

*A letter from our NAPOMLE historian*

## **Professors of Middle Level Education: An Historical Perspective**

*Nancy Ruppert*

In the fall of 1990, a small group of middle level professors met to talk about middle level education issues. Representatives from Valdosta State College, Georgia State College, West Georgia College, Oglethorpe University, University of Georgia and Shorter College met. Over half the represented groups were one-member departments. Our purpose was to talk about middle level issues and network with one another. We shared syllabi and invited congress members to share their perspectives on education. We talked about best practices and field experiences that were working. We drove in for the day, ate in the school's cafeteria and drove back home at the end of the day. The impact of this grass-roots initiative is what it means to "see a need, and fill it." When I joined that group of professors, I knew I belonged to something much bigger than I was alone.

John Lounsbury, John Meyers, and Jay Hertzog were the initiators of this group. I remember Jay Hertzog saying, "What shall we call ourselves?" (In that we were all middle level people we wanted to *belong* to something.) "We could be called POMLE," and there it all began – not very original, but clear. For the next three years, until I moved to South Carolina, we rotated meeting at one another's institutions and at the national conferences we attended sessions and joined one another for dinners. Each time we met, we decided what we wanted to focus on next... legislation, syllabi, best practices, assessment... The group fulfilled the intellectual, social and emotional

needs at a professional level for me. I was a college professor with a department of one – me; and knowing that group of people shared the same passion, commitment, and determination to prepare the best middle school people as possible meant I was not alone. I was inspired by hearing and sharing ideas. I still love seeing them at NMSA. Six years later the National Association of Professors of Middle Level Education was formed.

In the spring of 1999, the first NAPOMLE (National Professors of Middle Level Education) conference was held in Charlotte, North Carolina. Paul George was our keynote and we shared concurrent sessions and poster sessions with one another. We ate together, socialized together, and shared research ideas and best practices. The response from professors was much like my initial response in Georgia. We were not alone, we belonged. Our intellectual, social and emotional needs were being met. The National Middle School Association supported this conference and every other year continues to sponsor a conference specifically for us, middle level professors.

This week, in Charleston, 16 years after our first POMLE group began, I had the opportunity to participate in the first regional Middle Level Professors Symposium. With the help of NMSA and the North Carolina and South Carolina POMLE groups and State Departments, professors from four states, 25 institutions, and two state departments joined their forces to focus on *advocacy*. Our patriarch, John Lounsbury, who began his

career in middle level education over 45 years ago, Ken McEwin, NMSA's NCATE liaison, and Sue Swaim, the Executive Director of the NMSA all shared their vision, their passion, and provided us with a renewed commitment to middle level education. They were our advocates this week.

We engaged in conversations about advocating for parents, publishing, understanding adolescents, and accreditation. Faculty members conducted "round tables" on best practices and ideas for research and how they were advocating for middle school children and their families, and middle school faculty and administrators. Keynotes shared their visions of advocacy from a current view, an historical view, and what policies are impacting higher education at the State levels. State Department members shared what was happening at the state level that impacts curriculum and resources for content and understanding adolescents. Conversations spilled over to the porch on the campus of the College of Charleston and into the restaurants in and around Charleston.

The weekend was inspiring. The need to renew our commitment to middle level education, to inspire one another to continue to find ways to support the stakeholders of our nation's adolescents, to begin to join forces for families, legislators, and new middle school teachers was filled. The need to socialize with professors who believe that middle level children and middle level teachers and principals are treasures that we must support was filled. The need to know that what we are doing is good and necessary was filled. And the College of Charleston

and our nation's oldest port was not only beautiful, but hospitable.

Professors of Middle Level Education are a special group of people, making a difference in many ways on many different levels, and we believe we must continue to focus on advocating at the local, state and national level for our adolescents. We are appreciative of the members of the State Departments who participated with us, gave us their insights and demonstrated a commitment to work with us in this endeavor. We are appreciative to the National Leaders of the Middle School Association who shared with us their expertise, their passion, and their support of our efforts. And we are appreciative to those faculty members, principals and teachers who attended this symposium to share and give and get ideas.

Professors of Middle Level Education will meet in Memphis at the National Middle School Association. In spring, 2007 they will hold a Professors of Middle Level Education conference in Destin, Florida. And in two years, we are going to join together in the mountains of North Carolina where William Alexander and Ken McEwin began the first middle level institutes for principals and teachers. We hope you will consider joining us.

Sincerely,

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