As a principal parents often asked me questions regarding their child’s academic performance and the type of strategies teachers utilized in the classroom. I was often frustrated with these parents because I felt they were challenging our authority as educators. I tried to explain that we provided our students with an eclectic approach to learning.

I believe there is no one program, strategy or model of instruction that meets the needs of all children. Of course this attitude flies directly in the face of conventional strategies currently being utilized in many school districts, i.e. the programmed and scripted curriculum models currently being used throughout the state. However, as an example, a phonics program can work wonders in the teaching of reading skills for some students, but fails completely with other children who may have auditory discrimination issues. A flexible program that provides for various needs, abilities and learning styles of each child makes the most sense and is more meaningful to the children involved in the process. Students who are made to conform to a system or forced into a preconceived framework of learning often do not enjoy the learning process and often become agitated and reluctant learners.

A quality program does not merely train a child in factual knowledge. A quality program needs to present unique learning opportunities to explore interesting and exciting materials, preferably with a teacher who understands the needs, interests, and abilities of the children.

- A quality program allows the child to think independently and intelligently.
- A quality program brings together children and a variety of resources.
- A quality program develops strategies that have continuity and are purposeful.
- A quality program supports teachers with the necessary funds and materials.

Of great concern to all teachers and parents is what should be taught in the school and what specific methods are utilized to enhance learning for all the students. At present, there is a dichotomy between the content (what) and the process (how) of education. The value of what is learned is continually being contrasted with the importance of how the material is learned. Conventional schooling is said to concentrate on the former, however, all students need to be involved in the latter. In a content approach, subject matter is stressed. The use of standards emphasizes this method. Text books and curriculum guides break subjects down into neat parts and arrange them in prepackaged sequences of presumed difficulty. Teachers may even be told by administrators and colleagues not to assign topics to lower grade students which may be later used at higher levels in the program. Teachers are requested not to permit children to see films or read books that are designed as part of the designated curriculum for a higher grade. The main focus of this type of model to learning is the acquisition of facts, which tend to imply less concern for their usefulness. Application of factual knowledge is often limited to answering questions on an examination.

The process approach as a model de-emphasizes the specific materials learned in favor of teaching the students how to learn. The content is utilized to teach problem solving and thinking skills. For example, even if the children's hypothesis is found to be incorrect or their use of materials somewhat
unconventional, they are nonetheless learning how to evaluate data, how to correct, amend and reverse information. This approach seeks to aid children to direct their own learning, encourages them to pose their own problems and to solve them by various methods, such as formulating hypotheses, accumulating and analyzing data, drawing inferences and conclusions. This method presupposes a flexible approach to the curriculum, one that avoids raising barriers among subjects and most important, trains students to know when and how to use knowledge. In essence, this model of instruction seems to be a more natural way for learning to occur and is compatible with the brain research, however this method also requires that the teacher give up the control that is utilized in the content approach. The teacher becomes a facilitator for learning, rather than the sole provider of knowledge.

Each of these models has value and the wise teacher utilizes each when the time and circumstances are appropriate. The academic philosophy of each teacher needs to be practical in that methods used are effective and provide meaningful experiences for the children. The possibilities to explore and expand human potential are limitless. As educators our responsibility is to support children so that they may become more enthusiastic about their lives and eager to continue to be life long learners.