

TELL US WHAT YOU LOVE

Nitobe Bunka Gakuen, located in the Nakano area of Tokyo where MARUI GROUP was founded, has defined its goal of fostering happiness creation and is cultivating individuals with the capacity to help resolve social issues. This school also has the facility VIVISTOP NITOBE, which is a creative space that is not bound by the traditional conventions of schools and that allows teachers and students to learn together. VIVISTOP encourages students to freely create based on their interests. In fact, children are able to use this space to pursue their own interests. VIVISTOP resonates with MARUI GROUP's goal of developing spaces for co-creation. We sat down with four students from Nitobe Bunka Gakuen and Yusuke Yamauchi, a teacher at the school and core member behind the operation of VIVISTOP, to discuss the interests that they are using this space to pursue.



The students are pictured sitting on chairs created at VIVISTOP NITOBE by fifth graders of Nitobe Bunka Gakuen together with a designer. These chairs were awarded with the Prime Minister's Award in the 15th Kids Design Awards.

Unstructured Environment to Pursue One's Creative Interests

Mr. Yamauchi: I teach art at Nitobe Bunka Gakuen. After school, I engage in creative activities together with students at VIVISTOP NITOBE. Here, we have access to upcycled materials made from scraps as well as laser cutters and state-of-the-art tools. Both adults and kids work together to create whatever we think is possible in this environment. At VIVISTOP, we do not tell kids what to do. No, VIVISTOP is a place where everyone can do what they like and make what they want.

Hikari: You're not like other teachers! You sound just like a regular guy (everyone laughs).

Mr. Yamauchi: You're right, I'm not really teaching anything, am I? Anyways, how about you all tell us what you are doing at VIVISTOP? Hikari, I saw you painting a gradation pattern on some paper. It didn't seem like you had planned anything ahead, and it was more like you were just enjoying painting.

Hikari: Yep, I just did it, and it ended up looking pretty good!

Mr. Yamauchi: That's amazing. I am always so impressed at how you just have this natural understanding, this talent for making things look good.

Hikari: I put a little water in my paint, and then dunked this piece of paper in it. When I pulled it out, it had this pretty pattern on it. I tried all of the colors I

hadn't used yet and experimented to see what patterns I would get when I dunked the paper.

Mr. Yamauchi: Schools give us paper scraps that they would have normally thrown away, and we see what we can do with them. What we do at VIVISTOP is more like an extension of play.

Miri: There are a lot of wood scraps at my school. I am trying to make a swing

set together with two of my friends. I want to make a swing set because the kids at Nitobe Bunka Preschool and Childcare don't have swings. I have asked the preschool if it is okay for me to make a swing set. I want to make one with a long seat, like a couch, that you can relax on. I hope to give it to them as a Christmas present.

Mr. Yamauchi: You might not be done in

time for Christmas, but you could give them a model, you know, to show them what the finished product will look like.

Miri: No way, you can't swing on a model (laughs).

Ryotaro: I made a car that can move. I got the idea when I saw Yusei and Mr. Yamauchi playing with RC cars they had made, and I wanted to make one too.

Mr. Yamauchi: What is so cool about

Ryotaro's car is that he programmed it, built the controller, and made it so that the car could be controlled by himself.

Ryotaro: The hardest part was making the motor. I had to ask other people how to do things like make holes for the screws.

Yusei: I love trains, so I made things like a station platform and suspension bridge from wood. I used the laser

cutter, the machine that cuts wood with lasers, to cut the wood for the pillars and then ran kite string between the pillars. I was somehow able to get the balance right so that the rails are supported without the bridge falling over.

Mr. Yamauchi: Yusei won first prize in a robot contest the other day.

Yusei: Yep. If I mess up my program, I can't fix it by myself. So, I needed to get help from Mr. Yamauchi and other people. To tell the truth, I was actually aiming for a different prize.

Miri: What was that?

Yusei: The technology award. I just wanted to win some prize. When my name was called, I was like "huh, I won?" (everyone laughs)

Growth through Creativity

Mr. Yamauchi: Yusei, it has been about a year since you started coming to VIVISTOP. What do you think has changed over this year?

Yusei: Maybe how I use the laser cutter. I use wood to make stuff like desks and shelves.

Mr. Yamauchi: That's true. I have seen you using the laser cutter as well as a bunch of other tools, and the range of things you make has gotten much larger. What about you, Ryotaro? You joined us in the summer, but you seem to have learned a lot.

Ryotaro: I learned how to use the laser cutter and the electric saw.



Mr. Yamauchi: I've seen that. The laser cutter is something you would never use in class. You were quick to pick that up and to start using the electric saw, which I recall you initially putting off until you were more used to things. Now you are really good at using them by yourself. How about you, Hikari?

Hikari: I don't know. I just do what I want to do.

Mr. Yamauchi: You are really true to your feelings. If you want to do something, you do it. Miri, you have been with us for about half a year. Is there anything you have learned in that time?

Miri: I learned how to use a lot of the machines.

Mr. Yamauchi: Were there any tools or machines that you wanted to use before coming here?

Miri: Nope (laughs).

Mr. Yamauchi: So, you didn't think about it at all (laughs)? Do you prefer to make things by yourself, or with others?

Miri: It's more fun to make things with other people. If I'm by myself, I just think too much and never get started. If I'm with my friends, we can talk about what we're making while we do it.

Yusei: I think about what I want to make next at VIVISTOP when I am home, but everything is a prototype (laughs).

Mr. Yamauchi and other people give me ideas and advice on things like balance and stuff while I make things.

Mr. Yamauchi: It is natural to make a lot of mistakes. Not even I know what's best. It is probably common for everyone to find themselves scratching their heads while making things.

Space Where You Can Make Anything You Want

Mr. Yamauchi: What do you all like best about VIVISTOP?

Ryotaro: I like crafts and how I can make whatever I want, especially using the laser cutter!

Hikari: I don't like to study, but I love arts and crafts, and making pictures. I like how I can do almost anything I want. VIVISTOP is a magical place. I come here at least once a week.

Miri: I want to come to VIVISTOP every day. If I don't know how to do something, I can get help from Mr. Yamauchi and other grown-ups. Even if I make a mistake, they will give me advice on how I can fix it.

Yusei: I like the freedom, and how I can make whatever I want. I wish that VIVISTOP was open from 7 a.m. to midnight every day, even on weekends (laughs).

Mr. Yamauchi: Until midnight? (laughs)

Miri: I also wish we had a 3D printer.

Ryotaro: Yeah, we need a 3D printer!

Mr. Yamauchi: I will put that on the list of things we need to buy next year. It sounds like VIVISTOP is a place where you can give form to your imagination, where we can make our dreams a reality together. I am so happy that you all love VIVISTOP.



I won a robot contest! Even though I was the one who wrote the program, it is so complicated that I think of a train map when I look at it. I also like trains and photos. I even held a photo exhibition at school.

— Yusei
Fifth Grade



I want to make a swing set and give it to Nitobe Bunka Preschool and Childcare as a Christmas present. I have asked the preschool if it is okay. I hope to make a wooden swing set with a long seat, like a couch, that you can relax on.

— Miri
Fifth Grade



I made my first RC car with help from kids older than me. I didn't know how to write the program at first, but I somehow got it running. It was hard, but fun.

— Ryotaro
Third Grade



I like pretty things. Lately, I have been having fun pouring ink into water and seeing the gradations. When I color the paper scraps I get at school, they all have different patterns. I have made so many!

— Hikari
Fourth Grade

