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Perceptions of Visual Culture in Turkish Pre-Service Art Teacher Preparation

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Abstract

One of the key tasks of the university in the 21st century is to nurture visually literate students in the information age. Given that we live in a very highly visualized world, it is increasingly important that students are educated as critical viewers who are able to respond to visual images in an analytical and selective manner. The education of critical viewers starts with art teachers who appreciate and understand the embedded value of imagery within cultures, cultural differences, students' knowledge and experience, critical thought, and reflection. The creation of progressive models in art teacher education that connect art and everyday life can help achieve this goal. One vehicle that may help teachers arrive at this goal is visual culture. This study explores the state of art education in Turkey as revealed by pre-service art education university instructors, and the potential of incorporating visual culture studies in pre-service art education in Turkey. It examines the instructors' perceptions of visual culture, popular culture, and its impact on society.

Keywords

Art education, Visual culture, Art teacher education (Pre-service art education), Visual culture art education

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Abstract

One of the key tasks of the university in the 21st century is to nurture visually literate students in the information age. Given that we live in a very highly visualized world, it is increasingly important that students are educated as critical viewers who are able to respond to visual images in an analytical and selective manner. The education of critical viewers starts with art teachers who appreciate and understand the embedded value of imagery within cultures, cultural differences, students' knowledge and experience, critical thought, and reflection. The creation of progressive models in art teacher education that connect art and everyday life can help achieve this goal. One vehicle that may help teachers arrive at this goal is visual culture. This study explores the state of art education in Turkey as revealed by pre-service art education university instructors, and the potential of incorporating visual culture studies in pre-service art education in Turkey. It examines the instructors' perceptions of visual culture, popular culture, and its impact on society.

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Visual Culture in the Context of Turkey

This study grew out of both a personal and a national concern about the state of art teacher education in Turkey and the potential of visual culture to produce a change in the way art is taught. There is a need for extensive reflection on and debate about the meaning of art teacher education and its expected outcomes in contemporary Turkish society. Thus, it is important to identify best practices as they relate to visual culture to move toward change at a national level.

Visual Culture and Art Teacher Education

It is commonly advocated by visual culture art education (VCAE) proponents that students should be prepared to responsibly live within the contemporary sociological sphere. The pedagogical approach that is shared by visual culture educators (Duncum, 2001, 2002; Freedman, 2000, 2003; Freedman & Schuler, 2002; Tavin, 2000, 2003) calls for an art education that includes conscious and critical forms of student socio-cultural engagement. Duncum (2001, 2002) and Freedman (2001, 2002) put an emphasis on the fact that art education should go beyond its formalistic roots of aesthetic, which basically addresses aesthetic problems related to the abstract qualities of modern art. They believe that this type of approach, which originated from Kant's critiques simply conditions the way student approaches a series of forms isolated from meaning (Freedman 2001).

How the incorporation of visual culture and popular culture can enhance teaching and learning within the pre-service classroom is becoming an increasingly important question. Visual culture and media technologies inevitably lead to changes in how art educators are prepared at the local and national levels. In the area of visual culture, what knowledge and awareness prospective art teachers have, and how they incorporate their individual interests, abilities, and daily life experiences into the classroom are legitimate areas of inquiry. Therefore, research on the beliefs and attitudes of pre-service art teachers and art teacher educators regarding visual culture and its use within pre-service art education is also essential.

The information society is heavily dependent on commercial mass media. An important function of education is to help young people become better critics and analysts of visual and popular culture. This requires a critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1992; Tavin, 2001, 2003) built with a critical analysis of the media and visual culture. Kevin Tavin (2003), in his doctoral study, demonstrated how critical pedagogy and visual culture can provide diverse theoretical tools for art educators and elementary educators to move beyond Discipline-Based Art Education toward a performative transdisciplinary practice. Tavin (2003) said,

Both critical pedagogy and visual culture can be understood as reactions to and counter movements against conservative formations, positivistic theories, and undemocratic institutional structures. Critical pedagogy, in all of its variations, challenges technocratic methods of education that rely on so-called objective classroom practices and depoliticized curricula. In this sense, critical pedagogy attempts to provide an alternative to traditional notions of schooling, authority, and knowledge construction. (p.99)

