

Teaching Sabbatical at the University of Tokyo autumn semester 2022-2023

Final report Anette Wickström, Department of Thematic Studies, Linköping University

To begin with, I would like to express my great appreciation for getting this opportunity to spend a semester at University of Tokyo. Thanks to the leaders and staff at the STINT foundation, faculty and staff at the University of Tokyo and Linköping University for making my teaching sabbatical possible.

Preparation and planning

The day before Christmas Eve I got the good news that Linköping University's nomination and the following selection process for Teaching Sabbatical Fellowship were successful and I immediately agreed to spend the fall semester 2021 at the University of Tokyo (UTokyo). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the planning trip to Tokyo was called off and the meeting with the professors in charge of the Program in English at Komaba (PEAK) was held in zoom on April 30 2021. I presented my research profile and probable courses to teach and got comment and suggestions from the team. I learnt that I was expected to create one course for each of the junior and senior sessions at PEAK. However, as the pandemic continued and the teaching at UTokyo remained online, the sabbatical was postponed to 2022.

I kept in close contact with the director of the Organization of Global Japan Studies professor Yuichi Sekiya, and his successor from April 2022, professor Taihei Okada. The planning intensified during the spring and summer both in terms of the courses and the practicalities of accommodation and visa. The professors and the administrative staff were very helpful. Since application for university housing is competitive I applied for accommodation for me and my husband in April. The International Komaba Lodge Annex, located about 5 minutes from the Komaba campus, was our first choice, and Mejirodai International Village the second. We were lucky and got a 25-square-meter double room at Komaba Lodge Annex.

Given the freedom to create courses based on my previous teaching and research interests, I developed the courses *Anthropological perspectives on children and childhood* for the junior session and *Young people's mental health and wellbeing in a globalized world – interdisciplinary approaches* for the senior session. At the end of July, the online syllabus registration started and I submitted my outline of the two courses including literature, examination tasks and grading. Komaba campus library accepted my book purchase proposals and I brought the rest of the literature as pdf:s to be sure to have what I needed. Ms. Akiko Takao at the International Research and Cooperation Office applied for a Certificate of Eligibility (COE) to the Tokyo Immigration Bureau on our behalf. I submitted all required documents to apply for a professor visa and a dependent visa for my husband and we could finally get our visas at the Embassy of Japan in Stockholm on September 2.



Finally at the beautiful Komaba campus

Tasks and responsibilities

The Program in English at Komaba (PEAK) was established in 2012 and was the first undergraduate degree program taught entirely in English at UTokyo. It is a four-year interdisciplinary program where the students after two years of courses in liberal arts take specialized courses as part of the curriculum they have selected, Japan in East Asia or Environmental Sciences. Around 60 students are accepted each year through a rigorous admissions process. Except for the PEAK faculty members, professors from other institutions at UTokyo (as much as 70-80 percent of the college in 2022) are teaching at PEAK.

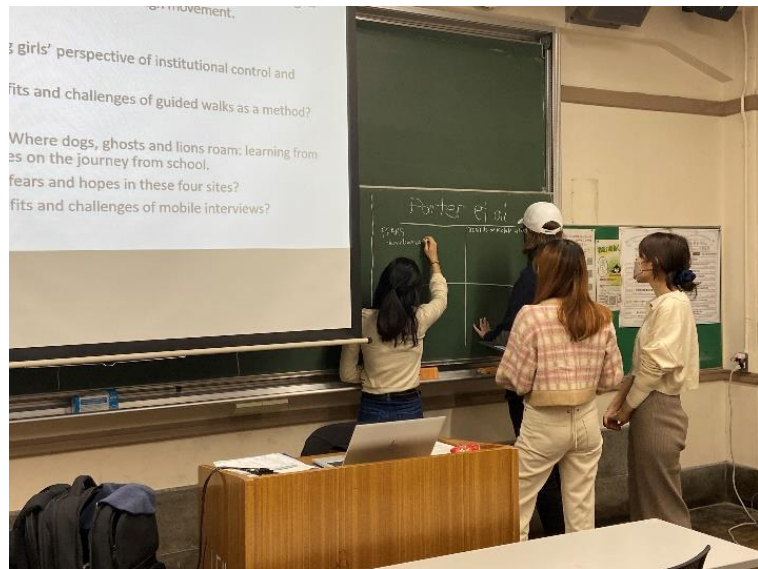
The courses I developed was based on my previous teaching experiences and current research in sociology/anthropology of childhood; medical sociology/anthropology; ethnographic methods; and actor-oriented and socio-material approaches to child and youth health. I was individually responsible for the two courses which involved lectures/seminars (90 minutes) once a week in each course for 13 weeks, distribution of course literature, registration of students in the course, creating and marking assignments, providing feedback to students and reporting grades to the administration. I was assigned lecture hall no 154 in the beautiful clock tower building No 1 from 1933. The first two to three weeks of a new semester the PEAK students are allowed to shop around among the courses given to determine which courses they find interesting and wish to complete. In the end I had 16-17 students in each course, which included some graduate students in the senior session.

