Transforming student engagement in COVID-19 remote instruction: a research perspective

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Abstract

This paper was developed in response to the article titled, "A design framework for enhancing engagement in student-centered learning: Own it, learn it, share it," by Eunbae Lee and Michael J. Hannafin (2016). Their work is examined through a research perspective. The authors' discovery of the lack of a comprehensive framework to guide the design, development, and implementation of student-centered learning prompted them to develop the model. The result advances a three-stage model known as, Own It, Learn It, and Share It. The impact of the model can be understood through the simplicity of the OLSit model by how it affords educators a clear pathway for transforming instructional planning. Given the many uncertainties associated with the "shift to digital" as a result of COVID-19, the OLSit model is very applicable for action research by teachers, student teachers, and teacher educators. A critique of the model is provided along with suggested applications to extend the OLSit research base.

Keywords Student-centered learning · Engagement · Research methods

Lee and Hannafin's (2016) discovery of the lack of a comprehensive framework to guide the design, development, and implementation of student-centered learning prompted them to develop the OLSit model. During this COVID-19 era where schools have been required to shift from traditional face-to-face instruction to remote instruction, this work is worthy of re-examination.

The OLSit model was built from a literature synthesis of research associated with student engagement, autonomy, scaffolding, motivation, and meta-cognition. The result advances a three-stage OLSit model known as, *Own It*, *Learn It*, and *Share It*.

In the *Own It* phase, students define their purpose and create a learning plan with the assistance of the teacher. This feature distinguishes the model from pure discovery learning where the student is left floundering to one where the teacher provides guidance. Guidance may be in the form of suggested resources, insights about how to set boundaries, or ideas about how to explore content more deeply. In the *Learn It* phase, the student engages in

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learning activities operationalized through a learning plan. Finally, in the *Share It* phase, the student identifies one or more channels for sharing what they have learned with an authentic audience.

Impact/value

In the typical teacher-directed bell-to-bell managed classroom, few K-12 students have been afforded the opportunity to engage in learning with a style, pace, and depth of their own choosing. As a result, most students (and parents!) were wholly unprepared for the level of independent learning required during pandemic remote instruction (Dorn, Hancock, Sarakatsannis, & Viruleg, 2020). Since many teacher's first instinct was to try to replicate face-to-face direct instruction methods using distance learning technologies, this was problematic for many reasons and teachers became justifiably concerned about the level of student engagement during remote instruction (Simmons, 2020). Parents were concerned about the amount of time they were required to sit with their child as a teacher proxy to assist them in completing their assignments (Perelman, 2020).

To-date, few teachers have considered flipping the paradigm. That is, instead of attempting to implement direction instruction at a distance, project-based learning offers a powerful alternative to promoting student engagement. The research literature is very clear, self-regulation and self-directed learning strategies need to be taught, and practiced, over time (Dignath, Buettner, & Langfeldt, 2008; Pandey et al., 2018). Project-based learning has the potential to enhance student achievement during a period when COVID-19 learning loss is an increasingly concern.

The simplicity of the OLSit model affords educators a clear pathway for transforming instructional planning. The shift in responsibility from teacher-focused to student-centered instruction can be readily accomplished via a restructuring of learning assignments. Conversations between the teacher and student, whether synchronous or asynchronous, provide the necessary guidance for the student to create a personalized learning plan. The student's management of his/her learning plan offers a necessary form of accountability. Finally, the model's emphasis on *Share It*, offers a public, and authentic demonstration of the learning outcomes. Naturally, teachers, students, and parents should not expect immediate impact after trying the strategy a single time. Over time, as the strategy is re-used and stretched in new ways, the process should become intuitive, enjoyable, and one that produces positive learning outcomes. Whereas teachers may initially be concerned about the amount of time project-based learning takes, the research indicates moderate effect sizes in learning outcomes associated engagement, project-based learning, self-regulation, and feedback (Hattie, 2009, 2012; Hattie & Yates, 2014; Lee & Hannafin, 2016).

Application

Given the many uncertainties associated with the "shift to digital" as a result of COVID-19, the OLSit model is very applicable for research by teachers, student teachers, and teacher educators. That is, what type of local knowledge can be generated by posing questions and systematically collecting data to understanding what works, for whom, and under what conditions? These types of research questions are ideal for action research studies.

Amid the chaos of the pandemic, there is a unique opportunity to gain new research insights about methods of deepening student engagement and improving educational outcomes. The artifacts generated through the OLSit model will contribute to the collection and analysis of evidence without significant additional effort. However, given the premium on every professional's time, action research may be best supported through school–university collaboration to share the workload and triangulate insights about what is being observed.

Limitations and constraints

Given the recency of the manuscript's publication, the literature has yet to see replications of the OLSit model. Naturally, there is a need for more exemplars of how the model can be used at different grade levels with diverse students. Furthermore, there is an urgent need to determine how to support students that have underdeveloped self-regulation skills (i.e., young children, some students with disabilities) or lack access to sufficient technology or learning resources in the home. It is unclear what assumptions can be made about adult availability to support the OLSit process in the home during the pandemic and how the presence/absence of adult support impacts the learning outcomes.

Future directions

Resources like the Learning Activities Types (https://activitytypes.wm.edu/) collection at the College of William and Mary offer helpful planning structures for educators seeking to align learning activities with technology tools. However, at the present time, little is known about the learning activities types being used by educators as remote instruction is implemented. Therefore, researchers may wish to explore that specific nature of the personalized learning plans created as part of OLSit in order to gain new insights about how various learning activities foster, or negatively impact, student-centered learning.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest There are no conflicts of interest to report.

Ethical approval The work reported in this manuscript complies with ethical standards.

Research involving human and animal rights This work does not directly involve human participants.

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