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Technology and Deaf Education
Exploring Instructional and Access Technologies

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF ASL SIGNERS WITH VOICETHREAD
Presenter: Rosemary A. Stifter
10:00 a.m. - Room 1310
June 23, 2008

>> ROSEMARY STIFTER: Good morning, everyone. Hello, and thank you for
coming to our presentation entitled, "Building a Community of ASL Signers
with VoiceThread." Some people in the deaf community have seen the title
"VoiceThread" and are puzzled by it. They're wondering if it's using your
voice and the threat is in string. We're using voice meaning expressing
yourselves with one another in a conversation through sign language.
During this presentation we'll use VT as our acronym for VoiceThread. My
name is Rosemary Stifter, and I am the Director of Technical Services at the
Laurent Clerc National Deaf Center. It's on the Gallaudet campus.
Includes both the Kendall School, the Kendall Demonstration Elementary School
and the Model Secondary School for the Deaf, MSSD.
>> Hello everyone. My name is Julie Longson, and I'm an Educational
Technology Specialist at the Laurent Clerc Center, as well.
>> ROSEMARY STIFTER: When you came in, there was a survey and brochure at
your seats, and it's just a short survey for the Clerc Center, so we can
disseminate a report specifically for Congress to let them know what we've
been doing. So if you wouldn't mind, there are two simple questions if you
could just fill that out and hand that into our med ray or wearing the red
shirt. She will collect the surveys.
Also, if you'd like to be on our e-mail list, in order to get information
from the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, we'll have that being
passed around, as well. And feel free to sign up.
Our presentation is going to talk firstly about what VoiceThread is.
Secondly, we're going to talk about how you can start using it yourselves.
Third, we're going to talk about communities, and how communities can be
developed by using VoiceThread. Fourthly, we'll talk about
ed.VoiceThread.com. Next we'll talk about other applications of VoiceThread.
And also, we'll have some tips for you that we've found as we've used it
ourselves. And then we'll have question and answers at the end. Hopefully
we'll have about 10 minutes at the end for questions and answers and we'd
appreciate it if you held your questions until that time.
VoiceThread itself is an online media application tool. This is a repository
for different types of media. For example, video comments, PowerPoint,
different documents can be uploaded, collected and archived.
Here's an example of one of the photos. And the nice thing about VoiceThread
is that people are able to leave comments. And you can see the I cons of the

pictures of the people who left comments on the side of this center photo. The big photo is where the media is, where you upload it. And then there are smaller icons that show where the comments are. Down here on the bottom of the screen show the variety of ways you can leave comments.

There are five ways to leave comment. You can phone in a comment using a telephone. You can use a webcam. You can use a microphone to record a comment. You can use your keyboard to type a comment. And the fifth one, I don't know if you can see, but you can draw your comments. We'll show you examples during our presentation of each of these five techniques.

Let me back up. I forgot to tell you something. I forgot to give you the background information about how we even found VoiceThread. It is an online tool and it is free. Last year in the summer, I found VoiceThread, and I saw this application. I thought this would be a great way to utilize storytelling. It would have pictures, for example, maybe somebody could upload their trip to Europe, and then comments could be solicited as to the pictures.

And last year, they only allowed audio comments via human voice, so I suggested to the company, I said, is it possible to add video comments? And I explained that I worked at a school for the deaf, and they thought that was a great idea so they added the application of video comments. They had sent me an e-mail saying they were thinking about that, but they didn't realize that there was an actual application for video comments. And they decided to work on it.

Three months later, they let me know that, indeed, they had a test site to show me, and I worked with them to figure out the right size for the video windows. At that time, it was a pilot, and they piloted the application with our school beginning in January until now. And we've been working with this, this is still new for the two of us, and we're sharing our experience with you, and we're hoping that you'll join us in this venture, as well. We'll give you a short example of what it looks like, so we'll hit the "play" button. This is what a comment looks like.

Hi, my name is Jessica. Here's a ball in the middle of his head. Right in between it looks like it's hitting him on the eyebrows. And his eyes are looking right at the ball. The purpose of this is we asked the students, please describe the picture. And we'll go into the application more later of how you can use it educationally. Julie will make some comments right now. And she's going to be using the webcam right in the laptop.

>> Julie Longson: A man, looks like he's up to bat and there's a ball coming right at his forehead.

>> ROSEMARY STIFTER: So you see how simple that was to upload the comment. Let's explain what it looks like in general, okay?

>> JULIE LONGSON: Now, we've seen VoiceThread, what it looks like. So how do you get it? How do you set it up? Well, first you'll need to have a computer with internet access. And you'll need to have a Flash player, at least version 7 or above. And you'll need to have the web address, of course, VoiceThread.com.

