

EXPERIENCING SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH THE SENSES

BY JIAYI WU

LCC CHANGEMAKER 2024-2025

FILM & TV



Opening: Visualising Impact

My journey into the Evaluation and Impact Changemaker project was triggered by a question that stayed with me: how do we visualise impact?

Coming from an immersive media background, I often grappled with how emotions, intuition, and unspoken transformations could be made visible — or whether they should be. When the opportunity arose to join a project focused on reimagining how reflection is structured in education, particularly in anti-racist and decolonial contexts, this question pulled me in immediately.

From the beginning, I sensed that traditional evaluation methods — forms, checkboxes, written reflections — might be insufficient for capturing the emotional, internal, and sometimes invisible dimensions of transformation. I wanted to explore what it would mean to design reflective spaces that honour not only what people think, but what they feel and experience.

Being a Changemaker from the Outside In

At the start of this journey, I experienced a strong sense of disconnection. I saw my role as a student in immersive design as distant from the pedagogical and anti-racist thinking I assumed a Changemaker should embody. I thought of myself as someone who could offer technical support—producing visuals, interfaces, or digital tools—but not someone who could actively shape how reflection and justice might intersect. I believed that reflection needed to follow specific forms: boxes, words, and an analytical structure. My tools, which often relied on metaphor, abstraction, and aesthetics, felt peripheral. What I didn't yet realise was that this difference was the point.

Mapping Evaluation: From Concept to Embodied Practice

Before any tools were created, we began by mapping the core structure of how evaluation is conceptualised within Changemaker projects. Using a WHO–HOW–WHAT model, we

collaboratively visualised tensions between institutional expectations and the realities of emotional and cultural transformation.

These early mappings helped us recognise critical gaps in access, positionality, and emotional reflection design, which would later guide our turn toward embodied and sensory-based methods.

Our team's early efforts focused on rethinking how reflection is currently constructed within institutions. We initially created a prototype feedback form, tested after a social justice-themed workshop. The form captured thoughtful cognitive responses, but we quickly realised something was missing: the subtle emotional shifts, the tensions, and the embodied reactions that students often experience during difficult conversations.

To address this, we developed a paper-based body mapping session. Over workshops, participants were invited to use colour, shape, and simple words to map their emotional responses onto drawn human silhouettes. These sessions produced richer, more intuitive reflections. Emotions like confusion, pride, anger, and exhaustion emerged visually, bypassing the constraints of structured language.

However, across sessions, we also observed recurring patterns of discomfort. Drawing emotional states publicly in a shared room introduced new layers of vulnerability. Some participants hesitated, softened their expressions, or withdrew altogether. It became clear that space, visibility, and exposure deeply shaped what could and could not be shared.

These realisations were pivotal. They revealed that even alternative formats like body mapping are not neutral — they carry their own risks and exclusions. Reflection is shaped not only by prompts but by spatial, cultural, and emotional contexts. This insight fundamentally reframed how we began to imagine safer, more adaptive spaces for reflective practice.

Designing for Embodied Reflection

It was in this moment that our team, pointed out by Saranya Satheesh, proposed a turn towards VR. The immersive potential of the medium offered privacy, intimacy, and creative flexibility. Building on her suggestion, I focused on how the VR environment might be designed through a lens of accessibility and emotional justice. What would it mean to create a space that not only felt immersive but also safe across cultural and neurodiverse needs?

I developed a virtual reflection prototype, building on the logic of body mapping. The environment includes three key elements: emotion guidance cards to support self-directed reflection, a colour-based drawing tool, and a virtual keyboard for writing thoughts. It was designed to be non-linear and user-led, giving participants time and space to engage with their own emotional pace. While this prototype was not externally tested due to ethical and time constraints, the design reflects a shift in focus—from collecting data to supporting internal movement and self-awareness.

Emotional Journey as Design

Rather than tracking outputs, we structured the experience around an emotional flow according to different stages: uncertainty, reassurance, excitement, vulnerability, reflection, and empowerment. This arc, while speculative, helped us imagine how reflective tools could be designed not for answers, but for affective journeys. Our approach aligned with ideas often found in trauma-informed and decolonial pedagogies, which view reflection as not purely cognitive, but deeply emotional and relational.

These perspectives reminded us to design for feeling and safety, not just comprehension.

Reframing My Role

This project also transformed how I saw my role. I stopped trying to make my creative tools conform to institutional expectations and instead asked how they might expand those expectations. My understanding of Changemaking shifted: rather than trying to “fit in” through translation, I began contributing through difference. As someone navigating cultural complexity and visual thinking, I came to value reflection that is nonlinear, embodied, and emotionally honest. Designing for justice, I realised, is not about perfect accessibility, but about actively making space for multiple forms of understanding.

What's Next?

We are now preparing materials for a second phase of development. The team plans to create a hybrid reflection toolkit combining both physical and digital elements. This will include flexible formats that support emotional safety and accessibility across diverse experiences. While the prototype remains in a concept phase, the project has already reshaped how I understand reflection: not as something to simplify or standardise, but as something to approach with care, openness, and creativity.

Showcase Outputs

- Narrated project video: <https://youtu.be/BFmtbY38qy4>
- Final presentation deck: Experiencing Social Justice Through the Senses
- Visual re-interpretation of emotional journey mapping (based on team insights)
- Documentation for future testing and hybrid toolkit development