

## Teaching for Contextual Learning

*"Students learn best—and retain what they have learned—when (1) they are interested in the subject matter and (2) concepts are applied to the context of the students' own lives." (ATEEC Fellows 2000)*

ATEEC became formally involved in Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) methods in 1999 as one of the regional cluster teams in a University of Wisconsin-Madison research project ("TeachNET") funded by the U.S. Department of Education. By June 2001, ATEEC's growing experience in CTL's problem-based learning approach was infused into the Fellows Institute. Principles and practices of contextual learning continue to be incorporated in the Fellows Institute curricular projects.

### Rationale for the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL)

#### Approach

Here we are in the twenty-first century with the world of technology at our fingertips. So why is it that many young people are finding it a struggle to make the transition from school to work? Not only is it a frustration for students, but also a cost for business and our economy as a whole. We need to prepare young people for high-quality jobs.



*Note: Student's printed caption on the image. These ladies, along with James, spent hours cleaning up areas of the Mississippi River. A hard day's work but worth all the effort!*

In a CTL learning environment, students discover meaningful relationships between abstract ideas and practical applications in a real world context. Students internalize concepts through discovery, reinforcement, and interrelationships. Contextual Teaching and Learning creates a team, whether in the classroom, lab, worksite, or on the banks of a river. CTL encourages educators to design learning environments that incorporate many forms of experience to achieve the desired outcomes (Hull & Souders, 1996).

### Six Contextual Teaching and Learning Strategies

The CTL model guides teachers to incorporate the following six strategies as they design instructional units.

- Base learning on an overarching problem, which is in the context of students' community.

- Plan for learning to be in multiple contexts.
- Draw upon students' diverse skills, interests, experiences, and cultures.
- Build in strategies that support students in becoming self-regulated learners.
- Plan strategies that stimulate interdependence among students and their learning groups.
- Examine students' learning outcomes by incorporating authentic assessment strategies.

In 2000, a group of ATEEC Fellows who had become experienced TeachNET educators met to discuss the six CTL strategies. Notes from their session are organized into a document that provides a window into their application of CTL principles. The pdf file, entitled "*A Group of ATEEC Fellows Discusses Six CTL Strategies*" is offered in the [Products](#) area as a free download.

Continue your investigation into CTL strategies by using *contextual teaching and learning* as keywords in an Internet search.