

# ***TEACHING ENGLISH TO STUDENTS FROM CHINA***

**Review by Peter Chan and Joyce Tan**

Brigham Young University—Hawaii

---

*TEACHING ENGLISH TO STUDENTS FROM CHINA*. Edited by Lee Gek Ling, Laina Ho, J. E. Lisa Meyer, Chitra Varaprasad, & Carissa Young. Singapore University Press 2003. Available in the U.S. from the University of Hawaii Press, \$20.00. Pp. 192. ISBN 9971-69-263-5

This book is a collection of articles written by teachers at the Center for English Language Communication of the National University of Singapore, addressing specific issues pertaining to teaching English to students from the People's Republic of China (PRC). The foreword states that authors of the book have over ten years of experience in teaching more than six thousand Chinese students who are from a wide range of academic backgrounds—from secondary school students to postgraduates. Hence, this book is useful to those whose work is related to teaching English to students from the PRC. For the most part, this book achieves what it intends in helping language educators “get to know PRC students better,” and design teaching materials to specifically meet PRC students' needs. It can help readers avoid some common stereotyping about PRC students and springboard into more effective instruction.

Chapter 1 is especially helpful in giving a historical overview of English teaching in China for the past century —its changing English language policies for college students, the predominant use of the grammar-translation model over the communicative approach, and its present focus on developing strong reading skills to gain information. Chapters 2 to 4 advocate using learner diaries as a reflective tool to enhance metacognitive awareness and discover learning strategies. Each of these chapters suggests different ways of introducing and using learner diaries, reporting through email or a weekly reflection paper. The purposes for writing these diaries also varies—to check grammar, help students to think about their learning strategies, or establish good rapport with students. Chapters 5, 7, and 8 review the use of instructional methods such as group work, oral strip stories, and children's literature in teaching Chinese students.

Chapter 5 is especially advantageous in clarifying some of the misconceptions related to Chinese students' attitude towards class participation. It corrects the misconception that Chinese students tend to avoid confrontation in order to maintain group harmony. In surveying 165 students from China and based on her own teaching experience, Meyer finds that PRC students are willing to state their disagreements with peers openly and they also welcome group work tasks and feedback. She indicates that these students can be forthright in their expressions due to the increased exposure to Western ideas and cultural influences. These are accurate findings because even within China, Western-style classroom participation and discovery activities are becoming more common as the government encourages teachers to be more creative in their instruction.

As mentioned throughout the book and most thoroughly examined in Chapter 6, studies reported in this book were conducted in Singapore—a multiracial society with Chinese as the dominant race (over 70%) but who use English as the lingua franca. Thus, the findings and even writing style reflect the local context. However, academics from other native English-speaking countries should still regard this quality work as a valuable reference. Chapter 9 informs readers, particularly those who are not familiar with China, about the different pronunciation problems between the Southern and Northern Chinese. The last two chapters are thoughtful investigations of the importance of learning strategies in second language acquisition and their results may be generally applied to the acquisition of second languages other than English.

Overall, this soft-cover, 192-page book is informative, accurate, and pragmatic in its approach. Although many of the learning and teaching strategies mentioned can be used for any L2 learner in the world, we particularly recommend this book as an important source of knowledge for those who are teaching ESL students from China.

### **About the Reviewers**

*Peter Chan is an Assistant Professor of Instructional Technology at Brigham Young University—Hawaii, and his research interests include using technology to assist language learning. Joyce Tan teaches ESL at Brigham Young University—Hawaii. Her professional interests include ESL curriculum design and effective pedagogy.*