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The Only True Multi-Medium is the Human Being

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I know a little fellow called Jay Superman. Actually, that isn't his name, but he is called that because of an event which transpired in our neighborhood last winter. The little fellow watched Superman on television very faithfully. His mother, reacting to his empathy for her son's hero, scrounged up a Superman uniform and presented it to him with a loving kiss. The lad put on the uniform and promptly began to strut about. Soon he climbed up on a chair and while his mother watched he took off in true Superman style and promptly was annihilated as he came in contact with the floor, belly down. He arose from the heap, tore off the Superman uniform and strode into the alcove of the house with his chagrin readily showing.

In looking at the estate of science and science teaching in the state and nation today, I wonder if we are not much in the same position. Our Superman myth has been exposed for what it is. Questions for us to answer as teachers of science are: Are we going to be struck rudderless? What has been the real meaning of our role in culture anyway? Are we responsible for the present estate?

I would like to react to the present mood of our culture by paraphrasing a statement from Lewis Mumford's great book, *The Myth of the Machine*. "What is needed in education today is a multi-medium for teaching so varied, so many sided, so flexible, so responsive to human need, that it can serve every human purpose. . . ." And then he says, "The only true multi-medium remains the human organism itself."

In my area of the state we have several lakes. The healthy lakes reflect their condition by a diversity of life forms. The lakes that are not in such prime condition reflect this by a monoculture of algae that stifles other growth. Perhaps we should be learning something from the world about us. In education we should expect diversity of outcome when dealing with our multi-medium, because we are dealing with a diverse commodity—the human being. What we are trying to create is a new human village. One that is not subject to the historic mischief of civilization—the subjugation of a large population by having all react to a lock step, all doing the same. Whatever autonomy we have or think we have disappears, once we have surrendered our senses and nervous system to those who would benefit from taking a

lease on our eyes, ears and nerves. The cause for alarm in today's education (remembering you and I are prime movers) lies in the hope it holds out for instant knowledge, instant power, instant destruction and controlled communication. The threat of excommunication is held over us if we, as educators, don't conform to this pattern. (Are you traditional?)



*Milbert Krohn (right) and D. Meeks
at a recent field seminar on inland
waters.*

The culture of which we are a part is worth investigating against time, as well as against the "now" emphasis. In time, we could perhaps view the "Pharaonic" culture of ancient Egypt, which thrived and built the pyramids as an evidence of their opulence. Today we have the skyscraper and the nuclear reactor. The Pharaohs threatened their civilization with the possibility of extermination of cities. The present culture threatens us with the same trick, through nuclear means. The innermost chamber of the pyramid has become the capsule of the astronaut.

The great issues of today's culture, such as nuclear strategy, cannot even be the subject of meaningful debate, whether in governmental bodies or in popular forums, because there can be no competent judge without meaningful knowledge. If we, as science educators, abdicate our responsibility to place science before children as a part of human activity and not something that deserves attention because we are offering it, then the great national decisions of life and death are going to be continued to be rendered by technological elites. In every field, from atomics to medicine, policies that permanently affect the destiny of human life have been formulated and carried through by self-appointed and self-regulating experts and speculators immune to human confrontation. You and I must change that circumstance.

I have been around in science education long enough to know that this has not been the business of science educators at the grass roots. I have a feeling that I know what this means. I have a further feeling that my tenure as leader of the science teachers of this state is going to be devoted to doing something about that very thing. However, I realize that I cannot do it alone. I need all the help I can get. It is not going to be an instant thing. It is going to take time. You and I will be here if we do what we need to do. I am looking forward to the type of interactions which will produce a change in the direction of science education in this state. You, the science teachers of this state, are my medium—my multi-medium. Iowa has a great deal to offer its children. Let's continue to make its education one of the prime offerings.