

Zipper Buddies

Purpose:

By combining art classes with economic study, we will enhance students' understanding of, and enthusiasm for, both fields.

Vocabulary:

Capital resources, choice, consumer, demand, goods, human resources, natural resources, price, producer, profit, services.

Project:

Students use their artistic talents to create an appealing product they will sell to other students.

Process:

For the past three years our second grade class manufactured and sold "Zipper Buddies." These colorful beads are made of fimo clay and contain clips that attach to the end of a zipper. The entire class participates in the project, and production takes place in art class. We sell our products at the end-of-the-year picnic. Apart from purchasing the materials we use to create our products, we have no parental involvement. This year, our project materials cost approximately \$15, and we netted a profit of \$37. This was an improvement over last year's net profit of \$22. We have recouped our expenses all three years. This year, our class decided to donate its profits to World Vision to support a project. Last year we designated our funds to help alleviate the drought in the Horn of Africa.

It is a joy to see the students learn to take pride in their project, and they gain a sense of instrumentality by benefitting a worthy cause. The project provided an incentive for active, engaged learning as, for example, we studied African geography and learned about the drought in class. The students enjoy expressing their creativity in making the beads, and in working cooperatively to make the sale successful.

When we first embarked on our business project three years ago, the children learned to conduct a market study to help them estimate the demand that might exist for their product and to set a realistic price they could charge for the finished product.

The second grade class has made the same project for all three years, and the novelty of the project has worn off. I would therefore suggest finding ways to keep the project fresh over time by changing the beneficiary, selling at a different venue, or changing some aspect of the product.

In seeking to revitalize our project for the coming year, the students discussed the benefits and limitations of our approach. We concluded that selling the product on the last day of school limits the after sale learning and evaluation. As a class we discussed other products which could be made and sold a few weeks before the end of the school year. We have tentatively decided to make earrings that could be sold for Mother's Day. The students felt that there would be greater interest in this product and will conduct another market survey to test their hypothesis. They also offered some suggestions for doing things differently this year, such as:

- Begin the project during Achievement Test week (held before Mother's Day). Our schedule that week is already disrupted by the testing. We could fill in the odd time slots with brief economics lessons and provide time for students to work on their project
- Students think they would be helped by doing an annual market study, perhaps introducing several product choices.
- We agreed that they would benefit from more in-depth teaching about manufacturing and production.
- Students would like to explore opportunities to individually earn the money and then decide what to do with it individually.

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