

From Dream to Reality: The Impact of SIM™ in North Carolina



When Elizabeth Gibbs visited Kansas in 1995 she never imagined that the trip was the beginning of a personal journey that would result in positive changes for thousands of students in North Carolina. Matter of fact, Elizabeth didn't even live in North Carolina at the time. She was a doctoral student at the University of Florida and had traveled to Kansas on the advice of Dr. Cecil Mercer, her mentor and advisor. He recommended that she visit the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning to experience first-hand its vast body of work regarding adolescent literacy. Elizabeth had already "become hooked" on some of the SIM™ learning strategies that she had learned from her colleague, LuAnn Jordan, but the trip to Kansas convinced her that the learning strategies and content enhancement routines were key elements of a school-wide

approach to adolescent literacy. She knew then that SIM™ had the potential to drastically change students' lives.

Upon her departure from her visit to the University of Kansas, Elizabeth tucked a souvenir of her trip in her purse – a sticker of ruby red slippers symbolizing her journey to Kansas. In addition, she tucked away an idea that would gradually grow and develop over the years to culminate in a statewide SIM™ literacy project. However, there were a few life events that would take place before her dream of an adolescent literacy project would become reality.

Elizabeth returned to her doctoral studies and completed her PhD in August 1996. After that, she and her husband decided to move with their two children to his family home in Marion, North Carolina where she eventually became a special education teacher at the junior high school in 2002. As she worked to help students learn at the junior high level, she also began to think about the need to align research validated reading supports across all grade levels. When a position for a literacy consultant at the state level opened up, Elizabeth's passion for implementing research validated reading practices in schools prompted her to apply for and accept the job in 2007. She finally found herself in a position to teach and coach others about reading instruction, and the dream that had started to form back in 1995 began to take shape. Elizabeth first worked with her colleagues to provide professional development to teachers across the state in the basic foundations of reading instruction. Later, when she was asked for her recommendations about reading supports for secondary schools, she eagerly shared her thoughts about SIM™. The wheels of major change at the secondary level were finally in motion.

Elizabeth and two other colleagues met with representatives from KUCRL in 2009 to explore plans for bringing SIM™ to teachers across North Carolina. During initial discussions Elizabeth would pull out the worn sticker of ruby slippers she had carried with her for years and talk about how the sticker had acted as a constant reminder of the power of SIM. Her dream had finally become a reality; the North Carolina Content Literacy Continuum™ Pilot Project was kicked off in 2010.

Since then, hundreds of teachers and thousands of students across North Carolina have been positively affected by SIM™. Additionally, the Xtreme Reading Program has been implemented in pilot schools across the state. For three consecutive years, the average gains in reading for students in the program have been approximately two years of growth at the end of the one-year course. Hundreds of students have learned that they can indeed get more out of school and more out of life; they have learned that they can succeed. And it all started with one woman's dream symbolized by a sticker of ruby red slippers that she carried with her for years. Roy T. Bennett could have been describing Dr. Elizabeth Gibbs when he said, "Don't be pushed around by the fears in your mind. Be led by the dreams in your heart." Many teachers are grateful that Elizabeth was driven by the dream in her heart to create change in secondary schools. And many students are grateful that her dream has positively changed their reality.