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# Perceptions Concerning Visual Culture Dialogues of Visual Art Pre-Service Teachers

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#### Abstract

The visual art which is commented by the visual art teachers to help processing of the visual culture is important. In this study it is tried to describe the effect of visual culture based on the usual aesthetic experiences to be included in the learning process art education. The action research design, which is a qualitative study, is conducted in this research. The study is conducted with the 12 pre-service teachers of Pamukkale University Faculty of Education -Department of Fine Arts Education, Program in Art Crafts Education. The data have been obtained through observation, interview forms and document analysis. The data are analyzed by using content analysis. As a result of the study it is observed that the critically cogitation skills provided that to be aware of the visual culture analyzes, in terms of the visual objects which included the apprehend series and to develop the pluralistic perspective that has got not only meaning in visible. As a consequence, Pre-service teachers have found that the analyzing of the visual culture and the learning area which included in education programs and to make more conscious choices in art and cultural events.

#### **Key Words**

Visual Art Education, Visual Culture, Visual Culture Education.

In our era, there is a period in which there is a post-modern expression getting common in every part of life. Especially it is observed that expressions, strategies and politics about post-modern and post-modern pedagogy are getting widespread. In this spread while art is tend to focus on differences and variations in creating hypothetical fundamentals (Eker & Seylan, 2005), education focuses on how to structure, how to live, how to listen and how to learn knowledge by removing it from being only a set of visual proposals (Kale, 2002). In the base of both fields post-modern understanding individualism and identity concepts are emphasized more and they head for creating a human being who is based on the approach of self-assertion, develop-

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ing a personality in different identities and being tolerated against other identities (Gudjons, 1993). Therefore, roles of art education and art educators are highly affected by this approach. It is suggested that art lessons particularly should take place in creating, spreading and adopting visual culture. Consequently, unless art educators take a defensive role, it is pointed out that they have the opportunity to contribute to the globalization of culture by taking a constructive role (Duncum, 2000).

According to Barnard (2002) it is a stubborn fact that a human-specific communication way, cultural expression, is as important as language. That is because every age creates a human type suitable for its own structure and within that human creates a culture suitable for its own structure (Gençaydın, 1995). What is the common culture of our age? It is easy to answer this question when we glance at around us. Our environment is full of various and complicated visual images. In today's world predomination of media such as photography, cinema, television and internet lead to the rise of visual culture (Bülbül, 2010). Our common culture has become a product

of what we watch (Barnard). With the rapid development of technology first the camera and then cinema and television which determine animated images were invented; therefore, the world has gone into a period in which "visual images culture" flows at a rate that can be explained by its own rules (Parsa, 2007). It is observed that in the last 40 years electronic images and in the last 10 years numeric based computer images have covered all areas of life (Parsa, 2007). Nowadays, from occupation to art, amateurism to professionalism, individual to government, every level of visual production and stocking is possible (Karadağ, 2004). When the images are in the centre, it is observed that eye-centered societies are composed (Parsa, 2007). Also in daily life almost in all corners, building entrances, subways, shops and parks optical electronic eyes are placed and they observe everything. In this concept seeing is a brand new culture style. This new culture is basically a synthesis of seeing, the ones that are shown and the ones that are seen (Karadağ).

Visuals, images are constantly talking to us and leading us to reach decisions by different associations (Karadağ, 2004). Either by human hand or by an electronic tool, images always keep various meanings inside. These meanings are attributed to images by the image producers either at the time they are produced or later on (Parsa, 2007). At this point it is important to understand how visible is interpreted or how we define the image, how we see it, what we see, what we do not see or what we are not allowed to see. Therefore, recently the studies are focused on new theories and techniques related to this subject. In educational researches approaches called as "visual culture education", "visual culture theory" or "visual culture pedagogy" are the social and cultural review of visual experience and interested in how people see what they see and how they interpret what they see.

