**Executive Summary-Implementing a Democratic Art Classroom for Eighth Grade Students**

**Background-** This study investigated how can students have some voice in their education so they can become life-long learners and democratic citizens who know how to search for the answers. Students discussed and researched social issues that were important to them, ultimately creating a work of art about an issue they are passionate about. They were encouraged to explore many different art styles and use any art materials that were available to them in and out of the art classroom.

“A quality art education does not just disseminate art historical, technical or formal knowledge. Through a quality art education students become familiar with, and are able to use the languages of multiple art and cultural discourses, and are thus able to generate new insights in to their lives and contemporary times. These abilities to investigate, analyze, reflect, and represent are critical skills for citizens of a participatory democracy.” –Oliva Gude

**Research Questions**

* What might an eighth grade democratic art classroom look like in practice?
* What are the teacher and student roles in a democratic art classroom?
* What types of art content works well in a democratic art classroom?
* What problems might one encounter when trying to establish a democratic art classroom?
* What can I learn from establishing a democratic art classroom?

**Approach and Methods**

**Participant Action Research Model -** As the classroom teacher I worked individually with each student sharing ideas and offering suggestions on art materials and art techniques. I also led many class discussions in which the students shared their ideas and learning from each other.

**Classroom Observations -** I documented and observed this particular eighth grade class while they created a work of art from idea to the final product.

**Informal/Semi-structured Student Interviews -** I met with several students throughout the course of the study to interview them on their thoughts and feelings about being involved in a democratic art class. I also had many informal discussions with groups of students outside of class time.

**Visual/Written Documentation -** Sketches and student artwork have been photographed. Anonymous student questionnaires and reflective writing have been documented for the final research report.

**Important Findings**

**Teacher Roles in a Democratic Art Classroom** - The teacher becomes the facilitator as opposed to the giver of knowledge. The teacher also becomes the student learning from class discussions, student processes, and student needs.

**Student Roles in a Democratic Art Classroom** - Students needs to be self motivated to participate in the self learning process that stems from a democratic art classroom. Students become the teacher for themselves and other students, creating a classroom community where learning happens from all parties involved.

**Student Voice is Key in the Art Making Process** - Choices help students engage with the lesson and art content. When given the opportunity students can create artworks that are rich in ideological content and personal meaning. Through classroom discussion and sharing in ideas students can connect to their peers on a deeper level.

**Social Issues Help Satisfy the Needs of Youth** - Discussing topics such as social issues in the art room gives students the opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings on what is important to them with others. Student artwork becomes a way for students to voice their concerns about our world and its problems. Students feel more satisfied with the art making process because they are sharing their voice with others to help address social concerns in a democratic society.

**Classroom Environment** - Students need a safe classroom environment in order to explore difficult topics such as social issues and social injustices. Students must have a good rapport with the classroom teacher in order to feel successful in a democratic classroom.