Introducing "The Funnels of Influence"
**Fiona Aubrey-Smith, February 2021**

As teachers, what we say, what we intend to do, what we live out through our actions, and what we implicitly believe, are often subtly different (Tannen, 2015). Each of these are a result of many different influences.

What we say (Espouse) and what we live out through our actions (Enact) can be seen and experienced by others. These are the forms of evidence that we depend upon in education research and through accountability practices (e.g. monitoring, observation, interviews).

Yet what we Intend to do and particularly what we Implicitly believe, sit much deeper. Our Intentions and Implicit Beliefs are shaped less by the context that we are in and more by our prior experiences – from the moment of our birth up to the current Moment of Practice.

The Funnels of Influence is a model for understanding the many influences which shape who we are and what we Espouse, Intend, Enact and Implicitly believe. It is a tool for researchers seeking to go beyond surface-level acceptance of espoused or enacted practice. It can also be a tool for professionals seeking to unpack practice – for example, understanding why what one teacher does in their classroom can be very different to what another teacher does – even in the same school and using the same resources. The key point being that practice that appears to be the same can actually, when unpacked, be quite profoundly different.

The Funnels of Influence model evolved from Twining et al.'s (2017) sociocultural framework, which provided a means to unpack the influences affecting enacted practices. The initial idea behind the Funnels of Influence model was that influences could be conceived as being from two directions. The Funnel of influences from within 'The Self' and the Funnel of influences from 'The Context'. Within each of these we can identify different kinds of influences that pour down into a shared third funnel – where they combine and result in a 'Moment of Practice'.
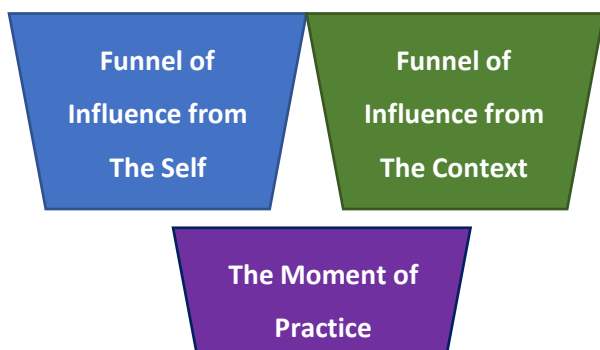
By separating out these influences it becomes possible to understand what might remain stable (and thus apply to all those operating within a particular context), and what is likely to be different for a particular person.

Let us now consider each of these three parts in turn.

The Funnel of Influence from The Context
We know that there are many different influences affecting a Context. For example, if we think 'big picture' we can recognise the effects of Culture, Politics, Global Shifts, Economics, Media, Law and Government Policy. We can also recognise national and cultural beliefs and norms about the nature of childhood and what 'being a child' means in a particular location. We can recognise that there are national and cultural norms about the roles of work, family, education, social interaction and the uses of technology. These are the kinds of things that highlight the differences

between contexts located in central metropolitan London, indigenous Australian outback and a remote village in China. Lave (1988) refers to these features as the '**Constitutive Order**' and all of the influences outlined above help to shape who we are and what we do – both in terms of how we are born and grow up, and also how we live our lives today.

Within a particular Constitutive Order, we can zoom in to a more specific context (e.g. a home, school, workplace, club, shop). Each of these has its own enduring human and physical features – facilities, routines, expectations, staffing – things that remain stable over a period of time. Lave (1988) refers to this as the '**Arena**' – we can think of it as a space where actors (people), scripts (objects) and plots (routines) combine to set the scene for a particular story to be told.

There is a difference between the long term stable features of an **Arena**, and the shorter term changeable yet still stable features of the context. Lave (1988) referred to this as the **Setting** – where people within an Arena interact with each other. However, we might separate out the features which are stable (e.g. classroom furniture, available resources, the children and adults who represent a particular class), and the features that are situational to the Moment of Practice. For example – not everyone will interpret the presence of 15 iPads in a classroom in the same way – for some it will be seen as a useful and powerful resource, for others a stressful burden, and for others something to consciously avoid engaging with. Another good example is the absence of a child in the class – they still form part of conceptualising 'the class' (and thus will inform the teacher's planning and thinking) even if they are absent on the day of the observed lesson. Thus we can separate Lave's Setting into two parts – **Stable** and **Situational**.

