

CAMPUS DREAMLAND

A Case Study for a Campus Participatory Design Project

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ABSTRACT

September 2002, TM College started its participatory venture for redesigning the campus public spaces. The process not only has produced better environments but also changed the school bureaucratic system temporarily. This paper describes the practice process: what techniques have been adopted to motivate people, how participatory process disturbed the existing school bureaucratic system, and what opportunities and factors assisted reaching the goals. This paper evaluates the whole process then suggests strategies for TM's next try on participatory design: authorize participants first, provide feedback, refer to existing cases, and link partnership as outside force against the existing power structure.

BACKGROUND: TO STIMULATE A TRADITIONAL SCHOOL

TM College is a conservative and obedient school. The school follows the guidelines of the Ministry of Education (MOE). The principal has to execute the orders from the trustee board. Teachers listen to the principal and college students obey the teachers. The school takes the role as a traditional institution—a homogeneous body that reproduces for the society. As Touraine (2003) describes, “This conception of education is centered not on the individual, but on society, on what are known as values and on rational knowledge in particular. . . . The individual of classical modernity learns to serve progress, the nation and knowledge.”

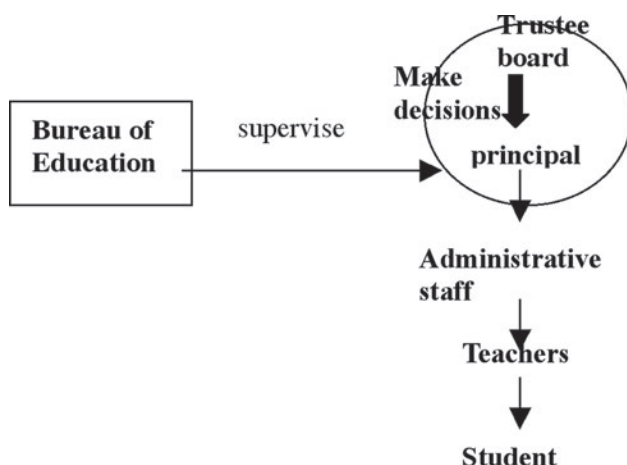


Figure 1. TM traditional bureaucratic structure.

However, two projects TM executed since 2002 provided the opportunity to transform TM from a traditional school to a school for the Subject: “community renaissance pedagogical studies” and “creative campus renew project.” These two projects were both commissioned by the MOE. TM, being a private school and planning to upgrade to the university level,² needs to perform well to impress the MOE.

“Community renaissance pedagogical studies”, handled by the Department of General Studies, basically was a seminar to introduce community renaissance/participatory design projects to facilitate teachers to conduct new classes regarding community issues. The “creative campus renew project” aimed at transforming some (forgotten) campus locations to be “creative” spaces. In 2002 six universities/colleges were reimbursed by MOE and each school had to face different difficulties. In TM's case, the main scope of the work was to create public spaces through participatory design process. Therefore, the above two projects were combined later.

Regarding the public spaces, according to the ideas of Lefebvre's production of space and Soja's the third space, there are three kinds of spaces to be considered, physical public space (the first space), the representation of public space (the second space), and the living space (the third space) (Hsia, 1997). These spaces aim to meet others, exchange ideas, and conduct discourses for public affairs. Ideally, by way of participatory design, the three spaces should be integrated.

When a school starts building public spaces, it is very likely to change its traditional reproduction role. Touraine describes an ideal school as a school for the Subject, that communicates, and that democratizes an educational system that “defines its mission as enhancing the capacity and will of individuals to become actors and learn to recognize that the Other enjoys the same freedom, the same right to individuation and the same right to defend social interests and cultural values that he or she enjoys is a democratizing system” (Touraine, 2003). In all, a school's role should be beyond an administrative service institution!

Then, how did TM create these spaces? How did a rigid school like TM start its participatory venture?

