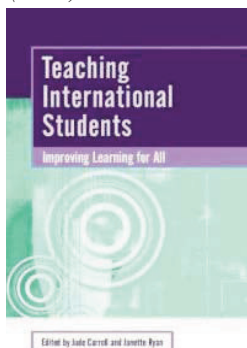


## ***Teaching International Students: Improving Learning for All.***

Janette Ryan (Author), Jude Carroll (Author) and  
Janette Ryan (Editor) London: Routledge. \$49.18  
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Reviewed by

*Lauren Miller Griffith, Central Michigan University  
(USA)*



The fourteen contributors to this edited volume put forth a powerful concept. They argue that the struggles faced by international students in the classroom can be a barometer for the rest of our students, or, as the title of the first chapter puts it, “canaries in the coal mine.” Being attuned to the needs and difficulties of international students can often be an

early alert system for the rest of the class.

While some of the challenges that international students face seem to be unique, in reality, most of them have correlates with domestic students’ experiences. For example, international students may be struggling to overcome a language barrier, but native speakers too are learning the nuance of a disciplinary language. Using “plain English” or providing a glossary of key disciplinary jargon are two suggestions from the book that would help both groups of learners. Of course, readers should remember that it is not just a difference in language but differences in communication styles can also impede intercultural communication (see also Tannen, 1990, p. 201-2). In a similar example, the authors point out that most college students experience stress as they move into this new phase of cognitive and emotional development. However, international students must do so in a new culture without their usual support network all the while knowing that continued renewal of their visas is dependent upon adequate academic progress.

Because pressure to succeed is high, international students are at an increased risk for stress related problems, including mental health issues, and need appropriate support. This is especially true during their initial year of study and faculty/staff working with international students should be aware of the signs of culture shock. Framing the international student's experience in terms of three levels of shock is valuable for thinking about how the culture, language, and academic setting might contribute to disequilibrium in the new

environment. It is unfortunate that this framework only appears in the final chapter of the text, but it is nonetheless a useful heuristic.

With a focus primarily on the UK, American readers might find it surprising to learn that our percentage of international students is relatively small compared to institutions of higher education in England or Australia. According to the text, international students comprise a mere three percent of our students, yet most of us with classroom experience in the US can attest to the importance of recognizing international student' unique needs such as understanding norms about plagiarism. What I had not realized prior to reading this volume was the alignment between best practices for educating international students and general instructional design (see Chickering & Gamson, 1987).

A real strength of this text is the prevalence of practical steps that can be taken to enhance learning for international students as well as the rest of the class. Upon a cursory reading it might seem as if the authors are suggesting we reduce rigor by excessively scaffolding students’ learning; however, they emphatically reject such an interpretation. Rather, they are asking their readers to carefully review their teaching practices and assessment criteria to ensure that they are not unfairly disadvantaging one group of students. This applies not only to our international students, but also to other nontraditional or underrepresented groups that may not yet have the cultural capital demanded by our institutions (Collier & Morgan, 2008; see also Gabriel, 2008).

The authors’ focus on cultural capital is an outstanding feature of this book. This perspective demands that we critically consider the nonmonetary assets that allow one to progress through a specific social field. The authors point out that international students have developed a great deal of cultural capital that is functional within their home environments; however, it is often poorly aligned with the cultural capital most valued in the academic setting of their host country. Rather than treating these students as if they are deficient, we should aid them in converting this so-called capital into a form that is more adaptive for their new social field. Learning to navigate a new academic context is like learning to play a game that has new rules and strategies. Teachers can help their international students by being as explicit as possible about the rules of the game.

One of the weaknesses of this book is that the authors, while stressing the applicability to all students, seem to focus predominately on Asian students. The reader is warned that while acquiring information about

student's home cultures is valuable, when done in a piecemeal fashion the resulting picture may be more of a stereotype than true understanding. Kam Louie, author of the chapter "Gathering cultural knowledge: useful or use with care," suggests that instructors engage in a cultural critique of themselves at the same time that they ask international students to do so. The ideal approach here, according to the author, is to help students develop a meta-cultural sensitivity, allowing them to see various cultures as systems with both affordances and constraints that can be used to navigate social life in their host country. This is a wonderful suggestion; however, subsequent chapters occasionally fall into the very traps described by Louie, reducing cultural complexity to a list of stereotypical behaviors and attitudes.

Another criticism of the book perhaps stems from my context as an American educator who has taught at a series of predominately white institutions (PWIs) with a relatively small percentage of international students. As I read this book, I couldn't help picturing the classes that each of the authors were describing. In my mind's eye, each class has a significant number of international students. Some of the learning tasks they describe might work extremely well in such scenarios, but in a classroom with only one or two international students, the same activities would either be unfeasible or be subject to criticism that the teacher is singling out the international students and forcing them to represent an entire cultural group.

In conclusion, this book represents a genuine attempt at integrating an often-marginalized student

population into the center of our classroom efforts. The authors make a sound case for how such practices can benefit all students, whether or not internationalizing the curriculum is an explicit goal of the institution. While the volume's utility probably increases in direct proportion to the number of international students in one's classroom, it is nonetheless an excellent read for any instructors seeking to improve their practice.

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### About the Reviewer:

Lauren Miller Griffith, PhD, is an instructional designer at the Faculty Center for Innovative Teaching, Central Michigan University. Dr. Griffith may be reached at [griff2lm@cmich.edu](mailto:griff2lm@cmich.edu)

### *Academic Writing: A Handbook for International Students (3rd Ed.)*

Stephen Bailey (2011). London and New York: Routledge. 292 pages. ISBN 978-0-415-59581-0, \$36.26

Reviewed by  
Krishna Bista and Pamela Shultz  
Arkansas State University, U.S.A.

For many international students, academic writing is a significant challenge because of the rules used in Standard English. Writing in academia consists of producing college essays, reflections, reports, and research papers which all require a working knowledge of the English language. Nevertheless, English Composition instructors, English as a Second Language

(ESL) program staff, and freshmen international students will find Bailey's book *Academic Writing* text a helpful resource manual both in and out of class.

*Academic Writing* is organized into four sections: the first introduces the stages of the writing process; part two is related to writing skills; part three discusses accuracy; and part four provides sample writings and writing templates. The selected readings and references come from authentic texts and journals. Additional learning materials such as extra readings, practice

