

Report on STINT's Teaching Sabbatical

Fredrik Tydal, Stockholm of School of Economics

During the fall semester of 2019, I had the pleasure and privilege of being a STINT fellow at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore. My regular job is that of *lektor* in English at the Stockholm School of Economics (SSE), and for my teaching sabbatical, I had been assigned to the English section in the School of Humanities at NTU.

I would like to preface this report by thanking STINT for the generous opportunity, SSE for nominating me to the program, and everyone at NTU for the warm hospitality during my stay.

Part I: The Experience

Background and preparations

I first learned that I had been accepted to the Teaching Sabbatical Program in the week before Christmas 2018. It was good news to be sure, and I was particularly pleased to see that I had been assigned to NTU. Since I spent almost three years in the United States on a postdoctoral fellowship, I already have a degree of familiarity with American higher education, so I thought it would be interesting to learn more about Asia in order to broaden my horizons.

Once the holidays were over, I began to correspond with the two contact persons I had been assigned: the Head of the English Section and a member of the administrative staff. Together, we agreed on the dates for my planning trip in March. Before that trip, however, there was another important event: the STINT information day in February, when returning fellows from the previous year would mingle with us outgoing ones. During lunch, I had the good fortune of ending up at the same table as the trio who had been to NTU the previous semester. From them, I received a good deal of useful recommendations that nicely complemented the general program information given out during the day.

In early March, I went to Singapore for my planning trip. As I had already been to the city-state before, I did not lose any time sight-seeing or acclimatizing; rather, I could focus entirely on making the necessary preparations for my visiting semester. Before coming, I had scheduled a number of meetings, most importantly with the Head of the English Section and with the Coordinator of Undergraduate Studies. One of the professors had also generously offered to let me sit in on one of her seminars, giving me first-hand insight into the teaching culture at NTU. In addition, I had arranged to meet in a more informal setting over dinner with another faculty member, with whom I had a mutual acquaintance. These meetings were all very productive, and I was grateful that they had each taken the time to welcome me, despite this being in the middle of the semester.

Before arriving, I had imagined being able to take care of all the practical matters during the planning trip, such as initiating the application process for my work visa and securing faculty housing. This, however, was overly optimistic, as my administrative contact was at this point still figuring out what visa category I should be in. While meeting her in person, I discovered that she was under the impression that I was the very first STINT fellow at the school, and that this was why she was struggling with my appointment. When I let her know that there had in fact been several Swedish teachers as part of the program at the university before, she then asked me to find out which subjects they had been in. So, I swiftly contacted the friendly trio I had met at the STINT information day in February, who quickly responded and also gave me the names of their administrative contacts. This solved the problem, by giving the administrative staff a lead. However, I could still not apply for a visa

while I was there, and it turned out that you could not reserve housing until you actually had your work pass number. So, in the event of administrative problems or bureaucratic uncertainty for future fellows, I recommend looking up which departments have previously hosted guests from STINT.

In the months that followed, I set up the course in consultation with the Coordinator of Undergraduate Studies via email. After first discussing the option of teaching an existing course, it soon turned out that all of my preferred ones were already taken. It was then suggested to me that I teach my own course instead. Thinking over my “teaching repertoire,” it occurred to me that the literary course I give at SSE would be interesting to bring to Singapore. At SSE, it is the only course of its kind, where students read a number of novels and other works of fiction that are of thematic interest to them as business and economics majors. Even though the students at NTU would be English majors, I still thought I could adapt the course for them, and thus pitched it to the coordinator as “Literature and Economics,” for which I was given the green light.

As the course I would be teaching was to be an elective, the enrollment of students would largely depend on the interest I could generate with my course description. Naturally, it would be embarrassing if I would get a low – or even zero – turnout. Thus, I had to write an enticing course blurb, and I came up with the following:

Can money buy happiness? What is the meaning of success? How can we alleviate poverty? Literature has dealt with these questions for centuries, if not millennia – from Aesop’s fables through Shakespeare to the present time.

