PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS LITERACY AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN THROUGH DESIGN EDUCATION

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Abstract: This study critically and creatively explores ways to promote the cognition and design skills of elementary school students on human rights through the process of design education and to cultivate their attitude towards sustainable development that values human dignity. In the curriculum process, the researcher guided the students to select several human rights problems that could often be found in the community and propose design solutions to these problems through brainstorming, discussion, practice, and correction. Through the induction of observation focus, group interviews, design work analysis, and other methods, we could understand the students' learning performance and experience. A critical analysis of the data shows students' change and improvement of human rights literacy in this learning process. The study found that students' active participation in the design practice of human rights could effectively construct their concept and identity of human dignity, which made the network system of learning concepts more complete and concrete, promoting the possibility of sustainable development.

1. Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to respond to the multiple challenges regarding human rights,

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economic growth and, environmental protection, which human beings are faced with (Lee 15-17). Through the setting of the SDGs, the UN aims to solve various problems in the modern world. Among the SDGs, the first five goals are particularly important for human rights protection, which are Poverty (SDG 1), Zero Hunger (SDG 2), Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), Quality Education (SDG 4), and Gender Equality (SDG 5), since these five goals are directly related to whether 'human rights' can be manifested, and whether the global human expectations for basic well-being can be realized. For the 2030 Agenda to have a breakthrough success, these goals, which are closely related to human rights and human dignity, must be valued and integrated into education in different fields because education can ensure the sustainability of these goals and the moral values of human nature can continue to be regarded as the focus of future endeavors.

Moreover, the argument of sustainable community development through design education has been valued by many scholars in recent years. Exploring the possibilities of 'sustainability' from design education has become one of the cores of contemporary design education. The practice of design education has been applied to help students cultivate their sustainable development competence. It appears to be a feasible direction to enhance students' cognition, skills, and attitude towards sustainable development, using design education.

The three core questions in this research are:

(i) Exploring methods and steps to enhance the sustainable development of students' human rights literacy through design education.

(ii) Exploring students' reactions, feedbacks, and performances in the process of design education with human rights issues as the core.

(iii) Analysing the changes and differences in students' performance in human rights literacy after a complete design education curriculum.

With the use of the design education process within action research, we explore the changes of students' human rights literacy during their studies and analyze their ideas and advice regarding

the maintenance and contribution to human rights. In this study, we also find that the teaching approaches of design education can make students internalize and complete their human rights competence, thus enhancing their human rights ethical and moral values.

2. Realizing Human Rights Literacy through Design Education

Research on the sustainable development of human rights has gradually attracted the attention of experts and scholars in various fields in recent years. Janet Fleetwood explores the relationship between food crisis and human rights from the perspective of social justice (4). Riikka P. Rajala et al. also discuss the priorities of water management services and basic human rights from water and environment majors' perspectives (13). Rosa Roig et al discuss the gender equality significance and empowerment behind the process of Spain's transformation from dictatorship to democracy, during which women's participation in politics increased (3). Nowadays, while the society pays attention to human rights issues, we see the importance of sustainable development of human rights. Such a trend is an influence of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals. How to make human rights develop smoothly in all aspects and gain attention is one of the cores of research for the sustainable development of human rights. Today, researchers intend to help students improve their human rights literacy through design education where research and learning are based on human needs. Tim Brown, CEO and President of IDEO, said in 2009 that learning design thinking requires learning insight, observation and empathy. We should learn from and reflect on life, see the problems, find proper action plans through careful observation of what others have neglected, and design for the sake of others considering humanity (Brown and Katz 39).

Solving people's problems with design is a feasible direction. However, we should adopt an attitude of action research to always examine the interaction between design and people. For example, Henry Sanoff proposed lots of examples of the research of social design and reminded that we should pay more attention to the

relationship between people, communities and design creation (75). Arthur Mehrhoff takes a community in Minnesota as an example to discuss how architects, designers, and community development specialists, through interactive and systematic planning, can influence and help a community (43). Umut Toker proposes that the process of community design should allow planners, designers, students and other professionals to put forward their ideas. Such a process is a public dialogue among the community through which the needs of people in the community can be truly understood (4-6). It can be seen that there is an increasing trend of design and design education advocating that during the practical process of design practice, we must interact with the people and the community, understand people's true needs, help them solve problems, and improve their quality of life and surroundings.