Purpose of the Study

Turkey is facing an explosion in the production and consumption of visual imagery; thus, it was the desire of the researcher to understand the different impacts of local and global visual culture on Turkish people. Visual culture elements, such as the media, Internet, advertisements, and shopping malls have been integrated into the lives of Turkish people so quickly that the result is a superficial copying of Western ways without a natural progression –doing it their own way without the extreme pressure of external influences. An examination of both the cause and the result of this speedy adaptation of new developments in Turkey is necessary. While the effect of speedy technology as it relates to media or the Internet may be observed as overwhelming for people across the world, the impact of the adaptation on the local and global visual culture in a developing country like Turkey may be even more drastic and detrimental. In addition, a fast adaptation of Western life styles may ultimately make it difficult to reflect upon what is experienced and what is seen – defined as ‘visual illiteracy’.

In response to visual illiteracy, the responsibilities of art teacher education instructors in fostering visually literate individuals were examined. I examined the state of art education in Turkey as revealed by university professors who teach art studio and theory courses, and explored the potential of incorporating visual culture studies in art teacher education in the context of Turkey. Visual culture was examined from an art education perspective that focuses on a pedagogical approach that emphasizes the perception and critique of popular culture and everyday cultural experiences, and the analysis of media including television programs, computer games, Internet sites, and advertisements. The study is aimed to

provide insights into the potential contribution of the study of visual culture to the improvement of art teacher training in general and specifically in Turkey.

Description of the Research Methodology

A phenomenological human science approach was employed in order to develop a description of the perception of visual culture in pre-service art education in Turkey as lived by the participants. In-person interviews were used to collect the data from a purposive sample of 8 faculty members who offered undergraduate and graduate art education pedagogy, art history, and studio courses within four-year public universities. This empirical approach sought to obtain comprehensive descriptions of an experience through semi-structural interviews. These interviews employed open-ended questions to gather information about the following: their educational and professional background; their definitions of art education and art teacher education and what it means for them to teach pre-service art education; critical reflections on the educational system of Turkey; perceptions of visual and popular culture; and finally individual approaches to teaching art education. Each participant was given pseudonyms in order to ensure confidentiality.

In this study, I examined the respondents' experiences related to the topic, then presented a "narration of the 'essence' of the experience" through reflecting his or her own description, and, finally, "seeking all possible meanings and divergent perspectives" (Creswell, 1998, p.150). My own experiences contributed to the understanding of socially established structures of meaning in the study. By being aware of personal experiences, I was able to compare and contrast the subjects' responses with the researcher's own experience. The study required that I identify and describe personal perspective while recognizing my biases on the subject.

As the researcher, I was most interested in the exploration of the essences or structures of the experience of other people in relation to her own understanding and experience of the phenomenon. The use of phenomenological research for understanding human experience was suitable for the exploration of the meanings behind the personal interpretations of the art teacher education instructors in Turkey.

Data Analysis

In the data analysis, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and then read several times to begin the formulation of important themes and /or meanings. Then, I extracted statements from each interview that related to how the individual experienced the topic and then grouped these statements into main and subthemes (Creswell 1998). I reflected on her own descriptions through using "imaginative variation or structural description, seeking all possible meanings and divergent perspectives" and then constructed "an overall description of the meaning and the essence of the experience" (Creswell, 1998, p.150). After this process, I finalized the data analysis with a composite description of each participant (Creswell, 1998). In an attempt to increase objectivity, I bracketed my conventional knowledge in order to avoid making judgments while maintaining perspective. This process helped remind me to listen and learn from the informants without bias from my own experiences.

To this end, the study concentrated on the meaning and the educational implications of adopting broader conceptions such as visual culture within the context of art teacher education in Turkey. I analyzed the concepts that described the visual studies process, evaluated the logical relations between claims of what visual culture studies can do in art education, and unearthed hidden assumptions as they related to the translation of American visual culture to a Turkish context. Consequently, I laid out how these translations could be modified to the needs of Turkish culture.

Limitations of the Study

The major limitation of the study was the sampling. Although the sample size was adequate for a phenomenological study, additional participants from different regions of Turkey could have potentially revealed more truths about the state of art teacher education and different perceptions of other instructors on visual and popular culture. All eight university professors were selected from four universities located in the Western part of Turkey. It is likely that visual culture and its impact in the Eastern part of Turkey is greatly different from that of the more Westernized section of the country and presents itself as a most important limitation of the study.

