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Inclusion of newspapers in social studies for gifted students: A phenomenological study

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ABSTRACT

This study examines pre-service teachers' views and experiences using newspapers in Social Studies lesson plans for gifted students. The research was conducted in the college of education at a large Western university in Turkey. The participants in the study were pre-service teachers from the Department of Gifted Education, who will become classroom teachers and expected to be teaching both life studies and Social Studies. The study is a phenomenological qualitative investigation based on pre-service teachers' views and experiences with the use of newspapers in Social Studies lesson plans. Pre-service teachers developed lesson plans that included the use of newspapers as a teaching tool in accordance with the course topic and content in the undergraduate course called Life Study and Social Studies for Gifted Students. Then, they presented their lesson plans as a way to practice receiving feedback from their classmates and shaping their lesson plans into a final form. Thirty-eight pre-service teachers (30 female and 8 male) participated in the study voluntarily. Written open-ended interviews were used to elicit data. Data were analyzed inductively, and emergent themes were shaped. The findings revealed that pre-service teachers indicated positive experiences and changed their views on the use of newspapers in their Social Studies lesson plans for gifted students.

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Keywords:
Social Studies Education, Using newspapers, gifted education, teacher education.

Introduction

Newspapers have long discussed as a valuable teaching tool in education (DeRoche, 1981, Rhoades &Rhoades, 1985, Wood & Nicholson, 2005, Vaughan, Sumrall, & Rose, 1998, Jarman, & McClune, 2002). Considering as a part of important place of media communication tools, as others, --television, internet, and magazines-- newspapers can also be positioned as creating a pedagogical environment as Segall & Smith (2006) discussed. Segall and Smith (2006) simply put that media gives shape to people's knowledge and information knowing about world and people. With this regard, as Segall and Smith suggest: "media texts act as social text; they construct social reality from preferred social positions" (Segall & Smith, 2006, p. 91). Lately in the study, they argued media texts, especially newspapers use in Social Studies. Juxtapositioning the purpose of Social Studies and possible use of newspaper as social text in the Social Studies classroom may shed light on how these two concepts overlap. In Turkey, the purpose of Social Studies is explained in Social Studies curriculum: "Social Studies course aims to educate citizens who embrace democratic values, oriented with society where they live and apply their gained knowledge to the life" (Ministry of National Education, 2006, p. 3). Social Studies is the course related with students real life, making students learn their environment, past, and to build a better future with their participation of active citizens as critical thinkers and problem solvers. One of the main aims of the educational institution is to educate effective citizens. Such mentioned skills, values and knowledge were mostly present in school curriculum in many disciplines

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but especially in Social Studies. Making newspapers as a source of bringing current events and captivating information to the classroom to teach for the aims for Social Studies might be valuable reasons among many others presented in some related research studies (Street, 2002, Deveci, 2005, Segall & Smith, 2006). Even though the Social Studies curriculum gives place to using newspapers in some activities, Social Studies textbooks were criticized their rather limited guidance on this issue in the Social Studies courses (Ünlüer &Yaşar, 2012). Ünlüer and Yaşar (2012) also emphasize that the newspapers as an important teaching tool for Social Studies are unfortunately not used sufficiently in classrooms (Ünlüer &Yaşar, 2012, p. 46).

When it comes to Social Studies for gifted students, there have been many emphases to explain significance of Social Studies for gifted students (Delisle, 1991, VanTasssel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2006). Making the emphasis for significance of Social Studies education for the gifted students, VanTasssel-Baska and Stambaugh (2006) state that the Social Studies means more than simply studying dates and history. Social Studies is the study of essential knowledge base including culture, social aspects of society, and study of social phenomena that all gifted and talented students need to study (p. 141). There have been some serious social issues need to be solved for humanity. (Poverty, hunger, wars, economic crisis, political unrests, environmental issues, etc.) Social Studies is the area of giving awareness to school children about these issues and educating them to create possible solutions to these social issues. Social issues to be expected for all school children may have awareness and create possible solutions. On the other hand, gifted and talented learners are seen as "potentially will become the leaders in all spheres, dealing with these emerging issues in world community" (VanTasssel-Baska and Stambaugh, 2006, p. 141). It is important to highlight the significance of Social Studies for gifted and talented students: some gifted students have natural talents for study and growth in the Social Studies disciplines. "They should be identified early and guided into the most intensive experiences in Social Studies throughout their school years" (VanTasssel-Baska & Stambaugh, 2006, p. 141).Van Tassel-Baska and Stambaugh (2006) also suggest advanced Social Studies instruction with together highlighting the gifted and students should be given more complex knowledge, "a new set of thinking skills to deal with information and issues, and be guided in the development of attitudes and values appropriate to a world perspective" (p. 141). From this point of view, bringing the new, larger and more complex social phenomena and issues to the Social Studies classroom for gifted and talented students may be possible by means of using newspapers for Social Studies classroom considering the aforementioned benefits of using newspapers in the classroom. Using newspapers in Social Studies, Deveci (2005) proposes that teachers need to learn how to use newspapers in Social Studies as an instructional and learning tool but first they need to believe in the importance and necessity of using newspapers in Social Studies classrooms. Deveci (2005) also suggests that the necessity of research studies to highlight on use of newspapers in the Social Studies. Similarly, Wood & Nicholson (2005) points out that the research studies on newspaper in education are rather sparse.

