Academic literacy in a hostile environment: improving access to university assessments through collaborative teaching

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Nicolas Moore

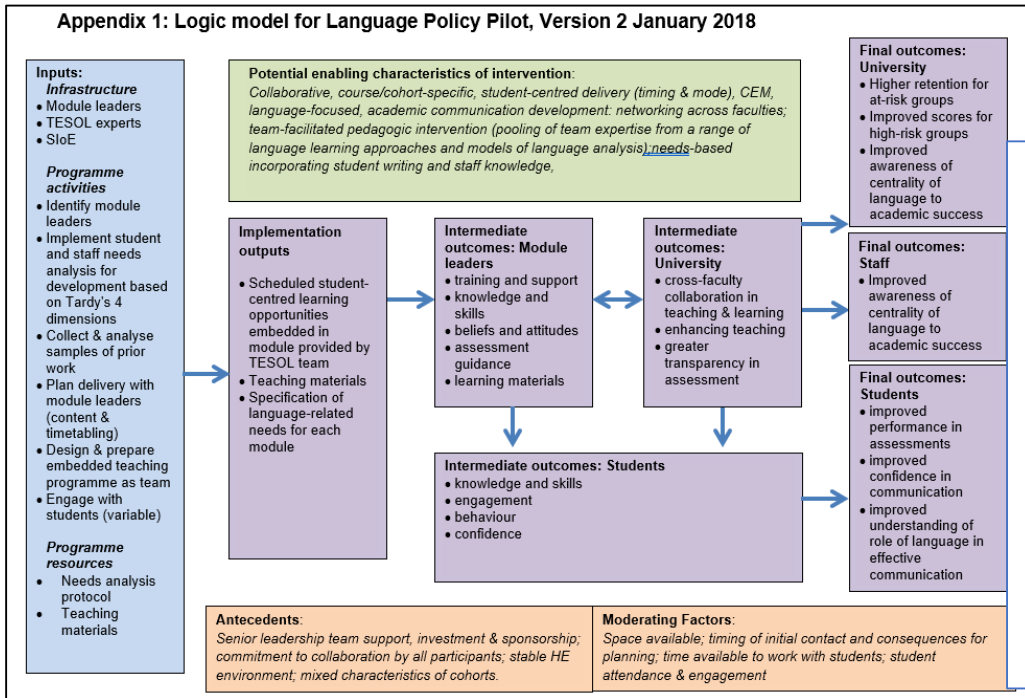Karen Nicholls

Hostile environments

For students:

- Applied University = very varied assignment types and expectations
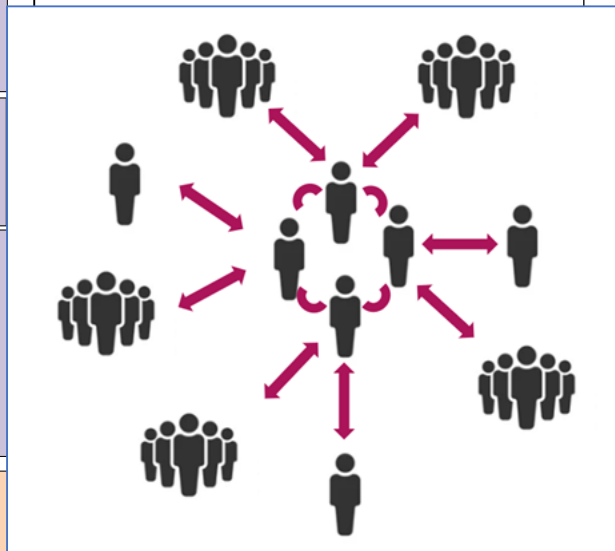- Diverse population = may not be aware of cultural expectations

For us:

- 32 000 students
- Small team (5 lecturers)
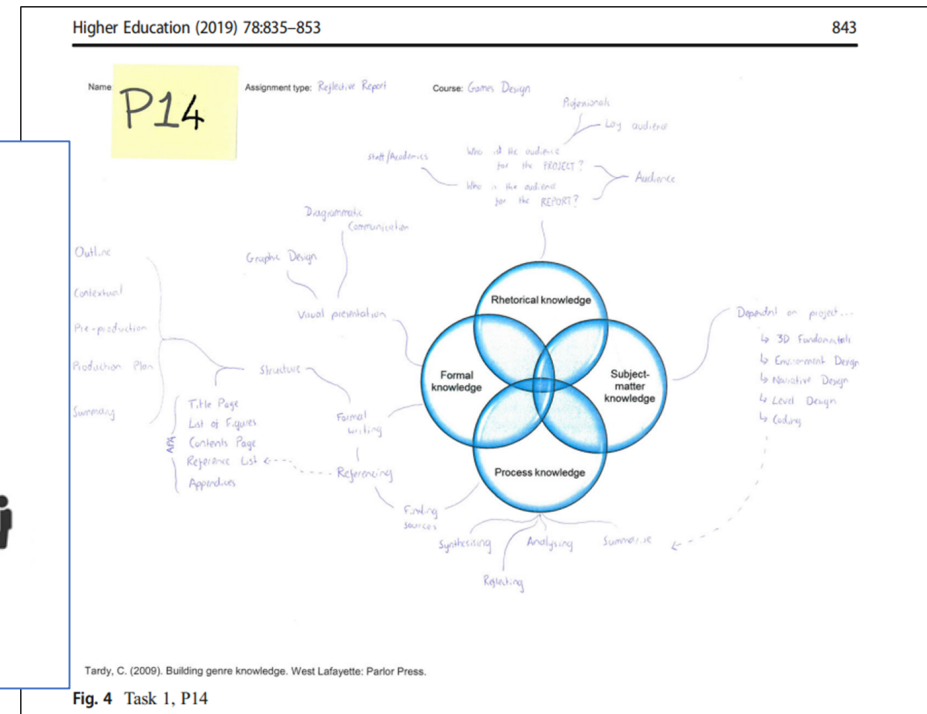- No explicit language / literacy policy

A systematic approach to designing collaborations

Logic model: our theory of change

Hub and spoke working model

Sample of subject lecturer's explanation of their assignment (McGrath, Negretti, & Nicholls, 2019)

Core elements

Students asked to think about examples of communication that they do, what roles they play

Students would start to write during the sessions

Academic literacy windows (Wingate, 2015)

Student work as the basis of our materials

Explicit use of lecturers' words as prompts for activities

Where possible, team-taught

Business intervention

How we met
New course leader, NSS improvement desired

Learning objectives:
to reflect on lessons learnt
to evidence theoretical frameworks in your reflections
to create coherence in writing through a 'golden thread'
to improve referencing and general accuracy (proofreading)

Enablers
enthusiastic colleague, new course leader
clear pedagogy to work within
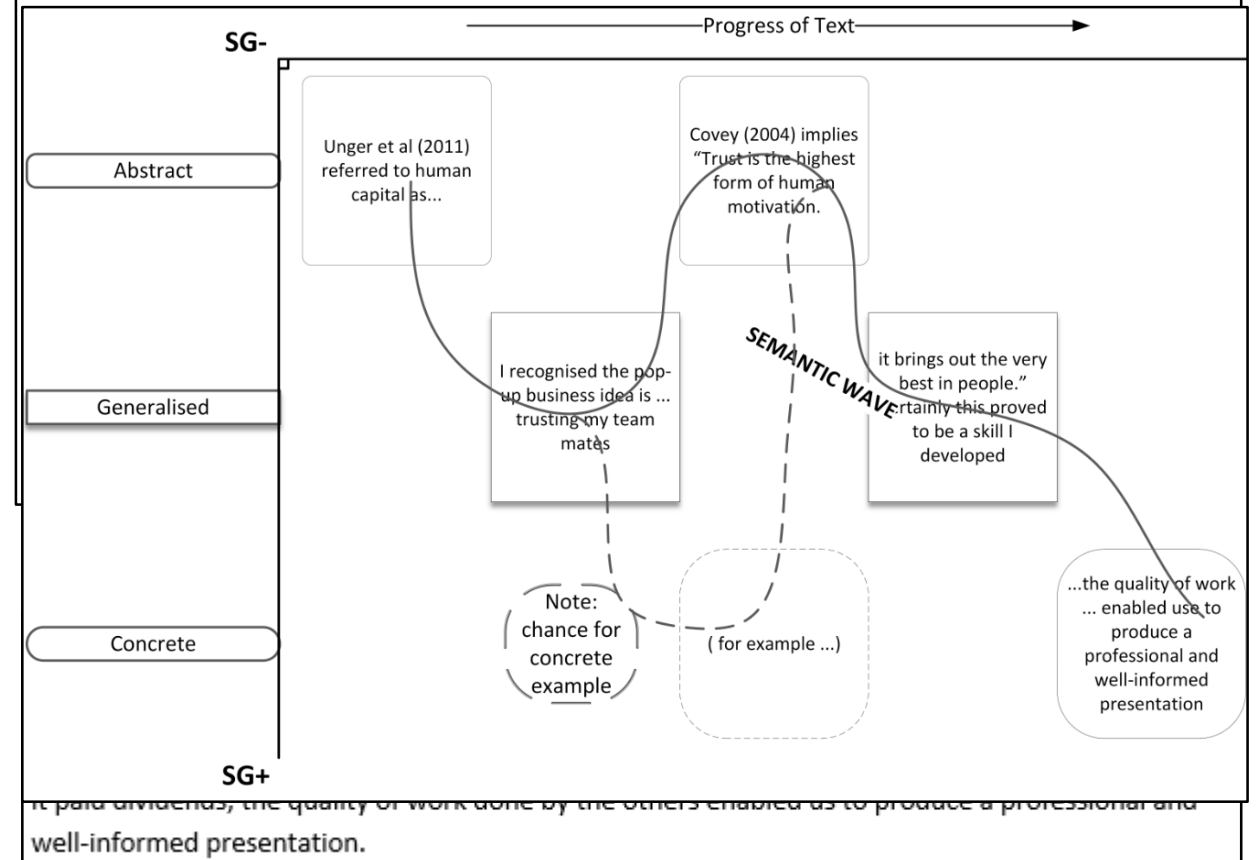students able to see themselves as good communicators
semantic waves as an accessible theory