*In this course, you will study a series of texts from the English-speaking world dealing with themes of money, success, and consumerism. You will learn about the mechanisms of an urban economy from John Dos Passos’s sprawling **Manhattan Transfer**, deepen your understanding of greed through Frank Norris’s cautionary tale **McTeague**, familiarize yourself with feminist economics through Agnes Smedley’s long-neglected classic **Daughter of Earth**, and analyze the tensions between old and new money through F. Scott Fitzgerald’s **The Great Gatsby** and Kevin Kwan’s **Crazy Rich Asians**. In this way, the course offers an introduction to economic concepts and ideas through their dramatization in literature, while on a deeper level also exploring the timeless and universal questions prompted by this staging.*

The course as proposed looked similar to the version I had been teaching at SSE, though I also adapted it to local conditions. For example, I included *Crazy Rich Asians* by the popular Singaporean writer Kevin Kwan, which I was curious about teaching in this context. Moreover, given that the students were English majors, I could also assign them Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, a text that would be too difficult for SSE students, who have no training in dealing with pre-modern literature in English.

In the months that followed, I was also able to eventually secure my work pass, as well as to apply for and receive faculty housing. For a while, I was a little worried about the process, especially since my contact person was suddenly assigned a new position within the university and the responsibility of handling my appointment was transferred to two different staff members. However, everything turned out fine in the end, and I hope I can calm the worries of future fellows in a similar situation by saying that the process is ultimately pragmatic.

Teaching in Singapore

I arrived to Singapore in late July, giving me ample time to settle in before my teaching started in mid-August. This allowed me to move into my new office with ease and to furthermore get acquainted with some of the others in the department. I was immediately invited to go out for lunch with several faculty members, which made me feel welcome. The Coordinator of Undergraduate Studies in particular proved to be a helpful resource, taking the time to answer many practical questions about teaching at NTU.

As the start date of the semester drew closer, it turned out that I had attracted 32 students to the course. The cap for class size is 35, so this was a very good number, and other faculty members congratulated me on the result. Thus the course began, with an almost full group of students. As it turned out, everyone in the class was Singaporean, which meant that they all more or less shared the same educational background. In this sense, it was on the one hand a homogenous group, but at the same time, it also reflected Singapore's inherent cultural diversity.

For the first seminar, I had paired up Benjamin Franklin's essay "The Way to Wealth" with Herman Melville's short story "Bartleby, The Scrivener," whose juxtaposition I hoped would set off the course to a dynamic start. For while Franklin's text extolls the virtues of industry and conversely castigates sloth, the title character of Melville's short story famously responds "I would prefer not to" to every attempt to make him perform his work duties. The tension between these two texts helped to introduce a number of themes that would recur throughout the course, making their combination an ideal point of departure.

While things were thus off to a good start, it did take me a few classes to find my footing, and the biggest initial challenge was the physical setup of the seminar room I had been assigned. In a redesign project a few years previous, many traditional classrooms had been converted into spaces more conducive to learning, based on pedagogical research. Basically, instead of having forward-facing tables, students in these seminar rooms sit around small roundtables. In addition, there is no teacher's desk; in fact, there is nowhere for the seminar leader to sit. At first, the pedagogical rationale for this design was not explained to me, and I only heard from fellow faculty that some really liked these new classrooms, while others held a more neutral view. Naturally, I could intuit the general benefits of such a setup, in how it would de-center and perhaps democratize the classroom, while also facilitating group discussion. It was only later during the STINT Mid-Term Day where I learned about the underlying research informing the redesign, as the man who spearheaded the project gave a presentation on the subject. As he explained it, a traditional forward-facing classroom is a physical space that is unique, in that there is nothing outside the school or university that bear similarity to it. But research shows that learning and memory are connected to place. For example, imagine that you are in the kitchen and realize you need something from the living room. Once you get to the living room, however, you suddenly forget what it was that you came there to fetch. Now, the best way to remember what it was, then, is to return to the kitchen, where you first thought of the object you needed to get. The implication of this for teaching is that what you learn in the traditional classroom tends to stay in that space, since there is nothing outside of it that physically resembles it. But if the classroom is made to look like other types of spaces that we frequent in everyday life – restaurants, cafés, communal study spaces – then it is easier for learning to travel and be reinforced outside of the classroom.