#### What is Visual Culture?

Parsa (2007) defines visual culture as a multi disciplinary approach which deals with social and cultural interpretation of visual experience and how people define what they see. Visual culture is defined as the combination of all visual structure from visual ones which are paintings or images and from elite culture to folk culture, multi dimensional to one-dimensional cultures. Barnard (2002) tries to explain visual culture as a combination of "the seen one" and "the cultural one". According to him visual culture covers all visible things. However, all visible things should not be defined as a part of vi-

sual culture. In order for a visible thing to be considered as part of a visual culture, it should include the indicators that reflect the beliefs and values of a society. Kırışoğlu (2009), on the other hand, defines visual culture as the effective power of images in the communication web of the age we live in and the unit and the effect of this power on people.

Tavin (2009b) states three definition of visual culture which are related with one another. According to him visual culture; (i) Deeply affects images, people experiences and pictures created by new technologies and tends to be various seeing practices, (ii) Is everything composed by sets of various objects and pictures?, (iii) Is a critical study area commenting different sides of visual findings, experiences and culture.

In Talvin's descriptions (2009b) it is obvious that there is a connection among association, overlapping and enlightenment. In the first approach, a social change and transformation is grounded on technological production and consumption of pictures. In this context, pictures play an important role in the construction of information. Moreover, they can serve to the reasons such as immediate transfer of information, expressing pleasure, strengthening values and believes or politic action or declaring mobilization (Tavin, 2009b). Therefore, pictures and images around us have an unbelievable effect on the constitution of personal identities. They can affect people's emotions in subjects such as ethnic origin, race, nationality, sex, friendship, family life, independency and citizenship. In the second approach, visual culture is defined as an area of materialistic culture. That is, pictures, objects and tools are stated as materials of culture. Visual content including architecture, products of art, computer games, fashion, cinema, graffiti, internet, photography, satellite images, design products, video clips is reviewed as elements which increase cultural experiences of people. In the third approach visual culture is stated as a study area. It includes visual stimulants of a culture and interpretation of visual experiences in a culture (Tavin, 2009b). This is an approach which mainly includes critical theories adopted from sociology psycho-analysis, history of art, feminism and media studies as a multidisciplinary field (Duncum, 2003). As a field this approach is about two basic principles: pictures and the ways to observe them. According to Duncum (2003) in this subject visual culture studies are hardly different from philosophical esthetic field. These differences are: including a number of techniques and including man-made products in a wide area. However, what is researched here is problematic conditions and problems. In this are what pictures say about cultures, identities or individuals is tried to be determined. Hence, visual culture is a concept which comes up due to analyzing and explaining the meaning of visual stimulants that an individual come across and emerging of post modernism at a time when there are lots of information and media technologies. This is because the emphasis made on the analysis of connection between visual form of experiences of culture and its representations by post modernist idea which expresses a period when culture and media have an importance on personal experiences has caused visual culture to become a study area (Türkkan, 2008). According to Hall and Evans (1999); certain themes that are full of visual metaphors are the center of cultural and media studies. As a matter of fact, Smith's (2005) some of the characterizations about post-modern culture and post-modern society may explain the reasons of the emphasis on visual culture studies: (i) Culture and media has become a lot stronger and more important in social life, (ii) Economic and social life expresses consumption of symbols and life styles more than production of goods with industrial efforts, (iii) Image and place have taken the places of narration and history as regulatory principles of cultural production, (iv) Hybridism and pluralism have taken the places of borders and classifications, (v) Thoughts about reality and its representatives are seen as problematical.

As it can be seen above, visual culture has become more distinct with the effects of post-modernism. At first, in 1980s when post-modernism started, many artists created works of art that brings about the strategies of social order hidden by bombards of the images coming from media tools and questioned the effects of cultural products, which include reality and fiction engaged with each other, on daily life by blending different expression ways such as documentary, drama, pop music and comedy (Antmen, 2010). Later the emphasis that postmodern age made on images caused individuals to question and criticizes images.

#### Visual Culture in Visual Arts Education

Today instead of reading words, we meet images everywhere. In social communication the culture based on hearing-seeing has taken the place of the written culture (Parsa, 2008). In every aspect of contemporary life, it is observed that visual images are surrounding everywhere. LCD screens, televisions, digital images, films, internet, medical

imaging devices, cell phones, cameras, newspapers, magazines and multimedia devices constantly show us something. These devices are set to spread relentless messages to see, to be seen and to represent new ideas (Tavin, 2009a). However, understanding and analyzing the codes in these images which have become a part of daily life and developing a point of view (Duncum, 2010) have become a necessity to analyze today's culture. It is necessary that these devices' own expression structure and the messages produced by them should be perceived, analyzed and identified critically (Parsa, 2007).

