

New Bedford's Discovery Language Academy to Become First South Coast School to Bring Virtual Reality to the Curriculum

The students at Discovery Language Academy will be travelling the world...virtually, that is...when the school becomes the first in the area to introduce virtual reality (VR) to its curriculum, beginning this December.

Only a few schools in the state are currently utilizing this revolutionary technology as a tool for language and cultural learning.

Virtual reality (VR) technology utilizes computer-generated environments that can simulate physical presence in places in the real world. By injecting students into all sorts of places and situations, it captivates their attention and fully immerses them in the learning experience.

Dr. Leslie Vicente, Executive Director, sees the introduction of this technology as significant step toward Discovery Language Academy's mission of providing innovative opportunities for students of all ages.

"The students are aware that we are going to incorporate Virtual reality into the curriculum and they are very excited about it" stated Vicente. "This will permit our students to virtually visit many places of interest worldwide such as Lisbon, Portugal or Washington, D.C."

Virtual reality will be incorporated into the school's curriculum at all grade levels twice a week, with different

modules for younger and older students and shorter experiences for young students.

The National Training Laboratory (National Education Association of the United States) reports that retention rates for lecture-style learning are 5%, with reading rates at 10%. Meanwhile, VR scored a retention rate of 75% and at the top of the class is learning by teaching others.

-MORE-

Although the technology has been used in gaming for years, it has only recently made its way into the classroom. This method of learning can be especially beneficial for students who may have trouble learning by more conventional means.

The modules that Discovery Language Academy will use simulate situations ideally suited to second language learners and, in addition to three-dimensional, real-looking visuals, includes auditory cues to stimulate interaction and help with pronunciation of new words.

For example, one module explores navigating an airport, taking students from check-in and immigrations to security and boarding. After completing the module, the students will be scored on their preparedness to navigate their way through an airport in a Lusophone country using only Portuguese.

For hardware, the school has invested in two set ups of an Oculus Rift S with an accompanying PC, giving students the very best of the virtual reality experience. With this setup, six or seven students can share and discuss each experience together. While one student uses the headset, five or six others will simultaneously see that student's experience on a large screen. Eventually, the school hopes to have 16 complete units with the financial assistance of community.

Originally incorporated in 1979 as Portuguese United for Education (PUE), the school changed its name to Discovery Language Academy in 2016, when it moved to the DeMello

International Center in Downtown New Bedford. It provides educational opportunities responsive to the diverse needs of the South Coast community in the areas of Portuguese and English language acquisition and cultural understanding.