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Digital Library Project Review Paper 1

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The Gateway to 21st Century Skills <http://www.thegateway.org/>

The Gateway to 21st Century Skills (which will be referred to as **Gateway** from this point on) is a digital library providing access to over 50,000 free teaching resources to educators around the world. Resource contributors include federal, state university, non-profit and commercial internet sites as well as educators. This digital library, originally called GEM, was created with funds from the U.S. Department of Education. In 2005 the funding ran out. Gateway is now supported by the NEA, National Education Association. The NEA's mission is to unite educators in providing all students with a quality public education. Gateway supports that mission. To ensure quality, all contributors have joined the Gateway Consortium and applied to have their record available through Gateway. The application is then reviewed for content, quality, accessibility and accuracy.

Service Features

The Home Page

The home page offers a navigation tool on the left side. A user can find out more about the site, get help, meet Gateway members, find out more about the NEA, as well as view and print featured resources. The homepage has a Browse by Subject area for educators to click on to view lesson plans. Educators can also view state standards which are critical in the development of lesson plans. A search bar and links to several articles are also available to the user on the homepage.

Browse by Subject

The browse by subject section can be a very valuable tool, especially for users who want to peruse the lessons or new users who may be unsure of how to locate specific resources needed. As well as the typical subjects one would expect to see like math, language arts, science and social studies, teachers can also click on one of the not so typical subjects including the arts, technology, languages, health, religion and philosophy. A number next to each subject area identifies the number of resources available. The glossary button opens to an extensive list of terms and definitions used in Gateway. A user can scroll through the document or click on the first letter of the word searched on the alphabet for quicker results. Terms from *abstract* to *metadata* to *webulated* can be found. Once a subject is clicked a brief description including text medium, type of lesson and grade level appropriateness are revealed for all lessons in the determined subject area. For example, Social Studies has 12,720 items. From this page the search can be refined by type of entry, some examples are activities, curriculum, project, research study, service, story and test. The subject can also be narrowed by grade level ranging from preschool education through adult and continuing education. The user can narrow the subject by keywords, beneficiaries and mediators, as well. There is a price code area that ranges from free to partially free to not free.

Search

The Gateway utilizes Seamark offered by Siderean Software which enables a user to search with key words. This faceted searching technique is much like searching on Google or AOL. A user types in key words to find relevant resources. Booleans do not enhance the search results.

Technology

A user does not need any special software to use Gateway. It can be easily accessed from any computer. There is no log-in required and all available resources and links are free to the user. The digital library is fairly easy to navigate and offers a first time users guide and hints for searching more effectively. Users need to become members to post comments and submit lessons. Becoming a member requires an application be submitted consisting of basic information as well as a short biography.

Reflection

The Gateway to 21st Century Skills digital Library can be a very valuable tool for teachers. Curriculum, lesson plans and activities can be easily accessed. The homepage is clean and uncluttered and provides menu bars and search tools to locate usable materials. Many of the resources are provided to the site by educators, ensuring quality lessons geared for specific age groups and grades. Gateway also provides links to the state standards. All lessons taught need to be aligned with the state standards to provide continuity and integrity in lessons throughout the state. Although Gateway digital library says in its mission statement that it is regularly updated and maintained several links were no longer active and pages could not be found. The majority of lessons were free to users but several links also connected to commercial sites where products must be purchased. This is a bit surprising since the goal of the site is to provide free resources to educators. One of the not free resources was a link to Disney. The link offered books, DVDs and CDs for purchase. Overall The Gateway to 21st Century Skills Digital Library can be an asset to professional educators world wide because they provide many free resources to educators and they also provide a format for teachers to easily share their best lessons. I will add this digital library to my favorites and utilize it when needed. Not only can it provide me with lessons and activities when teaching it will also help me to learn more about digital libraries.

Sources Used

The Gateway to 21st Century Skills <http://www.thegateway.org/>

The Educator's reference Desk <http://www.eduref.org/Virtual/Lessons/index.shtml>

National Education Association <http://www.nea.org/index.html>