

# The second of the six 'I' s of real learning - Immersive

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## A reminder and a definition

The six 'I's of the model are that learning is: Individual, immersive, incremental, iterative, intrinsic and intentional. This series briefly outlines each, and encourages combinations to enhance value.

The Cambridge dictionary defines immersive as: "The fact of becoming completely involved in something". The key word here is 'completely'. For the value of learning to be optimised, there must be 'complete involvement', ideally without distraction, for as long as is required, with total focus. This is hard in current busy times. Without immersion, for minutes or longer, learning outcomes will diminish very significantly.

Immersion demands discipline, control, clarity of outcomes sought, and management of time.

- Time dedicated to immersive learning is critical.
- Too little time allocated can mean insufficient to achieve intended levels of learning.
- Too much can lead to a drop in value due to for instance, attention straying, as concentration slides from over-exposure to complex or less than thrilling issues best left and revisited afresh.

## The challenges of immersive learning

Immersive learning is an investment worth making, it prompts an intense and highly productive use of precious time. Complete focus means the deeper dive often gleans more valuable insights, new options and a better outcome than a few begrudged minutes spent superficially before allowing any distraction to become a false priority. There are doors behind doors, immersive learning gives you the keys.

Immersive learning is easier when we have a tangible incentive, when the learning is perceived as being of value, and that it leads to a positive outcome or reward. Not all learning has these positive, engaging characteristics. Much of what we need to learn is hard, may seem to have little immediate purpose or value, and such learning if not managed immersively will become tiresome, fragmented and prolonged.

Very often, particularly in current 'more work from less people' workplaces, we are pressured to over-expect of ourselves and what we can reasonably achieve. Immersion can help here. Accept that only so much is possible in any contact with a demanding task or learning activity, and feel satisfied with the product of that dedicated time.

The 'hurry up' world of work can unhelpfully drive pace of delivery over quality of outcomes. We never have the time to do important tasks to a high standard. This is surely true of our learning, so it is vitally important to protect the time we can find from distractions that invade our thoughts and diminish what we can achieve in any time we find.

Now here's a painful truth. Immersion as emphasised already, requires protected space free of distraction. Let's be honest, and accept that the source of many of those harmful distractions are ourselves. Do we too often settle to a task, it may be something to learn, and know we are waiting for, even wanting to hear a beep on the phone, or a ding to announce an email that is suddenly and inappropriately given priority over all else, especially that tough learning task we know we *should* be doing.

So, try, against all odds, to develop the habit of either ignoring (very tough) electronic invaders, or, shock horror, actually move far enough away from/turn off devices that prevent true immersion.

## Two types of attention

Linda Stone has very clearly made the case for 'Full Uninterrupted Attention', where we give total, immersive focus to a task – for instance, 'though not exclusively, learning – in order to maximise the outcomes and product of time invested.

In contrast, [Linda](#) says we too often operate in 'Continuous Partial Attention' mode, allowing multiple thoughts to impact and distract, meaning tasks are completed less well than when we show complete focus.

## Some advice that may help

Choose carefully when, where and for how long to immerse yourself in learning something.

- The right time is when you know you are most alert and productive.
- The right place is somewhere free of competing distractions. Nancy Kline has eloquently emphasised 'space' as one of the ten components of a [Thinking Environment](#).
- How long is a judgement call – sometimes thirty minutes of quality immersion will be more productive than hours of less complete focus.

Immersion in learning that is difficult, demanding, frustrating, confusing, requiring persistence often brings the highest rewards. Managing effort, time and energy to have enough of each to break through, and not be driven off by less than immediate progress can be extremely rewarding.

It is essential that we genuinely feel it is legitimate to give ourselves time to think (Nancy Kline again). Immersive learning, must be seen as significant, and that distractions, particularly human, will often need to be prevented from corrupting or stealing that 'space'. Immersive learning or working will never become our norm unless we make explicit efforts to protect the precious time we find for 'complete involvement'.

Within this series of six 'I's of learning I will many times encourage the combination of one or more of the elements.

- This means the best results from immersive learning may result from intentional planning and implementation.
- Equally, an understanding that incremental progression has a lot of value and that immersive outcomes are enhanced by iterative sliced up revisiting rather than an unrealistic one-off feast.

Immersive thinking is a very worthwhile way to gain powerful results from learning – it's not the best way. Thoughts are fine, they are hard to manage, shape and manage because they are intangible, abstract, often fleeting, being replaced in our consciousness by others competing for attention. This is why writing, and I really do mean writing, as typing unless particularly competent can't get close to keeping up with our thinking is a hugely useful tool for deep thinking.

The act of writing thoughts, makes ideas real, puts them on paper, slows an over-active disjointed brain, and clarifies the madness bouncing around between our ears.

Capturing thoughts by writing prompts more, better, and richer insights. Without the immersive experience of getting raw thoughts onto paper many valuable ideas and insights will be lost.

## **Buy a tomato shaped timer**

Now here is a truly practical thought. Buy a Pomodoro timer, which can be set to allow uninterrupted time on a task from one to sixty minutes. This works best if your attention span is by personality very low, which is why it is best to set it to no more than fifteen minutes.

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