We invite you to explore, become lost, unsettled, rejuvenated, critical, playful, reflective, challenged, practical or impractical, and – perhaps – changed. You can start by exploring these pages and the challenges they contain. You can continue by finding out more about *The Dark Would* and how it may relate to your teaching and learning practice. Because while it's important to open up spaces in which we can ask questions of ourselves, our teaching and our learning, it is also vital that we recognise the ecosystems in which we exist and the possibilities and constraints within them.

An explorer can never know what he is exploring until it has been explored. He carries no Baedeker in his pocket, no guidebook which will tell him which churches he should visit or at which hotels he should stay. He has only the ambiguous folklore of others who have passed that way.
(Gregory Bateson, Steps to an Ecology of Mind)

Find out more about *The Dark Would* project: visit go.warwick.ac.uk/thedarkwould or email thedarkwould@warwick.ac.uk. To learn more about the Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning (IATL) go to www.warwick.ac.uk/iatl or contact iatl@warwick.ac.uk

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IATL

The Dark Would

The object you're holding in your hand is an invitation. It invites you to begin by thinking about the possibilities and constraints of learning and teaching in a university setting: what are the roles of the teacher and student? What is the relationship between the content of teaching and the form it may take? Who authors the learning experience? How is environment a part of the learning process?

These questions – and the answers they elicit – can help us develop our understanding of the ecosystem of teaching and learning. These pages seek to cultivate a space in which we can consider our place within that system.

Over the last year, two related projects within The University of Warwick's Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning (IATL) have, for us, crystallised around the questions posed here.

Applied Imagination, one of IATL's interdisciplinary undergraduate modules, is discussed by the module leaders and students overleaf.

The Dark Would developed through the design of a non-traditional learning environment which explores the relationships between teachers, students and space and allows us to consider the hierarchies and politics of knowledge and education.

A particular value of these projects lies in the spaces they open up for those involved to reflect on teaching and learning. We invite you to join us in exploring and mapping these spaces.

Applied Imagination: a case study

The module *Applied Imagination* (AI) looks at the ways our imaginations are shaped by and influence the contexts in which we find ourselves.

The module began with an underpinning question: what is the imagination? Alongside specialists from across the University we examined it by asking several different questions across the weeks, such as: how does a mathematician imagine four dimensions? What role does imagination play in changing society? Is there such a thing as a collaborative imagination? What's the relationship between play, failure and the imagination? What happens in the brain when we imagine something and does it matter?

Before we could engage with these questions in the classroom we felt we needed to face them ourselves and experience the processes to which we would ask students to commit. We attended external workshops, challenged each other to hone our interdisciplinary understanding of concepts, worked through the tasks we intended to set students, and refused to stop asking each other "why do this and not that?" Most importantly, we got stuck but kept going, just as we hoped the students would.

This sense of a shared endeavour was reflected in our use of *The Dark Would (*TDW) in the first session of the module. TDW is designed to be a non-hierarchical space. It seeks to empower students to be co-creators of their learning and engage with their practice as thinkers.

Crucially, there is no teacher within TDW: students explore the space by themselves. This allowed a disparate group to share a pivotal experience from which they could move forward equally and positioned us, the module leaders, as fellow explorers, not tour guides.

While TDW was only used in the first session, it remained an invaluable reference point for the rest of the module. It informed discussions and debates and was highlighted as a shaping experience by the students in their assessed work.

Some of the innovative aspects of the module worried students. For example, one student wrote of their concerns about the assessments: "We've created such a culture of success that we can no longer fail without feeling inadequate. This is a problem, I think, for *Applied Imagination*. Everyone is so set to follow a mark scheme that they don't dare to try as hard because the higher you fly, the harder you fall. No one wants to take a risk that could lead to amazing process and work because they don't know that it would end well for them."

However, in feedback 100% of students said they would recommend the module to someone else, and students were keen to comment on the impact AI had on their wider learning: "Not only will the skills I've learned help me to complete my degree to a better ability, but they have also increased my confidence in how I study."

Much of the success of AI was due to the sense of mutual exploration between the tutors and students, facilitated in part by TDW. However, this raises potential pitfalls. In her book *Syllabus,* Lynda Barry writes about setting a colouring task for her students every year. In the first year, the task invigorated them. In subsequent years the energy began to drop until the task was taking more from the students than it gave. Barry concludes that in the first year she joined in the exploration with the students, whereas in subsequent years she started to give instructions based on what she had already learned. Rather than experimenting, students passively followed orders and became bored. This raises a key question both for AI and TDW: now we have started to map the landscape, how can we remain as co-explorers with students rather than tour guides?