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JAPAN

DEVELOPING CHILDREN'S 'EYE-FOR-DESIGN' TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This essay presents an instructional approach to developing children's eye-for-design from the perspective of advancing the goal of 'Responsible Production and Consumption' in the Sustainable Development Goals. This type of eye involves design thinking and facilitates producing and appreciating quality design in daily life. I developed this approach by exploring three prominent designers' views of design thinking from an educational standpoint. This approach was tested in the classroom setting with sixth-grade children in a Japanese elementary school, and action research was conducted to determine the effects of the approach. Based on the results of this research, I discuss how design education might be implemented to achieve the goal of 'Responsible Production and Consumption'.

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to develop an effective approach to design education in elementary schools to advance Sustainable Development Goal 12: 'Responsible Production and Consumption'. The concept of design has been continually expanded, and today, design is not only considered a 'thing' in the tangible sense, such as industrial products, but also a 'thing' in the sense of services. Under such circumstances, consumers must have a public responsibility to develop a sustainable society. The production and supply of products and services result from consumer demand. Therefore, the better consumers' design literacy, that is, their critical eye for 'good design', the more high-quality products and services are produced. The concept of high-quality products and services does not merely relate to end products but also to products that use sustainable materials, the use of environmentally friendly production methods, and the contribution to social benefits. I believe that as the number of such products and services increases, production and consumption activities aimed toward a sustainable society are likely to be realized.

Therefore, I focus on consumer literacy that involves design thinking. Design thinking is defined as a unique cognitive activity that is undertaken in the process of designing (Fumi & Takuo 2019; Yamanaka, 2011), and it has become widely known through the efforts of the Stanford d. school and IDEO, Inc., in the United States of America. Such thinking is critical for acquiring an eye-for-design - a mindset that is developed through a problem-solving process - in designing a product and in the appreciation of the designed product.

In the field of design education in Japan, there is a tendency to pay attention only to the final product of design and to overlook the quality of learners' thinking processes, including how the problem is solved during the process of creating designs. The educative aspect of designing, which enables learners to cultivate the ability to 'discover and solve problems' rather than just complete the design product, should receive more attention.

Developing children's 'eye-for-design' to support sustainable development - **Ryohei Oshima**

ACTION RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPING AN EYE-FOR-DESIGN IN THE ART CLASSROOM

I developed a new instructional approach for design education, which features the application of a method of thinking used by designers for production to assist students in acquiring an eye-for-design. To articulate the features of design thinking, I reviewed three prominent Japanese leaders who were active and well recognized: Hara Kenya (2011), Oki Sato (2015), and Shunji Yamanaka (2011, 2017), and examined their views as expressed in their writings. The following six features of design thinking were identified through this examination:

1. Close observation of daily objects
2. Rediscover design elements in daily life
3. Discover consumers' needs and values through dialogue with them
4. Create an original design by developing a new relationship among design elements discovered in daily life
5. Create a design product with the user in mind
6. Improve design work through continuous dialogue with consumers

Applying these features of design thinking, I conducted a project with sixth-grade children in an elementary school in Hiroshima, Japan, aimed to develop their eye-for-design. The theme of this project was 'designing a book cover for my friend'. Children worked in pairs to design a book cover for their partner's favorite book. The project lasted two months, and I taught two art classes per week. Dialogue was regarded as key in the process of developing a book cover design in this project. Each child interviewed their partner to identify the partner's needs in regard to the book cover. It was expected that in taking into account their needs, the child would develop an eye-for-design, critical to producing and appreciating the quality of the design. The interview questions to determine the partner's needs included: 'What is your favorite color?', 'What is the title of the book you chose?', 'What part do you like best in the book?', and so on. The interview was conducted in an ongoing manner throughout the process of making the book cover design to ensure satisfaction of the partner's needs.

Along with this project, I conducted action research to examine the educational effects of this approach. One hundred sixty-five sixth-grade children volunteered to participate in this research. Pre- and post-questionnaires composed of four-choice questions were administered to the participating children. Their artwork and written documents produced in the classroom were also collected as a set of data to collect information useful for determining the effectiveness of the approach. The six questions used in the questionnaires are given below. These items correspond to the six previously described characteristics of design thinking:

1. I can observe daily objects closely.
2. I can find design elements in everyday objects.
3. I can create my own ideas by taking others' ideas into account.
4. I can express my own ideas using design elements.
5. I can create my own work with the user in mind.
6. I can use others' ideas to improve my work.

