Scenery Changes on Campus Advanced by Students

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Abstract

University is where students improve their abilities and professors proceed with their research. It is fortunate if their interests coincide with each other's. However, they are not always the same. In such a case, a seminar in a laboratory might fill the gap between them to a certain extent. In department such as architecture or landscape architecture that considered as training for creating real spaces, the final purpose is to have the students experience creating a place as they visualized it, even if it is a small one. Armchair theory does not accomplish their real needs. Theory is important for researchers; however, students are young and often impatient and do not pay attention to others' past works. As a beginner, only experience can teach them the knowledge they require.

This paper shows the result of a trial begun in 2013, wherein students were provided the chance to make actual change in the scenery in an experimental area of the campus. Lawrence Halprin's RSPV cycles were referred to in this experiment. The landscape operations added to the site by the students in the campus yearly for a period of three years are presented, and the meaning each change conveys is also considered.

Keywords: scenery change, landscape architecture, students' experience, failure

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Introduction

All students have to belong to a laboratory during their junior year in our landscape architecture program. Each professor has their own professional interests and manages his or her own laboratory. I am an associate professor interested in the theory of scenery making. I have researched historical Japanese landscape making (Okajima, 2009, 2010). However, research on this theme has not always coincided with the interest of students even if they belong to my laboratory. Theoretical research explores verbal information in written form. Students' imagine this subject is more visual and tangible and naturally visualize real open spaces. Our landscape architecture program is in the Environmental Horticulture Department at the university. Students have to take several other natural science subjects. Visible and tangible information seems to be more important than conceptual and abstract information. Students are disposed to study in this manner. To correspond with students' interest and their learning temperament we began with their pre-conceived interest and developed it. In craftsmanship, the master displays experienced skill to the disciple. The disciple learns the master's methods of creating things by assisting the master's work. However, in my case, the teacher is a theorist, so when students want to obtain a practitioner's position, what happens? In this case, the laboratory professor becomes an observer of students, reversing the role of teachers and students. In reality, disciples are developed in their master's company. The company pays for their work. Conversely, university staff are paid from students' fees. Thus, the money flow is also opposite. Hence, since 2010, our laboratory has supported students' project of creating scenery on campus. If students are interested in such a scenery creating process, we provide them the opportunity. Therefore, all we provided was the opportunity and observed what happened. Nevertheless, it is not easy in most cases. Researchers want to spend their money on their own research subject. When students created some real spaces that were not good products, the money for the project was utilized for the failed work of students. However, we did accept this situation for six years. During this period I lead a project myself only once in 2013. Except for this, students have advanced all the scenery changes. We have already published our activities in 2010 and 2013 (Okajima 2011, 2014; Fiscal year of 2014 is 2013). Three years has passed since then. This paper describes the new changes that have occurred.

Lawrence Halprin, a master of American landscape architecture called his life, "A Life Spent Changing Places" (Halprin, 2011). He did not say, "a life spent designing places." "Changing" was a better word for him. It is also true about our project.

Objectives

This paper first briefly displays the outline of our project, and second, indicates two important events from previous years. Halprin described the creative process as "RSVP cycles." We examine earlier important events in this respect. The accomplishments in 2016 were the most recent and impressive, so we review the project from the perspective of educational opportunity.

Project history and overview before 2016

Our campus was constructed in 2009. From 2010, our faculty members moved onto this campus and lectures and practices began. The first students' project began in

2010. Six years have passed since then. Table 1 displays students' activities each year. It indicates the year, outline of the activity, a concrete explanation, and the number of students who participated in this graduate work. The number of students varied each year. Altogether 23 students, 77% of all laboratory students chose this as their primary graduate work.

Table 1. Scenery changes practiced by our laboratory since 2010

Year	Outline of Activity	Explanation	Number of students
2010	Initial project	Land survey, Conceptual design, Level the land, Terrace and fireplace, Path, Readymade bench, Three small islands landscape	4
2011	Extending the 2010 landscape	*Karesansui* (Dry landscape garden), original bench, addition of six plants	1
2012	Creating an entrance	Low brick gate as an invitation of space usage	3
2013	Constructing a wooden shed	A shed for storing garden tools, adding human element in the woods	2
2014	Exchanging the 2011 bench	The 2011 bench was rotten	1
2015	Renewing the 2010 path and islands	Five islands from three, adding habitability in the 2013 house	5
2016	Renewing the 2015 islands, making a new pergola, exchanging the 2014 bench	Three new benches for people's communication, accessible pergola, improvement of darkness in the woods	7

The following content describes the important activities for this paper.