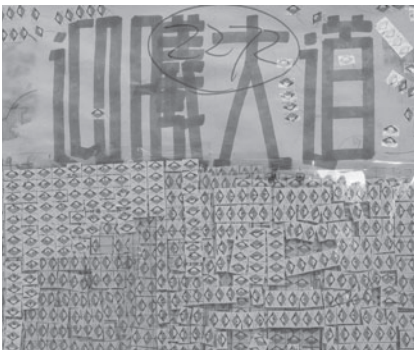
DESIGN PROCESS

Forming public discourse spaces

Principal Shen was the key person. In the private school system, the principal is the interface between the educational system and the trustee board. He/she needs to integrate the manpower and the ideas of both the administrative system and the trustee board. Therefore, the principal takes a critical role. In TM's case, Principal Shen initiated the “TM creative campus renew project.” She then assigned the Department of General Studies to handle the project and invited the Building and



Figure 2. “Give me a name.” Students voted for their favorite names (Left). Ballots on the first prize - Greeting Sunrise Boulevard (Below).



Planning Research Foundation (BPRF) to join the planning team. In the next step, the principal assembled a “Creative Campus Task Force” under the “Campus Planning Committee,” as MOE’s Request For Proposal requested. The Task Force, chaired by the principal and recruited administrative chiefs, teachers, students, and professional consultants (the BPRF team), was intended to incorporate broader opinions, which took a different way of its regular decision making process. Meanwhile, another related project—community renaissance pedagogical studies, took this project as a hands on practice, and thus recruited the main manpower to execute this project. The name of this study group was “the Wish Group (WG),” under the Creative Campus Task Force.

WG met once a week. The members came from various departments, which provided opportunities for teachers to communicate among different fields—the establishment of a primary public forum. Besides, these members were responsible to reach out through their networks to incorporate more opinions from the larger body. For example, Director Lin (for the student activities) conducted a student survey regarding the impressions of TM.³ In addition, toward the end of the project, Director Lin also assisted arranging student clubs holding activities on the planning sites to claim as students’ space. Teacher Joy Wu and Director Ko, core members, prepared a “TM creative campus” homepage as MOE requested and also invited a computer teacher to write a questionnaire program for students to fill out through the internet. However, WG evaluated that all the above methods still followed the existing teacher-student top-down power structure, which certainly could not guarantee motivating students to participate.

Therefore, WG changed the strategy to involve students by conducting several events. On the School Anniversary Day, WG held three events: “Wish Pool,” “Speak Up” and “Give Me a Name.” The first two were for students to state their suggestions to the site planning. While the last one was intended to attract students’ attention to a certain space—an alley between two building complexes, and also to increase the place attachment by naming it. In “Give Me a Name,” WG invited all classes to give the space a name and a rationale so that we can also see how students thought about a certain space. Partly owing to an award provided, this event turned out to be a hot campaign! 56 names were submitted for the competition.⁴ The first prize named “Greeting Sunrise Boulevard.” “We, being students, to study hard is our responsibility and to work contentedly is our goal. Just so hopeful as being sun shined. We also wish more activities to be held on this boulevard in the future,” the class stated.

Designing public spaces

The main purpose for TM’s creative campus renew project was to create spaces to meet Others—to break the boundaries among different people to experience multicultural campus. The needs also came from upgrading the school. When TM is changing from a professional high school level to a college/university, the class system is also changed from a whole-day-class to the class electing system. That is, students did not need to stay at their home base classrooms for a whole day anymore. There is free time for them to hang out on campus during the class breaks. It was necessary to create more spaces other than classrooms for students. Based on a primary survey by the Task Force, WG chose three locations for planning:

a) “The Green Island,⁵” – an old three-floor building that stands alone by the main gate, which was perfect to be the bridge between TM and the community. As the name described, it was a “forgotten lonely island.” It has been planned to be demolished for a new building. Therefore, it was empty for years, then changed to be student club bases. Since this space seemed to be abandoned, it had the potential for various usages, as Teacher Joy Wu’s poem described:

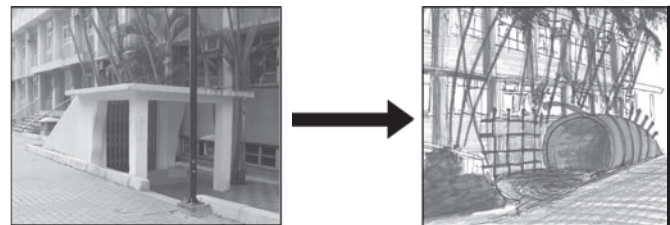


Figure 3. A space planned for students to display their ideas in the future “Imaging the basement exit to be changed.” (sketches by Y. C. Lee)

Let's play with the Green Island

Let's play with the Green Island, from ground floor to the third floor, from inside to the outside, from corridor to bathroom, from bathroom to façade, from façade to outdoor, from Latte to Spaghetti, from gallery to hip-hop, from now to renew. Let's play with the Green Island.

b) The newly named “Greeting Sunrise Boulevard.” It is an alley between the old Service Hall (south face of Quadrangle) and the new Renew Hall. This area constitutes students’ main living area on campus: it was one of the main walkways on campus; the basement of Service Hall was a convenience store; the old cafeteria was next to Renew Hall; many events were held on the stair flat by the Service Hall in the courtyard. The above functions could be integrated by renewing the “Greeting Sunrise Boulevard.” This space was full of energy and should not be merely a walkway.

c) The courtyard of Quadrangle. Quadrangle is the very first building on TM campus that deserves a landmark. The courtyard was landscaped by various kinds of trees that contained no passage or places to stop. It was only used when students held events that gathered people, otherwise most people just passed by. The change of Quadrangle means a new start for the school. Owing to limited manpower, WG put more emphasis on Green Island and Greeting Sunrise Boulevard, and provided primary suggestions to the courtyard.

Besides the above spaces, WG tried to leave some small spaces for students to decorate in the future so that each year you will see different images of the space. More importantly, the event will motivate more students to be involved in the campus planning process, which will hopefully empower them.

Opportunities

Were there any chances to achieve our goal in this private school? As this paper describes above, private schools need to evaluate the efficiency of each investment before spending. And the decision making process is always top-down. Under this condition, we were not so sure that we could execute this bottom-up process. Luckily there were opportunities which promised the right time, right place and right person: First, on the School Anniversary Day, people “speak up” for their wish in front of the chair of the trustee board. Secondly, the creative campus renew project followed the basic concepts of TM campus planning guidelines for upgrading, which was on the process of preparation and had been discussed in the planning committee for a long time. Besides, this renew project matched the future construction schedule. For example, TM had already budgeted for remodeling the Quadrangle in early 2003, which would be an opportunity to create a better courtyard at the same time. Thirdly, owing to the construction schedule for the campus, TM would precede relocating spaces at the same



Figure 4. Claiming for usage through an event.

time, for example, the basement and first floor of the Service Hall would change from a convenience store and classrooms to student club offices and convenience store respectively. This was the rationale to renew the surrounding area.

Lastly, frequent communications within the Task Force, especially between WG and the principal, could integrate forces from both trustee board and administrative system instantaneously. Take Green Island planning as an example: WG planned this site to be “TM House” to provide everyday needs for both school members and the neighborhood, including a cafeteria, galleries, and meeting lounge. WG took an existing case—YM Square, as reference, planned to recruit a company to operate it by way of Build-Operate-Transfer. As soon as WG had this idea, Director Ko explained it to Principal Shen, and invited Task Force members to visit the case in order to promote the idea. This should be a tri-win situation for students, the school (the trustee board mainly), and the neighborhood. The more people understand it, the more chances there are to accomplish it.

Design methods

In our minds, there were three considerations for the design of these spaces: claim for students spaces, design for proper usage, manage for multi-usage. First, claiming territory: During the planning phase, Director Lin suggested the student union use Green Island for an annual big event—White Valentine’s Day. On that day, Green Island and the surroundings became a student living area again. WG did the same thing at Greeting Sunrise Boulevard. During the School Anniversary Day, the naming ballot and “Speak Up” were held at the Boulevard. After that, Director Ko arranged another ceremony over there to try to transform this alley from a walkway to a plaza.

