

From the Guest Editors

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This collection, written by established leaders in the field, brings together six insightful essays on the role of reading in reconfiguring foreign language programs at universities. The volume aims to continue discussions about the Modern Language Association (MLA) Ad Hoc Committee's (2007) report "Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World" while focusing specifically on the issues underlying the complexities of second foreign language reading. The report has served as a major ground for vigorous debates, and it is our hope that the volume advances our understanding and stimulates further discussion and research about the theoretical and practical issues concerning reading in the foreign language curriculum. We feel that *Reading in a Foreign Language* is the perfect centralized venue for these diverse perspectives.

All of the contributions in this volume are written by authors who were carefully selected because of their research and/or practice. We asked the authors to begin the essay with a review of their different academic positions related to the topic. We invited them to respond to the MLA report while highlighting the role of reading, a critical ingredient to any consideration about transfiguring language programs.

The collection opens with an essay, by Elizabeth Bernhardt, entitled "A Reaction to the 2007 MLA Report," which provides a comprehensive and compelling analysis of the report while simultaneously calling for more collaborative research on the topic. She argues that key variables involved in structural changes include respect, collaboration, and science. Keiko Koda, in "The Role of Reading in Fostering Transcultural Competence," offers insightful and plausible ways to transform theory into practice. She specifically addresses how reading instruction could play a significant role in fostering *transcultural competence*, and her suggestions are substantiated with data driven research inquiries.

In his essay on revisiting the MLA report, William Grabe explores an impressive scope of perspectives driven, in part, by his experience in an applied linguistics department. He debates the limitations of the report by addressing a lack of interest in student needs and motivations and calls for a more instrumental approach to transforming language programs. JoAnn Hammadou Sullivan echoes Bernhardt's earlier comments on collaboration as she carefully presents and

examines varied examples of collaboration from her experiences in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures at the University of Rhode Island. The real scenarios and challenges are detailed with specific outcomes, which could be tailored to different language programs. Ginger Marcus provides authentic examples, from the Japanese program at Washington University in St. Louis, of how a carefully-planned reading curriculum contributes to overall linguistic competence and deepens cultural knowledge. Her descriptions serve as a successful model for other language programs to follow.

Finally, Diana Frantzen, well known for her insightful contributions in applied linguistics as well as for her commitment to bridging research and practice, eloquently discusses how reading is the most “natural” skill that could serve to unify a program, a department, even an institution. Her perspectives bring together the incisive scope of essays in this volume as she generates enthusiasm for reconfiguring foreign language programs.

On the whole, the commentaries provide a triangulated perspective on approaching crucial curricular matters facing Foreign Language Departments. They combine up-to-date insights and ideas from the areas of theory, research, and pedagogical practices while considering student and faculty needs, inclusiveness, and the array of institutional challenges experienced by US universities today. In this manner, we hope to stimulate ongoing debate and future efforts to foster reading development and literacy skills within all levels of foreign language curricula.

We want to thank the contributors for accepting the invitation to share their ideas with the readers of *Reading in a Foreign Language*. As is evident from the long list of positions held by each author, they are busy people! We are extremely grateful to the authors for taking the time to write the essays. We hope your dedication to this topic is magnetic to all. We also want to thank Megan Havard for her work as the guest editorial assistant of this volume, Zhijun (David) Wen and Hanbyul Jung for their web production work, and Richard Day and Thom Hudson for publishing this collection in *Reading in a Foreign Language*.