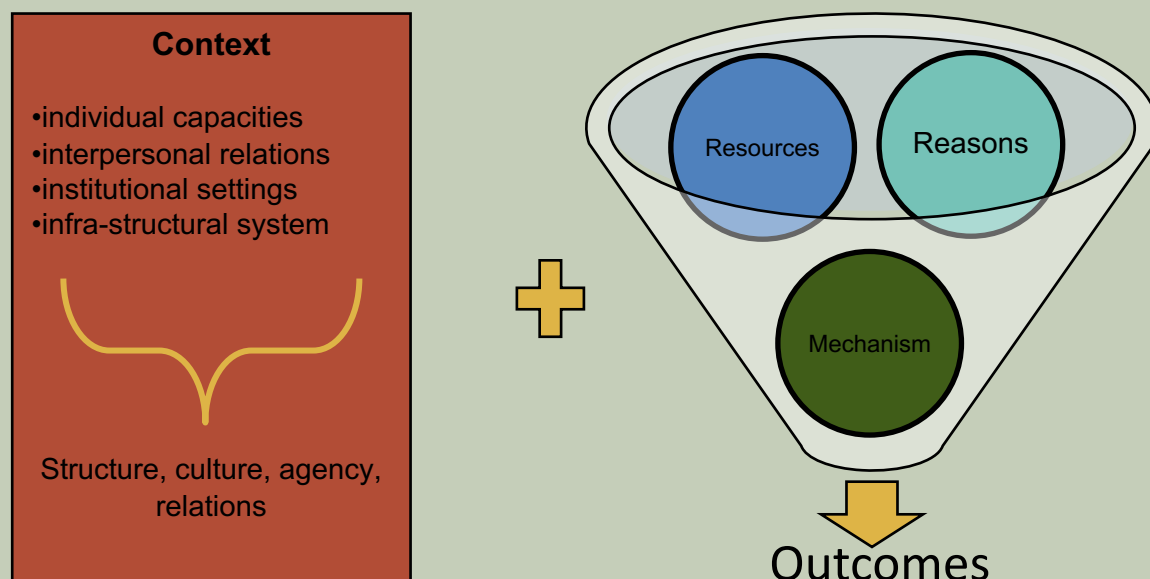


# A REALIST EVALUATION OF A CONTINUING TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSE

Zintle Songqwaru's research focused on the use of a theory-based approach to evaluate the Fundisa for Change teacher professional development course. The aim of the programme is to enhance participants' environment and sustainability content knowledge as well as the teaching and assessment of that knowledge. Data was generated through document analysis, interviews and observation of training delivered at five sites in five provinces.

The study drew on realistic evaluation. Realist evaluation uses a context-mechanism-outcome framework ( $C + M = O$ ) to surface for whom a programme works, with what elements and under what conditions. Pawson and Tilley (1997) argue that programmes do not work – it is the actions of programme beneficiaries who make them work. Programmes provide a resource, or an opportunity that is intended to influence participants' decision-making. Ultimately, it is the target participants' decision that determines whether the desired programme outcome is achieved. Therefore programmes do not cause change, but rather the target group, in reaction to a programme, within a certain context, activates mechanisms that bring about observed outcomes.

De Souza's (2013) elaborated context-mechanism-outcome configuration (CMO configuration) was used to explore the context into which the Fundisa for Change course was introduced (see figure below). Context for de Souza includes structure, culture, agency and relations. In the study programme mechanisms were **disaggregated** into resources and reasons to clarify the conceptualisation of mechanisms in a realist evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Dalkin, Greenhalgh, Jones, Cunningham and Lhussier, 2015).



An elaborated definition of context in terms of structure, culture, agency and relations enabled a comprehensive exploration of conditions and programme mechanisms that were activated to achieve intended and unintended course outcomes.

Findings highlighted that the achievement of Fundisa for Change course objectives was influenced by structure, culture, agency and relations internal to the training course. The **structure** of the Fundisa for Change training programme adopts a multi-stakeholder model where facilitators from government, environment non-governmental organisations and institutions of higher education work together to implement the course. The **culture** of the Fundisa for Change partners of working collaboratively enabled facilitators to work together in planning and implementing the course. The shared expertise meant that different facilitations skills were used during course implementation. Facilitators used their **agency** to adapt how they implemented the course to make it relevant for participants.

Facilitators' professional backgrounds, experiences and expertise contributed to the course. For example facilitators brought new **resources** with subject-specific content knowledge into the course. How the resources were used, for example their contextualization, was a **mechanism** that enabled participants to make meaning of the content covered. For example, field-based activities took participants to local places where they could explore concepts in practice. In one case this involved visiting a local water purification plant. Diverse facilitation skills, including explicit teaching of new content knowledge, discussions, and modelling of teaching strategies; influenced how participants learned new content knowledge and teaching methods. How on-course tasks were mediated enabled both individual and groupwork, and enabled peer and facilitator feedback. Resources and mechanisms influenced participants' **reasoning** in relation to current practice in ways that created opportunities for participants to reflect on current teaching and assessment practice in order to try-out new teaching methods and assessment strategies. For example, one participant noted: "I had my point of view which was elaborated. I came with my own point of view but have been transformed from hearing other points of view."

When teacher professional development programmes are conceptualized and implemented that stakeholders involved in teacher education work collaboratively as shared expertise creates opportunities for diverse resources to be introduced that enrich the programme. Additionally it is important that facilitators use their agency to respond to context when implementing a programme. Mechanisms that are introduced during training should resonate with participants in terms of their work contexts as this makes it easier for them to see the relevance of the programme in their professional development. Moreover mechanisms that support participants' professional activities work better to influence their reasoning in ways that could lead them to consider changing their current practice.

It is important that the Department of Basic Education is involved in selecting which participants should attend the course as this legitimizes the course for the participants. More on-course tasks should be included in the course so that participants can complete most of the tasks and get immediate feedback from peers and facilitators. This will enable participants to learn from each other and for facilitators to determine how participants are progressing in achieving course outcomes.

## REFERENCES

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