

everyday yilan



全區藝界 世紀的藝



*how can
culture and creativity
influence children's learning
in Taiwan?*

This educational project for school children in Taiwan, called City Yeast by Agua Design, invited 5 international designers to carry out workshops at schools in a rural area called Yilan.

Everyday Yilan focused on local culture and used a methodology that combined individual freedom with collaborative making processes - the final result was a visual magazine made by the children as a collective.



about yilan

An hour and a half away by bus from Taipei, behind the mountain range, is Yilan, a rural area on the northeastern shores of Taiwan, known for its green environment with a vast expanse of farmland and rice paddies.

These days, like in many other parts of the world, the local lifestyle and economy have shifted there, from agricultural to semi-urban. The farms of Yilan have been replaced with guesthouses that are said to be filled up with Taipei residents on weekend breaks.

Yilan is surrounded by mountains and ocean, yet it later became apparent that many local children are out of touch with nature. They do not spend time by the sea, rarely put their feet in the water, and are afraid of insects and snails!

The old town with its market was literally buzzing... with motorcycles. There seemed to be more people riding than walking the narrow alleys. Food vendors across the market sell their local snacks such as sweet potatoes, taro buns and deep fried bread. Some artisans continue their traditional trade, quietly, a few steps away from global chains and trendy cafes...

Our day in the old town culminated with a simple lunch of pork dumplings, sitting on plastic stools at a street corner restaurant... in the unusual absence of rain, the sun peeked through the clouds.



a map of everyday

Every morning, shortly before 10am we arrived at the schools. School hallways exuded a particular atmosphere alternating between children's young voices - even screams as they run, and the silent stillness of classroom exams. I was assigned to work with a class of 12 year-old children at Guangfu Elementary School and 9 year-olds at Yilan Elementary School. Schoolchildren in Yilan have a different educational framework than those living in urban areas. Their curriculum integrates environmental components - linking to the local agricultural way of life.

When I asked the students to keep their shoes off and leave them outside of the classroom, there was initial concern that a few would refuse or that parents would later complain of dirty feet. A happy surprise was to hear that many children refused to wash their feet after the workshop took place. Their "blue feet" was something special for them, like a memory to hold on to.

To break the monotony of studying behind a desk, I asked for tables to be put aside and for the children to sit on the floor. At the beginning, they sat far from me

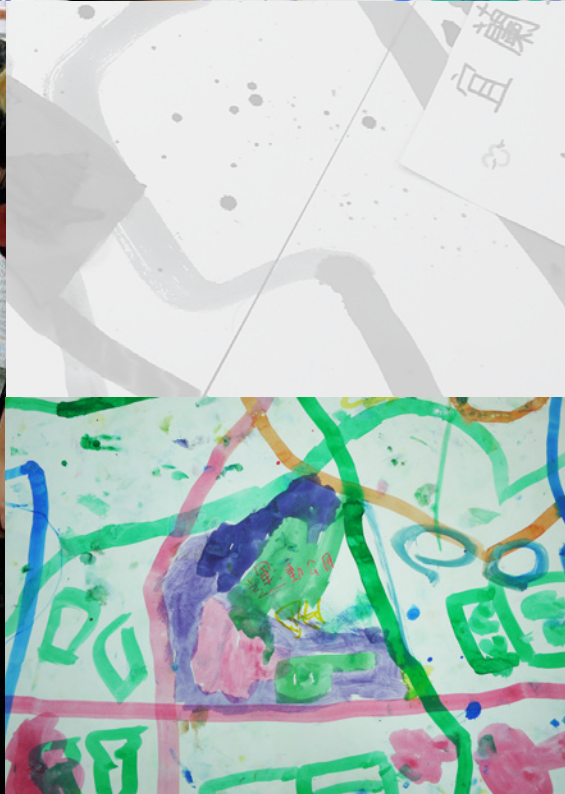
so I said "why don't you come nearer?" They came forward and giggled. At that moment I felt a connection instantly form between us.