I scored students' responses to each question by assigning a 4-point scale to the four response choices per question, with 1 being the lowest score and 4 being the highest score. The mean scores before and after the project were compared to determine the effectiveness. Moreover, I sought to understand the process of each students' design thinking based on the qualitative analysis of the design works and written documents.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AN EYE-FOR-DESIGN APPROACH

As shown in Figure I, the mean score regarding each question rose after the project. The largest increase was seen for item (5) 'I can create my own work with the user in mind'.
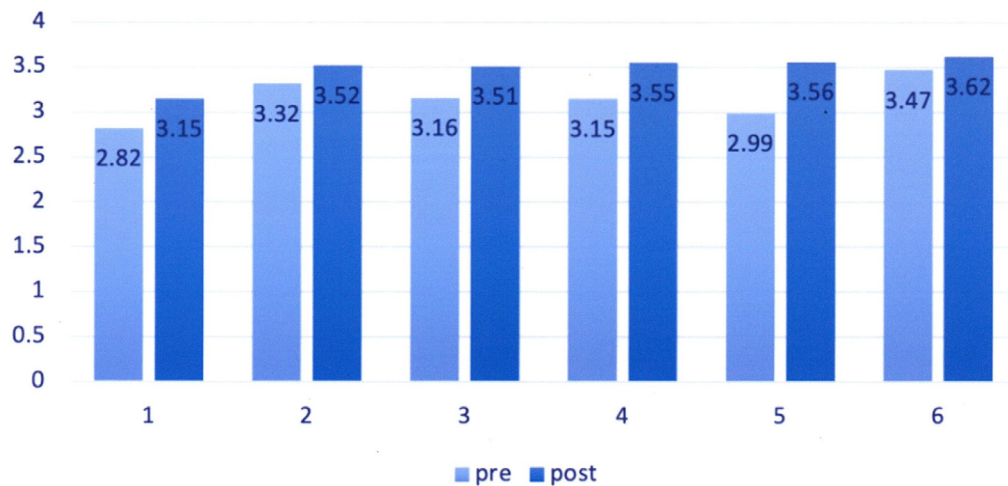
Figure 1.

A comparison of average scores on the pre- and post-questionnaires.

I consider the case of Hiroshi to demonstrate the process of children's design thinking. He was among the students who exercised design thinking effectively. At the stage of developing a draft for the book cover design, Hiroshi composed his design by combining all of what his partner Aki liked. Aki's favorite color was red, and he liked fruits, cherry blossom trees, and music. Hiroshi placed all of the items together randomly with red color in his draft. When Aki looked at Hiroshi's draft, he provided both positive and negative comments: 'I appreciate you putting all the things I like. However, because you use red color so dominantly, it looks dreadful and bloody'. In considering this comment, Hiroshi became aware of the expressive quality of his design, reconsidered his use of color and the arrangement of the parts, and experimented with his design through dialogue with Aki.

Figure 2.
Book cover design created by a sixth grader.

Figure 3.
Designed cover with a book.

In the final book cover design, Hiroshi used soft colors, such as pink and yellow, with a small amount of red to create a cheerful atmosphere, and he placed a banana, Aki's favorite fruit, with dancing music notes as the central subject. Through continuous dialogue with Aki, Hiroshi became interested in the book selected by Aki, which he had never read, and built a deep sense of empathy with what Aki liked. He also became more attentive to the expressive quality and design elements and principles in relation to Aki's needs.
I regard this aspect as important for developing an eye-for-design from an educational standpoint. Through creating a design based on such an emphatic understanding, children can develop an eye for discerning what design is good and how it is to be created.

CONCLUSION

As indicated in Figure 1, the mean scores regarding each item in the questionnaires increased after the project, which demonstrates that the eye-for-design approach helped the children enhance their design thinking. Continuous dialogue with the partner to identify their needs allowed children to think more deeply and to critically examine the book cover design from the consumer's standpoint.

I consider this to be the key element in educating children's eye-for-design in terms of contributing to the achievement of the goal of 'Responsible Production and Consumption' in the Sustainable Development Goals. I believe that introducing this type of learning in schools will eventually enhance the sustainability of society.

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