

DAVIN LARKIN

DESIGN EDUCATOR, Davin Larkin - 19.12.16

Davin takes a practice based approach (PBL) to his role as a design educator. This is twofold with him demonstrating his own skills through continued practice in Industry while also mentoring his students to learn in education as they would work in industry (Work Based Learning - WBL). Do as you preach and preach as you do.

This applied approach to design education nourishes students and their skills throughout their journey as a learner (Prince, 2004). Davin works alongside his students as a mentor, as a team leader and choreographs their learning path. Students are encouraged to actively seek knowledge while developing their own voice as a team member (Felder & Silverman, 1988).

As a student's voice develops, their thinking, approach and ideals are challenged in a constructive manner. This emulates industry and encourages students to develop an identity for their design approach but also an understanding of the consequences of decisions they make. Ultimately the student becomes the teacher as they then begin to challenge Davin's views and approach to design and they continue together as lifelong learners. This voice, this clarity of thinking enables each learner to become a valued member of the design industry.

A critical part of Davin's role as an educator is to stay in tune with what is happening in Industry. Through a variety of active projects this meaningful engagement further emphasis his practice based focus to design education in the furniture industry.

Design, prototyping, digital skills and organisation are the four distinct areas Davin works within. Each one requires its own approach while also understanding the merit of how one links with the other.

Design

Design is about making the user's life better. The first question Davin asks his students is why? He advocates a user first inclusive approach to all projects with an emphasis on sustainability through design for manufacture principals (National Disability Authority, n.d.). The use of design tools such as CAD is encouraged but emphasis on the importance of sketching as the de facto design language is prescribed.

Prototyping

Prototyping go hand in hand with design, however, with the advancement of CAD skills designers have become more reliant on their visualisation abilities (Winston, 2014). All products are used in a three-dimensional world and thus designing a successful product requires a physical prototype. Davin encourages students to design, prototype, interact, assess and iterate as required (Howarth, 2016). Only then can you progress to manufacture of the final product.

Digital

While traditional skills such as sketching and prototyping are fundamental, designers must also look to the future. Davin encourages students to marry the craft of traditional furniture making with digital manufacturing technologies such as 3D Printing, Laser Cutting, CNC Technologies and programmable chips such as Arduino boards. Smart products and smart factories are the future, without an appreciation for the digital world we risk our products and skills becoming outdated.

Organisation

Clarity in thinking is key to the success of a designer (Lawson, 2006). Davin encourages students to be organised in their approach, to understand the skills to hand and apply them when required. Planning, organisation, presentation and self-promotion are all key to a designer's success in Industry. These skills are embedded in every project presented to students in a holistic manner. Skills develop over time as students become clearer on what they are trying to achieve.

Ethos

As Davin's experience of design grows, more consideration has been given to the role designers play in society. Davin advocates a need for designers to consider both the sustainability of the products they produce but also the application of user first and universal design principals. Design should help solve our problems, not add more, an ethos Davin tries to follow with all his work.

Educator

Lecturing is always a challenging role and Davin feels it is extremely important for him to be practicing what he teaches. While Davin has been traditionally trained as a designer his ethos for design also applies to his role as an educator. Davin considers his approach to education as a user first one, and does not actively associate his style with any specific learning style or theory such as Kolb (Kolb, 1984), Gregorc (Gregoric, 1982), Felder–Silverman (Felder, 1988), VARK (Fleming, 2001), Dunn and Dunn (Dunn, 1989) among others. The reason for this is that all students learn in different ways (Hawk et al., 2007) and taking a user first approach means consideration must be given to the individual needs of each student. This in essence is a holistic or humanist approach to education that is applicable to Davin's role as a designer and educator alike.

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