Still, even as I could appreciate the pedagogical value of the classroom setup, it was challenging and posed a series of questions. Where do I stand? Do I walk around? How can I memorize the faces of the students if I do not see them from the front? Eventually, I became used to the classroom situation, and a strong contribution factor was probably that the students

themselves felt so comfortable with the setup. As the man behind the redesign told us STINT fellow, while some teachers were skeptical and uncertain about the new arrangement, students tended to be very positive, appreciating it on some intuitive level.

When it comes to the delivery of the course content, the experience of giving this course in Singapore provided a number of new perspectives, in keeping with the idea that works of literature speaks to different contexts in different ways. In Sweden, for example, Benjamin Franklin's *The Way to Wealth* tends to evoke the protestant work ethic, while in Singapore the students brought up their national ideal of meritocracy as a point of comparison. In Kevin Kwan's *Crazy Rich Asians*, Western readers (and movie-goers) see a light-hearted tale of the age-old conflict between love and money, whereas the Singaporean students were more mindful of the elements of stereotype and self-exoticizing. In addition, a few of the novels in the course involve tensions between individualism and collectivism; in Sweden, students usually take the individualist position in discussions, while in Singapore, the students were more conflicted and the positions not as clear-cut. To give a specific example, in Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth*, the protagonist is torn between her desire for economic independence on the one hand, and her sense of obligation to monetarily support her family on the other. It was my impression that Singaporean students could identify with this conflict more, which in turn made me appreciate the family vs. individual dynamic more as a theme. The protagonist's individualism, more than one student argued, did not make her happier in the end – and this is not a reading you would not get in Sweden. Again, it is a commonplace notion in literary studies that texts “travel” in different ways and that their interpretation may vary depending on context, but it was very rewarding to see this in practice. Some of these new perspectives brought by the Singaporean students I will now challenge my SSE students with this current semester.

As part of adapting the course to local conditions, I also had to come up with a creative project, since this was part of the assessment requirement for the type of elective I was teaching. After some thinking, I sketched out an assignment called “My Way to Wealth” (invoking Benjamin Franklin's essay), where students would crowdsource their friends and family on the nature of success using social media. First, I asked them to post the following question on their social media platform of choice: “What's your number one advice for success?” Then, they were supposed to collect and analyze the responses they received, in order to look for common patterns. The assignment was meant as an ongoing project, spanning the first half of the semester, which helped to connect it to the course content. Specifically, I was hoping for a cross-pollination between the advice they received and their readings of the literature. In other words, I wanted their collected data to inform their readings, and then let the readings in turn inform their interpretation of the data. Lastly, as part of the project, I also asked them to choose one specific piece of advice, drawn either from the crowdsourcing or from their reading of the literature, and then to live for a week according to that advice. This auto-ethnographic component, which I called “your week of success,” proved fun and interesting for the students, allowing them to apply some of the ideas raised by the course to their real lives. The resulting creativity was impressive: one student contacted local notables that he looked up to, asking them for their advice on the assignment topic – and received some definite nuggets of wisdom. Another student identified the main message in *The Great Gatsby* as the perils of living in the past, and resolved during her “week of success” to instead always focus on the present. Yet another one tried to find a better work-life-studies balance, while still staying afloat economically and keeping up her GPA; to this end, she found inspiration from the combined wisdom of author Mohsin Hamid and her peers on social media.

In the end, I was very satisfied with the outcome of the course. It was an excellent group of students, who naturally cohered over the semester, often getting into discussions and

addressing topics that would not come up in Sweden. Their ambition and creativity shone through at all times, and it was a privilege for me to get an insight into the younger Singaporean generation's thoughts on such important issues as materialism, the nature of success, and work-life balance.