The phenomenological method requires the researcher to bracket his or her “preconceived ideas about the phenomenon to understand it through the voices of the informants” (Creswell, 1998, p.54). Through using the method of bracketing as one of the essential points of the data collection and analysis, the researcher attempted to avoid possible interruptions by personal preconceptions and prejudices, unless the researcher believed their inclusion strengthened the study. However, this study was limited by the extent to which the researcher could effectively achieve bracketing.

Results

Perceptions of Turkish Art Teacher Educators Pertaining to the Definition and the Content of Pre-service Art Education in Turkey

The subjects were asked to provide a definition of art teacher education in general and/or in Turkey. The majority of participants answered the question based on their thoughts about art teacher education in their departments, while a few of them offered more generalized answers. The participants built their definitions of art teacher education around problematic aspects of pre-service art education in Turkey.

One of the informants, Aysen, said that teaching is not recognized as an important job in Turkey as it used to be. She said that she believes the value of art education has decreased over the years and being an art teacher is seen as an easy way out. Another informant, Ismet said that it is very difficult for him to come up with a definition of art teacher education. In his view, “there are two essential thoughts; one is that it’s not necessary to be an artist to become an art teacher, as to become a biology teacher, it’s not necessary to be a biologist. America says that to be an art teacher, it’s not necessary to be an artist.” He noted that traditionally in Turkey, art teacher education department instructors are, in most cases, artists before anything else. For him, since both art studio and art teacher education are very demanding it is necessary to balance them, and it is also necessary that both the instructors and students be able to differentiate art education from art teacher education.

For Latife, in art teacher education it is essential to give students motivation to search for new information and to enable them to present the information through interpretative and

critical viewpoints. Mustafa expressed a concern that may indirectly define what pre-service art education means in the context of Turkey. In his words,

The system requires students to be trained as pre-service art teachers. However, it has been very difficult for the graduates to be appointed as art teachers due to various reasons. For instance, Kamu Personali Secme Sinavi (KPSS) - State Employee Selection Test has been created by the government to reduce the number of teacher appointments. So what we try to do here is to create alternatives that could be used by students in the job market upon graduation. We encourage them to learn or even professionalize in certain areas such as printmaking, graphic arts, sculpture, ceramics, which are part of our programs. We are trying so hard to extend their job alternatives. We also try to teach them the ethical aspects of being an art teacher and the artistic attitude and identities.

Participants' Views on the Problems and Concerns about Art Teacher Education in Turkey

When asked about the problems facing art teacher education departments in Turkey, a plethora of concerns and issues were laid out by the respondents. It was expressed that some of the problems arise from the misguided policies of the changing government and through the presence of the Council of Higher Education (YOK), while some of the problems may occur as a result of a lack of collaborative effort among instructors, and even from the general characteristics of the Turkish people. For example, Latife mentioned that the Turkish society is traditionally under the influence of two key characteristic patterns of thinking, 'tevekkul' which means leaving everything in the hands of God and trusting God will arrange things for the best, and 'fatalism' which means the acceptance of all things and events as inevitable.

However, positive aspects of a centralized education are also acknowledged by many in Turkey. Yonca said that the Council of Higher Education is necessary for Turkey and it should stay because the society and thus universities need a control mechanism. She added that an autonomous system of education would further cause structural problems and political interventions.

The role of the university professor emerged from the interviews as an additional focus of concern. Oguz puts the university professor at the center of the problems. For him, as a result of low salaries and other institutional issues, professors direct their focus and energy toward the money making aspect of their art while putting aside their educational identities. Aligned with Oguz, Fehmi also thinks that in such economic hardship, concentration shifts to individual survival methods such as selling artworks, or accepting commissions from a political body.

Participants' Solutions to the Existing Areas of Weakness

Possible solutions for problems regarding pre-service art education in Turkey, as recommended by the respondents, were diverse. Fehmi, Bahri, and Oguz said university instructors should continuously renew themselves and keep their doors open to the world and concentrate on educational issues. Mustafa and Aysen, expressed that teacher education is very important because of its chain of impact. For them, one well educated and free-thinking student will pass on his/her wisdom and philosophy to his/her own students and his/her own children. If the teacher educator could achieve this with one person, this behavioral philosophical change could serve as a catharsis for societal change. This chain of events would be at the heart of the proposed radical transformation.