Secondly, designing for the usage: Since students’ living area was rarely included on TM campus, we visited other campuses as case studies. As a result, we introduced Yang-ming University’s YM Square for our TM House at Green Island. We

also used “A pattern language” to express individual concepts of the spaces for better communication. Then, we simulated our ideas on the models: For Green Island and Greeting Sunrise Boulevard, we added platforms to connect inside areas with the outdoors; for the courtyard, we suggested creating a hallway to let people easily walk through the courtyard, and build a stage for holding events.

Thirdly, managing for multi-usage: WG planned to conduct a series of events for multiple uses of the spaces being remodeled, which hopefully would re-claim the usage for the future. These examples were Green Island Festival,⁶ Cheer Squad Contest, and Christmas Eve Party. In addition, a students’ decorating competition for a façade and a basement exit would be held. These were the spaces for the continuation of the participatory spirit. Since these spaces were basically for students, we hoped the students would maintain the role of future management. WG had discussed this possibility with the chair of the student union for their involvement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Storms in a Pot

Among our target sites, Green Island was radically planned; the courtyard remained in similar usage; and Greeting Sunrise Boulevard transformed to be a real Boulevard. Consequently, the courtyard and the Boulevard were successfully remodeled; Green Island was rejected. The first two projects matched the Quadrangle remodeling schedule so that part of our ideas could be integrated into the final designs. After the contractor was commissioned, TM held one “Creative Campus Task Force” meeting and invited all WG members to comment on the design alternatives. The contractor agreed with some ideas for the courtyard, and fully followed our design for the Boulevard. As for the Green Island, even though the collaborative company had almost been decided, TM still maintained the use as classrooms for Extension Education but only adopted part of our landscape design for “decoration” without considering its original concept. Therefore, the new landscape became redundant and even awkward. Lastly, the plan to leave spaces for students to get involved was halted. The school made everything controllable and predictable as before.

Now there are more people hanging out at the courtyard and Boulevard.⁷ You will meet more people other than your classmates and teachers. It seems people have more chances to interact and communicate with others on campus. Perhaps we can argue that public spaces have been established at TM.

Have these two projects successfully changed the school bureaucratic structure after all? There are several phenomena to be considered:

a) All of TM's temporary groups were dismissed after finishing these two projects. The “Creative Campus Task Force” turned in their final report and was dismissed, WG finished its mission and the pedagogical studies wrapped up its one-year seminar. It was planned that the participating teachers would conduct new classes regarding the issues of community renaissance. Those teachers had planned and reached a consensus to conduct classes collaboratively because they hope this tiny participation experiment will be continued through classes.⁸ Unfortunately, this idea was objected to by some senior teachers who had never participated in the seminars and any event. Therefore, the department could not support teachers to conduct the community renaissance classes. Director Ko resigned from this position, too.

b) The whole process was a struggle between top-down and bottom-up. It is a paradox that the MOE, which supervises schools, (top-down) requests schools to execute a bottom-up process. This kind of institutionalized participatory process will be easily trapped by the existing power structure. It surely has been the largest defeat to the WG. “Our ideas were totally distorted in the construction. The spaces for students to display their ideas were destroyed by the school.” “Our ideas cannot compete with one word by the trustee board.” In TM's case, ways to solve the above difficulties were to use personal relationships for obtaining first hand information immediately and then trying to negotiate with different voices before making final decisions. Sometimes WG would need to seek the principal's support in order to integrate forces from different parties. It was the same case when bargaining with the trustee board. As I described before, frequent communication through the principal was needed. These strategies were repeatedly used at the end of the project to match the schedule/budget for remodeling Quadrangle. As described before, for the courtyard, WG explained the considerations for the spaces in a “public forum”—the Task Force meeting. Because Director Ko had discussed WG's ideas with the principal earlier, the Task Force meeting could wrap up with concrete conclusions, which helped to push the project forward.