According to Leppert (2002), images and pictures are built in a particular socio cultural area to function for a certain task; this means that the things that are shown have representative and resubmission beyond what is actually seen. According to Karadağ (2004) most of the images reflect their new forms and created fiction meanings but the meaning of life. Moreover, common display devices have started to be used as a powerful weapon to take over the societies. In ever part of the world a few power elites prefer using images in order to get hold of brains and to keep people away from social realities (Karadağ). Berger (1995) characterizes images as re-created or re-produced pictures and states that perception and evaluation of images change depending on the way people see.

According to Keifer-Boyd, Amburgy, and Knight (2003) the importance of visual culture lies not behind television programmes, architectural elements or paintings but under the processes and applications that make people understand all these. This is related with turning towards different viewpoints (Cohen, 1993) and realizing the limitations of one's thought (Rogoff, 2007). As a matter of fact recently the number of studies to identify visual culture better has risen. In the early 1990s in western countries, scientific texts, vocational magazines, new lesson programmes and conferences have focused on visual culture concept as a multi disciplinary approach. At first, these disciplines focused on visual images and representatives created by education of art, history of art, cultural studies, language, and media studies. Later, the subject and concept area of visual culture was extended when new multi disciplinary constitutions and contemporary post-modern theories became widespread (Tavin, 2009b).

Post-modernism sees art and education of art as one of the important tools to develop and spread culture. Visual arts education in which visual images are widely used is more advantageous than other disciplines for visual culture studies (Bolin & Blandy, 2003, p. 247). Art educators are a member of cultural class and while teaching through fine arts they are actually affected by their own daily esthetical hegemony (Tavin, 2009a); therefore, it is necessary to constitute a dialogue with students about daily cultural-esthetical experiences because we face a new generation which is named as web age and grown with digital media (Tonta, 2009). Digital age students can enhance more information on daily esthetical experiences than adults. They can understand the particular areas such as television programmes and computer games more sophisticatedly (Tavin, 2009a). Thus, studies state that today's children names as digital natives have different learning styles due to their use of digital media tools such as internet, computer and cell phones (Prensky, 2001; Tonta). Therefore, making children and young people think about the meanings of the stages which experiences esthetical experiences is one of the basic points of visual culture education. So, what are the fundamental dynamics of visual culture education?

Studies have focused on seven fundamental principles derived from visual culture literature. These are; power, ideology, representation, attraction, view, intertextuality and multicondition (Duncum, 2010; Mirzoeff, 1998; Rogoff, 1998; Tavin, 2009b). For instance; who applies the power through visual images? How, when, why do they apply? When carefully thought all images are arguments of an idea, a belief and a judgment. Therefore, all images give different ideas such as what they are, what they should be or what they should not be about similar things in the world. Companies which produce most of the cultural materials in the society benefit from social stratification, basic forms of cultural production and the ideologies that include fundamental forms of power (Duncum, 2010).

Ideologies express ideas, beliefs and values. Visual culture is fed by hopes, fears, expectations, indefiniteness and the wishes of life. It is possible to express ideological ideas, beliefs and values through visual culture. These ideas can be conservative, puritanical or reformative (Duncum, 2010). They include how visual images represent ideology, how they offer or do not offer ideology. At this point the effect an image has on people is important. According to Karadağ (2004) a human being does not escape from a pleasant picture. Especially advertising is a process of producing attraction and attraction is particular to our age (Berger, 1995). Visual images are attractive in different ways. They can settle into sub consciousness, desires and so-

cial taboos (Duncum, 2010). Therefore, thoughts and beliefs affect the way we see objects (Berger). As a matter of fact, in order to affect the way people look and see, visuals can make use of other cultural texts, can copy or can make intertextual connections in different forms. In the presentation of pictures multiformation can be used. This is, visual images are rarely presented without words, music or other sounds. Even the art works in art galleries are preferred to be presented with labels and critiques to be more effective. This is because music, words, sound effects can change the way a picture is seen (Duncum, 2010).

