

Eğitim ve Bilim  
2014, Cilt 39, Sayı 171

Education and Science  
2014, Vol. 39, No 171

## A Qualitative study towards infusing popular culture on teaching practice in classroom

### Popüler Kültür'ün Sınıf İçi Öğretim Uygulamalarına Adaptasyonuna Yönelik Niteliksel Bir Araştırma

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#### Abstract

The aim of this study was to define the impact of infusing popular culture's elements such as comics, TV series, popular music etc. on teaching practice in classroom in Turkey. Popular culture plays an important role in education. This study reveals that teachers often use popular culture that plays an important role in the lives of children in the classroom. Teachers attempt to integrate popular culture into the lessons in many different ways consciously or spontaneously. Popular culture is reflected in the, methods, and educational activities and drills in daily lesson plans. Popular culture is included sometimes as a reinforcing unit for some other units in lesson plans. Teachers noticed that they had to integrate popular culture into the teaching context because it allowed them to make connections between real life and school thus making daily classroom implementations better. Although teachers are against popular culture, they all agree that it is a reality for schooling and sometimes they use it reluctantly.

*Keywords:* popular culture, teaching, classroom, high culture

#### Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı Türkiye'de sınıf içi öğretim uygulamalarına çizgi film, TV dizileri vb.den oluşan popüler kültürün öğelerinin etkisini belirlemektir. Popüler kültür eğitimde önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu çalışma da çocukların yaşamında önemli rol oynayan popüler kültürün öğelerinin öğretmenler tarafından öğretimde ne düzeyde kullanıldığını ortaya koymaktadır. Öğretmenler popüler kültürün öğelerini bilinçli ya da bilinçsizce öğretime adapte etmektedirler. Popüler kültür öğretmenlerin günlük ders planlarındaki alıştırmalar, eğitimsel etkinlikler ve yöntemlerine de etki etmektedir. Popüler kültür bazen ders planlarında güdüleyici ve motivasyon öğesi olarak da yer almaktadır. Öğretmenler de buna karşı olsalar bile bazen gerçek yaşamla bağlantıyı kolaylaştırdığı için günlük sınıf içi etkinliklerde popüler kültürün etkisi olduğunu fark etmişlerdir. Karşı olsalar bile popüler kültürün eğitimin bir gerçeği olduğunu kabul etmişlerdir.

Anahtar sözcükler: popüler kültür, öğretim, sınıf, yüksek kültür

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## Özet

### *Amaç*

Araştırmanın temel amacı Türkiye’de öğretmenlerin sınıf içi öğretim etkinliklerinde popüler kültürü kullanma durumları ve derse adapte etme düzeyleri ele alınmıştır. Bu amaçla 4.ve 5. sınıfta görev yapan sınıf öğretmenlerinin ders planları, dersleri ve ders akışları izlenmiştir.

### *Bulgular ve Tartışma*

Öğretmenlerin çocuklara yönelik popüler kültür ürünlerinin derste kullanmasına yönelik bu araştırmada ortaya çıkan en önemli sonuç öğretmenlerin çoğunluğunun çocukların bu ürünlerden nasıl etkilendiğinden fazla haberdar olmamalarıdır. Öğretmenlerin yarı yapılandırılmış sormacalar vermiş oldukları cevaplar incelendiğinde birçok öğretmenin popüler kültürle öncelikle okul dışında karşılaştıkları Araştırmaya katılan öğretmenlerden çoğunluğu popüler kültür kavramına olumsuz anlam yüklemişler ve popüler kültüre dayalı uygulamalarına tereddütle yaklaşmışlardır. Popüler kültürün ürünlerini öğretimde ne dereceye kadar kullanıyorsunuz? Sorusuna verilen cevaplarda, öğretmenlerin zaman zaman TV dizileri vb. Yayınlardan etkilendiklerini ve öğretim anlayışlarında değişikliğe gittikleri ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu da bize öğretmenlerin popüler kültür ürünlerinin yerleşik anlayışların değiştirmeye yol açtığını göstermektedir. Öğretmenlerin özellikle eğitici film ve belgesellerden de etkilenmiş olmaları ilginçtir. Bir diğer olgu da popüler medyanın biçimlendirici etkisidir. Özellikle “Açık Öğretim” kanalı gibi eğitsel kanallarda yapılan yayınların da bilgilendirici olduğunu zaman zaman eğitim amacıyla buralardan yararlandıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Bunu popüler kültürün öğretimin niteliğini artırıcı yan etkisi olarak görmek olasıdır. Bunda popüler kültürün temsil ve sunuş biçimlerinin de etkisi vardır. Popüler kültürün ürünü olan dizi ve yayınların gerçek yaşamla öğretim yaşamını bütünleştirmeyi kolaylaştırdığını belirtmişlerdir. Öğretmenlerin popüler kültürün hangi boyutunu ve öğelerini kullandıkları sorulduğunda, öğretimde konuyu bilmenin önemini ön plana koydukları görülmüştür. Bununla birlikte var olan teknik ve yöntemlerle, ders araç gereçlerinin bazen bazı konu ya da başlıkları açıklamak için yeterli olmadığını belirtmişlerdi. Özellikle soyut konuların öğretiminde zorlandıklarında öğrencilerin ilgi ve motivasyonlarını artırmak ve ders içindeki etkinlikleri daha ilgi çekici hale getirmek için çocuklara yönelik, dizi film ya da çizgi filmlerden yararlandıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Alt sınıflarda “Susam Sokağı” tarzında diziler etkiliyken üst sınıflarda Harry Potter vb. Filmlerin daha etkili olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Özellikle rutin uygulamaların dışına çıkmayı sağladığı için popüler kültürün bu yönünden yararlandıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Popüler kültür öğelerinin öğretmenin sınıf içindeki alışkanlığını etkileyip etkilemediği sorulduğunda öğretmenler biraz düşünmüş ve etkilendiklerini belirtmişlerdir. Özellikle örnekler, alıştırmalar ve konular arasında ilişki kurarken popüler kültürden etkilendiklerini belirtmişlerdir. Görsel-ışitsel örneklerin çarpıcı olması, oyunların farklı formatta verilmesi ve öğrencilerin hemen hemen hepsinin konuya ilişkin arka planı iyi bilmesi öğretmenin derste ortak bir temel oluşturmasına yardımcı olduğu belirtilmiştir. Bu anlamda öğrencilerle daha kolay iletişim kurulduğu aynı zamanda popüler kültürü öğrencilerin konular arasında bağ kurmaya yarayan bir araç olarak betimlemişlerdir. Öğretmenlerden bazıları eğitim ve öğretimle ilgili filmlerdeki karakterlerin davranış ve tutumlarından belli düzeyde etkilendiklerini ve öğretim anlayışında onları bazen model olarak aldıklarını söylemişlerdir. “Örneğin Ölü Ozanlar Derneği” ve “Tehlikeli Düşünceler” filmindeki öğretmenin yaklaşımını etkileyici bulduklarını bu tür öğretmen olmayı arzu ettiklerini belirtmeleri oldukça ilginçtir.

