

**Course Topic: Language, Society and Culture****Course Instructor:**

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**Course Synopsis:**

When we plan and teach our English language courses and lessons, our focus is usually on the language learning activities and materials we will use to meet student needs. Lost in this planning and teaching process is the impact of the context in which we are teaching. The impact of context on our language teaching is much greater than we might think.

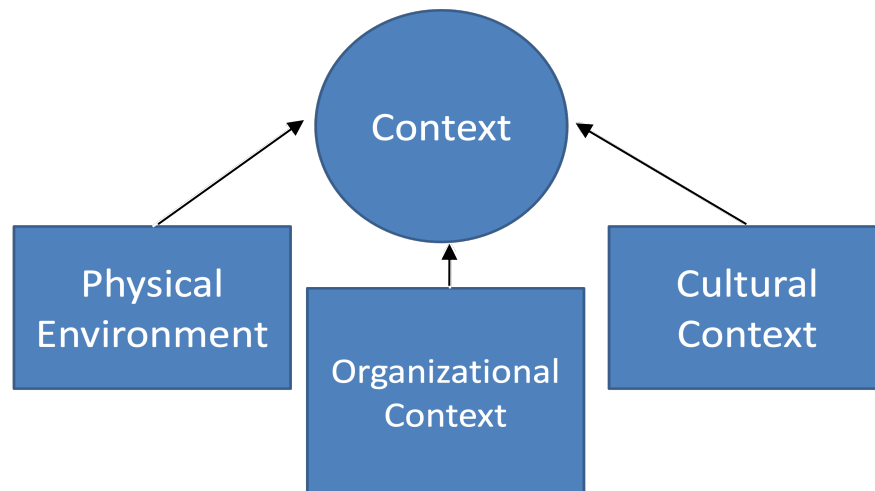
Through the analysis of scenarios drawn from real experiences in English language teaching and teacher training projects run around the world, we will talk about the impact that context has on what we do as language teachers. We'll see how **where** we teach very strongly influences **how** we teach. Context will be examined from three angles: the physical environment, the organizational context, and the regional or national culture. We will discuss the impact that each angle can have on the English language teaching and learning processes.

**Course Agenda**

1. We Can't Avoid the Context
2. Complexity Theory
3. The Influence of Context
4. The Physical Environment
5. The Organizational Context
6. The Cultural Context

