

# Report On The Voicethread Pilot Project

## Funded By A Teaching Institute Seed Grant (2009-2010)

Spr10 - Aztec (b)

To answer Jorge's question, this is made out of terracotta. I thought I had posted this thought in the past, but I guess I forgot...Professor Robertson had mentioned to me that the eight directions may very well represent the 8 directions. After hearing this I wondered why this was important to the every-day person. It later occurred to me that this may have been used by a shaman. I say this because each directions were associated with specific gods, and also because the patterns on the bowl go from concentric lines to "waves" which may suggest transformations, which are also associated with shaman. Lastly, I had almost forgotten it was a "tripod bowl," that is, it is elevated by 3 fin-line structures. It's hard to really peg the even general possibilities of the usage of this bowl since the information available only consists of a possible location and year found, and a material.

comment

<http://voicethread.com/#u166128.b1005473.i5559776>

Spr10\_ Research Techniques and Resources

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Search entire website

I like that this site acts like a searchable bibliography. However, while some of the content is immediately accessible, some requires that you track it down. I'm going to link to a short video how to do this with the library's e-journals.

comment

<http://voicethread.com/#u166128.b918920.i4896589>

By Janice Robertson, Ph.D., History of Art Department

# **Report On The VoiceThread Pilot Project**

## **Funded By A Teaching Institute Seed Grant (2009-2010)**

**By Janice Robertson, Ph.D., History of Art Department**

A Teaching Institute Seed Grant in the amount of \$1,500 was awarded to fund a VoiceThread Pilot Project. I was responsible for recruiting participants, training participants, providing participants with Higher Education VoiceThread Accounts, and coordinating this project with the FIT's Gladys Marcus Library, Technology Development Team, and Center for Excellence in Teaching.

I originally projected that six participants would be involved: four teachers (myself and three others, one or more to be selected from Departments outside of the History of Art); one librarian (Karen Trivette Cannell, Head of Special Collections and FIT Archives) to support class projects involving online research; and one member of the TDT (James Pearce) to offer training and technical support to both students and faculty.

The VoiceThread Pilot Project ultimately exceeded all of these projections.

- (1) Steve Muth, a developer of VoiceThread, provided a substantial discount for Higher Education VT Accounts purchased as part of this Pilot Project. This made it possible to expand the number of participants.
- (2) Five teachers (two from Departments outside of History of Art) launched class projects: Deborah Klesenski (Photography), Ann Denton (Textile Development and Marketing), Chad Laird, Shana Gallagher-Lindsay, and myself (all History of Art).  
  
Deborah integrated VoiceThread into a hybrid class, Shana used it in an online class, Chad initially used it in a brick-and-mortar class, and he expects to use it in his future online classes; Ann and I have used it to expand our classroom teaching.
- (3) Three librarians received training, and full-fledged Higher Education VoiceThread Accounts. All three participated in my class project computer labs: Helen Lane, Director of Research and Instructional Services; Marian Weston, Reference Librarian; and Karen Trivette Cannell, Head of Special Collections and FIT Archives. This was a huge success, each student that the librarians interacted with learned something different—and specific to their interests—some students were so enthused that they made appointments to consult with librarians outside of class.
- (4) James Pearce, TDT, joined me in offering training sessions to new faculty users; he also attended computer labs and supported VoiceThread class projects by solving any and all tech problems (not necessarily specific to VoiceThread) that arose in the process of creating multimedia class projects. He is also supporting an experiment of mine that seeks to expand on the model of MIT World by converting a filmed lecture into a VoiceThread that is open to further discussion.
- (5) Scott Stoddart, Dean of the School of Liberal Arts, also supported this pilot by provided additional funding (\$5000) for a dedicated VoiceThread technician: Nanja

Andriananjason (a part-time technician in the History of Art Department) received training and a full-fledged Higher Education VoiceThread account; he attended computer labs to support VoiceThread class projects and was available for tech support by email.

- (6) In the process of recruiting, I provided one-on-one training and/or basic accounts to faculty and staff who inquired or expressed interest in VoiceThread, including: Tamara Cupples (Director of Online Learning), Antonia Blatchford (Online Learning Coordinator), Brian Emery and Brad Paris (Photography), Nancy Ostroff, Mark Higden, and Catherine Geib (Fashion Merchandising), Daniel Levinson Wilks (History), Bill Mooney (English), Susan Breton (Counseling), Justin O'Connor (History of Art), Julia Jacquette (Fine Arts). These are seeds planted with an eye towards the future.
- (7) Jeffrey Riman (Instructional Designer, TDT, and Coordinator of the CET) contributed a tremendous amount of support to this project: brainstorming with me, offering training to new faculty users, and troubleshooting Angel and IT issues.

Jeffrey and I organized a VoiceThread Roundtable (April 26, 2010) to gather feedback from participants in the pilot project. It was well attended and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

In the original proposal for this seed grant, I state that: "VoiceThread webware can be customized for seamless integration into IT systems and used to promote institution-wide collaboration (see, for example, the case study of the University of North Carolina (UNC): <http://voicethread.com/about/highered/>)." This is presently under consideration at FIT, and Jeffrey is leading the way.

VoiceThread promotes "student-centered learning" by giving students a voice, literally, and providing a multimedia environment where users can look, listen, speak, text, draw and collaborate in the development of online "conversations" around still or video images. Within this environment, there is room for imagination: this brings out both the diversity, and the best in FIT students.

