

# VR program brings languages to life

A world-first program is taking students beyond the classroom to build confidence in languages, writes **Arianna Lucente**.

MLC is the first school worldwide to embed the pioneering virtual reality technology ImmerseMe into its language curriculum.

"We know that experiential learning is one of the most powerful ways to process meaning and content, and build those skills," says Chloé Briand, the Head of Languages at MLC. "It enables us to get rid of classroom walls and connect with the outside world."

The ImmerseMe program uses voice recognition software and puts students in an immersive environment, where they can practice the language with a native speaker.

"It's a sequence dialogue that's pre-recorded, so you could be in Paris buying a croissant and, in order to get to the next stage, you need to pronounce the correct answer perfectly."

Although MLC only introduced the technology into its year 7 curriculum this year, it has been in the pipeline for two-and-a-half years and is now the backbone of the school's language program. The students currently use the software on their laptops but the school plans to roll out the VR goggle application towards the end of the year.

The founder of ImmerseMe, Scott Cardwell, approached Ms Briand about the technology and she immediately saw its potential. MLC then created the content and dialogues from scratch, with Mr Cardwell travelling around the world to film each scenario.

"The content was designed for real-life interaction, so the dialogues at year 7 are all about travelling. It's making a booking, it's ordering food, and it's asking for directions," says Ms Briand.

This is a radical shift from the numbers, colours and animals vocabulary that students usually learn in beginner classes.

"We put them into a more adult language learning setting that they can use by the end of the year."

"I've been very fortunate to be supported by the College's senior management, who are quite visionary with where they see education going in the 21st century; also an innovative and talented year 7 team of teachers who have been implementing the program in their classes from the beginning."

Ms Briand says ImmerseMe is building students' confidence and reducing the anxiety often felt when learning languages.

"This is a tool that you use to practice and improve on your fluency and accuracy in a real-life scenario, without feeling self-conscious in front of a native speaker."

MLC have been in contact with PhD student



Study is getting very real in a virtual world for students at MLC taking part in the ImmerseMe program, a ground-breaking approach in language teaching.



Joan Palmiter Bajorek at the University of Arizona, who's researching the effect of ImmerseMe on student anxiety related to learning a new language. It suggests students are most comfortable speaking a foreign language with their teachers and peers, and most stressed when speaking with a native speaker in a foreign country.

"It's the perfect segue between a relaxed familiar environment and the outside world," says Ms Briand.

It also teaches skills surrounding global awareness and cultural appropriateness.

"What is the appropriate way to answer your boss in Japan? Or to organise a business meeting?" Ms Briand posits. "It's highly

visual, and experiencing that learning as if you were there makes it stick a lot more because your processing happens faster."

MLC offers Chinese, French and Japanese from year 7, and Spanish from year 9.

Next year, the school plans to roll out ImmerseMe into the year 8 and 9 curriculum to include all four languages.

It is also introducing language qualifications into the program, so year 9 and 10 students will receive a VCE-VET applied language qualification to put on their CV.

With plans to expand the program into its senior school under discussion, Ms Briand believes the technology would be particularly beneficial for year 11 and 12 students because it aligns with the exam topics and assessment formats.






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