

# Going Beyond the Basics Workbook



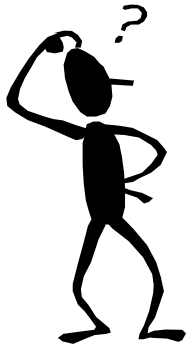
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## **Activity 1: Why Do Students Walk Through My Door?**

Brainstorm with your table partners some of the reasons that students enter your classroom.



## Activity 2: Looking Back

What was your first job?	
What skills did you use?	
What was your next job?	
What skills did you use and how were they different?	
What was your job before your current teaching job?	
What skills did you use and how were they different?	
What is your current job?	
What skills are you using and how are they different?	

### Activity 3: What Do They Need to Know?

What Skills Do My Students Need to Be Successful in Transitioning to the Workplace and a Family Sustaining Career? With your table partners, brainstorm **specific skills** that your students need in order to be successful in transitioning to a family sustaining career in the workplace.

Reading Skills	Writing Skills	Math Skills	Other Skills

What other skills do my students need?

## **Activity 4: More Than Food and Drink**

## **Activity 4: You May Be More Contextual Than You Think!**

Take this self-test and see if you are more contextual than you think. How many of the following ten contextualized standards do you use on a regular basis in your classroom?

1. I present new concepts in real-life (outside the classroom) situations and experiences that are familiar to the student.
2. I present concepts through examples and application exercises in the context of their use.
3. I present new concepts in the context of what my students already know.
4. The examples and student exercises that I use in my lessons include many real, believable problem-solving situations that students can recognize as being important to their current or possible future lives.
5. The examples and student exercises that I use in my classroom cultivate an attitude that says, "I need to learn this."
6. My students gather and analyze their own data as I guide them in the discovery of the important concepts.
7. I provide opportunities for students to gather and analyze their own data for enrichment and extension in my classroom.
8. The lessons and activities that I use encourage my students to apply concepts and information in useful contexts, projecting the student into imagined futures (e.g., possible careers) and unfamiliar locations (e.g., workplaces).
9. I expect my students to participate regularly in interactive groups where sharing, communicating, and responding to the important concepts and decision-making occur.
10. The lessons, exercises, and labs that I use improve my students' reading and other communication skills in addition to mathematical reasoning and achievement.

If you answered yes to the above statements, you may be teaching contextually!

Retrieved from the World Wide Web at: <http://www.cord.org/contextual-teaching-self-test/>

## **What Is Contextual Learning?**

What is the best way to convey the many concepts that are taught in an adult education classroom so that all students can use and retain that information? How can you effectively communicate with students

who wonder “Why do I need to know this?” How can you open the minds of a diverse student population so that every student can learn the concepts and techniques that will open doors of opportunity throughout their lives? These are the challenges that teachers in adult education face every day.

Many of our students are unable to make connections between what they are learning and how that knowledge will be used. This is often because the way that they process information and their motivation for learning are not connected to traditional methods of classroom teaching. Many of our students have a difficult time understanding academic concepts (such as math concepts) as they are commonly taught (that is, using an abstract, lecture method). However our students must be able to understand these concepts as they relate to their lives and the workplace. Traditionally, students have been expected to make these connections on their own. However, contextual learning is a proven concept that helps students make these connections within the classroom.

What is contextual teaching and learning? It is simply teaching and learning that helps teachers relate subject matter content to real-world situations and motivates students to make connections between knowledge and its applications to their lives as family members, citizens, and workers, and to engage in the hard work that learning requires.

In a contextualized classroom, students discover meaningful relationships between abstract ideas and practical applications in the context of the real world; concepts are internalized through the process of discovering, reinforcing, and relating. For example, a science class might learn basic scientific concepts by studying the components of a nutritional diet or the spread of a disease in a community.

