

Applied Imagination: Interim Strategic Project Report

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Since it began in July 2014, the IATL funded Applied Imagination (AI) strategic project has been developing innovative forms of learning, teaching and assessment through: the module 'Applied Imagination'; a symbiotic relationship with *The Dark Would* pedagogic project; teaching and learning events which have reached beyond Warwick University.

The Applied Imagination strategic project has, thus far, resulted in: the creation of an innovative, well-received, and valuable module; a fertile and symbiotic relationship with *The Dark Would* project; the publishing of student material; aided the professional development of both students and staff; and had an impact upon the wider Warwick teaching and learning community. It will continue to grow these through a large and innovative even planned in May, further publications, and the sustained development of relationships around the university. These will be outlined in more detail below and, as will become apparent, this strategic project has already had great success in furthering both university and IATL teaching and learning strategies and will continue to do so. It has: nurtured excellence in both teaching and student-led research; been committed to and sowed the seeds for a legacy of experimentation and innovation in module-development, assessment, and pedagogy; supported a fully collaborative and enthusiastic scholarly practice whereby there is a free-exchange of ideas between staff and students; enhanced student's learning skill-set in transferable ways; promoted a critically self-reflective and questioning mind-set to the betterment of both staff and student practice; provided for the diverse learning needs of students; demonstrably enriched many student's learning experience; prepared students for life after Warwick; built upon and added to collaborative teaching network around the university; developed an innovative pedagogical environment that embodies many of the values that underpin these outcomes; and explored, questioned, and supported inter- and transdisciplinary study.

The Module

Applied Imagination ran with 13 students from 11 different disciplines (5 of which were STEM subjects, 4 Humanities, and 4 Social Sciences). The spread of topics was also highly interdisciplinary (3 STEM, 3 Humanities, and 2 Social Sciences) all of which had a separate subject specialist leading part of the session. The module benefited greatly from having such a diverse student and staff body and this was commented on positively by many students in their assessed learning journals. This not only involved theoretical and scholarly consideration, however, as two sessions involved professional development insofar as they incorporated the study of imagination and creativity within the working world and how reflective practice such as learning journals can aid career and workplace development alongside personal growth. Additionally, having such a spread of staff and students has

allowed for larger networking opportunities and potential dissemination of resultant research and ideas.

Applied Imagination also capitalized on the opportunity to recruit a second module convenor in order to develop a syllabus, workshops, and teaching ethos in an interdisciplinary and collaborative fashion. The module leaders worked hard and well together, challenging each other in a variety of ways, in order to create a classroom space that reflected their rigorously inquisitive, questioning, and cooperative approach. This shows not only in student satisfaction and the quality of their work, but in the *nature* of their approach: openly-critical yet mutually supportive, imaginative yet academically rigorous, and largely interdisciplinary moving towards transdisciplinarity. While this may have been a 'best case scenario' in terms of developing and running a module, the benefits of this collegiate, collaborative approach were clearly demonstrated and the transdisciplinary processes which the module facilitated were in part due to this.

Feedback on the 'Applied Imagination' module was highly positive. In his peer review of teaching, Jonathan Heron described the session he observed in week two as "good with outstanding elements" and positively commented on both the team-teaching approach taken and the value the students were already finding in the module even so early in the module. Student feedback questionnaires, completed in week 10, were equally positive. 100% of students said they would recommend the module to someone else and students were particularly positive about the experiences of being encouraged to share their ideas and the feeling that the work they did for this module would be useful in their further studies. Indeed, only three out of 23 of the questions averaging under a 4 ("above average"). These were concerned with how they rated their own preparation for seminars (3.91), the logicity of the order of seminars (3.83), and how clear assessments were made to them (3.63 - somewhat offset by an average score of 4.18 when asked if they received enough support in relation to assessment).

Student learning journals were also complimentary of the module. They expressed the positive effect the module had on their wider learning styles and a more considered and self-reflective outlook on pedagogical practice. However, students rigorously questioned the module's methods and approaches where they felt it necessary. For example, some students still remain unsure about the nature of innovative assessment and while the pieces submitted and marks were largely of a very high quality the module convenors can learn from this and will do so in a way that can be disseminated to the wider university (and beyond). It is a testament to the way the module was run that students felt full collaborators in the space and wanted to contribute to its future embodiments and the project is currently developing publishable research based on these journals.

