



Reading Student Writing: Confessions, Meditations, and Rants

Lad Tobin

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Lad Tobin has a decidedly psychological take on life and a characteristically witty point of view on most subjects-especially his own writing and teaching. He also has a great deal of personal insight and story telling skill that make his books, articles, and presentations notable. In *Reading Student Writing*, he gets to the heart of teaching writing through a blend of humor, memoir, reflection, classroom examples, and student writing. While funny and irreverent, he tackles the serious and complex issues of how to read-really read-student writing and how to read ourselves as teachers.

He organizes his book around three main topics:

- forms of student writing that we find particularly problematic
- the ways in which our values, assumptions, and unconscious associations shape our readings of student writing
- how our assessments of student writing are inseparable from our attitudes toward the discipline of composition as a whole.

But this broad outline barely scratches the surface of what Tobin achieves in his execution. He fills his chapters with stories that read like the best creative nonfiction. And he doesn't hesitate to take on controversial topics, what he calls facing "the elephant in the classroom," the issues we usually avoid-specifically reading and writing personal narratives, our love-hate relationship with emotion, our misplaced anxieties about confessional writing, and our struggles to be fair and unbiased readers.

In the end, Tobin opens up the world of writing, both student writing and teacher scholarship. He invites us into a place that thrives on dialogue, diversity, and hybridity, that is more flexible, nuanced, and realistic. He sets an example for reading our classrooms, for writing-or rewriting-ourselves.

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