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VOICETHREAD TAKES YOUR PRESENTATIONS A STEP FURTHER

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Уміння розпочати дискусію і брати участь в обговоренні є дуже необхідною навичкою для викладачів і тих, хто вивчає англійську мову. Одним із найкращих веб-додатків у наш час є американська програма Voice Thread, яка дозволяє представити інформацію для аудиторії в Інтернет, і, що більш важливо, будь-хто, дивлячись презентацію, може залишити свої коментарі, анотації, відео/аудіо відповіді для кожного слайду.

Being a keen supporter of using IT in the classroom, I somehow neglected a very simple, yet powerful tool-the microphone.

Most students have it built-in in their laptops, and by encouraging them to use it as often as possible, the teacher helps them to overcome their fear of speaking in public, by recording themselves students have a chance to improve pronunciation, speaking skills, and correct each other.

To involve students in this activity, I needed some simple, but functional programs that combined writing, speaking and presenting.

My first attempt was Photo Story 3 by Microsoft.

A very simple application that allows you to upload photos, type your comments right on the photos, and record your voice comments. Also, you can upload a music track to play as background music.

But after some time I realized I needed a different program as the above program does not allow you to add comments by other participants, and therefore you can't generate a discussion.

Playing around with Masher.com, I came to the conclusion it does pretty much the same as Photo Story.

The way out was found when I came across VoiceThread, the program that allows you to make comments about a topic under discussion by typing them, recording them either using a microphone or a webcam. You can invite all your students to comment about the topic, and each of them will be able to read their comments or listen to them.

I am grateful to VoiceThread team for giving me an opportunity to use Professional version free for six months; it is enough time to familiarize yourself with the potential of the program and show your students what a powerful tool VoiceThread is.

My first presentation was about market research, the topic we were studying with a group of second-year HR students at that time.

VoiceThread turned out to be very easy to use. I uploaded ten photos about market research using the program search button linked to Flickr.

If you want to upload photos from your computer, this option is also available, but you need to download photos from the Internet beforehand to be able to do that.

Next, I recorded myself using a webcam. It is a nice option as students can see you in flesh, commenting on the topic under discussion.

After that I invited students by sending them emails to join me and post their comments. Just as I had expected, most of the students did not use a webcam or a microphone to leave their comments. Accidentally-on-purpose I did not specify that I would like students to post only their own comments, not the ones found on the web or in a publication.

Some of them did exactly that-copied and pasted other people's ideas. I had to interfere and point out to this plagiarism, and asked students to redo their presentations.

Just for the sake of experiment, I assigned a group of postgraduates to comment on the topic 'Making arrangements'. Prior to this, I had uploaded over twenty photos related to the topic. The result was quite discouraging. Only one student posted an audio comment, the rest just posted very short sentences commenting about a few photos. Doodling, i.e. circling interesting parts or underlying them, was out of the question.

This school year I am using a free version of VoiceThread as the Professional version I used expired in June.

My conclusion is that even using a free version, students can make excellent presentations on the topics they study. A case in point is a VoiceThread presentation 'What Sergei N. should not do in his new job.' It is based on a unit we covered, and its aim is to give me some practical advice by students on how to behave in a new job. I deliberately uploaded only two photos, hoping that my students would continue the story. Alas, this time they made a lot of audio and text comments, but only about the first photo; only one student posted comments about the second photo.

After listening carefully to their comments, I found out that they had not bothered to listen to their group mates' comments. What seemed obvious to me, fell outside the students' interests.

This time I had to explain in much greater detail to the students the criteria I base my evaluation of their presentations:

1. Students' typed comments must be their own, not stolen from other people.
2. Students should not limit themselves to commenting about one photo only.
3. Students must always listen to other comments, and be able to sum them up.
4. Students, before uploading webcam and audio comments, should rehearse them. If they prepare comments in advance, you can hear that right away.

Speaking about using a free version of the program, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that if you already have three VoiceThread presentations, you have to delete one of them to be able to make a new one. It is a bit sad, but still gives you enough stimuli to keep on using VoiceThread.

I try to use VoiceThread presentations for each unit we cover, especially the case studies at the end of a unit. You can make VoiceThread presentations about a million things. The more interested your students are the better a presentation will be.

A couple of weeks ago, at a long last, a few students asked me to assign them to prepare a VoiceThread presentation about 'Secrets to being a successful manager.'

This time there were a lot of audio comments, typed ones, but the most interesting was a comment done in rap. The student just sang his tips in rap.

<http://voicethread.com/share/2693261/>

VoiceThread can be used by student teachers, higher education faculty, college students, families, businesses, professionals, and anyone who is associated with a group and needs a systematic way to discuss, share, and collect comments on a given topic. Its uses are certainly cross-curricular and it can be integrated into any subject or particular setting with these needs.

The screenshot shows a VoiceThread interface for a presentation titled "Situating Action Research (1/4)". The central content area displays the logo for the "ino Practitioner Inquiry Network" and a section titled "About Practitioner Inquiry". The text defines practitioner inquiry as a systematic, intentional study by teachers of their own classroom practice, involving a cyclical process of posing questions, collecting data, analyzing it, and taking action. Below the text is a circular diagram of the "Inquiry Cycle" with four stages: "Share with Others", "Develop a Wondering", "Collect Data", and "Analyze Data". The interface includes a grid of participant avatars on the left and right, a "comment" button at the bottom, and navigation controls.

Рисунок 1 – презентація, зроблена за допомогою VoiceThread

List of literature

1. <http://www.teachersfirst.com/single.cfm?id=8315>
2. <http://itbabble.com/2011/08/03/voicethread-a-review/>
3. <http://www.slideshare.net/suziea/voicethread-examples-in-education-presentation>
4. <http://www.appvita.com/2009/04/24/voicethread-group-conversations-around-images-documents-and-videos/>
5. <https://sites.google.com/site/voicethreadliteracyessentials/home/voicethread-basics/examples-of-voicethreads-for-education>