Researchers believe such design practice experience is a kind of learning and training of morality and empathy, as well as a manifestation of human rights literacy, because during the process of design planning, practice and effect evaluation, we must carefully consider whether the design brings comfort, convenience and better quality of life to people. Whoever becomes a designer must put themselves in the public's shoes and consider their well-being, and must have good morals, integrating care, respect, empathy and contribution into their design mind-set. As Vedat Özsoy believes, art and design education can inspire our sensitivity and empathy, and develop our respect for the society and the environment, making us more sensitive and eager for protecting people and the environment (487). Indeed, human rights and design education are very closely related. Human rights shall be the core of thinking of design education, and design education should verify whether or not human rights are realized. Nowadays, in a time when we care about human sustainability, design education should adopt a human-centred method. We shall cultivate better morality for the next generation, actively speak for human rights, and through the process of design and implementation, get unreasonable and unfair situations of

humanity remedied and dealt with, so that we can create a sustainable environment worth looking forward to.

Besides, studies have also shown that the students' design process has a close relationship with their creativity (Hare and Ziyrek 1461). There are many human rights problems in the contemporary societies that need to be solved with creativity induced by design, such as the issues of human rights protection. As teachers, the next focus of design education is how to cultivate students to explore community cultures, to reflect on current human rights status in the community, to conceive effective and sustainable design solutions, so that the human rights issues can regain attention, and to provide the community with creative designs for human rights issues. We look forward to allowing students to obtain a more comprehensive and complete concept of human rights through the integrated designing education, and helping them to develop their own human rights points of view from cognitive, psychological and social aspects (Parson 778) as well as to connect their originally independent, unrelated, fragmented human rights knowledge with their experience to obtain a more complete design thinking experience and a moral view of human rights awareness.

3. Design Education Learning Process and Human Rights Issues

We established the following design education teaching framework (Figure 1) through the design education process, learning from the action research models of Damina and Almei (2012) and Gita and Apsari (2018). During the process of design education, researchers conduct curriculum research with the steps of planning, action, observation, and reaction, and maintain the flexibility of a dynamic cycle so that the research may be adjusted and revised at all times.

Thirty higher-grade elementary school students participate in this teaching plan for human rights. These students are 11-12 years old, 18 boys and 12 girls. Most students can clearly express their ideas and opinions in everyday life. This course attaches great importance to students' learning autonomy. The teachers' role is more of a guide and a counsellor. Students' observations, experience, perception, discussions, creation and suggestions, are

the main focuses of the teaching. Through the teaching approaches of this design education course, students can re-examine the relationships and connections between self and human rights. The teaching time is four months, totalling 720 minutes.
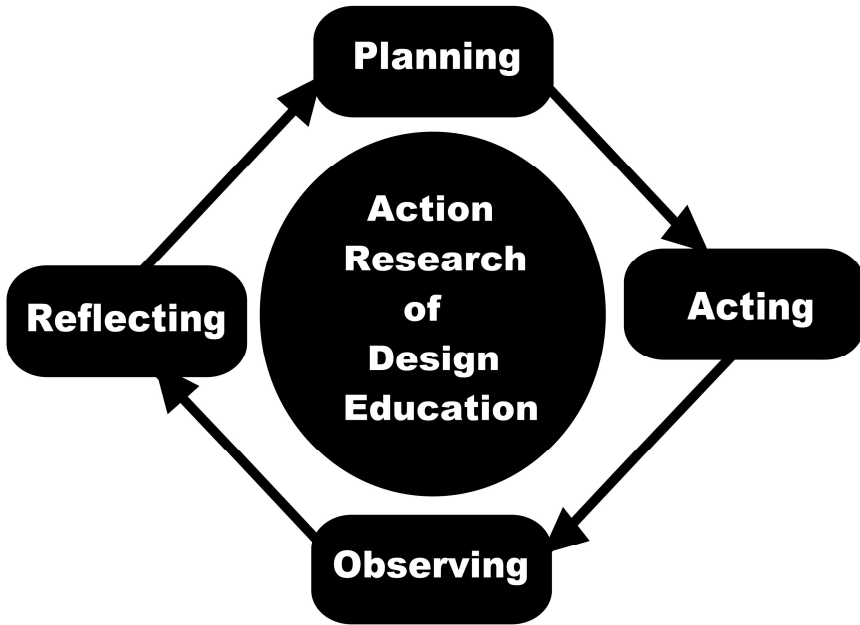

