



Developing Immersive Activities to Support Focused Learning Opportunities

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Overview

Project Aims:

Primary Aim:

- To increase attainment in a variety of subject areas by creating a range of dynamic immersive activities.

Secondary Aims:

- To reinvigorate the attitudes of students towards particular areas of the curriculum through new and exciting methods of teaching.
- To foster imagination and creativity.

Rationale

At Shireland Collegiate Academy, a large part of the Key Stage Three curriculum is taught through Literacy for Life, a theme-based approach which integrates subject and skill development. We decided to develop further this curriculum with the provision of a room dedicated to immersive learning, thus giving us the opportunity to be even more creative and imaginative in the way that we deliver the curriculum.

We quickly realised that the more life-like and realistic the experiences were, the more detailed and inspired the students' work became.

Immersive activities provided the unique and engaging curriculum to improve our Key Stage Three attainment.

Project Outline

1. To create a variety of immersive activities that:
 - a. Increase students' attainment
 - b. Engage students with the curriculum
2. To evaluate the impact of immersive activities on students' attainment and creativity.



Impact

- Initial results reveal that students' work is more vivid, detailed and engaging after experiencing the immersive activities
- Work produced by students after the immersive experiences tends to be more emotive and personal
- Immersive activities promote inclusion. Feedback reveals that students engage well with immersive activities, irrespective of their academic ability or needs
- All students surveyed stated that they felt the immersive activities helped with their creativity and imagination
- Over 85% of students surveyed stated that they preferred immersive learning to 'ordinary' teaching methods.

Student and teacher comments

Student comments:

"We learnt about the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in lesson. But, when we went into the Immersive Room and saw it, it felt like we were there! It made it feel real!"

"It makes my writing easier. Because I can see, hear and feel it in front of me, words and ideas just come to me!"

"It's so much more exciting than just reading about things. I know that every time I go into the Immersive Room, we're going to do something different."

Teacher comments:

"It [the Immersive Room] allows students to produce more imaginative and creative pieces of writing because they have seen, heard, felt and smelt it."

"It can bring a topic alive!"

"For the Performing Arts, the Immersive Room is great! It immerses students in a variety of realistic environments."

"It allows us, as teachers, to unleash our creativity."

"There is nothing better than watching the students as they enter the Immersive Room into a new experience. As soon as they walk through the door, their jaws drop."

How to set up immersive activities within your school

Immersive learning can be used in a variety of environments, from utilising a dedicated Immersive Room to using it within a normal classroom. The following steps are involved when planning immersive learning.

Immersive Activities

1. Understand the theory of immersive learning

The purpose of immersive learning is to 'immerse' students in an environment, making it feel as real as possible. As students are 'immersed', they are learning in a completely different manner. Much deeper learning skills are used, allowing students' creativity and imagination to shine through.

2. Decide what you hope to achieve

Immersive learning can be used for a variety of reasons. Some teachers use it to promote creativity or make content more exciting and interesting, whilst others use it to hone important life-skills such as problem-solving and collaboration.

3. Select a class or topic

Immersive activities benefit all students. However, you may wish to try immersive activities with any topics you feel are laden with content or are in need of a new approach.

4. Plan

Planning is vital to the immersive process. It has to engage the students, whilst getting them to achieve what you want them to achieve.

Try not to stick to a 'safe' approach - take a risk!

At first, planning new immersive activities may take time to prepare.

Some tips:

- Always keep the senses in mind; the senses help make the experience 'real'.
- Think about the role you could play - could you take on a character etc.?
- Instead of keeping it in the classroom, could you use a different environment?

5. Implement and experiment

Allow students to enjoy the experience.

Once students have participated in a couple of experiences, you may find certain experiences work better than others.

Try to keep immersive activities completely different so students' experiences are fresh and new every time!

6. Evaluate and feedback

Evaluate the success of a lesson through the quality of student work and the enthusiasm of the students.

Over time, you will build up an idea of which immersive activities work best with different groups.



Immersive Activities

Ideas for planning

Irrespective of the learning environment, when using immersive activities, the more senses involved, the more powerful the experience would be.

This is potentially the hardest sense to plan and prepare. It would not be needed for all experiences, but is helpful in some tasks. When thinking of tastes, think about different foods students could try and experience.

Visual stimulus may be the most important and engaging tool to use.

Making an experience realistic is vital.

