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Alderson, J. Charles (ed.), *The Politics of Language Education. Individuals and Institutions.* Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2009. ISBN 978-1847691422. 208 Seiten, 31,99 Euro.

Charles Alderson is a renowned international expert on language testing and language policy. His most recent edited collection, however, focuses on the micropolitics of language education, and thus comes as a surprise. The author explains his interest in this topic in convincing terms: While macropolitics and education policies determine which languages are to be taught and how they are to be assessed, the actual reality of language education, of curricular change and innovation looks much more complex and is far more than a simple realization of educational objectives and standards developed on paper. Language policies, projects and programmes are, the author argues, filtered through the agendas of institutions and individuals and thus become enmeshed with *micropolitics*, i.e., conflicting or vested interests, power relations, needs and ambitions. These processes become even more complex in international cooperative ventures where neither side is fully conscious of the socio-cultural and political background and hence the agenda of the other.

Alderson's call for an increased awareness and analysis of the multidimensionality and complexity of language education aligns him with several other authors who have either adopted a macropolitical perspective (Pennycook 1994, Philipson 1992), complexity and systems theory (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008) or ecological metaphors (Kramsch 2003, Clarke 2007). His and his contributors' perspectives differ in that they focus on fairly concrete organizational structures mediated by interacting and meaning-generating individuals who, at least to some degree, pursue their own agendas and thus behave more or less in accordance with social norms or in wholly deviant ways.

In order to shed light on the behavior of individuals in organizations in different socio-cultural contexts, Alderson introduces the reader in the first chapter to psychological, managerial and cross-cultural theories. His main questions in this section are: How do individuals understand and manipulate the system in which they work? What kind of interests do the different parties involved have? How, and under what circumstances, do they pursue them? What kind of strategies do they employ?

The case studies that follow come from authors who report on projects, programmes and policies in a variety of institutional, national and international contexts. In the second chapter Davies reports, for instance, on two different language educational projects – one in Nepal, the other one in West Africa - where ELT consultants and government representatives of the respective country worked together. Whereas in the first context the consultants managed to learn about local interests and create a compromise between their professional goals and the political agendas of the authorities, the consultants in the second case did not. As a result, the changes proposed by them were at first halfheartedly adopted and then quickly abandoned.

In the third chapter, Hunter discusses the role of project consultants for English language education in the context of developmental aid. He argues, like Davies, that the characteristics of any receiving – in this case resource-poor and post-colonial – context have to be studied and analyzed in order to avoid conflicts of interests, misunderstandings, face threats and the loss of time and money. In the particular case he reports on, the national 'elite' was not particularly interested in the 'greater good', i.e. the goal of developmental aid. Instead, the members of the 'elite' wanted to maintain their social status and the advantages which were partly sustained by their own bilingualism. Nevertheless, their interests and face needs had to be respected, given their powerful roles in decision-making processes. In order to capture these micropolitical aspects Hunter explores the field of political psychology. The author concludes from his case study that consultants should have clearly defined roles and obligations – as should all other partners in-

volved in projects – and give constant and corrective feedback on the development and implementation of the project. Only through a focus on *processes* can emergent patterns of micropolitics be attended to.

Kerr shifts the focus in Chapter Four from the target to the donor country by shedding light on the effects of macro-political decisions taken by the UK government in relation to English education projects in China. He looks particularly at the attempts and strategies employed by native English teachers in China to fit into and adapt to the changing directions and objectives in order to hold onto their jobs. Needless to say, they also struggled with the expectations of their Chinese hosts who, apart from pursuing their own agendas, did not always comprehend the nature, causes and aims of these changes.

In the fifth chapter, Little and Lazenby-Simpson turn to the relationship between immigration policy and language education in the European context. They report on a university-based initiative to provide English language classes to immigrants in Ireland. The institution was subsequently used by the government to fill a vacuum when immigration flows suddenly increased. However, it never received the financial and administrative support that would have been essential for its effectiveness and success. The institution and thus the educational and academic infrastructure that academics and teachers had constructed over the years were finally abandoned by the government when immigration policy changed.

