurrence are quite similar. I offer the consideration that instead of disavowing disillusionment and potentially trying to eradicate its existence, arts educators should engage with the culture of disillusionment in themselves, their students, and in our communities, as a call to action to incite profound change within each individual. I conclude by offering suggestions so that arts educators recognize the signs of disillusionment and actively utilize key tenets already extant in art education scholarship and practice to create a more empathic tomorrow.

KEYWORDS: Culture of Disillusionment; Art Education

*It was the middle of summer; we were in the midst of a major heat wave; and I was sitting at a restaurant across the table from my senior colleague. He hesitantly asked, "Should I even ask how writing is going?"*

*"Disillusioned... I am in a state of disillusionment," I dramatically lamented.*

*"Disillusioned about what?" he asked with bewilderment.*

*"Everything. The state of the State [that I reside in]; the state of the academy; the future of art education; bombings and shootings; people getting shot because of the color of their skin; presidential elections; civil unrest; you name it. How does writing for the sake of tenure even factor in with the very real happenings of the world? Besides that, is art education really the answer to these problems?" I bemoaned while looking down at my plate.*

*I was so near tears that I couldn't make eye contact at that moment. When I looked up, he seemed concerned, but didn't really have an answer for me. I'm convinced my pessimism was not what he expected to hear, nor wanted to hear,*

*from a junior colleague on tenure track. We continued our talk for another two hours, but on the way home and for the rest of the afternoon, I couldn't stop thinking about [my] disillusionment. Why was I feeling such despair and resignation in my life? And furthermore, I began to ponder if my "pessimism [was] justifiable, let alone [my] resignation and despair" (Alexander, 2016, p. 73). What was this demoralizing acquiescence of which I had found myself? I began wondering, could it just be me and my current situation?*

*It did not take long before I assured myself that I was not the only one feeling this way—it only took a quick glance at my Facebook and Twitter newsfeeds to see that I was not alone in my lamentations, and the actual US presidential election hadn't even happened yet. Immediately I began to surmise about what, if anything, had been written about disillusionment and how one could overcome it. I knew it was something I was feeling with extreme intensity, but I was unsure if it had been previously written about in a scholarly manner. I began searching frantically on my university library databases and found results, but most were tied directly to a specific country's politics during a particular time period. I kept searching. Serendipitously, later that same week, this journal's call for papers on New Culture Wars appeared on my Facebook newsfeed. Suddenly, my mental immobility and swirling thoughts about disillusionment transformed with clarity and purpose and started amalgamating instantly.*

## **New Culture Wars**

For many in society, *cultures* are often erroneously conflated solely with nationalities or recognizable social traits passed on from one generation to another, but cultures are multi-faceted conceptual entities that evolve over time and in different ways. These can include sub-cultures, which are groups having other traits distinctive enough to distinguish them from others within the same culture. This paper builds the understanding of the culture of disillusionment on the foundation of Sturken & Cartwright's (2001) definition of culture, which is "the shared practices of a group, community, or society, through which meaning is made out of the visual, aural, and textual world of representations" (p. 3). Furthermore, culture can be understood as not necessarily a group of things, but as a "set of processes or practices through which individuals and groups come to make sense of those things. Culture is the production and exchange of meanings, the giving and taking of meaning, between members of a society or group" (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 3-4). This includes those processes and practices that are shared by a group of individuals who may never have physically met due to the global

reaches of social media; however, they share the same practices for meaning making and embody similar feelings due to relatable internal values and/or external societal influences and events.