Inhibitors
attendance (enabler for the project?)

What your lecturers value

"They've got theory underpinning it and at the end they pull it all together."

Education intervention

How we met:

Module running within our department, course & module lead focussing on attainment gap, extra hours provided for this goal

Learning objectives:

to support reading of complex texts;
to relate personal experience to theory;
to critically review their own learning experiences
to raise awareness of register

Enablers:

running sessions as both education and language content lecturer
extra teaching hours

Inhibitors:

running sessions as both education and language content lecturer
attendance

'I remember, when I was studying A-Level Sociology, that I was expected to memorise the names of numerous theorists and their theories'

'My experience of this style of learning was very positive as the reflection essential to PBL (Downing, Ning & Shin, 2011) provided a feeling of empowerment over my own development'
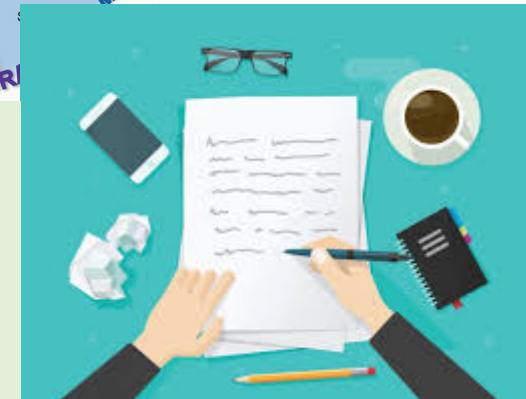
History intervention

How we met:

Departmental workshop using circles; major changes to the delivery model creating time

Learning objectives:

to have a point and get it across

to engage in the debate

to pick the right facts

Enablers:

awareness of language and writing

TIME – 12 extra hours of provision, of which we taught 6

integration of history module focus and ALL focus

Inhibitors:

attendance (enabler for the project?)

change!

Things historians say about academic writing in history

"how you engage in a debate"

"how you position yourself"

"independent judgement"

Thesis statements

"**Assess the importance** of **indigenous 'intermediaries'** for **European imperialism**"?