In this study, in a gifted and talented teacher education context, in an undergraduate level, in the course of life studies and Social Studies for gifted learners, as course requirement, pre-service teachers were requested to design lesson plans for Social Studies including the use of newspapers. After creating the lesson plans, they shared them in their undergraduate course. Therefore, they experienced with both planning lesson plans and getting some feedback from their classmates. At the end of the course, pre-service teachers were asked to report on their experiences and thoughts on inclusion the use of newspapers in Social Studies lesson plans. In sum, this study examines pre-service teachers' views and experiences with the use of newspapers in Social Studies lesson plans for gifted students.

Review of Literature

Many studies have reported the use of newspapers in education. Such studies have shown that the use of newspapers in classrooms is invaluable in many aspects (Vockell & Cusick, 1995, Vaughan et al. 1998, DeRoche, 1991, Kabapınar & Baysal, 2004, Deveci, 2005). Street (2002) proposed the following as the main aim of using newspaper in the classroom: "the newspaper is a source of up-to-date and compelling information that teachers can use to teach current events" (p. 131). Because newspapers cover topics that students consider stimulating, they are something students that read outside school (Street, 2002, DeRoche, 1991). These citations primarily state that newspapers may be motivational tools to use in classrooms. Social Studies is a course that relates social life to where the students live. In a Social Studies course, students might have an opportunity to learn about themselves, history, the present and the future while learning

values on the national, international and universal levels. What Social Studies proposes to do is to educate effective citizens. That is, Social Studies covers a wide variety of domain specific knowledge, social sciences, citizenship information and values. An examination of the Social Studies curriculum reveals that students are encouraged to learn thinking skills, such as critical thinking and creativity, problem solving skills and research skills (Ministry of National Education, 2006). These topics and skills covered by the Social Studies curriculum are required to make connections between current events and a Social Studies course (Deveci, 2005). From a similar point of view, Kabapınar and Baysal (2004) signified the use of newspapers to reach purposes of Social Studies. They stated that "because the news in the newspapers, which goes beyond fiction, gives feeling of a lived experience, it is thought that the use of newspapers can leave a trace about reality observed in life" (p. 388). Similarly, Street (2002) described the benefits for reading alongside critical thinking and problem solving skills. Though some studies have elucidated the benefits of current reading habits in education programs, more significantly, Segall and Schmidt (2006) highlight that "much more can be gained from using a newspaper in a Social Studies classroom" (p. 92). Morse (1981), Street (2002), and Segall and Schmidt (2006) stated that "newspapers, when used in the Social Studies classroom, become part of what is called 'education for citizenship' and 'life-long learning.' Exposure to newspapers in the classroom, one hopes, will 'ensure that today's children develop a regular newspaper reading habit, so that they may participate effectively and intelligently in their society' " (Segall & Schmidt, 2006, p. 92).

In an experimental study examining the effects of using newspapers in Social Studies on 4th graders in Western Turkey, Yaşar and Ünlüer (2011) found that the experimental group was more successful and had more positive attitudes towards the Social Studies course than did the control group. Yaşar and Ünlüer (2011) clearly stated the significance of using newspapers in the Social Studies courses and its positive effect on both academic success and attitudes. Thereafter, Ünlüer and Yaşar (2012) conducted a qualitative interview study to elicit students' views on using newspapers in their Social Studies course. Twelve students participated in the interviews. The students were subjected to 18 weeks of Social Studies education with the newspaper by means of different strategies. In the study, the students reported that using newspapers allowed them to better learn course subjects and helped them develop better reading habits, and they stated that they related course subjects to real-life problems by using newspapers (Ünlüer & Yaşar, 2012). Consistently, Kabapınar and Baysal (2004) found that the instructional approach based on using newspapers in a Social Studies course provided a classroom structure enabling highly motivated 3rd and 5th grade students in Social Studies discussions willing to participate (Kabapınar & Baysal, 2004, p. 417).

As Rhoades and Rhoades (1985) (cited in DeRoche, 1981) conclude,

> (a) Newspaper training programs improve teacher attitudes toward use of newspapers as an educational tool; (b) newspaper use improves students' attitudes toward reading and increases interest in current events; (c) newspaper use in reading classes improves reading achievement, particularly vocabulary development and comprehension; and (d) newspaper use improves the quality of students' verbal interactions in the classroom (p. 162).

Similarly, Wood and Nicholson (2005) reported that according to studies that emphasized Social Studies education, the "more students are exposed to the newspaper, the more their attitudes about its value to them as involved, concerned citizens increases" (p. 580). Vockell and Cusick (1995) highlighted teachers' attitudes on using newspapers in the classroom in an exemplary survey study. Vockell and Cusick (1995) organized their study with two participant samples. Their first sample included teachers who had participated in the newspaper in education (NIE) program, and the second sample included graduate students who were ineligible for the NIE program and full-time teaching. According to this study's results, teachers who did not use the newspaper reported issues such as difficulty with the curriculum, a lack of education on how to use newspapers, a lack of financial support, and a lack of time in their courses. In contrast, teachers who used newspapers in their classrooms reported benefits such as enhancing the teaching of the curriculum, improving students' enjoyment in classroom projects and cooperative learning activities (Vockell & Cusick, 1995, p. 360). Vockell and Cusick (1995) underlined some important implications from teachers' perspectives to understand the possible reasons why teachers do or do not use newspapers in the classroom. Vaughan, Sumrall and Rose (1998) found that pre-service teachers had positive attitudes toward using the newspaper to teach both science and Social Studies skills. They found similar positive findings for both participant students and in-service teachers in their study.

