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# Cartoons As Educational Tools And The Presentation Of Cultural Differences Via Cartoons

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## Abstract

The childhood of a person is shaped as per the conditions of his/her community. However, the childhood in our technology-based era is highly overwhelmed by the ubiquitous communication devices. As a pioneering type, television achieves in grabbing children's attention by using its multi-coloured and animated world. What is more, cartoons provide the children a great load of new ideas, allowing them to enrich their dream world as well as to improve their vocabulary and learn new games. These developments are then turned to permanent behaviours. This being the case, it becomes inevitable that these habits reflect the cultural and moral values of the countries depicted in cartoons. This, in turn, makes the children absorb the linguistic and behavioural traditions of those cultures. The present study delves into two well-known cartoons, one being Turkish, called "Pepee" and the other Canadian, called "Caillou", with a view to investigating the ways they present their cultural values. The ways of presentation were assessed using content analysis, and also the differentiating cultural elements were identified.

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## 1. Introduction

Television is the most ubiquitous medium of mass communication, presenting the audience an amalgam of visual and auditory stimulants and also a wide range of stories from both real and virtual realms. For these reasons, in many homes, television has been sanctioned as the most prominent household device, functioning as a form of

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accessing the world (Atay and Öncü, 2009: 69). The rapid growth in the number of televisions has affected every individual in some ways; however, the impact on children is the most alarming. Children's television exposure starts at two years with watching cartoons and in this way they become television addicts before they turn six (Çaplı, 2002: 184). Television is a powerful device which has many roles in the human life and also it consistently augments its authority. Accordingly, it is now commonly accepted that television has the power to influence and direct the attitudes and behaviours of people. This view is also endorsed by the publications reporting on the effects of television on people. Above all, the overwhelming power of television is the highest in children, which can be either positive or negative. Significant negative sides are mainly concerned with children's educational processes, specifically regarding their socialization stages, physical, cognitive, and emotional development, eating habits, and inclination to aggression and violence (Arslan, 2006: 4; Mutlu, 1997: 41; Büyükbaykal, 2011: 38). In contrast, when used rationally, television may help foster educational development of children with the aid of educational and instructional programmes. More to the point, cartoons have a great role in improving children's learning skills: in addition to teaching them interpersonal issues like family relations, friendships, communication, and playing games, cartoons also achieve getting children to embrace the cultural and social elements presented throughout the films (Yavuzer, 2007: 80). The present study is aimed to investigate the cultural reflections of the contents that are presented to children by the cartoon films on television. These films bear traces of cultural elements which pertain to their country of origin, and these features play an instructive role in children's acquisition of oral, behavioural, and attitude-based skills. Common cultural elements include emotions, ways of thinking and living, ethical, religious, and social values, cultural expressions, symbols, eating habits, and tools and devices (Arslan, 2006: 15). Accordingly, a Turkish-origin cartoon called "Pepee" and Canadian-origin "Caillou" have been selected as the samples of this study. Content analysis was used to assess the cultural elements presented by these two films.

## 2. Aim and Methodology

Cartoons, as important agents of cultural transmission, are instructive domains which present informative materials for children. The present study demonstrates to what extent each cartoon film – Pepee and Caillou – presents the cultural values of its country of origin and how these elements have been presented. The main objective, though, is to assess the instructive role of these cartoons in teaching these values to children. After watching a total of 60 episodes (30 + 30) of these cartoons, seven categories were defined, then studied using content analysis. These categories included "family relations and social affairs, traditional clothes, culture-specific meals, uses of language, national signs and rituals, social and religious symbols and rituals, and folkloric melodies and dances".

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Presentation of Cultural Values in Pepee

#### 3.1.1. Family Relations and Social Affairs

The concept of "family", as one of the most fundamental institutions of a community, has changed beyond recognition particularly following the events that took place in the post-capitalism era, when extended families gave way to nuclear families. Pepee's family, as depicted in the film, is an ordinary nuclear family whose family relations are not confined to the combination of a mother, a father and children. Conversely, this family is extended by Pepee's grandfather, grandmother, (maternal) aunt along with her husband, her daughter Şila, and her son Eke, which as a whole portrays an extended family with strong family ties, conforming to traditional structure of Turkish families. In this way, this cartoon attempts to create an impression of a traditional family as an equivalent to the concept of family in the minds of the children viewing this film.

The question of childcare has evolved to be a major problem in the modern world, specifically due to the growing number of female participation in the labour force. As a result, a great number of children are reared in kindergartens since both of their parents are at work during the day. Just like other traditional Turkish families, the same trend can be observed in Pepee's family since both of his parents spend the day at work. Accordingly, Pepee and his little sister, Bebe, are cared for by their grandfather and grandmother; that is to say, the children spend their

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