

Exploration on the Reform of Design Practice Courses in Landscape Education in Higher Vocational Colleges -A Case Study of Landscape Education in Suzhou Art & Design Technology Institute

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Abstract: Landscape design education focuses on practical teaching; it cultivates students' practical abilities, professional ethics and professional abilities. The practical teaching of landscape design advocates the integrated education mode; learning, doing and teaching are carried out simultaneously in the workshop, with theory teaching, technical service and practice combined together. This paper makes a brief review on the practice of curriculum reform in landscape design specialty in Suzhou Art & Design Technology Institute in recent years. Through the summary and reflections on the teaching practice, this paper aims to provide reference for the reform and construction of teaching system in the future.

1. General Situation of Development

In 1920s, some colleges and universities in China began to offer professional courses like Gardening Studies and Gardening Design, which was the beginning of landscape design specialty in China. In early 1950s, the Department of Horticulture of Beijing Agricultural University and the Department of Construction of Tsinghua University jointly established the first landscape architecture specialty, which marked the formation of landscape design specialty in China. Afterwards, some agricultural and forestry universities and architectural colleges began to establish the specialty of landscape architecture or teach related courses. At present, the landscape major is provided by four types of colleges and universities: architecture colleges, art colleges, agriculture and forestry colleges and a part of comprehensive universities. Architectural engineering colleges focus on architecture, urban planning and engineering; agricultural and forestry colleges focus on landscaping; comprehensive universities focus on regional planning or the deepening and extension of landscape geography; art colleges focus on environmental arts and visual perception.

Landscape design is a comprehensive subject which combines the protection, planning, designing and sustainable management of human and natural environment; it is an applied subject which integrates science, technology and art. In recent years, the landscape design specialty has made great progress in the professional construction of higher vocational colleges. The landscape design specialty in higher vocational colleges emerges from the development of higher vocational education and urban environment construction, and shows a trend of rapid development. At present, it has become one of the important components in the training system of landscape professionals. Different from doctoral, master, undergraduate and other types of education, higher vocational education aims to train high-tech and application-oriented professionals.

Suzhou Art & Design Technology Institute began to prepare landscape design education in 1998. In 2003, the landscape specialty which adapted to the development of the times was formally established and began to enroll students. Through studying the development process and existing problems of landscape specialty, the whole curriculum system was deeply studied and discussed at the beginning. In 2005, the senior technical personnel training mode was deeply reformed. Based on the big platform of environmental art, the mode took studio system as the core of landscape specialty. With the cultivation of professional ability as the first priority, the specialty construction and reform were carried out. In 2008, the landscape specialty was approved as the key specialty of Jiangsu

Province. After several years of teaching practice and educational reform, a relatively complete and scientific curriculum system and teaching mode has been basically formed: a progressive education pattern made up of basic courses, professional basic courses and professional core courses. In the stage of professional landscape design courses, the traditional teaching mode can not keep up with the development of our society, or achieve the goal of training high-tech talents. The studio teaching mode integrates the three aspects of theory teaching, technical service and on-the-spot operation in the process of teaching, learning and doing; it can improve students' practical and professional abilities, and cultivate highly skilled applied talents.

2. Curriculum Practice

Landscape design is a subject with strong practicality. Suzhou Art & Design Technology Institute has been exploring the teaching method of combining theory with practice in the curriculum system of landscape specialty. From 2010, the specialty have gradually formed its feature. A practical course with hands-on activities throughout the three-year study process has been established for students.

In the first semester, professional training is carried out on the platform of professional basic courses of environmental art. Directional basic courses of the specialty such as landscape sketch and space composition are provided in this semester. The first comprehensive basic studio course is also offered in the this semester. The teaching goal of this course is to help students to learn the properties of basic landscape materials and form preliminary understanding on the usage of landscape materials. Students need to consider space composition in design practice, and make the work on a given topic. For example, in the fall semester of 2016, the theme of the comprehensive basic course was “Floral Vessel”. The course started with daily used decorative plant container, studied the shapes of various floral vessels, and carried out form design. At the same time, the teacher told students professional knowledge about concrete: the material required for course design. During the five week course, students experienced the whole process of floral vessel design, material research and flower vessel construction. Such a teaching process stimulated students' interests in professional learning. At the end of the semester, the “greenhouse” built by students won praise from college teachers and students. (Figure 1.)



Figure 1



Figure2



Figure3

In the second year, students are trained in related theory and design courses such as traditional garden design, external space theory and special topic design. At the fourth semester of the second year, there is a design practice studio course of environmental architecture structure. This course aims to help students master the basic theory and construction methods of environmental architecture structure. Students are required to put forward reasonable construction schemes, draw construction drawings and complete some links in experimental implementation according to functional requirements and existing technical conditions. The teacher provides a small site or a certain design theme; then the design and construction experiments are carried out. In recent years, the curriculum mainly focuses on the design of a roof garden. Taking the course of environmental architecture construction in the spring semester of 2007 as an example, the professional teacher chose the roof of the landscape professional training building as the site of roof garden design experiment. Students were divided into groups and carry out case studies and program design. Through the research on material usage and manifestation, market research was carried out under the guidance of the teacher.

