

Mentor's Introduction

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Wygant: Mentor's Introduction

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Bonnie Southwind began her doctoral studies with a particular interest in the problems of rapport that face a teacher whose students come from differing ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds. Recognition of the problem is commonplace; various approaches have been elaborated by Chapman, Lanier, McFee, Natalie Cole, and others.

One of Southwind's first efforts was participation in a research program studying the linguistics of urban Appalachian families. A more promising conceptual framework began to develop as ethnographic studies were linked to work in art education courses, particularly in Aesthetics and Criticism in Art Education and in Socialization of Values in Art. In the former, it was held that the values identified in the various traditional theories of art must be recognizable in the every day aesthetics of most Americans. In the latter, the processes of enculturation gained special focus in Herbert Gans's distinction of pluralistic "taste-cultures," all of which have validity in so far as aesthetic experiences of any kind meet authentic personal needs.

By this time Southwind's own experience as an art teacher had gained a solid new dimension, through employment by the Cincinnati Recreation Commission as director of programs in community centers. In her neighborhood art projects, Southwind attracted more or less interested adolescents for whom the systematic school experience often was intolerably frustrating - youths, nevertheless, who could bring a modicum of talent together with energy, persistence, and ingenuity to achieve a rewarding product. With some of these "second generation Appalachian" youth, Southwind developed an enduring and trustful rapport.

These, then, were the components of the research reported by Southwind: the broad need in education for understanding and mutual respect; an urban context for the understanding of traditional aesthetic theories; a sociologically grounded validation of diverse cultural patterns; and a professional experience that seemed to undergird theoretical contributions of doctoral study.