Öğretmenlerin ödev ve alıştırmaya çalışmalarında da popüler kültür ürünlerinden yararlandığı ortaya çıkmıştır. Alıştırma ve ödevlerin konu ve sunumlarında öğrencilere farkına varmadan ya da bilerek popüler kültürle ilgili alanlardan örnekler ve somuşturmalar yaptırdıkları ortaya çıkmıştır. Popüler kültürün ürünleri olan çizgi romanlar vb. görsellik ve akıcılık açısından çocuklarca benimsendiği için öğretmenlerin bu konuya ev ödevlerinde de yer verdiği ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bunlar bize öğretmenlerin çocukların popüler kültürle ilgili birikimlerinin farkında olmaları zorunluluğunda olduğunu göstermektedir.

### *Sonuç*

Popüler kültür tek başına ele alındığında çoğunlukla olumsuz anlamlar çağrıştıran bir alandır. Alan yazında buna ilişkin çok sayıda araştırma vardır. Çocukları bağımlı kıldığı, şiddete yönlendirdiği ve hareketsiz kıldığı gibi eleştiriler en fazla dile getirilen konulardır. Bununla birlikte popüler kültürün çocuklar arasındaki tartışmasız üstünlüğü de kabul edilmektedir. Bu tür olumsuzluklarına rağmen özellikle öğretmen ya da eğitimcilerin bu alandaki olumsuzlukları azaltarak eğitim ve öğretimde popüler kültürden olumlu yararlanabilecekleri ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu tamamen popüler kültüre dayanmak anlamına gelmemelidir. Popüler kültür bireyin alışkanlıkları ve hayallerini biçimlendiren bir alan olduğu için öğretimde bu alışkanlıkları olumluya dönüştürmek öğretmenlerin elindedir. Öğretmenlerin bu alandaki gelişme ve ortak paydanın farkında olması eğitim ve öğretim açısından yararlı olacaktır. Popüler kültüre belli düzeyde dersinde yer veren öğretmenler derste ilgi ve motivasyonu sağlamada daha başarılı olabileceği kabul edilmelidir. Öğretmenler derse başlarken ya da süreç içerisinde ders materyali, somut örnek ve öğrenci yaşantılarıyla bağlantı kurma durumlarında sorun yaşadıklarında belli ölçülerde popüler kültür ürünlerine başvurabilirler. Derse alıştırma ve ev ödevlerini yapmaları için de öğrencilere başlangıç noktası olarak bu ürünlerden yararlanmaları önerilebilir. Popüler kültürün alt öğeleri olan diziler, çizgi filmler veya diğer filmler gibi ürünlerin derse adapte edilmesi yüksek kültüre hizmet edebilir. Burada önemli olan öğretmenin olayı ders ve öğretim bağlamında görmesi ve öğrencileri buraya yönlendirmesidir. Araştırmada ortaya çıkan en ilginç sonuçlardan birisi öğretmenlerin popüler kültüre tedirgin yaklaşımları buna karşılık derste kullanmış olmalarıdır. Bazen yöntemlerde bazen de içerikte popüler kültür ürünlerinden etkilenmiş olmaları da dikkate değerdir. Öğretmenin öğrencileri daha iyi motive etmesi, dersi ilgi çekici hale getirebilmesi ve iyi bir başlangıç yapıp, ilgiyi sürekli tutabilmesi için popüler kültürden yararlanması öğretimin niteliğini artırabilir. Ayrıca öğrencilerin somuttan soyuta gidebilmeleri konusunda da popüler kültür ürünlerinin derse adaptasyonu yararlı olabilir. İlköğretim öğretmenleriyle yapılan bu araştırmanın ders kitapları, öğretim programları ve daha üst sınıflarda görev yapan öğretmenlerle de yapılması alan yazına yenilikler getirebilir.

### Introduction

Popular culture has begun to link generations more broadly than 'high' culture has ever been able. Nonetheless, there are a variety of arguments against studying popular culture and some make the criticism that popular culture either lacks quality or that it is usually created by people who know little about it and who are not able to discern the quality of its artifacts. Many studies pertaining to popular culture in education directly address the role of students' popular culture (Berube, 1999, p. 12-13) despite the fact that it is not easy to clearly define this phenomenon. For the purpose of this study, popular culture will be defined as media and the consumer content of popular music, sports, computers, television shows and series, films, games and other habits that occupy youth's time and interests (Marsh and Millard, 2000, Javari, 2001, p. 382). The use of popular culture in educational settings may help to 'capture' the interests of children, thus enabling teachers to effectively introduce texts that are part of the curriculum and that can 'empower' readers, despite the initial reluctance of teachers to use such agents of popular culture. Indeed, it has been suggested that the contents of popular culture evoke pleasure in children and influence their instructional skills (Lambirth. 2003, p, 9-14). Children seem to delight in what their parents find offensive: much of popular media and consumer content exploits this very notion. Different studies have shown how popular culture, media and consumer content, by directly appealing to children's subversive instincts and tastes, have effectively constructed a youth audience, which can be defined as being in opposition to that of adult carers. For instance, Gee notes that "videos could reveal patterns of, and provide useful strategies for, learning. He urges that videos and quality popular magazines be used to enhance the key processes of learning and thinking. Children could be actively involved in learning thanks to popular culture, as knowledge is fundamentally embedded in the 'material, social and cultural world.' Furthermore, the products of popular culture may serve to maximize students' capacity to transfer abilities from related, known concepts to new ones. Further still, children may have the opportunity to go beyond

language and utilize visual symbols, images and other interactive designs to improve learning modalities to communicate meaning (Gee, 2003, p. 48-49).

