

## **Developing Visual Literacy Skills in Teacher Education: Different ways of looking at the visual images**

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### **Abstract**

This article attempts to use different ways of looking that help classroom and visual art teachers analyze the meanings attributed to visual images, thereby enhancing their visual literacy skills. In the study, holistic multiple-case sampling was employed in the context of case study method as each group of teachers was individually considered as an analysis unit and their analysis of visual images through different ways of looking was evaluated in a holistic way. The participants of the study comprised of a total of 508 teachers who attended teacher training workshop of the Project titled ‘The Implementation of Visual Culture Theory on Primary and Secondary Visual Arts Courses.’ The data were collected with worksheets, artistic drawings and participant diaries and analyzed inductively. The data were presented in three themes: analyzing visual elements, approaching the visual contextually, and determining the contributions of visual experience. The results denoted that classroom and visual arts teachers interacted with images through a series of questions related to different ways of looking at visual images, questioned visual representations, artistic components and sub-meanings and created various meanings in terms of social, economic, psychological and cultural contexts, thereby increasing their visual literacy skills.

**Keywords:** Visual Culture, Visual Literacy, Teacher Education, Visual Art Education

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## Introduction

With globalization and the rapid pace of technology advancements, we live in an age in which information is digital, participatory, immediately manipulable and visual. Being sometimes transparent and sometimes serving different purposes, the visuals that we often come across in private or public spaces surround our environment through different forms (auditory, visual, discursive) and various mass communication channels (TV, internet, advertisement, film, poster, video, magazine, etc.). Visual arts education gives students the opportunity to play with these visual structures. For example, students constantly produce new visual formats by taking photos, creating videos or sending messages such as stickers, gifs and emoji to others (Grushka, et all, 2021). The practice of visual arts education centers upon objects, ideas, beliefs, and learning activities that create the visual experience; such an effort shapes students' thinking about the world and enables them to create new meanings through visual forms (Freedman, 2003). As noted by Stewart (2014), students attend to expressive properties of imagery through art, explain the ways in which they respond to objects in a variety of contexts, and analyze the impact of or cultural associations prompted by specific images.

In the last two decades, many art educators in the field of art education have aimed to develop students' critical skills towards visual images, under the name of visual culture studies (Dilli, 2013; Dilli, Mamur & Alakuş, 2016; Etherington, 2018; Karagöz, 2020; Kwon, 2020; Lai & Cooper, 2016; Mamur, 2012; Riedler, 2016; Saribaş, 2019). For this purpose, the educators included many subjects dealing with comics as popular culture elements, cartoon analysis, the effect of fashion on personal identity and visual culture perceptions regarding gender roles in their lectures. However, the need for critical thinking that entails versatile reading is increasing with the pace of technological progress today. Further, children and youth generation should be equipped with the ability they need to change the audio-visual expressions and create meaning from them by using different ways of looking at visuals as well as learning to discuss the images from popular culture and mass media. In their recent studies, art educators (Bertling, 2019; Blaikie, 2019; Errázuriz, 2019; Kraehe, 2019; Wilson, 2019) pointed out the importance of 'visual based education' with enhanced visual literacy skills which concerns with images, imagination, image-making, and the relationship between them.

Visual-based education helps students understand the importance of visuality, which has an important place in their daily lives. It supports the development of critical thinking and visual literacy skills by making students think about why some visual images are more valuable and effective than others and how they choose these images (Grushka, 2010). According to Tavin (2014), the expectation of contemporary art education from teachers is to teach students to see the world in different ways, to see art deeply. In this direction, an in-service training project has been prepared for classroom and visual arts teachers who conduct visual arts classes in primary and secondary schools in Turkey. This project was implemented with the support of the Scientific and Technological

Research Council of Turkey [TUBITAK] in 7 provinces of Turkey in 3-day workshops with the participation of 508 teachers in total. In this project, it was aimed for teachers to understand the power of visual images acquired through their daily lives through visual culture theory. The workshops within the scope of the project included activities covering theoretical and artistic practices that would enable participant teachers to reflect on how images surrounding individuals shape the identities, values and behaviors of children and adults.

