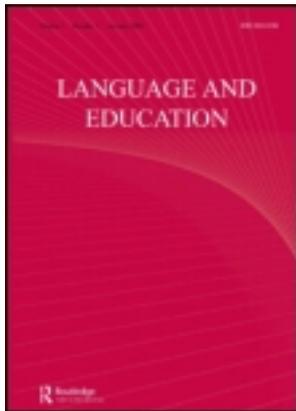


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A Review of "Negotiating language policies in schools: educators as policymakers"

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BOOK REVIEWS

Negotiating language policies in schools: educators as policymakers, edited by K. Menken and O. García, New York and London, Routledge, 2010, xiii + 278 pp., £95, ISBN 978-0-415-80207-9 (hardback); £34.99, ISBN 978-0-415-80208-6 (paperback); £34.99, ISBN 978-0-415-85587-4 (e-book)

Kate Menken and Ofelia García have edited an important volume on multilingual language policy. *Negotiating Language Policies in Schools: Educators as Policymakers* comprises 13 studies, mostly qualitative, which shift the discussion of language policy from a macro- to a micro-ideological discursive space. The voices and agencies of mostly – but not exclusively – teachers as policy-makers are richly textured with nuanced evidence throughout. The monograph resonates with insights from seven continents, including research from Australia, Chile, China, Ethiopia, France, India, Israel, Lebanon, New Zealand, Peru, South Africa, the UK and the US.

The foreword (Hornberger) and the introduction (Chapter 1, Menken and García) set the stage. Hornberger shares a field note from her visit to a unique Sepedi–English bilingual tertiary program at the University of Limpopo, South Africa in order to give readers a taste of two educators taking policy into their own hands. Menken and García’s introduction situates the volume through definition and metaphor while not forgetting to give the reader an encapsulated view of the constructs of language education policy to date. The editors adopt Spolsky’s (2004, 9) broad definition of language policy as ‘language practices, beliefs and management of a community or polity’ (cited in Menken and García, 2), refocusing it to the micropolitical ideologies and implementational spaces of teachers, administrators, and parents (re)constructing language education policy for their students at the level of practice. The metaphor which Menken and García adopt is policy as a multilayered onion (Ricento and Hornberger 1996), though the contribution of this book is to ‘*stir* the metaphorical onion’ (3; emphasis in original), suggesting a dynamic, nonlinear conception of policy rather than the proverbial – and otherwise more linearly conceived metaphors – of ‘ground-up’ or ‘bottom-up’ policy and practice processes.

The body of the book is divided into two parts; the conclusion comprises the third part. The individual identity and experiences of educators as guideposts to educational policy provide the focus for part one (Chapters 2–8), whereas social, contextual and situational lenses predominate in part two (Chapters 9–14). Each chapter has thoughtful questions and suggestions for action research that could contribute to graduate course work in language education policy.

In Chapter 2, Johnson and Freeman place the actors, US public school administrators from a large urban school district, at the centerstage of an action ethnography and policy discourse analysis. They show that through study and interpretation of policy documents, school administrators and teachers can find ways to interpret the documents to promote bilingualism despite challenges at all levels.

In Chapter 3, we move to the UK, where Creese analyzes classroom transcripts of interaction when content and language teachers are in the same classroom. In these classrooms, teachers negotiate shared implementational and ideological spaces as they (re)construct two policies – addressing individual learner needs and the integration of special-needs learners, including language minority students – in one classroom. Creese identifies hegemonic dynamics among teachers even when they go to great lengths to balance their positioning. Moreover, despite attempts to integrate special-needs and language minority learners, there remains evidence of their outsider status in the eyes of other students. Moreover, students still privilege frontal teaching and pedagogies of transmission, despite efforts to enact more collaborative learning structures.

In Chapter 4, Hélot analyzes the way two preservice teachers draw on their prior knowledge, beliefs about language and experiences to negotiate paradoxes of French language policies, which emphasize the value of foreign language education for French speakers while fostering monolingual French instruction for minority language speakers. The teachers' policies mediate, albeit not entirely, the Ministry of Education policy paradox.

In Chapter 5, Valdiviezo focuses on four Quechua teachers through an ethnographic lens. The teachers each voice beliefs and tap into personal experience to instantiate varied individual policies – some favorable and some unfavorable – with regard to Quechua language development. The work reflects and constitutes the inherent paradoxes in official policy, in this case Peru's bilingual education policy.

In Chapter 6, Bloch, Guzula, and Nkence explore the work of three South African teachers who reflect on ways to change themselves and their schools in order to more fully embrace the mother tongue language, literacy education and a balanced approach to reading instruction. Overcoming shortages of materials and a lack of government professional support, repositioning personal beliefs and subordinating English to the mother tongue during a reading lesson are clear challenges that teachers face daily.

In Chapter 7, English and Varghese, using case study methodology, demonstrate that the individual experience and personal identity of one elementary school teacher in the US who collaborates with an English as a second language teacher has positive results on the curriculum of language minority students. The researchers also discuss how district policy contradicts state policy, the former limiting multilingualism and the latter advocating for it, though not particularly in a proactive way.

In Chapter 8, Zhang and Hu record the efforts of three teachers of English in China as they implement a task-based language teaching reform and a communicative and interactive approach to learning. Depending on varying amounts of school-level support, teacher prior experience and belief vis-à-vis the reform agenda and teacher perceptions of learner needs, the teachers' work differed considerably.

