

# A Reflection on Voicethread

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This week in class, we used Voicethread to address the course content concerning the building of a virtual community of learners and why that is crucial for success in online learning. This was an interesting experience for me. Using Voicethread this week allowed me to experience some of the benefits, as well as some of the challenges, presented by technology in learning.

According to its website, Voicethread allows users to create content, comment on it via microphone, webcam, text, phone, and audio-file upload, and share it with a designated audience or the public. Given that the course objectives for the lesson this week included considering ways to build your course for an online learning environment, this activity was an interesting and novel method to provide students in this course with exposure to one deserving option that could be utilized for creating an online course. In an article by Vesey, Bloom and Sherlock (2007) students ranked instructor modeling as a key factor in building an online community. The way in which we practiced using this tool for this lesson allowed me to see firsthand how my instructor used this medium for this purpose.

Creating a community of learners is considered vital to the success of online learning because this sense of community enriches and deepens interactions, which can lead to more meaningful understanding. That being the case, however, I am not sure that this particular activity was the best way to yield deeper learning this week, due to the improvised manner in which it was presented in the course and the week in which it was presented, prior to the Easter weekend. Although I found the technology interesting and not overly challenging to use, the novelty of responding in this way caused me to absorb the content of the presentation more slowly than typical. Not having the ability to use text to recall my peers' comments was a bit frustrating. When I find a post or resources from a colleague's contributions to be helpful or interesting, I usually save it for future reference. The way in which comments were shared for this activity did not lend itself to great depth, as far as scholarly merit goes. I do believe, however, that with additional exposure, practice, and planning, the interactions between students could add academic depth to the presentation.

Voicethread might be a useful tool for applying several best practices for creating a community of learners online to any course I might teach online. I think it would be a fun and innovative way to do student introductions. An ongoing Voicethread might be one way to address student questions related to course assignments, as a more interactive and personalized response than email and less intrusive to the instructor's life than texting. It seems to me that it could be an efficient way to walk students through a course introduction. It could also be an interesting way to get informal feedback from students throughout the course, almost like a sounding board, which is probably a good metaphor for a tool called Voicethread.

## References

- Building An Online Learning Community, Wilcoxon (2013)

- Community of Learners, (2013)
- 5 Ways to Build Community in an Online Course, (2007)
- Developing an Online Learning Community, Khoo, Forret, & Cowie (2009)