Despite this great potential for educational exploitation, teachers have varying opinions as to the effects of popular culture - as opposed to high culture - on each part of the education system, namely the students, the curricula, the classrooms and so forth. The term "popular culture" seems to arouse a problem because of its connotations. Popular culture lives today, as well as in the past and in the social, economical and ideological conditions of its creation, involving every sphere of life. Popular culture is most emphatically not 'high culture', which refers to those aspects of culture which are most highly valued and esteemed by a given society's political, social, economic, and intellectual elite. Therein lies popular culture's dilemma. Regardless of these widely held opinions, it should be noted that culture and commerce provide certain concrete outcomes for both the educational process and popular culture, which coexist and cooperate with each other (Hong Xu, 2001, p.729-730). A claim often made by those against the infiltration of popular culture is that it does not allow students to have imagination (but to live in an imaginative world created by popular culture) and they cannot think abstractly due to the very concreteness of popular culture. On the other hand, it has been pointed out that teachers are afforded the opportunity to slant towards the intellect of students through popular culture media (Hofstadter, 1987, p. 512).

"The studies [on] usage of popular culture indicate that the teachers who did not wish to use popular culture in their classrooms share similar traditional conceptions of literacy with many of those who advocate the use of popular texts in the classroom. The teachers saw the use of popular culture items in opposition to the aims and objectives they felt were their responsibility to teach" (Lambirth 2003, p.12). They nevertheless highlighted the success of 'incorporating' children's interests in the items of popular culture texts for better learning and motivation in the primary classroom (Marsh and Millard, 2000, Dyson, 2001, Bromley, 2002). Dyson's research with young children draws attention to the "social and ideological processes underpinning children's use of media symbols - especially the superhero - as material for constructing textual and social worlds" (1997, p 3). The study explores the ways in which young children draw on popular culture as resources for both for 'learning to compose and learning to be a community participant' for mediating their relationships with others (Dyson, 1997, p. 2-3).

At the Birmingham School, the first generation scholars R.Williams, R. Hoggart and E.P.Thompson, focused specifically on popular culture. It was Stuart Hall, however, who first defined popular culture in academic life, although they all incorporated a broader understanding of what the term 'culture' means into their work. Hoggart chose to focus his attention on magazines and the people who read them, noting that the creation of a mass culture were approaching. Williams, meanwhile, sought to define what the term 'culture' had meant for the past two centuries within the context of industry, democracy, and the arts. He concluded that culture was undergoing a revolutionary change in meaning due to changes in technology. Williams stated that mass communication had come to dominate the way in which people communicate and see the world (Weaver, 2005, 28). Williams further described culture as a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning, but also in institutions and ordinary behavior.

If educational fields of knowledge are to remain relevant, it is imperative that more scholars start to take into consideration the impact of popular culture on the learning of students and teachers. It is important for teacher development to recognize the importance of popular culture for greater classroom success. In order to achieve this aim, teachers must consider going beyond the superficial issues relating to popular culture, as popular culture is evidently a great deal more sophisticated in its ability to teach young people and adults. In order to enhance classroom activities and thus the quality of teaching, an educational approach to popular culture might develop pedagogy that utilizes the power of pop culture. Popular culture serves as a forum for raising issues that are commonly of concern for students. Therefore, the adoption and adaptation of popular culture into daily school activities may change educational practices.

Teachers must come to realize the importance of popular culture in their educational activities and understand how these iconic images influence students' thinking. During teaching, teachers develop their expertise, competence and practical knowledge, which are to a great extent, implicit and experiential, so as to meet the expectations of their students (Ornstein, 2000, p. 15-17). Teachers collect impressions and tacit knowledge about their activities. Teachers not only teach history or biology for example, but also acquire a rich range of experiences of the various types of students, styles of teaching and ways of studying in lessons (Lacey, 1977, Ball and Goodson, 1985; Zeichner and Gore, 1990). There are some studies in Turkey however the studies that address usage of popular culture in education are very few. For instance Özkan (2006) discuss the terms of the high culture and popular culture theoretically. Solmaz (2009) points out the effect of popular culture on music education and founded that the new popular trends shape the music preferences of children. Öztürk and Bıkmaz (2007) in their study determined the state of popular culture tendencies among the children and founded that popular culture shape the educational, social and cultural and even future professional life of children. Kan (2011) studied the use of popular culture in social studies lessons and founded that teachers place the theme of popular culture in lessons consciously. These are the main studies on popular culture and education in Turkey, however there is vast studies that elicit popular culture in theoretically and practically.

Different components such as methods, new technologies, new teaching strategies, may influence the interests and motivation of students. One of the most important agents is popular culture, which is increasingly evident and may be delivered in different forms. The different representations of popular culture impact on teaching styles, tendencies, and the organization of educational activities, emphasizing the personal and affective nature of their teaching experiences while also restructuring the nature of their teaching (Calderhead and Shorrock, 1997, p. 86-92). Research on students' interaction with popular culture and its relationship to literacy practices suggests that students demonstrate a broad spectrum of literacy skills as a result of these interactions with popular culture. For example, students could develop certain abilities while reading popular books and publications, or watching TV programs and movies. There are relatively few studies, however, that pay attention to the need for preparing teachers how to integrate students' popular culture into their future lessons. Nevertheless, popular culture has an impact on the teaching activities and the practice and training of teaching staff themselves (Scapp, 1993, p. 291). That said, it should be noted that popular culture also operates in young people's lives in context-specific ways that often cannot be reproduced in the context of the school (Jabari, 2001, p. 384-385).