In recent years, slow looking learning method has been emphasized in art teaching education, which means learning through observation and slowly viewing the artworks, objects, or images in learning environments, such as art galleries, museums, art studios, design studios, and artisan ateliers, in order to thoroughly perceive and understand them. This method was found to be significant in terms of stimulating various senses of the students in visual arts classes and in terms of making learning permanent (Özsoy, 2019; Tishman, 2018). This study focuses on the assessment of the process of the “looking” activity, which is one of the activities of this workshop. This activity focused on developing visual literacy skills by making use of different looking practices during the production and interpretation of visual images. The reason for this is to encourage teachers to look at visual images from different angles and provide students with learning environments that will enable them to navigate visual information, evaluate visuals, create meaning, and encourage critical and creative thinking by establishing connections between these visuals and their daily lives.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Today’s generation stands out for their interaction with digital technology. They have the capability of actively discovering, experiencing, constructing, sharing and creating meaning from information just one click. This situation has changed what it means to be literate today. While literacy was a cognitive action that involved mental processes based on reading and writing text in the past, it currently includes interpreting, multiple reading and looking at audio-visual and digital media (Bleed, 2005; Duncum, 2004). In addition to traditional literacy, multiple literacies such as media literacy, digital literacy and visual literacy have emerged in today’s world.

According to Parsa (2012), one of the areas of literacy that has become a necessity to develop today is visual literacy, which is based on 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy and develops in parallel with visual communication technologies. The term visual literacy was first coined in 1968 by John Debes, who was the founder of the International Visual Literacy Association. Visual literacy has been variously defined in the literature. In the definitions made (Bamford, 2003; Fransecky & Debes, 1972; Roswell et al., 2012), it was seen that visual literacy focused on contextual, critical and communicative skills that enable the individual to use images and visual media effectively, interpret and create meaning from visual information. These skills are defined as visual learning (understanding visual features, rules, and how images interact with text), critical gaze (questioning the context of images and the

producer's intent), and visual communication (thinking about images) (Milbourn, 2013). It has been emphasized that in today's world where visuals play an important role, it is necessary to initiate visual-oriented teaching at every educational level for individuals to gain these skills. Especially in universities, emphasis has been placed on extending traditional text-based literacy teaching to include visual literacy skills that enable critical thinking on images and on practices that support valuing and using visual representations (Elkins, 2003; Felten, 2008; Kedra, 2018).

Students need to be aware of the manipulative uses and ideological implications of images. It is therefore of vital importance to enhance students' visual literacy skills that involve making judgements of the accuracy, validity and worth of images. Amongst the skills students can acquire through visual literacy, there are: having knowledge of the visuals generated and disseminated in the digital environment, to understand the cultural, social, economic, ethical, aesthetic and technical components involved in the production and use of the visuals, to be able to criticize, to discuss and thus to create personal knowledge, in other words, to encourage students to become innovative and problem-solving visual thinkers (Avgerinou, 2009; Bamford, 2003; Cheung & Jhaver, 2016; Ravas & Stark, 2012). To be visually literate, art students need an education that enhance their visual literacy skills and help them embody and understand the world of visual culture they live in, going beyond a technical or formal analysis, (Callow, 2008; Stankiewicz, 2004; Mitchell, 2002). It has been observed that there are a limited number of studies (Bozdik, 2019; Doğru, 2014; Eraslan, 2019; Taşpınar, 2017) examining the relationship between visual literacy and visual arts education in Turkey. These studies, mostly carried out by quantitative method, aimed to measure the visual literacy proficiency level of the participants and focused on determining the relationship between visual literacy with variables such as gender, academic achievement and visual reading.

The notion of visual literacy is grounded on 'seeing' and 'looking' phenomena which focus on what things look like and how they are interpreted (Parsa, 2012). Leppert (1996) claims that seeing is related to mental and thought processes rather than a biological and physical phenomenon. According to Amburgy (2011), looking is shaped in the relationship between subject (viewer) and object (thing looked at). As for looking, it involves the ability to define and analyze different ways of seeing (historical, economic, social, cultural and etc.) beyond a physical act of seeing. To illustrate, when we look at something, we not only engage with visual images but also interact with other related images featured or published together, our own bodies, other bodies, human-made or natural objects and possession, and the social contexts we look at (Huggins, 2008; Sturken & Cartwright, 2009).