The first important year was 2010. The candidate place was a wooded square area of 20meters by 30 meters. Once a withered tree was removed from the area, some open space appeared. First year students made a small garden there. That year three of four students were close friends. They wanted to symbolize their friendship by making scenery. In the summer holidays, one student called and told the teacher that he truly wanted to create a good graduate work with every laboratory member. The other student was not a part of the friends' group, but he had a strong interest in design. He drew his ideal plan as a diagram on a whiteboard in the students' room. The other three students respected this diagram and decided to construct it. Because the original diagram contained several ideas, they could not realize everything. The details of this project were introduced in the previous report (Okajima, 2011). Let us observe this project from the RSVP perspective. One student illustrated "Score" while the three close friends did "Performance." The first diagram contained a square terrace that was altered into a triangle to reduce costs. These four students did not give this advice. A fifth student indicated this procedure. It is like a "Valueaction" operation. Another student proposed that this area was suitable for our graduation work. Without the student's proposal, we would not have decided on this place. All these six members

that year participated in "Resources."

In 2013, a new aspect was introduced. The other university students did not seem to pay much attention to the wooded area. We had not examined people's usage frequency here. We did not recognize the exact effect and value of this place. The situation is the same even today. Fortunately, we saw a questionnaire conducted on senior students wherein a person indicated that this was the most relaxing place on campus. Though that was a nice description, I saw it as a somber space. The woods had been implemented as a garden. To make it a real garden, a house had to be constructed.

I proposed that the students create a small shed to generate more human warmth there. I imagined a summer resort in central Japan and "Zoki no niwa" which was a modern Japanese garden style. The teacher persuaded students about the purpose of the project. Thus, constructing a shed in the woods became their graduate work. Laboratory members did not draw the design of the shed. Perhaps members designed some shapes but we had to construct it in the space. In traditional architecture education in universities, students have the opportunity to design a variety of buildings but they remained un-built projects. To construct a real building a vast amount of money is required. The university could not pay for such an imaginative project. If students have to be involved in constructing buildings, they have to participate in real projects requested by clients outside the university. Since that is a true professional's work, why would an amateur receive such a contract? This project was an empirical study that assessed one very important factor. Did we really have the ability to construct a building from a blueprint? I searched for blueprints and advice regarding the concrete construction process. Even though it was a scenario, it was a completely new experiment for our faculty. Eventually we constructed a small wooden shed that year using a DIY text. Details of this project were introduced in a previous report (Okajima, 2013) as well. The DIY text was selected from several options based on an aesthetical viewpoint. The Teacher chose it. Let us look at this project from the RSVP perspective. The DIY text displayed a "Score." The Teacher organized the schedule for the construction. Two students had to participate in the construction. The Teacher also worked as a constructor. The Teacher had to work very hard. So two students and one teacher were "Performers." The DIY text explained every construction process. Though it was helpful, it sometimes did not explain every method specifically, so we had to consider other methods. This was like "Valueaction." Our university has a practical training facility that has several woodworking tools. This was one of the "Resources."

2016 Project

This year, totally there were seven laboratory members. There were three groups of close friends. Each group had different characters. One student was outside of the three groups. This student first chose a graduate thesis. The other six students wanted to be involved in scenery change as graduate work. Apparently, the group number was stable. If one group merged into another group, they could not work efficiently. The Teacher gave several choices such as different place, different theme etc. If they accepted to do graduate work in a vacant plot in a different place, they could do a completely new activity. The appeal did not make sense. They selected the wooded area even though it had several restrictions. Figure 2 illustrates the wooded area.

The wooded space was important for several teachers. It was the nearest woods from the main faculty building. The natural science teachers sometimes brought their students here to observe nature. This area was also frequented by environmentalist. There was the risk that students might insist on behaving like developers, desiring to cut down several trees.

For the students, the place senior students concerned was important. They considered the activity in this place endorsed an authenticity. For them the place was an important "Resource." Before admitting these students to utilize the area, I created an official document setting the boundaries for usage and protected areas. The space was 20 by 30 m^2 so, in a sense, it was not a completely protected area (it was venerable area). This document was circulated among the managing team members of our campus and a month later, we obtained permission to use the area.
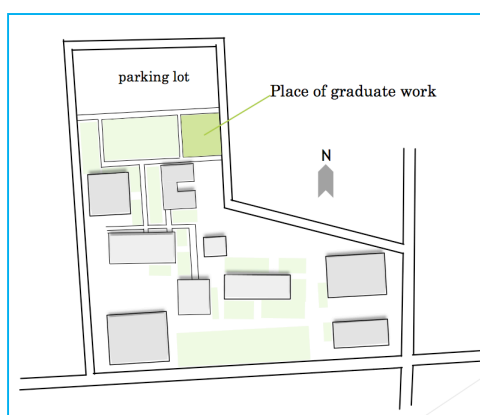

Figure 1. Placement of campus

It was the end of summer. It is difficult to use this area between spring and autumn as there are many mosquitos. The second semester began in October. From autumn to spring, the conditions are better. A student outside these three groups asked the teacher that he be included in the graduate work. He joined one group. This year three groups had to conduct graduation work in one area, so setting a boundary for protected and usage areas was helpful. The three groups wanted to conduct their work independently. To accomplish that, three themes had to be in place.