The quality of student work was high, overall. Applied Imagination has resulted in the planned publication of two student's work (a video from Oliver Higgins – Chemistry – to be used for IATL and university publicity and discussion purposes, and artwork and reflections from Oliver Stockley – English and Creative Writing – for the IATL newsletter on 'The Dark Would') and the performance of another's for 'The Dark Would' event (Catherine Powers-Freeling's – Philosophy – interactive art installation 'I stole this from the internet...').

Research is being developed from the experience of teaching AI with the intention of placing a publication in an academic journal.

Relationship with The Dark Would

The Dark Would project has developed a symbiotic relationship with Applied Imagination. The module used and developed the innovative educational space the TDW is based on. In return, TDW benefited greatly from the concrete expression its underpinning ideology found during the module. The two will continue to develop the emergent pedagogical philosophy, aiming for teaching and learning excellence and the nurturing of spaces for and embodiment of innovation. In the near future, this project will be funding an event called *The Dark Would* exploring these ideas and will use much of what has been learned from the experience of AI in the process. Outcomes of the event will include: films, an IATL 'newsletter' that also stands by itself as a short publication, a reimagined *The Dark Would* space, original music, pedagogic intervention grant applications and module proposals from participants, an event report to be submitted to *Exchanges: the Warwick Research Journal* for publication, and the continued growth and shaping of discussions around teaching and learning innovation and excellence at Warwick that will involve key stakeholders. All of this is solidifying the groundwork for a teaching and learning legacy.

Further Dissemination and Legacy

The outcomes of the project are being distributed in a number of ways. The convenors have already led a Teaching Grid Windows-into-Teaching session to great success, both in terms of positive reaction and 'buzz' created but also in terms of questions asked and reflections to take on board. Additionally, as mentioned, an IATL newsletter will soon be published which expresses further reflections on the module and the above relationship with *The Dark Would*. The newsletter has been described by IATL colleagues as potentially offering a new model for the development of IATL newsletters going forwards.

The project leaders will also be developing both their own and IATL's skill sets by attending an NVivo training course and leading one for the wider-team upon their return. This training course will allow the project leaders to create at least one further publication for the dissemination of invaluable material that has arisen from this project by way of student and

staff reflections on innovative module, assessment design, and the role of imagination, creativity, and interdisciplinarity in these and higher-education as a whole. However, having people skilled in such software within IATL will allow for further research and publication in this area and for the collation and dissemination of material for IATL as a whole in a much more structured and efficient way in the future.

Other tangible outcomes planned are: the creation and publication of material taken from the event as mentioned; the creation of a compelling base-line upon which external funding applications can be made to secure long-term sustainability for ambitious modules such as Applied Imagination and *The Dark Would*; and post-event and further networking to extend the continuing relationships between IATL and the wider university community.

For the project leaders, the legacy of the project has been considerable. It has provided a rich opportunity for the development of new pedagogic teaching and assessment techniques in relation to planning, team teaching, assessment design, new models for collaboration between administrative and academic staff in relation to pedagogic projects, the innovative use of space within teaching. It has provided an opportunity, too, for the development of networks of people interested in developing innovative approaches to pedagogy within the university.

Moreover, this project's legacy will also be secured by the impact it will have on a future strategic project application being designed by Philip Gaydon in relation to a practice handbook based upon studies and reflection on pedagogic excellence and innovation within Warwick and on the transference of the teaching philosophy and professional skills developed within this module into his module 'Ethical Beings' and a soon-to-be-proposed module 'The Philosophy of Sport' with Jonny Heron. Indeed, Phil wishes to add that this project has been the most valuable and exciting project he has undertaken in his eight years at Warwick and it has had an immeasurable impact insofar as it has allowed him to develop a teaching philosophy, hone his skill-sets, network with a larger university community, develop publications, and fully commit to interdisciplinarity and teaching innovation and excellence.