A preliminary budget on site material was also made. The whole course lasted six weeks; the rudiment of a roof garden was constructed in the end. That course has accumulated certain experiences in the previous two years. The design and construction of roof gardens will be continued in the future. A year-on-year continuous construction course will be launched to improve the experimental implementation of roof gardens. (Figure 2.)

In the fifth semester of the third grade, landscape students have a core studio course: landscape design practice studio course. The purpose of this course is to help students to understand and experience the whole process of project from design, construction to acceptance, to familiarize themselves with technical requirements and nodes of each link, and to master the types, requirements, procedures, principles and methods of system planning design and design management. Students should be able to finish projects with other colleagues in the team. In that course, teacher provides a landscape site, and requires students to complete drawings of the whole process from design to construction. In that process, students can form specific understanding, since experimental constructions are carried out on some key design nodes; site survey and on-the-spot teaching practice are conducted under the guidance of the course leader. The practical studio for the autumn semester of 2015 was the planning and design of Suzhou Zoo. In this course, students were required to complete the planning design and construction drawing according to the actual base of the new zoo. At the end of the course, the teacher presented and analyzed the actual planning design and construction drawings of the zoo, and led students to the construction site to carry out construction practice in accordance with drawings. The design and construction practice of large and medium-sized projects can help students to lay a solid foundation on design and construction. It is also the most important practical course. (Figure 3.)

3. Experience and Reflections

The three years gradual in-depth practical courses help student to form deep understanding on their own profession and possess certain professional abilities before graduation. That teaching system is in right direction, but it needs further improvement and development.

To sum up, following tasks are still need to be completed.

3.1 Further clarify the curriculum system and strictly carry out teaching activities in accordance with the curriculum system

Practical courses should also follow the mode of basic courses, professional basic courses and professional core courses. Some practical courses should be carried out in accordance with conditions of sites and teachers' plans, and may conflict with the whole curriculum system. The specific course arrangement should be further refined. The available time of practice sites should be confirmed in advance to make the course arrangement conform with the logical gradual process of the whole teaching system. For students, learning step by step can achieve more effective learning results.

3.2 Further invest in studio and hardware construction; develop teaching supporting funds

Over the past two years, under the leadership of young teachers with architectural background, the comprehensive basic studio curriculum of grade one has gradually formed a system. With one or two fixed classes as pilot projects every year, the experimental curriculum has entered the stage of comprehensive promotion and implementation. Due to the limitation of teaching space and tools in basic studios, there are some shortages on site and tools in that stage. At present, colleges and departments are constantly strengthening the construction of basic studios. They have initially completed the construction of basic sites and hardware. In next step, cooperation and exchanges between teachers are necessary for the reasonable and orderly implementation of professional basic studio curriculum.

The course of environmental building construction in grade two has entered a steady stage of development. The development of environmental architecture structure course needs sites and site construction materials. Sites need further coordination, while site construction materials need a

certain amount of investment every year. From college and department to landscape professional teaching and research office, practical courses have always been emphasized by the college. But for the long-term investment in teaching funds, a reasonable and clear plan is needed to ensure the long-term sound development of the curriculum.

3.3 Build a high-quality faculty team composed of teachers with theoretical knowledge and practical abilities

The landscape teachers in our department are mainly young professional teachers. Young teachers are more creative and have solid theoretical knowledge systems, but some of them are lack of practical experience. Landscape design is a subject with strong practicality. Professional teachers should have comprehensive theoretical and practical knowledge in order to teach and educate students better. Therefore, the department of environmental art urgently needs to make good use of the platform of school-enterprise cooperation, and send young professional teachers to the front line of enterprises for practical study and training, so as to truly build a team of high-quality teaching staff with theoretical knowledge and practical abilities.

3.4 Constantly expand the scope of school-enterprise cooperation

Our institute started school-enterprise cooperation earlier. After years of development, school-enterprise cooperation has formed a certain scale. Landscape specialty of the Department of Environmental Art Design successfully cooperates with large-scale design companies, like Golden Mantis and Jiye Landscape in Suzhou, and form the school-enterprise cooperative teaching mode. But the cooperation mainly focuses on courses with specific design topics, rather than the design practice. Although at present, the third grade design practice course has relatively mature teaching conditions, the implementation of teaching practice is still in uncertainty due to the development and changes of landscape construction sites and the lack of stable landscape construction sites. The school should further expand the field of school-enterprise cooperation and seek stable teaching and training venues. Apart from designing the actual project, students could also be provided with opportunities to implement actual projects, so as to enhance their professional abilities. This is an important development direction for the deep cooperation between our school and enterprises.

4. Summary

It is an inevitable trend to combine teaching, learning and doing together and cultivate high-tech talents. We must follow the reform path of combining theory with practice, deepening the reform, constantly reflecting existing teaching results and strengthening construction. Only in this way can we truly build our landscape specialty into the cradle of high-skilled talents with strong professional competence.

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