

Dynamic uses of Voice Thread in a Graduate Literacy Program: Teacher Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This research study indicated that more technology, particularly Voice Thread, enhances the online course experiences and improves the teacher's own teaching and professional practices. The findings from the survey indicated that, among other assets, using Voice Thread encouraged student engagement by creating more interesting lessons, improved fluency, aided differentiation of instruction and increased parental involvement in the home by such activities as creating Power Point Presentations with Voice Thread and posting these on class websites or e-mailing them to parents.

INTRODUCTION

The single most influential component of an effective school is the extent to which individual teachers know their students and respond to their learning needs (Marzano, 2003). Numerous studies have quantified the power of an effective teacher on student achievement (Haycock, 1998; Marzano, 2003; Nye, Konstantopoulos & Hedges, 2004). Nye and colleagues' (2004) research suggests that students with teachers who rank in the 90th percentile in terms of pedagogical competence will gain 13 percentile points in reading compared to students who have a teacher ranked in the 50th percentile. There is little dispute that an effective teacher makes a significant difference in student achievement. In the new millennium, effective pedagogy includes the use of technology for teaching and learning with 21st century learners. (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009, 2010). The 2014 Horizon Report identifies emerging technologies and trends that are expected to have an impact on teaching and learning in higher education. The report suggests that there is an ongoing need to make online courses more engaging (Johnson, Adams Becker, Estrada, Freeman, 2014).

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) provides guidance to ensure that our nations' students will gain the skills and competencies to be college and career ready. This necessitates that teachers develop the ability to "integrate critical thinking and communication and ICT (Integrated Co-Teaching) literacy in the context

of language arts lessons and instruction" (P21, 2009, p. 4). P21 recommends that teacher education programs provide opportunities for their teacher candidates "to model, teach and assess 21st century skills" (P21, 2010; P21, 2009, p.4). Teacher education programs are requisite to ensure that their candidates appropriately utilize instructional technology. Furthermore, teacher candidates are also learners, and their experience in higher education courses needs to reflect sound practices using technology. Learning in an online environment can be a substantially different experience as compared to attending a traditional onsite course. In an online course, interaction between students and the instructor, between students and course content, and among students needs to intentionally built into the course. One web-based technology that was identified in the 2014 Horizon Report as a tool to engage online learners is Voice Thread (Johnson, Adams Becker, Estrada, Freeman, 2014). The unique feature of this tool is that it allows for asynchronous, authentic conversations centered on an illustration, slide show, video, or any other digital artifact. The simple and interactive interface of Voice Thread can encourage collaboration and engagement while building a positive learning community in an online course.

PROBLEM

Online courses have been largely text-based and both faculty and students miss the interaction that is present in a traditional face-to-face

course. Communication in online courses is often limited to text-based discussion posts (Pall off & Pratt, 2011). Because of this, both faculty and students may miss the interaction and personal connections they typically experience in a traditional classroom course (Pall off & Pratt, 2011). Recent feedback from end-of-the-term surveys in four online courses indicated that the personal connection and engagement typically felt in face-to-face classes was missing in online courses. There is a need to find an effective, easy-to-use technological teaching tool to make courses more engaging.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to collect data to determine teachers' perspectives on a technological tool, Voice Thread. There is no disputing that an effective teacher makes a significant difference in student achievement. We also are aware that effective pedagogy includes effective instructional strategies, one of which is the use of technology. Despite knowing the influence an effective teacher has using technology with students; little research has been conducted to determine teachers' perspectives on the use of one technology, Voice Thread.

Teachers in four online Graduate Literacy courses in an anonymous, informal survey were required to create a PowerPoint and then create a Voice Thread with voice narration. The students were also required to comment on their colleagues' presentations. To gain the perspective of the teachers, the following questions were posed, "How was your learning enhanced by utilizing Voice Thread in your literacy courses? After using Voice Thread in your courses, how can your students utilize Voice Thread to enhance their learning and their literacy skills? Teachers reflected and documented on how Voice Thread may be used as an effective instructional tool. Using the data collected, we began to see patterns that emerged. This paper provides evidence of how Voice Thread was perceived by teachers and moreover, how it may be utilized as a powerful instructional tool in classrooms.