1. *In this essay I will assess the value of the intermediaries to the imperialist cause and consider the ulterior motives that lead them to work for a personal gain instead of legitimate government aid.*

2. *I will therefore look to demonstrate the crucial contribution that intermediaries played in the realisation of these aims, with reference to the political role of military recruits and local leaders in Africa, the economic*

3. Pattern of argument in a paragraph: evaluative words and phrases and linking

As Cooper states, taking political control over regions in Africa was a relatively straight-forward task for the European powers given their diplomatic and military strength. However, maintaining this control over the long term could not be possible through the threat of further military intervention from the metropole alone. Parsons points out two main reasons why this was the case. Firstly, the fact that empire was designed to be "run on the cheap" meant that minimal European military presence was deployed from the metropole, and having to send costly reinforcements was to be avoided at all costs. In addition, because the experience of most Africans under colonial rule was one of taxation and forced labour, this meant that the threat of colonial resistance was a very real possibility. Given these circumstances, recruiting indigenous intermediaries into army and police roles was important to provide security against the threat of uprisings. There are many examples of the Europeans reliance upon intermediaries to provide security to their rule, for instance the Nyasaland police force's contribution to ensuring that hut tax was paid, workers remained disciplined and that European property was protected . Yet perhaps the greatest example of this indigenous importance is in the Rhodesia British South Africa Police (BSAP). The white settler presence in Rhodesia was so small that it could not possibly constitute the coercive arm of the state. Controlling the African majority therefore required the training and recruitment of indigenous Africans who by 1914 already outnumbered Europeans as members of the BSAP. An important point that Stapleton also makes is that members of the BSAP were often the targets of anti-colonial violence during the 1960s and 1970s. This indicates just how important, in the minds of the indigenous people, that collaboration from members of their own population was in maintaining British political control over Zimbabwe. Using indigenous intermediaries to coerce the colonised people therefore played a vital role in allowing the European powers to maintain political control over their overseas possessions.

Summary: enabling and inhibiting factors

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equal partnership

motivation to collaborate

research plan and ethical approval

support from above

access to resources

ALL team developing mutual understanding (our CPD)

constantly changing environment

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mismatch of expectations

time and timing

student absence

difficulty of accessing impact information

constantly changing environment

So what?
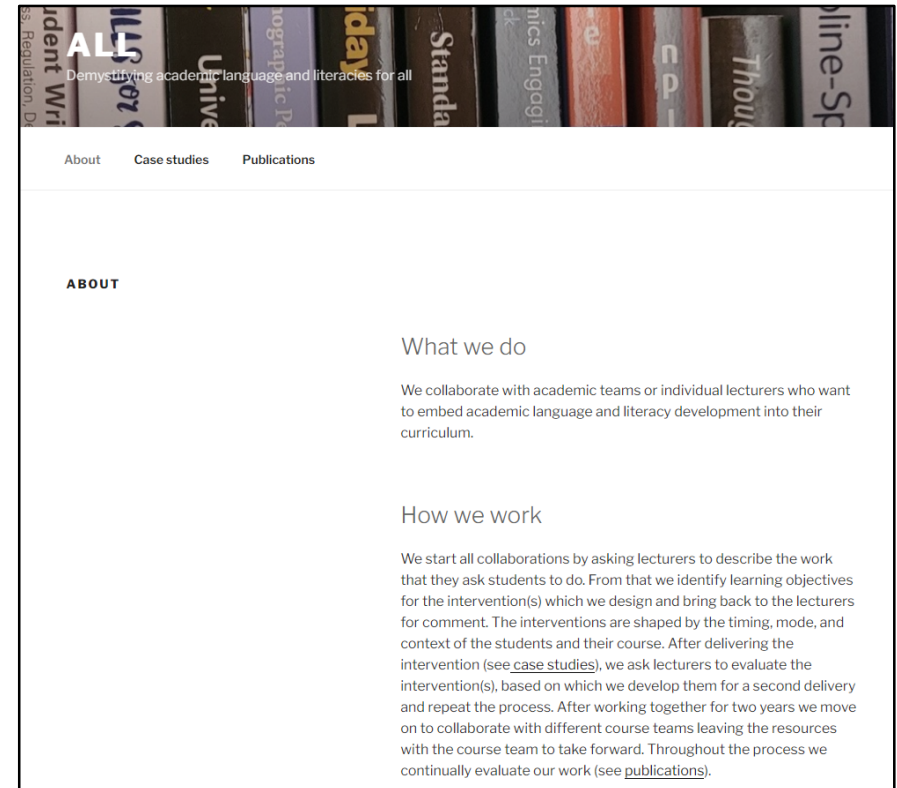
be available to 'solve' other's problems

