

Drugs

Essential question: “Why do so many young people in our neighborhood sell drugs?”

School: Thurgood Marshall Elementary School, Philadelphia, PA

Appropriate for grades: 7-8

Year of project: 2001-2002

Subjects: English language arts/Communications, math, social studies, science

(On teacher site only) For more information: Terri’s email address

Many of Terri Salvucci's 8th grade students were acutely aware of the presence of drugs in their community and had a sense of the economic impact the drug trade had on their neighborhood, their families and themselves.

In fact, this knowledge became the source of their project's essential question, "Why do so many young people in our neighborhood sell drugs?"

To deepen their understanding of this issue they met with University of Pennsylvania sociologist Dr. Elijah Anderson, author of *Code of the Street*, and Robert Alsbrooks, a former drug dealer who chose to apply his gifts in a different direction and who had become a successful social entrepreneur. The students felt a strong affinity with Robert, as he challenged them to set an example for others, kids and adults, by starting their own successful business.

They accepted his challenge and began working with Sharon Mosby, a youth entrepreneurship coach with The Enterprise Center. To help the class gain an understanding of how legitimate businesses get started, Ms. Mosby guided and encouraged the students as they formulated plans for three different businesses: a school store, a babysitting service, and a hair braiding service. As part of the process, they learned about the 4 P’s – product, price, place, and promotion. They developed names and logos for their businesses, researched costs, predicted income and established start-up operating budgets. They also wrote their own resumes, as potential business owners.

They presented their completed plans to a team of professional coaches at the Enterprise Center. Robert Alsbrooks, their mentor and community partner, was there to provide moral support and affirm their work.

Said their teacher, Ms. Salvucci, “We hadn’t talked about a dress code, but they came in suits and dresses. They were really proud of themselves and the effort they’d made.”

As an outgrowth of this experience, the students explored the possible establishment of a school store, and the school granted permission for the formation of an after-school "business club," which Terri Salvucci hoped could become a model for schools throughout the District.