

Tim Joy: Teaching Students to Serve The Community

Thanks to their analysis of the potential impact of a new private Catholic school north of Portland, two students at La Salle High School in Milwaukie, Oregon, were offered a contract as consultants to the Portland Unified School District. Three other students, who developed a model of how drinking alcohol affects a driver's reaction time, received state funding to continue. Both of these achievements resulted from work in Systems Dynamics, a learning tool brought to La Salle High School by English teacher Tim Joy.

“When you put students in charge of learning something, and you make them a resource to the community, you put them in a position of significance, which they should have,” Mr. Joy says.

Systems analysis is a critical thinking tool that was developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the 1940s, but educational applications were created only about 15 years ago. Mr. Joy is now a leader in this field, instructing teachers at other schools as well as students at La Salle High School.

With the help of STELLA (Structural Thinking Experimental Learning Laboratory) software, students working with a computer in self-directed groups have used this method to understand a wide range of topics, from the workings of a nuclear reactor and the state of Chinese population policy to the honor and integrity of Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. “Students don't want to leave the classroom,” when they're working on these projects, Mr. Joy says. “They'll stay late on Friday.” The reason? When you ask a student

what this has meant, “The most common refrain is that ‘it's made me think and see differently.’”

But another significant effect involves those often-cliché words, self-esteem and empowerment. The study of the effects of alcohol on drivers is now being developed – at La Salle High School – as an interactive computer program for

use in school health classes throughout Oregon. Stephany Yerger and her fellow classmates have learned more than the joys of teamwork in Mr. Joy's class. Says Stephany, “We have just begun to taste the sweetest of all successes – the knowledge that we have the power to make a difference.”

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Tim Joy stands in front of his “office,” a converted shopping cart. Since he does not have a classroom, he must move from room to room. Tim found that this was the best way to “cart” all of his materials around. With the help of his students, Tim enjoys decorating the cart for each season.