LITERATURE

The necessity to engage students is a key reason to use digital tools such as Voice Thread in an asynchronous online course. Kemp and Grieve (2012) compared the academic performance and experiences of undergraduate students in traditional face-to-face classes with those in

online classes. The study involved 67 undergraduate psychology students at an Australian university. Students were asked to provide written work, participate in a class discussion, and take a written test in a traditional classroom setting for one course topic and for a second topic, they were asked to do the same in an online setting. The findings reveal that while there were no significant differences in the test performance of either group, the students did indicate a "strong preference" for class discussions to be face-to-face. They cited that in class discussions were more "engaging" and feedback was more "immediate" than that in an online course. The students indicated that written work was positively associated with online primarily because of the flexibility of when they could complete the required task. These results were reconfirmed with a follow-up study of 37 students who were treated with the same conditions. Therefore, it is important to find ways to bring the engagement that naturally occurs in a traditional classroom into an online setting.

PROCEDURE

The Graduate Literacy program has offered online courses for the past 8 years in this large urban, mid-Atlantic college for years. All candidates in the Literacy program are currently certified to teach. Ninety-four graduate students in four online Graduate Literacy courses were informally surveyed about their experiences with and future applications to use Voice Thread. An entry requirement to the program is that candidates hold Masters degrees in education.

After reflecting on the candidates' feedback, two professors in the Graduate Literacy department developed assignments to incorporate the use of Voice Thread in their online courses. The assignments required candidates to identify, describe, and evaluate the implementation of evidence-based literacy strategies for diverse student populations. A final element of the project was to provide feedback on a minimum of two of their online classmates' presentations. The candidates were provided written and video instructions on how to create and comment on Voice Thread.

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At the end of the fall 2015 semester, 85 Graduate candidates in four courses were emailed a link to an informal, voluntary survey through Blackboard Announcements. Sixty-five candidates responded. The demographics of the 64 respondents are found in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of Survey Respondents

Gender of survey respondents	Male	6	9.4%
	Female	58	90.6%
Years teaching	Not teaching	3	14.3%
	1-3	8	38.1%
	4-6	3	14.3%
	7-10	4	19.0%
	11-14	2	9.5%
	15 or more	1	4.7%
Number of unique online courses taken (including current semester)	1-2	5	31.2%
	3-6	5	31.2%
	7-10	5	31.2%
	11 or more	1	6.25%

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

The participants of this study in the Graduate Literacy program are largely female (90.6% female, 9.4% male).

Table 2 provides information about the grade levels in which the respondents teach. The designation Pre-Kindergarten can be any age level of child who is not yet 5 years old. Of the 64 respondents to the prompt “Please select the grade level(s) you are teaching,” 23% indicate that they teach children below the level of kindergarten and 17.5% indicated that they teach “Other” or above the Pre-Kindergarten level.

Table 2. Grade levels taught by respondents

PK	15	23.8%
<i>K</i>	5	7.9%
<i>1</i>	3	4.8%
<i>2</i>	2	3.2%
<i>3</i>	4	6.3%
<i>4</i>	3	4.8%
<i>5</i>	4	6.3%
<i>6</i>	4	6.3%
<i>7</i>	3	4.8%
<i>8</i>	4	6.3%
<i>9</i>	1	1.6%
<i>10</i>	2	3.2%
<i>11</i>	0	0%
<i>12</i>	2	3.2%
<i>Other</i>	11	17.5%

The following questions were presented as an optional survey to the candidates:

- How could you use Voice Thread in your own teaching?
- How could your students use Voice Thread?
- How could Voice Thread be used with your colleagues for professional development purposes?

How could Voice Thread be used to meet the challenges of differentiated instruction for at-risk, advanced students, English Language Learners, and Students with Disabilities? In addition to demographics, one provided a checkbox for respondents to indicate the level of difficulty in creating a Voice Thread.

Why Use Voice Thread in the Prek-12 Classroom?

