Reviews

To Think

Frank Smith
New York:
Teachers College Press, 1990

—Reviewed by Anne Meek, Managing Editor, Educational Leadership.

A few years ago in *Understanding Reading* and later in *Reading Without Nonsense*, Frank Smith challenged the education establishment's conventional wisdom about the teaching of reading. Similarly, *To Think* will challenge and extend our current understanding of motivation, imagination, and the teaching of thinking. Using a compelling mix of expert knowledge and everyday examples, Smith describes the prevalence and the dependability of commonplace thinking. And since educators often believe that no one is thinking at all and that it is up to us to change that, this is very reassuring. With grace and strength he explains his use of the terms *thinking critically* and *thinking creatively* rather than the popular terms *critical thinking* and *creative thinking*. He makes it clear, for example, that we can generate taxonomies of thinking skills with ease but that these taxonomies do not really differentiate operations within either the brain or the mind.

Still, Smith does not say that everyone is thinking well or that society has enough good thinkers. He sees the same room for improvement that you and I see; and he makes his case thoughtfully, without florid claims. The conditions needed for improved thinking, he says, are *knowledge, disposition,* and *authority* (pp. 102–107).

The need for knowledge shows in our inability to think critically about things we don't know. If you ask me to give you a critical review of Tolstoy's work, and I've never read even one of his books, I simply can't do it, no matter how well I can compare and contrast, distinguish fact from opinion, detect propaganda, and so on.

The disposition to think critically arises from the ability to doubt judiciously, to know when to doubt, because to dispute everything is not the same as thinking critically.

To explain the relationship between the possession of authority and thinking critically, Smith discusses the effects of political relationships in our school systems and societies. He's not too hopeful about what students learn from teachers who are at the bottom of the hierarchy, faced with rigid rules for the conduct of their classrooms that are the antithesis of thinking critically or creatively.

These three conditions become the basis for his brief and powerful commentary on "Thinking and Education" (pp. 124–133). Not surprisingly, he tells us once more that effective classrooms are based upon interest and respect. More radically, he suggests that perhaps we should begin to foster thinking by fostering doubt:

> Schools should be fertile with questioning, not in the sense of teachers' constantly catechizing students to assess how much they know, but of everyone's investigating contemporary reality to try to understand why it is the way it is. How will students learn to think clearly and boldly, especially about their own education? Only by seeing teachers engaging in thought in this way, beginning, as I have suggested, with a joint examination of the educational system itself (p. 130).

Nor does Smith shrink from suggesting changes in the typical political relationships:

> We could stop thinking of educational institutions as places where only those judged most fit survive, and start to think of them as communities of mutual respect; as sanctuaries from the pressures and inequalities of the world outside, not a proving ground for discrimination, segregation, and unfairness (p. 131).

This small book will not go away; it has the mark of another seminal work. I only hope that in 20 years it will be seen as the conceptual and theoretical underpinning of school communities in much the same way that *Understanding Reading* can be seen to support today's curriculum work in language arts.

Available from Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1234 Amsterdam Ave., New York, NY 10027; $16.95 paper, $34.95 cloth.

The Spectrum of Teaching Styles

Muska Mosston and Sara Ashworth
White Plains, New York:
Longman, Inc., 1990

—Reviewed by Dolores Varnon, Clifton, Virginia.

With the proliferation of material on teaching styles in the education literature, it is nice to find a publication that provides a comprehensive description of the different teaching styles and their impact on the teaching-learning process.

The book focuses on the teacher as decision maker and facilitator of learning. The teacher-learner relationship is addressed and defined within the context of each teaching style. Teaching styles are organized into 12 identifiable categories that progress from the purely teacher-directed (The Command Style) to the learner-initiated (The Learner-Initiated Style).

Each teaching style is presented in terms of its contributions to the physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and moral development of the learner. Mosston and Ashworth discuss the many ways teachers can promote the development of higher-order thinking skills, individual and group interactive problem-solving strategies, and learning situations and meaningfully involve the learner in the process of education.

The Spectrum of Teaching Styles is an excellent resource for teachers. It provides definitive guidelines for making decisions about which methodology can move learners along a rich and wide continuum of learning experiences in each content area. Principals may wish to refer teachers to this book to extend their repertoires of teaching strategies and to improve their instructional programs. Teacher-preparatory programs can also use *The Spectrum of Teaching Styles* as a source of information about appropriate teaching strategies and their effects upon learners.

