

New Ideas Take Flight

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In my mind, Joyce Valenza, teacher librarian at Springship Township High School in Erdenheim, Pennsylvania, is one of the school library world's best role models for integrating technology into our libraries. Last October I was fortunate to attend her session, "Information Fluency Meets Web 2.0," at the AASL conference in Reno, Nevada. You can get a feel for this session by visiting her NeverEndingSearch blog (<http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/blog/1340000334.html>). To view the PowerPoint of Joyce Valenza's AASL presentation, visit her "Web 2.0 Meets Information Fluency!" wiki at <http://informationfluency.wikispaces.com>. Click on the link Information Fluency Meets Web 2.0 PowerPoint.

She covered an overwhelming number of Web 2.0 tools and provided suggestions for ways to help our students with information access, evaluation, analysis, ethical use, synthesis, collaboration, and effective communication. The presentation could easily have filled a semester course and more. I will not attempt to summarize it here but recommend viewing the slide presentation referenced at the end of this article. Here, I will focus on one of the tools she described that I am pursuing and one of the goals towards which she has inspired me to work.

VOICETHREAD.COM

The most exciting new tool I learned about was VoiceThread. This Web-based software allows you to create online files called VoiceThreads in which you upload and display one or more images, documents, and videos, and then record or upload oral or textual comments. A brief visit to the site (<http://voicethread.com>) to view some examples will explain the VoiceThread concept much better than I can describe here.

One example Valenza showed was a library project in which students used VoiceThread to create booktalks. I had wanted to create online booktalks in my library and this looked like a way that I could do so easily with limited equipment. For my first experiment, I uploaded a jpg photo of myself holding a book. Then I used the built-in microphone on my Mac Book to record the audio. I created my first VoiceThread!

The next step was to include students in the project. I recruited library book club members to prepare booktalks for each of this year's California Young Reader Medal nominees and created one multi-image VoiceThread with

each of the booktalks. To find this booktalk, go to <http://voicethread.com>, select *browse*, then search for *CYRM* (or enter <http://voicethread.com/#u23637>). To find other booktalks, search for *booktalks* or *book talks*.

Once you create a VoiceThread, you can keep it private or make it available to the public or to an invited audience. A great collaborative feature of this tool is that, as with blogs, other viewers can add comments, either oral or textual, and you can opt to moderate the comments before they appear publicly.

VoiceThreads are not just for booktalks. They offer a range of applications, including storytelling, the display of artwork, photos, or other images, tutorials, or even asynchronous group discussions. My next plan is to adapt my library orientation PowerPoint to create a VoiceThread tutorial for those students who miss the live version at the beginning of the year. To make the tutorial livelier, I plan to have student helpers record part of the audio. Next, I hope to work on other library tutorials for lessons I teach and include student input in these as well. I am also working with a teacher to have students create VoiceThreads as part of their literature circles.

To highlight the VoiceThread booktalks and encourage more students to contribute talks or comments, I have imbedded one of them in my library Web page and will be updating it with a new one regularly. I have also created a booktalk blog in which I am imbedding all the booktalk VoiceThreads. I am adding topics/themes as keywords to each one so that students can search for books on a given theme. You can access the blog from my library Web page at www.lvusd.org/lcms/library or directly at <http://linderobooks.blogspot.com>.

With any new tool, there are always some technical issues. I have learned that getting good sound quality is tricky with a built-in computer microphone. Although you can record directly into a VoiceThread, I am finding that it works better to record the voice comments with Audacity, a free downloadable audio recording application that allows for editing and volume adjustment, and then upload these comments to the VoiceThread. Another plan is to buy a better quality microphone.

VoiceThread offers a free educator account that I have been using. On January 25, 2008, VoiceThread also introduced Ed.VoiceThread. This option is not free but may be a good option for schools seeking a more secure network restricted to K-12 school participants.

OPEN THE DOORS AND LET 'EM IN

Valenza encouraged us to let our students participate on our Web sites. One of the goals I set while attending her presentation was to make my Web site more interactive. I am now trying to incorporate student participation as part of my library Web page. In addition to the Voice Thread booktalks, I have imbedded a slide show from www.slide.com that allows students to visit the site and create their own shows.

I opened a free Polldaddy account at www.polldaddy.com, a site I learned about during the presentation that allows users to create polls and surveys. These can be imbedded in the Web site or included as a link. I conducted a one-question poll on my site asking students to indicate the type of books they liked best. I was pleased to get a lot of response. When I switched to a longer linked survey, hardly anyone participated. From this, I learned to keep opportunities for participation quick and easy.

I have recruited teachers to collaborate on class projects where students contribute to wikis or blogs and get feedback from their classmates. By linking to these wikis and blogs from the library Web page, students outside the class can view, enjoy, and comment on the entries, expanding participation and engagement with the ideas.

START SMALL

With so much more potential, I have to remind myself that these activities are just a start. Early in Valenza's presentation, she described herself as "Web 1.8, working to be Web 2.0." My first reaction was, "If she is not 2.0, then who is?" Yet I realize that we are all evolving, that we will never actually get there, and that the journey is the point, which is what makes our jobs so constantly challenging and invigorating. As Valenza also emphasized, "It's okay to be beta." If we want to properly serve our students, we need always to be looking for and exploring new skills and options that might improve the library experience we offer them, but we can't do it all. We can only do our best to try a few of the new ideas that look promising, and then continue to develop those that work for us. I may be a long ways from Web 2.0, but at least I am moving steadily in that direction.

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