Figure 1. Model of Design Education and Teaching

Through the process of designing education, we aimed to help students pay attention to the issue of human rights and raise students' awareness and respect for different ethnic groups and genders through the subtle learning experience, so as to develop a good ethical attitude and moral character. The following are the main five steps of teaching:
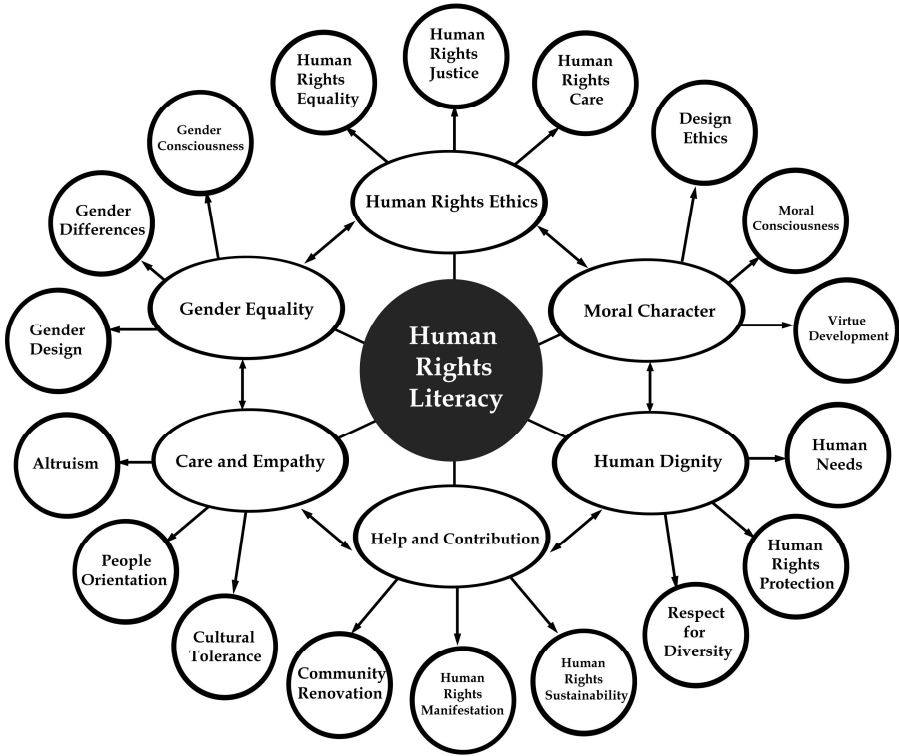
(i) Guide students to explore the human rights issues in the community and to clarify the possible causes of these issues.

(ii) Through discussion and interaction with the peers, let students propose methods and strategies to solve these human rights problems.

(iii) With design creation as a means of transmitting messages and concepts, the human rights issues of the community can be valued and even solved through students' design thinking and works.

(iv) Guide students to convey these design thinking and works related to human rights issues through various platforms, and to communicate and introduce their own design views on human rights protection.

(v) Let students review and reflect on their design thinking and works on human rights issues, refer to the feedback and suggestions from the general public, and then propose new ideas and amendments to their design plans.

The diagram above shows several important concepts that students learn in Human Rights Literacy through the teaching process, that we designed and implemented. While teachers guide students to experience and practice these concepts, we have a great opportunity to further discuss related concepts extended from these main concepts. We hope that we can deeply internalize the concept of 'human rights literacy' in students and help them get a more complete connection and application of concepts after the

curriculum of design education, so that the sustainable development of human rights literacy can be ensured and completed. In addition, the integration of the concept of human rights literacy and the design education process enables students to apply what they have learned to life situations and practice the core spirit of human rights literacy.

