

DANFORD DIALOGUES

FROM LEARNING ENGLISH
TO A DREAM JOB



From Bogotá to a Job Offer: How David Turned a Civil Construction Diploma Into a Career in Melbourne

David didn't expect to fall in love with a city. He came to Melbourne in 2022 for six months, with one goal: learn English, then go home. Three years, one diploma, and a job offer from a major Victorian construction company later, he's still here — and he says Danford College is a big part of why.

"I came here just to learn English," David explains. "My mum was like, 'Hey David, I have missed out on different job opportunities just because I didn't speak English. Go there, pick up the language, and then you come back.' So it was the plan at the beginning." Six months in, the plan changed. "I realised that six months is not enough time to become fluent. I fell in love with the city, with the people, with all the nationalities you can meet. And here I am."

Finding his way back to construction

Before Melbourne, David was a qualified civil engineer in Colombia. But after a year away from the field, he says, "that flame inside of me was getting smaller." He needed a way back in — one that also gave him a legitimate pathway into Australia's construction industry.

That search led him to Danford College's Advanced Diploma of Civil Construction and Design. "Danford was the one that captured my attention," he says. "I realised we were having a new building, new spaces. I was like, 'Okay, this is a really good school — they are investing money in this project.'" For David, the course wasn't just a formality on top of his existing qualifications. It was a way to translate what he already knew into the local context. "This was an extra course for me to get familiar with all the vocabulary and knowledge that I have — the Australian standards and codes."

It's also where he met Ekta, his teacher and, later, the host of the Danford Dialogues podcast episode this story is drawn from. "Once I met Ekta, I resonated with her. She's been studying the same things, she's got the same knowledge that I do," David says. "She was supporting me, encouraging us as a group — 'Hey guys, keep dreaming. You can get a job. Just try to do your best here in class.' I'm really grateful for having a teacher just like her."

A job offer before graduation

The milestone David is proudest of arrived before he'd even finished his course: an offer from a major company on a large-scale project in Victoria. "This has been one of the biggest milestones in my journey here in Australia," he says, "because it's something I've been working on for a year — even since I decided to study this course."

For a graduating student, the timing means something. "Now that I'm about to finish my course, it's been a long journey. Two years that we saw each other's faces, and soon we're going to stop doing this for a while," he reflects. "I'm going to really miss my classroom, my friends, the experiences we had. But this is a new step in my life. This is the best way to finalise my studies here — with this big achievement."

What he'd tell the next graduating class

Asked what's made the difference in his own progress, David keeps coming back to the same idea: people. "I like group projects. I need my people. I need to be surrounded by people, to interact with people," he says. Given the choice between online and in-person study, he's unequivocal. "It's more natural when you have interaction with your teacher and not just behind a screen. I believe that when you study online you might grow as a professional, but what makes you human is the interaction with people. When you're in the classroom, you get to know each other — that's fundamental when you're growing as a professional."

His broader advice for anyone starting out echoes the same theme: "One skill that everyone should learn is how to interact with people, how to treat people and how to respect them. How to communicate and express yourself, and understand someone else."

The small things that keep him going

Some of the details David shares are less about career strategy and more about what makes a long journey bearable. He can't work without music — "when I'm at the gym, I play music, when I'm on the tram, I play music. I feel like my life is a movie" — and he's candid about trading late nights for early mornings once his new job started 7am shifts, a shift he calls going "from a night owl to an early bird."

Then there's the coffee. "Since we were kids in Colombia, we start drinking coffee at seven, eight years old — long black, strong coffee, not cappuccinos," David says, laughing. "I'm from the coffee region of Colombia, so we're well known for the quality of our coffee." He's noticed Melbourne takes its coffee just as seriously, if with a different sensibility. "Here it looks a little bit bougie, more expensive — they've got the art on top, it makes it feel luxury. But it's pretty much the same thing to me. I still like my flat white. It does the job."

Perhaps the most personal detail is the photo on his phone's home screen: a picture of himself as a child. "People ask me a lot — 'who's this kid, is this your son?' I tell them, no, this is just my younger self," he says. "As a migrant, sometimes you get frustrated in a different country. Sometimes you feel like things aren't going well. But this keeps me humble — thinking, look where you come from, and just make this kid proud."

Still writing the story

David's next chapter starts on a Victorian construction site, applying the standards and codes he picked up at Danford to a career he'd started building long before he ever arrived in Australia. His course is finished, but by his own account, the bigger story — the one his younger self is watching — is only getting started.

Danford College's Advanced Diploma of Civil Construction and Design is designed for students like David: those bringing existing skills into the Australian industry, and those building them from scratch.

