

## Passion for the Classroom:

When watching a sporting event, like football, there is a subtle yet recognizable difference between the players who were taught everything they know, excelling in the fundamentals and the predetermined plays, and those who possess a natural gift for the game. The naturals have a knack for making those spontaneous, instinctual decisions when the plays are broken. They don't have to think but simply turn on a dime and tear across the field in perfect placement for the winning catch before the ball ever leaves the quarterback's hand. So it is in music: There are those singers whose voices are nearly over-trained and those for whom singing is like taking breaths, a natural ebb and flow in perfect pitch.

It may come as a surprise to some, but it is much the same with teaching, although the results aren't quite as tangible as a touchdown or a Top Ten hit. Actually, they are best measured not by the teachers themselves but through the students whose lives they've touched. A perfect example of a natural in the classroom is Ashley Catino of Roger Bacon Academy. Just ask her students.

"Teaching's tough, but it's so worth it when a child tells you 'thank you for helping me,' " she tells from experience. "I've had many moments when I've had tears in my eyes because I've read such heartfelt messages. As a matter of fact, one is on my refrigerator right now!"

Teaching for Ashley began far before the prerequisite coursework she would eventually take at the Watson School of Education at UNCW. In fact, the notion of teaching seemed to have been a permanent fixture in her life since childhood.

"As far as I can remember, I've always wanted to teach," she recalls.

---

**She dove into the work, embracing the Direct Instruction technique the academy uses—one that is "a proven method of teaching where each child learns, regardless of ability level,"**

---

"I remember playing school all day long, filling out papers and then grading them, reading to my 'class.' My mother even bought a full-size chalkboard that she hung up on the wall in my 'classroom.' It's huge, and it's still there today! I've always looked up to my teachers and wanted to be like them."

## Meet Ashley Catino

Those dreams were eventually put into practice when Ashley went to college and set her sights on pursuing her childhood passion, a natural progression for this born-to-be teacher. "I was in a sorority, in which we did the 'adopt-a-school' program," she describes. "I would go to College Park Elementary and tutor children during my free time."



And so it began. Upon graduating Ashley applied for and accepted a position teaching elementary school at Roger Bacon Academy. She dove into the work, embracing the Direct Instruction technique the academy uses—one that is "a proven method of teaching where each child learns, regardless of ability level," Ashley says—and even finding joy in the year-round school schedule.

"The most overrated part about teaching is the three months off during the summertime," she asserts. "I've grown to love the year-round schedule my school has. Not only do I believe it is better for the children, but it's better for the teachers as well. It really prevents any burn-out time."

"Burn-out time," as Ashley puts it, is hard to come by regardless, given the nature of her profession itself.

BY: Emily Rea , July 2008

"Every day is so different in the classroom," she reveals. "One day can be really exhausting because of an unexpected mishap, or the kids are just really chatty, and then the next day will be the complete opposite. You're dealing with little human beings, so you never know how they are feeling until that day begins!"

The little human beings under Ashley's care are certainly in good hands. She guides them with compassion and selected the grade level she teaches foremost out of her love for the age of the children in it.

---

**"I've grown to love the year-round schedule my school has. Not only do I believe it is better for the children, but it's better for the teachers as well. It really prevents any burn-out time."**

---

"The children are adorable and hilarious!" she says. "They don't have a filter at that age, so you never know what they are going to tell you. They are so honest and loving. . . . I had the choice between first or third—I chose first because I love the younger ones."

First grade is also where the magic happens—learning how to read. It is an occurrence that never ceases to amaze and rejuvenate the teacher who gets to witness it year in and year out. "I love reading books with exaggerated expression because it gets them so excited," Ashley describes. "There's nothing better than a child that is excited about reading. Writing is fun to teach, too, because it allows you to really be creative and imaginative."

Although teaching is never boring and not always easy, Ashley has sound advice for brand-new teachers: "Do your best. It's the only thing that can be asked of someone. You can't beat yourself up; I learned that my first year."

However, even more than recognizing the hardships that come with being the one at the front of the classroom, Ashley's heart remains most empathetic to those in the little seats before her, taking the place of the dolls she used to teach as a child in a very real way.

"Just growing up in today's society is the toughest challenge for any child. That's why you must be the most positive role model that you can be," Ashley says. "Teachers are with their students more than most family members are. We must remember that and be the person that you would want your own child to be with throughout that day."