4. Students' Reactions and Performances on Human Rights

We find that there are the following characteristics in the responses and performances of students regarding human rights issues. From the observation, we can further understand students' genuine opinions and feelings about human rights issues, and we can clarify the differences between the perspectives of students and of adults, which in turn can help us adjust our teaching to better enhance students' human rights literacy.

4.1. Human Rights Consciousness and Student Sub-cultures

Through the course of design education, we discuss the importance of human rights issues with students. The students raised many human rights issues in the community after their field survey. In addition to mainstream views, the issues which students raised also contain many human rights issues that fall into the student sub-cultural field, which involve students' rethinking of the human rights competence of self and others. For example:

● I think there are not many playgrounds planned for children in our community. I think this is unfair.

● I think the most serious human rights problem in our community is that the elderly is not taken care of. Many of them sit idle in front of their houses every day. I think we should pay more attention to them.

● I think we have neglected the design of safe rest places in the community. Sometimes people get tired and need to rest, so a rest area is something that our community lacks. I think it would be even better if we can add warm colours and charging equipment to the design of rest areas in the community.

Compared to the human rights issues that adults care about in mainstream thinking, the human rights issues which students pay attention to are closely related to their life and cultural experiences,

which is something not to be ignored. Students' responses and points of view make the researcher think that we may have ignored many human rights issues that needs attention in small corners of the society. The urgency and importance of these problems being cared for may be much higher than what the mainstream society is currently giving.

4.2. Expanding the Understanding of Human Rights to Gender, Morality and Human Dignity

Students' human rights literacy gradually improved along the design education learning process. Students' thinking about human rights has changed from superficial to more diverse, insightful, and complete. The scope of students' human rights awareness expanded from the poverty and equality in the beginning to the issues of gender, morality and dignity. Students' awareness of human rights issues has become more extensive. For example:

● There is a lot of garbage in the river. I think the people living on the river banks must be very uncomfortable – they are not respected. Everyone should stop littering.

● There are very few public toilets in the community, and the facilities are inconvenient for women. I think we should respect the needs of different genders.

● There are many signs in our community that are particularly protruding and have blocked most people's views. I think this is very dangerous and really selfish.

Through the process of design education, the level and scope of students' understanding of human rights gradually developed to higher-level cognitive concepts, and students could explore the status of community human rights with more in-depth and diverse perspectives. This is a key step to cultivating students to contribute to the sustainable development of human rights in the future, because students begin to think about human rights with more comprehensive approaches and try to find solutions and strategies.

4.3. Creative Responses to Human Rights Issues

Due to the integration of human rights issues to education, students' design thinking and works express diverse creativity.

Some of their ideas focus on solving human rights issues, some protest and advocate about human rights issues, and some even design a model that makes the concept of human rights be brought into play – the students demonstrate ample creativity and innovation. For example:

● My design thinking focuses on the hope that everyone should pay more attention to the elderly living alone in the community.

● The poster I designed mainly conveys the message regarding the trucks speeding in the community, which poses a threat to our lives!

● I have an idea. I hope to design a community human rights issue feedback app. When you report a problem through the app, the local government sends people to the site to solve the problem.

While solving human rights problems in the communities through design education, students' creativity must be triggered, so that they can find feasible solutions for the issues. This process simultaneously enhances students' human rights literacy and creativity, which complement each other. In the face of human rights issues in the community, here we not only teach students to find and know the issues, but guide them to actually propose a variety of viable creative solutions, which we believe is truly contributing to human rights issues.

4.4. Feedback from the Communities

Most students use various platforms and media to introduce their design thinking and works on human rights issues. During the process, they interact and communicate closely with people in the community to express their design views on human rights protection. People's response and suggestions became an important inspiration for them to further reflect on the concepts of human rights and whether the concepts can be demonstrated through their designs. For example:

● I really like the advice given by an old lady in the community. She hopes that I can design more posters regarding elderly care. This makes me think that my efforts for them are worthy.

