

ASCILITE 2024

Navigating the Terrain:

Emerging Frontiers in Learning Spaces, Pedagogies, and Technologies

Old meets New: Engaging with Indigenous Perspectives via Virtual Reality

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Virtual reality (VR) has been used for various experiential purposes in tertiary education. This technology is valued for its capacity to simulate experiences close to real-life, for example, providing virtual hands-on experiences (e.g. Agbonifo et al, 2020; Pande & Jepson, 2025) or interactive vision of focal locations (e.g. Dobricki et al, 2021). Despite three decades since VR was recognised at a rudimentary point of development (Moore, 1995), it is not yet broadly used in higher education despite potential to do more to facilitate situated learning (Schott & Marshall, 2021).

As an immersive technology, VR offers an avenue for engaging learning through situated Indigenous storytelling. VR has recently proven valuable for transporting school students to Australian Indigenous places otherwise not easily visited and experienced (Education Group, 2024), while a university VR initiative enables delving deep into history to experience the Australian Indigenous landscapes of pre-colonial times (Morse, 2024). VR Indigenous experiences can be valued for their fidelity, especially when created by mob such as Brett Leavy's virtual songlines (Hardy, 2020). Nevertheless, there are noted global cultural issues, such as risks in adopting a Eurocentric approach and falling short of the fidelity required for Indigenous storytelling (Tubby, 2022). In Australian contexts, ongoing concerns include what can be shared online compared to what is sacred (Yarn Marketplace, 2024), and the need for engaging Aboriginal community to ascertain cultural protocols for designing interactive technology (Loban, 2022).

This poster introduces a work-in-progress innovation project at RMIT University, on designing an immersive VR storytelling experience for university practitioners to engage with local Indigenous perspectives. The project aims to *contribute to cultural capability growth*, and to *develop responsible practice in action*, and thus navigate the terrain for creating innovative and culturally respectful learning spaces through technology.

For *contributing to cultural capability growth*, the projects' VR resource enables university staff to experience culture and ways of learning in innovative and engaging ways, to broaden their understanding of local Indigenous perspectives (the Kulin Nation and surrounds) and equip them with the cultural intelligence to underpin effective and empathetic interactions that value Aboriginal perspectives.

For *responsible practice in action*, the project sought a culturally respectful way to learn through community consultations, to inform this and future project processes. The development of the resource was made possible through the efforts of a diverse team from different cultural backgrounds working towards creating a culturally safe environment, including with Indigenous staff members who actively contributed individual personas for the pilot. Development beyond the pilot extends this approach "With mob", via "respectful partnership" (AIATSIS, 2022) with local Aboriginal community. Consultations respectfully seek guidance, permissions, and potential further Indigenous personas to enrich the resource, and advice on how the VR experience is shared and "the types of tasks" it is used for, given these are complex and "because each facet of culture can simultaneously influence a range of processes" (Littlejohn & Margaryan, 2006, p.270). The project will continue to champion Indigenous culture and refer to community guidance on reusability in other contexts (such as student-facing).

Keywords: Indigenous perspectives, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, virtual reality

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Poster presentation

We propose an interactive poster presentation session. Our audience will be invited to ask questions and will be offered the opportunity to interact with the pilot resource. Audience choice of interaction, beyond interacting with the digital poster, includes wearing one of our VR headsets for the full immersive experience or using the QR code on the poster to access the resource via mobile phone.

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