

# Chapter 2

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Debate

Chaired by

**Jean François Mabardi,**  
Louvain-la-Neuve, BELGIUM

**Tom Jefferies**, Manchester, UNITED KINGDOM

The question is: In the light of the underlying criteria by RIBA, in Britain, does it actually matter at all what has happened in schools of architecture?

**David Willey**, Plymouth, UK

It is quite easy to answer, in a way, because the 109 criteria do not matter at all. It is a real pain as teachers to have to demonstrate all the time that our students know all that information, which clearly is not the case. So, constructing that particular myth for the RIBA is time consuming and annoying, and, in terms of the student, it is not crucial at all because you are not teaching that level of information. A lot of what they are concerned about or what they are expecting the professional architect to do is very routine knowledge. For instance, they expect them to know what the fire regulations are and it just happens that, sometimes, we have students who have not learned them, which can be a bit of a calamity, but it is partly because we or they may not have focused on that as it is not, necessarily, the most important thing.

I think that some of these meta-level skills that people have been talking about, such as how to understand your own design process, personally, I would articulate as, *what are the questions about architecture that intrigue you as a final year student? What is it about architecture which is difficult and intriguing? What are the questions that are going to consume your professional life?* A school should be able to equip students with the necessary skills to be able to tackle these issues. Personally, I do not believe in answers, but only in questions because answers are transient whereas questions, though not eternal, do tend to stay with us for some time. Also, answers are never constant, subjected to afterthoughts and reflections.

It seems to me that we should equip students with the awareness that what they are doing is dealing with a set of questions that are in some way embedded in the discipline. These questions deal with issues such as: *how does a building belong? How do we decide what is appropriate in terms of what we knock down or put up?* So whatever we do, these are the questions we need to deal with because they belong with architecture, and how we set about answering these questions is the pursuit of a lifetime. Also, you can never be sure that you have actually answered these questions, but you do know that those types of questions absorb you. For example, I am absorbed by windows and want to know why that particular window was put there. I know that I can always deal with this question if I want to design as an architect because windows are always with us, and though the making of a window may not be clear to me, I know that it is a very interesting question. I think, in the end, through their education, students choose what they want to be absorbed by. It seems to me that this is what we are actually doing.

However, it so happens that other people do not share this view, and that is the hidden agenda among us, that is, that we all have a sense of what we think we are teaching, ultimately, but there is no common agreement to that. In fact, I doubt if there are more than 2 or 3 people here who I can agree with me regarding the choice of questions I want to work with. Other people want to articulate what they think, and the outcome of their teaching is in a way different from mine. Nevertheless, we can assume that it is not the 109 identifiable criteria that are expected from the architecture department, but it would have to be something else and at the meta level. Articulating all that is also one of the problems we face both with our students and with professional groups, which, in my opinion, did not come out of the papers.

**Christian Huetz**, Regensburg, GERMANY

Somebody pointed out the role of the school and influence on students. If we assume that the role of the student is to learn, then our job is to get the students thinking about the right approaches to achieve this. Moreover, it should not be done strictly according to the teacher's beliefs, but should also follow their own beliefs. This is very important. To add to another point mentioned earlier, it is natural that students will make mistakes, but mistakes should be perceived as a means of learning.

**Per Olaf Fjeld, Oslo, NORWAY**

Perhaps, there has been some misinterpretation of what was meant by the term "beliefs". What I meant when I said that the school should have a certain belief is that it needs to be strong enough for it to have its own base, meaning that the school has the capacity to put forth whatever type of architectural argument the school wants to promote. Therefore, the meaning, here, is quite different from the notion of beliefs as a set of principles we transmit to students. Finally, that belief formerly referred to represents a base from which a discussion can start, and without that base from which to work, the argument that can be put forward for discussion will lose ground.

**Loughlin Kealy, Dublin, IRELAND**

There is a question I would like to add to the discussion, and it is partly about "belief". I wish to emphasize the importance of not abandoning the idea of belief. If I can just draw from a perspective of my own country: it has extraordinary difficulty at the moment in managing its environment, in addressing intelligently the future of settlements, in managing its own landscape, and so on. There are many young people who want to be involved actively in that process (of environmental management), and what has animated us in their the development of education, is the desire to make that happen, and to look into issues in a way that enables people to acquire skills and engage in the process - in the full awareness that they are also engaged in something that has a long cultural history, which continues long after their deaths, so that they are not disembodied entities floating in the universe. It is essential that students believe that they can make a difference through their actions.