Some studies suggest using popular films to teach students to think critically. Weber, for example, claims that students could develop analytical skills through using popular films (such as *Lord of the Flies*) (Weber, 2001, p. 281). It should, clearly, not be forgotten that popular films or the products of popular culture described here do not in themselves answer the question of how to teach students better. One suggestion might be for the characters to be incorporated into the interactions of the children, allowing teachers to participate in the students evolving a play-world culture (Duff, 2002, p. 483). As children take the characters of popular culture and stories into school as part of their background knowledge and cultural repertoire, teachers can use this actuality for a variety of educational goals. The references to popular culture in instances like this provide connections to the contemporary cultural worlds of students and, more subversively perhaps, enable students to prolong and provoke discussion and forestall their return to potentially less engaging lessons such as history or science. Thus, the infusion of popular culture into the classroom is becoming extremely commonplace (Dimitriatis and Mccharty, 1999, p. 125-126).

A great deal of learning is concerned with reconciling and relating different ways of knowing about the same thing, until such time as an individual has developed a comprehensive and, on occasion, deep understanding of a given concept. Students thus construct knowledge by reaching conclusions through having regarded the same phenomenon from different perspectives. Learning through popular culture is not the same as learning from a book or learning from a conventional lesson. These activities are all different forms of learning, and each result in a slightly different way of knowing about something. Deep understanding comes about, therefore, when all

forms of knowing are internally reconciled and integrated by the learner. In fact, to attain deep understanding students often need to learn about the same concept in a variety of ways. For example, reading the script of a play, seeing it performed on a stage, and seeing it produced as a television program or film all add something new to their understanding or appreciation of that play. The more ways we can learn about a subject or topic, the more deeply we are likely to understand. Hence, one immediate advantage to the usage of popular culture and its agents is that they allow us to represent the world in different, additional ways. This study will address the question what extend the teachers use popular culture in teaching and are aware the popular trends of students and reflect them student's experiences?

#### *Significance of the study*

This article elicits the use of popular culture by teachers for teaching and learning in classroom. Teacher are not aware the power of popular culture in children's life. This study may help teachers to have a deeper understanding how to incorporate popular culture's components in classroom and to be aware of tendencies that are popular among the children. This article addresses to make teachers conscious on the popular culture of children and what extend the popular culture affect teaching in the classroom. The study will contribute the learning of students if teachers' know their interests and motivations. The study will open new study areas for both academics in teacher education and researchers.

#### *Description and the study*

There is an increasing need for schools and teachers to support students in making sense of, and surviving in, unstable and unpredictable environments, and for learning institutions to provide opportunities for teachers to replenish their skills, competencies and educational activities. For this study, [1] the influence of popular culture on the habits and behaviors of teachers was investigated and [2] the limits and possibilities of popular culture in teaching were analyzed. [3] This study also focused on the lesson plans and activities used in classrooms. An expected outcome of this study was to provide teachers with ideas on how to make enhanced, logical connections between real-life situations and educational settings surrounding the children being taught, as well as the teachers. Some questions guided the researchers to specifically identify the influences of popular culture on teaching practices and teaching practices.

#### *Method*

As stated, the aims of this qualitative study were to investigate implicit and explicit uses of popular culture in teaching. Turkey has a strong centralized structure of elementary and secondary education. All schools represented teach common curriculum: all of the schools have a centralized curriculum developed by the Ministry of National Education, the implementation of which is required throughout the country. Firstly, therefore, it was necessary to examine the daily teaching practices and views of teachers on popular culture within this structure. The participants were thirty-two teachers of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades from four different elementary schools in Ankara, Turkey. Twelve of the teachers were males and twenty were females, all between the ages of twenty-five and forty-two. All of the participants were experienced, having been teaching for approximately ten years (apart from four teachers who were less experienced less than 5 years). The possible influences of popular culture on methods, content, examples, drills, assessment schemes and reading lists in daily teaching activities were analyzed for the collection of data.

Questions relating to the impacts of popular culture on teaching were identified by scholars working in the field, teachers and other educational experts. Additionally, all of the teachers wrote about their ideas and gave descriptions relating to the impacts of popular culture on classroom activities on the reverse side of the questionnaire forms. During the data collection process, the researcher also engaged in informal conversation with the participants on the subject of popular culture. The researcher discussed with teachers who had submitted assignments the issue of feeling apprehension in the use of popular culture in lesson plans and teaching activities in the classroom. The main points raised were to determine what the teachers were doing with regards to the following:

1. To find out what teachers do know about popular culture and how they feel about it.
2. To determine the extent to which teachers can recall the outcomes of using the items of popular culture in teaching contexts.
3. To explain the usage of the elements of popular culture such as games, TV series, comic books and popular music in their teaching practices.
4. To what extent teachers prefer to integrate popular culture's games, comic books, and etc. into instruction and, what sort of activities they choose (namely, how they organize reading, writing, discussing, etc)

The researcher also conducted semi-structured interviews face to face with the teachers and discussed their daily teaching practices in the schools of teachers after finish of lessons. Teachers have answered the semi structured forms and researcher and his assistant followed the lessons and crossed a checklist about the teaching habits and use of popular culture elements. There was no recording as the teachers did not approve. The outcomes of the interviews were quantitatively analyzed in order to offer a more detailed explanation as to the impact of popular culture. In the interview, the teachers were asked to express their ideas about popular culture and to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses as teachers. Some notes were taken in order to characterize and classify the reflections of popular culture in the language used by teachers during the interview.

#### *Data Analyses*

For data analysis "memoing" approach has been used. During the process of data collection researchers took some reflective notes and write memos. The researchers transcribed their data by typing into word processing documents. For coding and developing categories the notes, memos and observations and transcribed data have been checked and red by researchers and have been divided into segments that were given below. The segments are also the headings of the findings. The responses and analyses have been reduced into inductive categories such as educational objectives, teaching methods, content, drills, homework activities and reading lists.

