

Language educators at Melbourne's Methodist Ladies' College have got a new take on teaching, and there's not a torturous vocab list or stilted listening tape in sight.



Instead, you'll find Year 7s locked in conversations with real people plucked from streets and cafes from all over the world, busy honing their tongue in Japanese, Chinese, Spanish or French, in bona fide social scenes that don't stick to formulaic textbook clichés.

This is all thanks to a first of its kind software, called ImmerseMe.

“It's 1:1 technology, so students are immersed in an authentic setting, so every scenario is filmed in real shops with real people; not actors, just normal people from everyday life,” head of languages, Chloe Briand explains.

Think of it as a ‘build your own adventure’-style experience, the Victorian adds.

“So students need to listen to what the native speaker is telling them and they need to answer with near perfect accuracy (as) they have a model they can repeat and rehearse with.

“And when they are ready, they click on the microphone to answer the question, and then if they are successful they get pushed onto the next scene in the scenario.”

Briand should know such intricacies, having helped spearhead the technology's development right from that watershed moment when Scott Cardwell (now CEO of ImmerseMe) first pitched the idea.

“...he said ‘I’m thinking of launching this product, what do you think?’ And immediately I thought ‘my god, this amazing!’ So I got involved right from the beginning.”

With “just a little bit of money in the pocket” Cardwell traversed his way around the globe, feeding the material and ideas back to Briand.

“It’s a very cool job!” she says.

“When he created the first batch of content, he went to Europe with a camera man, a 360-degree camera, and literally just shot different scenarios in different languages, in different countries.”

Briand reports that so far the trial with Year 7s has been tremendously encouraging.

“...the research shows that the most stressful thing to do when you are learning a new language is to speak to a person in real life, that’s the most daunting (thing), I think everybody can relate to that.

“And so in the classroom that’s where they can feel the most safe, with their teacher and with their peers – that’s what ImmerseMe does, it bridges that gap...”

The educator is clearly excited for what’s to come.

“...I don’t believe there is any other software ... that combines the virtual reality element with voice recognition, it’s a genius stroke really from Scott.

“Having the chance to ... collaborate on designing and seeing the results with the students almost immediately, there’s nothing more exciting for a language teacher...”