For the first workshop session, we put white paper on the floor to make a big white space and they stood around it. We handed out cups of gouache paint and asked them to draw their way from home to school. They hesitated at first... Five minutes later, freedom flowed. From the initial fear of making a mistake to running across the imaginary streets of Yilan, a new space had been created, both physically and mentally within each of them.

At Yilan's Elementary School, lunch was served as usual in the classroom. The atmosphere however was different. The children sat around the map and ate while glancing over the imaginary view of their city.

"Teacher, can we keep the classroom like this from now on?"





start / finish

The workshop gave a limited quantity of material supplies, trusting the children's ability to create from very little.

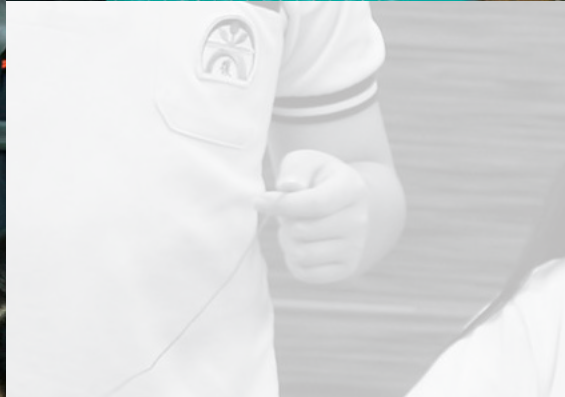
The second session called for the children's handmade skills as well as their knowledge of local experiences (e.g. food, places, environmental sights...) This exercise aimed at gathering visual and written information that depict everyday life in Yilan.

In the process of making their objects, children were given a challenge: to stop working on their piece and swap with someone else's work to finish it.

This exercise challenged a few of them who became worried of having their work "spoiled" by someone else. However, the initial worry dissipated and was quickly forgotten to leave a sense of trust instead. One boy said: "When I had to give my work away to someone else, I was afraid that it would get ruined. But in the end it turned out to be fine."

Collaboration, exchange and compromise, which are fundamental characteristics of life itself, were here presented as crucial elements of design thinking. Beyond creative activities, this workshop is about highlighting values enabled by human connections, such as sharing, understanding and building something together.





deconstruct to reconstruct

On the second day, the map was dismantled into strips. The process of deconstruction surprised many of the teachers who were present in the classroom.

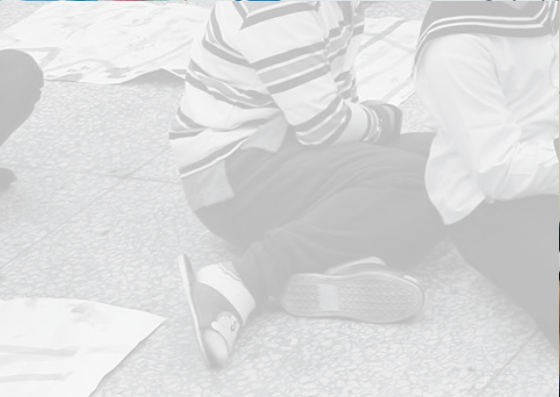
The paper strips were glued together and formed the basis of the magazine, totalling approximately 160 pages at a length of 23 meters.

The children formed different groups, each taking care of different sections of the magazine. Due to time constraints, the “editing” of content happened spontaneously and accidentally, generating some unexpected and compelling visual compositions.

As hours passed, the children started to sprawl on the floor, drawing in the most relaxed way, carefree as if they were in their bedroom, and not showing a sign of worry.

As the magazine came together into a single folded piece, the young participants were eager to sign their name. One of them exclaimed: “our magazine is thick like a dictionary!”







口
三
文



河城護

林
木

宜蘭名產

(牛舌食餅)

我覺得去宜蘭必去買
牛舌食餅，因為它很好吃。

好水
好山
好田



信

卒	帥	士	將	車
卒	將	士	車	馬

愛
心
環
繞



to be different

In schools, children can sometimes be afraid to make a mistake, stand out or do something differently from their classmates.

Gary was different. He was introduced to us as a child with special needs and a learning disability - although it was never confirmed, I suspect the disorder to be autism.

