

Introduction of Paul George's speech in MSJ

An Event and a Message That Calls for Action

On May 18-20, 2011, over 100 of America's best and most experienced minds in middle level education gathered in Milledgeville, Georgia for the special Southeastern Regional Professors of Middle Level Education (POMLE) Symposium, **"Celebrating the Legacy of the Middle School and Envisioning Its Future."** This landmark meeting was held on the campus of Georgia College where POMLE was born in 1987. Included in this extraordinary collection of intellectual prowess were most of the pioneer leaders whose works comprised the volume, *The Legacy of the Middle School: In Their Own Words*, which was released at the symposium.

This major publication chronicles the movement's history through extensive interview transcripts of the 20 founders and early leaders along with introductory materials and two concluding chapters that summarize and identify goals to guide future developments. These chapters were written by Tracy Smith and Ken McEwin, the editors and directors of the Middle Level Education Legacy Project. In addition to the early leaders, major officials from professional associations, professors of education from institutions around the country, and other noted and established middle level educators were participants.

The symposium offered an opportunity to reflect on the middle school movement's past in order to see ahead and consider actions that would reinvigorate the middle school movement which, during the NCLB era, for the most part, had been forced to tread water. More of a think-tank than a typical conference, it proceeded with topical, interactive sessions and working groups, and no speeches.

In a dramatic opening session, Ken and Tracy brought to life 50 years of the middle school movement. All 20 of the early leaders were present in pictures and videos if not in person. In a narrative, Tracy reviewed the past in words and images with each

individual pioneer featured on the large screen and some of his or her own words spoken by that person or by a proxy. The special spirit and deep commitment that characterized the movement in the 70s, 80s, and 90s was rekindled as the past was made present..

In the Celebration Banquet that evening, there were words of welcome and brief comments by Joan Jarrett, NMSA President, before Nancy Ruppert, National POMLE President, recognized six individuals who were responsible for creating “first” distinctive middle level teacher preparation programs. The highlight of the evening’s festivities was the planned exception to the no speeches edict. The Planning Committee asked Paul George to prepare some remarks in keeping with the symposium’s theme. This Paul did in a masterful and provocative address made available to you here.

In *The Middle School Movement: Taking the Long View*, Paul, with a depth of understanding of American and world history and education’s place in it, offers a foundational perspective on the middle school movement. In a very serious, scholarly, reasoned, philosophical presentation that brings to the forefront the value-centered and culturally related nature of the middle school concept, Paul provides a larger world-wide context for the movement and identifies its place in the age-old struggle between differing cultural views on what is the nature of human nature.

Though we all have been discouraged during recent days, Paul points out that the progressive middle school philosophy is part of the “moral momentum” that is underway in human affairs and has led to such victories as the abolition of slavery, child labor laws, civil rights, and school desegregation. The middle school movement has importance that goes far beyond what happens in grades 5-8; and it will not fade away.

I entrust this message to you, to read, reread, contemplate, internalize, discuss thoughtfully with colleagues, share, and use in whatever way it can be to inform all discussions on improving education, discussions that must deal with the real philosophical issues that are at the heart of education's problems and be the impetus for action.

John H. Lounsbury