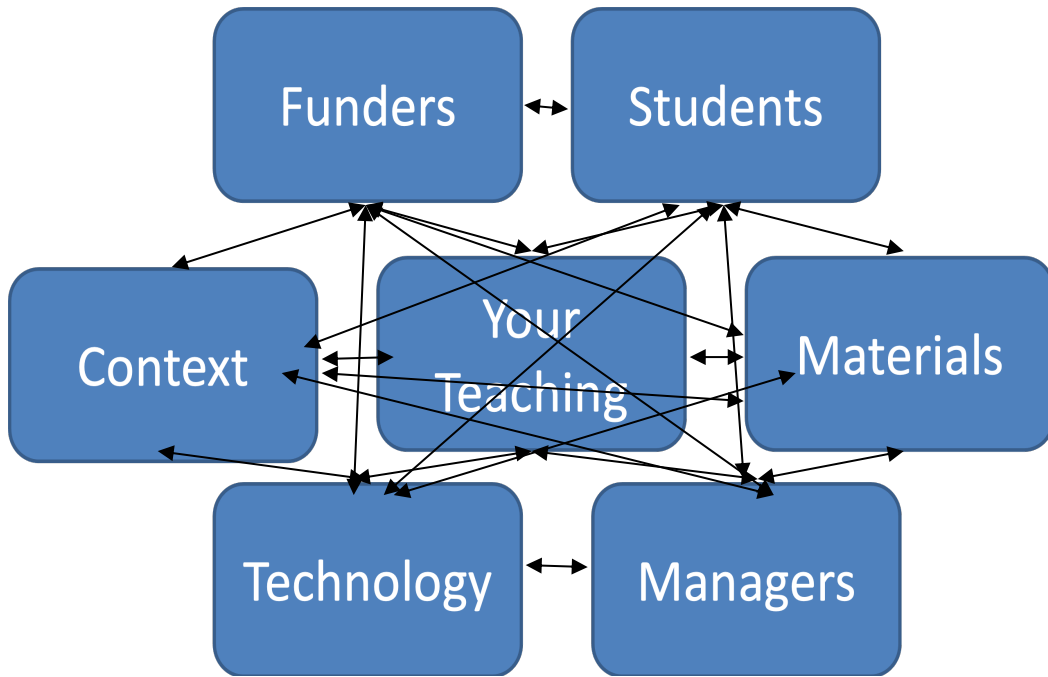
## 1. We Can't Avoid the Context

As an English language teacher, you are likely to encounter a number of different teaching contexts throughout your career. You might find yourself teaching in colleges, universities, workplace settings, small towns, big cities, countries with a lot of educational resources or countries with little to no educational resources. As the examples in the video illustrate, it is extremely important to be aware of your context and the different ways in which it can affect your teaching. To be an effective teacher, you must be prepared to modify your lesson plans, sometimes on a whim, in order to adapt to your unique teaching context.



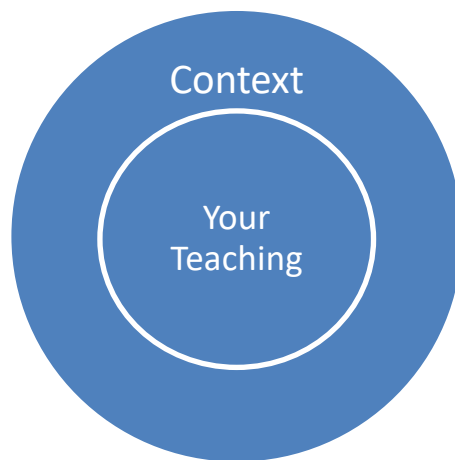
## 2. Complexity Theory

Complexity Theory helps us understand how organizations function and thrive in a dynamic, ever-changing environment. It examines the different factors that mutually influence or change one another as an organization functions on a daily basis. The diagram below illustrates some of the major factors at play in an education organization.

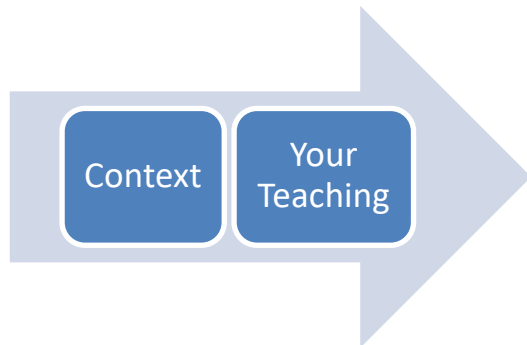


### 3. The Influence of Context

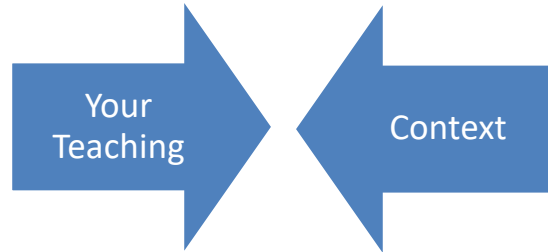
When we go back to our original question about the influence of context on how we teach, complexity theory helps us understand the mutual influencing that occurs between teaching and context. Our teaching can influence the context and our context, in turn, influences how we teach. Another way to think about this is to imagine that our teaching is at the core of an onion and occurs within the outer layers of context.



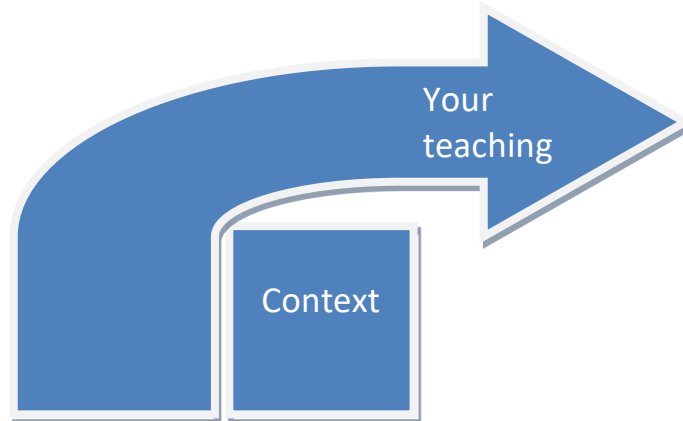
Context can *enable* your teaching



Context can *slow down or halt* your teaching



Context can act as an immovable *roadblock or barrier*, forcing you to find an alternate route