To support me in all kinds of administrative and organizational tasks related to the senior class, a teaching assistant from one of the master programs was allocated to me. Her work and

knowledge of Japanese made it easy for me to learn the different internet platforms at UTokyo and other practicalities.

Activities during the Teaching Sabbatical

Studying liberal arts at PEAK means 13 mandatory lectures in each course. Usually the students take five courses during one semester. This amount of teaching hours and high teacher density, compared to social sciences and humanities courses usually, enabled space for including elements of seminars or debates in every class and the possibility to practice and develop an active learning and student-centered pedagogy. After my initial presentation of the course, we started the semester by talking about the meaning of seminars and the usefulness of critically evaluating knowledge production, discussing theoretical concepts, and using them to examine the world around us. My goal was to create interest both for the course content and for scholarly work as part of an intellectual, political and public debate, in this case on children and childhood from a global perspective. Every week the students were given one or two peer-reviewed journal articles or book chapters to read, and associated study questions to prepare for the next class.



Seminar activities

Another goal I had for my teaching was to let the students develop the practice of process writing – to choose and discuss topics that they were interested in, produce drafts, revise, give and receive feedback on their work through peer review, before they submit a final version of their essay. To get a sense of their thoughts about my way of teaching I created a mid-term evaluation. The students suggested some changes that were easily implemented, such as getting my digital presentations before the lecture and having a short break in the middle of each class. Apart from these minor proposals of change, the students expressed enthusiasm for the seminars, the process writing and the fact that the courses were based on the research field in which I am active.

Except for teaching, I got the chance to participate in Global Faculty Development, research-related meetings, seminars with special guests and presentation my own research at Department of Cultural Anthropology. My office was located in Komaba International Building for Education and Research (KIBER) and I shared it with Thomas Marmefelt, the teaching sabbatical fellow from 2020 who also had got his sabbatical postponed due to Covid-19. In KIBER, the University of Tokyo Global Development Faculty arranged monthly seminars and lunches for international and visiting scholars to discuss education, teaching and learning. At the first Special lunch event I got the opportunity to present myself and discuss my pedagogical work with process writing and peer review. Another of the activities was the Diversity Series where Professor Euan McKay presented recent research under the title Introduction to LGBTQ+ on Campus.



KIBER building

The Graduate Program on Global Society (GPS) arranged online research workshops regularly where the PEAK students presented their research proposals or their ongoing research. The students' presentations and discussions with PEAK professors gave a picture of the different research areas that are covered in PEAK and what was expected of my students at the end of the program.

On November 10 the Graduate Program on Human Security was visited by Elisabeth Spehar, UN Assistant Secretary and General for Peacebuilding Support, who presented the interesting and hot topic *UN peacebuilding architecture and its strategies to build peace in the challenging world*. It was interesting to see how the participating students had prepared themselves and took active part in the seminar discussion.

To create contact with researchers in my field I visited Sachiko Horiguchi, who is professor in Anthropology at Temple University, Japan Campus. We discussed our joint interest in young people's mental health and her research on long-term school nonattendance and social

withdrawal of youths in postwar Japan. Just before going on STINT sabbatical I finalized a practical school research project on school nonattendance in cooperation with a Swedish gymnasium within Education, Learning, Research (ULF in Swedish), a pilot project implemented by the Swedish government. Thus, we had a lot of interesting comparisons between Japan and Sweden to discuss. Professor Horiguchi is interested in collaborations in the future.