Fulcher describes the effects of the marketization of British universities in the case of modern language departments in Chapter Six. He shows how one of the most marketable and profitable parts of these departments, the areas of EAP and ESP, first are evaluated as being non-academic, then are outsourced and turned into a profitable business provider cut off from (costly) research opportunities. Fulcher argues that the separation of EAP or ESP from university departments does not only constitute a disadvantage for EAP/ ESP teachers, but also leaves modern language departments who were complicit in the outsourcing process in an economically more vulnerable position.

In Chapter Seven, Crossery relates general macropolitics to the macro- and micropolitics of language education. The context of his case study is the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the extension of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to central and eastern Europe, which changed the role and status of English. He argues that although this situation would have called for a coherent international educational language policy, e.g., an agreement on language proficiency levels, the lack of awareness of contextual and historical specificities and the concomitant lack of coordination and regulation between the macro and micro levels of politics, however, impeded such development.

Buck's argument in Chapter Eight is of a more general kind. He attempts to show that language assessment is never a purely academic matter, but always constitutes a compromise between theoretical perspectives and institutional interests such as project givens, conflicting values and micropolitics. Coming to terms with this fact, he stresses, empowers language test developers to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate claims.

Pizorn and Nagy focus on the same historical context as Crossery, the changes in central Europe after 1989, but concentrate on the case of Hungary. They acknowledge the need for a reform of foreign language education at that time but argue that the technical, top-down approach adopted ignored the local history, interests and needs and thus resulted in a loss of a lot of time, money and effort.

Figueras, finally, focuses on the language policies of the European Union and the Council of Europe. He shows convincingly that the lack of informed translation between macro recommendations (see for example the *Common European Framework for Languages*) and institutional implementation leads to a regulatory vacuum that is easily filled by micropolitics, in this case the adoption of particular discourses without the concomitant practices. Since there is no institution that specifies and controls the fit between the two, textbooks, learning materials, assessment procedures and courses can thus be sold as meeting these standards when in fact they do not.

What surfaces in all these case studies is a lack of essential knowledge about local conditions or lack of motivation to learn about them, cross-cultural differences in power relations and values, an intersection of conflicting economic, political, institutional, professional and personal interests, the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their particular goals in and through organizations, the importance of face-saving needs, turf

wars and competition between departments and institutions, inertia within bureaucracies, plain incompetence, hidden agendas and, at times, even unscrupulous practices. While the authors do not condemn micropolitics as such, they do raise awareness of its unavoidable existence, nature and the disastrous consequences of unintended and counterproductive micropolitics. This includes not only the failure of reforms and projects and the resultant waste of resources, energy and effort. The well-being of students, it appears, is often a rather coincidental outcome in the everyday struggle for limited resources. In the end, learning seems to be dependent on the motivation and professionalism of individual teachers who, in turn, have to fight for their status quo in an institution – a perspective many foreign language teachers could probably empathize with immediately. It also becomes evident that in order to act professionally we do not only have to learn about the content of our profession, but also learn how to identify, interpret and deal with the different agendas of those in power.

Alderson's collection not only provides a refreshingly realistic perspective on our profession, but also stands out for its honesty and commitment to the generation of useful knowledge for practitioners. Very little has so far been done in this area. For this reason, there are few methodological instruments and analytical concepts that could systematize research and make results generalizable beyond the individual case. Although Alderson attempts to provide such a framework in the first chapter, the body of the book consists of isolated case studies with little analytical interconnection and an, albeit necessary, overload of contextual information, which makes the collection at times a bit challenging to read.

The editor himself addresses these shortcomings in the last chapter where he discusses practical, theoretical, methodological and ethical issues in researching and publishing accounts of the micropolitics of language education. He reports on his own difficulties in publishing articles of this sort. Although academically written, they are often judged to be at the edge of 'informative journalism' since the subtle, opaque and subjective nature of micropolitics makes it difficult to apply rigorous methodologies or qualitative approaches such as, for example, ethnography. Alderson argues, however, that 'informative journalism' might be a worthwhile beginning from which further interdisciplinary-based methodologies, theories and concepts could be developed. It is a good starting point for an increased awareness of our own positions as foreign language teachers, researchers in applied linguistics and consultants in language-related projects – particularly in an environment where ever more faculty members become adjunct, are outsourced or made redundant, and where universities and other educational institutions are increasingly becoming marketized and managerialized.

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