In Turkey, there have been many studies found discussing use of newspapers in education. Use of newspapers in education can be dated back at least to the foundation period of Turkish Republic. For example, Uyanık (1937) published a book on use of newspapers in education, gave clear examples across different disciplines in primary and elementary school settings. He also proposed that different uses of newspapers but on the other hand stressed out necessity of consideration students' knowledge of concepts. He elucidated that students' level and their concept pool should be in appropriate level to use newspapers that is enable students with meaningful learning activities. More recently, other studies elucidated use of newspapers in educational settings. As Ünlüer and Yaşar (2012) stated earlier, newspapers were considered among learning tools in Social Studies. (Demirel, 2007, Sönmez, 1997; Yaşar, 2008)

Gedik (2010) discussed use of current events since the content of the social studies there is a connection with current events. She also discussed that use of current events may develop students' critical reading and problem solving skills.

According to the studies highlighted in this section, the use of newspapers in education, specifically Social Studies education, brings some considerations, such as teachers' usage, students' perceptions, instructional strategies and the newspapers used in gifted and talented Social Studies instruction. The existing literature has gaps that this study attempts to address. As indicated above, though some research studies are based on surveys conducted on a larger scale, there are also qualitative studies examining the use of newspapers in education. However, little or no research concerning the use of newspapers in Social Studies for gifted students exists. Moreover, though there is a growing body of research based in Turkey, most of the research in this field is from the United States. This study thus elicits student teachers' views and experiences on the inclusion of newspapers in their Social Studies lesson plans for gifted classes in a Turkish context.

Social Studies Education for Gifted Students and Newspapers

There have been many contradicting definitions and ideas of the definition for giftedness (Davis & Rimm, 1998, Ziegler & Heller, 2000). According to the National Association of Gifted Children, the definition of giftedness is:

> Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains. Domains include any structured area of activity with its own symbol system (e.g., mathematics, music, language) and/or set of sensorimotor skills (e.g., painting, dance, sports) (NAGC, 2014).

In Turkey, giftedness is defined as, "Children/students who demonstrate high levels of performance as identified by experts in intelligence, art, leadership, and special academic areas in comparison with peers" (Ministry of National Education, Science and Art Centers Bylaw, 2007). As mentioned above, to explain the connection between giftedness and Social Studies, Social Studies is defined as a course that includes both social science disciplines and citizenship education. Aiming to help individuals be more social, Social Studies reflects social science topics such as history, economy, sociology, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, political science, and law, and it includes citizenship knowledge. Social Studies is an elementary school course that was created with an understanding of corporate instruction. It includes areas of learning under themes or units and examines humankind's relations with the social and physical environment in the context of today, the past and the future (MoNE, 2012).

As observed in the definitions for Social Studies, it can be considered a unique course that stresses citizenship education alongside social sciences. After examining the Social Studies curriculum, its primary purpose is to provide students with the skills and knowledge required to become active citizens in society, both nationally and internationally (Cole & Schreyer, 2007). In the current literature, there are some arguments that Social Studies education and gifted education are naturally connected or are extensions of each other. Steward (1985) elucidated this connection: " The objectives of both fields frequently overlap—encouraging inquiry, critical thinking skills, creative thinking skills, decision-making skills, investigation of real problems, and leadership skills" (p. 238). Considering the social, economic and technological changes

and possible problems, the significance of Social Studies education being used to educate all students that they can respond to any possible social issues and can be effective citizens in society is being more apparent.

Geunther, Anderson, and Blocher (1987) suggested that it is necessary to provide qualitatively different instruction and a different curriculum for gifted learners. Moreover, they stressed that gifted students "have general intellectual ability or advanced general aptitude, have specific academic aptitudes, have the ability to think creatively-that is they show divergent thinking that results in conventional tasks, products and behavior, have leadership abilities, have visual and performing arts ability" (p. 3). They noted that these activities could be newspaper-based activities to enhance and cater to gifted students' characteristics. Considering the use of newspapers in Social Studies for gifted students, the necessity of including real-life problems emerges to nurture gifted and talented students' educational needs with additional resources. Cole and Schreyer (2007) indicated that it is important "to provide in depth, detailed accounts from multiple perspectives, Social Studies curriculum experts suggest the inclusion of additional resources and materials" (p. 814). Newspapers provide all students, including gifted and talented students, with in depth, detailed accounts that enrich classroom activities. Because Social Studies classes are taught about current events and social problems through newspapers, this can be an opportunity to use different resources and tools in Social Studies classrooms.

