

Call for papers Sheffield Hallam 2020

The Artist's Journey #3: Day 2

Improfessional practices — Im- :in, into, within, on, towards, against, not, and opposite the 'professional' ¹ — art education and informal groups.

This conference aims to shed light on the practices, interest and groups that operate at the fringes of or outside of the 'professional' and formal structures of art education. Art schools frequently facilitate or tolerate, groups of students (and staff) that take it upon themselves to meet regularly to produce work or dialogue — to explore or talk about content or means of producing, to share opportunity, to drawing or essay together, put on a show, develop performance, constructively criticise each other's work, embark on specific enterprise, or to activate public spaces, etc. To share experiences in a way that is not part of the formal curriculum. These groups are part of a long tradition of informal education practices that operate within and often beyond the art school. They are valued for engendering learning that compliments curriculum experiences. They are a means of extending and expanding on the potential outcomes of study; taking the individual into collaborative territories or exploring alternative dynamics that frame art possibilities and interactions with civic society. Such groups often promote initiative. They can have an ambiguous relation to the art school but can form part of the student exit strategy or lead graduates into post-study environments: alumni that continue to meet once a month, effectively maintaining the course culture; studio collectives; non-studio collective; the monthly crit located in and supported by the art school. They locate, at least partially, outside the art school and relate to a broader social and cultural community; often pointing to alternative economies and realities for graduate. The art school can be a porous institution, alive with groups that bubble up around passions and practices. It is a source of new economy and comm with art practices at the core.

1 *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*(1988), s.v. im-¹ and im-²

Such groups can be framed in terms of communities of practice. According to Wenger and Snyder (2000) communities of practice can be found all over the place and many of us will be involved in a number of them; characteristically they occur when self-selecting members come together around a shared passion, because they get something out of it, and learn, problem solve, develop, enhance, and exchange knowledge and capabilities through interaction with the other members — the group lasts as long as there is interest in maintaining the group. Indeed, NAFAE is a community of practice. Wenger and Snyder propose that in communities of practice members learn to solve problems, develop professional skills, generate economy, create value, and contribute to the developing landscape of an industry. Indeed, should art schools and higher education develop strategies for identifying them, and infrastructure for supporting them? If this is an outcome of the art school that promotes or produces alternative futures does it also require an alternative relationship with the institution? Is there a danger that any formal directive to form or maintain communities of practice might generate empty shells devoid of the members personal interest and passion, their characteristic defining feature — they are communities of passion as well as practice.

The conference will ask about different models of groups, and the strategies evolved within the group that structure members' interactions. What role can and should the art school play in identifying and maintaining relationships with emerging groups and networks of artists, producers or researchers? What are the models for art schools taking responsibility for nurturing and incubating opportunities for younger artists, activists, designers, and curators?

This call for contributions invites educators, recent graduates, external networks, and artist collectives, and research groups to submit papers, propose workshops or discussions, offer posters, that uncover, invent, and critically engage with models by which art education might foster and promote learning and thriving, and the further development of art education practices. Accounts of innovative learning practices in collaborative and group work are particularly welcome.

References

Chambers Dictionary of Etymology, (1988) ed. Robert K. Barnhart, Edinburgh and New York: Chambers, 1988.

Smith, M. K. (2003, 2009) 'Jean Lave, Etienne Wenger and communities of practice', *the encyclopedia of informal education*, [www.infed.org/biblio/communities of practice.html](http://www.infed.org/biblio/communities_of_practice.html)

Wenger, Etienne, C., and Snyder, William M., (January – February 2000), 'Communities of Practice: The Organisational Frontier, Harvard Business Review, reprint number R00110.

1. *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*(1988), s.v. im-1 and im-2