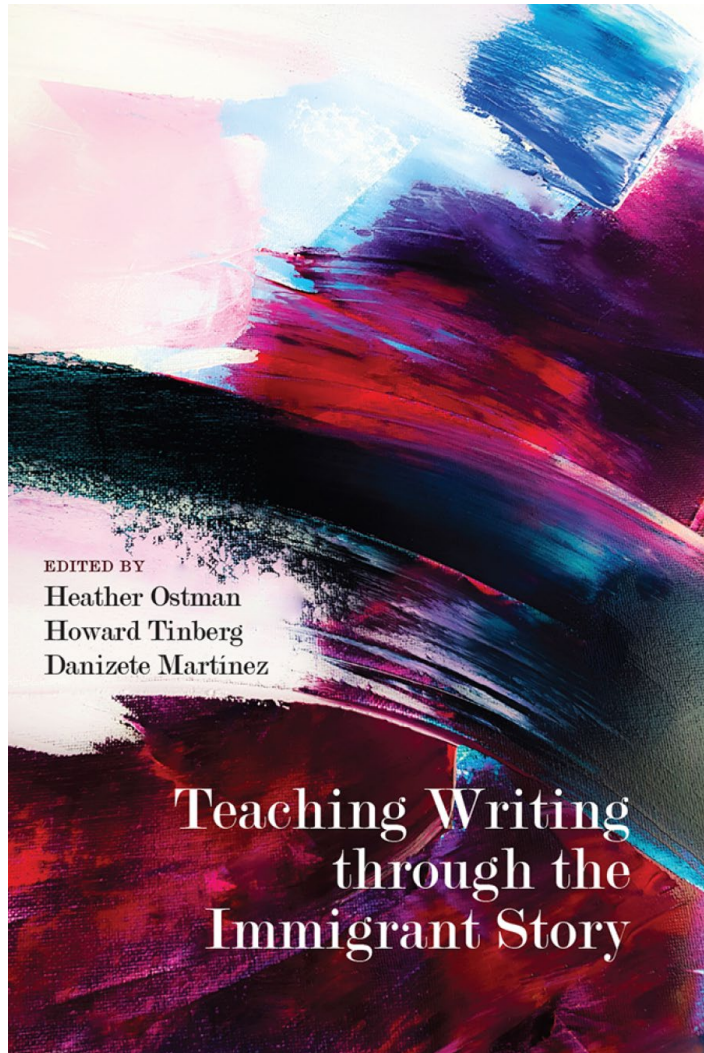


Review of Heather Ostman, Howard Tinberg, and Danizete Martínez's *Teaching Writing Through the Immigrant Story*

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Building on a growing body of scholarship that advocates for student-centered approaches in composition pedagogy, Heather Ostman, Howard Tinberg, and Danizete Martínez advance a narrative-based framework in *Teaching Writing Through the Immigrant Story* that centers the voices of immigrant students in U.S. higher education. Each contributor to the collection presents their course designs, demonstrating how the immigrant narrative serves as a powerful strategy for teaching writing and fostering active, collective knowledge-making. While their individual practices offer concrete real-life examples, all contributors assert that composition classrooms, as public spaces, must cultivate inclusive environments where diverse immigrant narratives are not only welcomed but are critically examined through intentionally designed course frameworks. These pedagogical spaces enable students to participate in political discourse rooted in their lived experiences while prompting them to critically analyze the dynamics of power and privilege through reflective writing. By foregrounding immigrant stories, this collection enriches ongoing discussions of positionality in composition and rhetoric studies—anchored in seminal works like Deborah Brandt et al.’s “The Politics of the Personal: Storying Our Lives Against the Grain” and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater’s “Turning in upon Ourselves: Positionality, Subjectivity, and Reflexivity in Case Study and Ethnographic Research”—by

encouraging both instructors and students to recognize how we are shaped by, and can actively reshape, the world to create a more equitable society.

