

# Significant Books

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## The Making of a Modern Educator.

*William Van Til. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1961. 252 p., paper bound, \$1.95.*

Twenty-five years ago—or 10—or 5—what were *you* thinking about? What were your concerns and worries? Your burning youthful ideals? Your notions about how to save education and the nation? Have you ever rummaged through your old term papers, supervisory bulletins, yearbook chapters—and all the other literary odds and ends of an educational career—to trace out the course of your growth?

Something like that is what Bill Van Til, now Professor of Education at NYU and President of ASCD, has done in this book. Always the owner of one of the few really good pens in the field of education, he has looked back through a quarter-century's writings to select the short pieces and excerpts from longer ones that still seemed worth saving.

His selections range far and wide, from the purely personal to the purely professional. From before World War II there is a chapter of *The Danube Flows Through Fascism*, written after two summers of floating down the stream in a foldboat. Dating a quarter-century later comes another account of long European travel, this time with three children, on a daily average cost per person of \$4.77. What Van Til decided to keep included several amiably malicious Importance-

of-People columns: "A Fable of Textbook Strategy" (which had everybody half angry at him), "John Dewey's Disciples," and a couple of things on the remarkable culture of American college faculties.

The selections range all the way back to the author's days as a teacher in The Ohio State University High School. They include some samples of his concern for intergroup relations. But I judge that what Van Til found he wanted to save most of all—and rightly so—is contained in two sections: "Meeting Forces Affecting Education" and "Participating in the Great Debate."

What emerges from the whole is a delightful thing, fresh in every page, witty with a felicitous touch, always the penetrating insight of a first-rate mind, and always informed with a deep sense of values that runs a consistent thread from beginning to end. For those of us who have known him, the image of the man stands out, of course. Yet I think a stranger might also feel the same impact of a person.

For here is reflected an educator who in the high years of Progressive Education was in the thick of it, not only buzzing with theory but actually developing and teaching the curricula we dreamed about—yet always alertly aware and able to hurl some devastating shafts at the movement he held dear. Later, when the tides had turned, when hostile critics were at their zenith, he was calmly

and thoughtfully analyzing the forces and the arguments, calling them as he saw them, refusing to use the barometer of public opinion as guide to educational doctrine. No thread runs more consistently than his concern for democracy—for everybody; and he never made a more powerful statement of it than at Nashville, when he was teaching at George Peabody College, in the midst of the tensions surrounding integration.

But this is a review, not a eulogy. What is the book worth, in the open market? It is a very good book—of that there is no question—vitaly interesting to anyone concerned for education. Some of its more practical statements on curricula and good teaching are outstanding guides to practice. Its analyses of the social scene, of forces and dangers and hoped-for goals, rank among the very best in our educational literature.

But I suspect there is something more than this. For an intelligent layman who wishes to get inside a basic way of looking at education—the way a true professional thinks about it—this may be one of the best media at our command. The young teacher—or even more, the college student looking forward to his career—may see here how a thoughtful and devoted teacher hammers out his sense of values and his base of theory, and then shapes his actions to fit. And many a young supervisor or administrator could get from the book some added strength of backbone; for, if this book says any one thing beyond all doubting, it is that a schoolman need not be blown about helplessly by every storm of opinion, but can, with dignity and heart, stand by what he believes.

In other fields—science, for instance—the great biographies and autobiographies wield tremendous power. They teach by example a way of thought and

a way of life, and they bring young men not only toward understanding but also toward dedication. If *The Making of a Modern Educator* has not quite reached that strength, it is among the very few books in education that have come close.

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#### Research

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sensory poor environments (homes, neighborhoods or communities). Can these children recoup their loss? If so, what kind of curriculum will be the most enabling? The difficulty will be in the objective determination of the exact nature of a sensory poor environment. Should we be able to identify these children, we will need to take remedial steps early. It seems reasonable to conjecture that for some children the public school experience will begin as early as three or four years of age in a curriculum designed to remedy the sensory deprivation which they have experienced.

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