Available from Longman, Inc., 95 Church St., White Plains, NY 10601.

Historical Literacy: The Case for History in American Education

Paul Gagnon and the Bradley Commission on History in the Schools
Boston:
Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989

—Reviewed by Henry C. Zabierek, Chelmsford, Massachusetts

Recent test results reveal that too many students remain ignorant of important historical events, geographic locations, and governmental functions. To remedy this, the Bradley Commission on History in the Schools is exploring the reasons for our failure to effectively teach students and what we might do to restore history as the core of social studies.

This book is a call for more history, better taught, from kindergarten through higher education. It offers a full-court press on the traditional "expanding horizons" elementary curriculum and urges the institution of history, biography, and folktales. It calls for history departments at the college level to return to survey courses of "quality and liveliness."

The book includes a series of chapters on the value of history and suggestions for its effective teaching. Suzanne Wilson and Gary Sykes have contributed a courageous and long-needed chapter on "Toward Better Teaching and Certification," in which they urge college teachers to strengthen their identification with teaching and to reflect on the quality of that teaching. History and Education Departments must "get together" to help students become excellent history teachers. History badly taught produces teachers who teach badly.

Unfortunately, since no regular member of the commission is a card-carrying elementary teacher, the book gives short shrift to elementary education. The chapter on elementary teaching is saved for last, and its discussion of the hoped-for partnership of teachers from elementary school through graduate school is the stuff of illusion.

A variety of persons and groups will find this book useful. Schools that are revising their social studies programs would be wise to make this book required reading so that its suggestions can be either adopted, adapted, or rejected. Those who insist on the "utility" of education may gain a different perspective on the goals of public schooling. And "Education" presidents who insist that the United States be #1 in math and science by the year 2000 would do well to place this book on their nightstands.

Available from Houghton Mifflin Company, 2 Park St., Boston, MA 02108.

Learning to Learn Across the Life Span

Robert M. Smith and Associates
San Francisco
Jossey-Bass Inc., 1990

—Reviewed by Harold G. Shane, Professor Emeritus, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

An interesting feature of *Learning to Learn Across the Life Span* is the geographical scope of the institutions from which Robert Smith recruited the co-authors: of the 12 contributors, 1 is from Queensland University of Technology in Australia, and 3 are from Canadian universities in Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario. American contributor schools are equally scattered: from Teachers College, Columbia University, to North Carolina, Wisconsin, Ohio, Florida, and California. Three are from the senior author's own institution, Northern Illinois University.

Because *Learning to Learn* has a special focus, its variety of contributors (from doctoral candidate to professor emeritus) from these different geographical locations successfully provides a broad review of the many aspects of learning. Implications of the learning to learn concept are discussed as they apply to persons in teacher education and administrators, classroom personnel, media special-

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ists, and others in virtually all educational roles—including parents.

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The book is readable and relevant, well documented, and ample in scope.

Available from Jossey-Bass Inc., 350 Sansome St., San Francisco, CA 94104.

Changing Schools through the Arts: How to Build on the Power of an Idea

Jane Remer
New York
American Council for the Arts, 1990

—Reviewed by Fred Patterson, Knox County Schools, Knoxville, Tennessee.

This book is a guide for implementing school change through the Arts in General Education (AGE) program. The author offers her experiences working with the John D. Rockefeller III Fund (The Fund) Arts in Education Program and the League of Cities for the Arts in Education as evidence that the AGE program can be an appropriate catalyst and vehicle for school development.

After presenting an extensive history of The Fund, The League, and AGE, Remer focuses on John Goodlad's concepts of developmental change in a review of the characteristics of developing schools. She then argues that the arts are not just for the gifted and talented or for the cultivation of the so-called finer or higher side of human nature. Rather, they can help administrators and policymakers realize their overall instructional and social objectives, galvanize community support for the schools, and add a touch of class, glamour and excitement to the process (pp. 65–66).

The final chapters present practical steps for building districtwide and school-based AGE programs, networking, selecting teachers, and finding sources of leadership and support.

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