Participants' Perceptions of Visual Culture and Popular Culture and their Application to Pre-service Art Education

Three of the participants were puzzled when asked to define visual culture. The definitions reflected unfamiliarity with the concept of visual culture, while familiarity with the terms 'visual' and 'culture' led them to provide varied answers. For Yonca, visual culture meant traditional art and culture of the society and how they are perceived by the young generation. For Oguz and Mustafa, it meant the education of tastes. Bahri simplified the concept of visual culture to a child's preoccupation and identification with television cartoon characters, and the characters' impact on the creative world and intelligence of the child. He said that as soon as the child starts experiencing life with these characters, he or she is, in a way, abducted by the system of visual conditioning. Latife, Aysen, and Ismet defined visual culture as everything seen through the eyes, and anything that is related to the visual; any kind of cultural types that are based on the visual and the understanding of the visual. For them, this visual perception involves everything regardless of meaning or aesthetic value. The perception of a connection between training of aesthetic tastes and training in visual culture reflects confusion in terms. To raise the aesthetic consciousness or to increase good taste is important in art education. However, education of visual culture means enhancing students' critical thinking abilities toward the everyday visual experience, regardless of the aesthetic quality.

People, who define visual culture as the improvement of aesthetic good taste, perceive 'culture' as 'superiority'. According to them, visual culture is not something that the society uses in daily life. A person with culture is perceived as a person who is intelligent, well-educated, and literate – superior.

Varied connotations of the meaning of culture were reflected in the responses. As it is commonly defined, culture is simply the symbols and meanings that unify societies or an accumulation of the social processes of a civilization. We speak of different cultures such as family, national, ethical, global, work, university, football, or gay (Lewis, 2002). All of these different types of cultures are modified or intensified through mass media images and information technologies in the contemporary global age. The effects of globalism became a central theme in the discussion of visual culture.

Yonca and Aysen praised the richness of the crafts and traditional arts in Turkey such as carpets, rugs, embroidery, ceramics, and marbling. However, both shared the view that these traditional arts and customs are slowly disappearing as a result of external influences, such as globalism. In Aysen's view, the influence of globalism contributes to Turkish society becoming increasingly superficial. For Latife, Turkey is under the influence of cultural globalism that increasingly stereotypes people in the world. Similarly, Bahri stated that because everybody receives the same information and dresses identically in a globalized world, it is likely that people will lose their spiritual richness and eventually turn into robots.

Aysen, Ismet, and Latife perceived visual culture as "everything we see with our eyes." Latife said that it is about everything related to the visual; any kind of cultural types that are based on vision and understanding of the visual; cinema, folk dance, architecture, city culture, television, computer, etc. Ismet made the point that, it is everything we comprehend through the eyes, from the clothes we wear to the street on which we walk; from the commercial image to a cartoon movie; from the cartoon movie to Mona Lisa; from Mona Lisa to different versions of Mona Lisa; to logos.

Ismet, who has a broad knowledge of visual culture and visual culture art education, said that visual culture includes everything from our ways of seeing to the messages that are given to us with different visual codes, and to the fact that it is generally separated from art education on the basis of rejection of popular culture in art education. Ismet said,

When we talk about art education being a visual culture art education, surely it would be a far-reaching symbolic change. What is important is what is done in classrooms. But I think, if the 150 year old discipline that is called art education is to reflect the meaning and relevance of visual culture, it definitely has to include popular culture that has been greatly influencing us. If art education won't mention popular culture, it will lose its relevancy. When there are computer games that are becoming important leisure sources, it is very odd to have children to draw a vase in an art class.

The majority of the respondents perceived that visual culture can be reflected in pre-service art education. However, due to the concept confusion, 6 of the respondents, Aysen, Oguz, Yonca, Bahri, Fehmi, and Mustafa were either unsure about how visual culture can be practiced in education or simply gave tangential comments. For Aysen and Oguz, the majority of students exhibit characteristics resulting from their upbringing and education that would create challenges to the study of visual culture in art teacher education. Latife approached it from a political standpoint and emphasized that students need to be educated about environmental, political and social, and economic issues before anything else because the country is inundated with serious concerns such as illiteracy, economic, and other social problems.

Like Aysen, Oguz also complained about students who are incapable of the critical learning process. He said,

Because the social culture is deeply rooted and established, the formation of the intellectual culture that we imported from outside (West) is taking a long time. Actually, our youngsters are open to renovations, but social and traditional dogmas prevent them from behaving more freely. This is reflected in education, in art, in science, and in business.