Duncum (2015) emphasizes the importance of visual in art education by arguing that the visual image includes versatile "looking" skills and that meaning should be created in these images. Given today's visual content-driven world, the contexts in which images circulate have become increasingly complex. For instance, it is now possible to send digital images captured by smartphones

to web pages via e-mail, to publish the private moments of people on the internet via photos and videos and millions of people can watch these private moments at the same time. This means that any imagery or video can be displayed in very different contexts within a short time, thereby creating different representations and meanings (Sturken & Cartwright, 2009). Therefore, more comprehensive approaches that will encourage students to look at visual images from different perspectives should be adapted so that students will have the chance to improve their visual literacy skills by interpreting and making sense of these versatile texts. Therefore, in order to improve their visual literacy skills by interpreting and making sense of these versatile texts, broader approaches, which will lead the students to look at the images from different aspects, are necessary. Regarding understanding and critical interpretation of visual images and versatile texts, some art educators (Keifer- Boyd & Maitland-Gholson, 2007; Rose, 2002; Serafini, 2011) suggested different ways of looking at the images. The approaches suggested for interpretation of the images focus on demonstrating the ways the individuals interact with the images from the mass media within the context of visual literacy, and the ways they question, interpret, and make sense of these visual text according to their own experiences within social, historical, environmental, cultural, and political contexts.

In visual arts lessons, it is important to encourage students to think and observe visuals and to gain experience on visual and aesthetic components. To achieve this, it is necessary to help them develop critical and divergent thinking skills (Tomljenovic, 2015). In this context, important responsibilities fall on the classroom and visual arts teachers who teach art lessons. In a significant number of studies conducted with classroom teachers in Turkey and in some countries, it has been observed that teachers use art for decorative purposes in practices, and they prioritize developing practical skills rather than questioning skills of students (Çakmak & Türkcan, 2019; Lajevic, 2013; Smilian & Miraglia, 2009; Tarı, 2011; Yükselgün & Türkcan, 2012). In addition, in these studies, it was concluded that classroom teachers felt inadequate in applying visual arts teaching principles and techniques, and were superficial in terms of artistic knowledge, skills and experience. For this reason, it has been emphasized that the position of art should be re-evaluated in terms of professional development of teachers with pre-service and in-service training programs in today's global world. According to Romero and Bobkina (2021), teachers should consider the multiple use of visual texts to prepare students for the 21st century. They should bring together different techniques and activities to analyze visual images in order to develop their critical thinking and visual literacy skills. In this context, in the workshop held within the scope of the in-service training project in this research, it was aimed to develop visual literacy skills of classroom and visual arts teachers in order to use different ways of seeing that will help them analyze the meanings attributed to visual images with the theme of "looking" activity.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

In order to examine the main purpose of this research in a holistic and in-depth manner, case study method, which is one of the qualitative research approaches, is used in this study. According to Patton (2015), case-oriented elements in case studies can be analyzed in a holistic approach, and how the participants have been affected by the case researched can be revealed. Holistic multiple-case design, which is a type of case study, is used in this study. In this design, classroom and visual arts teachers are considered as one units of analysis. The case in the study is reflected in a holistic way of how both groups of teachers interpret visual images in different ways of looking.

### **Participants**

508 teachers who teach visual arts at primary and secondary school levels from provinces selected from seven geographical regions of Turkey (Çanakkale, Erzincan, Kayseri, Diyarbakır, Giresun, Mersin ve Denizli) participated in the teacher training workshops organized within the framework of the project carried out within the scope of TÜBİTAK 4005 Science and Society Innovative Education Practices support program. 284 of these teachers are visual arts teachers, and 222 are classroom teachers. To determine these participants under the research, we used typical case sampling, which is one of the purposeful sampling strategies. The purpose in typical case sampling is to inform the individuals, who do not have sufficient information regarding a certain field, subject, application, or innovation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p.138). Informing two groups of classroom and visual arts teachers about visual literacy skills through different ways of looking at visuals was effective in the selection of this sample.