Other activities

Before my teaching began, I attended a conference in Macau, namely the 22nd Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association. There, I gave a paper on the representation of the China in the Armed Services Editions, a book series that provided the American military with reading material during World War II. Given that the majority of those at the conference were from East Asia, it was a suitable start to my visiting semester, allowing me to make contact with several academics from the region.

During the semester itself, I tried to take part in as many activities outside the classroom as possible. First, and most importantly, I had the opportunity to give a research seminar, where I presented a summary of the main findings of my larger project on the Armed Services Editions. The feedback I received in this context was quite valuable; one colleague, for example, pointed my attention to similar historical publishing initiatives in China, which was a new comparative angle to me. Then, I was part of a modernist poetry reading group for faculty and graduate students, led by an American visiting scholar. More generally, I tried to attend as many research seminars and guest lectures as I could, not limiting myself to those within the English subject, but across the whole School of Humanities and Social Sciences as well. Lastly, and in a different category, I also advised one of my students on a prospective master's project for her application to a British university. Through our reading of Agnes Smedley, she had become interested in Western women writers who traveled to China, and was curious about the possibility of developing a project on that topic.

On a different but in some ways equally important level, I also had many interesting conversations with colleagues over a number of lunches, coffees, and dinners. While more informal in nature, these social occasions nonetheless added significantly to my visiting semester, deepening my understanding of both the university culture and Singaporean life in general.

Part II: Comparison between the Host and the Home Institution

Pedagogy and its importance

As should be clear, NTU is highly invested in pedagogical development. So too is SSE, though this is an area of focus that has only recently started to receive more attention. For example, the school now offers a faculty course on pedagogy (PDA) and regularly organizes lunch seminars on a variety of teaching-related topics. In addition, faculty are encouraged to enroll in the International Teachers' Programme (ITP), an exclusive month-long program organized by a consortium of leading business school around the world.

Taken together, I would say that while the two universities value pedagogy to an equally high degree, NTU has come further in their work in this area – to the point of rebuilding classrooms, and perhaps this is something that could inspire SSE. Returning to the school this semester, I did notice that some classrooms had been refurbished with new decorations, such as paintings, lighting up what used to be quite sterile and bare. However, this is far from actually reconceiving the classrooms as educational spaces in the manner of NTU. While I am not suggesting that SSE should make a complete overhaul – especially

since I am not a 100% won over by the model myself – it would be interesting to try on a limited scale.

Curriculum and courses offered

The difference in curriculum and courses offered between NTU and SSE is largely a result of their difference from each other as institutions. While NTU started out as technical university, it has in the past twenty years expanded into what is more or less a full university, with business, humanities and social sciences offerings. SSE, on the other hand, began as a specialized institution – a business school – and still remains one. Nevertheless, the last decade has seen an ambition by SSE to broaden its profile outside its traditional domains, as demonstrated by activities of the Art Society (an extracurricular association for both faculty and students) and the SSE Literary Agenda (a reading club of sorts, featuring regular author talks).

While SSE will remain a business school for the foreseeable future and not undergo as dramatic a broadening as NTU, there is still a potential for the development of more humanities courses, as well as some hybrid ones located at the intersection of business and language, such as management communication.

How teaching is conducted

Aside from having audited one class during my planning trip, I did not have any other first-hand exposure to teaching at NTU. Though naturally, conversations with colleagues over lunch or in the hallways gave me certain insights. Based on my own experience in the classroom, I would characterize the educational culture as Confucian in nature, with students deferring to the teacher as authority and generally expecting more lecture-style classes than in Sweden. At the same time, it is difficult to generalize, especially about a diverse country like Singapore, where the Confucian influence would not necessarily be felt across all ethnic groups.

As for SSE, it has in the past been known as a somewhat traditional school, but like other Western institutions, it too tends to follow the Socratic model of teaching. Classes are typically characterized by lively discussion and students are generally not hesitant to speak up. This leaves the teacher with a certain flexibility, in the sense that all classes do not necessarily have to be meticulously planned out in advance; rather, there is some room to let the discussion lead the way.