Actually, the related concept given above states the reasonable grounds for visual culture taking place in education. According to Freedman (2003) cultural studies are essential for students to learn the world they live in. Students should be provided visual culture and analysis of the environments that visual culture presents in a critical way. Students should be educated to learn visual culture, to know the effects on cultural identities, to assess and analyze it (Kırışoğlu, 2009). According to Rogoff (1998) the analyzing and critical approach on visual cultural studies can be built upon the meaning of the one that is seen, the one that is not seen or the one that is not permitted to be seen. In other words, questionings can be established around "seeing" concept. However, according to Mirzoeff (1998) visual culture studies do not occur in a standardization which is prespecified and can be applied to all visuals and pictures. Tavin (2009b) supports this opinion. Because visual culture is a multidisciplinary approach and the borders of disciplines may be restrictive depending on visuals (Tavin, 2009b).

Nowadays, in the art world intellectual researches and questioning are hegemonic (Duncum, 2003). Correspondingly, it has come into prominence to make art and to think art in art education in accordance with a critical, historical, political and self-directed understanding (Duncum, 1999). In daily life there are activities planned based on visual images that we face at any time. In art lessons, it is observed that studies and applications that include daily pictures produced by today's corporate companies (Duncum, 2003; Stankiewicz, 2004; Tavin & Anderson 2003; Taylor, 2000; Van Camp, 2004) take place. For instance; in a lesson with candidate visual arts teachers Taylor starts the lesson with a video clip of Madonna. The video includes dramatic and disputable images. First they talk about the meanings in the video, they ask questions such as which are the seen symbols, which ideas take place in the video and they try to answer these questions. Then they watch the video again and this time they create different questions. After that students do a research about Frida Kahlo, Rene Magritte and whirling dervishes whom they think have connection and the lesson goes on with different art applications. Tavin and Anderson completes a study on how primary school 5th graders perceive representations of Disney cartoon characters. Students are presented two films of Disney (Peter Pan and Pocahontas). Students are asked to discuss these authentic representations of native culture in the pictures in a critical way. In the following lessons students are made watch other films of Disney (Tarzan and Alaaddin). A discussion area is created by a few questions. Comments show how students perceive themselves and other students. Students are asked to reach new comments on how to change the elements is these images by using collage and assemblage techniques.

As it can be seen in the examples, these approaches are attractive, pleasing, intellectual, interactive and include scenes from real life. For this reason, it is necessary to enrich such visual culture applications/projects and to share the experiences. As a matter of fact, the aim of this study is to define the effects of esthetical experiences gathered through the images we see every day on a person's view of life and creating personality. It is necessary for candidate teachers to develop their view towards visual culture in order to evaluate the importance of technologic, economic and social dynamics which are represented in visual images on visual culture in the correct way. Moreover it is essential to give place to daily esthetical experiences based on visual culture in a process of art education in order to contribute to critical thinking skills of candidate teachers.

#### Method

#### The Model of the Study

In this study, a qualitative research method was used in order to enlighten the basic purpose of the study in a holistic approach. Action research pattern was used so as to study the impacts of aesthetic experience on students obtained through the visual culture.

#### **Study Group**

12 prospective teachers (7 girls and 5 boys) who attend Pamukkale University Faculty of Education Fine Arts Department participated in this study. They were chosen among the ones who were at-

tending spring semester courses between 2010 and 2011. Willingness was the most important element in determining the prospective teachers.

#### **Data Collection**

Initially, the sizes and stages of the course designs to be applied were determined by the researcher. The application and data collection process are planned as six week-period. The first and the last week of the research are allocated to apply the interview forms. The visual culture study period was determined as two course hours (80 minutes) each week.

