

## Positive Playgrounds a hit at Holy Redeemer



Book and program being used across the Country.  
Submitted by Jeannette Giesbrecht

Remember when recess meant playing hide and seek, hopscotch or tag instead of computer games and trading cards? Those days are having a resurgence at elementary schools across the country through the implementation of Positive Playgrounds.

In Ardrossan, school counsellor Paul Berg has been working closely with parent volunteers since October to introduce the program at Holy Redeemer Catholic School, the first school in the Elk Island Catholic School Division to use the program.

"I contacted Pearl Marko, who developed the program, last year when I heard that a school in Lamont was doing it," said Berg. "I ordered the manual and we held several committee meetings with the parents, who are very active in the school and with kindergarten to Grade 3 students.

"The parents are the ones who've done most of the work organizing this," he said. "It's been fun to watch them because they're very excited about it."

The program divides a playground into zones, each with an old-fashioned game: there's a parachute game in one zone, tag in another and skipping in a third. Children receive instruction and supervision from zone facilitators so that everyone plays with the same set of rules.

Not only does the program teach children ways to have fun without technology, it also promotes social skills. "It's an attempt to keep the students busy, to involve them in co-operative play and to get them interacting with children outside of their regular circle of friends," said Berg. "When we were kids and we were out playing, you had to learn to socialize and co-operate," said Marko. "With computer games, there's no co-operation or social skills, and these are skills our children are losing."

Currently the program involves Grade 5 and 6 students helping to facilitate the activities for grades K-3 students during the lunch recess at the school once every two weeks.

Not only has the program been popular with the younger students, it has also received positive comments from the older students. "We've had an amazing number of Grade 5 and 6 and junior high students helping," said Berg. "We're working on programs for K-3 right now, but after the new year, we hope to do more with grades 4-6. It's still in the pilot stage at this point."

The program comes from Marko's manual on Positive Playgrounds, a step-by-step guide that leads teachers, volunteers and facilitators through the development, scheduling and implementation of games from a generation ago.

"I started developing the program about nine years ago after watching a program on TV that discussed the impact of technology on our children" said Marko. "I went to my own child's playground and saw that a lot of kids weren't doing physical activities. So I approached the principal and offered to research games."

After a successful run at her own child's school, Marko said she was approached by other principals to bring the program to their schools. She's now working on her third Positive Playgrounds book and the program is being used by schools across Canada. "This year alone, the manual has gone out to around 500 schools," she said.