Ismet said, "We, as art educators, must include all types of visual culture in order to enhance our students' critical approach to the things around them', and one of the basic reasons for this is that capitalism now is of such a dimension that people buy without even questioning whether they really have a need, with the encouragement of the commercials." Ismet stated,

Presently, as in America, big shopping malls are built in the big cities of Turkey and windows do not exist, even though windows are basic elements in architecture. I ask why they don't build windows, and someone says it is because commercial ads will be placed on the walls. I mean, commercialism is that important. If we happen to compare what is spent for the fine arts and what is spent in commercials...it is crazy! They keep working harder and harder and spending more and more money to increase the level of desire in people. That's why, it is an obligation to include visual culture in art education...not even extending the scope of art education...it is an obligation!

Participants' Perspectives on Teaching Art Studio and Pedagogy

Because visual culture and popular culture are part of students' daily lives impacting their learning in substantial ways, participants' views on making connections with students' daily lives were explored. The majority gave examples from their teaching practices or metaphorical statements that imply the necessity of making connections.

Latife said, "Because daily lives change simultaneously with the speed of today's world, curriculum is no longer able to catch up with the speed of life." In her opinion, because of the continuous change of concerns and agendas, it is very important that university instructors continuously update their knowledge and teaching methods in order to prevent falling behind their students.

In Fehmi's view,

A wrong approach to art education was created a long time ago in Turkey and it still lingers today. For instance, if you consider a drawing based in a schematic – illustrative manner, it is enough to draw a vase proportionally. What happens then? The art teacher draws a vase on the blackboard, and says that is how you need to draw. What does it mean? Then it becomes a science. There is a right way of drawing it, then...right way of drawing a vase! There is no such thing! If this is art, everybody's right way is different from the other; everybody's vase will be different. The responsibility of an art teacher is to enlarge the horizons of the children and to teach them how to look and how to learn from things. And it is a tricky one...to provide the child the power of interpretation. Art is an individual thing. If there are 15 students, then there are 15 issues. A teacher needs to be close to his students and share his knowledge and experience with them. Anyone who won't share should not be an art teacher.

Latife repeated her opinion against the standardized curriculum on the basis that it does not enable the instructors to go beyond the predetermined subjects to talking about such things as daily life issues, or social issues. She said that she no longer limits herself to art making activities or art conversations in her classes. It is important for her to talk about many other things that can be very influential in students' lives. Because daily lives change simultaneously with the speed of today's world, so do the issues and concerns change and transform themselves. Therefore, she believes, curriculum is no longer able to catch up with the speed of life, and it is very important that professors constantly update their teaching methods, themselves, and their knowledge.

The respondents were asked if they believe in cross-disciplinary study in a new and rapidly developing field. If so, they were asked to describe any cross-disciplinary examples that they use in their programs. Six out of eight respondents expressed a positive view indicating that they believe in and apply cross-disciplinary studies. Yonca said that they use an interdisciplinary approach in their classes with an emphasis on discipline based art education. She said, "We include criticism, art history, and aesthetics in our classes. We have students create theatre play designs. We ask them questions related to the stories they write." Mustafa said that he mostly uses either music or movies especially in his special teaching methods class. He said that he shows his students fragments of some movies, which he believes to have educational benefits. He continued by saying, "I do that in order to provide students a wider perspective and a critical viewpoint. Students learn from analyzing some movies that are classified as artistic creations."

Ismet pointed out that 'interdisciplinary' and 'holistic' are very similar concepts. For Ismet, a teacher who recognizes art education as visual culture has to be holistic because it envelopes a much bigger area. He said, "I no longer have the concept of art theory that is dependent on the formalist rules, which are based on the limitative Kant aesthetic. I extended my view of art to all kinds of art related shows such as caricature exhibits or 3-D movies. I know that I should not keep my eyes closed to those, since I operate with the consciousness of being a teacher. America has benefited me greatly in gaining this."