The Study

The purpose of this study is to examine pre-service teachers' views and experiences with the use of newspapers in Social Studies classes for gifted students. In a large Western state university's undergraduate level setting (the gifted education department), students were required to design and develop a lesson plan for the course "Life Study and Social Studies for Gifted Students," which incorporated newspapers as an instructional tool. At the beginning of this course, students were informed of the possibility of using newspapers in the curriculum and in the Social Studies curriculum in particular. Discussions were made to make sense of the involvement of both Social Studies for gifted students and the use of newspapers based on research studies and literature. Students designed and developed lesson plans by including newspapers directly or indirectly to their lesson plans. Students were divided into groups of two. During lesson planning, instructor counseling was provided to the participant pre-service teachers. After completing the lesson plans, the groups of pre-service teachers were asked to present and practice their plans. Thus, they received feedback and evaluations from their classmates on their respective lesson plans. Upon completing the lesson plan presentations, pre-service teachers were asked to report on their experiences and thoughts concerning the inclusion of newspapers in their Social Studies lesson plans for gifted learners. The study is an attempt to illustrate pre-service teachers' experiences and views on the use of newspapers in a Social Studies classroom's curriculum. The significance of the study is its potential to contribute to both the existing sparse literature on the topic and the educational practice related to use of newspapers in Social Studies and teacher education for gifted learners.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to gain a qualitative and detailed understanding of experiences and views of a phenomenon that pre-service teachers hold with regards to the use of newspapers in Social Studies curricula for gifted students. As stated above, the study aims to explain what it is like to use newspapers in Social Studies lesson plans that have been designed for gifted learners. Because the study aims to explore pre-service teachers' experiences and thoughts, the phenomenological research paradigm emerged as the most appropriate framework for the study's design (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, Creswell, 2007). Johnson and Christensen (2004) stated that "[t]he purpose of phenomenological research is to obtain a view into your research participants' life-worlds and to understand their personal meanings constructed from their lived experiences" (p. 364). In other words, phenomenological research is an attempt "to understand how people experience a phenomenon from the persons' own perspectives" (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 46). Moreover, Schwandt (2007) put a frequently discussed manner of phenomenology in context of qualitative research: "it aims to identify and describe the subjective experiences of respondents. It is a matter of studying everyday experience from the point of view of the subject, and it shuns critical evaluation of forms of social life" (p. 226). From the perspectives summarized above, this study describes the experiences of the

pre-service teachers' use of newspapers while also attempting to interpret the meanings in terms of the participants' views.

Setting and Participants

Thirty-eight pre-service teachers, who were all senior students majoring in elementary education for gifted students at Istanbul University in Turkey, participated in the study. At the time of the study (2013-2014 academic year), they were enrolled in a four-hour undergraduate course called "Life Study and Social Studies for Gifted Students". Thirty female and eight male pre-service teachers voluntarily participated in the study. Their ages ranged from 19 to 23. At the beginning of the course, information about the use of newspapers in Social Studies education was provided to all participants. After they completed the lesson plans, they presented them to the class. Upon completing all of the lesson plan presentations, participants were given an open-ended questionnaire to elicit their experiences and views on the topic.

Data collection and analysis

The open-ended written-interview questionnaire was based on a pilot study of a written interview and on suggestions from experts in the field of gifted education and Social Studies (Creswell, 2007). These written interviews were the main source of data, as Creswell (2007) also indicated. The open-ended written interviews provided a rich source of data. The participants wrote about their experience from their own perspective and in their own words (Creswell, 2007, Silverman, 1993). Pre-service teachers were asked to answer the questions: (1) considering your experiences with the use of newspapers in Social Studies for gifted during the course, what do you think are the place and significance of using newspapers in a Social Studies class for the gifted learners? (2) What advantages and disadvantages (if any) did you experience while creating and applying the lesson plans? (3) As a teacher, how would you use newspapers in Social Studies for gifted learners? (4) Considering what you learned during the course, how do you think newspapers could be use what do you think is the use of newspapers in a Social Studies class for gifted learners? Students were also asked to report demographic information, including age, gender, and department information. To create a trustworthy atmosphere, it was explained that these open-ended questions were not intended to judge their views or evaluate their course performance in any way. This approach motivated participants to express themselves freely and to communicate their experiences and thoughts earnestly. The data were analyzed inductively, as Creswell (2007, 2012) and Patton (2002) suggested. The interview questions provided a framework for the emergent themes. All written interviews were read repeatedly to make sense of them as a whole; from subsequent readings of the data, tentative patterns and themes were recorded. Subsequently, peer-debriefing sessions were applied to increase the trustworthiness of the study. The initial patterns and themes found were revised as a consequence of peer-debriefing. Two colleagues provided input on how to shape the final version of the themes. It should be noted that the emergent initial patterns and themes were shared with participants of the study (member-checking) and that both researcher and participants found an opportunity to change and confirm "personal meanings constructed from their lived experiences" (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 364). It should also be noted that the written interviews were translated by the researcher, who consulted two colleagues who were proficient in both Social Studies and the English language. The major themes that were identified emerged from the data analysis.

Findings

From the data analysis process, four common themes emerged from the participants' experiences and thoughts. The themes drawn from the data were the place and importance of using newspapers in Social Studies for gifted learners, the possible uses of newspapers in Social Studies for gifted students, curricular considerations for the selection of newspapers, and future considerations on the use of newspapers.