With Sturken & Cartwright's (2001) definition of culture advanced, and in order to contextualize the intellection of a culture of disillusionment, I begin with a brief introduction to the concept of the New Culture Wars in the United States (US). The phrase "culture war" etymologizes from the German *Kulturkampf*. The German word *Kulturkampf* (literally *culture struggle*), refers to the clash between German governmental groups and Roman Catholic religious groups in the late 1800s, mainly over the control of education and ecclesiastical appointments (Spahn, 1910). The Culture Wars in the US refer to conflict between what can be imperfectly referred to as traditionalist/conservative values and progressive/liberal values. Culture Wars have influenced the debates over many issues of politics and morality, such as human reproductive rights, civil rights, education, sexuality, the arts, etc. James D. Hunter's (1991) book, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, provides analytical explanations and metaphors for the dichotomous nature of the contemporary Culture Wars.

First, Hunter (1991) defines cultural conflict as "political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding. The end to which these hostilities tend is the domination of one cultural and moral ethos over all others" (p. 42). He provides a historical analysis of the polarizing impulses that each side has revealed through vociferous expressions and actions, which are essential to their moral tendencies in the public arena of US politics and cultural day-to-day operations. Though he was speaking about social events nearly 30 years ago, the descriptions of both sides of the Culture Wars still resonate today. In short, the traditionalist/conservative or orthodox side has a "commitment on the part of adherents to an external, definable, and transcendent authority" (p. 44); whereas the progressive/liberal side has a "tendency to resymbolize historic faiths according to the prevailing assumptions of contemporary life" (p. 44-45). In other words, progressives do not think of one truth/authority outside of themselves, but rather think of truth as a process that is always unfolding in context of the *Zeitgeist*. What Hunter clarifies is that this is not merely about differences of opinions, attitudes, or assumptions, but it is about "fundamentally different conceptions of moral authority, over different ideas and beliefs about truth, the good, obligation to one another, the nature of community, and so on" (p. 49). Therefore, it is not a war of rhetoric that can end with a debate,

and this is precisely why each side is so passionate in defending its struggle for cultural domination. Both sides firmly believe that they are right and the others are evil, which leads to unethical civilities or no civility at all.

Economic, religious, and ethnic pressures are often not just non-civil but anti-civil; they enter deeply into the civil sphere, distorting its utopian promises, creating destructive intrusions difficult to repair. Sometimes social movements are rallying efforts to expand the civil sphere and gain inclusion; just as frequently, however, they are backlash efforts to narrow solidarity and create exclusions... The discourse of civil society stigmatizes some people and groups as evil, as threatening and anti-civil, even as it purifies others as democratic and good. (Alexander, 2016, p. 75)

It only takes visits to our social media accounts or news media outlets to see social movements on either side of the Culture Wars rallying their efforts to expand their ideas and gain power through inclusion of like minds and exclusion of opposers. Consequently, I believe that through this public operationalizing of the conflicting values in the US, disillusionment on one or both sides is inevitable. Here I segue into literature on the concept of disillusionment to set the stage for delineating the more specific intellection of what I call a *culture of disillusionment*.

## Defining Disillusionment

In this section, I begin by defining disillusionment both in a vernacular sense and then in a psychoanalytic sense. For clarification and depth, I provide potential signs of disillusionment by outlining the concomitant feelings that many have as a result of an utter disappointment in reality. As I mentioned in my short introductory narrative, when I began searching my university library databases for scholarly writings on disillusionment, I quickly found results, but most were tied directly to a specific country's politics during a particular time period (e.g., *Progressivism and postwar disillusionment, 1898-1928*). Upon further searches, I found the concept of disillusionment scantily scattered in literature on the helping professions (nurses, teachers), psychoanalysis, and the social sciences. I focus my attention on the literature of disillusionment within the

field of psychoanalysis, relying heavily upon the work of Dr. Stanley Teitelbaum (1999), who discusses the role disillusionment plays in human functioning from a developmental, theoretical, and clinical perspective.