To prepare K-12 students to be college and career ready the 21st Century, teachers need to find ways to integrate new literacy’s. New literacy’s include those informational and communication technologies that children today are accustomed to using into the curriculum (NCTE, 2016; Smith & Dobson, 2009) and help students to access and present content and learning. Per the NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts (2012), teachers must teach students to use “spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes” and “use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information (2016).” Using Voice Thread can help to meet those Standards. Even more, National Accreditation Standards for teacher education programs require that “candidates’ model and apply technology standards as they design, implement and assess learning experiences to engage students and improve learning; and enrich professional practice” (CAEP, 2013). Based on our findings with Voice Thread, the data indicates that more technology enhances the online courses in GSE and improve students’ own teaching and professional practice

TEACHERS’ REFLECTIONS

Student Engagement and Increasing Fluency

The highest response by students enrolled in the online Graduate course was that Voice Thread would increase student engagement by creating more interesting lessons. On teacher noted,

“This would make my lesson more interesting.” Interesting lessons lead to more student engagement. This engagement was especially noted with struggling readers.

One teacher stated, “I think It would be very helpful to use Voice Thread with my struggling readers. I have several second graders in my class that are reading below grade level, struggling to decode words and read fluently. This difficulty prevents them from engaging in reading activities in the content area, even when the focus of the lesson is on the content material and not necessarily the literacy skills needed to read the material. I think Voice Thread would allow my students to be engaged in lessons because the information could be presented orally. This would give my students an opportunity to graph new concepts independently without having to constantly ask for help decoding new words. I think this would significantly boost their confidence when acquiring new information in the content areas of social studies and science.”

Another teacher perceived Voice Thread to build engagement through collaboration “...possibly for a collaborative activity for the class. Maybe ask the students an opinion question, and they could each say their response.”

Based on research by Brunvand and Byrd (2011), “Voice Thread will not address the learning needs of every student in every situation, its interface and feature set are well-suited for promoting student engagement and motivation as well as for helping students develop as independent learners.”

Engaging struggling readers in the reading process is very often a fluency problem with many struggling readers. Fluency has been described as, “using smoothly integrated operations to process the meaning, language and print (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006, p.62). The importance of fluency cannot be underrated. In 1995, a large-scale descriptive study found high correlations between scores on a rubric measuring phrased and fluent oral reading and scores on tests of comprehension (Pinnell, et al). In 2002, a national panel convened to synthesize the body of research on reading instruction pointed out the important connections between fluency and comprehension (NICH 2002).

Another teacher noted how engagement of lessons would be increased through developing fluency.

“I may use Voice Thread to do a voice over a story for the students to watch and listen to independently. I would upload the pages in a story, read each page, and make it so that each word that I read is highlighted or bolded as I read it. This would be a great opportunity for students to hear a model of fluent reading, follow along as I read, and practice and develop their reading comprehension.”

One Graduate student averred, “I may use Voice Thread to do a voice over on a story for the students to watch and listen to independently. I would upload the pages in a story, read each page, and make it so that each word that I read is highlighted or bolded as I read it. This would be a great opportunity for student to hear a model of fluent reading, follow along as I read, and practice and develop their reading comprehension.”

Prosody may also be improved with the use of Voice Thread. “I could use voice thread in my own teaching by having students listen to a story being read by the teacher in different tone of voices.”

It is interesting to note that one teacher indicated how his/her own fluency would be developed through the use of Voice Thread. “I could use Voice Thread to rehearse a lesson I am thinking about teaching to see how my voice is sounding. I could also use it to read a book out loud, and monitor my voice...”

Most candidates enrolled in our online Graduate courses indicated that Voice Thread would increase student engagement by creating more interesting lessons. One teacher noted, “This would make my lesson more interesting.” Interesting lessons lead to more student engagement and contribute to supporting struggling readers.

Another teacher stated,

“I think it would be very helpful to use Voice Thread with my struggling readers. I have several second graders in my class that are reading below grade level, struggling to decode words and read fluently. This difficulty, prevents them from engaging in reading activities in the content area, even when the focus of the lesson is on the content material and not necessarily the literacy skills needed to read the material. I think Voice Thread would allow my students to be engaged in lessons because the information could be presented orally. This would give my students an opportunity to graph new concepts independently without having to

constantly ask for help decoding new words. I think this would significantly boost their confidence when acquiring new information in the content areas of social studies and science.”