Place and importance of using newspapers in Social Studies for gifted learners

The main purpose of the study was to highlight pre-service classroom teachers' experiences and views on the use of newspapers in Social Studies lesson plans for gifted students in a Social Studies methods classroom in an undergraduate setting. The findings of the study were diverse in terms of the emergent themes and categories. The participants reported that the newspaper was an invaluable tool in their Social

Studies classrooms, particularly for their gifted students. There were different opinions on why the newspaper was an invaluable tool, but the importance of using newspapers was a perspective that all of the participants shared. Concerning the place and importance of using newspapers in Social Studies classroom, newspapers are defined as an integral tool or antecedent of instructional methods. It was stated that because newspapers bring real-life context to the classroom, they provide the opportunity to use problem-based instruction. For example,

> Newspaper makes Social Studies courses more enjoyable for gifted and talented students. I think newspapers' news are the sample cases. For this reason, it is similar problem-based learning… but more alive: because Newspapers reflect current events, transferring the information that students learned in the course to real life can be easier. (Participant 1, Female)

> Using newspapers helps show how real life has problems and how we address those problems. I think this is a very instructive approach. (Participant 19, Female)

Another point that the pre-service teachers emphasized was the place and importance of bringing current events to Social Studies courses and its connection to the general characteristics of gifted students. Most of the pre-service teachers reported that the nature of Social Studies is to teach and learn about real life. Though it was not addressed explicitly, pre-service teachers implied that Social Studies is not the course to which gifted students give importance or show interest. In other words, most of the participants stated that the use of newspapers helped focus their gifted students' attention on the Social Studies course. Newspapers as an instructional tool can be an important changing agent to attract the gifted students' attention to the course because the course itself does not address their interest and educational needs. Thus, pre-service teachers tried to make a connection between these different dimensions: first by knowing the gifted students' characteristics and learning needs and second by drawing their attention to the course by bringing real-life issues to the classroom.

> If we use newspapers in the course as a part of current events, it would create useful Social Studies courses for gifted students. Moreover, noting that the content we teach is intertwined makes the course more popular to students so we can be successful teachers. (Participant 2, Male)

> Newspapers allow students to connect their knowledge and current events and give their information meaning in a real-life context. Thus, students may create many connections to the current events with the knowledge that they obtained from Social Studies. (Participant 3, Female)

> In schools, we need to give gifted students social skills and academic skills in Social Studies. Because of this reason, it is important to educate students who are interested in current events. I believe that following the current news from the internet and TV is not as effective as newspapers. (Participant 5, Female)

As the participants stated, newspapers have been perceived as effective, even more so than other media tools, because bringing current events into the classroom via newspapers would be valuable in Social Studies lessons. In addition to bringing current events to the Social Studies classrooms, newspapers make Social Studies a more popular course, which explains the necessity for increasing the Social Studies courses' attraction. The research participants considered newspapers to be a tool that increases gifted students' attraction to the course. Similarly, the following excerpts highlighted the place and importance of using newspapers in a positive way.

> Social Studies is the course that develops social awareness for gifted students… and I believe the ideal student, for me, is the student who follows current events. A student with curiosity can develop himself/herself. If we can introduce striking news to them, we could both share the news with our students and could find more newspaper articles and essays to discuss with them. Newspapers are useful for attracting their interest to the course. (Participant 6, Male)

> The Social Studies course is excessively nested in real life. Because the newspaper is the most common among other media, its use is beneficial in Social Studies courses. My experience with this is, I would say, that gifted students give importance to topics on world issues; this is the reason that use of newspapers in Social Studies makes the course more interesting for gifted students. (Participant 8, Male)

> Because we are university students, honestly saying, most of the time we stay away what's happening around us and, of course, the world. Because I think that Social Studies aims to educate students to solve real-life problems, newspapers are the perfect choice. (Participant 11, Female)

> Because Social Studies is the course directly inside real life, it should be supported by current event information. If we cannot find course-related information in newspapers, we can use the newspaper archives. Thus, students can easily make connections between the course content learned and real life. (Participant 12, Female)

Improving reading habits is another reported point made by some of the participants. It should be noted that pre-service teachers made connections on their experiences and information about gifted students' characteristics. Gifted students' curiosity for the disciplines of Social Studies may be revived with the help of newspapers:

> Students learn what is happening in the world and its current events. In this manner, both curiosity and concerns for the students who read the newspaper are awakened. We can use the developments in the world and what we lived in the past to make personal connections with the events. (Participant 14, Female)

> The use of newspapers can be beneficial in terms of giving students a newspaper reading habit. The awareness of gifted students to the environment was rather developed. Thus, to show the possible reflections from newspapers, related course content may bring attention and curiosity to learning Social Studies topics. (Participant 16, Female)

Two participants reported that the course content generally stays more or less stable due to the attachment to class content or textbook content. As opposed to the thoughts presented in textbooks, participants indicated that newspapers can be a tool to provide enrichment, particularly because the newspaper course content may be supported and updated.

> In Social Studies courses, if we use newspapers, it means that we automatically update the course content consistently. Newspapers are tools for enriching and supporting the course content. (Participant 13, Female)

> Without being dependent on textbooks, the use of newspapers gives new dimensions to Social Studies for the gifted learner. Newspapers provide students with new horizons concerning the current events in the world and create awareness for the students. The information gained in Social Studies courses becomes permanent. (Participant 24, Female)

When describing her experience of learning about a different country and culture, one of the participants reported a unique result of using a newspaper. It can be called learning about culture. Her experience gives an idea of how students can learn about culture by reading a newspaper. She stated that she learned a lot from a lesson that was designed to teach about advertisements through Social Studies.