Then you can set up your account, register it. And again, this is free. So you can set up a free account, and this means that you are limited to 3 VoiceThreads, which means you'll have to change them out yourself if you want to apply more. As an instructor, you'll probably want to have many of them, right? And so maybe you're wondering how you can increase the number of VoiceThread accounts you can have. It's free, as well. You need to register a second. You'll need to click at the top.

It will say "go pro," and then at the bottom, it will say K-12 instructors and you click that. Then you can register with your school e-mail address and that will give you more access. Again, it is free. The "go pro" account, you have to pay $60 annually, but for education -- for educators,

the benefit is free. So again, it is free for you. If you want to use video imaging with this, as you saw, instead of having a picture in the middle, you can have a video comment, so you can have video, as well in the middle picture, as well.

We've uploaded our PowerPoint presentation, and you can upload PowerPoints, video, PDFs, spread sheets, word documents, and as well, photographs. And I believe you can have up to 50 pages.

Now, this will take you now through how to upload. You click "upload," and this brings up from my computer, you can click on that. Or you can use Flicker, or FaceBook, may media means another videotape or other pictures that you have saved, VoiceThread, you can move them over into VoiceThread. Also URLs, you're able to upload, as well. And we were showing you how to make a comment, as well, share.

Share means, with VoiceThread so you can open what other people are viewing or you can make a comment or maybe you don't want people to be able to comment. You're able to restrict it, as well. If you want to keep something private for yourself only, that's fine but really the point of VoiceThread is to build an established community. And the sharing of ideas. So maybe you want to invite friends to view your VoiceThread. You can add your friend, add my friend means that both of you can add - pictures, documentation, whatever. You can upload and change the VoiceThread.

And you can send a link so that a person will have read-only access. There you go. This was set up for public comments, and you can see that indicated here.

Also, you can export your VoiceThread. You can download it and save it to your computer. But understand that there's a limited number that you can download for free. Otherwise, it costs $1.99. I think it's for education, there's one or two that you can have for free and the rest cost $1.99 to download. I'm sorry, let me go back.

The comment moderation, there's that ability, as well. Which means you can add your own, turn it on or turn it off. You can moderate the comments as they come in.

You can also embed your VoiceThread to do it with a blog or vlog on FaceBook, and it's very simple to do. You want to show the link?

Here's the link, you can see. And you can copy that and send it to your friends. Now, how can we use it in the community? Maybe a community could just be two people, teacher-student, that's it. They can use it for writing or signing back and forth with one another. Or it could be the whole world that you want to have involved. The community depends on -- where before community really depended on where you lived, what your community was. And now community really depends on your ideas and the things that you're interested in. And VoiceThread.com -- ed.voiceThread.com will explain a little bit more about that.

>> ROSEMARY STIFTER: Ed.voiceThread.com is a web based application for K to 12 educational settings, and people can join annually, and as many students who want to join can join as many -- as many students can join as they want. So it could be school-wide and that would be one dollar per student which is a great price for the school. You might be wondering why they have this separation out. Ed.VoiceThread, its purpose is for those instructors and educators for those developing VoiceThread and it's a collaboration tool for the educators and in a separate sec is shun they don't want the students to be involved with that so they don't want the students to see the collaboration.

Sometimes the discussions might go off point so they just want this to be a collaboration tool among educators. Also, there are more protections set up for students. Students can sign up without an e-mail address and that's possible. So there's no concern about other people outside contacting the