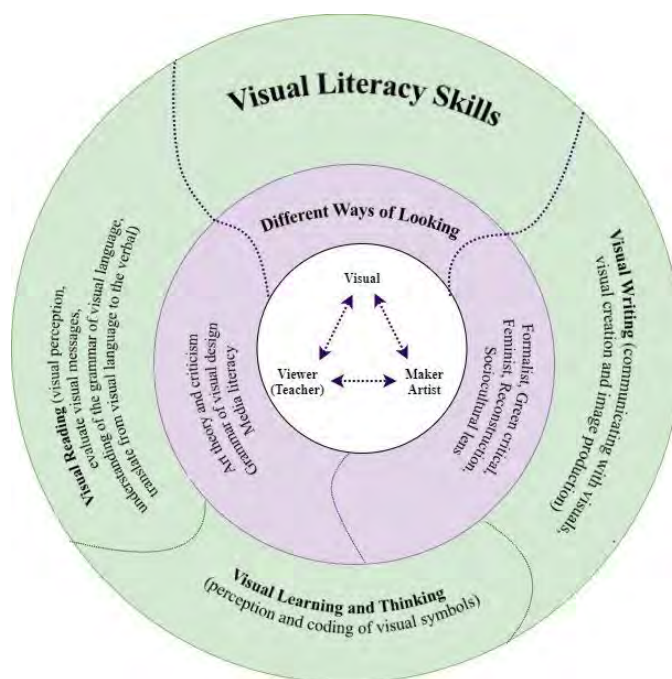
### **Data Collection Tools**

In this study, document review method (Yin, 2018), which plays a significant role in case studies, is used as data collection method. Worksheets, artistic drawings, and participants' diaries were used within the scope of the document review, since the authors wanted to see how multiple resources complement each other within the data analysis process.

### ***Worksheet (W)***

Within the scope of the TUBITAK project used in this study, 3-day workshop activities were performed in each city. In this study, the data were collected through artistic practices performed within the scope of group activities in the first and second days of the workshop, and the reflective diaries/memo books, where the teachers noted their individual opinions. On the first day of the workshop, a 2-hour presentation was made regarding the messages given by the images and the ways people look at these images. Then, homogeneous groups of five participants, which include equal numbers of both form teachers and visual arts teachers, were created. Two worksheets were prepared

in the workshop within the scope of this project. These worksheets are based on a trilogy of visual, audience (teachers) and producer / artist. Figure 1 shows how these worksheets are constructed according to different looking approaches as part of visual literacy skills.



**Figure 1.** The use of different ways of looking in visual literacy skills

Aiming to enhance visual literacy skills of young adults, Kedra (2018) questions what it means to be visually literate and proposes three lists of visual skills with thematic categories, namely, visual reading (visual perception, evaluate visual messages, understanding of the grammar of visual language, translate from visual language to the verbal), visual writing (communicating with visuals, visual creation and image production), visual learning and thinking (perception and coding of visual symbols). In this context, Kedra's lists of visual skills were used to associate the worksheets with visual literacy skills. In the first worksheet, various posters and advertising visuals were employed to expand teachers' perspectives on interpreting versatile popular culture texts and to raise their awareness of how to question media images. Open-ended questions such as art theory and criticism, grammar of visual design and predominantly media literacy perspective suggested by Serafini (2011) were used to interpret these visual images. In the second worksheet, teachers were asked to analyze and interpret cultural, environmental and social issues addressed by contemporary artists. To this end, teachers were asked to answer open-ended questions regarding the works of some contemporary artists (İrfan Önürmen, Christian Boltanski, İnci Eviner, Yoko Ono, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Gürbüz Doğan Ekşioğlu). They were also asked to look at the artworks from the perspective of Keifer-Boyd and Maitland-Gholson (2007) which they call multivocal approach including formalist, green critical, feminist, reconstruction and sociocultural lens. It was thus intended to form a basis for both classroom teachers and visual arts teachers regarding how to see and create the representational meanings (ideas,

context and technical features) of images and transfer them to their own learning environments. Table 1 shows questions prepared according to different ways of looking.

**Table 1.** Activity questions according to different ways of looking

First Activity Questions	Second Activity Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do these images say about the world?</li> <li>• How are groups or individuals represented in the images presented to you?</li> <li>• How are wishes, dreams, beliefs and fears represented in these images? What is most promised? What is not shown?</li> <li>• What do these images say about you?</li> <li>• What are the image(s) that bother you the most? What causes your discomfort? Why do you think the power of this image(s) stems from?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are visual features (objects, people, lines, textures, shapes, colors) handled in the work?</li> <li>• From where did the artist get the necessary tools and materials for his work?</li> <li>• How could the work contribute to the environmental sensitivity of the place where it is located?</li> <li>• What does the work tell us about a specific time and place?</li> <li>• What are the meanings of the images in the artist's work?</li> <li>• What do you think about the artist's intention?</li> <li>• Who or what is stronger in this image?</li> <li>• What kind of social relations does this image convey?</li> <li>• Who could this image be made for?</li> <li>• How does this image affect you?</li> <li>• What does the main subject of this image mean to you?</li> <li>• Associate this visual with a concept and reinterpret it with an artistic work.</li> </ul>

### ***Participant Diary (PD)***

Participants' diaries include the representation of teachers' visual experiences and emotions regarding this application at the end of the process. The opinions of the teachers were received through open-ended questions, such as "How do you think today's learning activity has contributed to your daily life?", "What kind of contributions will this learning activity bring to your teaching experience?", "What do you think about the ways today's learning activity will influence primary and secondary school students?"

