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Visiting Japanese educators, Stadium teachers share ideas

This is not your father's geometry class. Inside a classroom at Tacoma's Stadium High School, teacher Tim Chalberg's freshmen and sophomores are seated in groups of four and five, working together to create a geometric figure.

DEBBIE CAFAZZO; STAFF WRITER

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Yui Miyazaki of Japan, center, watches as Stadium High student Sarah Jaasko receives instruction Thursday from geometry teacher Tim Chalberg. Miyazaki was among 20 visiting educators – most from Japan – who observed the Studio Classroom method of teaching math. (LUI KIT WONG/Staff photographer)

This is not your father's geometry class.

Inside a classroom at Tacoma's Stadium High School, teacher Tim Chalberg's freshmen and sophomores are seated in groups of four and five, working together to create a geometric figure.

"Give me a thumbs up if you have a picture that looks something like this," he tells them, after drawing a few basic lines they will use as their starting point. "See if you can make a parallelogram."

As the students get to work, quietly discussing their ideas and making notes, Chalberg circulates around the room. But he's not alone. He's shadowed by math coach Elly Claus-McGahan, who works with teachers at both Stadium and

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Classroom. Tacoma Public Schools is using the method in several disciplines, including math, science and language arts.

On Thursday, 20 visiting educators — mostly from Japan — were on hand at Stadium to observe the method at work. They were in Tacoma for a conference hosted by the University of Puget Sound's School of Education and an international group called the Japan-U.S. Teacher Education Consortium (JUSTEC).

Some might wonder what Americans can teach the Japanese, who are widely regarded as having an excellent school system.

Fred Hamel, a UPS education professor, said that JUSTEC was established to create a dialogue between educators in the two countries. Among other things, he said, Japanese educators are interested in how American schools teach diverse learners.

They are also interested in learning about the Studio Classroom.

The studio approach encourages students to take an active part in learning. After laying out the problem, Chalberg challenges students to use the tools they've acquired to solve it.

The goal, explains Claus-McGahan, is to "get more student engagement." Students need to arrive at their answers — sometimes by working in groups. They also need to understand why their answer works, and how they can apply it elsewhere.

Chalberg's class period is marked by frequent stops as he checks in with students, making sure they're on track. It's more like a conversation than a lecture.

Nobody is asleep in the back of the room.

After class ended, Chalberg and others met with the visitors to answer questions and reflect on the lesson.

Sachiko Tosa, originally from Japan but now a faculty member at Wright State University in Ohio, said some visitors felt the geometry lesson didn't go well, because some students didn't immediately understand the concept.

She said they questioned whether free-thinking exploration was the most efficient way to deliver the lesson. She wondered if there's a middle ground between old and new methods that could help students more.

Akio Yamamoto, a teacher at Gakushuin Boys Senior High School in Tokyo, said the task seemed difficult for some of Chalberg's students. Yamamoto compared it to having the right ingredients for a recipe, but not knowing how to cook them together.

Chalberg, who is working on his master's degree in teaching at UPS, said students are used to working together to solve problems.

"As long as they have all the ingredients, it's up to them to combine them," he said.

Rather than teaching students prescribed processes to arrive at an answer, Claus-McGahan said, the Studio Classroom encourages them to use their own reasoning to get there.

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""Sachiko Tosa, originally from Japan but now a faculty member at Wright State University in Ohio, said some visitors felt the geometry lesson didn't go well, because some students didn't immediately understand the concept.
She said they questioned whether free-thinking exploration was the most efficient way to deliver the lesson.
""

Clearly this is an extremely inefficient method of teaching..... Where is the data to support this method?

Google : "Why minimally guided instruction does not work" by Kirschner, Sweller, and Clark

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Tacoma Public Schools told teachers last week to get ready for changes in special education programs.

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