



SHARON DAVISON
Kindergarten Teacher

GETTING STARTED

I've been teaching for over 3 decades, so I didn't grow up with this technology, but it has completely transformed me. I first found out about VoiceThread at my school through our education technology integration specialist, who is also a teacher. It was so great when she shared this because it was a way to capture things that we were doing with our kids; things they are exploring, things they are curious about. It was a way they could share what they were doing and get feedback from other people outside of our classrooms. That was what was really appealing to me. When I first got started with VoiceThread, I made a connection with an incredible kindergarten teacher from New York. She and I created a VoiceThread together. We were both collaborating on an author study about Dr. Seuss. She created slides for his books and our students were able to make comments about which was our favorite book and why it was their favorite. That was really interesting, and I think what is most powerful about VoiceThread, especially with little children, is that it gives them an opportunity to use oral language. It really helped them explore and share what they understand.

DESIGNING LESSONS WITH VOICETHREAD

I did a study on Tommi DiPaolo and took pictures of all of my students' artwork. They were then able to go in and make comments on each other's work and their parents were able to comment too. What I noticed is that when my students realized that their work was going to be shared with a larger audience, all of a sudden the rigor in that activity was raised not by me, but by my students. It became really, really important for them to do their best. What was most intriguing for them was getting feedback on their work.

So right away, I thought this was a great way to teach them about digital citizenship. We could explore this together with their families instead of me just telling them about it. What was really awesome was that once they started to hear the comments on their work, they were inspired to do more. They started to develop this awareness that there were other people in the world who cared about what they were learning about.

As a Kindergarten teacher, I have an opportunity to model how to use tools in a way that is safe, kind and responsible. With VoiceThread you can share if you want it public or private.



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The students really look forward to learning what other people are going to tell them about their work. VoiceThread is a tool that lets me highlight the things that are important to my students.

For me, it's been one of those really great web tools. The beauty of VoiceThread is that you can tie it into what you're already doing.

I've used it a lot for math as well. In our school we've done a lot of work on best practices in terms of looking at the different mathematical habits of the mind. We worked on understanding how children think about solving problems. VoiceThread was a really easy way to do this. We make a lot of quilts and two and three dimensional shapes. When we would make a quilt, I could take a picture and upload it to a VoiceThread then ask the students to make mathematical observations about what they noticed. We start in the classroom having face to face conversations with their partners. The students listen to each other and repeat back what they heard. We call this habit of the mind "listening to understand." Then they talk about how their mathematical ideas are the same and how they are different.

When it comes time to record their thoughts on the VoiceThread, they have a chance to think deeply about what they have created. That is what is so powerful about VoiceThread.

Once students understood how VoiceThread worked, it became a great way for them to reflect and think about what it is that we're exploring. Through their own oral language I am able to listen to what it is that they are capturing. Can they see patterns, are they able to make predictions, what kind of math talk or math language are they using? Then, when we listen to it together, we are able to make connections as a class. When we share it with their families, we are giving them an opportunity to share this work alongside of each other.

SHARING WITH PARENTS

When I get my list for my new class at the end of June, I send out an email with an "e-guide" for parents and I include authentic examples of the work we've done over the years. Then in August, I invite the parents to come in and learn how to access our digital tools. I offer sessions throughout the year for parents to come in and learn how to use this with their child. Parents really

respond to these opportunities. Each week, I send the parents emails with links to the work we've done. I feel very strongly that parents are important stakeholders, so we want them to have opportunities to connect with their children's learning. VoiceThread is one of the ways we facilitate this connection.

ASSESSMENT

One of the things I like about VoiceThread is that it includes the speaking component. When it comes to feedback, we are focused on leaving safe, kind and responsible comments. I don't think of it as assessment; I think of it as a celebration or an opportunity to see what they understand. With any kind of assessment, it's great to have a variety of tools. It's better than simply saying "this is the only way it's going to work." VoiceThread is great because students can create and have conversations about what they created. I'm able to get a picture about how they are forming their sentences and how they are preparing their thoughts. I can also hear if they are using math language and how often they are using it.



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