

## **Building Bridges**

My Future as a Learner

By Tammi Simpson

*“Learning is not attained by chance. It must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence.” – Abigail Adams*

Recognizing the need for bridges to be built – whether between teachers and their goals, or between students and a genuine learning experience – is one of the first steps in becoming a life-long learner. Already, as I am wrapping up this final master’s course, I am thinking about what I want to learn next. I am thinking about books I can’t wait to read and technologies I can’t wait to play with. I am thinking about twenty-first century learning and researching more about virtual education. I am thinking about ways that I can improve my own teaching methods and add to the expert advice I have already been given. In addition, I am thinking about my role as a leader in challenging and encouraging other educators in continual, educational inquiry and life-long learning. Ultimately, there are many canyons that I still want to cross and life-long learning is the only way to build the bridges.

### **Continuing to Build the Bridge**

One of my main goals in getting my Master’s in Literacy Education was so that I could acquire the materials and tools needed to build a bridge across the chasm between students’ abilities to read phonetically and their abilities to reason and think deeply about what they read. C.S. Lewis once said, “Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become.” Lewis so eloquently points out the power of literature to transform the soil of our souls into rich, fertile ground and to give students a genuine learning experience. The Literacy Program at MSU has introduced me to some exceptional literature that has the kind of power Lewis talks about, but there is much to be explored. I want to continue to discover great literature and brainstorm ways to use that literature to build classroom community and to create awareness among students.

My goal for any student’s life that I have the opportunity to impact, is that they will connect with literature in a way that broadens their perspectives and gives them one “a-ha moment” after another. Several courses I have taken through MSU have provided specific guidance as well as the needed materials to significantly begin building this bridge. I have learned and experimented with how technology can enhance the teaching of literature. I have also learned how to “read” literature beyond the first impressions of the text and illustrations, and I have learned to recognize the impact of stereotypes on whole cultures and how vital it is to pay attention to the details of literature.

Going forward, I feel better equipped to go beyond students’ abilities to just read well. My goal is to teach them to think well – to reason out what they read and to make choices

about it. This gives me great responsibility as their teacher to provide them with quality, genuine literature. I have learned that this is not an easy task; for the old cliché that “All that glitters is not gold” applies to literature as well. The literacy courses I have completed have given me new eyes to “read” adolescent literature more carefully and thoughtfully than I had in the past. This, I have learned, is one of the crucial tresses for building a bridge for literacy in my classroom. As a life-long learner, I know there is much more to explore and I am excited about diving in to different genres and encountering a variety of authors, new and old.

### **Bridging Gaps with Technology**

Another future goal I have is to use technology more as part of my lesson plans. I am looking forward to exploring ways that teachers have used technology to enhance student learning and also to explore a variety of technology options. In particular, I would like to explore more about the best ways to conduct student online discussion forums because I feel that they allow students to reflect before they respond. They also give every student a chance to participate in the discussion so that all voices are heard rather than just the confident, outspoken ones. This was something I personally enjoyed using with online classes – not just for the reasons mentioned above, but also because it allowed me to access the discussions whenever I wanted and as often as needed to gain deeper insight and understanding in regards to the topic.

In reality, there is so much that teachers can do with technology – from Wordles to Digital Storytelling to Wikis – and the more I learn, the more I realize I have to learn. But this does not discourage me; instead, it only aids in making me excited about the possibilities. I don’t see this as an endless bridge to build, rather that each new technology is itself a bridge that has the potential to connect students in a meaningful way to the learning.

### **More Bridges to Build**

One thing I have realized is that each time I build a bridge, it leads me to new ideas waiting to be discovered. I believe that the more I learn and the more I understand about educational practices and tools, the more effective I will be in drawing my students’ head knowledge down into their hearts, and as an educator this will always be at the forefront of my goals. My desire to get my master’s was to meet this goal, my desire to continue reading and listening to the voices of history and experience will also lead to the fulfillment of this goal. I will continue to keep my eyes open for opportunities to take more classes, seek advice from other educators, listen to students, and search and research new technologies. Ultimately, I vow to do as Abigail Adams suggests in her quote – to pursue knowledge and meticulously apply my mind to it. In short, I vow to be a life-long learner.