The Confucian and Socratic models of education have been developed over the course of millennia, and as such, they are very much entrenched in their respective contexts. While this is in another words an aspect that cannot be changed, there is still something to be said for occasionally challenging the assumptions of the dominant model. This is of course what NTU is doing with its classroom redesign, which in effect disrupts the notion of “the sage on the stage.”

Employment and career opportunities

NTU is influenced by both the British and the American higher education systems, and an example of an influence from the latter is their tenure-track system. In this system, early career PhDs are hired as Assistant Professors for a set number of years, at the end of which they go up for tenure review, when all their teaching and research activities are evaluated. If given a positive review, they are then given a permanent contract. But if the review fails to meet expectations, they have to leave within a certain time frame (usually a year).

SSE too has a tenure-track system, implemented in the last decade, although as a *lektor* I stand outside of it. As such, I can see both the advantages and disadvantages of the system. First, it does create more flexibility for early-career scholars: in Sweden, *lektorat* positions are few and far between, and as a newly minted PhD, you are typically not competitive for them. Rather, you will often have to juggle part-time teaching positions and/or be awarded a postdoc while building a teaching and research portfolio before you might have any chance to get a *lektorat*. Or this is at least the experience of me and other peers in my field. However, with a tenure-track system, more positions can be advertised (since not all of them lead to permanent positions), and you are hired not primarily on your existing merits, but more importantly on your future potential, which means that you can apply for these positions right after – or even before – completing the doctoral program.

Of course, the years on the tenure-track can be very stressful, with pressure to publish and the looming threat of not being able to pass the tenure review. In that situation, for example, I imagine it might be difficult to devote as much focus and energy to teaching as you would like. Nevertheless, even if you fail the tenure review, you will still have gathered teaching and research experience as well as earned a salary. Seen this way, the situation may not be that different from the Swedish post-PhD who spends a number of semesters teaching at a university on a fixed-term basis (*visstidsanställning*) before their contract cannot be renewed anymore.

As for career opportunities, more than one faculty member at NTU – whether in a light-hearted way or not – expressed a desire to go on a teaching sabbatical like me. In fact, one of them said it would have been great if the program I was on had been an exchange, so that they could in turn have come to Sweden to teach. Perhaps this is something that STINT could look into: whether any of the partner universities would be interested in such an arrangement. This would obviously also be something that could facilitate continued contact with the host institution.

Use of technology & IT in education

At NTU, I drew on the same digital tools that I use in Sweden, such as Mentimeter and Poll Everywhere. I do not know to what extent these are used at NTU, and I could not gauge from the student response whether or not these applications were a novelty to them.

NTU uses Blackboard as its on-line course portal, whereas SSE has its own software. As I only taught for one semester, I did not become acquainted with Blackboard beyond its basic functions, but it seemed useful. SSE's own software is very simple and easy to use, but I have heard whisperings that it might be replaced – and perhaps Blackboard would be a good new option to explore.

The relationship and/or status of pedagogical merits compared to research merit

Since I stand outside the tenure-track system at SSE in my position as *lektor*, I am not sure how much weight is given to pedagogical merits and research merits in the tenure review. At NTU, it appeared from conversations with faculty members that it was expected to publish a book during the tenure-track, making the requirements of receiving tenure similar to that of becoming a *docent* in the Swedish state system.

To what extent educational programs conform to labor market needs

SSE students have a high employment rate: according to the latest annual survey, 95% of Bachelor's graduates and 94% of Master's graduates had secured a job within three months of finishing their studies. In light of these numbers, SSE programs obviously conform to labor market needs, and throughout their time at the school, students are encouraged to actively think about their post-graduation employability, through career fairs, interview coaching, and internships.

At NTU, I taught humanities students, and I found it interesting that they too were focused on employability – more so than Swedish humanities students. For example, some of my NTU students were doing internships alongside their studies, which is not really part of the culture for humanities undergraduates in Sweden. This is most likely related to Singapore's entwined ideals of meritocracy and productivity, which leaves little room for students to pursue academic subjects out of pure personal interest, as is sometimes the case in Sweden.

