Personal Narratives: Threading the Past into the Future Through Virtual Reality Non-Fiction

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The pandemic has made digital technology more pervasive, increasing the interest in integrating participatory teaching and learning approaches in formal and non-formal educational spaces. Virtual Reality Non-Fiction (VRNF) narratives are immersive interactive media experiences that push beyond film to immerse audiences and engage them as active participants instead of passive spectators. Using immersive heritage applications in citizenship education can provide students with experiential learning opportunities to imagine living in the past and figure out how to apply values and lessons from the past to the present to shape the future. This paper focuses on the role of personal storytelling in promoting history identification and citizenship education. I will conduct an autoethnographic close reading analysis of two VRNF narratives, (Anne Frank's VR Experience) and (The Book of Distance). These experiences are examples of constructive storytelling that delve into the history of war, trauma, and displacement through the personal stories of those who experienced it firsthand. Overall, through a critical examination of those narratives within the context of the ongoing conflicts and displacement of refugees worldwide, this paper examines (1) virtual reality as a mode of memory-making, (2) VRNF educational potential for critical heritage studies and citizenship education, and (3) the relationship between form, content, and heritage identification.