The research indicated that teachers, in general, are reluctant to use popular culture in their teaching and learning practices. The problems lie heavily within the lack of available resources and the already heavy workload of the teachers. However, teachers indicated that they might approach the products of popular culture, however, as a backdrop for teaching different age groups, with an increased awareness of gender issues and the effects of stereotyping on students' lives. Teachers also indicated an awareness of a need to use creative teaching strategies to provide opportunities for students at all educational levels to expand and enhance their instructional skills.

The informal interviews and discussions with teachers and data sources from popular culture functioned to improve the validity and reliability of the study. All the data, with the exception of the interviews, was collected from natural settings, either as an integral part of the participants' teaching activities or through the essays analyzed in this study. Thus, this had the purpose of promoting the teachers' reflective processes and making them conscious of their beliefs relating to popular culture. Although the essays analyzed here were part of the coursework, they may still be regarded as relevant

sources of teacher thinking, and also as flexible and natural methods of enabling the whole group of thirty-two teachers to reflect intensively, on repeated occasions, on the issues related to the teachers' ideas, beliefs and knowledge related to popular culture. There was the risk of getting artificial responses that do not correspond to the teachers' actual attitudes or their actions, which had to be taken into account in the interpretation of the data. In order to elicit genuine responses a list of points was given to the teachers. This list was compiled based on the points made by teachers with regard to what they considered to be the components of popular culture. Then, the frequency of occurrence of the elements of popular culture found in the lesson plans and classroom activities were reviewed. The headings were selected to enable an assessment of the influences of popular culture on classroom activities and lesson plans. The headings in the lesson plans were as follows:

1. Objectives,
2. Methods,
3. Content,
4. Drills,
5. Homework activities and reading lists.

Firstly, those methods that may not be convenient to the school setting were assessed, namely active learning, student centered learning, creative drama, and use of popular media in lessons.

The analysis of the essays and interviews was qualitative, emphasizing the common patterns and recurring themes expressed by the participants. Each set of essays was analyzed separately. The notes on the use of popular media sources for the enhancement lessons, stimulating the interests of students towards lessons (teacher behaviors that are conveyed from movies or other sources) and bestsellers, movies and popular items reflected what occurred in the teaching process. Examples chosen in daily plans were also initially analyzed. Subsequently, the outcomes of popular culture in lesson plans were also considered, together with homework activities and reading lists. In some cases, the data included interesting contradictions within the essays, as some of the interviewees were rather outspoken in their responses.

## Results

### *What do teachers know about popular culture and how do they feel about it?*

The essays analyzed for this study indicate that for most of the teachers, popular culture was a domain that they encountered both within schools and out of school on a largely subconscious level. The popular culture assignment enabled the teachers to become more aware of their own experiences with popular culture. One teacher's<sup>3</sup> realization was particularly representative of all the participants' view of their own popular culture:

'I used to think that only teenagers and young children experience popular culture. Now I realize that I also have such an experience. It is just a case of recognizing different types of popular culture and how often I experience it.'

Almost all of the respondents pointed out that they were not openly conscious of the impact of popular culture on teaching. Furthermore, the majority of teachers were reluctant to use popular culture, due to the very fact that it was popular and stood contrary to high or elite culture. One common belief was represented in the following statement:

"I do not specify what popular culture is exactly. I am not so interested in popular culture and its influences on teaching. I do not prefer to use popular culture; however, all of my students

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<sup>3</sup> For giving the citations from participants here used a general statement like one of the teachers or one of the participants in the same meaning as the teachers asked us not give any pseudonym name as well.



give examples and ideas from it.... It fuses into high culture and school culture, therefore I think that I have to read and analyze the products of popular culture since I want to be an effective teacher... When I conduct drills and group discussions to consolidate topics, I recognize that students give examples from film series, magazines, comics and they do remember them very well... they discuss the same thing at the same time without my direction. It is very surprising for me, because I do not tell them to read or to watch the films and so forth; however, everybody is willing to speak about them... so, I will attempt to learn their culture..."

This demonstrates the fact that teaching entails a great deal of mental and physical effort. In order to be a good teacher, one perhaps needs to take pedagogical risks to try new approaches and explore different methods for interacting content.

*To what extent can teachers recall the outcomes of using popular culture (films, best sellers, books, fictions and so forth) relating to teaching?*

Teachers explained that they were influenced by fashionable, trendy themes found within popular media in their teaching, which occasionally led to changes in their educational practice. In other words, popular culture at least partly determines the changes in the accepted norms of the teaching profession. Although there is an educational channel (Open Learning) on TV in Turkey, teachers pointed out that they preferred regular TV series and films to the programs on this channel. One of the teachers clarified the reason as follows:

'I know 'the Open Learning channel' very well but it is boring and dull. There are good programs for teachers, but they do not contain instructional essence and interaction. That is, there is no communication. There is only a teacher who is giving a lecture. There is no interaction and it is hard to follow every detail. However, in TV series or in movies you get an image of the stories instantly. Even when the content is thought to be uninteresting, the format, especially the image style, makes films and series seem readily accessible, as suggested by the following response: ['Pictures make it easy to watch attractive although boring content']

Moreover, participants intimated that popular culture might sometimes be useful for improving the quality of instruction. Another important point raised was that teachers had a clearer understanding of their own (sometimes subconscious) use of popular culture. Popular culture, with its attractiveness and visual dimensions, may serve to better connect school to real life. It may also provide opportunities for students to understand abstract concepts. Indeed, using daily routines similar to those experienced by the students was found to be apposite by many teachers. As one of the teachers pointed out:

"[We] Teachers also dismiss some popular books and comics because we think reading them is unproductive. However, we accept that popular readings make difficult concepts understandable through colors, pictures and so on..."

Moreover, the format - the limited amount of text combined with many illustrations - seems to be more accessible than the solid texts of books, as shown in the following teacher's response:

"You do not have to read lots of sentences. You don't have to think about anything when you read comics and other popular books, either..."

There are evidently a variety of ways of using popular culture in the classroom. Rather than simply banning or forswearing these resources, teachers may wish to explore the kinds of texts being read and the series being watched by their students, and also how readers and /or viewers actively engage with these books, films and other resources. Students may become better critical readers if teachers equip them with the necessary skills with which to understand the variety of messages that popular culture can symbolize. This approach would undoubtedly be more effective than forbidding

students from reading these types of books and magazines. Nevertheless, the use of popular culture used in the classroom does need to be carefully handled.