On December 19, I was invited by my academic contact at Komaba campus, Professor Yuichi Sekiya to present my research at the Department of Cultural Anthropology. The seminar was visited by professors and master or graduate students in Cultural Anthropology as well as from PEAK. It was a great opportunity to discuss my research on young people's mental health and wellbeing in Sweden as it directly raised questions of comparison concerning child rearing and school institutions in Sweden and Japan.



Seminar at the Department of Cultural Anthropology

The final strategy I used to learn more about Komaba campus activities and how the PEAK program was organized, was to contact colleagues that I had e-mailed with when preparing my sabbatical or met at the Welcome get-together the first week of my stay, asking for a lunch or coffee meeting. As most PEAK professors are employed at other institutions and located in other buildings than KIBER, this was indispensable to get opportunities to get to know and discuss the different education and admission system, organization of teaching, the different grading systems, the learning management system ITC-LMS and not least the academic and sociocultural context of Komaba campus.

Important lessons

One of the lessons I was reminded of during my time as sabbatical fellow at University of Tokyo, was the importance of face-to-face meetings with the students in the lecture hall on a regular basis. The academic culture and the attitude and expectation of mandatory presence at PEAK gave us the chance to get to know each other and improve the learning experience under the way. I could involve the students in the planning and discuss my teaching and way of holding classes which contributed to the students' interest and engagement in the course

topics. Of even greater value of mandatory participation, was the possibility to guide students' processes of developing an understanding of critical thinking and promote their possibility to manage the constant need for new knowledge. As I see critical thinking as the foundation for sustainable knowledge, I hope to lay the ground for an understanding of knowledge production as situated in a specific context and help students develop a meta perspective and problematise understanding of humans and societies. This takes time, and benefits from seeing each other regularly and discussing knowledge production and how different theoretical perspectives and approaches have been negotiated over the years. The face-to-face interaction helped me to see when the students understood the arguments or needed more explanations and discussions.

As a contrast to what I just said, the face-to-face interaction was not befriended by the Covid-19 restrictions at UTokyo and in Japan generally. I got used to lecturing wearing face mask, but I had problems hearing what the students said. As wearing the mask is to show respect to others, I could not ask students to remove their masks when talking. In the end I realized that visualizations of arguments and theoretical concepts by writing key words on the blackboard or showing digital presentations together with the oral presentations, was one way forward. It also helped distribute the students' speech space more fairly, helping the more withdrawn students to have a say. However, the restrictions influenced my contact with faculty and staff more profoundly as we had no regular natural meeting place. Most meetings and seminars were held on-line, and faculty and staff had the possibility to work from home to some extent. At meetings face-to-face, masks were recommended. In common spaces for teachers, silence was enjoined. Obviously, a great deal of efforts was needed to promote communication and get to know each other.

Not really a lesson, but a valuable experience. As a teaching sabbatical fellow, I learnt a lot about social and cultural aspects of the Japanese society and academic life from colleagues and students. Sharing something from my own background, I thought, would contribute to communication and mutual understanding. When Lucia was celebrated in Sweden I streamed the SVT program from Gräfsnäs in Alingsås and served gingerbread cookies that I found at IKEA in Tokyo, to my students. It was a minor effort from my side, but the students were fascinated of the moving occasion and thanked me for sharing my traditions with them.

Comparison between the host and the home institutions

Liberal arts and societal needs

The main similarity between my home and host institution is that major societal questions are studied and analyzed from an interdisciplinary perspective. When I left for Japan at the end of September 2022 young people were demonstrating in Stockholm to demand climate justice, the new government announced reduced global aid, restricted right to asylum and visitation zones, and Russia had occupied Ukraine, so Finnair had to fly a long detour to avoid the Russian airspace. Reaching Japan, North Korea intensified firing off short range robots which landed in the Sea of Japan. These events put the spotlight on questions of the role of the social sciences and humanities in relation to major societal issues. How can we as researchers and educators help transform societies and our way of living to address critical challenges for humanity and planetary life? I came from the interdisciplinary research Institute of Thematic

studies at Linköping University, engaged in research and education designed to help formulate adequate questions and compelling arguments, communicate well, and address societal problems. Coming to PEAK intrigued and made me feel at home as the education is on a wide-ranging liberal arts subjects like international relations, philosophy, ethics, history, political science, international law, literature, ecology and much more, and prepare students to understand and address societal transformation and needs.

