

JLTANE Abstract:

Title: Exploring Social Justice Through Virtual Reality in an Intermediate-Level Japanese Course

In response to the social justice crisis, schools have implemented social justice as the core of their curricula, and educators have explored and created various social justice lessons in their classrooms. In the meantime, Virtual Reality (VR) was brought to educators' attention as a new educational tool. VR was first implemented in the field of science and later extended to various educational fields. Then, how do we implement VR in our language teaching?

It is said that virtual reality helps people develop empathy with the objects that they see in the VR images. If this is true, VR can be an effective tool for students to explore and learn about unfamiliar topics such as Japanese culture and allows students to experience a meaningful exploration of social justice. Therefore, the presenter designed a course where students 1) practice basic vocabulary, grammar, and kanji characters from a Japanese textbook; 2) tie the linguistic exercises from the textbook to a broader content – Japanese history, specifically the social transformation from the Edo period to the Meiji period; and 3) utilize ukiyo-e (浮世絵) woodblock prints and VR to help students deepen their understanding of Japanese history and develop empathy toward others.

In this session, the presenter will first introduce virtual reality research in language teaching and talk about the benefits and challenges of VR in language classrooms. Second, the presenter will explain how students in a low-intermediate Japanese class explored and examined social justice in their content-based Japanese course. Third, the presenter will demonstrate activities in which students used VR to grow empathy by examining the Edo society with ukiyo-e woodblock prints and virtually visiting the current Japanese society with the Oculus Quest app called "Wander." Lastly, the presenter will discuss how other educators can adapt this approach. The presentation will be in English. Sample activities will be in Japanese with English translations.

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