



CREATIVE THINKERS

ArtsCalibre Academy • Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

"The greatest scientists are artists as well," said Albert Einstein, who believed that his insights didn't come from logic or mathematics, but from inspiration cultivated through the arts. It's a philosophy shared by the founders of ArtsCalibre Academy, an independent school unlike any other.

Accepting children from the age of three, the academy doesn't just offer instruction in the arts, but infuses the arts into every area of the curriculum. Music, dance, theatre and the visual arts enrich virtually every lesson, so the children's creativity is given free rein. "We use the arts as a vehicle, so, for instance, we are creating dioramas in science and building communities out of art supplies in social studies," says Sandra Walton, the school's Executive Director. "It's a hands-on approach that encourages critical thinking."

THE ART OF THE MATTER

Educators have long recognised that engagement in the arts contributes to academic success. In a 2002 study, researchers from the University of California found that students with a high arts involvement performed better in standardised tests. They also shed light on associations between the visual arts and reading, drama and conflict resolution, as well as a strong link between playing the piano and mathematics.

However, when Walton, an experienced K-12 teacher, began looking for a school for her own daughters, she couldn't find one that was suitably enriched by the arts. "There was nothing out there that would be engaging for them," she says. "So we started ArtsCalibre Academy." Class sizes are capped at 15 with each class having two teaching staff. It means that children have the support to explore their passions, and progress at their own speed. "If a child is exceeding his or her grade level, we just keep them moving forward," says Walton. "We don't stop them."

Walton deeply admires Sir Ken Robinson, the educationalist whose TED talk "Do schools kill creativity?" is the most viewed in TED's history. She is also inspired by Stephen Covey's bestseller *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. "It's the basis for our 'Leader In Me' programme," she says. "It fits beautifully with our arts focus."

Walton and fellow co-founder Charles Forget believe they have hit on the formula for happiness in school. "The children are excited to come in each day," she says. "They love seeing what's next, what's new." They could also be unlocking the potential of a future Einstein. "These children have already surpassed anything I saw in a traditional school environment," says Walton. "I am so excited for their futures."

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