

# A 'self-esteem angel'

BY MARK WEBER  
*Red Deer Express*

Giving young students the tools they need to combat attacks on their self-esteem is the aim of a year-long program at Ecole Oriole Park School.

Taking that a step further, local author Wendy Collier talked about how being different is cool last week at the school.

Several students were featured in two short plays about building self-esteem and letting go of mean comments others may direct at them.

Collier's message springs from her book by the same name.

"It teaches kids about self esteem, but it also teaches them how to 'reframe' what is

being said to them," she explains.

Students learn to question hurtful and teasing statements: is it a fact or is it opinion?

"Most of what's being said is opinion," she said. "If it's an opinion, they can understand that it's not a truth about themselves."

This, along with a stream of other tips on bolstering respect for oneself and others, have been life-changing lessons for students, said principal Cathy Gukert.

"Basically, for the month of January we're focusing on self-esteem," she said.

"It's not something teachers don't already know about or do with the kids, but having the book as our focal point has allowed us to stop and really think how we need

to be helping the kids with that message," she said. "It's provided a common language and a common set of discussions throughout the school," she adds.

Collier's book was initially read to the entire school via smaller groups.

"Teachers have taken Wendy's ideas and done a whole variety of things throughout the school, depending on the ages of the students."

Gukert said Ecole Oriole Park School has been engaged in a year-long project on learning respect for yourself, for others, for property and for learning.

"So many bullying and teasing programs tell kids these behaviours are bad, so go tell an adult," she explains. "That's an important message but we also believe there is another part to it - empowering the kids and giving them tools to deal with it themselves."

"Having a positive self-esteem is at the foundation of that."

Reframing unkind words wields a tremendous power.

"Is it true? Does it matter? We're also trying to give the kids some 'stop' phrases like 'well, that's your opinion' or 'being different is cool' and just walking away."

Having Collier bring her wisdom to the students has been a rich experience this past while. Gukert said the



Foundation for Red Deer Public School provided funding for the project. And all the teaching on respect is paying off.

"We give out 'super kids' coupons for acts above and beyond acts of respect," said Gukert.

So far, 4,500 have been given out.

"We're really excited about it," she says.

"When you consider how many thousands of interactions have to occur among the children and the adults, and just a bump or two each week of a minor nature, to me there's a lot of respect going on," she smiles.

*Being Different is Cool* is aimed at children from ages five to 12.

For more about Wendy Collier's books, visit [www.angelbooks.ca](http://www.angelbooks.ca).

[mweber@reddeer.greatwest.ca](mailto:mweber@reddeer.greatwest.ca)



**FEELING BETTER** - Grade five French immersion students Raeanne Moore, left, and Claire Wilson read a play about self-esteem at the Ecole Oriole Park School.

Chad Hipolito/Red Deer Express