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FEELING BETTER ALL AROUND

Tribes Philosophy

Silver Creek Public School promotes safe environment

By JENNIFER ENRIGHT

Something so basic as showing common courtesy and demonstrating respect for others is a scarce commodity in our society, according to Wendy Harrison, the principal at Silver Creek Public School in Georgetown. So she's happy when she's able to head a school that actively promotes respect and understanding not only among students but also among parents and teachers.

At Silver Creek Public School in south Georgetown children are actually taught to practise appreciation statements, and it's this kind of thoughtful approach to human relations that Mrs. Harrison sees little of in our society. "It is something that is truly lacking in our society. It's give, give, give, and feed me, feed me, feed me, and not enough thank you."

Mrs. Harrison's school recently was recognized as part of Today's Parent magazine's survey of top schools in Canada for its innovative programming. The school follows what is known as the Tribes philosophy, a way of teaching developed by Jeanne Gibbs, an American mother and researcher. Tribes, which was developed in the 1970s in response to drug use in American schools, has grown in popularity among schools in the United States and Canada. The basic premise is to offer a safe and caring environment for students, one that helps promote learning and understanding.

On the wall at Silver Creek Public School you can see some of the basic tenets of the Tribes philosophy. A poster at the principal's office highlights the four agreements that school staff teach students including attentive listening, appreciations (without put downs), the right to pass, and mutual respect.

In an article in Today's Parent, writer Dahlia Reich singled out Silver Creek for the unique way the school puts its principles into practice. Aside from encouraging appreciation statements, teachers start the day in each classroom with a communi-

ty circle. The circle gives kids a chance to reflect on what they're learning and to set goals for the day.

But to really see the Tribes way of education in action, you have to watch how kids handle different situations. Language - and its ability to encourage rather than hinder development - is at the heart of Tribes. As Mrs. Harrison says, "They (students) have a chance to express their feelings. They learn good communication relationship skills."

Mrs. Harrison says Tribes has actually benefited the teaching staff as well, not just the students. On her desk, she can point to a journal where she logged discipline issues from the last school year. Less than a tenth of the book is filled with concerns about kids not getting along, and for her this is a tangible reminder about how effective Tribes is.

Since she received training on Tribes in September of 2002, she has been sold on its effectiveness. However, she says her school and staff are not alone in promoting this innovative approach to education. She says the concept of Tribes has steadily gained in popularity among educators, and she points out that many at the Halton District School Board are learning about Tribes. "There is a line up to get trained by teachers."



PHOTO BY JENNIFER ENRIGHT

Wendy Harrison, the principal at Silver Creek Public School in Georgetown, pictured here with the wall hanging which states that a Tribes school is "where students, staff and families work together to create a learning environment for healthy human development."

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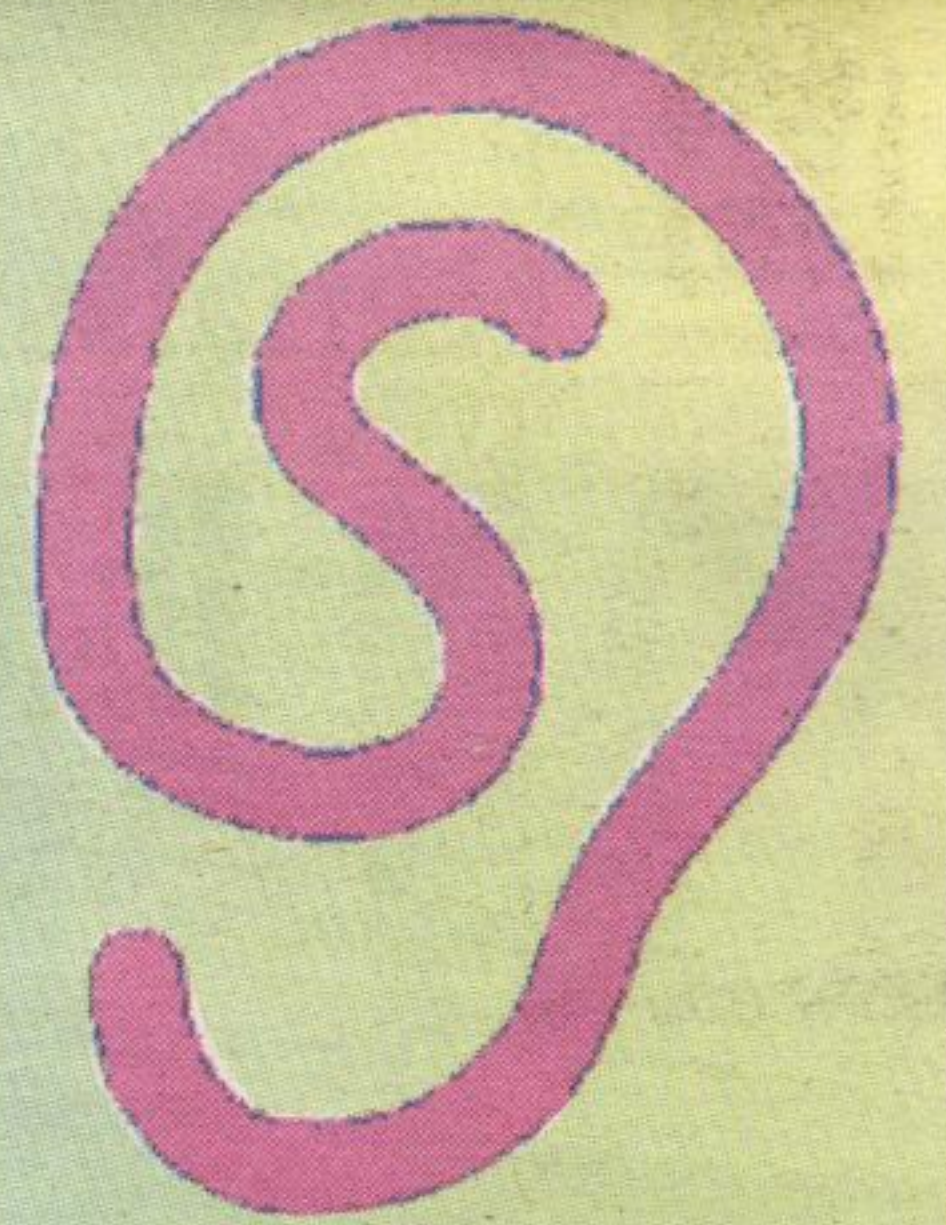
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