be explicit about the theories that underpin our pedagogies
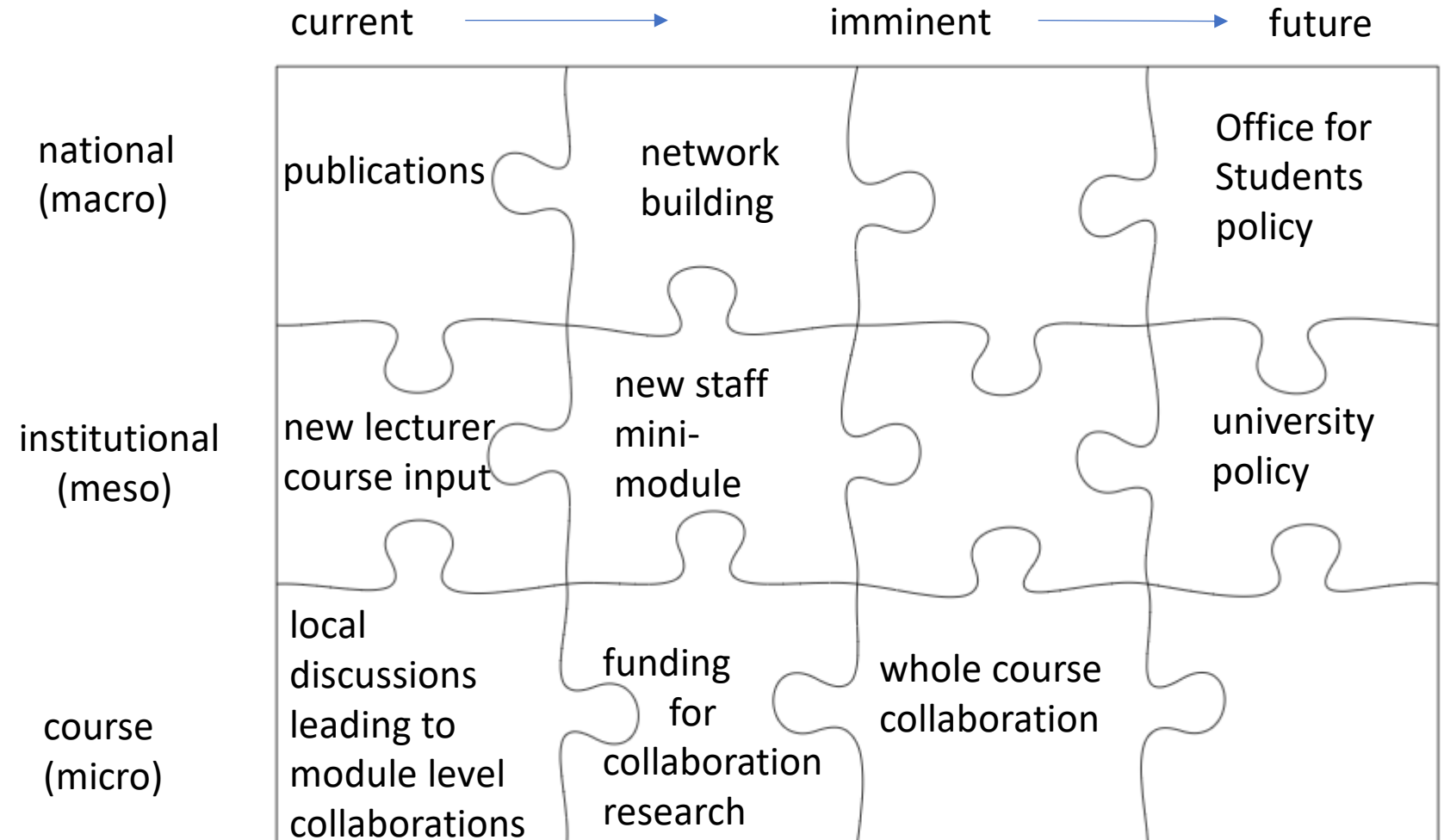
apply for all available resources

present your work

publish

don't overcommit

Next steps - sustainability strategy:

current →　imminent →　future

	current	imminent	future
national (macro)	publications	network building	Office for Students policy
institutional (meso)	new lecturer course input	new staff mini-module	university policy
course (micro)	local discussions leading to module level collaborations	funding for collaboration research	whole course collaboration	

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Questions?