

Mentor's Introduction

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Mentor's Introduction

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The doctoral research of Mercedes Thompson is based upon her concerns as a member of the faculty in art education at North Carolina Central University.

As a doctoral student, she became especially interested in the ideas of Edmund Feldman, as they might be applied to the conventional college level art history survey course. In approaching the problem of appropriate design for research, it was normal to consider an experimental approach using an experimental and a control group. There were several objections to such a design: 1) the course (at North Carolina Central University), offered by the faculty in art history, was well established, conventionally based upon Jansen's popular text; 2) a valid control group seemed impossible in view of certain factors of instructional staffing; 3) the situation was one of exploring the implications for curriculum design, rather than one of testing a model that could be assessed in advance as a valid adaptation of Feldman's ideas; 4) Professor Thompson was not a professional specialist in art history.

In view of the situational difficulties, attention turned to the problems of adequately analyzing and characterizing both the conventional art history survey course and the inferred nature of a similar course designed according to the ideas of Feldman.

The researcher was also much concerned with the questions of suitability of either kind of art history course to the students at NCCU. (They are mostly minority students who have limited backgrounds in art history, and possibly have different attitudes toward the history of art as presented by Jansen.) This concern stimulated attention to the course construed as an experience of the students, as distinguished from the course understood as the execution of a curriculum design (the course as planned instruction.)

To describe the course in both ways, a set of common categories were taken from the literature of curriculum planning, viz. purpose, goals and objectives, content and method. To gather and interpret data, and a variety of other concepts and procedures were used.

The study can be understood as a contribution to the methodology of description of coursework at the college level, with reference to the student population and to the particular area of content, i.e., an introduction to the history and appreciation of art.