

# Reconceptualization of Education Media in an Informal Learning Context

~ Focusing on the Students' Activity at a Marginal Village ~

Yoshitaka Kimura  
*Graduate of Kansai University*  
k744245@kansai-u.ac.jp

Kenichi Kubota  
*Professor Kansai University*  
kubota@kansai-u.ac.jp

**Abstract:** The purpose of the research is to investigate how students learn in a informal learning context, at a marginal village in Japan. The author examined a marginal village with educational media in which students interact with people and artifacts. In the past, traditional educational media research has focused only on electronic devices, such as computers and TVs for educational media. Previous research has verified learning effectiveness by comparing the results of pre- and post-tests. However, it is important to focus on interaction between the learner and the media, as “mediated actions”, unit of analysis. The author conducted semi-structured interviews with three, fourth-year university students who participated in the activity at a marginal village in Kyoto, Japan. After analyzing the transcript data of the interviews, students broke down the significance of Village K, as a media into the following three stages. Stage 1. Media for self-growth, Stage 2. Media that enables people to review their own lifestyles, Stage 3. Media capable of creating "self that we want to be in the future." This is a three-stage media that enables us to create a future "self that we want to be." Students found that their experiences in marginal villages were captured into these three phases. The authors concluded that viewing a marginal village with educational media can provide a new perspective in understanding how students learn through their interaction with local people and artifacts of the marginal village in an informal setting.

**Keywords:** Educational media, Higher education, Qualitative Research

## INTRODUCTION

Much of the research thus far has viewed educational media as a tool to assist professors, assuming that they teach knowledge during class. Suzuki (2013) summarizes trends in research on educational media as having many studies that measure the learning effects of educational media in classes. However, Kubota (2012) pointed out that the research on educational media to date has focused on school education, and that the problem is that there is little research on informal learning outside of school.

With regard to informal learning, in order to continue to learn over a lifetime, Yamauchi (2013) reported that the learning effect will increase as a result of a continuing attitude of learning through reverse classes using ICT. In addition, Waragai, Ota, Marco, & Kurabayashi (2012) developed a smartphone system to enable students to use what they learned in the classroom even in the true context outside of the classroom. The use of this system changed students' awareness of learning and resulted in learning effects.

These previous studies demonstrate that informal learning has also been studied to test the effectiveness of ICT inclusion. In informal learning, however, the learners themselves are responsible for their own learning. It is therefore necessary to analyze this from a social literature point of view that considers the learner's learning process. In other words, research should focus not only on technical tools such as ICT, but also on broader media, focusing on the interactive relationship between learners and media (Kubota, 2012).

Therefore, in this paper, the authors use the term "acting in the middle" as defined by Imai (2004). The definition of educational media as "acting in the middle" means that the media perceives human actions as being mediated by the media. Wertsch (2002) uses the concept of "mediated action" to capture learning as an interaction between learners and the media, which are strains that cannot be reduced to either. By expanding the concept of media in this way and focusing on student learning from a social and cultural perspective, knowledge about

informal learning can be fully generated (Kubota 2012).

Recently, fieldwork and problem-solving learning in marginal villages have been implemented in regular courses and other events, that have gained attention. In this study, the authors will proceed with the discussion of marginal villages as educational media. When viewed from a sociocultural perspective, rather than just a "place," the marginal colonies were considered to be historical cultural artifacts and as a mediator tool for learners. The author focused on the interaction between this artifact and the student.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

The purpose of this study is to highlight the interactions between marginal village (media) and students in informal learning, as well as media in which marginal communities became the media for students and the learning they obtain. The authors then examined how students learned using educational media in an informal setting.

The subjects of this study is a group of students, from University K, who worked in a marginal community with the goal of revitalizing villages located in the mountainous region of Sakyo-ku, Kyoto Prefecture (hereinafter referred to as "Village K"). The authors interviewed three students in this study. The form of the interview was a group interview with two authors and the target audience.

Qualitative analysis was performed as a method of analysis. The procedure was as follows: 1. Writing interview data of three students, 2. Writing and open-coding the data, 3. Categorizing labels extracted in open coding, 4. Identifying relationships between categories. The descriptions of the generated categories are described in brackets, and the descriptions of the students are described in quotes, as shown in more detail below.

## RESULTS

As a result of the analysis, students identified the significance of Village K as a media into the following three stages through Village K. Stage 1. Media for self-growth, Stage 2. Media that enables people to review their own lifestyles, Stage 3 Media capable of creating "self that we want to be" in the future. This is a three-stage media that enables people to create a future "self that they want to be." Students found that marginal villages were captured in these three phases.

### Stage 1. Media for Self-Growth

An experienced and knowledgeable coordinated organized the activities for students in Village K.

When students heard the stories of the coordinator and became involved in activities, the students felt, "I'm very interesting because I have a lot of (life)

experiences and want to know more about the coordinator's ideas." In other words, Village K appears to function as a medium that creates a connection between students, who are able to "learn something" and people who are able to act independently.

### Stage 2. Media for Reviewing Your Life

Student S realized that many of the conveniences normally seen in urban life were not available in the marginal village. Students appreciated this rural life style, living with nature, where even cooking simple foods like rice was done without electricity.

### Stage 3. Media capable of creating "self that we want to be" in the future

Throughout activities and the lifestyles in Village K, students began to look at themselves in terms of their future jobs. For example, Student H wanted a job that would enable students to share Japanese culture with foreigners. Student H had the opportunity to experience living in a natural environment and the culture of Village K during his stay there. Student S became more interested in rural life and began to think about "migration to marginal villages" while living in Village K. "It's like old age, isn't it? I'd like to move to Village K," he said. He decided that he wanted to live in rural areas in the future.

## CONCLUSION

Analysis using the concept of "mediated action," which provides a sociocultural perspective, provided a dynamic picture of student learning. Students and the media were constantly in tension, and if the tools used by students changed, the content of learning changed. In addition, if the things they want to learn changed, the media changed. The authors suggest that dynamically treating of educational media can become the focus of future examination of educational media in the research of informal learning.

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