

Dr. Julie Ashworth
came to Augustana
after spending
25 years teaching
in elementary
school classrooms.

As she teaches
tomorrow's teachers,
she stresses social
justice, advocacy
and inclusion.

She is an ...

AGENT FOR
CHANGE

His name was Colton. As a third grader, his life should've been all about Match-box cars, Transformers, shooting hoops and collecting baseball cards.

But it wasn't. At home, he suffered horrific abuse and gruesome neglect. In school, he acted out his aggressions in class and on the playground. He had few friends. He was labeled a trouble-maker; a problem kid. He was a nobody, and he knew it.

His future seemed bleak until partway through the year when he began to connect with his teacher. She took the time to ask him questions, learned about his interests, listened to his dreams and, somehow, made him believe in himself – made him believe he was the best kid in the class.

"He could do anything, be anything," she told him.

His teacher's name was Mrs. Ashworth. After time, he told her the heart-wrenching details about his home life. She listened quietly, her heart beating loudly. She could make it better, she told him.

And she did. She notified Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) officials who, after investigating Colton's situation, removed him from the hell he was enduring and placed him in a safer environment.

She came to visit him on weekends and even invited him to her home to share meals

students. I asked him to share some of his journey with them."

"To me – that's what it's all about," Ashworth says of Colton. "Teaching is an incredible opportunity and it's an incredible responsibility. But, if you can change one life – just one – to that degree, and get to witness that; well, that's what it's all about."

A Way of Life

Ashworth grew up as one of eight kids in a small town in rural South Dakota, endlessly playing "school" with her neighbors.

"I knew I wanted to work with kids who came from limited resources because I've always felt that all kids should be included. I've always felt in my very being that we all belonged together."

She majored in elementary education at Augustana, specializing in deaf and special education. After graduation, she spent 25 years working in various elementary schools in the Sioux Falls school district, including Garfield, Lowell, Cleveland and Hawthorne, a school where today more than 97 percent of students live in poverty.

In 1992, she was named the Sioux Falls School District's Teacher of the Year. The following year, she was named South Dakota Teacher of the Year. In 2009, she received the Augustana Student Association (ASA) Professor of the Year Award and the Vernon and Mildred Niebuhr Faculty Excellence Award.

Her success in the classroom happened,

you'll ever have. But it also gives back to you emotionally, spiritually, mentally. You have to really love being with students and love who you are when you're with students. I can't imagine a boring moment," Ashworth said.

Change Agent

Ashworth came to Augustana in 2001, at the urging of then Education Department Chair, Dr. Bob Kiner.

"I really felt called to preparing future teachers. I felt that if I was really going to affect change in education, I had to do it at this level. Today, I teach the methodology classes – how to teach. The bottom line is, teaching is relational. If you care deeply about a student over a sustained time they will learn from you. I absolutely believe that for teachers, knowledge of students is equally as important as knowledge of subject."

Despite the still-challenged economy which, in many states, including South Dakota, resulted in decreased K-12 education budgets in 2011, education continues to be a sought-after major among Augustana students.

For Fall 2011, 312 undergraduate students were declared as education majors. Among those, 85 were specializing in elementary education, 54 in secondary education and 54 in all grades.

Ashworth says a key asset of Augustana's Education Department is that all of its professors have extensive K-12 backgrounds and are still involved with schools in the Sioux Falls

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– Dr. Julie Ashworth, Class of 1975

with her family.

Then, one gray afternoon in December, his grandmother came to visit him. She told him she was taking him away. He would live with her from now on.

He never saw Mrs. Ashworth again. But he never forgot her.

This fall, more than a decade had passed since Dr. Julie Ashworth, class of 1975, a former Sioux Falls elementary school teacher and now an assistant professor of Education at Augustana, had met Colton in her classroom at Hawthorne Elementary.

Despite the passing of time, she hadn't forgotten him, either. She even kept his photo and a letter he'd written about her in a frame in her office.

She often wondered where he was. What was he doing? Who had he become? Would she ever see him again?

Turns out, she would.

"This fall, I'm sitting here working in my office. There's a knock at the door. This kid – Colton, now age 18 – walks in, holding a piece of paper," Ashworth says, smiling.

"I had to find you and had to show you," Colton told her, waving the paper. "I graduated from high school. I got my diploma."

"After leaving Sioux Falls, he'd lived in eight different states and had gone to 13 different schools. But this kid made it through," Ashworth says. "I hugged him and told him how proud I was of him. Then I got so excited I took him down to my class to meet my

Ashworth says, because she looks at teaching not as a job, but as a way of life.

"I believe teaching is the most important vocation there is in terms of affecting and changing the future," she says. "Teaching is a calling. It's a way of life. Many people think it's mostly instruction but teaching is so much more than that. It's advising and guiding and coaching and modeling and inspiring and teaching. Teachers need to know their content but, they need to know how to teach that content."

According to a recent study conducted by researchers from Harvard and Columbia, she's right.

The study, entitled "The Long Term Impacts of Teachers," explored the impact quality teachers had on students, both immediately and over the course of their lifetimes.

"We find that students assigned to higher Value-Added (VA) teachers are more successful in many dimensions. They are more likely to attend college, earn higher salaries, live in better neighborhoods, and save more for retirement. They are also less likely to have children as teenagers. Our study shows that great teachers create great value ... it is clear that improving the quality of teaching – whether using value-added or other tools – is likely to have large economic and social returns," the study said.

Ashworth knows the challenges and rewards of her calling.

