

Revealing the Academy: Exploring the Relationships and Agency Between School, Teacher and Student in an Architectural Education

SESSION 11

SALLY STEWART

Mackintosh School of Architecture,
The Glasgow School of Art

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In what ways and to what extent can the individual shape the institution and thereby the architectural education it provides? How does this manifest itself in the formation and experience of the student on their journey towards establishing their own personal creative practice and agency?

This paper attempts to explore the three-way relationship between school, teacher and student, with the aim of exposing the constant dynamic and flux as each acts on and is responsive to the others, while all aim to achieve a coherent and synthesised architectural education and entry to architectural practice. In this, the impact and agency of communities of practice are considered in counterpoint to the charismatic individual.

The paper also discusses the methods used to unearth aspects of our relationship between teacher and student, mentor and tyro, proto and mature practitioner, not as a set of dualities but as spectrum where the individual's position, behaviours and dependences shift and change over time as they continue on a bespoke trajectory, more often a series of loops and knots than a straight line.

Having identified three key communities of practice that have helped define the Academy (Glasgow School of Art and the Mackintosh School of Architecture) in which my teaching practice is located, this paper and the connected research considers how these have influenced the development of my practice, firstly as a student and then latterly as a member of staff and equivalent of 'senior partner' within the 'practice'.

While initially these communities appeared to be emblematic of their period, through archive searches, background reading and mapping of the specific circumstances of each I have become aware of the specific dynamics within each community or constellation, structures, creative relationships and ambitions within each, and the impact these have had on the individuals involved and the Academy at large. To do so has required looking past orthodoxies and accepted accounts of these relationships and their achievements, to begin to reveal the process of exchange and innovation at play.

In parallel to this I have also been investigating by own spatial intelligence and mental space, and its formation and evolution through childhood, as a student and as an architect and teacher, to the present. This aspect of the research is interconnected with the key communities of practice but demands a different methodology of investigation and documentation, may include influences, valences, sources and outputs. It is likely to be recorded through a series of maps and mappings, which also connect to my creative practice and everyday (creative) life.

This entails research 'at zero distance from the subject', a research situation which all practitioners experience but which

has been less well received and embraced in traditional academic contexts. The advantage and purpose of this is twofold; while allowing the researcher to step away from the situation they are immersed in and share it with others to benefit from their peer review; to allow a continuous, uninterrupted relationship with the work itself, the 'habitus' the revealing of the core conditions and sentiments that underpin it; and to provide a clear means to re-engage with the situation and to deploy the insights and feedback the process has provided. In many ways this mirrors the process we understand as architectural students and that we encounter in the teaching studio.

The research considers the issues, perceived and existing, in practice-based research as opposed to practice itself, to identify the obstacles of considering the academy and teaching in particular as a form of creative practice, 'bringing new things into existence' in relation to traditional concepts of creative or architectural practice and pedagogy. This is particularly critical if an understanding of how we (as individuals in reality rather than in the abstract) learn to become the architects we wish and need to be is to be established, and we are able to take control of this throughout our education and subsequent careers.

Techniques and methodologies developed and used in carrying out this research now form part of a toolkit which allows the tacit aspects of the design process, decision making and realisation to be identified and revealed for closer consideration and wider discussion, and in regular use with second cycle students and young practitioners. In addition, these same techniques have allowed a basis for the critique of the academy itself, to support its evolution, re-invigoration and regeneration, allowing the hidden school to be revealed. Undertaken both as a scholarly activity and a process of critical self-reflection, this research is seen as a crucial element in the definition and sustaining of a relevant, robust architectural community.