#### 4. The Physical Environment

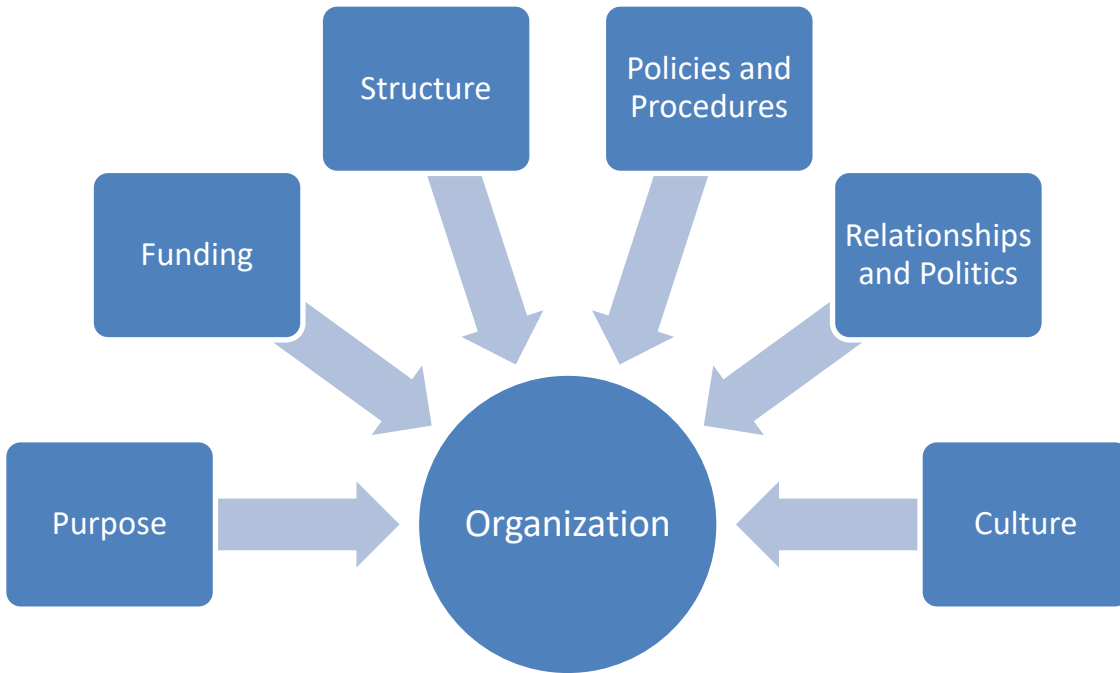
The Physical environment can be broken down into four categories: Location, seating arrangement, teacher writing surface and other environmental factors, all of which can significantly influence the teaching and learning processes.

Location	Seating	Teacher Writing Surface	Other Environmental Factors
✓ Small classroom	✓ Individual desks and chairs	✓ Blackboard	✓ Room temperature
✓ Large classroom		✓ Whiteboard	✓ Lighting
✓ Lecture hall	✓ Movable or	✓ SmartBoard	✓ Noise level
✓ Lunch room	immovable desks and	✓ No board	✓ Windows
✓ Computer lab	chairs	✓ Flip charts	✓ Wall colour
✓ Gymnasium	✓ Board room table and chairs	✓ Computer and LCD	✓ Air quality
	✓ Desk-chair combos		
	✓ Group tables and chairs		