In Chapter 9, Berryman, Glynn, Woller, and Reweti explore the concerted grassroots efforts of Māori teachers, families and communities in New Zealand to develop teaching practices which foster the revitalization of Māori language and culture. The discussion centers around culturally appropriate and responsive pedagogies that are identified by community stakeholders.

In Chapter 10, Zakharia uses ethnographic methods to analyze the effects of postwar reconstruction in a Shi'i school in politically conflicted Lebanon. Four French and English teachers are shown to transform the foreign language of instruction into a vessel for a critical pedagogy that focuses on sociopolitical community concerns.

In Chapter 11, Shohamy reports on three grassroots language policy initiatives in Israel which challenge the centralized, otherwise-top-down Ministry of Education language policy. The first is the teaching of spoken Arabic instead of Modern Standard

Arabic in Hebrew-medium schools, an attempt to develop communicative and germane language instruction. The second is a grassroots effort that supports three Arabic–Hebrew dual-language schools which attempt to foster a biliterate and bicultural student body and overcome the protracted political conflict within the schools. The third initiative is a grassroots effort to teach English in grade one by homeroom teachers. Largely successful, the shift has been led by parents and subverts the official policy of the Ministry of Education that states English should be taught by specialists, starting in grade five or six.

In Chapter 12, Ambatchew discusses the complexities of implementing a bold, determined statewide policy in Ethiopia that allows local schools to adopt ambient languages as media of instruction. Internal migration to schools which offer desired languages is discussed, as are modifications to classroom languages via code-switching.

In Chapter 13, Mohanty, Panda, and Pal examine the implementational spaces of teachers and administrators from two school districts in India – Orissa and Delhi. India has from 300–400 indigenous languages, but only 22 of them are granted official status despite the fact that India’s constitution states that every child has the right to be educated in the mother tongue. In each district, three languages are mandated for use in the schools: the regional language, Hindi and English. However, because of the large number of children who do not have any knowledge of these three languages, language teachers and administrators create policy which in practice resists top-down mandates. In so doing, they attempt to reach out to greater numbers of children.

In Chapter 14, Galdames and Gaete illustrate how an innovative approach to balanced literacy together with professional development for teachers to help them transition to the new approach fails to get results. Analysis indicates that the top-down nature of the implementation, while mediated by practitioners in many ways, does not provide space for teachers to construct a working understanding of the approach. Consequently, teachers reshape the approach to accommodate their teaching styles and the learning styles of their students in traditional phonics-based patterns, and the original initiative is in part resisted.

García and Menken author Chapters 15 and 16 which comprise part three, the conclusion to the book, appropriately named ‘Moving Forward’. They argue for a socially constructed, dynamic view of policy. They also suggest 10 guiding principles for educators, which chart a course into nonlinear ways of knowing by way of a sort of blueprint for moving forward. These are very practical ways for teachers to critically explore their individual identities, experiences and social, situational and contextual (re)constructions. These are a gift for graduate students of policy, language and education and the logical hyphenated, interdisciplinary spaces among these disciplines because the principles give the actors ways to operationalize critical – and possibly new but certainly organized – habits of mind, even nascent positionings in a developing nonlinear and dynamic approach to language policies.

Menken and García’s book, therefore, lays the groundwork for complexity theorists to begin the work of remapping our understanding of status, corpus and acquisition planning. The book, then, is a timely addition to a growing interest in reframing applied linguistics as a complex system (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008). Indeed, Menken and García move the study of language policy into an ideological space characterized by dynamic, adaptive, nonlinear, multidimensional behaviors by educators stirring the onion across the world.

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Write dance in the early years, 2nd ed., by Ragnhild A. Oussoren, Los Angeles, CA, and London, Sage, 2010, 128 pp., £85.00/\$120.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-84920-138-4; £27.99/\$47.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-84920-139-1

It is always exciting to come across books that incorporate imaginative use of dance and music in the teaching of other areas. This book adopts a very personal approach to using the arts in early childhood education to enhance the teaching and learning of writing – it combines all the elements that make learning fun, such as storytelling, music, movement and art, in a process the author calls ‘scrimbling’ (an invented word describing working with a variety of materials on a writing surface). One of the lessons incorporates using water, and others suggest ‘scrimbling’ in shaving cream. A comprehensive list of materials is provided at the beginning of the book.

Write Dance in the Early Years appears to be a personally devised pedagogy by the writer who has hit upon a way of interesting children in writing with dance, music and storytelling as catalysts. It is obvious that this methodology has been a personal quest by an imaginative educator who has generously passed it on through this book. The release of a second edition, plus translation into six languages, is testimony to its success.

The motivation for the book stems from the belief that children in modern society have fewer opportunities for play, outdoor activities and physical manipulation than in the past. Hence, the movement, action and drawing activities are to provide whole-body experiences which are aimed to teach skills that assist in handwriting, such as coordination, rhythm, wrist strength and flexibility, balance between tension and relaxation, control of speed and direction of movements, control of pressure and concentration.

It is a carefully constructed narrative that scaffolds writing-skill development through dance, music, play and creativity. A CD is included with songs that accompany each story in the two sections, entitled ‘Home’ and ‘Funfair’. Each section has a group of narratives that begin describing the activity – a story, a song with words to learn, a chart of actions to each line, ‘scrimbling’ instructions, line illustrations of the movement pathways and a section called ‘Theme Play’ – along with ideas for games and follow up activities. There is a lot to interest children, and the instructions are clear. It is a tight framework with not much room for improvisation, although the ‘scrimbling’ in a variety of media does allow for a range of personal expression.