In this process, the data were collected through observation notes, interviews, and document analysis (worksheets). Triangulation was made by using different data collection methods. Making triangulation enables gathering information from different people and situations. It also decreases the limitations in the methods, and helps to assess the reliability and validity better (Maxwell, 1996). In other words, the obtained data can be controlled with the other

#### Analyzing the Data

Content analysis was used in data analysis. In the process of analysis, primarily the literature and the theoretical framework were studied and draft code list was formed to be used in the analysis of data set. Then the data set was read within the framework of draft code list and checked whether a meaningful data units were accomplished. After testing the functions of the code list, the researcher coded the data set by using the draft code list. In this process, main code list was reached by adding the codes (obtained from the data) to the draft code list. Oualitative data set, which was read and coded within the framework of main code list, was then coded by another expert for reliability. Draft themes were determined during the coding process, and those draft themes were taken into consideration. However, final themes were reached during the coding process of data set.

A variety of approaches were exhibited in order to resolve the problems of validity and reliability. First, findings were defined with quotations and then they were interpreted. In order to ensure the consistency of the findings, both the consistency among themes and their correspondence with each other were assessed. An expert in the area checked whether they had created a meaningful whole or not. In method section, the research model, the study group, and

how the data collection tools were developed and described in detail.

In order to ensure the reliability of the study, findings are directly presented without adding a comment. It was achieved with quotations first, and then researcher's comments were attached. Furthermore, triangulation was used by making use of a variety of data collection methods and resources.

#### **Findings and Comments**

In this study, three main themes were identified as a result of the observation, interview, and document records during visual culture dialogues with prospective teachers. Those are; (i) interpreting social dynamics of visual culture, (ii) the effect of visual culture dialogues on prospective teachers and (iii) questioning visual culture dialogues in terms of art education.

#### Interpreting Social Dynamics of Visual Culture

This theme, which discusses the technological, social, and economic dynamics represented in visual images, focused on seven concepts (power, ideology, representation, charm, perspective, intertextuality, multiformation).

Prospective teachers have made judgments that reveal the impact of mass media bombardment on social order. They questioned how powerful companies produce information about the world, how they spread that information, and how they affect the individuals via visual culture consumption.

In the first interview form, students did not give any idea about the ideologies presented by visual culture images. However, after the application the findings revealed some differences between the concepts "looking" and "seeing". Students expressed how racist and discriminative discourses in visual images affect human consciousness.

It can be said that students have developed a inquiring attitude towards the subject or problem. Students have thought over the main visual structures again and again and started to search for new meanings. In this sense, new information is added to the process. Prospective teachers' views have gradually widened by the help of questioning the visual items and their views have changed step by step. It has been achieved by commenting on intertextualism. Since prospective teachers thought about the items that take part in visuals together, they can easily recognize the meaning layers of the visual objects. In this sense, it can be said that intertextualism helps

teachers understand what is seen is not composed of a unique meaning. For this reason it can be stated that they accept a pluralist point of view.

## The Effect of Visual Culture Dialogues on Prospective Teachers

In this theme, the effects of visual culture dialogues on prospective teachers were discussed and the impact of daily aesthetic experience on an individual's identity obtained by the images seen at any time was studied in detail. Findings were given under the following titles: the e the awareness of experience, visual culture, attitudes, and questioning the impact of visual culture on life.

Visual culture dialogues have increased prospective teachers' level of social culture awareness. While some of them states that the interaction between the child and the images that surround them is inevitable, others explain their awareness towards communicative and functional purposes that are formed by visual images via visual culture dialogues.

According to the findings, prospective teachers had experienced different learning styles, orienting different perspectives, discovering the things they couldn't see, gaining critical perspective. The prospective teachers exhibited various attitudes in discovering the implicit meanings in visual images, acting with a question in mind that what is seen does not have only one meaning, associating, and questioning.

## Questioning Visual Culture Dialogues in terms of Art Education

The theme which questions the visual culture studies in terms of art education tries to analyze the affect of aesthetic experience gained via popular daily images.

Prospective teachers address visual culture as interesting and innovative. They think that visual culture practices are good for developing behavior. They believe that those practices are important in terms of mentioning and sharing their views and raising individuals who are good at critical thinking. Especially via visual culture, it is believed that it would present effective results in terms of creating social and physical awareness towards community.