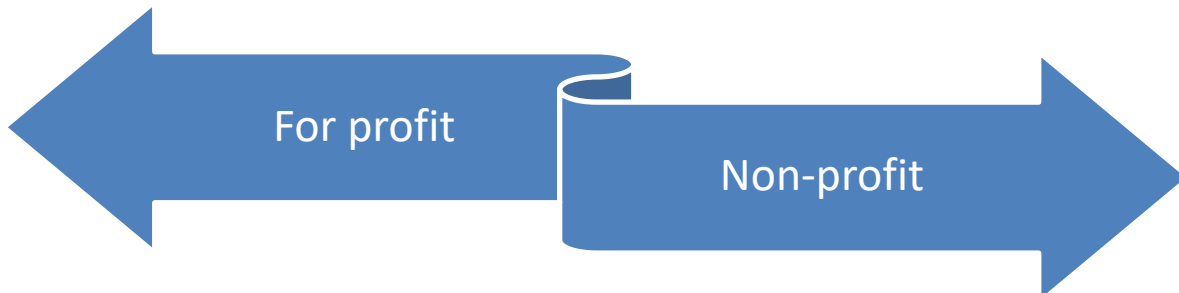
✓ Computer stations

### 5. The Organizational Context

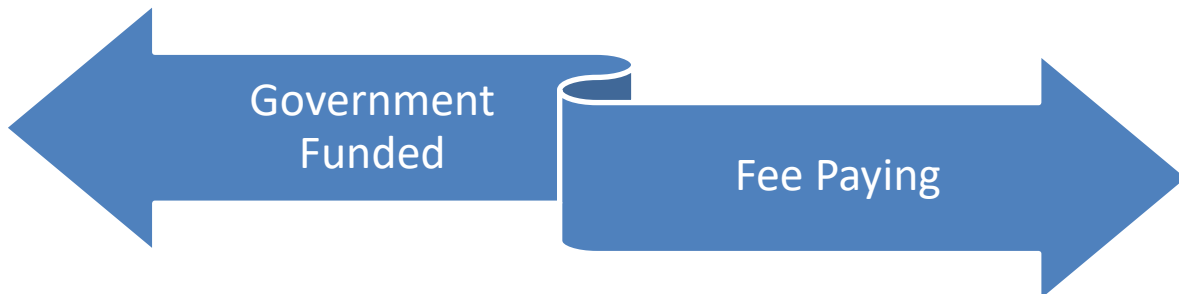
The organizational context can be divided into six categories: Purpose, funding, structure, policies and procedures, relationships and politics, and culture.



