

SYMPAB - (16610) - EXAMINING INFORMAL SCIENCE EDUCATION RESPONSES TO COVID-19 IN KOREA: THE FUTURE OF UNTACT SCIENCE LEARNING?

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Short Abstract

In response to the global pandemic, since winter 2020, the majority of informal science education centers (museums and science centers) around the world have experienced repeated closures to stem the spread of COVID-19. This practice has greatly reduced visitors' ability to access informal science learning opportunities. This study examines the response by informal science educators in Korea to understand what strategies have emerged to allow visitors to continue to engage in science learning in an era of "untact" or non-face-to-face education. In this presentation, we report findings from a qualitative study involving informal science educators from museums and science centers around Korea to learn how informal science education has been impacted by repeated closures due to the pandemic. Specifically, we describe and characterize the emergence of several "untact" strategies involving the development of virtually accessible content aimed at engaging users to learn science safely. Drawing from interviews with educators and analysis of online content, we provide several examples from different science education museums and centers to highlight the ways in which educators have attempted to adapt. We conclude the presentation by raising questions about the role of the informal science education settings in the context of a post-pandemic world. Specifically, we discuss the ways in which the reliance on untact responses may contribute to a shift in the ways in which users and educators view the purpose of informal science education and the long-term impact on science museums as "brick and mortar" spaces for science learning.