

**Presentation of Judy Gaspard, Speaker, 56th Annual DPI/NGO Conference,
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Approximately 43% of my students are White, 37% are American Indians, 17% are Black, and 3% Asian. 84% are on free/reduced lunches in a very low-socio economic area of South Louisiana.

At a very young age, many of these children come to believe that to survive they need to be mean and tough----get the other fellow before he gets you. By the time they enter Grand Caillou Middle School at the age of 9 many have lost hope in their future.

But when they graduate from Grand Caillou Middle School as eighth graders, these same children have become kind, respectful, happy, and academically successful. Walk down the halls of our school. My teachers have become masterful at teaching, and we have a joyful school. You'll hear children and teachers laughing and working productively. You'll see parents in our halls working with students. You'll see happy children riveted on learning. In fact, often challenge our visitors and ask them to walk freely through our school and tell me if one child is off task. No one has been able to find one. I also challenge visitors to identify any of the 80 or so handicapped students in my school (except for those in wheelchairs). No visitor has been able to do so. Our students love to learn, and they love to help one another learn.

Not only do our students learn to read, write, do math, and speak well, they also become actively engaged in the learning process itself-and they carry these skills with them. Their high school teachers tell me that our kids stand out in high school where they compete with more advantaged students. These teachers tell me that Grand Caillou graduates like to read more than other kids, they take more interest in their classes, and they know what they need to do to learn. Our students are achievers and they are kinder human beings for having been with us at Grand Caillou Middle School.

This morning I'm going to describe the core beliefs that have guided and strengthened my work. I also want to describe how the Carbo Reading Styles Program enabled my school to become the first middle school in the United States to be named a National Model Reading Styles School. The Reading Styles program helped our students to discover and use their own strengths. And, in doing so, achieve a large measure of personal dignity, security, and academic proficiency---achieve a transformation in their lives and in their very dreams of their future.

I am honored and humble to be here with you today. My father was too poor to go beyond first grade and my mother to fourth, but they believe deeply in education. They would be so very proud that their daughter, who grew up speaking French in the Cajun backwoods of Louisiana, is representing American educators at the United Nations. I was raised by poor, loving, and supportive parents. I didn't know I was poor, because everyone around us was poor and our home was rich with love. I was raised to work for everything I got and to take pride in whatever work I do.

Here are my own core beliefs: Everybody should be given a chance. Do the best you can. NO excuses. Be positive. Give students choices when decisions are to be made. LISTEN to a child's side of a problem then make decisions in a positive way. We have always helped the students at our school understand how to become a good person. I often tell them, "Here's your chance. Do something with it" And they do.

As I said, I'd like to tell you about the Reading Styles Program, developed by Dr. Marie Carbo, because I believe so strongly in what this program does for teachers and for children. Reading Styles is not a canned program, it's a strategy that can be taught to a child and they own it forever. We teach them to use their reading strength during their stay with us and as they go to the high school and into the working field or as a college student. Average teachers become good teachers, and good teachers become master teachers. Most important, the Reading Styles Program helped us to understand that our students have different learning strengths and that if we accommodated these strengths with the right teaching strategies, our students would learn faster and easier. We tried it and it worked. Our students thrived. My staff, the children, and I became empowered with Reading Styles.

First, we learned how to use a simple questionnaire, called the Reading Style Inventory (RSI). We learned which one of our children are strongly auditory, visual, or tactile and much more. The RSI also recommends the best reading methods and teaching strategies for each child and for groups of students. We began to look at our students in terms of their learning strengths, and they looked at themselves and each other in the same way. They became more respectful of one another's differences and more accommodating of each other. With training, my staff learned how to teach any subject with many different strategies, how to provide students with the learning choices that matched their strengths, and how to use high-interest materials and teaching games. They learn how to create comfortable environments that made school more inviting and relaxed. The school felt more and more like a large, loving family. Our academic program got better and better, and as it did, the children felt smarter, and the level of joy, respect, and kindness in the school grew as well.

One of the most important reading methods we learned in the Reading Styles Program is a special way of recording reading material that was developed by Marie Carbo. We use some of Dr. Carbo's recordings, and we make some of our own. The method uses high-interest reading materials that stretch students' abilities, combined with a somewhat slowed pace when recording. The slow pace helps to synchronize the spoken and the printed word for the student. Now we use the Carbo recordings throughout the school and are continually amazed at how quickly our children's reading fluency and comprehension improve. Children who read well tend to improve in all academic subjects.

We teach to our children's strengths every day, and we see positive benefits daily. We help our children understand a new meaning of the word "strength". My students grew up thinking strength is only physical, a means of achieving physical dominance over those weaker than themselves. Now they're seeing that their own strengths are something they can use to change their lives. We also involve the parents by having a parent meeting to discuss the learning style

of their children and the learning style of the parent. There are many positive reward programs we use to attract the students and will be happy to tell you about them if you wish.

As part of your Millennium Development Goals in education, you want the people of the world to have ever-growing access to educational, social, and economic opportunities. You want them to be able to choose and exercise their beliefs, to be able to build on their strengths, so that they can live in dignity and participate in the decisions that shape their world.

But in order for that to be able to occur, our children must come to know that they have strengths, that they are people who matter. That's the hidden curriculum we teach at Grand Caillou Middle School. And along the way we teach our children to read, to calculate, and to become loving caring, informed citizens. That's why for the past three years, we have had four valedictorians at the high school come from Grand Caillou. Caring and a belief in the worth of every single child are at the heart of our work. And out of that caring and belief grows the security and dignity that you seek

Thank you for inviting me to be here with you. Through honoring me with your invitation, you honor all of those teachers with whom I am honored to work, and you honor the children we exist to help. The community has felt important and proud of this wonderful event.