So, I do not have a whole lot of sympathy for the "affordance" opened up by the availability of digital media, per se, because it seems to me that capacity immediately puts back in, the question of underlying values: *what do you want to use this for? Why is it important?* These questions go parallel to the ones David put forward. Therefore, I do not think that architecture exists as a purely intellectual discipline. It is integrally bound up with the materiality of the world.

Now. If I can go back again and look at how programs were presented, there was a whole collection of areas that we (readers) knew nothing about. For example, with regard to some architecture programs, I found it interesting to realise that areas of work were not professionally orientated in the same way. I did find the discussion on the search for commonality on the whole missed out on that kind of difference - situations where profession and academia are closely entwined and where they are not: situations where you can start to make constructions immediately you are qualified - against that, in the UK there are extra requirements that have to be met - and for us several institutions have requirements that have to be met. At the end of the day, what the teacher needs to do, it seems to me, is to prepare students for work in the practice of architecture, no matter what the institutions, conditions or circumstances may be - there might be a risk of detaching oneself from the centre ground: thinking that what is crucial in architectural education is that there is no clear pattern - that is what emerges from this book that we are discussing.

**Josep Muntañola, Barcelona, SPAIN**

One thing that I found intriguing from the proposal is on re-focusing on the creativity that is lacking from the book. When we think of creativity the way it is perceived nowadays we only think of either massification of individual creativity. But students do not have the opposition of making the rules of massification or the way they want to be autonomous with a kind of inside social reciprocity, not any kind of social reciprocity. They check all the time autonomy and social reciprocity but they acknowledge situations that for us were very difficult. They do it faster and this new creativity is very important and we can help them this way. It is both wrong to say that we will dictate the behaviour to them but we have nothing to say nothing to them such as that no reciprocity is good. I have collaboration with doctors in Spain that deal with pathologically ill children with distortions of space and time and they ask the doctor when a problem with a child is solved.

How do you think the cure has come? One thing that can prove that is that the child is more autonomous. Another way is that the child is not suffering any more.

I would like to make another point about computers. There is undoubtedly a new tool and a new possibility good for survival, but I remember a reaction from Plato that said that with writing we will stop thinking and talking. I think, similarly that the drawing should not disappear; we can still write, think and talk. I think we should not eliminate drawing with any mystification of computers, drawing or writing. The more the skills the better. We can combine computers and all other skills with creativity and that will depend on the use of the tool.

**Simon Beeson**, Edinburgh, UNITED KINGDOM

I was one of the contributors of the book. We were asked to write about ourselves, which was one of the interesting things about it as an exercise, and it raises some interesting questions about why we are here.

I have a friend who recently published a book based on a series of workshops he did around schools where he asked children for questions. One of the questions a child came up with was "Are there more questions or answers?" I guess that is a good question.

There are some questions that were not asked for in the book. One is whether there are problems in the profession that architectural education can solve. Are there problems in the profession? From the perspective of architectural education, do we see a problem? What is the relationship between the education and professional accreditation? I think that varies from country to country, but it is becoming more and more important.

There is a quote from Charles Eames which I find very useful. He was once in a forum presenting some of his ideas, and, at the end, one of the students asked him, "Why do you do so little architecture?" and his response was, "Everything I do is architecture. I just don't make many buildings." (NB. Interestingly Ray Eames also remarked that she never gave up painting but changed her palette).

I think that one of the problems we have in trying to find a common ground is identifying what exactly "doing architecture" is for Eames, whether designing his chairs, drawing, building or designing an exhibition.