To begin, the dictionary definition of the word disillusionment provides the concept of "a freeing or a being freed from illusion or conviction; disenchantment" (dictionary.com). In other words, disillusionment in the vernacular sense is a state of utter disappointment when one's (perceived) impression of reality doesn't meet personal expectations of reality. Disillusionment is "the process that springs from the realization that one's wishes, beliefs, expectations, and assumptions are not going to be fulfilled. In extreme situations disillusionment may be felt as devastating and demolishing to one's belief systems" (Teitelbaum, 1999, p. 3). Disillusionment, when considered with a psychoanalytic lens, might be compared to the psychic break/discordance that is felt when one realizes that fantasy is just a deceptive illusion of one's own positing. What was hoped for, or was sincerely believed to be so, isn't so.

For some individuals, the "relinquishment of a needed illusion can be traumatic... the task of giving up their illusions, mourning their loss, and working through the ensuing disillusionment engenders unthinkable anxiety" (Teitelbaum, 1999, p. xiv). As a result, a person is likely to feel frustration and even hopelessness in addition to their anxiety. The concept or effect of frustration is a feeling of dissatisfaction, often accompanied by anxiety or depression, resulting from unfulfilled needs or unresolved problems. Within psychoanalysis, frustration "does not concern biological needs but the DEMAND for love" (Evans, 1996, p. 69). In the case of the Culture Wars, it may be the demand for love in the form of acknowledgement or buy-in of ideas from individuals on the opposing side. An individual may become frustrated when she feels her perspective is not being respected or even considered by someone with conflicting views. So, in effect, this individual is feeling frustrated because the other is not answering the demand for love of the individual as someone-who-matters and/or her ideas. Similarly, the vernacular understanding of anxiety is not only a feeling of distress or uneasiness of mind caused by fear of danger or misfortune, but also a state of apprehension and psychic tension. Within psychoanalysis, anxiety has been theorized as the threat of fragmentation of the body in the mirror stage, and more recently as "the point where the subject is suspended between a moment where he no longer knows where he is and a future where he will never again be able to re-find himself (S4, 226)" (Evans, 1996,

p. 11). Within the contemporary Culture Wars, the occurrence of an individual feeling an immense loss of both sense of self (suspension of a recognizable entity that matters and has agency) and a perceived stable positionality in a future equitable society is unfortunately all too common.

In addition to feelings of frustration and anxiety, disillusionment can lead to an overwhelming hopelessness that emerges in the form of depression. A common psychiatric definition of depression is that it is a condition of general emotional dejection and withdrawal and/or sadness greater and more prolonged than that warranted by any objective reason (dictionary.com). From a more psychoanalytic understanding, depression “often emanates from the loss of core illusions and the concomitant disillusionment that is experienced” (Teitelbaum, 1999, p. 169). An illusion is a human (mis)perception that deceives by producing a false or misleading impression of reality. Core illusions are necessary to deal with everyday life and are often developed to protect oneself against depression and from the painful truth of reality. It is the loss of those illusions (e.g., living in an equitable society) that leads to disillusionment and depression. To be more succinct, “it is disillusionment pertaining to the loss of life dreams, ambitions, and goals that leads to depression” (Teitelbaum, 1999, p. 176). To return to the context of the Culture Wars, an individual from either side would potentially feel disillusionment when the reality of the US, its perceived/actual culture and politics, as well as its moral consciousness, are not the same as, or do not resonate with, the individual. As an example, a traditionalist/conservative individual might feel disillusioned when political pundits or policy makers ban the mention of God in the Pledge of Allegiance or put laws in place where abortions are funded by tax dollars. Likewise, a progressive/liberal individual might feel disillusionment if the mention of God is *not* removed or if abortions are made illegal. Again, with a quick scroll through my social media outlets, I recognize that I have individuals that I care for deeply on both sides of these contemporary Culture Wars. Both sides make very passionate posts about their underlying moral convictions and resultant general animosity (e.g., “I will unfriend anyone who voted for a particular presidential nominee”) toward those on the opposing side. What I also noticed was that individuals on both sides were disillusioned with the general state of the country and the larger geo-political (in)actions of the global community in which we reside. “In the place of high hopes, there is a bitter taste of disappointment. Confidence that social strains can be repaired has weakened and, in many quarters, there is a growing sense of despair” (Alexander, 2016,

p. 73).