A teacher perceived Voice Thread to build engagement through collaboration “...possibly for a collaborative activity for the class...asks the students an opinion question, and they could each say their response.”

One teacher reflected on collaborative feedback by stating “I can use it (Voice Thread) during the drafting portion of an activity, by having other students review and assess other student’s work products. It will also be a great resource for me to give my students ongoing feedback about a project.”

Like any other educational tool or strategy, Brunvand and Byrd (2011) noted that, “Voice Thread will not address the learning needs of every student in every situation, its interface and feature set are well-suited for promoting student engagement and motivation as well as for helping students develop as independent learners.”

Fluency has been described as “using smoothly integrated operations to process the meaning, language and print” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006, p.62). Reading problems related to fluency can often lead to a lack of engagement, especially for struggling readers. The importance of fluency cannot be underestimated. In 1995, a large-scale descriptive study found high correlations between scores on a rubric measuring phrased and fluent oral reading and scores on tests of comprehension (Pinnell, et al, 2006). In 2002, a national panel convened to synthesize the body of research on reading instruction pointed out the important connections between fluency and comprehension (NICH, 2002).

Another candidate described how fluency could be improved through more engaging lessons.

“I may use Voice Thread to do a voice over a story for the students to watch and listen to independently. I would upload the pages in a story, read each page, and make it so that each word that I read is highlighted or bolded as I read it. This would be a great opportunity for students to hear a model of fluent reading, follow along as I read, and practice and develop their reading comprehension.”

Prosody, or intonation, may also be improved with the use of Voice Thread. “I could use voice

thread in my own teaching by having students listen to a story being read by the teacher in different tone of voices.”

It is interesting to note that one teacher indicated how his/her own fluency would be developed through the use of Voice Thread. “I could use Voice Thread to rehearse a lesson I am thinking about teaching to see how my voice is sounding. I could also use it to read a book out loud, and monitor my voice...” Additionally, teachers who reflect on their own practice are meeting professional standards (In TASC,) and are on the path to becoming a highly effective teacher as described by the Danielson Framework (2015).

Overall, teachers believed that student engagement and fluency may increase using Voice Thread.

DIFFERENTIATION OF INSTRUCTION

The candidates believed that Voice Thread supports differentiation. One teacher commented, “After teaching a lesson, I can split the class up into groups based on their understanding of the lesson. Half the class can view a voice thread reiterating what I taught, and the other half can work with me on enrichment and next steps.” Another teacher indicated, “It is a great way to re teach a topic in the classroom or at home. It can be a great resource for students to reference back to. It can also be used repeatedly and adapted as needed.” Another candidate noted how it may increase comprehension for struggling readers. “Voice Thread could be used as a read-aloud alternative with questions to help aide in their comprehension.”

Different learning styles and different instructional approaches were recognized by one candidate. “For students, they all learn differently. Voice Thread targets all different types of learners because you can view picture, write text and listen to what the presenter is saying. This is especially use for ELL learners to pair pictures with words and sounds.”

For students who are working above-level, one candidate noted that students may reach a deeper level of understanding through the creation of their own Voice Threads. The candidate stated it will, “encourage the children to think more deeply about their learning by allowing them to create a Voice Thread.”

Another teacher candidate stated how mastery of learning objectives may be achieved with students using Voice Thread. “I believe my

students could use VT to increase their oral literacy and their own learning. The students can be more reflective on the material, and the best ways to present the material. Also, if students are able to communicate complex ideas or content and teach their peers, then this demonstrates that their understanding will be at a level where they have mastered the learning objective from the teacher.”

One candidate recognized that the technology could be used to address different learning styles, “I would use Voice Thread to create engaging lesson plans where students could listen to information, watch videos, interact with the lessons, answer questions, and ask questions. Voice Thread will be a great tool to diversify the way my students learn.”

Some candidates emphasized the power of reading aloud to support differentiation of instruction, “Voice Thread is an amazing tool...I will record myself reading a story and then use it as an option for the students to pick during free choice time.” Students could differentiate their own learning by replaying a story after a story is read aloud by the teacher. One candidate noted, “I could use voice thread to record myself reading a book or text. This way students could listen to me read and they could stop and replay the story if need be.”