When developing a system of contextualized instruction, it is important to remember that effective contextualized instruction is based on:

- high expectations of student achievement;
- development and utilization of authentic methods of assessment;
- demanding courses of study;
- providing abundant and varied materials to read and discuss;
- promotion of new forms of student activity in and out of the classroom; and
- re-examination of the classroom environment because contextualized learning is embedded in a genuine context rather than the decontextualized structure of traditional environments.<sup>1</sup>

### **Research On Contextualized learning**

Although a major trend in the past twenty years, contextual learning is not new. Contextual approaches to teaching and learning, and efforts to attach meaningfulness to subject matter can be found in the education theories of John Dewey (1859-1952). Dewey stressed experiential modes of learning, theorizing that learning results as we strive to make sense of our experiences.

Effective teachers have always placed a heavy emphasis on the search for meaning and understanding. Educators have often motivated their students by relating what was being learned to the realities of daily life and have encouraged them to learn through hands-on and practical approaches. Although diverse ideological and pedagogical traditions exist, many believe that true learning exists only when contextual principles are being implemented.

Contextual learning had its true beginning in the work of William James. James believed that teachers should have their students put new knowledge to immediate use in order to build useful systems of association. James contended that the mind operates in a purposeful way to organized thoughts and to process experiences. In his work *Principles of Psychology* (1880), James reflected that without human experience and action, true learning cannot occur.

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<sup>1</sup> What is Contextualized Learning? Nebraska Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy Retrieved from the World Wide Web at: <http://literacy.kent.edu/~nebraska/curric/ttim1/art5.html>

Within adult education, contextual education has been the focus of many researchers. Research has shown that “people learn best when they begin from what they already know and when the learning process allows them to accomplish something they want to accomplish.”<sup>2</sup> Additionally, people retain more of what they study if they can simulate or actually perform the task. A contextual approach to teaching and learning seeks to connect subject matter to real world contexts in order to increase student motivation by increasing meaningfulness.

Thomas Sticht proposed a functional context theory in the 1990s based upon his research. When writing about the “turbulence” or student attrition so pervasive in adult literacy, Sticht (1998) proposed that persistence and attendance would be markedly improved if programs could provide education directly linked to job training objectives.<sup>3</sup> Sticht suggests that students who cannot link instruction to some direct outcome of significance to their lives are less likely to persist in the adult education program. For Sticht, functional context education is the most expedient way of providing adults with important knowledge in critical areas of their lives as they do not often have a long period of time to learn basic literacy skills in order to improve their work opportunities or role as a parent or community member. Sticht’s approach focuses on the mastery of tasks viewed as essential in various areas of life as evident in his emphasis on contextual learning through his research on military and workplace literacy.<sup>4</sup>

### **Contextualized Approach to Curriculum and Instruction**

According to contextual learning theory, learning occurs only when students (learners) process new information or knowledge in such a way that it makes sense to them in their own frames of reference (their own inner worlds of memory, experience, and response). This approach to learning and teaching assumes that the mind naturally seeks meaning in context, that is, in relation to the person’s current environment, and that it does so by searching for relationships that make sense and appear useful. Teaching students in ways that they can understand is essential to ensuring that real learning takes place. When students see the connection between the concepts they are learning and the way in which these concepts are used in the real world, they are involved in contextual learning. Education becomes purposeful for students when it bases a solid content into a real-world context.

Dale Parnell in his book *Why Do I Have to Learn This?* (1995) identifies seven principles that form the framework for contextual education. “These principles of contextual education are:

1. Purpose Principle: Teachers help students understand . . . not only what they are to learn, but why!
2. Building Principle: New knowledge and new units of study are . . . connected with students’ prior knowledge or past learning so that new learning builds on prior experience.
3. Application Principle: New knowledge is specifically related to its practical, real-life application – especially how it relates to students’ future roles as citizens, consumers, workers, family members, lifelong learners, healthy individuals, and participants in cultural and leisure events.
4. Problem-Solving Principle: Students are encouraged to become active learners by using new knowledge and skills to solve problems.
5. Teamwork Principle: Students learn teamwork and cooperation by working together to solve problems.
6. Discovery Principle: The classroom slogan is “Try It!” Students are guided toward discovering new knowledge rather than having the answer (or multiple answers, as is often the case) handed

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<sup>2</sup> Auerbach, E. R. (1992) *Making meaning making change: Participatory curriculum for adult ESL literacy*. McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems.

