

# (Dis)Order: Art Education in Pre-Apocalyptic Times

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Disorder? Conduct that is disruptive of social norms, a necessary precondition of creativity, mental health categories for labeling people who don't "fit," or an ultimate apocalyptic event? All of these possibilities were explored by a group of young adults and teenagers in a Spiral Workshop at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

This presentation suggests a model of curriculum design that mirrors authentic strategies of artistic research, recognizing that good art (and good research) begins with intuitive inklings, not pre-determined research methods and designated ends. In this artmaking and curricular approach, teachers function as community artist leaders, identifying and developing artistic strategies through which participants/students conduct collaborative investigations of generative themes in their lives and the lives of their communities. The intent of such a curriculum is to generate the discursive artistic spaces within which quotidian activities and the descriptive language, underlying structures, and framing metaphors that make meaning in individual and collective life are noticed and examined. This method suggests the importance, of using art as a method for experiencing and perceiving outside of conventional parameters.

The initial inspiration for exploring the theme of Disorder came from two very different sources: an educational conference at which a government social worker introduced art teachers to classifications of emotional disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, including the bizarrely coyly named, ODD—Oppositional Defiant Disorder. The other inspiration was a quote from a classic work from the field of anthropology, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* by Mary Douglas. "In the disorder of the mind, in dreams, faints and frenzies, ritual expects to find powers and truths that cannot be reached by conscious effort." The quote suggests that disorder can be experienced as states that suspend normal structures of being and knowing and thus open up new possibilities.

The final segment of the unfolding Disorder curriculum came as a surprise when it was first identified, but in retrospect seemed to be the only possible conclusion of investigating disorder in contemporary times. The group decided to focus on world apocalypses, the ultimate disorders. Students made lists of apocalypses, ranging from supergerms and economic collapse to zombies and aliens. It was sobering to see the long list of cultural productions—movies, TV shows, books, comics, and video games that were based on apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic scenarios.

Our artistic research recognized that for today's youth the threat of multiple life devastating events has become the new norm. Today's post-apocalyptic games and movies seem not to be warnings that encourage us as a society to avoid impending catastrophes, but rather these disaster and post-disaster scenarios are the traumatic repetition of events that have not yet fully occurred, but which have come to be perceived as normal and inevitable. Some people have suggested that it is creepy for teens to picture coming apocalypses, but isn't it even creepier to look the other way while the end of the world creeps up on us?