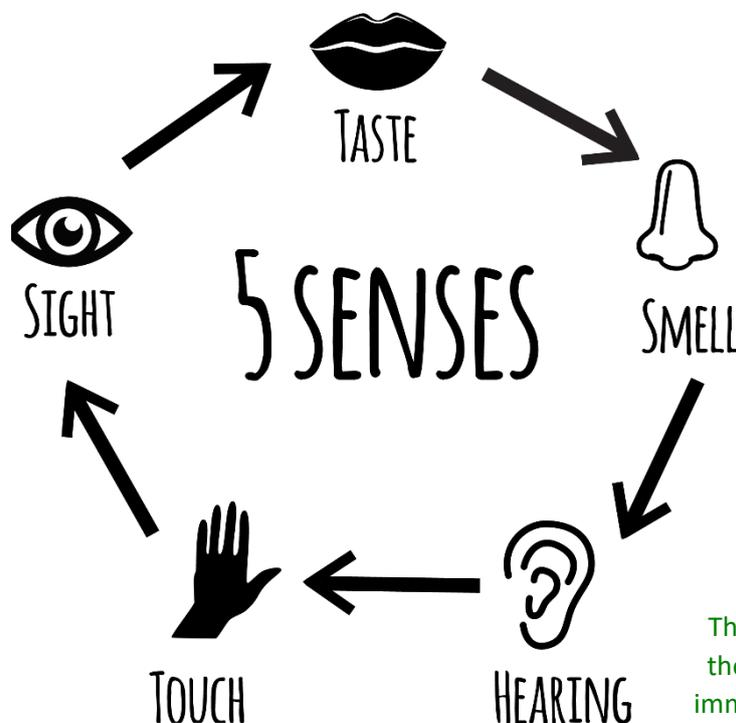
Using websites (such as Google Earth and AirPano) can be very effective. Video clips taken from the Internet can also work well.

Don't forget that you as the teacher can be used. You could dress up and take on a role!

Allowing students to explore is important in immersive learning.

Gathering different objects relating to a topic is vital.

Objects could include items given by museums etc.



Different smells can be purchased from numerous websites (i.e. the ash smell).

However, smells from food, perfumes etc. may work just as well.

The more realistic the sounds, the better. Students are to be immersed completely, taken out of the classroom and placed into a different environment. Sounds should reflect this.

Sounds can be used from the Internet, films, documentaries etc.



Immersive Activities

Immersive learning in action: A Shireland Case Study

When teaching the theme 'India' in the project-based Literacy for Life curriculum, a mixed-ability group of Year 8 students was asked to describe a slum.

Whilst in the classroom, students were shown images and a description of life within a slum was given by the teacher. Straight after describing this, students were given a GCSE-styled English question and asked to write a brief descriptive piece about a picture of a slum. These pieces of writing were collected in.

First sample taken from student 1:

"I can see temporary slum houses filled with clothes and people's possessions. On the floor, there is lots of rubbish and the place seems quite old. In the background there are some old buildings and they also seem old as they're dusty..."

First sample taken from student 2:

"In this picture I can see a few houses and a building. The houses are worn out and are surrounded by mess. Outside the houses there are washing lines with many clothes on it..."

Students were then taken to the Immersive Room and given a range of immersive activities which not only included images of slums, but also sounds and smells.

After spending 15 minutes in the Immersive Room, students were then given the same written task to describe an Indian slum.

Second sample taken from student 1:

"As I walked down the unknown street, I could see the temporary houses, plastic-covered rooves surrounded by pots and clothes. I could hear children whimpering, nagging to feed their empty stomachs...I could feel the boiling sun burning my skin...Every step I took, there were endless amounts of rubbish surrounding my shoes..."

Second sample taken from student 2:

"As I walked through the worn out, old buildings, I could hear sharp screams and babies moaning like a cat meowing for food. The mosquitoes sang away around dirty water and bit their way through rough, old skin..."

* See Appendix 1 for the full example of the students' work



Immersive Activities

Clearly, the second samples of descriptive writing were stronger. Our analysis of the development in the student writing as result of the immersive activity was:

Senses:	Students used only sight in first draft, but all used at least 4/5 senses in second draft.
Imagination:	24/24 more personal and detailed.
Language techniques:	10/24 improved. Start to see similes, emotive language, rhetorical questions etc.
Sentence structure:	4/24 improved. They start to use sentences for effect.
Vocabulary:	15/24 improved. More complex vocabulary used.

Following the activity, students wrote in a more personal and emotive manner. They also referred to at least four of the senses in their descriptions, adding greater depth and imagination to their work. As they became more passionate about their writing, about half of the students also began to use their previous knowledge of writing techniques (i.e. similes and onomatopoeia) for effect. Whilst only a small effect was seen on the use of sentence structure (just under 20%), more complex and imaginative vocabulary was used in the students' second description.

Summary

These initial results show the positive impact immersive learning has on students' attainment levels. For greatest impact, immersive learning must be used alongside and developed with other methods of teaching.

Appendix 1: Students' work for the Shireland case study

Student 1, before the immersive experience

I can see temporary slum houses filled with clothes and people's possessions. On the floor there is lots of rubbish and place seems quite old. In the background there are some ~~buildings~~ buildings and they also seem old as their dusty. On the right bottom corner I can see a little boy sitting under the boiling sun and I estimate that he is probably homeless. The weather ~~is~~ in the picture is a sunny, clear day. But overall it is a slum area.