<sup>3</sup> Sticht, T. G. (1998). *Passports to paradise: The struggle to teach and to learn on the margins of adult education*. San Diego: San Diego Consortium for Workforce Education & Lifelong Learning.

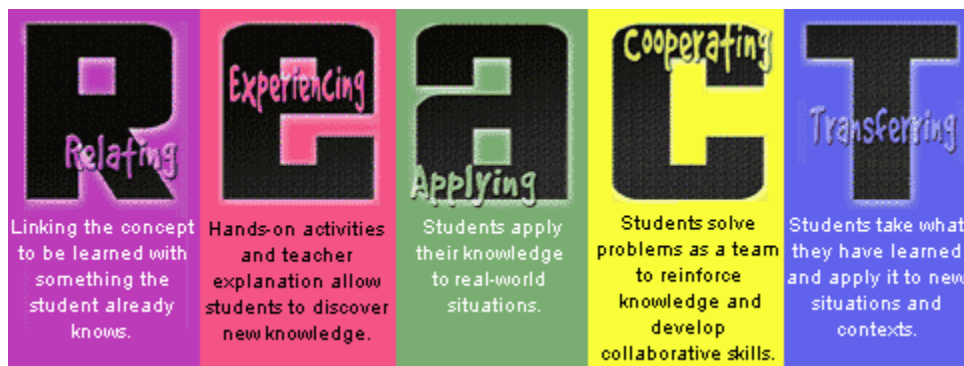
<sup>4</sup> Sticht, T. G. (1997) *Functional context education: Making knowledge relevant*. San Diego, CA: Consortium for Workforce Education and Lifelong Learning.

to them. Teachers help students explore, test, and seek their own answers, often with the help of learning partners.

7. Connection Principle: Teachers help students see the connections between context and content, knowledge and application, one discipline and another. Divisions between traditional disciplines are minimized.”<sup>5</sup>

The Center for Occupation Research and Development (CORD) provides a supporting framework for contextualized education through describing five essential forms of learning that are required to prepare students for greater success in careers and higher education. Often referred to by the acronym REACT, these skills are:

- **Relating** – placing learning in the context of life experiences to call attention to everyday sights, events, and conditions and then relating those everyday situations to new information.
- **Experiencing** – providing hands-on learning opportunities for students so that they can learn in the context of exploration, discovery, and intervention by manipulating equipment and materials and actively researching problems.
- **Applying** – taking concepts and information and placing students into an imagined future (a possible career) or into an unfamiliar location (a workplace) through text, video, labs, and activities, as well as firsthand experiences such as plant tours, mentoring arrangements and internships.
- **Cooperating** – learning in the context of sharing, responding, and communicating with other learners. Cooperating helps students learn the materials and is also consistent with the real-world focus of contextual learning through small-group and partnering activities.
- **Transferring** – enabling students to gain confidence in their own ability to transfer skills that they know to new contexts. Building new experiences on what students already know assists them in developing confidence and retaining their sense of dignity when confronted with a new situation.<sup>6</sup>



In addition to the seven principles of contextual learning, Parnell describes the contextual learning process model through which a learner moves in order for learning to become meaningful. These elements are often referred to as the *Four As of Meaningful Learning*:

- Acquisition - learn and retain to apply to real life situation

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<sup>5</sup> Parnell, Dale. (1995). *Why Do I Have to Learn This?* Wacim TX: CORD Communications, Inc., 8-9.

<sup>6</sup> The Center for Occupation Research and Development (CORD). Retrieved from the World Wide Web at: <http://www.cord.org/the-react-learning-strategy/>.

