VOICETHREAD IN THE CLASSROOM*

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Abstract

VoiceThread is an interactive tool that allows for collaborating, sharing, and commenting. VoiceThread is a free program that can be operated by students and easily monitored by teachers. It allows for uploading pictures, narration by the creator and commenting by other viewers in 5 different ways-including audio and text. It has revolutionized story telling and can be used by teachers in all subject areas to present and share information. VoiceThread can be used as a creation, discussion, and assessment tool. VoiceThread is changing the way in which information in presented and shares.

1 Introduction

The world is slowly becoming smaller and smaller thanks to more advanced technology. But to young children they world is often still limited to their neighborhood. What if there was a program that allowed students to create and share not only with classmates and neighbors but also with people all around the world? VoiceThread is a technology that makes this possible. VoiceThread is a convenient, simple, interactive, online tool that can be used by person of all ages. Individuals can create a VoiceThread containing pictures and narration, which can then be commented on by others. It can be shared to anyone on VoiceThread or kept private.

VoiceThread is especially beneficial within the classroom. "Teachers and students are using VoiceThread as a storytelling tool, a deep thinking tool, a research tool, an expository communication tool, and even an assessment tool" (Dyck,2007). VoiceThread has brought storytelling to the 21st century and allows stories to be shared around the world. "VoiceThread is a collaborative, multimedia slide show that holds images, documents, and videos and allows people to leave comments in 5 ways." Through the use of comments, VoiceThread creates an interactive environment in which individuals can share commons interests and ideas. It can also be used as an assessment tool for examining others opinions and as a tool for teachers.

Businesses, teachers, and students use VoiceThread. It provides a creative outlet for students and encourages the sharing of ideas. But the uses of VoiceThread are not limited to storytelling. VoiceThread has unlimited possibilities in that it can include voice, type, doodling, unlimited slides or just a simple slide. It can include pictures or typed documents. It can be embedded or exported to other destinations and multiple identities can be created under one account. This is great for teachers who can establish one account and have kids use multiple identities to create and comment. VoiceThread can be used to collect information as well by uploading a simple slide and evaluating comments. Not only can VoiceThread be used as a creative outlet but it can also be used to learn more about others experiences and views. VoiceThread makes it possible to examine the thinking of others through pictures, text, doodling, and voice.

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[†]http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/

2 VoiceThread 101

VoiceThread is an online album that other VoiceThread users can directly comment on using voice, writing, video, and drawing. VoiceThreads can be used to share information, start a discussion, receive feedback, or simply tell a story. The basic VoiceThread consists of a series of photographs where different VoiceThread users, including the creator, make comments on each picture. VoiceThreads can cover almost any topic. They range from the story of a young girl getting her hair cut to a discussion of literature. The creator of the VoiceThread has several options to control public comment. They can make their VoiceThread private or public, allowing only select people or everyone to view it. The creator can also disallow comment, monitor comment, or allow free comment on their VoiceThread.

Making a VoiceThread is simple and easy. The first step is to create a VoiceThread account online at http://voicethread.com¹. Then, the topic and audience of the VoiceThread should be decided. It is important to understand the direction of the VoiceThread before completing it. After researching or creating a topic, photographs or other media must be chosen to lead the discussion. For each slide of the album, there should be a different piece of media. You can choose images, PowerPoint slides, or even video. Once your VoiceThread is planned, you click on the create tab on http://voicethread.com² and title your VoiceThread. The next step is simply to upload the pictures into your new VoiceThread. If you need to reorder your media, drag the image or video to the appropriate location. Once you are ready, click share to set the privacy settings for your VoiceThread including moderating comments and public or private status. When you want to add a comment to any of your slides, click record for audio comments or type for written comments. You can choose to save or delete any of your comments. The draw option allows you to doodle or highlight important parts of your slide. You may create several identities under an account under the "my account" tab. Once your VoiceThread is finished watch and participate as others begin commenting on your VoiceThread.

Very few materials are needed to create a VoiceThread. VoiceThread is an online tool; therefore, the use of the program depends on an internet connection and browser. A microphone is also important to leave audio comments on any slide. If a microphone is inaccessible, a phone line can be used to leave a comment. Images, video, and other media files are also required to create a slide.

VoiceThreads can be very complex or simple based on the skill and time spent on the album. Commenting on your own and others VoiceThreads is an essential part of the process. The collaboration VoiceThreads allow brings about creativity and ideas from people around the world.

- $\bullet \quad \text{VoiceThread Slideshow http://www.slideshare.net/edtechvision/voice-thread-for-education-presentation-} \\ 660270^3$
- How to Use a VoiceThread Basic Steps http://educationalsoftware.wikispaces.com/file/view/VoiceThread.pdf⁴
- Tutorial Video http://www.teachertrainingvideos.com/voice/index.html⁵
- Give Your Students A Voice With VoiceThread http://www.scribd.com/doc/6521990/Give-Your-Students-a-Voice-With-Voice-Thread⁶

3 VoiceThread in the Classroom

VoiceThread offers a section of their website especially for educators. The use of http://ed.voicethread.com⁷ requires proof of being an educator as well as a small fee. The use of this branch of VoiceThread ensures appropriate comments and allows educators and classes to collaboarate.