VoiceThread also functions as a form of faculty development, challenging teachers to think in interactive terms, and to rethink how and what they teach. This is a process that will continue to play out as faculty review and evaluate the results of the assignments they have created, reshaping those assignments in response and in preparation for the next semester.

Hopefully there will be a next semester.

Thank you for your support and consideration.

*Jamice*

## Teaching Institute- Seed Project on Universal Design in Instruction

Susan Altman- Educational Skills

With seed money from The Teaching Institute and support from The Chair of Educational Skills and the Dean of Liberal Arts, Susan Altman and Joseph Plutz designed and implemented a reading lesson for use in Ms. Altman's Educational Skills class, utilizing the elements of Kurzweil 3000, a speech to text software program, and embedded it with audio of teacher prompts, written footnotes, background and enrichment materials, and you tube videos of student modeling techniques. The aim of Universal Design in Instruction is to engage students more fully, accommodate individual learning styles, encourage students to apply the skills to other lessons, as well as to create a lesson that can be saved for future use and shared with other classes.

The article selected was a New York Times article of January, 2010, "The Afghan Leader's Hat, Always More Than Just Headgear, Losing its Cachet," by Rod Nordland. This article was selected for its wide spread application in other classes; sociology, English, fashion classes. Furthermore, the appeal would be immediate, as fashion and politics are not often discussed in the same article.

Ms. Altman went through the article line by line and attempted to reconstruct the prompts she would use to direct students if the lesson took place in a classroom. The lesson was coordinated with units that are covered in the classroom; previewing skills for reading comprehension, and vocabulary development. She wrote a script, putting "sticky notes" where voice would be embedded, footnotes added, discussion encouraged, background material needed, and you tube video planned. Now it was ready for the team effort.

Mr. Plutz went through the text of the article, phonetically changing words that were mispronounced by the software. We selected our students who would help with the lesson and later on act as student ambassadors. The job of the students was twofold: they would help record audio and model in video form, and they would help the test group learn the Kurzweil software and direct them during the lesson. One student, Jose Acevedo was a student in the Educational Skills class, selected because of familiarity with the curriculum, and the other student, Carly Gold, was selected because she regularly uses the Kurzweil software located in the Fitable lab. Together, we added voice notes. The biggest challenge became making sure that students would be able to follow the voice notes as indicated by little speakers, along with footnotes that are numbered, in the crucial and correct sequence. We informally referred to this as "mapping", and then asked Jose to use his computer graphic skills to help us as we tried to clarify the lesson by editing.

We got further help from Professor Michael Cokkinos, who, along with his student, videotaped Jose and Carly working through paragraphs to understand words by using the context clues in the nearby sentences. This was notated and linked to the program.

Mr. Plutz arranged for the Kurzweil Company to send us several test CD's which were loaded into five computers in the Educational Skills Lab, C614. We presented the project to faculty at an Educational

Skills Department meeting on May 4<sup>th</sup>. The next department meeting is including on its agenda a discussion of the application uses for our department. Possibilities include use in hybrid courses.

The class lesson took place on May 13<sup>th</sup> in Ms. Altman's ESO33/133 class. Ten students read and answered the questions for the article in the traditional paper and pen form, and five volunteers were guided by Jose and Carly, to answer the same questions as the class, plus to complete a survey, evaluating the experience of learning by Universal Design. Interestingly, when Ms. Altman asked for volunteers, after describing the concept of Universal Design, of the five volunteers, three students were learning disabled, one ESL, and one a traditional learner, making the perfect test group.

The five students needed very little help in following the sequence of the lesson. They were totally engaged and seemed to adapt the program to their own paces and learning styles effortlessly. We observed that they read the article at least two times, and then went back to read excerpts to answer the questions. They were on task for at least twice as long as the rest of the class, and answered the questions in much more depth.

The questions were divided into two parts, comprehension and vocabulary. The test group's average was 78% for comprehension, and 90% for vocabulary, while the control group was 72% for comprehension and 78% for vocabulary. As the test group self identified as three students with learning disabilities, one ESL student, and one traditional learner, I would say that we not only leveled the playing field for them, but we gave them the tools to exceed the class average!

All five students answered a survey from "Survey Monkey." The first three questions asked them to identify themselves as learners. Three identified as LD, one ESL, and one, none of the above. However, 100% said they "often have trouble reading and remembering details from my texts."

The next group of questions concerned the acquisition of skills: Eighty percent of the students said they were "able to focus more on what they were reading," very much or some, 80% said they, "remembered more," very much or some, and 80% "understood vocabulary better," very much or some.

The last part tried to assess the future applications for Universal Design in Education. While only 20% said that they were "encouraged to learn more about the subject," 80% said, "this taught them how to approach subsequent readings," and 100% said they "would like to see Universal Design applied to other lessons or classes."

I think that this was a valuable project and hope that we can continue to apply the lessons learned from it. We would need to purchase the Kurzweil software and install it in our labs or on a main frame. Once instructors learn how to integrate this technology into their lessons, the benefits would be great: Students become more engaged in the learning process and are encouraged to higher level thinking skills. Additionally, the lessons could be saved, shared, and used for extra credit or as tutoring tools. This approach stretches across the curriculum.