Voice Thread may be used across the curricula when students need further interventions. One teacher suggested, “For concepts that I want my students to understand I can make tutorial voice threads. They can refer back to them whenever they need to learn or relearn a concept. For example, conjugating verbs (Spanish) or Lists (Computer Science).” Another teacher also reflected on those students in need of additional support. “It can also be helpful to students who are struggling readers because it can be used to record a reading of words that are also on the screen. You could adapt the thread and use it as a guided reading or to underline vocabulary words students may struggle with.” “Voice Thread could be used as a read-aloud alternative with questions to help aide in their comprehension.”

Students can become more autonomous learners when teachers “record our voices to repeat and interpret instruction for students working independently.” Another candidate stated regarding differentiating, “I could see this as being a great tool for that.” I will record my voice reading the stories familiar to the students and stop to ask the students questions. This will

allow small groups of students to have the ability to listen to a story with questioning without a teacher’s constant guidance.”

Home/Parental Involvement

Other teachers also noted how Voice Thread could increase parental involvement in the home. “I could create a review for an upcoming test or create an explanation about an upcoming project. Many of my classroom parents speak Russian and need to hear the instructions since their reading of English are not great.”

Many teachers now have school and class websites to keep families abreast of what is being taught in their child’s classroom. “I could create Power Points summaries with accompanying voice threads and post them on the class websites or email them to parents to use as mini-lessons to reference in order to help their children with their homework and other assignments. They could be used to send parents to explain major assignments that students are expected to complete so parents know how to help their children and what they will need” as noted by one teacher.” Another teacher commented, “I could use it (Voice Thread) to explain things for parents at home as a review guide for something we have learned.”

One teacher expressed how many parents may not be aware of what is being taught in the class. Voice Thread may address this concern. “I could also send a lesson and the information to parents, so they are able to see what we are working on” as indicated by one teacher.

Voice Thread may be used for Open School nights as stated, “I can also use it (Voice Thread) for presenting information to parents about course work.”

Projects can be explained to parents easily with Voice Thread. “I would use Voice Thread to explain the directions of a project that students need to complete at home. I could use PowerPoint slides to demonstrate what each step of the project should look like and then record my voice to explain the directions orally. Also, a lot of our parents have difficulties understanding and explaining the new Common Core math. Therefore, I could post the math that we are working on in class and record myself explaining how to solve each problem. This would be a great way to get parents involved and allow them to help their children with homework.” Another teacher said, “In my own professional teaching, I would use voice thread

...to reach out to parents and them how to better assist their child.”

The positive online availability for viewing a Voice Thread in the home by students was indicated by several teachers, “I could use Voice Thread in my own teaching by using it as a supplement when teaching any type of subject to my students. I could also make them available online so students could view them at home if they need a review while doing homework or studying.” Voice Thread can be used as part of a flipped classroom. The flipped classroom is a pedagogical model that reverses class work with work at home (Edu cause, 2012). In a flipped classroom student can view materials at home and use class time to ask questions, collaborate, and apply their knowledge. Clark & Mayer (2008) propose that learning may be words, printed or verbal, are linked to relate visuals may improve learning.

Other teachers expressed, “I could also send a PowerPoint with voice thread to students to review lessons” and “I could use Voice Thread in my own teaching as a reference for a homework assignment or studying. Students could reference the PowerPoint with the voice over whenever they need to.” Another teacher stated the benefits of Voice Thread as a tool for studying by stating, “The teacher can also provide an online access for their students to listen to these recordings at home, for re-teaching and studying purposes.”

Unique Applications for Student Development K -12

Kindergarten through high school teachers reflected on the application of Voice Thread in their own classrooms. One kindergarten teacher reflected that she and her co-teacher may “have a Power Point of a book, and record our voice while reading it. Listening to the book can help the students understand and remember the story. We use the TCRWP curriculum and one of the reading units suggests reading the same books multiple times throughout the week to have the students basically memorize the story and feel comfortable ‘reading’ it themselves. Using Voice Thread my student will be able to listen to the books during center time.”