To return to my introductory narrative in order to provide a personal example, the disillusionment that I expressed to my colleague may have been initiated by the loss of my core illusion of myself as a competent scholar who should have had enough articles in my nascent career. I had potentially invested in this illusion of heightened literary competency in order to protect myself against the realities of negotiating a prolonged personal illness and investing copious amounts of time into myriad acts of service to the university during my tenure track process. The reality that I was entering the last stretch before my tenure package was due to the school had suddenly set in and broken a core illusion that I harbored out of a psychic necessity for my functional wellbeing. “It is this loss of one’s hopes, ideals, and the frustration of one’s expectations that leads a person into a state of nihilism or fragmentation” (Morales, 2001, p. 1). My personal disillusionment was potentially generated out of the loss of my hopes and goals of a straightforward maneuvering through the tenure process and frustration that my expectations of myself had fallen short in actuality. It was indeed a painful emancipation from the ideal view I held of myself as a scholar versus the reality of where I found myself not quite meeting the mark.

Sometimes disillusionment in an individual can manifest in quite a different way, such as denial, which is inherently different than frustration or anxiety. It can be understood that denial is the refusal to acknowledge the validity or existence of something/someone as true or actual. Psychoanalytically speaking, “denial is a defense mechanism that involves a refusal to believe or accept a painful or unwanted reality. It includes an investment of energy devoted to changing the choreography of real-life events” (Teitelbaum, 1999, p. 101). It usually involves ignoring some portion of reality that is unfavorable in order to unconsciously bypass the results and consequences of that portion of reality’s existence. Through denial, the individual is attempting to alter reality as it is.

Other times, disillusionment in an individual can lead to the state of mourning or feelings of intense sorrow or lamentation. Psychoanalytically speaking, according to Freud (1917), “mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal and so on” (p. 243). This can include mourning the loss of a core illusion in the actual state of the society or country in which one lives, as can be evidenced by the lamenting

outcries of individuals after the 2016 US presidential election. As a result of the election, some individuals actually mourned the loss of societal liberties that were threatened to be eradicated through policy reform and intimidation. There may have also been an (un)conscious mourning over the realization that the Culture Wars of earlier years in the US had never been resolved, as evidenced by still rampant racism, homophobia, and xenophobia within the US.

Lastly, disillusionment in an individual can lead to idealization or overestimating an admired attribute of another person, culture, or entity. In idealization, “illusions about the magnificence of the other person abound, and the connection one has to such a person serves to bolster feelings of well-being and security... [this] serves as a defense against underlying feelings of vulnerability and inadequacy” (Teitelbaum, 1999, p. 97). Again, the 2016 US presidential election serves as a perfect example of how many disillusioned individuals from both sides of the Culture Wars idealized their candidate in hopes of deriving a sense of security in their perceived connection to that candidate and her/his campaign promises. As an example, some individuals from the progressive/liberal side took immediate action to compensate for feelings of disillusionment and despair by offering support groups through social media, such as *The Pantsuit Nation*. In concentrated efforts of self-therapy and providing support for like-minded individuals, those joining this group, grasping their “true state of vulnerability in the world... may attempt to compensate for [their] lost illusion by investing in the belief that [they are] attached to something or someone who is big and strong” (Teitelbaum, 1999, p. 8). As individual voters/citizens, people often feel inadequate in being able to make large societal changes that can lead to a more egalitarian society that values differences and honors civility, so they must emotionally invest in someone much *larger* and more politically capable than themselves. Idealization of a presidential candidate and her/his abilities is one way to navigate this disillusionment.

In this section, I defined the concept of disillusionment to set the stage for delineating what I call a *culture of disillusionment*. By first defining culture and then defining disillusionment, I aim to align the two concepts to help arts educators understand the shared psychic state that many in the US and our arts classrooms are currently feeling. Regardless of what side of the Culture Wars they may identify with and rest their hopes in, most of our students may need some assistance in recognizing this in themselves and consequently be offered strategies for successfully working through their disillusionment.

