

Discovery Centre program caters to special need

By LISA RUTLEDGE
Herald Special

Nearly 160 North Halton students will learn how to make a discovery this year at Pinéview Public School.

The Discovery Centre, established by the Halton Board of Education, provides an open and challenging atmosphere to explore, create and problem-solve.

For seven consecutive school days, 16 groups of students, 10 in each group, will be chosen to participate in the Discovery Centre. Students in Grades one through four are picked by classroom teachers based on their ability to express themselves, their willingness to ask questions and their desire to explore.

The Discovery program, now in its third year, was designed to enhance the creative problem solving and exploring skills of bright children, explained the program's teacher Lucy McLean. Students who can work independently in a classroom and do not create a problem don't require a great deal of a teacher's attention, she said. But they still have special needs, Mrs. McLean insisted.

The Discovery Centre takes these students out of their regular classes to give them room to experiment and to equip themselves with the proper learning tools to use in every aspect of their lives.

The Discovery classroom has been transformed into a bazaar of information - the room broken into stations full of electronic gadgets, reptiles and molding clay just waiting to be discovered by curious hands.

Getting the answers requires knowing how to ask good questions, how to organize the information and how to write the answer clearly, explained Mrs. McLean. "We're teaching them to use charts and graphs," she said. "Visuals help because they add structure to an answer and help the students to see how things develop. And when they find the answer they should feel good about what they find."

At the centre, the students receive individual feedback on their projects, something rare to larger, less specialized classrooms. Mrs. McLean continued. In regular classrooms the teacher's attention is distracted by the students who require constant assistance, she said, but there should be focus on the needs of bright children as well, she added.

Posted about the classroom are key words and phrases to guide the students on questioning methods in order to arrive at a full answer

Words such as purpose, value, style, changes and conditions are included in a list of things to ask while researching a subject.

At the beginning of the first session, which began on Sept. 17, Mrs. McLean introduced the important characteristics of a discovery

learner. Among those traits is curiosity, persistence, a desire to take risks and the ability to use physical senses.

Eight-year-old Theresa Clayton, a Grade 4 student at M.Z. Bennett Public School, in Acton, conducted a research project on dolphins to find out how they survive and if they are near to extinction. Theresa gathered information from encyclopedias and organized it into a presentation, complete with a plaster-cast of a dolphin. Theresa said she enjoyed the Discovery Centre atmosphere because there were fewer students and more freedom.

Laura Willis, a nine-year-old Grade 4 student from Joseph Gibbons Public School, in Georgetown, said she has learned how to ask better questions. Laura completed research projects on birthstones, spiders and also researched dolphins. "I learned how to look up things by going around and asking people," she said, molding ocean waves around a plaster-cast dolphin.

Laura dreams of becoming a teacher and plans to pass all the

tools of learning on to her students, especially the importance of asking questions. No one should be afraid to ask questions, she insisted.



Laura Willis, 9-years-old, enjoys computers



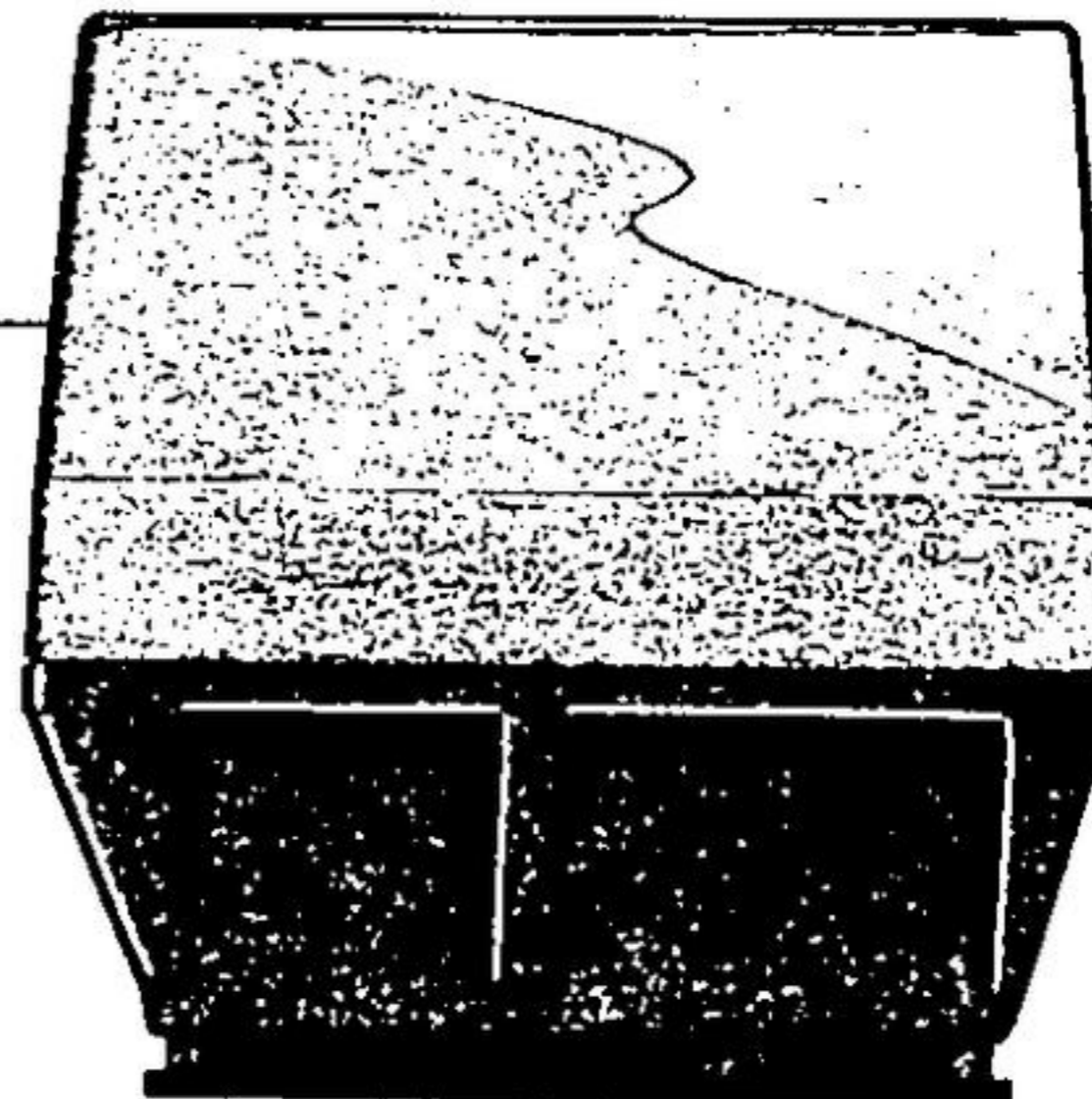
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