



RONI GALGANO / Union-Tribune

Business is brisk: Wads of padillas change hands at the comics booth, but the eyes of Roberto Gomez, 7, are firmly fixed on the book he wants to buy.

Mini-entrepreneurs thrive in school's Microsociety

By Lillian Salazar Leopold
STAFF WRITER

CHULA VISTA — The boys running the Classic Comics and Cards booth were doing a brisk business. So brisk they earned a plastic grocery sack full of money.

And their peers at the business permit office fined them \$100 for creating a hazard because they had too many people gathered at their booth.

So without ever having read a chapter on free enterprise or government ordinances, sixth-grade "business owners" Victor Garcia, Danny Hernandez and Ivan Rios were living the lives of entrepreneurs.

The boys and the 280 students attending summer school at Parkview Elementary this summer are participating in a schoolwide experiment — the Microsociety — which started in Lowell, Mass., and has taken root in schools across the country.

In this Microsociety, consumers from kindergartners to sixth-graders swirled around during the pre-lunch hour at Parkview. Some were taking out loans at the bank so they could open their own businesses. Others were working at the music store, travel agency, post office, nature center or restaurant.

And then there were the govern-

ment agencies levying taxes, police officers issuing tickets for running or fighting, and a courtroom where students could settle their differences before fourth-grade judge Justin Humphrey.

Microsociety was introduced to Parkview when teacher Jorge Ramirez transferred from Sherman Elementary, which piloted the program in San Diego. The Microsociety is a blooming success, and nine Parkview teachers will use it in grades two through six next year.

"It's a powerful tool," said third-grade teacher Erik Latoni. "The hardest thing is convincing the kids they have the power."

The students in Ramirez's classroom learned quickly of their power. Soon after the program started three years ago, they were becoming unruly, so Ramirez ended their Microsociety sessions.

"You know how, as a disciplinary measure, you take something away that children like?" Ramirez said. "Well, it backfired on me."

The students knew that, under the classroom constitution, Ramirez had no right to take away Microsociety. So they sentenced him to spend his day in the Washington, D.C., Detention Center while they conducted their business.

"Microsociety ran well that day," Ramirez remembers. "It shows the leadership these students get."

Even with just eight days of summer training, these students quickly grasped the concept.

The comic book boys thought up their business on their own, wrote a business plan and pooled their "padillas" — the money named after school Principal Charlie Padilla and his family — to start their enterprise.

"We knew everybody likes cards," Ivan said.

And since most of the cards the boys were selling were doubles of ones they already had, what better way to thin out their collections and get money for things they could buy in the Micro Mall?

They could buy a candy telegram for 10 padillas, as did second-grader Mark Portillo, who got them for his mom and dad. With a little Hershey's kiss at the top, Mark's telegrams said, "I Love You."

For 25 padillas, students could buy a copy of *The Student's Voice*, the student newspaper, which carried ads from No Fear Travel Agency and a story about the nature center.

Or they could just save those padillas.

"Some of them take so much pride in earning the money that they will keep it and take it home," Padilla said. "It's such a sense of accomplishment for them."

While Parkview teachers are getting on the Microsociety bandwagon, teachers participating in the summer school session are also among the converted.