The following was what happened. One group proposed to take over the renovation of the 2015 project ("group C" hereafter). The senior students had created five islands in 2015. Members of group C obtained permission from the seniors to alter the island scenery. Therefore, they appropriated that portion of the site and selected the working area. The Teacher did not influence this group. They found their own working area.

Members of group B increased into three people by the end of summer. They seemed to be interested in woodcraft. One student was interested in architecture. I asked the student to design a wooded arbor. Our university is situated in Southern Japan. In summer, it is hot and the sun is very strong. "If an easy-to-make arbor model is designed, it can be used in other places on campus. So how about making a good model in the wooded area and if it is nice let us build the same model in other places as a sunshade." This was the proposal for the students of group B.

Group A members were interested in motorcycles. They enjoyed altering and repairing motorcycles. Hence, they were considered good at manufacturing. "They might do graduate work smoothly," the teacher thought. They seemed to be realists. They did not approach theoretical learning during laboratory seminars. They always seemed to have something more important to do than laboratory activity. They proffered minimum participation in the laboratory. This group was proposed an assignment. Samples of the hardwood "Itauba" from Brazil were in our laboratory's storage. Group A was asked to use the timber in graduate work. The Teacher did not tell them what to make. Therefore, for a long time, they could not decide what to do.

Figure 2. Completed scenery

Figure 3. Scenery of group B

Figure 4. Scenery of group A

The group A leader would sometimes offer to help the other groups if necessary. However, such need did not appear. The leader finally found a theme to work on. In the first semester, we had conducted a seminar in the shed made in 2013. Eight people gathered in the shed. It was very small for eight. The leader remembered this and proposed to create a space where seminars could be held. Three benches for about eight people were proposed. He said, "This space will be a good place for laboratory seminars in the forest in the future. Sometimes holding seminars outside will help deciding the next effective laboratory activity." It was a sign that the group had found their own theme.

All three groups were informed about the budget for their activity. "Maximum budget for the activity of each group is 700 dollars," they were told. Then they began their own assignments. Completed scenery is shown in Figures 2, 3, and 4.

Consideration

In scenery, when many people gather and effectively accomplish something there has to be some "score." If there is no score, the people may not accomplish anything meaningful. That is human nature, I think.

In our laboratory activity in 2016, three groups had to do something in one place. The three groups had their own scores and their own missions. Table 2 illustrates the first score maker. The existence of these "scores" leads their own "performances." First performances have the potential to lead their next scores. When their performances were about to result in scenery, they were asked, "Why not consider each other's work? This is one place and we are doing this as a group. Please look at the whole scenery. There are sceneries made by senior students and by other groups. Please find a way to relate fittingly with the other works as currently, each scenery is isolated."

Table 2. First score maker

Group	Score maker	The contents of first score (assessed by observer i.e. teacher)
A	Students	Inherited senior students' area, enhance its usage aspect
B	Teacher	To create an arbor where passersby can rest
C	Students	To create a suitable space in the woods where several people can have discussions

Group B created a small path to the one that senior students had made in 2015. They changed the rafter design. This might be a small aspect but it transformed the area and created a sense of unity. The Teacher's advice operated as "Valueaction."

One "Resource" in this experiment were eight (7＋1) laboratory members. There were other resources including history, i.e., five years of accumulated sceneries. There was special hardwood that was a material resource.

Evaluation

After the completion of every construction, the students were given a questionnaire. It asked nine aspects of graduate work that are summarized below.

1) Do you think it was useful for you to choose graduate work (changing scenery project)? Please write the reason.
2) What do you think if you have a special budget for your project? Does it help?
3) Compared with a graduate thesis, was it good for you to actually create a space?
4) Do you think teachers have to participate more in your project?
5) Please evaluate the result.

86% of students stated that choosing graduate work was useful and gave the following reasons:

・*Having to work within a set of guidelines enabled me to think of different ways of doing the work. If there had been no rules, I might not have been able to consider new methods.*
・*We could imagine a garden and consider it in unity with the surrounding environment. We could contemplate the ideal state of the place from several viewpoints.*
・*Deliberating on a way to make the place better, we thought and got ideas.*
・*I learned the difficulty of dealing with lumber. I learned about presentations.*
・*I learned to make a schedule and act upon it.*
・*From this experience I could see things what I couldn't before. It was related to other things.*
・*This enabled me to think for myself and act.*

One Student did not provide a positive response as he suffered from Agoraphobia and Claustrophobia. The person indicated that he could not obtain a similar job because of his anxiety disorder.

Conclusion

We explained a brief history of scenery changing activities from 2010 to 2016. The 2010 and 2013 projects were reviewed from the RSVP perspective. The process of the latest 2016 project was described. The 2016 project was almost successful so the RSVP cycle was utilized. Reviewing this project indicated the following:

1) Good relation between students creates a good result.
2) Students are happy with graduate work especially when it is a result of their good teamwork.
3) A kickoff "Score" is effective for students to begin their own projects. Such scores stimulate students. A score leads to "Performance." The performance leads to the next score with "Valueaction."
4) Showing students the "Resources" of the activity is also effective.

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