*Do teachers use the components or elements of popular culture in classroom?*

A commonly held belief among teachers is that the most important thing is not knowing the subject, but effectively transmitting the knowledge. Therefore, they themselves need to become passionate about their learning. Teachers therefore need to move beyond mere techniques to get in touch with the fundamental essence of their students. Teachers should engage students in content that requires changing their instructional routines in order to motivate these students. Given such a context, teachers stated that they sometimes had inklings as to the impact and extent of popular culture on teaching activities but not in a real, concrete sense. They pointed out that they did not have enough information on the popular culture of the students and added that if they were at all versed in the products of popular culture, it was because their own children were generally informing them. It was interesting that the teachers who had children older than eleven years of age did not show the same attitude towards the popular culture of their students (of the same age and older) as they did with the popular culture of their own children, albeit often the same. Therefore, their choice of homework included fiction such as *Harry Potter* rather than extending to cartoons such as *Pokémon* or even *Sesame Street*. The teachers also underlined the importance of movies and other media in popularizing classroom activities. One of the participants noted:

“Students could improve their reading, writing, discussing and various learning skills, and they often might develop critical analytical skills simply by using the products of popular culture (visual culture especially), since students require more concrete questions than abstract ones...”

Certain forms of popular culture might in themselves be pedagogical. Therefore, the practices of popular culture could present significant outcomes for learning. Another teacher noted the perceptions of students on facilities of popular culture as follows:

“The characters capture the imaginations of the pupils and have become important fictional figures in their lives, discussions, and role-playing, and suddenly have created an entire landscape for students perceiving the world around them.”

The cultural environments within which children live are channeled into a number of sporting or other cultural activities, of which particular forms of popular culture can be among the most pervasive and significant. Students may reflect more clearly upon the issues that have a significant effect upon our daily lives through utilizing the psychological ‘distance’ afforded by popular culture. Popular culture is both a social and a communal experience, but is also clearly more fluid and participatory in its nature than most forms of curriculum.

*4. Do the components of popular culture have any effect on the behaviors of teachers in the classroom setting?*

Popular culture shapes not only the everyday experiences of the students and the teachers, but also their attitudes to teaching and learning. The day to day lives of students are, in part, encompassed by their affective investments in popular culture. This implies that teachers should endeavor to make popular culture a legitimate source of school knowledge, so as to deepen the relationship between education and daily life, while embracing popular culture as a basis for critical analysis, as it clearly goes some way to classifying student identities, experiences and cultures.

Almost all of the teachers agreed with the notion of placing importance on learning about popular culture as a method for improving teaching in the form of an educational tool. Consequently, audio-visual examples accounted for a large part of their lessons. These results indicate that the popular culture of students does have an impact on the methods, activities and the teaching processes within lesson plans. However, teachers do not favor computer games and computer-based titles for any of their educational activities. Teachers also made note of the fact that they would consider using

popular culture, provided they could attain positive outcomes. Moreover, the participants stated that being aware of the popular culture in student experiences involves not simply acknowledging that experience but also working with, and on, that experience. In this sense, popular culture may also be used as a tool for developing relationships between subjects.

The teachers in the study recognized that the popular culture in question mainly consisted of TV shows, music and magazines. Additionally, many further layers of popular culture existed due to the individuals' specific cultural and life experiences. In other words, popular culture also reflects their multiple identities within the roles of teacher, parent, spouse, and friend. The following exemplifies the remarks of some teachers:

“The image of my popular culture is very different. I like to watch TV series, shows or movies but the students spend a great time watching cartoons and using the computer and they often use technology more efficiently than I do. All of these pushed me to be interested in popular culture and integrating it into my lessons.”

A final noteworthy aspect of student popular culture is its partial similarity to teacher popular culture. One of the teacher's observations succinctly summarized the views of many:

“Although I was not aware of all the aspects of student popular culture, I noticed that we really had more things in common than I had thought. I need to take their popular culture into account ...”

The recognition of similarity in popular culture enabled the teachers to perceive student popular culture from a positive perspective. Most teachers also approved of the fact that their students, just like themselves, did utilize many literacy skills during their interactions with popular culture, although the students may not have been fully aware that they were doing this. As many of the teachers observed:

“We are responsible for helping our students become conscious of these literacy skills and of showing them ways to transfer these skills to every subject at school...”

Most of the teachers focused on the numerous literacy and drill skills that are fused together within popular culture while preparing their lesson plans. In their lesson plans, they mentioned using popular culture (TV series, movies, books) in homework as reinforcing activities. They pointed out that while these activities were very ordinary for the students, they also supported the aims of lessons. This was consistent with the findings of Barker (1989), who found, in his study of comics in Britain, that part of the enjoyment of reading popular books was due to the fact that it was not encouraged in school and could be a way of resisting the power of teachers and school in general. A reason for caution is that not all students like reading popular books and that they may therefore resent the time spent on these texts in the classroom. The use of popular books in the classroom may require more care than the use of traditional genres. One of the participants suggests the following approach:

“The products (of popular culture) also directly influence the teaching and the methods used therein. Students usually find textbooks too traditional, boring and disillusioning; therefore, I try to find other ways to teach effectively. The products of popular cultures and popular books, such as *Harry Potter*, are often dominant in the teaching-learning process. Whenever I try to give homework, I suggest the books, magazines and so forth to be used. When you asked me about my knowledge on popular culture, I realized that I only had insight into my own habits. I am even against using TV series, movies and other elements of popular culture, and I did not realize that they could be used as educational materials for my lessons.”

These challenges illustrate the fact that the products of popular culture can draw teachers' attention to the power of effective teaching and qualitative instruction. Indeed, a number of popular films, series and books may effectively represent the real lives of teachers and their teaching activities. The products of popular culture offer a powerful lesson on the nature of classroom activities. Teachers are able to see a shift in how the students view instruction and learn more easily through the end

products of popular culture. Many teachers were inclined to think, "I am sure I could do better" after utilizing such end products. Teachers also have the opportunity to adjust their distinctive teaching attitudes.