## Culture of Disillusionment

While attempting to neither elevate nor denigrate either side of the Culture Wars, I explore the concept of a common *culture of disillusionment* that I posit has evolved on both sides. While the leading causes of disillusionment on either side may be instigated by myriad opposing views, the effects of this social occurrence are quite similar. I provide more general illustrations of cultures of disillusionment to showcase that while the effects may manifest differently, the affects do not.

As a reminder, in this paper, culture is defined as the shared practices of a group of individuals who may never have physically met due to the isolating yet global reaches of social media; however, they share the same processes for meaning making and embody similar feelings due to relatable internal values and/or external societal influences and events. Clearly, cultures of disillusionment can exist in different social classes, ethnicities, and occupations and within any persons or groups at any given moment for various reasons. Some examples of disillusionment are readily found in the subcultures of the helping professions such as poverty lawyers, public health nurses, high school teachers, social workers, and psychologists (Cherniss, 1995). For the sake of size constraints and specificity of audience, I will only focus on disillusionment in teacher culture and student culture to expound the intellection of a culture of disillusionment that we may be more familiar with or (un)knowingly engage with every day.

One of the possible reasons for a culture of disillusionment in teachers might be due to a collision between their idealism of the profession’s perceived impact on the world and the reality of little impact for the greater good. Other real-life reasons might be budget cuts, layoffs, student misbehavior, low wages, and general lack of parental, administrative and/or societal support (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Näring, Briët, & Brouwers, 2006). Because of similarities of external factors (e.g., structures of schools/schedules, administration, national testing), as well as internal thoughts and feelings (e.g., altruism, leadership), teachers can share in a culture of disillusionment. Though signs of disillusionment may be different for each individual, there are some similarities in what those in the same culture may experience. For example, some of the potential signs of a culture of disillusionment in teachers may manifest in actions such as:

frequent tardiness; frequent requests for sick days;  
frequent parent calls to the principal; same children

being sent to the office on a regular basis; avoiding faculty interaction; leaving daily with large stacks of paperwork; delaying responses to requests from the principal's office; using blaming language; regularly appearing negative and frustrated; having a high rate of student failure; and/or consistently lacking clarity about goals and student performance. (Michigan State University, 2016)

While there is literature (Beltman, Mansfield, & Price, 2011; Perry, 2015) about how teachers thrive despite the factors listed above, the main goal here is to familiarize teachers with feelings they or their colleagues may be exhibiting. A teacher may display any number of these signs of disillusionment; however, the feelings that lead to/underlie these actions, such as anxiety, frustration, depression, mourning, denial, and/or idealization (discussed in the preceding section), are what other teachers and administrators should be aware of and help the individual work through.

Segueing into student culture, two of the possible reasons for a culture of disillusionment in students might be due to their perceived lack of control of their state of being (e.g., their home lives, classes, future careers) and the perceived lack of relevance of schooling (e.g., disconnected courses, boring lectures, high-stakes testing). As Cardon (2014) points out, "Millennial students are generally resistant to highly abstract material if denied the opportunity to reflect on its relevance" (p. 39). Other real-life reasons might be difficult academic schedules, demanding extracurricular activities, unfavorable afterschool working conditions, and/or animosity with friends. Because of similarities of external factors (e.g., compulsory education, structures of schools/schedules), as well as internal thoughts and feelings (e.g., distractedness, boredom, fear of missing out), students can share in a culture of disillusionment. Though signs of disillusionment may be different for each individual, there are some similarities in what those in the same culture may experience. For example, some of the potential signs of a culture of disillusionment in students may manifest in actions such as:

Lack of participation or only observing things passively; often off task, delay completion of tasks or they don't complete tasks at all; only do the minimum work and are satisfied with average results; avoid challenges; openly or quietly resist learning; are in a state of aversiveness (e.g., this task is boring,

there is nothing to do); unsure of the expectations or learning; lack the ambition to authentically care about the content; are apathetic towards individual development and goal attainment; and/or believe school is unimportant and does not relate to their future job or personal interests. (Gutierrez, 2014, para. 16)

I provided descriptions of these two specific cultures of disillusionment to illustrate that though leading causes of disillusionment in any culture may be instigated by myriad reasons, the effects of this occurrence are quite parallel. Similar to teachers, while a student may exhibit any number of these signs of disillusionment, the feelings/affects that underlie these actions may actually be anxiety, frustration, depression, mourning, denial, and/or idealization. In the next section I offer ways that arts educators may help students work through their disillusionment.

### **Engaging with the Culture of Disillusionment**

It is here at the intersection of different sides of the Culture Wars where students may share a commonality in a culture of disillusionment that arts educators can work with individuals and groups of individuals to re-envision a more equitable society. I offer the consideration that instead of disavowing disillusionment or potentially trying to eradicate its existence, arts educators should engage with the culture of disillusionment in themselves, in their students, and in their communities, as a call to action to incite profound change within each individual and eventually within society. I conclude this section by offering suggestions for ways that arts educators may actively utilize key tenets already extant in art education scholarship and practice (supportive space, meaningful work, etc.) to help students work through their disillusionment and to create a more empathic tomorrow.

To be clear, it must be said that hatred, racism, sexism, and xenophobia cannot be tolerated; however, we cannot disavow that they exist within some of our students, so working through these issues and letting go of illusions should be encouraged in a supportive space such as an art classroom. "To let go of an illusion in which one remains invested is a painful experience that requires a tolerance for disillusionment" (Teitelbaum, 1999, p. 3). Allowing students to feel these negativities and then having them productively work through these issues may be difficult for the art educator to navigate, but with

tolerance, patience and empathy, it can be a transformative experience for all involved. As a reminder, “disillusionment is traumatic, and social reconstruction requires trust” (Alexander, 2016, p. 74). This is why I believe arts educators have immense potential in assisting students with reconstructing a social reality that is more collaborative and empathic toward all peoples. Arts teachers are often the authority figures in the educational landscape that are most trusted with an individual student’s innermost thoughts and feelings—that is usually the subject matter of our art processes/products. With some of our students, it may be helpful for them to make artworks that uncover their “defenses in order to remove them as constricting impediments to productive functioning” (Teitelbaum, 1999, p. 88). Again, I have no misgivings that this will be easy or enjoyable, but it is necessary for actual change, and arts educators have the abilities to grow with their students during this messy process. Whether we frame these as merely intense work sessions or calls to action, arts educators most often have the ideal attributes (e.g., caring, receptive, creative) and environments (e.g., supportive, engaging) to motivate actual change within each individual and within communities/society.

Following is a list of eight practical hands-on ways that arts educators can engage with a culture of disillusionment in their classrooms and that helps individuals thrive in the midst of their inner turmoil. These are based on recommendations Cherniss (1995) made for individuals in the helping professions who had been experiencing disillusionment; however, Cherniss’ recommendations are also appropriate in addressing the disillusionment of our arts students.

**Supportive work setting.** It all starts with a space that is supportive for students to work through their disillusionment. As I have written elsewhere (Hetrick, 2017), while one might argue that the space being opened up to talk with students should also be a *safe* space, when talking about one’s (un)conscious disillusionments on either side of the Culture Wars, the space is anything but *safe*. Divulging and coming to terms with concepts that may be disturbing one’s idea of self and/or society will be intensely personal and potentially disrupting (Aoki, 2000). Therefore, I suggest that the space for talking through disillusionment should be done in a *supportive* space because of the potentially unavoidable and necessary disruptions that may result.