An upper grade teacher noted the use of Voice Thread for students to enhance their speaking skills and encourage their self- confidence. “In the older grade, I believe students can use Voice Thread to present their projects, rather than having each student go up in front of the room. I

also believe this can help with children who do not particularly like speaking in front of their peers. It can become a positive experience for them.”

A high school teacher noted, “As I completed my first Voice Thread, I was thinking of how I can utilize this program in my classroom. I am constantly encouraging and motivating my students to attend college, and this will probably be something they will encounter when in college, so I’d love to give them a head start and utilize this (Voice Thread) program.

Teacher Development

Teachers expressed how their own learning was enhanced and personalized by creating their own Voice Threads and seeing their colleagues’ Voice Threads. “I learned a lot from other colleagues using VT. I appreciate being able to see visuals, along with hearing a voice and reading text. It adds an extra component to learning that is sometimes lost.” Another candidate noted similar appreciation to hear other teachers’ Voice Threads, “In both my presentations and view (of) my peers’ presentations, I found that I was able to better express my thoughts and I was able to learn more from my peers’ presentations.” Another teacher expressed a similar learning experience, “My learning was enhanced because you were able to listen to a colleague critique your work.”

One teacher who is working as a grade leader noted that Voice Thread may enhance teacher staff development. “I have made a mock PD PowerPoint and feel that this could be used throughout the year with my staff. As a grade leader in my school I have led many PD’s... (and) using Voice Thread I will be able to send out Power Points and different useful information to my coworkers.”

One teacher indicated how his/her own thinking was enhanced using Voice Thread. “Using Voice Thread allowed me to practice what I would actually say and think more deeply about the project I had done.” Another teacher expressed, “My own learning was enhanced when I could hear myself presenting information. I learned a lot about who I was as a speaker, and was able to adjust my speech and the points I chose to highlight in the VT. I also was able to take a more reflective view of the material I was presenting, and was able to modify my slides to have less information because I realized there were some elements I

could explain better through my voice than in the physical slide show.”

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material I was presenting, and was able to modify my slides to have less information because I realized there were some elements I could explain better through my voice than in the physical slide show.”

RESULTS

The findings of the study indicate that out of the 64 responses to the question on the level of difficulty candidates experienced making a Voice Thread, 68.8% (44) found that Voice Thread was not difficult to use (Figure 1).

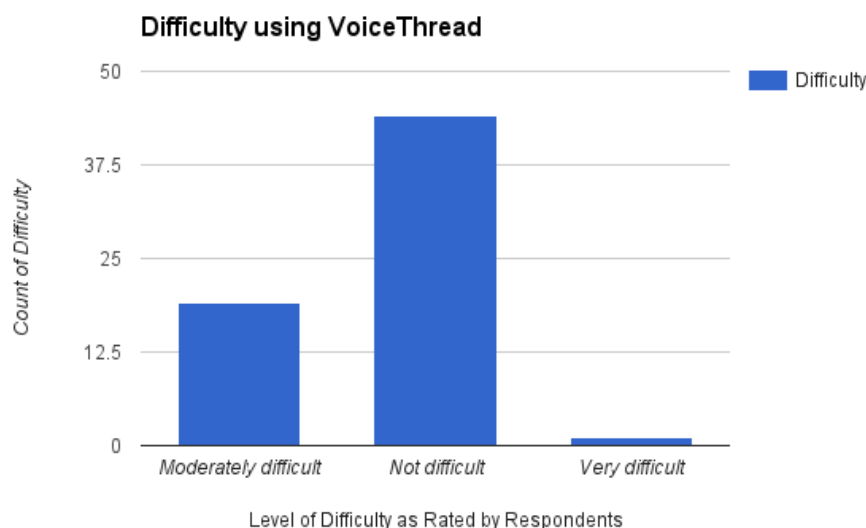


Figure 1. Level of Difficulty in Making a Voice Thread

http://www.educationworld.com/a_tech/columnists/dyck/dyck019.shtml

CONCLUSIONS

This research concludes that there is a need to include more visually interactive elements to engage learners in online courses.

Moreover, one of the directives to teacher education programs is to increase the use of technology across the program (CAEP,

TASC, ed TPA). The use of Voice Thread can help achieve that goal.

