Negin, G.A. (1992). *Teaching thinking and literacy*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 142 pp., $16.50 (softcover).

> There is an art of reading, as well as an art of thinking, and an art of writing. (Isaac D'Israeli, *Literary Character*, Ch. 11)

Since in our century "arts" have given way to "sciences," Negin's book on teaching critical thinking would seem to be timely, considering the cross-curricular initiative of the 1990s. The book consists of five chapters: "The Challenge of Making Sense of the World," "The Reading Process," "The Writing Process," "Study Strategies," and "Making Decisions About Instruction." The chapters are prefaced by introductions ranging from a few lines to a page, set apart from the chapter proper on a separate page.

In the introduction to chapter 1, Negin excerpts from a Kurt Vonnegut [sic] novel, "All of the true things I am going to tell you are shameless lies" (p. 2), and concludes with "We want to give you the same caution. We are going to lie to you" (p. 2). Such an assertion is hardly conducive to reader confidence. Presumably Negin has sounded this note of caution because he intends to explain things rather than merely provide "his [own] view of things" (p. 2). Thus, before beginning the first chapter, the reader is puzzled as to how the book will address its avowed topic, teaching thinking and literacy.

The book's title suggests that Negin has a teaching readership in mind. However, with its choppy and periodic sentences, overuse of rhetorical questions, and repetitious style, the book seems geared towards novices on the subjects of epistemology and the processes of thinking, reading, and writing — perhaps undergraduates rather than teaching professionals. Vocabulary and syntax, too, support his contention regarding the target reader. Those who teach at the primary level undoubtedly appreciate complete sentences rather than such unwieldy fragments as "Wonder and Mystery. The things we want to know and the things we do not know. The desire to understand what we do not understand. The search for knowledge" (p. 3).

Although none of the five chapters contains much that is new, Negin provides a thoughtful condensation of what is known about the subjects he tackles. Unfortunately, Negin seems prone to pursue his own interests rather than those of the classroom teacher. For example, in the first chapter, his consideration of epistemology ("the study of the assumptions, procedures, and conclusions that lead to knowledge") is heavily based on philosophy. Thus, even though Negin thoughtfully footnotes his sources, the uninitiated reader begins to feel that the argument is moving away from the classroom and towards the seminar room. When he scrupulously defines such terms as "*a priori* statements" (p. 3) Negin seems to anticipate that his reader has little background in philosophy, but what is one to make of Negin's failure to define an equally esoteric term (namely, "speech community") from rhetoric and composition studies? Negin seems to assume that his reader knows little about philosophy and terms of argument; yet, what teacher is unfamiliar with the term "hypothesis" (which he finds it necessary to define)?

However, Negin offers a useful table of generalizations from six areas of the curriculum, then discusses how we form generalizations. The discipline headings, such as "English," and the sample generalizations which follow, might be thought-provoking to secondary (subject-oriented) teachers. He treats the concept of "hypothesis" in a similar manner. From a pedagogical perspective Negin's emphasis on "supportive evidence" would be particularly useful for those who must teach critical thinking across two or more curricular areas. His discussion of evaluation and judgment is less useful for direct classroom application.

The chapter on the reading process is full of truisms and is generally dated, focusing on environmental and physical influences rather than on the nature of text and on the interaction between text and reader. Any teacher who has been trained within the past decade will have received more detailed information on the reading process than this chapter offers.

The chapter on the writing process has more to commend it, since Negin rightly clarifies authorial and textual variables and focuses on the central role of the sentence in effective written communication. The best

chapter in the book, however, is that on study skills (although this may seem to have little to do with teaching either thinking or literacy). Negin builds on the contention that education is not knowing certain discrete pieces of knowledge, but knowing where to look. He provides a comprehensive summary of time-honored techniques such as SQ3R. Look for nothing new here; it must be obvious by now, for instance, that "rate of reading is influenced by background knowledge" (p. 91). The discussions of methods for reducing test anxiety and for time management seem ill-matched by Negin's consideration of the failure of reading machines (e.g., the tachistoscope). Again, he seems to have taken all knowledge for his province when the reader wants an emphasis (suggested by the book's title) on pragmatic solutions to classroom problems. Although the final chapter contains a good section on measurement and evaluation, there is nothing that a practicing teacher would not have been exposed to in a professional year course on these topics.

A quibble with the publishers rather than Negin: The text is as visually inviting as an undergraduate essay turned out on a typewriter. Even modestly priced word processors are now capable of such subtleties as italics but the book offers underlining instead.

At a time when institutional expenditures for professional texts are scrutinized owing to budgetary shortfalls, each purchase must fulfil its avowed purpose — *Teaching Thinking and Literacy* does not. Although there are two chapters with some merit, the $16.50 asked for Negin's work might better be spent elsewhere.

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