Forms of examination

As part of the requirements for electives, my course did not have a traditional hall exam; rather, there was continuous assessment. This is also the model we currently use for all English courses at SSE, and it is one I have to say I prefer. The main advantage is that students are able to keep track of how they are doing, which can preempt grade dissatisfaction later on. In addition, it allows them to see their own progress and to improve over the course of a semester.

Naturally, different courses have different requirements for examination, with some subjects lending themselves better to the traditional hall format (such as math and statistics, to use SSE examples). But where continuous assessment is appropriate, it should definitely be used.

Part III: Lessons and Recommendations

Lessons

On a general level, the Teaching Sabbatical was an invigorating experience, giving me a host of new impulses and impressions. In the same way that a student grows from an exchange semester in ways that may not be immediately quantifiable, I feel as if my own lessons from the experience will take some time to tease out as I settle back into my regular teaching.

Nevertheless, some specifics can be brought up. First, it might be wise to sometimes question your own assumptions as a teacher. In my case, it would be the Socratic fundamentals of my approach, which I realize are so deeply embedded that I may unconsciously take them to be universal. Indeed, there was a slight culture clash between me and my Singaporean students, as I came into the classroom on the first day expecting to teach more or less like in Sweden. While things went well enough, I could still tell by the second class that I was not getting a 100% response, which forced me to think more self-critically about my approach. Over the course of the semester, I then adapted to the students' learning style, while they in turn adapted to my teaching style. In the end, I believe we met each other halfway.

Second, since I could not rely on the Socratic model as much as expected, I was pushed to come up with and try new models of student engagement, more suited for a Confucian learning environment. As a result, I now have a whole slew of new exercises and approaches that I can draw on in Sweden. While some of these will work, and others will probably not, I

have nevertheless expanded my tool box considerably, and I am looking forward to make use of its new contents.

Third, I am continually intrigued by the relationship between physical space and learning, as brought to the fore by NTU's classroom overhaul. For me, this spatial turn is an entirely new dimension of pedagogy, and I hope to share it with others at SSE. It also makes me interested in following the pedagogical development at NTU in the years to come, to see what other innovations they will come up with in this area.

Lastly, when it comes to research, I have now made a number of valuable contacts in a part of the English-speaking world where I previously had none. I envision meeting up with members of the NTU English faculty at conferences in the future, and I hope that research collaborations can materialize at some point.

Recommendations

As already mentioned, I recommend establishing contact with the host university as soon as possible. Regardless of where one ends up, a visa will be needed, and the application process for that should be initiated sooner rather than later. Similarly, it is advisable to give housing an early priority, for even if some universities (like NTU) will offer campus apartments, some of these may be more attractive or suitable than others, in which case they would be available on a "first come, first serve" basis.

Academically, try to contact faculty in advance that have similar research interests – perhaps to already meet during the planning trip. In general, book the calendar as full as possible for that trip, in order to meet with both academic and administrative staff. Inquire beforehand about the possibility of auditing a class during the visit, to already then form an understanding of the teaching culture. In other words, it is vital that the planning trip itself is carefully planned.

As for the visiting semester itself, it will of course be different for everyone: some will have the freedom to set up their own course, others will teach an existing course, and yet others will co-teach with someone from the host department. Thus, given the fact that everyone's experience will vary considerably, my recommendations here can only be general, so I would again emphasize being mindful of cultural difference as it relates to both teaching and learning styles.

On a more general level, I would recommend future fellows to take full advantage of living in a foreign country, and all that this has to offer in terms of culture, language, cuisine, and just plain variety of everyday life. Even if it is only five months, it does enable a level of immersion into the culture that is unattainable for the tourist or mere visitor. One way to engage more deeply with a culture is to consider the different levels of its sights and attractions. All cities have their top-tier attractions, of course, which are by all means essential to experience. In the case of Singapore, these would be such things as Gardens by the Bay, the Merlion, Clarke Quay, and Orchard Road. Yet a longer stay also presents the opportunity to explore the lesser-known sights, those off-the-beaten-path attractions with a middling ranking on TripAdvisor that may be more popular with locals than tourists. In the case of Singapore, some of these secondary but just as interesting places include Pulau Ubin, an outlying tropical island inhabited by wild boars and monkeys; the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, where the Chinese revolutionary leader plotted the overthrow of the Qing dynasty; the Former Ford Factory, where the British surrendered to the Japanese in 1942; and Haw Par Villa, a free-admission 1930s cultural theme park that simply defies description.

