Making Design Accessible

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Abstract
The paper describes the development of a multimedia programme, aimed at Art and Design Students, which is concerned with promoting awareness of how designers use drawing in their creative practice. The programme was created in response to an identified need to support first year undergraduates applying their drawing skills within an educational environment. The paper illustrates how the team from the University of Ulster developed their section in terms of concept, structure and production methodologies.

Introduction
Drawing in design is crucial to the creative process. It enables the designer to understand form, surface, relationships, order, layout and the structuring of space, information and the three dimensional environment. However the changing nature of art and design education in the UK has meant that the traditional Atelier type structure of teaching which encouraged a continuum of drawing as a core aspect of understanding, development and practice has given way to a much more modularised task based regime. This regime which still needs and employs drawing cannot maintain the support for it in the same holistic way. The consequence of this is evident in a poorer quality of visual expression and a lack of student confidence in using drawing in the solving of design problems.

In an effort to address this a consortium of Art and Design Institutions led by the London Institute and including Falmouth College of Art, Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, and the University of Ulster collaborated to create a multimedia programme about drawing suitable as a general introduction to and reference resource for first year undergraduates in Art and Design. The programme was not intended to replace traditional teaching in drawing but support the student through a number of drawing perspectives which would describe a range of contexts, issues and applications and build to an awareness of drawing in a wider sense.

The programme recognises that one cannot teach drawing through a computer but that the computer is an effective tool for illustrating the rich multi faceted nature of drawing in a tangible array of exercises, exemplars and issue bases. It was decided that an appropriate way to reflect the eclectic nature of the drawing experience was to approach the programme from various perspectives to ensure that the breadth of approach would be of interest to first year undergraduates right across the spectrum.

Approach
The team from Ulster chose to address the needs of undergraduate designers and in particular illustrate how methods of drawing are based on a fundamental core that is reflected in specialist applications. This part of the programme was entitled Drawing as Method. The section is not directly concerned with “how to” activity but focuses upon those forces which encourage one to draw, the intellectual process which sees, evaluates and translates observation into representation and the practical expressive skills which are developed as a corollary of the drawing process.

Structure
To work effectively as a learning tool it was important for the section to have a structure which enabled the student to understand the process in depth and breadth. A structure was created which allowed the student to choose how he/she navigated the section whilst having the option, if they choose, of following a recommended pathway. It was anticipated that the programme would be used both as an informing device and as a reference tool.

It consists of two elements; a core and a discipline section. To maximise the user potential the concept was to present a core element addressing the fundamental elements of the practice i.e. observation, evaluation, interpretation, formulation of the image and then reinforce these elements within a number of contexts across various design disciplines. The core is in the form of a presentation by an established ceramics designer using the drawing activity as a focus on
fundamental aspects. A range of additional interviews complements this with discipline specialists who illustrate the use of drawing in the context of graphics, animation, product and environment. This approach reflects a well established pedagogy in Art and Design as research has shown that students respond well to practitioners who are prepared to discuss their work objectively.

The core consisted of an introduction, the process in action and a review of each section. The "core" video was shot as a complete drawing process; the designer described the selection of the subject, the reasons for using particular materials, the techniques employed in the drawing process and his thinking process during the activity. This was further extended by his approach to restructuring the drawings and using elements selectively to create his design forms. Finally the drawing was reviewed in the context of the three-dimensional ceramic object created. Each discipline was illustrated in sections entitled; why draw, approach, application, reference and style.

The short introduction is video based. The core presentation consists of five video clips and image support to complement the principle points. Each discipline section consists of video introduction, images for each of the five sections, audio support and text complement to major points. Each of these sections is consolidated by a short review to reinforce the principles.

Users can select how they view and can compare designers' work across the disciplines reinforcing the concept of the application of core elements. Together the two sections explore how analysis and synthesis operate within the process of drawing, and how these are conditioned by experiential factors that benefit the creative process.

Production system

The nature of the project meant that each institution had autonomy in the design and structuring of their particular section. The London Institute as lead partner was responsible for the composite development, software authoring and final production of the programme.

As visual people, contributing to a visually rich programme and working at a distance we found it more appropriate to create visual composites as a basis for discussing ideas and potential layouts. To save time these were created on the presentation programme Powerpoint. This enabled inclusion of video, image, audio, text and basic animation and although limited in some respects provided an excellent mock up of most of the screen layouts that led towards our final format. These were very useful in presentation form and as screen grabs were needed to discuss individuals layouts.

The final work was sent in file form suitable for inclusion in Director. Video and audio material was created on DV and edited in Premiere and Edit DV and sent as compressed, flattened files suitable for cross platform application. Visuals were created through scanning and digital recording, modified in PhotoShop and coverted to jpeg. Text was in Word.

Conclusion

Much work is being done in the area of Art and Design as the potential for application of the complex image increases in educational material. Use of computing has increased rapidly as technology has made image manipulation significantly easier. This programme reflects this growth in both it's structure and content presenting the student with the diversity of drawing and it's use whilst providing a resource for study support. Glasgow University and The London Institute are currently testing a beta version programme across a number of locations teaching Art and Design. Each of the contributing institutions is also testing the composite product through their own establishments.

References

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