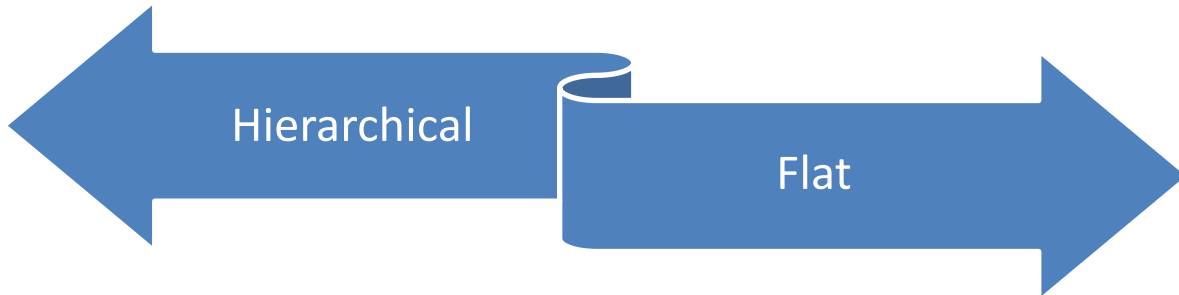
#### Purpose



#### Funding



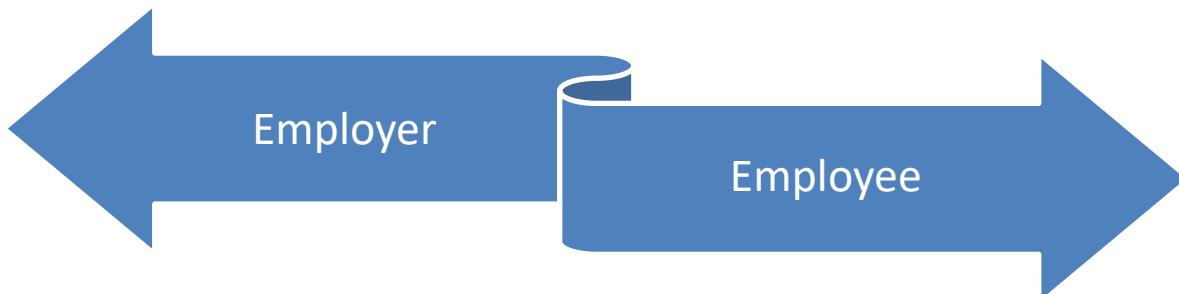
**Structure**



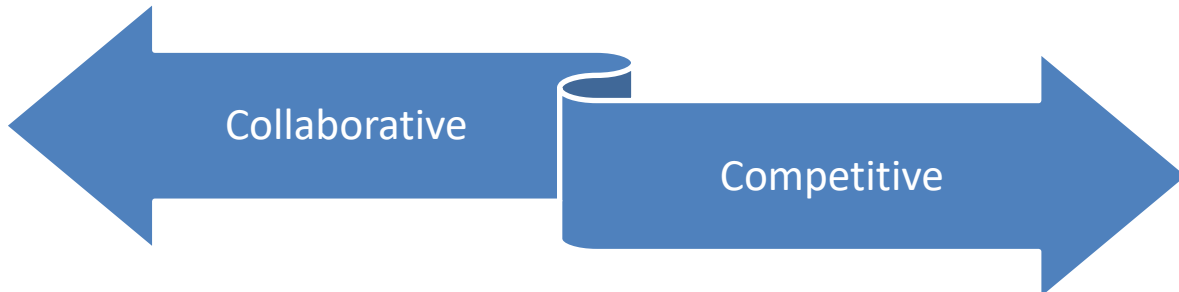
**Policies and Procedures**

Classes	Class Placement	Teaching	Curriculum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ What size are the classes?</li> <li>✓ How long are the classes?</li> <li>✓ How many classes do students have per week?</li> <li>✓ How long is the term?</li> <li>✓ At what point in the term are students admitted to the class?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Which students are eligible for the class?</li> <li>✓ How are students placed in the class?</li> <li>✓ How do students move up to a higher class?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ How is good teaching defined?</li> <li>✓ How is good teaching measured?</li> <li>✓ How are teachers rewarded for good teaching?</li> <li>✓ How is teacher professional development supported?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ How is the curriculum structured?</li> <li>✓ What textbooks, materials and technologies are mandated?</li> <li>✓ What is the feedback loop on the curriculum?</li> <li>✓ How are decisions about the curriculum made?</li> </ul>