More than half of the candidates who used Voice Thread found it to be easy. The candidates expressed that above-level, on-level, struggling readers and ELLs may benefit by using Voice Thread in K – 12 classrooms. The candidates determined that Voice Thread may increase student engagement through collaboration, increase parent involvement, meet the needs of differentiated instruction and be used as a technological tool to address different learning styles.

It is concluded that Voice Thread is a valuable technology tool that has limitless possibilities to engage learners in an online course and students in the classroom.

LIMITATIONS

Depending on their level of proficiency with technology, the teacher candidates might need more practice with the technology, i.e., as in more than one course). Proficiency leads to confidence. Proficiency leads to ease of use.

School administrators were not involved in this research study. Administration support is critical for a new technology tool to be utilized in schools.

This research was conducted with a small size of teacher candidate population who were enrolled in graduate literacy courses. More teacher candidates need to be involved in the research. This study should be replicated with a larger sample of teacher candidates.

This research took place over two semesters. It is recommended to conduct this research over a longer time.

This research study was conducted with mainly urban school students. More research needs to include students from rural schools.

Most teacher candidates who responded to this Voice Thread survey were Pre-kindergarten to grade 5 teachers. It is recommended to survey more teachers in the upper grades, i.e., grades 6 to 12.

Despite understanding the influence an effective teacher has using technology with students, little research has been conducted to determine teachers' perspectives on the use of one particular type of technology, Voice Thread.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study and article was to collect data to determine teachers' perspectives about a particular technological tool called Voice Thread. Voice Thread is a web-based technology tool that is very valuable for engaging online learners, as well as classroom teachers at all levels. The unique features of Voice Thread are that it allows for "asynchronous authentic conversations centered on an illustration, slide show, video or any other digital artifact. The interactive interface of Voice Thread encourages collaboration and engagement, while building a learning community."

While carefully researched, our article is very teacher friendly. It includes a review of the literature in this area. Our study included 94 graduate students in four online Graduate Literacy courses at Touro College in the NYC area, who were informally surveyed about their experiences with using Voice Thread in their courses and about future applications for using Voice Thread in their own classrooms.

Our study indicated that more technology, particularly Voice Thread, enhances the online course experiences and improves the teacher's own teaching and professional practices. The findings from the survey indicated that, among other assets, using Voice Thread encouraged student engagement by creating more interesting lessons, improved fluency, aided differentiation of instruction and increased parental involvement in the home by such activities as creating Power Point Presentations with Voice Thread and posting these on class websites or e-mailing them to parents.

Our article includes many helpful and exciting suggestions for helping Kindergarten-high school teachers to apply Voice Thread in their classrooms. Therefore, we believe that this article would be very beneficial for college literacy professors and for teachers at the elementary, middle and secondary school levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- This research has demonstrated the many positive uses of VT to increase literacy skills. Further research utilizing other populations, such as students from other areas (urban vs rural), other types of schools and other students, as students with disabilities, ELLs and struggling readers.
- More training of teachers, information put out about the value of Voice to principals, staff developers and schools. A training video sent to all schools in a "teacher and student-friendly" presentation is needed to understand the many uses of VT.
- Teachers who are familiar with the many uses of VT Training is needed with staff developers in using Voice Thread.
- Further research is needed in the upper grades, particularly high school students.
- Colleges that are currently teaching the use of VT should begin collaborating with schools to impart more information about the use of VT and train staff developers in the respective schools.
- Reading teachers including Academic Staff Developers (AIS) and ELA Staff Developers may consider including VT to increase literacy skills.
- VT may be used as an assessment tool, a learning aid. Students may present material orally rather than writing a response.
- Motivation is addressed with VT and therefore, may be used to enhance literacy skills.
- A book compiled with "Great Ideas for Use of Voice Thread" should be created for teachers to update and reference for use from Pre-Kindergarten to grade 12. This may be made available through International Reading Association.

Voice Thread can build communication and engagement in online courses to meet the challenges of our 21st Century digital learners. Therefore, by incorporating experiences that

build on collaboration and communication technologies by implementing Voice Thread, instructors are encouraging their students to gain the skills and strategies to improve their own teaching for Pre-Kindergarten to grade 12 students.

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