This top-down/bottom-up conflict also happened when WG tried to recruit students to participate in the whole process. It was a big challenge to WG to let students take equal status during discussions. One presumption was the teachers’ awareness to be open to all ideas. The other way was to use outsiders (of the power structure), in this case, BPRF, to be the interface and disturbance to the existing power structure. Therefore, the two parties would have a new equal status for the public discourse.

c) The participatory spirit seems to have evaporated. Ideally, the product (in this case, physical spaces) of this participatory process will meet the needs of the users, which provides

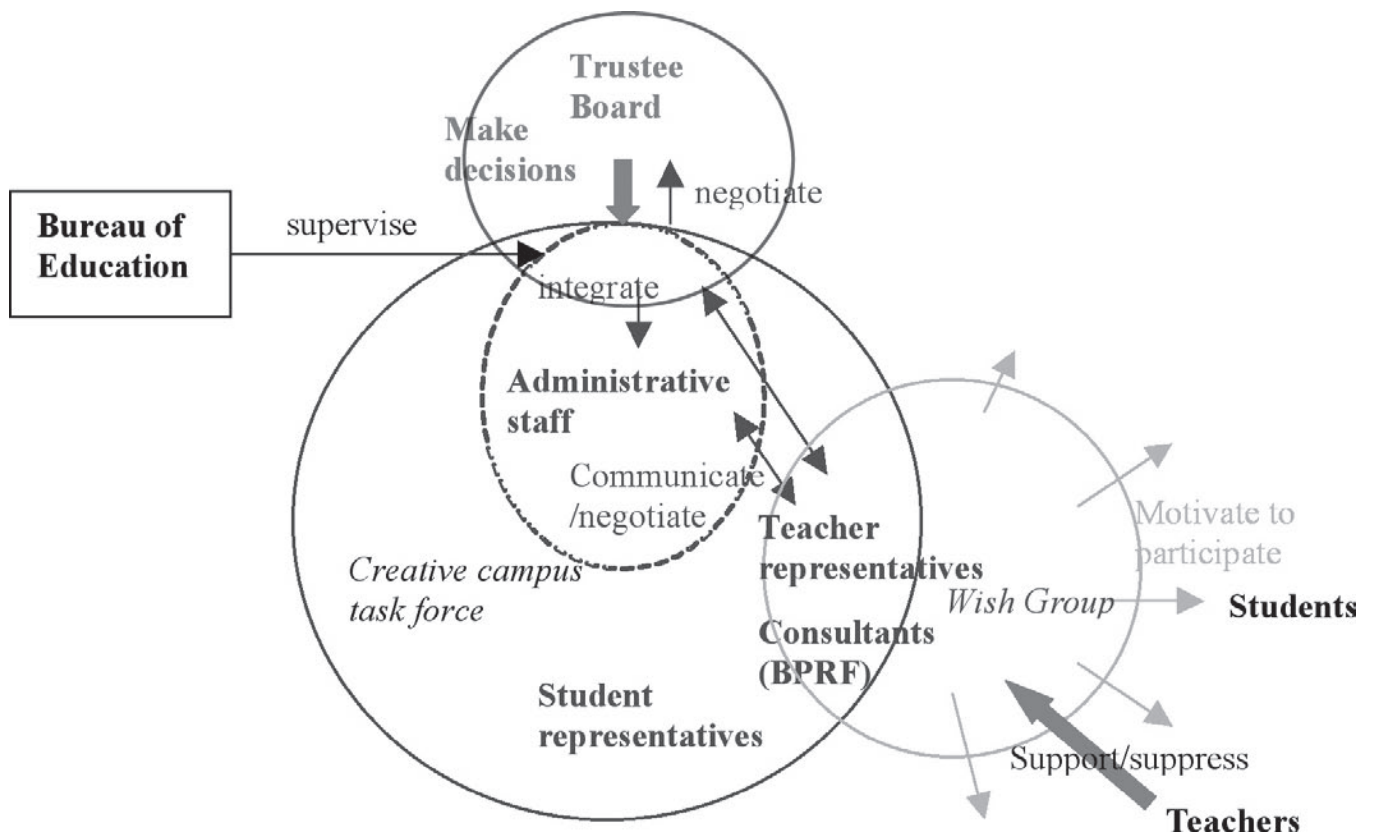


Figure 5. TM Creative Campus Renew Project bureaucratic structure.

