

Inquiry-Based Learning for the Digital Age with School Libraries as Learning Environments

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Abstract

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At the Tamagawa Academy in Tokyo, Japan, we offer students an option of inquiry-based learning—WAZA for learning—in ninth grade. This special fifty-minute class is held twice a week in the school library as the “Period for Integrated Studies,” and it uses Information and Communication Technology (ICT) effectively. The learning purpose is the cultivation of language literacy and logical thinking skills. Students create their own research questions and make decisions about the choice and collection of information. Further, they learn to be aware about the differences in media sources, summarizing their research, respecting copyright, and making presentations. Academic writing is incorporated systematically throughout their inquiry-based learning.

Tamagawa Academy provides education from kindergarten to the graduate school level within one campus. We provide educational experiences that align with the developmental stages of our students according to the 4-4-4 system, and consider the building of a rich and harmonious human culture as our first educational principle. We have an international baccalaureate course and we develop educational activities that cultivate the next generation of leaders who can play an active part in international society. We are authorized as an SSH (Super Science High School) and SGH (Super Global High School) by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology.

“WAZA for learning” was started in 2008 as a class for learning the skills required for the digital age. It is cross-curricular and cultivates the skills used as the basis for all academic subjects. In addition, students can spontaneously master ICT. It is carried out in the Multi Media Resources Center (MMRC) where, in addition to traditional library functions, the learning space includes a multimedia theater, a work space for making movies or music, and a workshop space. The significance of carrying out inquiry-based learning in the MMRC, which allows students to use a variety of media, such as books, magazines, academic papers, the Internet, pictures, movies, and online databases, all within the same space, is great.

Kurokami et al. (1999) has proposed the teaching method of “Learning Situation Designing Method,” which states that when the teacher transfers his/her intention to the learning environment, in spite of children tackling learning actively, students are indirectly led to the learning purpose that the teacher expects. MMRC is a learning

space in which ICT can be used effectively and naturally. Above all, once students grasp how to use the MMRC master, it will be useful to their lifelong learning.

An important feature of “WAZA for learning” is that it uses a team-teaching approach, with a teacher-librarian or ICT teacher paired with other subject-teachers. Kuhlthau (2007) has pointed out the importance of a collaborative teaching and learning environment for inquiry-based communities in guided-inquiry schools. As our next goal, we are tackling the question of how to enhance the learning effect of the inquiry-based study by considering the relation from a lower to an upper grade in K-12 consistent education.

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