 $^{^{1} \}rm http://voicethread.com/$

²http://voicethread.com/

 $^{^3} http://www.slideshare.net/edtechvision/voice-thread-for-education-presentation-660270$

⁴http://educationalsoftware.wikispaces.com/file/view/VoiceThread.pdf

⁵http://www.teachertrainingvideos.com/voice/index.html

 $^{^6 \}mathrm{http://www.scribd.com/doc/6521990/Give-Your-Students-a-Voice-With-Voice-Thread}$

⁷ http://ed.voicethread.com/

VoiceThread offers many benefits for students. The commenting feature is particularly beneficial for classes. Students can receive feedback from people around the world on their work. Teachers can also use VoiceThread as an effective assessment tool to see if students understand key concepts. VoiceThread also easily lends itself to group work for class projects on any subject. Educators will also be able to quickly view which students put in the most effort during projects. VoiceThread allows students who may not like to participate in class discussion feel more comfortable with sharing their ideas. It eliminates a lot of the social pressure of the classroom. VoiceThread is also simple for teachers to manage and maintain the safety of their students by moderating comments. Parents can also become part of the classroom by viewing their child's work online. The different commenting styles allow students to participate in the discussion in whatever manner they are most comfortable.

VoiceThreads take some time to set up and conceptualize. They also require access to technology that may not be available at some schools or some students' homes. Safety is also always a concern when students are online. VoiceThread allows users to have a picture in their name with each of their comments. Students should use not use photographs of themselves or their full names while commenting. Teachers should also get permission from parents before starting a VoiceThread project.

VoiceThread can be used in almost any grade level with a wide range of subjects. Students could comment on a VoiceThread about a particular story or novel read in class. They could respond to a particular question or just give their overall impressions. For a history project, students could look at a series of photographs of artifacts and make predictions and inferences about the culture the artifacts came from. A VoiceThread could also be created as supplemental material given for students who need an extra challenge. Students could also create a project using VoiceThread where they describe different habitats or scientific concepts. The possibilities for using VoiceThreads in the classroom are truly endless.

- VoiceThread 4 Education Wiki https://voicethread4education.wikispaces.com/8
- VoiceThreads: Extending the Classroom with Interactive Multimedia Albums http://www.edutopia.org/voicethread-interactive-multimedia-albums⁹
- $\bullet \quad \text{VoiceThread Slideshow http://www.slideshare.net/edtechvision/voice-thread-for-education-presentation-} \\ 660270^{10}$

4 Notable Examples

Boooo Global Warming

Booo Global Warming is a VoiceThread created by Zoe Farrel, a 4th grade girl who created the thread as part of her Science Fair Project and a Book report. Zoe created the VoiceThread due to her interest in Global Warming and its effect on Polar Bears. The VoiceThread discusses things people can do to make a difference and looks specifically at Spiral Island and Richie Sowa. She became interested in the topic after reading a Time for Kids magazine article in class. There are tons of comments from other kids and adults. The comments add a lot to the VoiceThread and provide great additional information. http://voicethread.com/#q.b1192.i13696¹¹

Interpreting the Past

This project challenges students to extract information from photographs. They answer questions such as who, what, when, where, and why. They also look at the influence of what is happening in the pictures and connections to the world today. Arcadian helpers are the main theme throughout the VoiceThread. It demonstrates how VoiceThread can be used in different subject areas and how it can help asses a deeper thinking. It is a great example of using VoiceThread to tell a story through pictures and narration. http://voicethread.com/ $\#q.b1134.i12703^{12}$

⁸ https://voicethread4education.wikispaces.com/

 $^{^9\,}http://www.edutopia.org/voicethread-interactive-multimedia-albums$

¹⁰ http://www.slideshare.net/edtechvision/voice-thread-for-education-presentation-660270

 $^{^{11}}$ http://voicethread.com/#q.b1192.i13696

¹²http://voicethread.com/#q.b1134.i12696

One Busy Day, Mini-legends

The most interesting part of this VoiceThread is that it allows the viewer to control the plot of the story. A whole class created the story. The project includes the children's original artwork, narration, and text. At the end of a "chapter" readers choose what they want to happen next and navigate accordingly. It demonstrates the role of VoiceThread in creativity and collaboration. It is a great example of how truly interactive VoiceThread can be. http://voicethread.com/share/ $4973/^{13}$

World Travels

World Travels is a beautiful presentation create by a man name Michael. Michael spent a year traveling and taking amazing photographs. He has uploaded all his pictures and narrated what the picture is from and what it is of. The project allows viewers to learn and see many aspects of the world. It is a great example of how VoiceThread can be used as a storytelling devise, since Michael used it to capture his adventures. The project demonstrates how VoiceThread can be used to showcase children's artwork and creativity. http://voicethread.com/share/462/14

5 Tips for Teachers

- 1. Start small. Begin by creating your own VoiceThread on which students may comment. As your students become more comfortable with VoiceThread, they can make an individual project.
- 2. Model appropriate comments for students. Give them prompts to start their comments like, "This reminds me of..." or "I'm surprised that..."
- 3. Make sure to discuss internet safety and copyright issues when starting a VoiceThread project.
- 4. Under one account, you can create several avatars. You can easily monitor students from your account.
- 5. If your VoiceThread is public, make sure to monitor all comments.

References

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¹³http://voicethread.com/share/4973/

 $^{^{14} \}mathrm{http://voicethread.com/share/462/}$