Latife expressed her strong belief and tendency toward interdisciplinary study. In her words,

Owing to the fast development of the information age, there are no more borders. Now, the borders between sciences, arts, and other disciplines are lost. I feel like everything is being put in a big pot. For instance, I cannot separate art from philosophy, sociology, psychology, or physics. Art comes out of the synthesis of all these disciplines. For instance, quantum physics was reflected in art. What was the modernism saying: 'there is one truth, and this truth is justified through empirical studies'. What, however, postmodernism said after quantum physics is; 'there is no one truth, and every event or every situation creates its own truth'. I read Baudrillard and Foucault who talked about this as well. Such as Baudrillard's 'Simulacra' or Foucault's 'This is not a pipe'. Both of them wrote on simulation. I believe art is much related to philosophy and psychology as well as to the politics, physics, and other sciences. Art is something that is created by the combination or synthesis of all. That is why I strongly believe in the interdisciplinary approach.

Finally, the participants were asked if they use visual technologies including photography, cinema, television, computer image, and digital art. They were asked to give a brief description of the media technologies they use in their classes. For the majority of them, the Internet is an excellent source that encourages and facilitates the acquisition of new knowledge and appreciation of art. The participants indicated that the most common use of the Internet in classes is searching for visual images. The study implied that the new and emerging software may not be used due to the lack of knowledge or unavailability of software in art education departments in Turkey. Another implication is that the accessibility to networking technologies may also vary across different universities and regions. Universities situated in major cities in Turkey are likely to have wider opportunities for the use of the media.

Discussion

Implications for What Visual Culture is in the Context of Turkey

The discussion focuses on the meaning of visual culture in the context of Turkey. Visual images of a culture that is subjected to drastic changes in a short period of time may present a compilation of images that are conjoined in very unprecedented ways. For example, an evaluation of what visual culture means in Turkey may be a complex one since Turkey, as a developing country, adopts Western values for the purpose of Westernization, while conditioned by Islamic values. This creates unique forms of visibility that is characterized by the combination of the West verses the East, the Christian verses the Islamic, or the old verses the new.

Importantly, visual culture does not consist of standardized methods or sets of concepts.

An important reason for the interest in visual culture is its embeddedness in local cultures. As pointed out by Anderson and Milbrandt (2003), visual culture is a “socially grounded approach that recognizes the context of making and viewing as being as important as the artifacts and performances themselves” (p.63). Shopping malls, for example, would have little relevance to a Turkish person who lives in rural sections of the country. Likewise, the scripts written on trucks or decorations of public busses would hold no relevance to an American citizen. People’s understanding of the social and ritual meanings of visual forms may vary greatly from one culture to another.

Regardless of the different forms and characteristics that visual culture takes in social and cultural contexts, the discourse of visual culture is based on promoting students’ critical understanding for the purpose of empowerment (Anderson and Milbrandt, 2003). Its focal objective is to enable students to explore their own meanings instead of passively accepting meaning from a book or a teacher. This objective of visual culture art education became the focus of this research.

Advocates of visual culture rightfully encourage art educators to develop critical thinkers who may question social factors within the society. Within the context of Turkey, social factors are shaped by the historical background, politics, and religion. These factors sometimes restrict the level of critique in certain areas. For instance, the fact that there is less tolerance for outspoken criticism directed towards established institutions or social phenomena than in America and other western countries, may hinder the process of decoding the inherent meanings of artifacts that have political connotations. Nevertheless, with its emphasis on critical pedagogy, everyday aesthetic experiences, social reconstruction, and interdisciplinary methods, visual culture may create great possibilities for Turkey. Scrutiny of the existing complex social realities that find their expression in the visual culture in Turkey may create a new consciousness in students. Media, social life, politics, and religion construct a very rich and complex pile of visual culture in Turkey. For example, the increasing popularity of shopping malls in Turkey along with other avenues of consumerism is worthy of exploration as related to visual culture within the Turkish context.

Moreover, the way that Western symbols are combined with traditional symbols into peculiar forms in Turkey requires further exploration. For instance, an exhibition that was organized by the Coca Cola Company in Istanbul in 2002 may be an excellent example of the juxtaposition of the global and the local. The exhibition involved interesting Cola bottles one of which was covered with Evil-Eye beads —Nazar Boncugu (traditional lucky charm). This is not strange within Turkish culture with houses in which everything; dining tables, coffee tables, dressers, chairs, kitchen cabinets, even glasses and plates are embellished with needle work and various other embroidery (Kahraman, 2007). Flower patterned carpets cover the floors and numerous other types of decorations fill the houses. That specific Coca Cola bottle symbolizes that characteristic.