- Application - actively engage in practicing and processing information in real life context, performing authentic tasks to gain an understanding of how information applies to real life.
- Assimilation - demonstrate sufficient understanding of context and content to apply knowledge and skills effectively to new situations. (Reading signs in a driver's manual, but also reading signs at work, reading signs in the community, and reading signs in the airport or at the bus terminal.)
- Association - learning is organized around problems and themes, students learn to transfer, apply and assimilate knowledge to new problem solving situations. (Ex. Reading signs are necessary for my drivers' test, but do I need to know how to read signs when reading the directions with my new washer?)<sup>7</sup>

Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2003) identified four key components of a contextualized and mutually supportive learning system: the learner centered environment, the knowledge centered environment, the assessment centered environment, and the community centered environment. Each type of environment identifies how individuals attain new information and make sense of how to use it in their lives.

The learner centered environment is based upon the prior knowledge and beliefs that learners bring to the learning situations. Learners use what they already know to develop new knowledge. This is often referred to as using background knowledge and personal beliefs to integrate new knowledge that is being taught.

The knowledge centered environment deals with the individual's ability to think and solve problems based on an understanding of a content area. Development of knowledge areas should always emphasize an understanding of how facts relate to the larger context, rather than emphasizing rote memorization of facts.

The assessment centered environment utilizes on-going feedback as a mechanism to develop quality of thinking and understanding. This feedback is important in order for an individual to identify the strengths and challenges of their performance. This is the type of task that workers complete each day as they assess "how they are doing on the job."

The final type of environment is the community centered environment. This is based upon the belief that learning should develop a sense of community where students learn from each other and support each other's growth. The community environment sets the tone for the climate of learning in a classroom. It is this interplay of environments that affects how learning takes place in a contextualized learning situation. Instead of an instructor developing sequential types of lessons based on prerequisite knowledge and skills, they instead begin with the skills for which learners have expressed a need and then "back into" the knowledge and skills needed to perform tasks. It is this shifting from presenting skills in a sequential manner to presenting skills in an interactive manner that provide a meaningful and realistic context for learning.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid 14.

<sup>8</sup> Bransford, J., Brown, A. L., and Cocking, R. R. (2003). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. National Academies Press.

## **Why Should I Use a Contextualized Approach?**

The benefits of contextualized learning for the learner are that:

- The purpose of the learning is explicit. The learner knows why and how instruction will be provided and applied to real-world situations.
- Learners are actively learning and sharing previous knowledge with each other.
- What is being learned impacts their lives in their roles as parents, workers, and community members.
- Skills learned in the classroom can be used outside the lesson to solve real-world problems.
- They are responsible for their own learning and can control their learning process by the rate of participation.
- Knowledge learned in the classroom is easily transferable to different situations as the skills learned are immediately recognizable in real-world settings.

There are also many benefits of a contextualized learning process for the education setting and the instructor. An effective contextualized learning system:

- Increases student knowledge retention
- Increases student motivation
- Views learning as a team effort between the teacher and the learner, encouraging student persistence
- Makes learning the learner's responsibility.

The Center for Occupation Research and Development (CORD) provides the following questions to ask regarding whether or not contextual teaching is occurring in a classroom.

### ***Are You Teaching Contextually?***

1. Are new concepts presented in real-life (outside the classroom) situations and experiences that are familiar to the student?
2. Are concepts in examples and student exercises presented in the context of their use?
3. Are new concepts presented in the context of what the student already knows?
4. Do examples and student exercises include many real, believable problem-solving situations that students can recognize as being important to their current or possible future lives?
5. Do examples and student exercises cultivate an attitude that says, "I need to learn this"?
6. Do students gather and analyze their own data as they are guided in discovery of the important concepts?
7. Are opportunities presented for students to gather and analyze their own data for enrichment and extension?
8. Do lessons and activities encourage the student to apply concepts and information in useful contexts, projecting the student into imagined futures (e.g., possible careers) and unfamiliar locations (e.g., workplaces)?
9. Are students expected to participate regularly in interactive groups where sharing, communicating, and responding to the important concepts and decision-making occur?
10. Do lessons, exercises, and labs improve students' reading and other communication skills in addition to mathematical reasoning and achievement?<sup>9</sup>

## **Creating a Contextual Learning Environment in the Adult Education Classroom**

When planning contextual lessons, it is important to focus on the following four questions:

- What do we want students to know?