feedback to follow the same process to form a public forum in the future. However, when this participatory power is institutionalized, can it remain public? I think it depends on whether the structure has been reconstructed or not, for example, recruit new outside forces, form a partnership with other schools. All these methods help to open up the existing structure. But it is an ideal situation. Usually when the project finishes, the participatory process will pause. TM is still under this situation. In the worst case, the process becomes institutionalized. It is pseudo-participation that is still controlled by the original hegemony, and the school remains an administrative institution.

Therefore, to answer the previous question, strictly speaking, the projects TM executed have disturbed the original bureaucratic structure but are still under the control of a conservative power. Even though we introduced the idea of participatory design, toward the end, we had to admit that it seemed like storms in a pot. Whenever the water threatens to overflow, a conservative power—as Touraine (2003) describes, existing among the teachers and administrative staff raises to hold the lid in order to maintain the existing power structure in the school, which lets the school remain in its traditional role.

Epilogue

Even though the results were not fully satisfying, I am still optimistic that the people of TM will continue implementing the

participatory design process in the future. Two phenomena support my points: a) Teachers were independent enough to stand against the mainstream. b) The results of the physical space remodeling provided positive feedback. According to Touraine's (2003) idea of democratized school, he indicates the needs of the independence of teachers. In TM's case, although WG teachers were at the existing power structure, they still tried to fight against the main stream to create new spaces through a participatory process. They were independent from the traditional structure. Next, the remodeling turned out to be acceptable, people love to use it. This positive feedback perhaps also urged proceeding with the next creative space. It is always the best encouragement for facing further challenges.

In conclusion, according to TM's previous experience, there were factors to increase the efficiency of the process of participation. I believe it will be true as well for their future practice.

a) When participants are authorized, they will have a better position to contest with the existing structure. In TM's case, WG members were authorized, which facilitated them to express their ideas efficiently. But this authorization should be carefully used not to be another hegemony but a tool for empowerment.

b) Positive feedback will enhance participants' confidence to continue their efforts. In TM's case, after the courtyard was

remodeled, WG members then believed that their efforts could be realized, which gave them more confidence to carry on.

c) Taking cases as examples is a good way to persuade people for certain concepts. During the design process, WG members visited other campuses that not only inspired them but also became references for future design.

d) Link partnership as an outside force to disturb the existing structure. In this case, BPRF being the consultant was especially useful to be the interface among different parties. Under this condition, people will be released from the existing hierarchy system to form a public forum on equal positions.

TM's next round of participation process needs to expand the influences to the larger school body. As WG expresses in the report "When school upgrades, the characters of students will change. We hope students will learn to take over the management of their campus." Now that the mechanism of empowerment has been prepared, we hope TM is ready to take another journey.

ENDNOTES

¹ Planning Team members: TM University (Wish Group): C. H. Ko, C. L. Joy Wu, C. L. Lin, etc. BPRF consultants: Ching-fen Yang, Su-chun Lin, Yu-chung Lee

² The MOE takes the responsibility to decide which college is qualified to upgrade.

³ Who has a strong relationship with the students.

⁴ The alley is between two buildings: Service Hall and Renew Hall. Therefore, most names used the synonyms and connotations of the two buildings. One other naming type reflected its orientation—east-west. The other naming type expressed students' wishes for the future usage on this space.

⁵ In Taiwanese connotation, "green island" refers to a place that stands alone as in the real world that Green Island is located East to Taiwan island.

⁶ This event was planned to combine the forces of school and neighborhood. The programs would be a neighborhood flea market, story telling about the history of this area, computer aid booth, etc. All the programs would claim Green Island to be the bridge between TM and the neighborhood.

⁷ Somehow it is odd, by observing, there are more first year students than others. Perhaps higher classes have more choices than the freshmen and would rather choose to go out of the school during the break.

⁸ Teachers specialize in history studies, geography, civil education, arts, and public health.

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