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## **Immersive Learning Experience (ILX) – Transforming the Learning Journey**

In today's rapidly evolving and distraction-filled world, capturing and maintaining students' attention is a formidable challenge. Distractions lurk around every corner, diminishing the effectiveness of traditional learning methods. So, how can educators counteract these distractions and enhance the learning experience? The answer lies in immersive learning.

The advent of technology has not only brought about a multitude of diversions but has also paved the way for innovative educational solutions. Immersive learning stands out as a revolutionary approach, offering a dynamic and engaging learning environment far beyond mere physical spaces or technological gadgets (de Back et al., 2021). It intertwines narrative pedagogy, creative staging, and the strategic use of technology, encompassing methods that utilize vibrant environments, tactile feedback, and traditional artifacts (Dodds, 2021). By delivering captivating visualizations, immersive learning not only minimizes distractions but also eradicates monotony, fostering an atmosphere conducive to creativity and open-mindedness.

Reflecting on our initial foray into a school classroom, we were unknowingly introduced to an immersive learning environment. Teachers, with their innate understanding of this concept, transformed classrooms into worlds of wonder filled with illustrations, models, and photographs, engaging students across various subjects (De Freitas & Neumann, 2009). With the rise of digital technology, these physical classrooms have evolved into Virtual Immersive Learning Environments (ILEs), designed to mimic real-world settings (Jantakoon et al., 2019). These environments provide a safe and efficient space for learners to acquire and practice new skills before applying them in real-life scenarios.

The surge in virtual immersive learning platforms has sparked a re-evaluation of immersion's role in education, highlighting its ability to significantly enhance learning outcomes (Beck, 2019). The ultimate goal is to deeply engage students in their tasks, making time seem to fly. This high level of cognitive engagement has been linked to more effective learning, supporting long-held beliefs about the benefits of immersive environments in education (Seprum & Wongwatkit, 2022). However, it's important to note the distinctions between immersive learning and traditional educational settings. While virtual reality offers a unique form of psychological immersion, it cannot fully replicate the interpersonal interactions and subtle communications present in a real-world classroom environment (Weiss et al., 2022). These elements are crucial for a holistic learning experience.

Amidst the distractions of modern life, engaging learners throughout a session is incredibly challenging. Immersive learning, with its simulated environments, presents a solution by fully immersing students in the learning process. This approach not only brings abstract concepts to life but also allows learners to experiment with real-life scenarios in a controlled setting. The result is an increase in both engagement and motivation, as learners navigate through and control their virtual worlds. Moreover, immersive learning creates a highly interactive space, enabling the digital reproduction of scenarios that extend beyond the classroom's boundaries.

As educators, our mission is to ignite curiosity and foster comprehensive learning. Drawing from experiences in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the importance of creating rich, immersive environments that challenge and engage learners from a young age becomes clear. Developing these environments requires dedication, meticulous planning, and the incorporation of students' ideas, empowering them to take an active role in their learning journey.

Many educational institutions now adopt a thematic approach to curriculum delivery, integrating various subjects under a single theme. This strategy, while complex, enriches the learning experience by allowing for a deeper exploration of topics. An immersive learning environment, reflective of the curriculum's theme, can stimulate students' curiosity and immerse them in a world of exploration and reflection.

Immersive Learning uses the environment as a catalyst to enhance sensory experiences and bring exciting adventures to life. Through the use of themed decorations, resources, and role-play, students become actively engaged and intrigued. Teachers act as facilitators, creating opportunities for the development of critical thinking skills and fostering a sense of ownership over personal learning and achievements.

While implementing immersive learning can be demanding for educators, the benefits are manifold. It places students at the heart of the educational process, ensuring that all efforts are centred around their development and success.

Haaga-Helia UAS's theBox immersive learning environment is located in the Haaga Campus. Since 2016, theBox has led educational efforts in blending new technologies, storytelling, and experience design for students and professionals in tourism, hospitality, and experience sectors. The author, a PhD in immersive multisensory experience development, has nearly a decade of experience in creating tech driven immersive experiences for international firms and Haaga-Helia UAS partners to design their Immersive Learning Environments and brand promotions in more than 21 countries.

### **Immersive Learning Environments:**

TheBox ([Video](#))

ZUYD University of Applied Sciences Food Experience Lab, Maastrich ([Video](#))

TAMK/ TU Virtual Healthcare Lab ([Video](#))

### **Additional reading:**

de Back, T. T., Tinga, A. M., & Louwse, M. M. (2021). CAVE-based immersive learning in undergraduate courses: examining the effect of group size and time of application. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 18(1), 1-18.

Beck, D. (2019). Augmented and virtual reality in education: Immersive learning research. *Journal of Educational Computing Research*, 57(7), 1619-1625.

Dodds, H. E. (2021). Immersive Learning Environments: Designing XR into Higher Education. *A Practitioner's Guide to Instructional Design in Higher Education*.

De Freitas, S., & Neumann, T. (2009). The use of 'exploratory learning' for supporting immersive learning in virtual environments. *Computers & Education*, 52(2), 343-352.

Jantakoon, T., Wannapiroon, P., & Nilsook, P. (2019). Virtual immersive learning environments (VILEs) based on digital storytelling to enhance deeper learning for undergraduate students. *Higher Education Studies*, 9(1), 144-150.

Seprum, P., & Wongwatkit, C. (2022). Trends and issues of immersive learning environments in higher education from 2001 to 2020: perspectives on adaptive ubiquitous learning experiences. *International Journal of Mobile Learning and Organisation*, 16(1), 95-122.

Weiss, K. A., McDermott, M. A., & Hand, B. (2022). Characterising immersive argument-based inquiry learning environments in school-based education: a systematic literature review. *Studies in Science Education*, 58(1), 15-47.