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<sup>9</sup> The Center for Occupation Research and Development (CORD). Retrieved from the World Wide Web at: <http://www.cord.org/contextual-teaching-self-test/>

- Why do they need to know it?
- How will we know they know it?
- How will they learn it?

Contextualized learning looks different depending on the content. An important part of a contextualized classroom is the use of authentic tasks or materials. An authentic task replicates challenges faced in the real-world, as well as leading to a tangible end product.<sup>10</sup> They enable students to demonstrate their proficiency in applying the concepts and skills they have learned in real-world situations. When setting up an authentic task, the teacher should use the following questions designed by Jonathan Mueller as a guideline.<sup>11</sup>

What should students know and be able to accomplish?

- Read directions and complete a specific task

What indicates students have met the standards for reading directions?

- Is able to summarize steps in the directions
- Asks questions for further understanding
- Uses references to identify meaning of words that may be unfamiliar

What does good performance look like?

- The task is completed using the steps outlined
- The task is completed in a timely manner

How well did the students perform the task?

- Effective – met all criteria
- Adequate – met most of the criteria
- Inadequate – failed to meet the majority of the criteria

It's important to provide students with access to authentic materials in the reading classroom. Research has indicated that the use of authentic materials increases the learners' motivation level.

The following are some examples of authentic materials for classroom use:

- Graphic-based materials – photographs, graphs, tables, charts, and maps
- Print materials – newspaper articles, book/movie reviews, letters to the editor and editorials, advice columns, informational brochures, print advertisements, leases, employment applications, employee manuals, memos, letters, food order slips, operational procedures, safety logs

When teaching mathematics, you may wish to use the following authentic tasks:

- Compute sales prices
- Count finished products to determine if product orders are completed
- Weigh or measure ingredients
- Collect payments from customers
- Balance currency, coin, and checks in cash drawers
- Determine cost of a specific type of building

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<sup>10</sup> Authentic Tasks. North Central Regional Education Laboratory. Retrieved from the World Wide Web at: <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/atrisk/at4lk3.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> Mueller, Jonathan. Authentic Task. Authentic Assessment Toolbox. Retrieved from the World Wide Web at: <http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/tasks.htm>.

## Incorporating Authentic Tasks and Materials

Authentic tasks and materials are important in every academic area. However, they are an integral component of all contextualized learning.

Authentic tasks replicate challenges faced in the real-world, as well as lead to a tangible end product.<sup>12</sup> They enable students to demonstrate their proficiency in applying the concepts and skills they have learned in real-world situations.

Jonathan Mueller designed the following questions as a guideline for setting up authentic tasks in the classroom.<sup>13</sup>

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- The task is completed in a timely manner
  - How well did the students perform the task?
- Effective – met all criteria
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Research supports that the use of authentic materials can increase the motivation to learn, as well as renew students' interest in the content area in which they are working. Students who are motivated to learn tend to remain in programs longer and thus have greater levels of achievement.

Examples of authentic materials for classroom use are diverse. They can include such items as:

- Visual materials – photographs, graphs, tables, charts, and maps
- Visual/auditory materials – news clips, comedy shows, short stories on tape, radio advertisements, documentaries, and television commercials
- Print materials – newspaper articles, book/movie reviews, letters to the editor and editorials, advice columns, informational brochures, print advertisements, leases, employment applications, employee manuals, memos, and letters

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<sup>12</sup> Authentic Tasks. North Central Regional Education Laboratory. Retrieved from the World Wide Web at: <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/atrisk/at4lk3.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Mueller, Jonathan. Authentic Task. Authentic Assessment Toolbox. Retrieved from the World Wide Web at: <http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/tasks.htm>.