This was touched on by an earlier statement which said that a project is meant as an architectural argument. Of course, we know what arguments are, but we do not seem to be able to state very clearly what an *architectural argument* is, even though we use the term over and over. We can find a common ground in using the word *architecture* or *architectural education*, but we are loathed to define what "architecture" is. Even if we were to talk about creativity, *architectural creativity* would be different. It seems to me, that Charles Eames states that there is a particular way of looking at situations or creative issues from an architectural point of view. If there is an unspoken skill, we assume that it is not essential that we articulate it in the profession, because there is nothing seriously wrong with the profession, because with the rise of pluralism there are different kinds of architecture. I suppose it is not because we want to solve any problems with the architectural profession, but because we want to articulate it within our teaching.

In reading the "Initiations" section of the book, there is some agreement in level 1, where we are less confused about what architecture is. I think we realise that the product of architecture is a building around which we focus various issues and that we have no problem getting students to make small houses and buildings and discuss these possible issues. What is strange is that at the end of the course, there is disagreement about what architecture involves.

Finally, I would like to say that one reason why we need to articulate what we do is not because it is a problem with architecture as such, but because we have something to offer, and I do think that architectural education is a wonderful foundation for a great deal of other activity in our culture. In this case there are other issues such as how to design the curriculum base of the architecture degree at the undergraduate level. If we knew better what we did, then we would be able to offer it to a wider audience. We could actually identify how to apply a particular way of

thinking. We are at the moment very unclear about what we do and we ought to make an effort to make ourselves clearer.

**Per Olaf Fjeld, Oslo NORWAY**

I agree with you and, like others, believe that architecture has a design which is not at all static, and in order for the school of architecture to bring that forward, if they do take on the task, the more precise we are in the articulation of our research in the beginning statement, so that we have an awareness of the driving force behind the research, irrespective of the outcome, that precision in the initial phase will direct that energy in a certain way, allowing us to understand whatever we can derive from it. If not, I think we may be cruising down the same level, which is mainly what we do.

**Ali Uyanik, Aarhus, DENMARK**

Regarding what was mentioned about innovation, and creativity, somehow, I prefer to use innovation. Since creativity is sometimes misunderstood. Innovation in my mind includes not only falling on an idea but understanding, choice, elimination, construction of an idea in to a work of architecture. For a long time I thought Leonardo was a very talented person, that he could create works of art just by doing it. Then I found a large number of entries in his notes préising how to paint sun down. This was a revelation to me. He was not only gifted but can deliver his geni because he knew how to construct. That is why I say the use of word innovation is better.

Then the word rare was mentioned I would rather speak of quality, meaningful, because I do not think that in the times we live in, also with so many architects at work every piece of an architect produces should or can be rare. It should be rather be of quality and usually quality of the common.

The effect of the teaching staff's personal architectural standing was put to question. Having teaching faculty with clear positions on architecture will help to create an atmosphere where students can flourish. It seems to me that this is probably the most important thing we can do for students.

**Cesare Macchi Cassia, Milano, ITALY**

I had a point to make following David Willey's very interesting speech. He introduced a third question to the problems discussed in the research in the book on architectural design education, "What and how we teach " and a very important question, "Why we teach". It is easier for our students to respond to the question of "Why they are learning architecture" because today our students can see and think about architecture from the start. I think that responding to this question is necessary in order to have the opportunity to discuss architecture education. What is important for us to discuss together is the sense of architecture today in our societies and the way to teach it, but it is impossible to teach without clarifying what the role of architecture can be. I believe it is primarily an ethical problem followed by a cultural one. Also, since we are no longer in the 30s we must have an idea on why before what and how.

**Per Olaf Fjeld, Oslo NORWAY**

Just in passing, it is interesting that neither Nouvel nor Gehry were mentioned anywhere in the papers whereas Christopher Alexander quite a lot.

**Patrick Flynn, Dublin, IRELAND**

I think as educators we seek to promote relational knowledge. Relational knowledge is where knowledge is related back to something the student has already experienced. I think one of the talks referred in a provocative way to the students knowing nothing. This, I believe, is not true. The students already know a huge amount about architecture even when they arrive the first day of

college. You may have a student who has come from farming background say for example and your role as a tutor is to allow the student to see the architecture in the way the fields are transformed by the action of the farmer.

As tutors we deal in the exchange of what we believe with what the student believes and this interchange of ideas produces new knowledge.