> The use of a newspaper can be effective for culturally diverse children in Social Studies education. I come from a different country and culture; I have not seen Social Studies in schools. My experience involves bringing a country's culture by means of newspapers, or from real life. Learning both about country and school really helps orientate or integrate people into the new culture. If I give an example, one of the lesson plans was about the historical journey of newspaper advertisements from the past to present day. I clearly saw the culture, people, simplicity and change of a culture as reflected in that course. It was amazingly enjoyable to attend that Social Studies class. I think, from this point of view, that this approach can be useful for our gifted students. (Participant 35, Female)

Possible uses of newspapers in Social Studies for gifted learners

Considering all of the participants' responses on their experiences, their thoughts and experiences on the possible uses of the newspaper were different. Possible uses were considered mostly after being introduced to using newspapers in a Social Studies classroom. Most of the participants stated their expectations on students' responsibility for using newspapers in Social Studies.

> When using a newspaper, I would expect my students to take responsibility to use the newspaper. I think that it is more significant how students use the newspaper instead of how the teacher does. Related or unrelated to the course, I would request that they use the newspaper to bring some interesting news to the classroom. I believe that these approaches can awaken a research curiosity and interest in the course for both gifted and non-gifted students. (Participant 14, Female)

> First, I would prefer to use a newspaper to show my students how to use it in Social Studies. Lately, I have given them homework as classroom activity, in this manner, and they both research the topic and develop routines to read newspapers. (Participant 20, Female)

> I would give homework to students and allow some time for them to bring and present newspapers in the course. (Participant 4, Female)

As stated in the excerpts from pre-service teachers' statements, some participants noted the importance of students and not teachers using newspapers. Some of them stated that newspapers should be used in a natural way. According to one participant, natural means that one could incorporate a newspaper as part of the flow of the course. Requiring the use of newspapers may cause students to have a lack of interest in the course. Integrating newspapers into classroom or homework activities would help students with their research and thinking skills. A participant introduced a different topic on the use of newspaper, particularly the digital or traditional versions:

> We can give a place to both digital and traditional newspapers. I do not think that it is important to use only the paper-based newspaper. If the purpose is to attract students' attention to Social Studies topics and make connections to current events and course topics, we need to serve these purposes. But, at the same time, I think that it would be better if we could find the original newspaper and digitize or scan it as is. (Participant 28, Female)

Participants mostly preferred to use newspaper as traditional paper form, though a few preferred digital versions. However, they mostly stated that if they could access traditional newspapers from archives, they would prefer to use them in that fashion. The reason, they explained, was that this way of use or visual presentation makes more sense concerning the reading of newspapers. However, it should be noted that little consideration of how technology makes a difference in the use of newspapers was made, except by the one participant who raised this particular concern.

Selection of newspapers

Pre-service teachers expressed their serious concern for selecting newspapers. Because it would not be possible to find an objective point of view in newspapers, students might be influenced by what the newspaper wants their readers to think. Participants indicated concerns about fulfilling the aims and objectives of the Social Studies curriculum that are difficult to find in newspapers. Choosing what newspapers to use in Social Studies courses was considered important because newspapers communicate a subjective point of view and document events and the world from a particular perspective.

> Though newspapers deliver news and information to the people, they may not behave objectively. Thus, we should meticulously revise the news that we want to use in the course. The topic should be in accordance with the course aims and objectives. I can say that finding such content in newspapers is really a hard job to do in my experience. (Participant 1, Female)

> The same event can be reflected as different in different newspapers; as a consequence, twisted realities of events may appear. That is why we should choose the correct newspapers. (Participant 3, Female)

> Though our purpose was to support the subjects of Social Studies, non-supportive news could be selected just to use newspapers in the course. (Participant 5, Female)

In contrast, the teachers' thoughts on how to evaluate the newspapers were ambiguous. Though they deliberated on an approach during the lesson planning on choosing newspapers for the Social Studies courses, some dimensions of how they planned to use the newspapers remained unclear:

> Though newspapers were stated as tools that reflect current events with clearness, they reflect news on the borders of their views, not the news they did not like, and subjectivity is a negative aspect that we need to evaluate when we use newspapers in Social Studies. (Participant 8, Male)

> I think that our understanding of journalism indicates that it has become a profession for expressing specific people's interpretations of events in terms of their understanding and using them in favor of themselves. If newspapers can be used in a beneficial way for students and in an objective manner, it may support both current and past events and can be useful for course explanations. I think that if we can use the newspapers like I mentioned, it may straighten real life and the life in the course. (Participant 34, Female)

According to the participants, the teacher's control while designing the Social Studies course is crucial. Before planning the course with newspapers or during the course, pre-service teachers' dispositions mostly reflected an interest in a structured use of newspapers. This can be a questionable form of using newspapers in a Social Studies course for the following reasons. First, seeking a *conceivable* (emphasis added) use of newspapers may make the lesson plans lie on the border of the teachers' thinking, which can constrain the course. It should be noted that gifted students could possibly grasp more overarching concepts founds in newspapers than could teachers. That is, teachers' consideration for gifted students' readiness and characteristics is important. Further, developing the higher-order thinking skills that have been proposed primarily for gifted students but also for all student levels in Turkish Social Studies curricula, might be one possible way to use newspapers, which could even convey multiple realities such that the students could study perspectives, different representations of world knowledge and questioning by means of this type of inclusion. To sum up, careful selection of newspapers is important. When including them in lesson plans, teachers must consider the course's objectives, and the gifted learners' level of interest, ability and higher-order thinking in Social Studies course.

