

## **Gathering Food for the Winter**

By Tammi Simpson

I have been amazed at the uniqueness of my story compared to the average graduate student. Simply put, if you were to ask me my occupation, I would reply by saying, “I am a stay-at-home mom.” I have been out of the classroom now for almost nine years and have at least four more to go before I walk through that door again. While I agree with the wise words of Solomon when he said, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven” (such as my season to concentrate on the upbringing of my own children), I do not want to neglect the wise actions of the ant that gathers its food during the harvest so when winter comes it will be prepared and have plenty to eat. For me, getting my master’s degree in education has been the best way for me to prepare for the next season while I enjoy the present season of being mommy to my little ones.

Only now, as I take time to reflect, do I understand the complexities of my simple goal to keep one foot in the door of education while I work to fulfill this personal goal of staying home and raising my children. Just as I was determined (and still am) to be the nurturer, teacher and encourager for my children in the early years of their life before they all head off to kindergarten, I was also determined to not let rust begin to grow on the educational tools that I had already spent nine years sharpening.

Five years ago, when I applied for admission into the online MAED program through MSU, I simply wanted to gain expertise and insight that would shape me into a better teacher and give my students a genuine learning experience that they would carry with them throughout the rest of their lives. I was drawn to the Literacy Concentration for two reasons. First, I have seen how a personal connection to literature causes students to be more responsive and reflective, and my hope was to learn how to decipher quality literature for the purpose of using it to teach students valuable lessons about themselves and the world in which they live. Second, I saw a chasm that was very disturbing in regards to students’ abilities to reason and think deeply about what they read and to further express these thoughts in their writing. Honestly, I felt ill-equipped at times when trying to bridge the gap across this chasm and knew I needed some expert advice. Ultimately, it was the combination of my love for students, learning and literature that stirred in me a desire to immerse myself in MSU’s Literacy program.

This immersion has been priceless. Not only have I gathered a rich treasury of knowledge that I have shared with my own children and other children that I have been able to work with one-on-one, I have also been given opportunities to share it with teachers who are now on the front lines of education. So, while my goal for “gathering food for the winter” – like the ant – has not changed, my vision of what I can do with that food has gained tremendous perspective and the courses I have taken at MSU have only served to whet my appetite!