Few other books align their pedagogical principles with their writing style as effectively as this one. *Teaching Writing Through the Immigrant Story* is rich with first-person narratives from contributors, editors, and students alike, along with course designs, student examples, candid evaluations of these practices, and an overview of related scholarship in every chapter. The editors begin the book compellingly by sharing their personal journeys to the U.S., setting the stage for the narratives of other contributors and student writers throughout the collection. The book is organized into two sections, “Situating the Discussion” and “Teaching Through the Stories,” which

mirror the pedagogical shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. The first section features three chapters examining how immigrant educators' backgrounds shape their classrooms, with a particular emphasis on developmental writing pedagogy. The second section, comprising six chapters, explores practical strategies for integrating students' immigrant stories into the composition curriculum, assessing these approaches from both student and educator perspectives. Each case illustrates how this collaborative knowledge production transforms students from passive consumers of text into producers of powerful discourse, cultivating socially and politically engaged critical thinkers.

The first chapter, Sibylle Gruber's "I am an Immigrant: Cultural Multiplicities in U.S. Educational Systems," serves as an illuminating opening to the book, exemplifying the kind of immigrant storytelling that the collection seeks to promote. It also introduces critical pedagogical approaches aimed at generating meaningfully inclusive classroom environments that validate and amplify student storytelling, a theme that resonates throughout the subsequent chapters. Gruber opens the chapter with a personal reflection on the complexities of being perceived as "different" during her transition from Austria to the United States (13). She highlights the sharp shift in her social and economic status, as well as the linguistic barriers marked by her accented speech, and demonstrates how integrating her personal experiences with academic research offers practical strategies for effectively engaging with international and immigrant students in her classrooms.

Gruber emphasizes that understanding the nuanced challenges faced by both immigrant teachers and students is crucial, particularly within evolving cultural paradigms, shifting public perceptions of immigration, and, at times, hostile attitudes toward immigrants. She also warns that classroom dialogues—whether among students or between students and teachers—must be carefully structured to avoid unintentionally reproducing dominant or privileged perspectives. Drawing on Iris Marion Young's concept of "asymmetrical reciprocity," Gruber underscores the importance of encouraging pedagogical practices that approach students' narratives with genuine curiosity and openness (23). She suggests that educators must resist the tendency to default to universalized experiences or to address "an amorphous middle," as doing so risks overlooking the diverse, complex, and dynamic experiences of immigrant students (22). Instead, she advocates for a pedagogical stance informed by Young's notion of a "sense of wonder," emphasizing the importance of fostering curiosity, facilitating critical listening, and remaining open to learning from differences (23). Such an approach, she argues, shifts the pedagogical focus away from seeking assimilation or sameness at the surface level and toward recognizing and valuing the particularities of students' lived experiences. By intertwining the theoretical framework with her practical strategies, Gruber sets a tone for the collection, modeling pedagogical practices that prioritize student-centered, culturally responsive teaching. Her work foregrounds the importance of continuously challenging unexamined assumptions and designing classroom spaces that make room for historically marginalized voices, reinforcing the book's larger call for inclusivity in composition pedagogy.

Elizabeth Stone begins the second chapter, "My Italian Grandmother, the Enemy Alien: Bringing Her Story and Others into My Classroom in an Age of Nativism" by recounting a moment when a student questioned her interest in immigration issues and literature, given her perceived white identity and European-sounding name, and despite her immigrant background. Stone shares her Eastern European Jewish heritage, noting her grandparents' immigration to the U.S. in the late nineteenth century and the initial discrimination they encountered. She draws parallels between the historical stigmatization of Eastern European Jews and contemporary nativist discourses targeting non-white immigrants such as Mexicans and Muslims. Stone argues that this othering rhetoric is a recurring strategy for stigmatizing immigrants. Stone closes by suggesting composition instructors consider integrating personal ethnic histories into their pedagogy to enhance students' understanding of the immigrant narratives and recognize the persistence of such rhetoric across generations.

In “Reorienting via Triad: From Animals, Rapists, and Gang Members to Living, Breathing, Human Beings,” Katie Daily outlines her pedagogical strategy using three texts by Edwidge Danticat. This approach is designed to enhance students’ understanding of the language and rhetoric surrounding immigration justice and policy. By analyzing how the same narrative can be presented in various modes, students are encouraged to set aside their political biases and develop critical reading skills essential for interrogating the dominant narratives propagated by politicians, news sources, and their social circles. Additionally, this literary curriculum not only addresses critical issues such as the privatization of detention centers, the judicial policymaking process, and detainee medical treatment, but also fosters emotional connections by helping students to relate their own immigrant experiences to those of others, thus “re-humanizing” immigrants (65).