#### Discussion

Visual culture, which is a fairly new concept for our country, has started to come on the agenda in the West in the early 1990's especially within the framework of academic articles, and professional journals. Also, critical pedagogical approaches have become widespread within the framework of contemporary post-modern theories, so the subject and content of visual culture has been expanded. In fact, most of the art teachers have preferred to use visual culture studies instead of works of art (Duncum, 2002). But, this common adoption has raised a number of discussions (Stankiewicz, 2004). Those are; (i) Visual culture is threatening the core of real art education, (ii) Visual culture is not new. We have been teaching popular and commercial arts within our curriculum, (iii) Visual culture is a new approach. But, it is impossible to practice it in this area, (iv) Visual culture is a new approach. It might have a deep impact on the area.

First response stems from the idea that the density of visual arts applications will weaken the dominant position of elite art in life. Particularly, the boundaries between outstanding art, popular art, and sub-culture products are melting; and this creates an anxiety that causes a kind of reaction. The third response is the discomfort that results from reducing formalist aesthetic instruction purely to economic, political, and social relations. The main concern is the necessity of having basic aesthetic knowledge in order to cope with its other forms that can be found in various relations (Kırışoğlu, 2009). The newest approach states that in critical analysis and establishing social, historical, and cultural relations it is not possible to ignore the speed of communication and visual intensity. The point is that, especially post-modern aesthetic movements have gained importance with historical, political and cultural topics. Approaching visual images in a context and evaluating every image in its atmosphere with the causes of its creation are important. In this study it is not considered that visual culture will replace the traditional art education. However, the findings obtained from the literature and research experience display that art education should take place systematically at all levels of curriculum. Today, popular images especially affecting children and young people, information technology, modern advertising designs, and contemporary art practices should take place in the curriculum. In this modern era, although people are supposed to control the images, they came under pressure of dominant images (Karadağ, 2004). Images are everywhere today, but there is a serious gap between reflecting the thing we see and seeing the image (Duncum, 2003). Filling this gap with education is urgent. In this sense, how designed training contents will take place both in teacher training institutions and visual arts teaching programs should be discussed.

In order to increase visual culture practice in our country, visual culture studies should be taught at teacher training institutions primarily. But the course content should be structured considering the cooperation with several disciplines and critical pedagogy. Purpose of critical pedagogy is giving an opportunity to students to develop a reflective and subjective view, and examine beliefs and values within historical cultural criticism (Kuru, 2011). It is necessary to use a method to activate students' desires, imaginations, and intellectual structures and to help them question social, political and intellectual situations that influence their lives. According to Duncum (2002) this course can be structured by the help of three main behaviors in this field. Those are; (i) A big image and work of art archive, (ii) Focusing on how to look at a work of art or visual image, (iii) Focusing on the conditions under the look.

Activity in the form of a four-week course is planned to achieve the following: Questioning visual culture help students to have a critical point of view, recognize the meaning in visual objects, develop a pluralist perspective, address the meaning search to everything around them. Since visual culture questioning is effective in thinking critically, drawing attention, motivation, interpreting contemporary art practices, making choices prospective teachers believe that it is helpful at primary and secondary education, if it becomes a subject at schools. In this sense, results of the study are akin to Türkkan's (2008) study called "Visual Culture Studies within the context of primary education visual arts course"

Prospective teachers reported that visual culture; especially image-producing technologies adversely affect the identity of children and young people. They mentioned that negativity as the characters in the images, emulating their lifestyle, blending fact with fiction, and giving negative messages. In this sense, research findings support Tavin and Anderson's (2003) study. Other result reveals that (Bülbül, 2010; Uysal, 2011) visual culture has great impact on students' artistic work. However a finding about the impact of visual culture on students' artistic works has e not been obtained in this study.

The following can be suggested considering the obtained findings.

For arts education programs in schools, applications in different areas of learning (formatting in visual arts, culture of visual arts, and consciousness of museum), making use of popular images, information technology, and modern advertisement designs are thought to be beneficial. It would be useful to spend time on the visual images that students are interested in and also give them a chance to produce different meanings on those images during art education in classes. However, teachers and teacher training institutions should be informed first. In today's world, image and information production is too fast, so education programs and teachers should constantly update themselves. For this reason, the research results and new applications for visual culture can be shared with visual arts teachers via internet or in-service training programs.

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