

## **Findings Abstract**

### **Determining the Intellectual Quality of Internet Accessible Lesson Plans: A Conceptual Content Analysis**

Joseph S. Micheller, Ed.D., Cleveland Heights-University Heights Schools

National reports and studies have argued that to be successful in the economic context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century instruction must focus on developing students' intellectual capacity often identified as critical thinking skills, conceptual understanding, and higher order thinking skills. Recent studies have suggested that the Internet can bring to classrooms digital resources that serve as a medium to extend the development of higher order cognitive reasoning. Most teachers are using the Internet to access lesson plans, but do the lesson plans link cognitive development to real world scenarios, or promote traditional didactic instruction?

This study examined if lesson plans accessed from the Gateway to Educational Materials (GEM) online catalog contained instructional strategies that promote intellectual quality according to Newmann et al.'s (1995) authentic achievement framework. A review of the literature found that authentic achievement is grounded in constructivism and cognitive psychology. GEM was selected because of its organization, high volume of usage, and because it contains evaluation criteria for lesson plan acceptance.

The study utilized a conceptual content analysis to examine GEM social studies lesson plans according to Authentic Achievement rubrics. Data was gathered by downloading the entire index of grade 6-8 social studies lesson plans, and randomly selecting 100. Reliability was established through rater training, pilot study, post study rater interviews, and application of the CRESST inter-rater reliability instrument.

Findings indicated that over 50% of the GEM plans promoted higher order thinking, deep knowledge, substantive conversation, and connections to the world beyond the classroom. Less than 20% of the plans promoted only lower order didactic thinking skills.

This study examined lesson plans within a technology context. This context was limited to using the Internet to download the same types of lesson plans that teachers were accessing from their classrooms and homes. Technology was not used as a method of analysis, or as an object of the study. Results and methodology can be used to provide teachers, curriculum developers and researchers with a tool to better align their instructional strategies to performance accountability systems that focus on higher order cognitive processes.