student via an e-mail address they got through VoiceThread. That won't happen.
Only those people who are members of the ed.voiceThread.com are allowed to comment on the content, anything that's created in that environment. Also, you can view comments, is that true? You can't view the content -- you can view the content but you can't view the comments, referring to this last point on the slide on the left under "students."
And, of course, there's more available space to save more files. So if you want to have an account through ed -.voiceThread.com, you've got that extra space. On the right, it says 40 gigabyte, that's huge. An educational account tends to be how much, Julie, do you know? Is it the same? It's the same as a pro account, okay.
Honestly, this application is very new. It's new to us. And we're is still learning how to apply it with our students.
Now, the fun part. We're going to demonstrate some of its uses. In our school, well, in Kendall School, this is an example from the Kendall Demonstration School. They use a strategy called visualization and verbalizing.
And so what happens is the teacher will show the students a picture, and the students have to describe what they see. The teacher has a list. It's kind of like questions. For example, what color is it? What size is it? Just a variety of questions.
And if the student has described the picture, and included all this information, the teacher won't necessarily ask the questions. But if the student's having trouble, the teacher has these questions to help the student expand their description.
Because often, deaf students have gaps in what they describe. They will assume that you already know many things already, and they don't understand that things have happened.
So, for example, a student will make comments about home, assuming that you have a lot of the background information. So this is a great strategy to teach students how to visualize and verbalize what they're describing. And these students, it's a beautiful way to document their responses, as well.
So you can see what the picture is. And the teacher's asking, tell me what you see. And here's one student's response.
>> JULIE LONGSON: Hello! I see a dog. With big eyes. And black and blue bow, a pink bow. He has a nose and the tongue is hanging out. This dog also has spots and a collar.
>> ROSEMARY STIFTER: The teacher is responding.
>> JULIE LONGSON: Is it a girl dog?
>> ROSEMARY STIFTER: Hi. I liked your description of the dog, thank you. You said that it had a bow. That was a good sign. And remember, you said it had this thing, which is a collar. We sign collar this way, "collar." Okay, collar shows the classifier for collar.
And what size is the dog? Is the dog big or small? I really don't know. Is it a tall dog or is it a short dog? I don't know. Could you please add to your description more information, for me? Okay? Thank you, good job! That class itself is a special-needs class.
This is a really powerful tool. The students and the teachers are both excited, and we're very happy to introduce them. We introduced this tool to them at the end of the school year, and hopefully they'll use it next school year.
We set up a collaborative project between the Kendall Elementary School and the high school, MSSD. We wanted to see how dialogues between the two schools and school-age children would occur.
So they ask questions and they have responses. The student will videotape him or herself asking a question, using movie maker with a webcam. The

quality's not the best here but it's so easy for the students to use, it's great.
The second -- this is a second and third-grade class -- no, I'm sorry, the previous class, the special-needs class, that was fourth and fifth grade. This is first, second, and third-grade students on this video clip, and you'll see.
I have a question for the MSSD dancer. How did you learn? And do you have to practice dance? That's my question.
>> JULIE LONGSON: Yes. I went to school and I took dance. With other deaf and hard-of-hearing students. It was a mixed class. I do have to practice every day. I have to practice my rhythm. I have to practice listening and watching the other dancers to take my cue and to know when to show up, so I do practice Monday through Friday and sometimes on the weekends, as well. How did you know about my dancing? Did you see this on the web?
>> ROSEMARY STIFTER: I saw the dancing MSSD show, I saw them dancing. So do you see how the dialogue began with the question and the comments? It's really cool. I wanted to say something else. Oh, oh, yes, I remember. I'm sorry.
The students in Kendall School on Fridays get together and watch other students, and they'll ask questions or they'll make their responses, and then they'll sign. That's on Fridays.
The MSSD students do their dialogues on Tuesdays, so every week, we have some type of conversation going on. This is an MSSD student who's asking a question.
Hi, I have two questions for you: What is your favorite ANIME movie or book and what would you say is your favorite robotic or technological thing that might relate to work in the future?
>> JULIE LONGSON: My favorite is animals and dolls.
>> ROSEMARY STIFTER: You asked us if we had a favorite movie. And my favorite character is a mouse, because they chase others, and they get hit in the face. It's really funny, and it makes me laugh.
Do you like to watch movies? What do you like? What's your favorite movie? This is really a wonderful way for them to practice their questioning. First, they have to answer with an answer, they open their comment with an answer, and then they might follow up with a question. This is a really good way for them to practice those skills. And it's really exciting - for the students. The students love using this technology.
This is an example of a collaborative project between a high school in Washington, D.C., it's a hearing high school. They're learning ASL. And a middle school students at Kendall Demonstration School. And they're working together. The hearing high school students sign, and then the deaf Kendall School students correct their signs that the hearing students are using.
>> JULIE LONGSON: Hi. My name is Rachel.
And I live in Washington, D.C. And I love to read books. I love sewing. I love to swim. I love biking. BYE!
>> ROSEMARY STIFTER: This is an example of the videocam of the frames per second. Are you familiar with frames per second? You have to use 30 frames per second for sign language, and I think this particular student used 15 signs per second so her signing speed was very slow and we were going to make that point at the end, that you need to include that, the frames per second, and attend to that when you're signing.
Now here's a comment from the Kendall School student.
Hi, my name is Amber Lynn, and you started doing things on your fingers, you started from your thumb. And I would suggest if you're only going to have four things just to use the 4-hand shape. It's clear in sign language and more ordered. It follows the rules of sign language. And your sign for your name, you said "my name" is a very formal way in ASL to say that. If you're