"Teaching is the most emotionally, spiritually, mentally and physically challenging job

School District. Today, Ashworth still goes to Hawthorne twice a week to observe changing classroom dynamics firsthand and spends countless hours mentoring new teachers.

In addition to teaching tomorrow's teachers, she says a big part of her job is helping students discern whether teaching is right for them. And, to help students find their "stance" as a teacher.

"The reality is, you teach who you are. I'm teaching as a daughter, as a wife, as a grandparent, as an actress, as a mother of a child with disabilities. Your stance is always changing and always emerging."

A self-proclaimed crusader of social justice, Ashworth calls it her mission – and that of her department – to teach teachers how to carry out social justice in their classrooms.

Key to that mission is the "Circle of Courage" framework the department uses. It consists of four elements teachers need to implement in their classrooms to help students succeed:

- *Belonging*: Humans have a need to feel valued, important and safe. Every student needs to know that they belong.
- *Independence*: Every student needs to feel that they have autonomy; that they can make good decisions and follow through on their actions.
- *Mastery*: Students need to feel like they are competent in their abilities and also feel they can seek more knowledge and skills in a safe environment. An example is a child named Rudy, a former elementary student

of Ashworth's from Guatemala who struggled academically and socially but was a gifted artist. Ashworth named him the classroom's "artist in residence" and encouraged him to create artwork on behalf of the class whenever possible. It became the thing he was known for – the thing he was good at.

- *Generosity:* Every student should have the opportunities to feel like they have something to give in the classroom, that their presence contributes, and that they are empathetic towards others and want to help others.

While Ashworth argues that teachers are instrumental to a student's success, she says the classroom environment they create is also key. To illustrate that point, she creates a different theme in the department's model classroom each year.

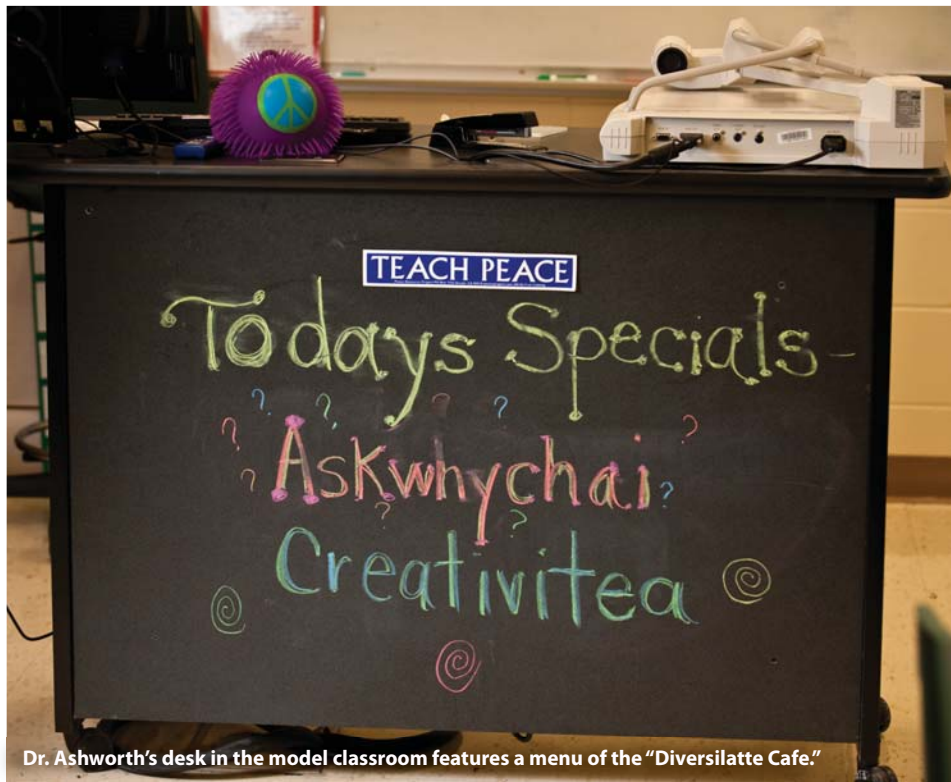
This fall, she introduced the "Diversilatte Cafe," a coffee-shop-themed design complete with a "special of the day" chalkboard, diner-style tables and chairs, and coffee cups – all of which she says encourages courageous conversations about diversity and the quest for social justice.

"The physical environment is so important – it keeps students' curiosity high; keeps them engaged and excited about learning.

Be the Advocate

For Ashworth, the chance to spend every day in the classroom, nurturing and guiding the teachers of tomorrow, is a gift. It is, in her opinion, a chance to change the world, one person at a time.

"There isn't a day where I can't wait to get here. They'll be dragging me out of here when



Dr. Ashworth's desk in the model classroom features a menu of the "Diversilatte Cafe."

I'm 80," she says, laughing.

"I always tell my students: 'Be every student's advocate. Go out there and be change

agents.' In the big picture, that's no small task. There are obstacles – I never sugar-coat those – but the rewards are beyond measure."

Theatre



Zombie Prom

The Augustana Theatre Department presented the musical "Zombie Prom" March 1-3 and 8-10 in the Edith Mortenson Center Theatre. The student-designed production brought the "fabulous fifties" back to life — and a few other things that should have stayed dead. The show, by John Dempsey and Dana P. Rowe, told the story of teenage love gone wrong. Next up, the Theatre Department will debut "Our Town" April 26-28 and May 3-5.