Experiences and future considerations on use of newspapers

Participants in the study stated that this was their first time to obtain experience with using newspapers in the classroom. They commonly seemed to indicate that they had thought this study was an activity proposed as a course requirement, but it did not occur how they imagined as a consequence. It should be noted that many of the participants stated that the inclusion of newspapers in their lesson plans was a valuable activity. In contrast, participants stated that they had no experience using newspapers during their time as students. According to their statements, they learned how to use a newspaper in their Social Studies course for the gifted learners and have learned something new and different for their prospective students.

> When I was learning Social Studies throughout my education, there was no activity that used newspapers in classroom. However, if there were, I would have known much more information about Social Studies. For of this reason, from now on, I think that the use of newspapers makes Social Studies more effective for both our non-gifted and gifted students'. (Participant 7, Female)

> When this assignment was introduced, I could not understand the necessity of such an assignment, and I thought I would make an effort for nothing. However, I recently understood this assignment. For example, most of the uses of newspaper were chorological such that we

> could able to see changes by means of newspapers about the topic in Social Studies. Even I learned lots of things about Social Studies topics because the use of newspapers requires more detailed and complex account to learn. I believe that use of newspaper is a beneficial in practice. I believe that I will enable newspapers use for my Social Studies courses. (Participant 11, Female)

> We have not met this kind of activity before, even in our lower-grade Social Studies courses. I thought that it was going to simple to do. I experienced difficulty in preparing a lesson plan. While listening to and commenting on my classmates, I noted that giving a place to newspapers would be enjoyable. The most positive thing is reflection of real life in the course. (Participant 20, Female)

> I realized that use of newspapers can be an invaluable tool for gifted students in enrichment activities in a Social Studies course. Some negative samples in the courses also were noted and discussed, which allowed me to prepare a lesson plan while using newspapers. I saw that, without use of newspapers, Social Studies courses may become shallow. (Participant 29, Female)

As observed from the excerpts, the lack of information about the use of newspapers as a tool and instructional strategy emerges as an issue until the introduction of a Social Studies for the gifted course. The activity applied in their undergraduate level course led them to see that newspapers are useful as an instructional tool. Because newspapers may provide depth and complexity as well as higher-order thinking for gifted and talented students, bringing real-life issues to the course is a unique learning experience for Social Studies gifted learners.

A participant stated that they used newspapers in his primary school level but only with the purpose of creating collages with cut-out pictures:

> We experienced newspaper use, and I found it to be very successful because we can teach events from past to present. Frankly speaking, until we begin this course, I have not seen anything like the use of newspaper in a course. I recently recognized that this is one great way to make Social Studies very effective for gifted students. When I was in primary school, we cut pictures out from newspapers and pasted them to a board in the classroom. We were never interested in the news and content of the newspaper. I do not have a routine for reading the newspaper because of this reason. (Participant 34, Female)

From a different point of view, a participant stated that preliminary preparation is required for teachers to use newspapers successfully. It is also necessary for teachers to design lesson plans in accordance with gifted students' specific needs and characteristics:

> In my observation from the course, a few of my friends will use newspapers in their classes. I predict that they would not want to make an effort to plan for placing newspapers in a correct manner to meet their gifted students' learning needs. It requires more work. (Participant 18, Male)

Pre-service teachers shared that they experienced difficulty in designing such a course. The planning requirements, they stated, were necessary for including newspaper use to add scope to the curriculum. The strategies make it possible to use newspapers following teacher education programs and educational settings.

Conclusion and Discussion

The experiences and thoughts of the 38 pre-service teachers on the use of newspapers in their Social Studies courses resulted in four reoccurring themes. All of the participants expressed that the newspaper was an instructional tool that increased the students' interest in Social Studies because it introduced social problems and current events, values that are covered by the Social Studies curriculum. It also added flexibility to the lesson plans. The newspaper also added more depth and complexity for gifted students and may provide higher-order thinking skills, such as creativity, decision making, critical thinking and problem solving.

Some participants noted that they had difficulties in planning for gifted students because of a lack of resources and a lack of knowing how to design lesson plans. Participants also stated that they did not have any prior experience with designing and presenting their lesson plans for gifted learners. These findings suggest there should be more attention given to the use of newspapers. As Vockell & Cusick (1995) highlighted, "if more teachers have this information, more students may be given the advantage of another learning tool" (p. 362).

Another finding of the study is that preparing lesson plans, including the use of newspapers, might cause difficulties because some participants find that planning requires serious preparation for both the content and newspapers in accordance with students' interests.

Postman (1985) stressed the importance of media by describing it as providing the first curriculum, not the school as Segall and Smith (2006) cited. From this point of view, the place of newspapers in Social Studies for different educational purposes, particularly the teacher's approach to the influence of media messages, needs to be reconsidered. Media literacy skills emerge when using newspapers. Developing media literacy leads to students being able to think critically about the news they encounter; as Segall and Smith (2006) suggested, it might be an important step for educating students to be active citizens, which is a lesson that Social Studies aims to teach.