just talking casually, you can just point to yourself and reference who you are, and give your name, or say "me" with your name. Thank you! This is really a wonderful way for our students to diagnose ASL, and help other people and encourage other people to use ASL.
But they have to be able to diagnose themselves first, and figure out how they're expressing themselves in order to help other people. It's really cool.
Because of time constraints I'm not going to show this, but here's another example of using ASL hand shapes and the variety of signs. So what signs can you use with the one-hand shape? It could be think, hearing, deaf. So different people make comments on the variety of signs that can be used with the one-hand shape.
You can use this starting with very young children, so you get the idea.
>> JULIE LONGSON: Now again, because time is running out, we're going to have to hurry through this. This is an example for science teachers to use to teach their students about the carbon cycle.
And this can be uploaded to VoiceThread, and then students can make comments or describe what they see or know about the carbon cycle.
And students are usually very excited about this. They want to discuss it with one another and make comments, and they want to add to it themselves.
So students were doing research on the web to find out more information, and upload to it the VoiceThread, so it's very exciting way to get them involved.
We've got different comments. And again, this is showing you the drawing that we were speaking of before.
>> ROSEMARY STIFTER: The carbon cycle uses carbon dioxide, and it's people and animals in the air use the carbon dioxide and it gets transferred to the plants to help them grow.
>> JULIE LONGSON: So this is a great way for students to be able to demonstrate what they know and what they see. As well, they can type text. Here they use what they call the bi-bi approach. They use both text and signing.
In an English class, students wrote autobiographies, and sort of, they had to go A to Z. Pick a letter and tell a story related to it.
So they had to use their favorite signs, and they had to set it up on a blog. This is a story about moving to the United States.
>> ROSEMARY STIFTER: The first time I went to America. When I was 6, my sister's Godfather names Oleg Strutzka was in America but he was born in the Ukraine when I was 1.5 years old and he moved to America. When I was 6.
>> JULIE LONGSON: We can't show you the full story because of the time but if you're curious you can look on the website, and you can go to the presentation and watch the whole story.
But this is a good example, though, I don't have U don't know how to sign something, you can have a text and then you can see it and -- see it in sign language and use the English text. So again the bicultural-bilingual approach.
>> ROSEMARY STIFTER: But that's not in the VoiceThread blog.
>> JULIE LONGSON: True. This itself is not in the VoiceThread. But remember, in the comments, you can embed, so you can copy things and put them in, and post them on a blogger.
So there's really no programming that you need to know. We have another example of a student, this is from an English class. And this student is from Sweden, a woman from Sweden came to teach them Swedish sign language.
So they -- here they're commenting and saying thank you for coming from Sweden to teach us sign language. That was done on a videotape, and then uploaded to the VoiceThread.
So this is signed in Swedish sign language and then we've got the English text so that you'll know and understand what he's saying.

Here it is. So there are different approaches to it.
>> ROSEMARY STIFTER: Okay, there are so many educational applications for VoiceThread, and we're just starting with some of the ideas that we've investigated. And we are not finished and we can't show you everything. But here are some of the other ideas that we've thought of that can be used for VoiceThread.
You can use them in group work, group discussions or storytelling. One student or the teacher could start signing something, and then another student can add to the story by continuing the story in sign language, and it can go around the class and to a final conclusion.
So it's wonderful for storytelling or language experience. If the student goes out on vacation, or the class goes on a field trip, you might take pictures. The pictures could be uploaded, and the students could tell stories or make comments about those photos.
KWL, it's perfect to see what the students already know. Or after they've learned something, then you can test them on it. You could ask them, what did you learn about? For example, we saw the carbon cycle video, and the students can add their comments. And that's a document of their work.
For quizzes and tests, you could have a finger spelling test maybe for the younger students. For example, one class was learning about streets and cities, and the teacher would fingerspell "city," and that would just be there, and then the student would have to reply with the sign.
So questions and quizzes like that, games, it could be used for critique or evaluation. Maybe those new ASL students or new ASL signers coming in, and they're taking a course in ASL, and they're signing and practicing, and then the teacher can interrupt them and stop the video and give them feedback.
It has the capability of stopping a video and then commenting on it. So, for example, the one woman or the one student, signed, I like this first, second, third and fourth and started with her thumb. At that point if she had an instructor, the instructor could stop it and say, why don't you use the 4-hand shape?
Also you could use this for portfolios, whether they be poems or documentaries or PowerPoints, all of these things can be archived here in VoiceThread. And the list goes on.
There are many, many applications and ideas that we've come up with. On the right, the PowerPoint presentations with commentary, Julie and I planned after this conference, we're going to try to sign this, and you have the web address in the handouts, so hopefully, you'll have our comments signed that will be accompanying the PowerPoint slides and presentation, all in VoiceThread.
>> JULIE LONGSON: So just to review, our experience with VoiceThread, we've learned some things in our process of learning this. You must apply for an educational account, you must, if you want to have unlimited VoiceThread. Because if you're limited to three and you're having to change things out all the time, that's a lot.
Again, it's free, and it's worth it.
Also, when you're utilizing movies to upload, it can be automatic, but if you -- for having it in the middle picture, the large picture, you need to have MovieMaker and you need to put it in your computer and then upload it. For example you can also use I movie. You need to have video settings and you have to remember you don't want it to be slow like the woman that we saw was learning sign language.
Also, the background is very important. I mean, if there's anything distracting going on with background, it can be really difficult to see. So be careful of your background, and choose something that's a dark color.
Good lighting is very important, as well, so that your face can be seen clearly. And if possible, you've can afford to buy it, buying a better