Student 1 after the immersive experience

As I walked down the unknown street I can see the temporary houses, plastic covered roof ~~is~~ surrounded by pots and clothes. I can ^{hear} children wimpers ~~is~~ nagging to feed ~~is~~ their empty stomachs. I can smell the strong pollution filling the air in all points making harder to breathe. I can feel the boiling sun burning my skin. In the background I can see old buildings. Every step I took there were endless amount of rubbish surrounding my shoes. I look into the ~~is~~ ^{sad}, innocent and ~~is~~ little boy's eyes and I can feel how famished and how desperate they are to receive anything to fill their bellies. I can also hear the creaks of the unsteady house threatened to collapse any moment. I feel really uncomfortable and guilty of this feeling.

Student 2, before the immersive experience

In this picture I can see a few houses and a building. The houses are worn out and are surrounded by mess. Outside the houses there are washing lines with many clothes on it. I believe that this photo represents a slum but next to the houses there

Student 2, after the immersive experience

As I walked through the worn out, old buildings I could hear sharp screams and babies moaning like a cat meowing for food. The mosquitoes singing away, around dirty water and biting away on rough old skin.

Around the whole slum I can see chipped bricks on the floor which must of fell off the sheet covered houses. Another thing in the middle of nowhere are torn apart clothes hanging off a washing line next to damp broken wooden fences.

I can smell pure sewage everywhere I go mixed with toxic air filled with extremely poisonous gas and dangerous chemicals.

As I walk around the air follows me into my mouth.



Immersive Activities

Appendix 2:

Sample Immersive Activity Plan for Year 8 Literacy for Life

	<u>Theme</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>How to make it 'immersive'</u>	<u>Resources needed</u>	<u>Outcome</u>	<u>Subject Links</u>
October	Journey to the Centre of the Earth	The Eruption of Mount Vesuvius	Students watch the eruption of Mount Vesuvius stage-by-stage and witness the destruction of Pompeii. They then use their experiences to write a descriptive diary entry.	<u>Visual displays:</u> 1 main wall showing eruption <u>Sounds:</u> Volcanic eruption <u>Smells:</u> Ash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spray can of ash smell • Pompeii video. 	Students compose a diary entry which focuses on the senses.	<u>English:</u> descriptive writing. <u>History:</u> content about Pompeii and Vesuvius. <u>Geography:</u> volcanic eruptions.
December	India	The Two Worlds of India / A True Reflection of India	Students look at travel brochures promoting India before the immersive experience (flipped activity*). Using information gathered, students describe their impressions of India. With this in mind, students step into the 'real India' (looking at the diversity in the quality of life). Mixture of videos/photographs / street view to show how many people live. * For more information about Flipped Learning, click here .	<u>Visual displays:</u> 3 walls showing a mixture of videos and still images <u>Sounds:</u> traffic, crowds etc. <u>Smells:</u> spices <u>Artefacts:</u> foods, shanti house?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spray can of spice smell / actual spices • Artefacts • India video. 	To create a reflective magazine article about the 'true India'.	<u>English:</u> Writing <u>Geography:</u> Environments <u>Citizenship:</u> Differences in the ways of life <u>ICT:</u> Format of magazine article online?

Immersive Activities

January	Freedom	All aboard!	<p>Students step into a recreation of a slave ship. Screens should show outside the ship (waves etc.) and inside the ship (cramped conditions etc.).</p> <p>On the floor, students see the sizes of sleeping conditions (students to squeeze inside them).</p> <p>Bring in item boxes from museums so students can handle artefacts?</p>	<p><u>Visual displays:</u> 3 screens showing the ship conditions.</p> <p><u>Sounds:</u> Seas etc.</p> <p><u>Smells:</u> sea</p> <p><u>Artefacts:</u> items from a slave ship / tape to show size of room to sleep in.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artefacts • Spray can smelling of sea • Ship animation / background. 	<p>Students create a factual piece of writing based on life on a slave ship (this could be in an electronic format or paper-based)</p>	<p><u>History:</u> Slavery content</p> <p><u>English:</u> writing to inform</p>
March	Da Vinci	Da Vinci Art Gallery	<p>Students move around Da Vinci's art work; looking specifically at his works on anatomy and inventions. Students sketch a piece of artwork that interests them using specific artistic techniques.</p>	<p><u>Visual displays:</u> Art gallery wallpaper which changes periodically. Atmosphere of an art gallery recreated. Ropes etc that would usually be in an art gallery.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art gallery video • Worksheet for sketching. 	<p>Students use their artistic skills to recreate one of Da Vinci's works. Students then create a presentation showing their new information.</p>	<p><u>Art:</u> Drawing / sketching. Researching artists.</p>