Specifically, within the **Stable Setting**, there will be what Twining et al. (2017) refer to as **Opportunities** for the teacher to engage with. These might include people (e.g. an available Teaching Assistant), resources (e.g. a trolley of laptops) or timetabled capacity (e.g. a one-hour lesson). Importantly, the teacher may or may not see that these Opportunities exist and may or may not consider them as Opportunities available to *themselves*. We will return to how the individual teacher perceives those Opportunities as Possibilities shortly.

So within the Funnel of Influences from The Context, we can see how it is possible to refine an undefined Context into distinct components of Constitutive Order, Arena, Setting (Stable features) and Opportunities. All of which allow us to identify tangible aspects that can be unpacked.

The other Funnel – The Funnel of Influences from The Self - can be similarly unpacked.

Drawing on the work of Abercrombie (1993) and Nias (1993), the Funnels of Influence from The Self begins with what we can describe as our **Roots.** These are the influences that shape our formative years from birth (arguably from pre-birth). For example, the social ideologies, norms, values and belief systems that we are born into, the culture and sub-culture that we are raised within, and the associated culturally informed elements of self (such as age, gender, health). These all shape what Rogers and Scott (2008) call our **Substantial Self** – the version of ourselves that makes meaning from experiences that we live through.

We then consider the role of all the experiences that an individual has prior to the Moment of Practice that is being focused upon. The Funnels of Influence refers to this as our **Growth** and there are two important features to consider within it. First, Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014), introduced the idea of Funds of Knowledge and Funds of Identity – the gathering of experiences which accumulate and shape our understanding of ourselves. Much like adding ingredients to a bowl in order to make a cake – all our prior experiences build up to form who we are in any given moment. These would include the impact of sequences of experiences within and across all of the influences identified in the sections above. However, there is also a second aspect to Growth, and that is its relationship to the

2

'Moment of Practice'. The Moment of Practice that we are considering – whether in research or through accountability observation – can be for the duration of a project, an individual day, a lesson, a section of a lesson, an input, an activity, a conversation or even a very precise interaction. Whichever unit of analysis we are focusing on will create experiences that will immediately feed back into the Funnel of Influence from The Self – specifically **Growth**, and shape the next Moment of Practice. Thus, **Growth** and the Moment of Practice are inextricably conceptually linked.

So we now have some clear definitions of the two core components – Roots and Growth – within the Funnel of Influence from The Self. We also have clear definitions of the components within the Funnel of Influence from The Context. The question remains, how do these two funnels merge?

The collision point centres around the idea of **Identity.** However, more specifically, **Identity as a Situational Self.** In other words, Identity that is born out of the **Substantial Self** (see above), and manifest through the specific situation in the Moment of Practice – with all the influences outlined above at play. This draws heavily on the work of [Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt, (1999)](), [Korthagen (2004)](), [Olsen (2008)](), [Beauchamp and Thomas (2009)](), [Pillen, Den Brok and Beijaard (2013)](). The focal points of Identity as Situational Self asks who the teacher considers that they are in that Moment of Practice. What meaning do they conceive that they are making and why the teacher thinks they are doing and saying the things that they do - all consequent choices made as a result of all the influences above. Bookmark this point, because we need to immediately ask – how can we (as a separate being) know what the teacher conceives internally. We will return to that point shortly.

The Funnels of Influence locates **Situational Self** as an influence upon (not subject to), **Situational features of the Setting** (remember earlier we were considering the Stable features of the Setting as explicitly located within the Context). This is because the Situational Self influences the Situational Setting. In other words, the role that the teacher believes that they have within the Moment affects the situation itself. This, in turn, creates what [Twining et al., (2017)](), refer to as **Possibilities.** These return to the idea discussed above about **Opportunities** but applies a new lens to them - what available options does the teacher *perceive* as possible to them personally? This could include the nature of how a TA might be deployed or the ways in which the teacher conceives the use of available resources (e.g. a trolley of laptops). This will also include perceived expectations (what the teacher thinks is expected of them by the different actors), and what they perceive they can therefore do (**Agency**).

All of these influences are at play in every moment and every context that we all live our lives through. Arguably, whilst The Funnels of Influence has been born out of educational research it can also apply to any context that we find ourselves in. The question remains, how do we identify the Moments of Practice, and therefore how do we begin to extract evidence on this basis. To do this, we can examine a bounded Moment of Practice as seen through:

- **Espoused** practice: What the teacher says;
- **Intended** practice: What the teacher intends to do; and
- their **Enacted** practice: What the teacher lives out through their actions.