webcam is advisable, because the better-quality the equipment, the better the quality of your video.

So if you've got sort of low-grade equipment, it's going to show up in the quality of the images and movies that you're able to produce.

Are there any questions?

>> I have two questions. Two questions. You had 4 gigabytes per year. Is that per year? And suppose you got up to 4 gigabytes, can you then remove content?

And then the second question is: How do you find other people who have this program that you can network with? Is there a list of people or a list of schools that have the same -- that are also members of this?

>> ROSEMARY STIFTER: The 4 gigabytes, remember Julie mentioned about you can export an archive so it's free but you might pay to archive it but you can delete which would then reduce the amount of space you're using.

The second one, remember, this is online, so it's available to anyone and everyone. You just have to register. But you do make a good point as how you actually connect with people like the deaf schools around the country. So we have our e-mail address. And so please contact us. Maybe we can set something up where we can network with each other. I think that's a great idea. And how the project will impact all the deaf schools. It would be great if all the deaf schools around the U.S. could be involved. That's great. Thanks.

>> So you said you can archive it. That means all of the comments, all of the video and everything, you don't want to lose that. So you can download that to your own local server.

>> ROSEMARY STIFTER: When you download it, it becomes a movie. So it plays itself. It's not interactive anymore once it's downloaded.

But you do have a place to preserve it.

>> JULIE LONGSON: It does cost a little bit of money, as well, to download things. That's $1.99 for each download that you do.

>> So $1.99 for each comment, each video? Or is it based on the kilobyte?

>> JULIE LONGSON: The voice threat and all the comments are included so the central picture with all of the comments that surround it.

>> So for each of those, it would be -- one of those would be preserved. So, you know, one or two, it doesn't matter. Question?

>> I'm confused, you said that VoiceThread.com is free, and then you said ed.VoiceThread costs money. So what's the difference between the free versus the paid portion?

>> ROSEMARY STIFTER: Okay, let me try to describe this. VoiceThread is an open, public place. Anybody can participate in that. But if you're an educator, you can sign up and register for free for a pro account, which means you have unlimited VoiceThread. The free limited public space is limited to three VoiceThreads. Ed.voiceThread.com is a secure network for educational purposes.

The one that's open to the public, anybody can get in and post anything. The secure paid portion is more educationally focused and that's why there's a fee. You could try the pro account and see. Students can join. They have limited-fee accounts but they can't get the pro account. Do you understand what I'm saying? So that's why it's limited for the students. For the educators, it's fine.

If you want a student to join, say, in a classroom, then it's better to go with the $60 a year account that's a class account. But test it yourself. Try with the free one first and if you need more flexibility then you might want to pay for the ed.voiceThread.com account. Is that helpful? Clear maybe? Kind of?

>> Hello, I'm from Texas. It's very easy, if you can use the internet, which I assume that most people here can, if you can get into a website and click

on it, if you can bring up an image, then you can register for an account, follow those directions. My name is blah, blah, blah and fill out all that information. And it's really very simple, very simple.
>> My voice means your VoiceThreads. And make new one. So you click on "create." You can click on "upload," and then you can go to your computer and pull up any photo you want, click on it and it uploads. The pictures are uploaded, it's done. It's there.
So there it is. It's up in less than a minute. You've got pictures, if you've got them saved, you can upload them. Most people can upload a picture these days. And e-mail, people can attach pictures, right? And it's the same kind of concept here. It's very simple.
So, I mean, if you're really awkward with technology, maybe it would take you a half an hour, okay? If you have some computer savvy, maybe 10 minutes.
 [End of Presentation]
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