

**Alderson, J.C. (Ed.). (2009). *The politics of language education: Individuals and institutions*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters. 236pp. ISBN 978 1 84769 142 2.**

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This is an important new book presenting nine case studies on the micropolitical agendas of individuals and institutions involved in ELT projects in various parts of the world. It opens windows on some nefarious activities usually hidden from public eyes, but which may be well understood by those who work in the academic and professional worlds of (English) language education.

After a seven-page overview of the topic of micro-politics and a summary of the nine case studies, Alderson's first chapter sets the scene with a 37-page review of key concepts which provide a rationale for the book. He begins this with a dozen vignettes of misconduct by individuals or organisations involved in different sorts of ELT projects in various parts of the world, claiming that such "tales from the field" are simply not reported in publications about such projects (a matter which he discusses from his personal experience at more length in the final chapter in the book). He argues that there is a need for honest and open descriptions of the real process and outcomes of language education in specific cases, so that an appropriate and adequate theory of the politics of language education can eventually be developed. In this respect, he is following up the point made by Fishman (1994, p. 91) that language planning needs to be informed by ethnographic studies, and later by Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) and Baldauf (2006), although, interestingly, he does not refer to any of the standard works in the area of language policy and planning by these and other authorities. His review of background sources, however, is otherwise broadly based, taking into consideration key works in psychology, general education, organisational culture, etc.

This is followed by an explanation of the key distinction between macro- and micro-politics. Alderson quotes Blase (1991, p.1) that "micropolitics is about power and how people use it to influence others and to protect themselves." The rest of the chapter is taken up with consideration, from various theoretical positions, of how individuals interact with others and with organisations, concluding with a consideration of the nature of politics in commercial and quasi-commercial organisation, and in some educational contexts in particular. Table 1 sets out the broad details of each of the nine studies.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the discourse community in which Alderson is engaged, most of the chapters discuss projects concerning testing and evaluation. Nevertheless, the issues raised are of broader concern, as may be seen from some of the implications I have drawn from the chapters. It is impossible in a short review to cover all nine cases, so I have decided to focus on Chapter 6, partly because testing and evaluation are outside my specific research interests, but more particularly

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because the fate of foreign and English language teaching in British universities resonates with the current state of affairs in New Zealand's tertiary institutions.

**Table 1: The nine studies**

Ch.	Setting	Period	Focus of project	Implications
2.	a) Nepal b) West Africa	a) 1980s b) 1960s	a) survey of national ELT b) examination reform	Language is always a political issue, and professionals need to compromise sentimental with instrumental.
3.	Low income Asian country	1990s	INSET examinations textbooks	Delivery of ELT aid projects needs to focus on process, especially against a background of saving face.
4.	China	1990s	a) from teachers to trainers b) from trainers to managers	Intended plans and reforms will be implemented unpredictably to suit local political agendas.
5.	Ireland	a) 1990s b) 2000-2008	a) ESL to refugee immigrants b) ESL in Irish state schools	Governments need to develop policies that reflect real multicultural complexity.
6.	Two English universities	2000s	a) foreign language teaching b) teaching / testing of EAP	ELT and FLT have become commercialised and de-professionalised.
7.	NATO members (esp. Poland)	2002-2006	language coordination	Micropolitics can become the determining factor in international educational policymaking.
8.	Various	2000s	language test development	Local contexts should have a significant influence on all aspects of a test developer's work.
9.	a) Slovenia b) Hungary	a) 1990s b) 1990s	a) examination reform b) examination reform	Major (test) reforms must take political and personality factors into account.
10.	Europe	1996-2006	testing and accreditation	Unclear directives and top-down approaches have so far been unsuccessful, and have been severely criticised by professionals.

Glen Fulcher states that the aims of his chapter are firstly to describe the general picture of language education in UK with particular reference to modern foreign languages (MFL) and TESOL/EAP, and then to report on questionnaires sent in 2007 to 104 TESOL/EAP providers in UK universities, with a separate set of questions

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sent to three of the larger organisations soliciting universities to outsource their TESOL/EAP provision and to academic registrars of universities which had outsourced, or were about to. Both sets of questions are appended to the chapter. In his overview, he points out that there is a clear trend for MFL departments to cease language teaching and focus on literary or cultural studies, and an even more pronounced tendency for TESOL/EAP to be viewed more as a commercial than an academic activity. He illustrates these issues with reference to two case studies of (anonymous) universities; in the first of these, the costs of MFL have increased while central funding has been reduced, and EAP activities have cross-subsidised MFL departments. Neither the teachers of MFL nor of TESOL/EAP have academic status. He summarises by saying that the desire of universities for more and more international students means “not the organised mobility of mutual exchanges, but the spontaneous mobility of fee-paying individuals” (p.131). In his second example, EAP and applied linguistics were treated by the MFL professor newly-appointed to the School of Languages “purely as a commercial enterprise designed to generate funds for its School and the university” (p.132).

It was against this background that the survey of EAP providers was made, and Fulcher presents the findings in terms of organisation and activity, academic activity and entrepreneurship, staffing and provision, testing and outsourcing. In summary he states (p. 138-9) that TESOL/EAP teaching is becoming increasingly marginalised and commercialised, that staff are given few or no opportunities for scholarship or research, and programmes are subject to outsourcing to commercial providers. To explore the latter issue in more depth, a set of questions was sent to three of the main commercial organisations bidding for TESOL/EAP contracts. Two responses were received, both declining to address any of the questions. A similar fate awaited the survey of registrars at (an unstated number of) universities. In the light of this negativity (perhaps not surprising, given the somewhat aggressive tone of his questions), one might query the usefulness of including a discussion of the single substantive response that was received.

The chapter ends with a number of conclusions, all of which toll a sad bell for TESOL/EAP provision in UK universities. Senior management at universities may become convinced that TESOL/EAP provision is merely a sub-degree pre-university activity, and “administrators are easily tempted to de-professionalise the discipline in the search for new sources of income” (p.142). Many language centres cease to engage with scholarship and research, and the most successful TESOL/EAP units are those located within independent academic departments offering programmes at all levels. Fulcher ends by saying that TESOL/EAP units need to evaluate how their activities, academic programmes, and staffing policies rate in terms of the issues raised in this chapter.

Fulcher’s chapter, like several others, serves to remind readers that micropolitics is not a phenomenon that occurs merely at an individual level, or even as an internecine

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struggle for power within an office or a department. Rather, the perversion of ostensibly educational projects to serve self-interest can operate at the highest levels of any institutions – as the subtitle of the book clearly suggests – and universities can be tempted into degeneracy of this nature. We may not, of course, need to be told this in New Zealand, but the case studies discussed here can alert us to signs of its potential occurrence, and to take appropriate steps to avoid the negative consequences of power play. I hope that a wider readership of this ground-breaking new book will stimulate more, many more, critical case studies of the politics (or *realpolitik*) of language education.

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