"The uses of items from popular culture can contribute to teaching in different ways. Children can read the text easily from these items. For starting problem solving and discussing the common themes among the children, these were useful as all the children had almost the same background. Drawing conclusions, discussing and mediating based on the items of popular culture affected the lessons. If such lessons were adopted and supported in schools, the need for frameworks and support for teachers in developing and implementing curricula organized around technology and digital literacies is clear, in terms of working and playing with texts".

The teachers were appreciably surprised by the students' abilities to discriminate between what was acceptable as popular culture for school learning from what was not. The teachers even allowed their students to suggest activities appropriate for the lesson. As one teacher stated:

"I just provided my students with the objectives of the lesson, and they came up with the activities that can address these objectives..."

In some descriptions, it is possible to observe signs of conceptual change, and some of the teachers did stress the necessity of changing their own frame of reference, noting that, although they were aware of the role of popular culture, they felt they needed to adopt the students' way of thinking,

"If you do act as an adult, unaware of student's aspirations, you cannot be a good and efficient teacher. You should try to move over to the students' side. It would enhance your pedagogical world view..."

It was somewhat confusing for teachers to discover that the new element in their thinking was in fact that they had begun to see the world through their students' eyes, while still attempting to filter harmful knowledge out of teaching and pedagogical knowledge. As one teacher pointed out it,

"I believe that the development of my teaching style has started. I cannot even watch television or follow the other constructs of popular culture without thinking of how I could use them when teaching history, social studies or science. When I read magazines, newspapers or science fiction, I start to wonder whether I could clip and save the item for later use..."

There has never been such a cultural saturation of popular culture in Turkish society as there is today. Live shows, soap operas, hospital and historical dramas, thrillers, police dramas, sitcoms, science fiction and cartoons, all these constitute the central hub of popular culture which are intended to attract and maintain audience figures counted in millions. There is now a huge market for films, whether on television, video, or in the cinema. News and documentaries often use visually aesthetic formats to present factual information, while advertisements use highly efficient techniques to influence every aspect of popular life. As individuals, we may naturally differ in our tastes and preferences, and, consequently, in what we choose to watch, but there is little doubt that a majority of students receive the majority of their knowledge and information through the various forms of popular culture. The reason why so many teachers feel that they do not understand popular culture, or feel that any understanding they do have is merely partial and confused, is because much of this undervaluation of their level of understanding is tacit; that is to say they acquire it without learning how to articulate it. We have experienced, in our wider cultural surroundings, that an appreciation of the connections between the two will aid those teachers who do not have sufficient experience with popular culture to gain the confidence to continue teaching popular culture as part of their curriculum.

The teachers selected topics from popular culture (supernovas, wars, international relations, space, etc) to integrate into their lessons, and this was used as a criterion for evaluating their lesson planning. They also made clear the fact that they preferred popular activities that were accepted as useful for the students . Teachers gave homework including tasks such as watching a particular television series or movie in order to support their lessons, but they also addressed the unexpected outcomes of this activity. One of the teachers expresses,

“It is interesting to note that, given the connections we make between the lessons in the classroom and the wider cultural manifestation, how significant such spaces are in soap operas and other television series: cafes, laundrettes, pubs all serve as locations where members of the community can meet and talk about their own lives. As a primary school teacher, you may well try to use the potential of the end products of popular culture, but you will run into two related problems. The first is that the initial excitement of setting up the situation in the popular theme seems to wane quickly; the space becomes little used and you can be disappointed by the quality of the activity that takes place there. The second problem may appear in the activities that the children memorize and repeat, even though all of these may result in enhancing childlike creativity...”

These confirm to us that popular culture is important for children. Teachers are, nevertheless, required to account for and manage children’s learning with clear objectives and outcomes. Popular culture is therefore a central reality for teachers. It has a place of its own, even in lesson plans and teaching, and has even become a part of the lesson. Teachers have noticeably added components of popular culture to their lesson plans, in the formats of printed or non-printed texts or audiovisual images, whether explicitly or implicitly. As one teacher explains,

“Teachers need to be clear about the learning objectives and expected outcomes that they have planned for the children. Working with a nationally prescribed curriculum, you may be given very specific skills, knowledge and understandings, which you are expected to develop over a specified period of time. Incorporating the popular culture of students, in terms of their experiences, can be an important way in which you might give learning a living, human context for students, making it exciting and relevant. However, you have to be quite clear about your purposes and you need some means of showing that your intentions are being met... Each context would suggest an idea for how the products of popular culture may be adapted into the lessons...”

Once the decision has been made regarding which popular culture artifacts are to be used for a specific subject or topic, the more detailed planning is to be undertaken for the purpose of focusing on the requirements of the existing curriculum, as well as protecting the students against any unexpected and unwanted outcomes of using popular culture. In such a situation, teachers have to find suitable ways to develop their teaching practices and their students’ learning styles. Comments about skill performance and ways to improve are inevitable, because they enable students both to make generalisations and to better understand the lessons. The aim here must be to get the students interested in the lessons and then to ensure that they participate in the activities in the classroom. The changes in the methods and approaches used in the classroom, through the utilisation of popular culture, enable teachers to change their instructional activities and to help students focus and renew their interest.

#### Discussion

Turkish teachers’ reactions to popular culture are generally the same as in the west. Both teachers and academics demarcate between what is considered proper culture and popular culture. As far as the Turkish intelligentsia is concerned, popular culture is associated with the distortion of proper culture. Popular culture is thus recognized as consisting of cheap and temporary trends that are discontinued within a short period of time. Furthermore, popular culture is widely regarded as

being for laypersons, unlike the so-called high culture. High culture cultivates and fosters people whereas popular culture merely entertains the masses. The broadcasting industry in Turkey can be said to have established the main components of popular culture. There has been a strong, not always positive, impact of popular culture, both on society in general and students in particular. Teachers are aware of this actuality; therefore they feel somewhat reluctant to use it for educational purposes.