### **Data Analysis**

The research data were analyzed by inductive analysis, one of the qualitative data analysis techniques. According to Patton (2015, p. 792), inductive analysis involves exploring patterns, themes and categories in data. During the analysis phase, all the data of the research were read many times. Then, codes were taken from the data, and the codes that were thought to be related to each other were brought together to reach the categories and from there to the themes. This process, which progresses from codes to themes, summarizes the inductive structure of the research. In order to ensure the reliability of the research, a similar process was applied by a field expert, and all codes, categories and themes were compared to reach meaningful, realistic and holistic data units. The themes obtained as a result of the analysis are named bi-directionally. These; 1) Definition: Analyzing visual elements, 2) Interpretation and reflection: Contextual approach to visual, 3) Evaluation: Determining the contributions of visual experience. These themes have been tried to be illustrated in the findings with direct quotations.



## Results

As a result of the analysis of the data, three themes were created: analyzing visual elements, contextual approach to the visual and determining the contributions of visual experience. The content information for these themes is as follows:

*Analyzing visual elements*; It includes defining the elements that structure the visual images regarding what the figures, objects or texts in the visual images represent, what they promise, the art elements and principles that make up the visual composition, and the effects that the images create on them. *Contextual approach to the visual*; It includes teachers' visual interpretations of the contexts in which visual images are produced and their reflection on artistic works. *Determining the contributions of visual experience*; As a result of the examination of the participant diaries, the teachers' evaluation of the assumed contributions of the process to themselves, the learning-teaching environments and their students.

### **Description: Analyze visual elements**

Teachers critically questioned metaphorical and symbolic meanings of the formal elements (people and objects) in visual images. Mostly female and male representation styles are discussed in advertisements and posters and it was seen that these interpretations of representations often addressed a global problem such as racial discrimination coupled with gender judgments. To illustrate, regarding the symbolic meanings of women, *following* statements were made: are sexual object, being responsible for housework, being dependent on a man, passive, attractive, female, self-confident and consumer. On the other hand, men were evaluated as strong, confident, authoritative, handsome, good-looking, free and problem solver. In addition to that, teachers reported that the white race were portrayed as clean, superior and good while the black race was portrayed as dirty, bad, slovenly and second-class person. The symbolic meanings of the objects are represented through contemporary artworks in a way that address different emotions, social and experiential concepts. Accordingly, many symbolic narrations were identified. For example, coffin was regarded as death of nature, sadness and anxiety; plant was regarded as rebirth, life, immortality, peace and hope; sculpture, was associated with simplicity, perfection and holding on the past; pile of clothes were considered as chaos, consumerism and disorder; puppet were associated with the manipulated possession; mask were associated with confidentiality, shadow was associated with fear and nudity was associated with sexuality and desire.

Emanuel and Challons-Lipton (2013) contend that the individual examines the techniques used to create the imagery, learns the vocabulary of shapes and colors, determines the characteristics of an image that makes sense and analyzes the ideas creating the image. Teachers were invited to interpret the distribution and characteristics of the art elements and principles that form the unique

language of art in the works of art. Teachers emphasized the use of colors on highlighting objects or figures and describing emotional situations; geometric structures of shapes such as rectangles, triangles, squares and forms like cubes as well as stressing symmetrical balance, horizontal-vertical lines and light-dark values. They also mentioned illusions created by light-shadow objects and shapes and the contrasts resulted from the use of different (hard-soft) materials and textures together. The participants also stressed the repetition of units and shapes and irregular and wrinkled textures. Some of the opinions are as follows:

Dark and dominant colors create a sense of mysterious atmosphere, chaos and curiosity (Group 34).

The composition mainly consists of rectangular prisms (Group 1).

The sculptural model was highlighted by using vivid colors (Group 44).

Contrast was created by using soft and hard materials together (Group 56).

There are horizontal and vertical lines on each object (Group 26).