Eligibility requirements and student recruitment

After the students' submission of the first individual assignment in the junior class I was struck by the high level of English language skills. Compared to the international master program at my home institution where some students every year have difficulties managing the language skills required, all the students in my two classes at PEAK had a very good command of the English language. I learned that the eligibility requirements at PEAK are strict. Nine out of twelve school years must have been completed in a language other than Japanese, and students coming to Japan must have taken a university preparatory course in Japanese. Two essays must be attached to the application. The admission process is thorough, and the professors are involved in marking all different aspects of the applications. This differs from the Swedish system where the central admission unit manage the process and the different programs' lecturers cannot be involved in finding out about the details of the students' competences. The system at PEAK seems to guarantee a more profound admission process though it is time consuming.

The seminar format

The seminar format is central in academic milieus. At PEAK I participated in different kinds of seminars, for example when students presented their work, international guests visited, or I presented my research. However, the use of the seminar format in the lecture hall depends on the subject and the individual professor. The students I had in my class reported that they very much appreciated the seminars, discussions, and debates we had and expressed a wish for more of these elements in the program. Still, most students seemed to be used to discussing theoretical concepts and empirical results and having experiences of seminars from previous courses.

Academic articles

At my first lecture, I introduced the students to reading academic articles. Just a few of them reported that they were used to that kind of literature. We discussed extensive and intensive reading and the structure of a journal article. Throughout the course, I asked them to read one academic article every week with published empirical studies and emphasized the importance of learning the skill.

Balancing teaching and research

The professors at PEAK are having a heavy workload due to their appointed courses, management assignments, administrative work, and meetings that extend over the weekends. The consequence is that the time for conducting research is limited, if not non-existent, and the balance between teaching and research is difficult to achieve. There are similarities with the situation for lecturers without external funding at my home institution.

Recommendations

First, I recommend future TS fellows visiting University of Tokyo to safeguard that the term of appointment is set from September because one is not allowed to move into the appointed accommodation before the first date of the term of appointment. Even if the classes do not start until October, the official opening of PEAK is in September and it is good to get to know the campus, the organization and the surroundings before the classes start. My second central point is to take every opportunity to interact with colleagues at PEAK, through research seminars with students and professors, the Global Faculty Development, individual meetings with teachers and people in charge of the program as well as researchers in the field of interest at other campuses and universities. These meetings are indispensable to get to know more about possible research collaborations, UTokyo life and academic and educational practices at PEAK.

As for administrative issues two things can be mentioned. First, the dependent visa for a partner who will be in Japan more than three months, requires an official letter from the employer who certify that the employee will be taking a leave of absence and have no kind of income during the time. This is because the tax law in Japan requires residents to pay tax in Japan on their worldwide income. Second, when somebody stays more than three months in Japan the national health insurance must be taken out after arrival. When leaving the country, a return visit to the city office is required to fill in the moving out form and get any excess of the insurance refunded.

Action plan

Personally, the teaching sabbatical gave me the possibility to practice and develop my teaching from an active learning and student-centered pedagogy perspective. I bring these experiences to my teaching at my home institution and I have already involved my Japanese students to contribute with examples of their writings to my students in Sweden. At Department of Thematic Studies I have shared my experiences by a written report in November and an oral report in January. There will be more opportunities to share and to encourage colleagues to apply for STINT exchanges. I have discussed possibilities for future collaboration with researchers at PEAK. Yet another possibility is collaboration with my contact at Temple University, Japan campus.

As for the Swedish research and education system, I would like to have a broad discussion on student recruitment because it strongly contributes to the quality of an academic program. It guarantees that the students with the right capability and willingness to put efforts on their studies are recruited. The way UTokyo works with recruitment and admission would be a good example but it requires resources and prioritizations.