There are some risks about using the popular culture in the classroom therefore teachers should be aware of these risks. For instance the usage of popular culture widely in teaching can cause a dispute that addresses the undermining the high culture and unexpected results of popular culture. The other risk is that children get involve more in popular culture's elements and can have bad habits as well thus teachers should be very selective and cautious.

Popular culture lives today, as well as in the past and in the social, economical and ideological conditions of its creation, involving every sphere of life. Popular culture is most emphatically not 'high culture', which refers to those aspects of culture which are most highly valued and esteemed by a given society's political, social, economic, and intellectual elite. Therein lies popular culture's dilemma.

In the past, teachers hardly spoke of popular culture: They were uneasy about touching upon the subject due to its populist connotations and its perceived negative influences on teaching. They hesitated when trying to deal with popular culture and were, to a certain extent, tentative. It is commonly known that preparing lesson plans takes time. It entails great effort in terms of determining how best to reach out to the students. An average teaching day lasts for at least six or seven hours and entails coping with many activities and educational processes, all of which aim to ensure that the objectives set are accomplished by the students. Teachers consequently need to utilize many different approaches and activities in order to reach their objectives. The most difficult challenge for teachers is grasping the levels of the specific students and stimulating their interests. Some of the most hardworking teachers are thoughtful, passionate and keen on attaining a high standard of quality in their teaching. They always search for the best way to educate children and use their background knowledge extensively to contribute to the growth of their students while making use of the real artifacts, concepts and events from life outside the classroom. A great proportion of popular culture output serves to stimulate such teachers.

The teachers recognized that popular culture is already in some way integrated into their lessons subconsciously, and they observed that the influence of popular culture was stronger than they had expected. Teachers also noticed that popular culture was interwoven into their professional culture and that TV series, movies, and other works of fiction had, inevitably, played a defining role in lesson planning because it so effectively engaged the students.

All students are able to read from the same script without needing any preparation or background knowledge on the themes often found in popular culture. Therefore, the teacher must also be party to this experience in order to deal with particular functions, to shape the useable elements of popular culture within the lines of curricular aims. Teachers have to develop the confidence and expertise, while considering the needs of students, and combine these with a tacit understanding of popular culture, in order to fashion this new aspect into meaningful, educational experiences that match the demands of the primary school curriculum. The teachers pointed out that they used popular culture in order to find effective methods of ensuring student participation in the learning process. In short, teachers use popular culture as a means for interacting with their students in an enhanced way. Teachers seek to foster a learner-centered classroom through the use of popular culture. By using popular culture in teaching activities, they hope to get in touch with the students perspective of reality and to thus develop practices that may be effective in the classroom. All of these lead to success by enhancing the teacher's planning time and the planning process itself. Teachers primarily seek to use popular culture to steer students toward a richer understanding of ideas and try to find new approaches and explore different ways of communicating the content to the students through this resource. Indeed, many teachers make use of commercialized learning products in order to take care of their students.

Teachers need to consider the learning needs of students in order to create suitable environments; environments that respond not only to the needs of the students but also allow for a dynamic classroom. To convey content, teachers have to become passionate about teaching and about the learning of students: this necessitates moving beyond the conventional techniques, contents and media and branching out to embrace different ideas. Using the products of popular culture, teachers may enable students to learn how to learn and to construct their own knowledge. Teachers should therefore explore ways of fostering teaching so as to capture the different dynamics of the teaching and learning process.

There are a great number of wide-ranging effects of popular culture in teaching. Some of these represent scenes and factual events from real life, while others are fictionalized depictions of idyllic characters or subjects. The products of popular culture contain an array of complexities that might stir up a variety of emotional responses in teaching. Therefore, teachers do not tend to use popular culture in teaching settings, due to the very fact that it is seen as popular, and this has the potential to resonate negatively. Both teachers and students have useful insights into many subject areas from their interaction with popular culture, insights that could produce a powerful lesson related to the given subjects. Since a friendly and affable atmosphere could be established for the students, even those teachers who are against popular culture are more inclined to consider using popular culture after having seen a film or read a particular book. In this way, they can easily interact with their students, and also feel closer to the students' culture. Using popular culture may thus provide a means for teachers to actively engage with their students.

A passionate and well trained teacher is able to perceive the benefits of using popular culture to enhance their teaching. Teachers can supplement their pedagogical knowledge, skills and practices by observing and utilizing a variety of different methods of teaching. Classroom activities are largely carried out using different forms of interaction between students and teachers. The form of interaction employed is dependent on many factors, such as the use of new technology or the adoption of new approaches among many others. Such factors serve to form the behaviors and teaching styles of teachers. What is required of teachers is to be both restrained and sparing in how they convey their knowledge in a classroom, since students generally suppose that the teacher knows everything. Passionate teachers always fight to keep students active in the classroom, because teaching is not only concerned with providing information, but also linking the facts with the real culture of the students, as well as regulating interactions. Although the teaching-learning process is customarily associated with the formal curriculum and its aims and objectives, the non-formal curriculum and its interrelated factors operate as a silent force which both influences the teaching process and affects teachers' relationships with their students. Effective teachers always look for the best means of communication in order to determine whether the students have learned effectively or not. All of the factors underlined here should serve to enhance the passions of teachers who endeavor to convey knowledge and go beyond the visible manifestation of popular culture. In delving the real depths of subject areas and ideas, they attempt to make real-life classrooms possible, using the world of popular culture. Those teachers who understand that students vary, who have different cultural expectations, and who adapt the most useful methods and content according to their situation will have the most positive influences on students and will be able to attain the intended learning outcomes from them. Objects of popular culture can be used in teaching in a diverse ways. The primary usage may be in reading opportunities, not to mention writing, problem solving, drawing conclusions and discussing and mediating. If such lessons are adopted and supported in schools, the need for frameworks and support for teachers in developing and implementing curricula organized around technology and digital literacy is clear, in terms of working and playing with texts, and in the practice of new and different literacy such as media literacy, the sciences and history to name but a few. Regarding the lack of enough studies of popular culture on teaching it is recommended here to make some longitudinal studies for determining the changing trends parallel to development of children and preferences of secondary education teachers.

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