Visual literacy includes cognitive functions such as critical thinking, visualization, make and create meaning and utilizes the affective domain that reveals emotions and attitudes as well (Avgerinou & Pettersson, 2011). During the workshops, teachers were asked to share their ideas regarding how these images influenced them and which imagery made them feel discomfort while analyzing the visual elements. The teachers described the images projected in contemporary art works as thought-provoking, questioning, developing different perspectives and impressive. When it comes to emotional effects of images on themselves, they highlighted positive and negative emotions such as pessimism, hope, fear, calmness, sadness, anxiety, depressing and unhappiness. For instance:

When we think that the objects do not make sense on their own and there can be many underlying causes, it has led to emotions such as fear, anxiety and pessimism (Group 28).

It makes me sad. It reminds me of wars and makes me think of the desperation of the innocent people there and makes me upset (Group 40).

While the coffins that remind of death give pain and sadness, the green saplings make me feel the new hope and life (Group 38).

Looking advertisements and posters, teachers described the images they found uncomfortable. They interpreted disturbing visual contents using some expressions such as the use of women as sexual objects, violence against women, racial discrimination and abuse of childhood, sexist view, economic inequality and destruction of nature. According to teachers, this emanated from the value

judgments imposed by the society on women and men, the weaknesses of the people, the sales and marketing policy, the belief that money controls the world and ecological unconscious. In this respect, some of the teachers' views are as follows:

The most disturbing image in the soap ad for us is that the child turns into a white boy and feels happy after taking a bath. Because there is a racist approach. Whites are portrayed as a superior race (Group 44).

It is quite disturbing to associate only one organ of the woman's body with sex, and here it is especially associated with food. This is because the world is ruled by men because women are characterized by only fertility and sex (Group 52).

The bruise on the woman's foot bothered us. It shows that women are constantly exposed to violence (Group 32).

### **Interpretation and reflection: Contextual approach to the visual**

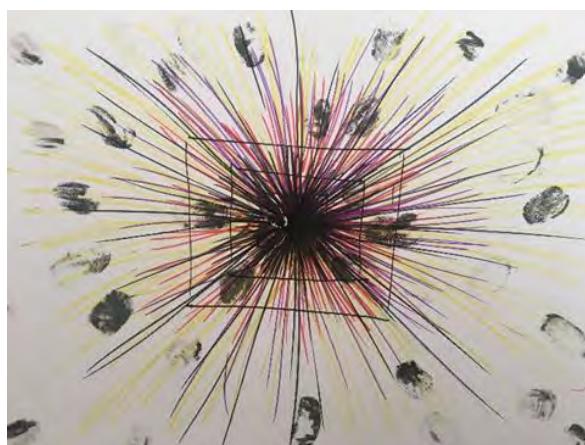
Teachers interpreted the contexts affecting visual production as *capitalism and society*, *culture and society*, *environment and society*, *personal and experiential*. According to Anderson and Milbrandt (2005), context focuses on the surrounding conditions rather than the physical qualities of images and their impact on individual perceptions. Teachers most frequently commented on capitalism consumer culture through advertising and poster images. More specifically, they questioned the idealized life styles, the imposed values and their effective roles in shaping individual and social identity. In regards to becoming a consumer society, they articulated their point of views as follows: everything is furnished with colorful and eye-catching elements to boost consumption, big brands are everywhere and people's clothing looks like each other and individuals consume too much without questioning whether they really need them. In this sense, some groups interrogated consumer society in their artistic works creating meanings such as 'insatiable, dissatisfaction, burnout syndrome, collapse, exaggeration, limitlessness and be set free from unnecessary burdens.' To illustrate, discussing the notion of 'Nonsatisfaction', the Group 11 commented regarding their artistic works as follows:

We consume everything very quickly in all areas of our lives. This leads us into a terrible consumerism. We consume without asking like 'Do we need it, do we really need it?' In this picture, there are many colorful clothes in the wardrobe, on the floor, around, on the bag, on the bed. However, it reflects how insatiable we are, although many of us have many clothes, like she has nothing to wear and creates a negative moment.



**Figure 2.** Nonsatisfaction (Group 11, Erzincan)

Some teachers commented the overall message underlying the image in the context of culture and society according to gender roles. In this respect, while they described men as strong, the one who can manage themselves, they described women as follows: weak, destined to be ruled, easily manipulated, whose purpose of coming into the world is to serve men and to reproduce. Some teachers' perceptions towards the images include the following statements: people of all colors and types can live together and accepting differences are natural. Thus, some groups questioned being sensitive to different cultures and created images using such concepts as respect for differences, empathy and tolerance in their artistic works. For example, Group 21 made an abstract transfer by using fingerprints of the group members in their artistic work 'Respect for Diversity.' They shared their views pertaining to the work; remarking that 'We made a picture that conveys the message of respecting for differences, not being prejudiced, welcoming people's different thoughts (good and bad) with tolerance, and accepting ourselves and others as what it is.'