During the workshop, he was isolated, not interacting with the other children and in his own world, either sitting in a corner or hiding under a table. I approached him and gave him a messy bundle of cotton threads.

Gary suddenly started concentrating for hours, picking each thread and organising them nicely on the floor. He made little cotton balls and put them side by side to form a geometric pattern. That was Gary's work, his unique work that did not look like anybody else's.

Once the workshop was over, he asked if I would come back the next day. I said no, today was the last day. We said goodbye and he gave me a fist bump. After that he came by the classroom window again and again to say goodbye as many times as he could.



特色小吃

魚丸米粉

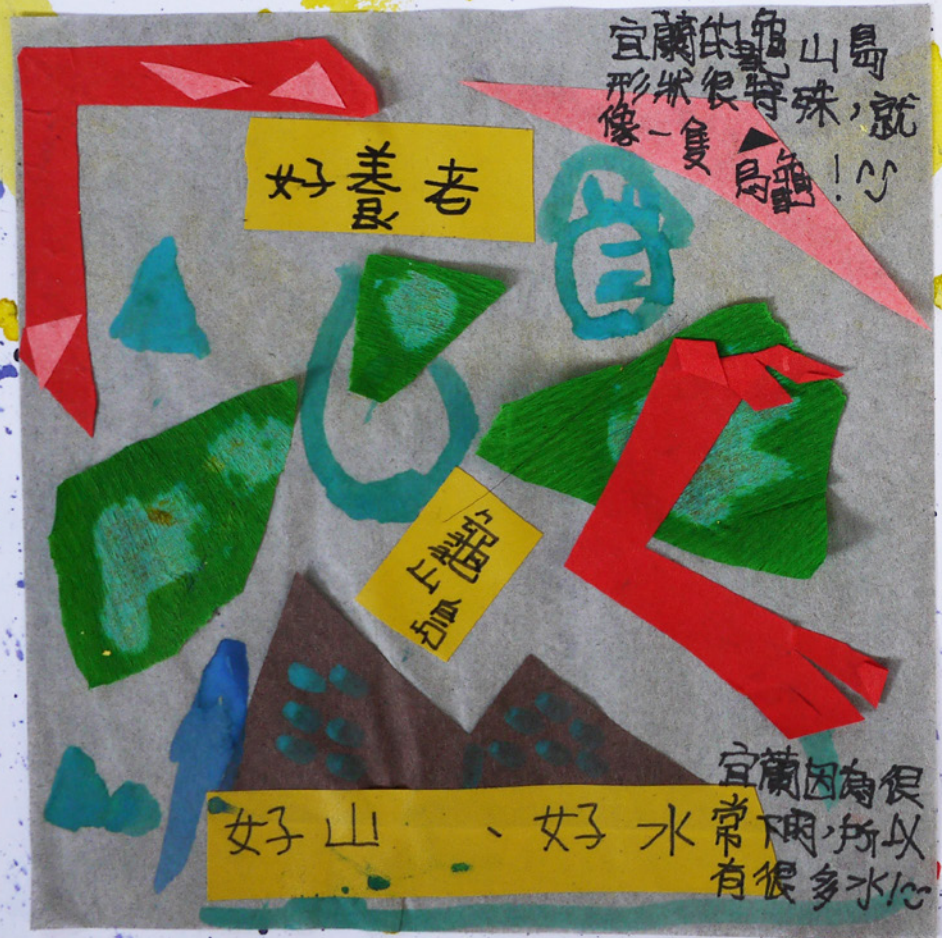
Yummy!

宜蘭很有名的小吃，非常美味，來宜蘭一定要吃!♡

魚丸湯
魚丸麵



特色景點



好養老

山

水

好山、好水

宜蘭的龜山島形狀像一隻龜

宜蘭因為常常下雨所以有很多水



In recent years, time for creative reflection has become limited, the mind being too often consumed or distracted. Many of the smaller yet important things in life go unnoticed...

We must once again seek and nurture true creativity: the kind that is not afraid of taking its time to awakens the senses, and helps us build a meaningful relationship with others and the world.



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