Hinsdale Central School

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GETTING STARTED WITH VOICETHREAD

In the very beginning, I took a 7 year sabbatical when I stayed home to raise my children and I went from a position where my only technology was an overhead projector to a position where they said you can have iPads in your classroom and a smart board and laptop carts, so I felt like I needed to explore all the things that had changed within those 7 years.

So I said to my committee, "you know what would be wonderful? If there was some type of tool where you could post a picture and have the students interact with the picture, talk to each other and comment" and they said "that sounds like something we heard of called VoiceThread." So I started to explore how to use it in the classroom and it's been a wonderful tool for a lot of different reasons.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

For teachers new to VoiceThread, I would encourage them to think about what they want as an end product, create a rubric and then make a VoiceThread modeling what students should do.

I learned that if I didn't give them good instructions, their comments weren't good. They can easily go through and leave 40 comments, but they might be 40 shallow comments. You need to really model the depth of response that you want from your students. If you don't, you can get overwhelmed and it's hard to give them feedback.

If you show them the rubric, you can say "this would be a 4 point response, this would be a 3 point response" that sort of thing. You don't want to get the same answer over and over from your students because then even you won't want to listen to them all. Give the students a quality over quantity talk.

SELF-PACED "FLIPPED" LEARNING

I've used VoiceThread for student-created projects and I've also used

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98%
said VoiceThread is
Easy or Very easy

> "I think that VoiceThread is a very good way to teach kids how to learn because some kids use different methods for learning and I think that VoiceThread understands that."

it for self-paced lessons where I give the instructions and student use it as a flipped class model. One of the first lessons I did on VoiceThread was about explaining how to tell time in Spanish. It was great because it allowed the students to move at their own pace. Some students got it right away, but some students really struggled with telling time. What I love is that I can make a new copy of it from year to year and have them start fresh.

It's great because if a student misses a day, they don't miss any instruction from me. It's like I can divide myself into 18 people and have each student understand something step-by-step.

We've made a class audio-visual dictionary on a certain topic where everybody contributes. We had a list of reflexive verbs in Spanish like "I wash my hair," "I comb my hair," "I brush my teeth," verbs like "to concentrate" which is used reflexively in Spanish. I wrote the whole list on the board and students used the iPads to take pictures of themselves acting out the verb. We uploaded them to a VoiceThread and I pronounced them because they hadn't been exposed to the pronunciation yet. So they actually created the images and they were able to learn the vocabulary with some visual input.

USING VOICETHREAD FOR AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENTS

VoiceThread is so useful for both formal and informal practice. With our new standards of accountability, we're not supposed to score our own students. Some teachers don't do that because they can't think of a way to have someone else come to their classroom for those four months. If you had to share videos with a teacher in another building, how else would you do it, really? It would be hard to know who was who without VoiceThread. We had evidence of their speaking because we used VoiceThread for that part. We share those VoiceThreads with the other teachers and they use a rubric to assess each other's students.

Our 9th graders do a virtual field trip to a Spanish-speaking country. They plan a trip, they find a map and locate a city, then they find a plane ticket through Kayak or a site like that, they screenshot the ticket, they go through travel sites to find top destinations and then find pictures of those destinations. They find a famous person from that country and food from that country. After they've done all their research they upload the pictures to a VoiceThread and then they leave comments explaining all those things in Spanish.

It takes them a while, but they learn so much from that. We incorporate lots of different grammar and vocabulary into the lesson and then we review, so it really gets them into authentic trip planning skills. It also embeds a lot of the culture into the lesson. I learn a lot of things from their research that I didn't even know. I really love that project and I've gone back and revamped it a few times.