**Figure 3.** Respect for Diversity (Group 21, Çanakkale)

In the workshops, some groups discussed major current social and environmental issues such as violence against women, animal rights, war and environmental pollution with respect to their inquiries about images in the context of environment and society. Questioning these issues, some

teachers embodied the meaning of images using following concepts such as natural balance, slaughter, protection, chaos, and social peace using images. For example, the views of Group 26 on their artistic work ‘Natural Balance’ are given below:

As a concept, it discusses natural balance. Animal rights are underlined through this concept. If we critically approach to image, we can articulate that people actually cause the extinction of animals and the deterioration of the natural balance by buying clothes made from animal fur and skin for their own pleasure.



**Figure 4.** Natural Balance (Group 26, Denizli)

Some groups of teachers interpreted visuals in terms of personal and experiential contexts. In this respect, some of them examined the concept of death related to human existence for the continuity or end of life, and some teachers questioned human fears, religious teachings, traumatic memories and dreams. In this context, some groups concretized the meanings they created through concepts such as memories, obscurity, fear and repressed emotions. For example, Group 44 shared following views in their artistic work titled ‘Repressed Emotions’:

The hidden, unavoidable emotions with fear and anxiety and the obstacle of these emotions to our lives, while exhibiting a colorful and cheerful personality in our daily life, the imprisonment of many emotions (fear) that do not appear in the background and put obstacles in our lives.



**Figure 5.** Repressed Emotions (Group 44, Kayseri)

Briefly stated, the teachers created artistic works by producing meanings in social, cultural, economic and psychological contexts. Such a practice in the workshop contributed to the teachers in terms of creating meaning from visual images, approaching them from different perspectives and looking critically.

#### **Evaluation: Identifying the contributions of the visual experience**

In the workshop, both teacher groups found the process effective in terms of raising visual awareness. This process allowed teachers to realize what was seen did not have a single meaning and that meaning could change according to individuals and go to multiple perspectives, to build connections between images, to create meaning by questioning sub-meanings attributed to visual images. In addition, it was observed that the visual experiences provided by the process also enabled teachers to construct ideas regarding their own teaching environments. Especially classroom teachers mentioned that they should incorporate more visual content across learning activities. Further, both groups of teachers stated that they would teach their students different ways of looking at visuals in their classrooms, and they would create an opportunity for them to make critical inquiries by enabling them to create dialogue through visuals. Accordingly, some of the teachers' comments are as follows:

I understood that others cannot evaluate many visual expressions from my point of view and it will differ from one person to another (CT, PD)

I gained critical thinking skills regarding the detrimental effects of global visual culture (VAT, PD).

I learned that the visual perspective has many effects on children. Therefore, I have learned that we should not ignore art lessons and that art increases success in other lessons and positively affects brain development. (CT, PD).

I will guide my students to better interpret visual communication images and to see and think rather than look (VAT, PD).

I realized that I should use more visuals in my lessons. I will make children do more intensive visual activities in primary school (CT, PD)

During the workshops, teachers expressed their opinions about how they could contribute to students when they applied different ways of looking approaches to visuals in their classes. They concluded that this would contribute to the development of visual literacy skills among students in terms of gaining different perspectives, critical and creative thinking, being a conscious consumer, being sensitive to art and respecting different opinions. Some of the statements regarding these opinions are as follows:

I believe it will have many benefits to bring different viewpoints to the students regarding images (books, magazines, social media, etc.) (CT, PD).

Our students may gain awareness on negative images that have an impact on the subconscious (VAT, PD).

They gain awareness. They begin to consume more carefully. They know how to use what they have, and economize (VAT, PD).

This will make them to examine their surroundings more critically and carefully, and to notice their positive and negative aspects (CT, PD).