● Originally, the design promotion I wanted to do was to make everyone care and respect the new immigrants, but after I discussed with them, I changed my idea to making everyone discover the beauty of the new immigrants.

● I found that the accessible park I designed still lacked consideration in equipment design, because after discussing with a few physically challenged elders in the community, it turned out that their needs were different from what I thought.

While cultivating students to value sustainable development of human rights, we teach them to experience others' situations, empathize with others and contribute to others, because these abilities help students really 'care for others.' Moreover, only such experiences can make them genuinely pay attention to and make efforts for the goals of sustainable development of human rights, and only so will the human rights which the society nowadays advocates be realized.

4.5. Creative Responses with Altruistic Ethics

Some students have deeper insights and care in their human rights design thinking and proposals. In addition to their original creativity and ideas, they have more thoughts on "How to help with people's true human rights needs in the community?" The premise of design for human rights is internalized to become more profound 'altruistic ethics,' showing that students pay more attention to and reflect on the concepts of human rights. For example:

● I hope that my new proposal can really help waste pickers in the community and attract more attention and support for them. I had always neglected them in the past, and now I think I should do something for them.

● I used to merely think that the community was very unfair to women, but I didn't know what to do. After discussing with women in the community, I found that women need more friendly and convenient spaces.

● From this course, I learned to listen to others' needs and to think about what we can do for the community. If our efforts can help improve their lives, I will feel very happy because I know that I have helped people.

Students' reactions, feedback, and performance in the design education with human rights issues at the core have expanded from the recognition, understanding, and discussion of basic human rights issues to diverse human rights issues. The scope of discussion has gradually become enriched and broadened. Students are also willing to try different models and categories in terms of design thinking and performance. More importantly, students are willing to share their human rights related design ideas and works, to accept feedback and suggestions, and then to propose new solutions, gradually moving their human rights consciousness towards altruism and making themselves people with good ethics and morals. This is the most precious discovery and analysis of our students' learning responses during the design education.

5. Evaluation by Students

In the learning process of design education with human rights literacy at the core, observing students' reactions and performances in each step, we can find that students' ideas and creation are closely connected with the values of human rights. As the course progresses, their human rights awareness obviously becomes better and more focused. From the weak awareness at the beginning to the rich and diversified literacy afterwards, the design education with human rights at the core has obvious impacts on students.

Through the integration of the concepts of human rights literacy, we can more effectively help students focus on different human rights issues in the community. During the discussions, many ideas are sparked. What is different from the past is that students begin to see human rights from different perspectives. In terms of design creation, they also use innovative thinking and techniques to observe, criticize, reflect, and create effective responses to community human rights issues. Because of the increase in concepts and wider connections, students' imagination and creativity accumulate. Consequently, in the learning responses of the last few units, the students show high quality and commitment in their performances. For them, human rights are no longer a slogan, but an important fact that they experience, discuss, and respond genuinely. They also show their care for diverse human rights through

communication, understanding, and acceptance. In the end, they create works and platforms to manifest the value of human rights and concern for people. Here, we can see that human rights have become an important part and norm in their lives.
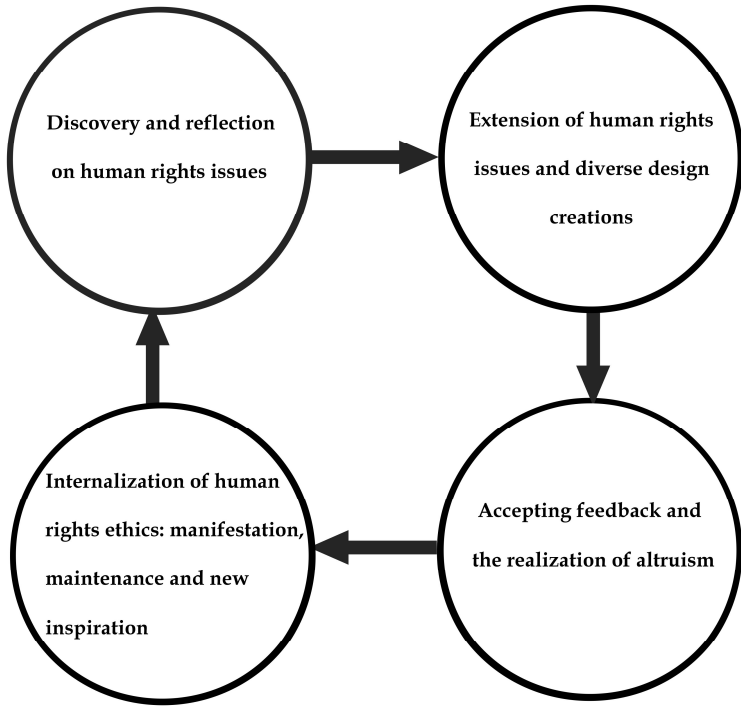