**Relationships and Politics**

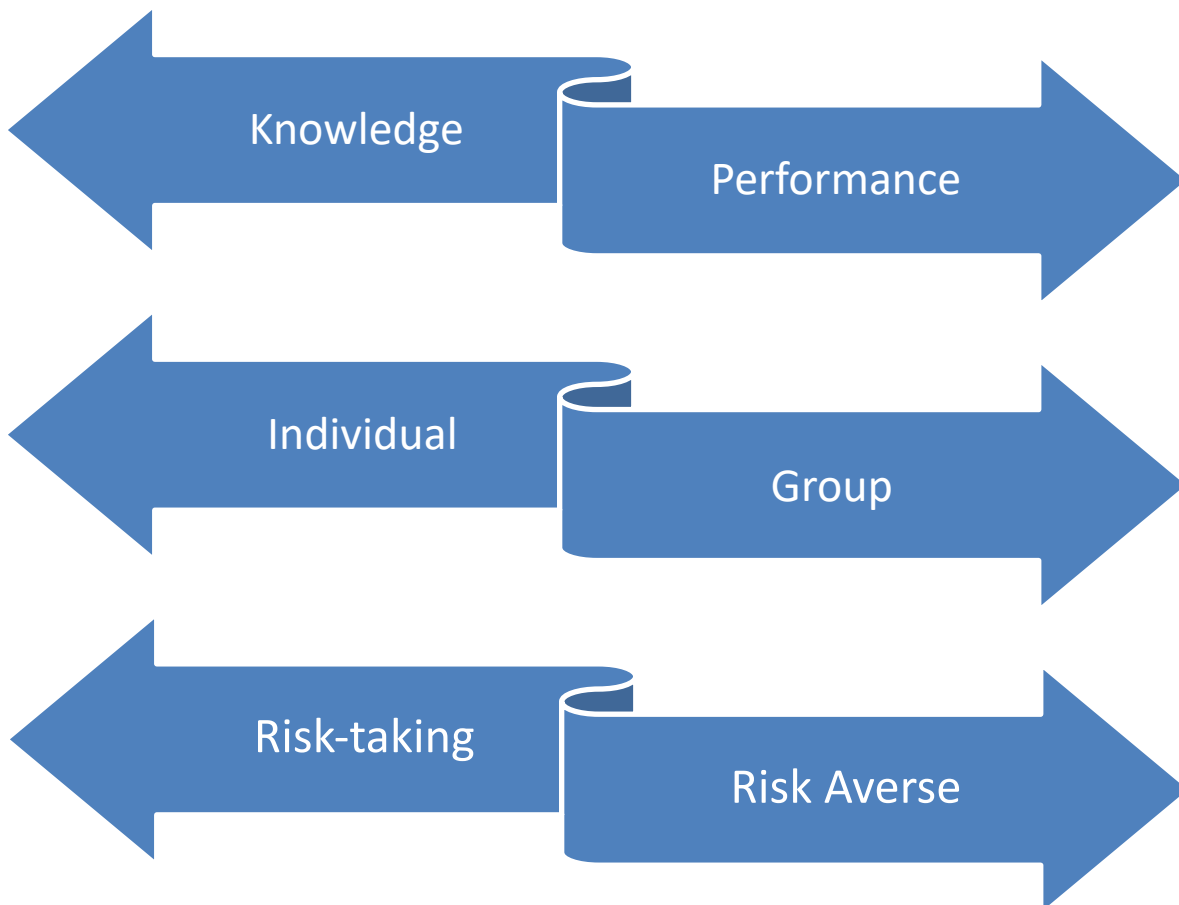


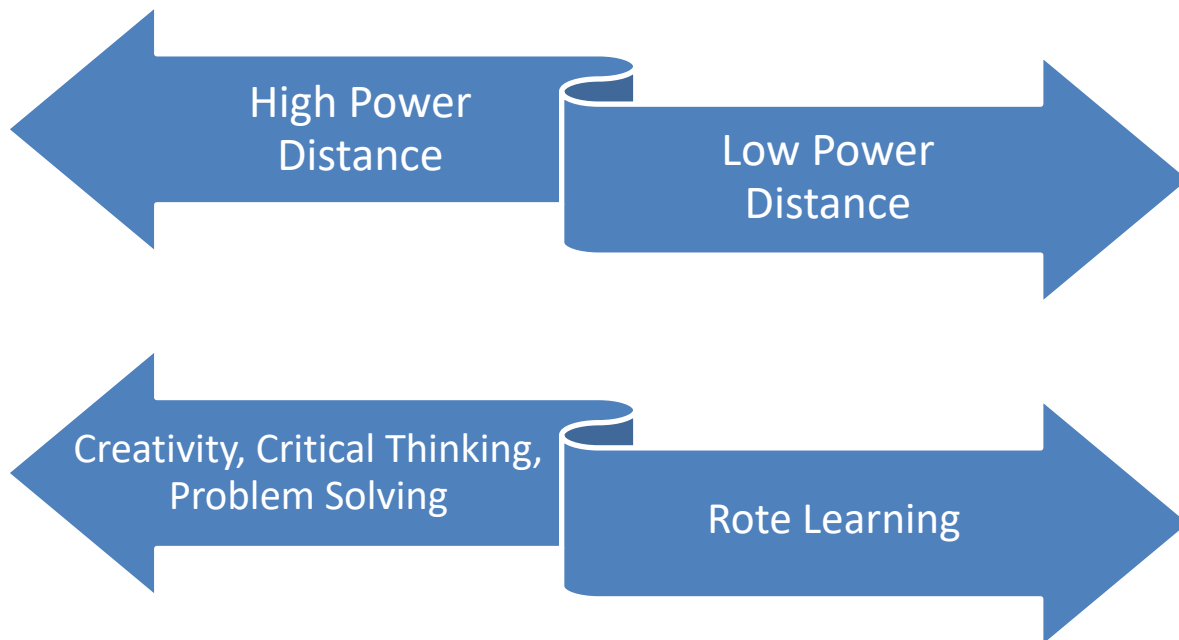
**Company Culture**



**7. The Cultural Context**

Each organization that offers English language classes is also situated within a larger cultural context. The following are some of the cultural factors that influence the teaching and learning processes.





### Putting it into Practice

Take a look at your current teaching situation and, using the factors discussed in this video, analyze the physical environment, the organizational context and the cultural context. For each of the factors, decide if it is enabling your teaching, pushing it back or slowing it down, or creating a complete roadblock. Finally, look at each of the factors and decide if it is a factor you can control or a factor you can't control. If you can't control it, it's not worth spending a lot of time and effort on. Instead, focus your time and effort on the factors you can control and make sure they are positively influencing or enabling your teaching.

**Thanks for participating!**

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