

Visual Culture Studies in the Development of Social Empathy and Critical Thinking Skills

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Abstract

Students' social empathy and critical thinking skills may be improved by making them discover the meanings of various artworks or visual culture images about social justices and injustices in art classes. In terms of providing fundamental human rights to create more democratic, pluralistic, and equitable societies, the disability rights are designated as the subject focus of this study. Within this context, a series of activities were prepared to make the students empathize with the disability living, to eliminate their biases, and to make them question the existence of the disabled citizens within the society. These activities were planned based on visual culture pedagogy, democracy education, and social justice. It was aimed to give the students a critical insight on society through internalization of disabled individuals, who have different characteristics, and to contribute to recognition of their own capacities in terms of transforming the society. The participants of this study were 20 fifth-grade students between the ages of 10 and 11, who take Visual Arts classes in Tepebasi-Istiklal Secondary School in Eskisehir, Turkey. The data of this study were obtained from semi-structured interview questions, reflective diaries, artworks of the students, and their essays on these products during a

seven-week teaching period. The data were analyzed through content analysis. The findings of this study showed that these activities increased social responsibility awareness of the children, encouraged them to show tolerance to different people, and gave them skills and knowledge to discover what they could do within the context of social transformation.

Keywords

Democracy education, Social justice, Critical pedagogy, Visual arts education, Disability rights.