Part IV: Action Plan

As an individual

For me as a teacher, my action plan would simply be to apply and implement those lessons I have already sketched out. Yet lessons are by nature abstract, so part of the challenge becomes how to turn them into concrete action.

In the past at SSE, I have enjoyed the luxury of not having to reflect on the underlying cultural assumptions of my own teaching style, since at least 90% of my students have gone through the Swedish educational system. When I have had exchange students, I have tried to integrate them into the class, by encouraging them to speak up, but I have largely not modified my own Socratic approach to accommodate them. The next semester, however, SSE is undergoing a fairly dramatic change, as the Bachelor's program for the first time becomes taught entirely in English. This means that the school can now expect applicants from all around the world, and as a result, the make-up of my classes will be far more heterogeneous. In this new and diverse SSE classroom, it will be more important than ever to be mindful of cultural differences regarding teaching and learning, in the context of which my experience from Singapore becomes especially valuable.

For the department

For the department – and here I view it as the Center for Modern Languages – I think we may have something to learn from the school of humanities at NTU. Even though NTU is now a full university, the technical subjects dominate in many ways, and in that sense, the humanities subjects may share with us a certain need to assert ourselves. While I think we are doing a very good job of staying relevant and meeting both student expectations and job market needs, it is always important to highlight our unique strengths in the context of the school as a whole.

One concrete example again relates to SSE's new English-language Bachelor's program, which presents a number of opportunities for us at the Center for Modern Languages. The Director of the Center, a former STINT fellow, has already started to develop a number of language and communication modules for the new program, and now that I am back from Singapore, I will be a part of this process.

For the home institution

In my opinion, the concrete results NTU is seeing following its investment in pedagogy – through both student evaluations and grades – should be seen as a validation of the direction that SSE has taken in the last few years, with a new focus on teaching-oriented matters. As an individual teacher, I can only try to support this development in the ways that I can, such as by attending and participating in the regularly organized pedagogical events. In fact, I am expecting to host one of these events myself later this semester, sharing my experience of the Teaching Sabbatical and presenting its main pedagogical takeaways. In addition, the Center for Modern Languages has also initiated a school-wide project on feedback practices, and this would be a perfect vehicle in further promoting interest in teaching and pedagogical matters at SSE.

In the Swedish education system

From my experience, Singapore is clearly ahead of Sweden when it comes to pedagogical innovation. It is hard to say exactly why, considering that pedagogy is hardly neglected in Sweden; on the contrary, in all the higher education institutions I have taught, it has always been a priority, with a variety of courses and workshops offered to faculty. In this light, it is certainly a paradox that a country like Singapore, whose education system is perceived as strict, would be more innovative when it comes to pedagogy than a country like Sweden, whose education system is often viewed as overly permissive and where there are routinely calls from both opinion journalists and politicians to “restore the authority of the teacher.”

I have no answers to this paradox, though simply identifying it may be the first step towards disentangling it over time; as such, this will be part of my broader action plan. Thinking preliminary, it may be that the Singaporean students are better prepared from their earlier education to appreciate and absorb the pedagogical innovations they are met with at university. But since I have no experience of teaching anywhere but at the tertiary level, I would not know how teaching is conducted at those earlier levels in Sweden.

Continued relationship with the host institution

My colleagues from the visiting period at NTU have made it clear that I am welcome back in any capacity, such as for guest lectures and research presentations. I continue to stay in contact with several faculty members, and later this year, I will meet at least one of them at a conference. I have also raised the possibility of bringing one faculty member to SSE for a guest appearance in my literary course, since her research partly deals with economic themes.