**Trust and confidence of the teacher.** In order for a supportive space to be created and *felt* by the students, they must trust the arts educator and each other. The teacher’s trust and confidence in students’ abilities can be shown by giving students a greater role in the planning of projects/changes to curriculum. It should be noted that

if students share personal thoughts and feelings, the arts educator should take care to keep that information private unless harm may befall the student or others if proper authorities are not informed.

**Make meaningful work and cultivate special interests.** Set up lessons that are not pre-determined or mimetic, but rather flexible and problem-based with timely issues important to/chosen by the students. Teach the students how to critically research topics or encourage them to take initiative in cultivating an interest in something bigger than themselves or the local community.

**Intellectual challenge.** Along with their own topics, allow them to choose the media and modes of expression to further their personal investment. Challenge the students to go conceptually further than they normally aspire. Educators should allow for a high degree of autonomy in the students’ work environment.

**Make a significant impact.** Closely related to making meaningful work, have students choose topics and produce work that may create a direct and significant impact in dissolving their own disillusionments or those of their communities. Projects may include aspects of research such as interviewing community members about their thoughts and experiences, conducting and charting opinion surveys, or creating and displaying murals that depict peaceful resolutions to situations that have occurred or are occurring in the area. This may also mean taking literal actions including talking to school administrators or public legislators to affect policy changes.

**Importance of change.** Nurture an environment where change is not only acceptable, but championed. Remind students that change can be difficult within the self and even more challenging when trying to change the ideas of others, especially when connected to ideas of moral authority. When an individual is “devastated by the loss of a much-needed illusion and is unable to deal effectively with the accompanying disillusionment...the individual may need to institute new illusions in order to restore a sense of emotional homeostasis” (Teitelbaum, 1999, p. 87). This means change happens gradually, with stops and restarts, but the results are generally worth the effort involved. Patience, listening, and empathic understanding are necessary for true change.

**Active interest of the teacher through recognition and critical/timely feedback.** It is important for students working through feelings of disillusionment to feel that the teacher is interested in what s/he is

doing. The arts educator can show interest through recognizing and validating what the student is trying to say/show in the artwork and provide critical and timely feedback. The feedback should be as unbiased as possible, specific to the student and the work, and get the student to expand her/his thinking. As educators, maintaining our biases is considerably difficult if the student is perceived to be on the *opposing side*, but we must try to help all students work through their issues without harsh judgment. This is where knowing our students and how best to scaffold their learning and self-discoveries toward a social justice mindset will be integral, as each student and situation will be different. However, if hateful or harmful actions may come to fruition, it is our responsibility to stop those using appropriate measures, which may include disciplinary consequences outlined by our schools or districts.

**Support for continued learning.** Lastly, arts educators should support and encourage their students' desires for continued learning. It is favorable for a teacher to acknowledge that learning can and does happen even after the creative process of artmaking may be over and a *final* product may have been produced. Show the students how they can continue to research more about their special interests and inspire others to join them in the quest for more information and new/multiple perspectives. Instilling a desire to continue learning will benefit our students in their adult lives.

## Concluding Thoughts

This list of eight ways to engage with a culture of disillusionment offers actions that many arts educators already may be implementing in their classrooms, thus reinforcing my belief that arts educators have the ideal attributes and environments to motivate actual change within each individual and within society; we can all use a friendly reminder that what we are doing does make a difference. This paper underscores disillusionment as not just a hot topic to study or something that we should want to erase, avoid, or sweep under the rug. Instead, it is an overall feeling that I am sensing from so many individuals with opposing views at this present time in our society. This leads me to believe we need to step up to the challenge before us, engage the culture of disillusionment that we find ourselves within and surrounded by, and realize that it "includes an investment of energy devoted to changing the choreography of real-life events," (Teitelbaum, 1999, p. 101). Together, by focusing our energies on the similarities of the affects of disillusionment, we can work through

these Culture Wars, transform and renew our minds, and create a better tomorrow.

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