By examining these and more specifically, applying discourse analysis to them (more of which in another article!), we can then draw out what the teacher's **Implicit** beliefs are. It is those **Implicit** beliefs that will be most revealing, and thus the most credible and robust form of evidence upon which to build findings.
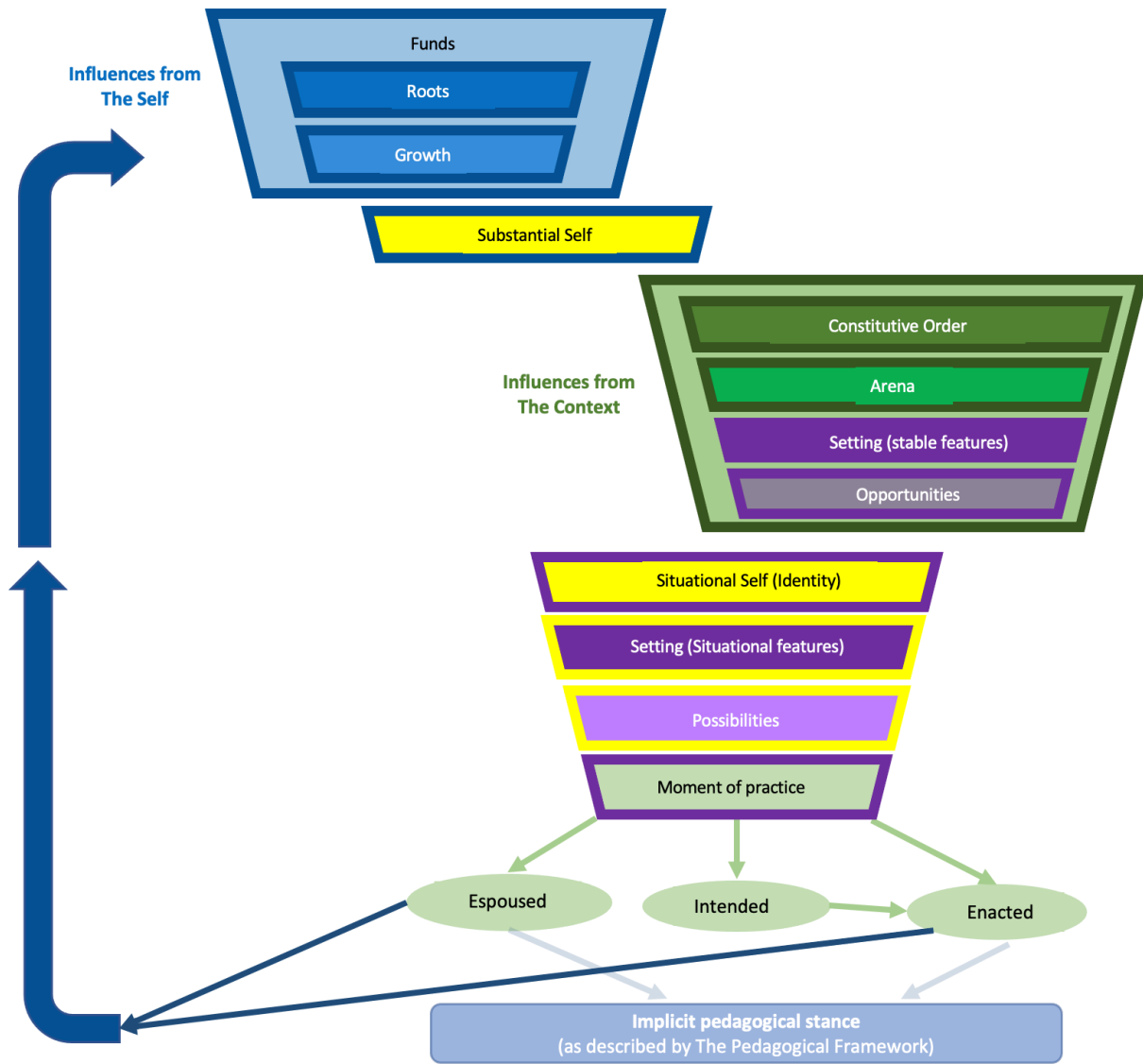
This article is a short informal summary of an extensive literature review undertaken as part of a recently published EdD thesis. Aubrey-Smith, F., (2020) An exploration of the relationship between teachers' pedagogical stance and the use of ICT in their classroom practice. *EdD Thesis. The Open University.*