Turning to student perspectives, Tuli Chatterji’s chapter, “Narratives and Counternarratives: Contextualizing Immigrant Voice” is particularly compelling as it explores not only the experiences of immigrant students but also the perspectives of U.S.-born students, highlighting the complex dynamics that can emerge between these groups when they share the same classroom. Chatterji examines how both immigrant and U.S.-born students, despite their prior resentment of colonial hierarchies, can inadvertently perpetuate those very systems and exoticize one another. This chapter advocates for a global curriculum that embraces pluralistic, complex, and disjunctive narratives, shifting from a quantitative to a qualitative view of knowledge by integrating immigrant students’ prior learning into current contexts. Chatterji argues that this approach encourages students to engage with multiple perspectives, thereby redefining and internalizing their identities beyond the dominant/minority binary. By positioning students as “translators” of their experiences, this approach to global learning reframes writing as a tool for challenging exclusion and fostering cross-cultural dialogue (91).

In “Classrooms Filled with Stories: Writing Immigrant Narratives in the Age of Trump,” Libby Garland and Emily Schnee identify four distinct patterns in students’ essays when they are invited to share personal immigrant stories within broader political and social contexts. These patterns include (a) conclusions that reinforce dominant myths of hard work and the American Dream, (b) complex personal stories that lack critical analysis, (c) narratives that respond to and challenge the current nativist immigration rhetoric, and (d) stories that skillfully weave larger historical and political contexts. Garland and Schnee provide extensive student examples and discuss the pedagogical implications of each pattern. In their conclusion, they also address the administrative difficulties associated with activating campus-wide participation in curriculum innovation and implementing policy changes, challenges that are likely to resonate with other institutions.

Chapter eight, titled “Teaching Immigration in a Writing-Intensive Honors Course,” showcases the collaborative pedagogical strategies featured in the book. It incorporates the perspectives of three professors—John C. Harvard, Silvia Giagnoni, and Timothy J. Henderson—and two students—Brennan Herring and Rachel Pate—from a co-taught junior research seminar. The course is structured into three units—history, media, and literature—and includes major assignments such as an events scrapbook, an immigrant interview, and a research project. Students also participated in co-curricular activities like a panel discussion and a visit to a local detention center. The chapter offers “useful resources and cautionary tales for faculty” who seek to promote critical analysis of contemporary immigration issues in their classrooms, providing detailed assessments of both successful and less effective methods (135).

In the last chapter, “Reflective Practice, Immigrant Narrative, and the Humanities Institute,” Heather Ostman discusses her successful integration of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) into her pedagogy and the Humanities Institute at a community college in New York. She employs narrative practice to guide students in reassessing their previously undervalued experiences, effectively bridging their prior knowledge with academic learning. The chapter provides an overview of scholarship on reflective learning, Actor-Network Theory, and the legitimacy of

nontraditional knowledge. Ostman illustrates how narrative reflective practices extended beyond the classroom to the institution, facilitating a cultural shift and positioning the Humanities Institute as a platform for diverse immigrant narratives. This approach not only promotes individual academic growth but also strengthens the institution's commitment to immigrant education.

Teaching Writing through the Immigrant Story emerges from a collective sense of urgency in response to the rise of nativism and anti-immigrant sentiment following the 2016 election and subsequent political and social events like debates about a wall between the U.S. and Mexico, the rollback of in-state tuition for DACA students, and mass deportations. This book remains highly relevant and timely today, as the same rhetoric echoes in recent political and international affairs. Meanwhile, immigrant-origin student enrollment in U.S. higher education continues to rise. Each contributor to this collection, through their interactions with immigrant students both inside and outside the classroom, is keenly aware of the profound impact political decisions have on these students—not only regarding their legal status but also their emotional well-being, which ultimately affects their academic performance.

College composition instructors, especially those working with diverse student populations, will find *Teaching Writing Through the Immigrant Story* by Ostman, Tinberg, and Martínez both inspiring and instructive. The narratives and collective wisdom in each chapter offer not only the pleasure of engaging with diverse stories but also valuable contributions to ongoing discussions in the field about expanding academic discourse by incorporating ways of knowing traditionally regarded as non-academic. Ultimately, this book challenges exclusionary political climates by advocating for a more inclusive vision of the student body that higher education can embrace.

Works Cited

- Brandt, Deborah, et al. "The Politics of the Personal: Storying Our Lives Against the Grain." *College English*, vol. 62, not. 1, 2001, pp. 41–62.
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