A Coca Cola commercial on Turkish Television which features a Ramadan (the Islamic month of fasting) Iftar meal (the meal to break the fast) with its traditional Ottoman music sung by a women’s chorus is another example. One of its implications is the homogenization of the world cultures that gather around commonalities; everybody wears jeans; everybody eats McDonalds, everybody drinks Coca Cola, or everybody watches the same programs, etc. The product must join the culture in order to be desired by that culture (Kahraman, 2007). A study of this commercial within the discourse of visual culture may bring to light various concerns and discussions such as homogenization of the world.

Implications for How Visual Culture Can Be Taught in Turkish Pre-Service Art Education

With respect to the themes derived from this research, the study lends itself to various theoretical perspectives that highlight the necessity of inclusion of visual culture and popular culture studies in pre-service art education in Turkey. Various tenets and themes of this research can be seen through lenses of various sociological and cultural perspectives. One concern which was pointed out by a few respondents was the students' low intellectual quality and lack of self-confidence that hinder instructors' efficacy. Therefore, it is essential that art teacher educators take different approaches and orientations toward guiding their students to become more effective learners and teachers. To this end, it is important that teacher educators must be willing to change some of their traditional ways of teaching. These efforts should focus on increasing art teacher education candidates' competence and confidence to execute practices required to produce visually literate students. In doing so, pre-service instructors should integrate on-going cultural transformations exemplified as visual culture or popular culture into existing and new courses. More specifically, pre-service art teachers should be taught about visual culture in their own social context as part of their learning theory requirements in their teacher education programs.

Within art teacher education in Turkey, visual culture could be a means to break from the traditional approaches that are primarily based on design principles and techniques, and formalistic ideals of art. Teachers maintain the tradition by teaching in the way they were taught. Visual culture pedagogy would be an excellent alternative, allowing art education to move away from these traditions. As suggested by Hermann (2005), an understanding of multiple viewpoints must be discussed in the classroom and students should be encouraged to think critically about the visual culture of which they are a part of.

In the irreversible tide of globalization, ethnic traditional arts are exposed to contemporary trends to a greater degree than ever before. The visual culture that emerges from the interplay between the local and the global reveals a tension between traditional arts of Turkey and contemporary trends. Turkish traditional arts may be a means of improving students' understanding of their own cultural values and beliefs. For instance, students can examine the place of rugs within the context of Islam and the nomadic past, which could provide a basis for meaning making. The exploration of the meanings of local and traditional arts beyond urgent meanings learned from books or instructors can be maintained. This could be achieved through critical pedagogy with a focus on examining critical inquiries that are relevant to students' social lives not just within, but also beyond school.

Furthermore, the power of incorporating visual culture in teacher training can provide new perspectives to Turkish students toward recontextualizing themselves, and critically recognizing what impacts them. Thus, visual culture can lead to a critical pedagogy that empowers them to make choices of how they reinvent themselves for the future. As students make conscious choices, their awareness of social surroundings can be heightened. Therefore, visual culture maintains an objective of social reconstruction, which is about understanding issues of power and making decisions to correct inequalities.

Conclusion

This paper is not about presenting a new fool-proof method for visual culture studies in pre-service art education programs in Turkey. It has shown that key experiences related

to visual culture in higher education share coherent themes. While no single strategy was offered, the results suggest that professors should be aware of their educational potential and the depth of their possible influences on students' learning. This study has also shown the importance of professors' educational efforts in overcoming challenges. The evidence points to strategies that are worth pursuing. One such strategy for creating necessary reformation is to expand the shift from a more teacher-centered to a more student-centered schooling system. Findings further indicate that current professors do not have the training so they cannot teach what they do not know and that training pre-service teachers the old ways does not create change. Thus, training in visual culture art education for professors and pre-service teachers is necessary towards making a change and creating a chain of impact on the society.

In conclusion, visual culture as a concept and as a discipline is new and adherents in Turkey are very few. There is a need for a conscious concern for visual culture in education. In spite of the fact that Turkey has been the home of many rich civilizations with their rich visuality, the rapid changes brought by industrialization and urbanization have created greater meanings and aspects of visual culture. I believe visual culture art education would offer great possibilities in Turkey where rich visual imageries exist with all their conflicts and dynamics and in which all the aspects of being at the crossroads between East and West are reflected in every shape of social life.

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