### **Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations**

Living in the visual age requires art teachers to guide students to critically question and interpret visual culture (Grodoski, 2016). Therefore, it is important for teachers to dedicate themselves to a visual education in the classroom that includes visual learning and thinking strategies that will enable students to perceive visual messages and create meaning for them from different perspectives. In this study, which was planned in this context, classroom and visual arts teachers interpreted various visual forms that were accompanied by questions about different ways of looking at visual images. In this process, teachers constantly communicated with the visuals. They perceived and coded what the figures and objects in the images represent, and defined the artistic components that make up the visual composition. It can be said that this situation helps them to recognize the elements and principles of visual design and to develop an aesthetic perspective. Similarly, in the studies conducted by Williams (2019) and Yeh (2010), it was concluded that the participants were able to interpret the images by using various art and design elements and developed aesthetic sensitivity while analyzing the images.

Teachers made evaluations about the consumption culture created by the capitalist system in their advertisements and posters, and expressed the situations they were disturbed by social and environmental problems. Among these, they mostly focused on global issues such as gender and racial discrimination. Contemporary works of art, on the other hand, were thought-provoking and questioning, and based on these works, they referred to different emotions, social and experiential concepts. As a result of these, teachers have produced artistic works by making inquiries in social, cultural, economic and psychological contexts. This helped them to create meaning from visual images, to approach them from different perspectives and to look critically. This result of the study is similar to the findings of some studies on visual literacy skills. For example; In the studies conducted by Abas (2019), Carpenter II and Cifuentes (2011), Chung (2005), Dođru (2014), Kelly-Jackson and Delacruz (2014), teachers with advanced visual culture and critical looking skills help students understand the power of visual image. They revealed that they helped them to gain critical awareness towards the world of consumption and to produce various meanings through their own life experiences. In addition, these studies have shown that teachers, with their visual culture education competencies, help their students to experience how art can be used as a tool to create social awareness, to interpret information in context and to think critically.

Teachers should consider the multiple use of visual texts to prepare students for the 21st century. They should bring together different techniques and activities to analyze visual elements in their classrooms in order to develop their critical thinking and visual literacy skills (Romero & Bobkina, 2021). This study supported the development of visual literacy skills of teachers such as reading, thinking and writing visuals through different visual texts. It also helped them develop ideas about how to transfer these skills to the arts classrooms and how they could contribute to students. Particularly, classroom teachers emphasized that they understood the need to include more visual content in learning activities. However, both groups of teachers stated that they would provide an environment for students in the classroom to make critical inquiries that would provide different ways of looking at the visual and initiate a dialogue over the visuals. These findings are similar to those of Begoray (2001), Şahin and Kıran (2011) obtained in their studies. These researchers emphasized the importance of incorporating more visual materials into the classroom environment for teachers to create meaning and experience through various visual forms such as cartoons, photography, artwork and video so that students can use visual language in their daily lives.

Art education is an important way to provide students with critical life skills that encourage questioning, creating and thinking about visual content beyond the obvious (Etherington, 2018). According to Herrmann (2005), more than one perspective understanding should be accepted and discussed in art classes. Thus, it can be ensured that students understand how visual images and texts relate to each other and develop a critical perspective on how they are affected by them. In this study, both groups of teachers stated that they would contribute to the development of visual literacy skills



such as critical and creative thinking, being a conscious consumer, being sensitive to art and respecting different ideas, through different approaches to looking at images. As a matter of fact, there are studies in the literature that support these views of teachers. For example; Lopatovska et. al. (2016), Özkubat and Ulutaş (2018) found in their studies on the development of children's visual literacy skills, that children are more interested in the images in the environment, they develop their visual interpretation skills by paying attention to visual objects, symbols and signs, It has been concluded that they are willing to interact with the work of art, recognize visual art elements and imagine themselves in paintings.

Seeing the world from a broad perspective, being able to interpret what we see through visual communication in the context of visual culture, and learning how to transfer these skills to others are the keys to academic success in our visual world. For this reason, it is important for both classroom and visual arts teachers to review traditional approaches in visual arts teaching practices and turn to a literacy that includes visual texts and multiple perspectives. In this regard, it is important to provide teachers with in-service training on their ability to acquire visual literacy skills and use visual communication technologies. In addition, it may be beneficial to add courses on how to develop visual literacy skills to teacher candidates in the teacher training programs of universities and to create an opportunity for them to design activities. Classroom practices can include computer games, film criticism, visual inquiry through mass media, contemporary art practices, and online websites. In cooperation with online museums or galleries, visual literacy skills can be developed with questions about different ways of looking at visuals. Contemporary artists can directly affect students' lives as they often make visual references to daily life and social problems. For this reason, teachers can encourage their students to seek information on contemporary works of art and to make inquiries through different ways of looking in their classroom practices.

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