
Phyllis Franklin, David Laurence, and Elizabeth B. Welles, eds. *Preparing a Nation's Teachers: Models for English and Foreign Language Programs* NY: The Modern Language Association of America, 1999. 423p.

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Change is always the issue. To embrace the work, worry, and ego threat which is integral to change, professors must feel that the end result is professionally and personally valuable. Having taught or studied in well over a dozen foreign language departments and English departments, I believe that the MLA's 1999 book, *Preparing a Nation's Teachers: Models for English and Foreign Language Programs*, presents an accurate view of what is. I am not convinced that the glimmer of what ought to be is a bright enough beacon to gain trust where it will matter most: with the professors of those departments. However, it is worth reading in the same way that looking in a mirror can be helpful. The book should have wide appeal to its target audience of those engaged in educating future teachers of foreign languages and English, whether in colleges of education or in the content area departments.

Ostensibly, "language" professors and "literature" professors are all teaching usage and culturally approved norms of communication, and doing it via the literary canon as soon as students' linguistic capabilities will tolerate it. *Preparing a Nation's Teachers* gives lie to that assumption. First, there is not always agreement on exactly what is "approved."

According to an old saying, "The British and the Americans are separated by a common language." Differences in vocabulary, intonation patterns, pragmatics, and slang, among other things, contribute to misunderstandings among speakers of the many dialects of American English and British English, as well as the many versions of foreign languages. There is also the same kind of separation between various schools of "language" instruction and "literature" instruction both in college English departments and in foreign language/literature departments.

The book documents the fact that the teaching of literature continues to be more prestigious than the teaching of language in both kinds of departments. That view is supported no doubt at least in part by supply and demand: there are generally many fewer literature courses available to teach than there are language courses. Most who earned a Ph.D. in English or a foreign language did so by a thorough investigation of a subfield of literature. Consequently, they may wish to continue their involvement in literature by teaching it. Many will say that they consider language teaching to be basic skill-building and far beneath their level of expertise in the language. Moreover, the teaching of such basic courses is not re-

lated in a direct way to the literary research most would prefer to be doing, reinforcing their view that teaching language is “service” not “privilege.”

This split in prestige and its consequences is well-documented in this book with an introductory overview of the school reform movement and its impact on higher education and then six case studies of university English departments followed by six case studies of university foreign language departments. While there are important differences among the departments examined, their inherent sameness is what is striking. They all show the split in prestige of language versus literature and their prime interest is getting numbers of students to remain in the language part of the program long enough to swell the ranks of the students of literature.

The book moves on to assessment considerations, skillfully described by renowned English and foreign language assessment experts. However, it is only the final section of the book that provides glimpses of tantalizing possibilities for genuine changes within these two types of departments as they cope with a changing mandate. Higher education in English and foreign languages has historically been for a sort of “ivory tower elite” who could afford a life of the mind apart from mundane considerations. As the population of students reaching college has grown more egalitarian, diverse, and, consequently, practical in orientation, proportionally more of the students in these two departments are there to become teachers of the subject, hence the title of the book. Of course, such lowly ambitions are scorned by their “real” professors, i.e., those who are privileged to be teaching literature classes, or wish they were.

This debate almost wholly misses the point: language is for communication among real people regarding issues of genuine import to the participants. Because more and more of the issues revolve around business, science, technology, economics and other pragmatically oriented fields, both English and foreign language departments are falling on increasingly hard times in finding populations eager for their literature courses. This may be due to the perception by students that those courses are irrelevant to earning a living and coping with a fast-paced, complex world. Fewer students currently prize literature as a fountain of solutions to their problems than was true a generation ago. Instead, students flock to communications departments, seen both as more exciting and as more useful. The issue is one of focus.

I agree with Franklin et al. in their proposals of productive new directions. Instead of the split focus on language versus literature, English and foreign language departments should be looking at ways to integrate the teaching of language and literature with those fields in which students wish to function. That includes teaching new teachers to teach in such fields using well-honed English and/or

foreign language skills to satisfy communication functions, and literature to enrich the dialog. Some solid plans for accomplishing that integration can be found in this last and most valuable section.

I highly recommend this set of case studies and helpful analyses of prestigious programs. It is most significant for its bold exploration of current alternatives, and for avoiding the temptation to be content merely to document and analyze. Moreover, it is enjoyable to read, peppered as it is with anecdotes and supported with references. ✨