Figure 3. Diagram of Human Rights Consciousness Construction

Besides, from the perspectives of students' learning interaction, interview records, work analysis, etc., the impact of the design education learning process on students' human rights literacy is quite profound and effective. Not only do students know how to design for the protection of human rights, but, more importantly, how to protect human rights has become a part of their metacognition, a core belief, and even a new ethical imperative. Students gradually become advocates and guardians of human rights awareness. The processes of construction and internalization of human rights consciousness are complete sequences of ideas (as shown in the Figure 3). The process of design education makes students' human rights literacy consolidated and solidified.

When students learn to value human rights, we should not stop at the representation of superficial definitions. Really meaningful human rights education is to guide students through experience to understand the importance of protecting human dignity, gender equality, and moral and ethical concepts. Through the learning process of design education, these important human rights concepts seem to be more easily internalized by students. Helping students share their design thinking and works through various platforms does not only let students understand others' views on their human rights advocacy design, but, more importantly, also increase students' sense of social responsibility and morality, so that students can truly implement the concepts of human rights protection in their lives and contribute to the societal ethics.

6. Conclusion

During the process of designing education, internalizing human rights literacy and guiding students towards learning autonomy are the keys to promoting the sustainable development of students' human rights literacy. Drawing students' attention to the importance of human rights to our lives is the first step to promote the sustainable development of human rights. The process of in-person participation through design education makes it easier for students to internalize the concepts of human rights literacy, and in turn practice the concepts in their lives. Therefore, it is suggested that the design education of human rights issues be conducted with teaching methods such as Learning Autonomy, as the main axis of guidance. Teachers should avoid too much dominance, so that students have more personal experience regarding the concepts of human rights, as well as more motivation and practical abilities for human rights awareness. Only when students are willing to care and pay attention to human rights, can they manifest morality through design learning, can they be conscious of the dignity and equality of others, and can the possibility of sustainable development of humanity be continued.

Through the exploration, planning, action, observation and reflection activities in design education, students have developed a more complete human rights literacy. We believe that cultivating

the next generation which values 'human rights literacy' is worthy of our active efforts. Design education provides a good way, opportunity, and platform for students to cultivate an attitude of upholding human dignity, and to pool ideas and propose meaningful and creative problem-solving strategies. The learning includes a process of exploration, planning, action, observation, and reflection, which can be repeated continuously until the human rights issues are truly dealt with and paid attention to. The construction of students' human rights literacy is more than just superficial cognition. Design education helps students integrate more concepts which can make the quality of students' human rights literacy better and more complete. Therefore, we believe that the design education with human rights issues at the core can more effectively help students improve their human rights literacy. We believe that the continuous promotion of such an education model will be of great help to the development of human rights.

After the implementation of design education, students' human rights literacy has extended to more diverse aspects, preparing for the next course of action. We start from the community and pay attention to the human rights issues in the community. Through design thinking and practice, the courses help students reflect on the connections between human rights and design, subtly improving students' human rights literacy. After the end of the course, students report more human rights concerns. The idea of human rights reach has been integrated into their metacognition, bringing motivation for future actions. We believe that such experiential learning helps students to demonstrate more wonderful learning achievements and to make efforts and involvement in human rights issues and sustainability of human rights in their personal and social lives.

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