In teacher education programs, strategies that engage newspapers in different ways should be considered because most of the pre-service teachers' statements did not meet the instructional purposes of newspapers in Social Studies. According to our findings, pre-service teachers also stated that their experiences with the Social Studies course for gifted students led them to use newspapers because there is an overlap between gifted teaching methods and the goals of Social Studies. The findings are consistent with studies that were primarily conducted in Social Studies classrooms. Wood and Nicholson (2005) synthesized the conclusions on the use of newspapers in education from many research studies. The followings are some examples of what they stated:

> Daily newspapers are a valuable and useful instructional tool…using newspapers on a regular basis in classrooms improves the reading interests and the newspaper reading habits of learners… Newspaper use seems to influence classroom verbal interactions, student motivation, school attendance, and student behavior… The use of the newspaper has been demonstrated to increase students' interest and knowledge of world affairs and current events. Newspaper use helps students to become more involved in political issues in the community and the world at large. (Wood & Nicholson, 2005, p. 580-581)

Other studies have generally represented Social Studies teachers' and students' uses and thoughts on the use of newspapers both in international and Turkish contexts. In contrast, this study can be called a rare effort to highlight the use of newspapers in the context of gifted teacher education in a specific field, namely Social Studies education.

The findings on pre-service teachers' experiences on the use of newspapers for gifted students highlight what needs to be considered in gifted teacher education programs within the borders of the qualitative paradigm. The findings are not generalized because the aim of qualitative studies is to give a tone of life to the research. From this perspective, the study reveals pre-service teachers' experiences and thoughts on the use of newspapers in Social Studies course without aiming to generalize the findings but instead to learn from them. Accordingly, the small size of the sample of participants can be considered a limitation of the study.

The use of newspapers can add depth and complex knowledge and skills to Social Studies courses and an understanding of real-life issues beyond those offered in textbooks. As Kabapınar and Baysal (2004) found, textbooks reflect a mostly idealized and imitated world of what students expect to learn in Social Studies. The textbooks contain the information that students need to learn to be educated as effective citizens and made aware of social sciences, research skills, among the traditions of Social Studies proposed by Barr, Barth, & Shermis (1978), and textbooks were also stated as being full of advice of what students need to do or not do (Kabapınar & Baysal, 2004). In contrast, newspapers can be used in many ways

newspapers have many assortments to teach proposed in the Social Studies curriculum and meet a wide range of gifted students' interests, according to the pre-service teachers' experiences.

There have been many usage opportunities presented in the literature that can be used by teachers. As DeRoche (2003) indicated, newspapers enhance the learning opportunities for all levels of students. DeRoche (2003) stated that the use of newspapers is not just developing reading skills but also developing civic literacy, communication skills, ethical decision-making, understanding real-life problems and character education, which are covered by the Social Studies curriculum in Turkey. DeRoche (2003) stated that newspapers in education can also help promote citizenship and civic education. DeRoche (2003) also added that "something happens to teachers and students when they encounter newspapers together. The four walls of the classroom open to the real world. The class comes alive. Relationships change. Conversations are enriched." (DeRoche, 2003, p. 36). The findings of this study present similar thoughts from pre-service teachers on the use of newspapers in Social Studies classrooms.

The findings of this study do not reveal any statements on the ideal format of the newspapers (whether online or traditional print versions). Wood and Nicholson (2005) noted the current change from the traditional way for both reading and publishing newspapers. In this study, one pre-service teacher specifically emphasized that using digital or traditional newspapers made no difference. Most of the participants preferred to use traditional newspapers by scanning it and viewing it digitally. Thus it can be inferred that there was a mixture of traditional and technological means of using the newspaper.

The findings of the study contended that Social Studies is the course in which teachers can use newspapers as a teaching tool and to create activities in their lesson plans. The topics covered in a Social Studies curriculum make it ideal for using newspapers in a gifted learners' classroom. Though there are no Newspapers in Education (NIE) programs in Turkey, as there are in the United States, the Social Studies curriculum emphasis on using newspapers shows that the topic is considered significant by Ministry of National Education. Conversely, because teachers implement the curriculum, they should be educated and equipped with the qualifications necessary for these kinds of applications. The role of teachers in Social Studies programs go beyond simply selecting teaching methods and applying the officially adapted curricular objectives; teacher education is more significant than is perceived, as stressed by Ross (2006), who ascribes the notion to Thornton (2004):

> Teacher beliefs about Social Studies subject matter and student thinking in Social Studies, as well as planning and instructional strategies, together function to create enacted curriculum of the classroom—the day-to-day interactions among students, teachers and subject matter… The difference between the publicly declared formal curriculum and the curriculum experienced by students in Social Studies classrooms is considerable. The key to the curriculum experienced in Social Studies classrooms is the teachers. (Ross, 2006, p. 30)

In conclusion, this study revealed the experiences of pre-service teachers who used newspapers in their Social Studies lesson plans for gifted learners. This study adds to the literature by highlighting different points. First, it highlights pre-service teachers' views and experiences with the inclusion of using newspapers in Social Studies in a specific context. Second, the study may give an idea about teacher education programs for gifted learners and provisions on gifted learners for the future. This study made an effort to highlight the essence of what was experienced in a relatively small sample in a Turkish teacher education context. Understanding other similar contexts and the experiences of gifted students should be investigated, which will be the topics of further studies.

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