



TIME Magazine Profile: Getting Creative - Annalee Adair

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Two years ago, the hallways of Caslan School, a Métis elementary and middle school in northern Alberta, were scarred with graffiti. Students routinely skipped class and scored below standards on provincial exams. Caslan's principal, Tim Murphy, says exasperated teachers often quit within a year.

Which is why Murphy says he is grateful for the help of Annalee Adair, 45, a former high school and university instructor who has pioneered a novel way of teaching math, history and other subjects. Disillusioned by Canada's rigid education system, Adair created a community arts program for the city of Ottawa and co-founded Arts Network for Children and Youth. The mother of three from Chelsea, Que., is now winning raves for her work championing ArtsSmarts, a program she coordinates nationally on behalf of the Canadian Conference of the Arts. ArtsSmarts is built on the idea that students learn more effectively through the creative lens of art. Since 1998 the program has provided that lens to 250,000 students by partnering 1,500 schools Canada-wide with 3,000 artists, from painters to videomakers. Adair says Caslan School is important because it is a "test pilot," proving the program can turn around a troubled school, especially aboriginal ones where some students lack cultural pride.

Caslan's students have worked with such artists as a pottery maker, who helped them build a 2-m-by-2.5-m multiplication table from tile, and a textile expert, who showed them how they could create quilts stitched with facts about Canada. Grades are improving, Murphy says, "because the students aren't missing school and are engaged in learning." Says Darla Daniels, 13, whose reading level has jumped several grades: "Since ArtsSmarts came, I don't want to miss one day of school. I don't want to miss the fun."

Educators who use ArtsSmarts overwhelmingly vouch for its ability to induce positive behavioural changes in students. Other aboriginal schools are looking to replicate Caslan's success; schools in the Quebec Laurentians are leveraging ArtsSmarts to help curb their high dropout rate. Adair is trying to make the arts a permanent part of the Canadian curriculum and fund expansion of ArtsSmarts through community and provincial partnerships. She is encouraged by the program's success, but she says she has more work to do. "Kids are not engaged," she says. "People are looking for new ways to teach." Adair clearly has one of them.