

STINT report

STINT Teaching Sabbatical 2022

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1. My background and application to STINT

This report describes the details of my teaching sabbatical at the Department of English, Linguistics and Theatre Studies, National University of Singapore (henceforth NUS) during the Autumn 2022 term. I would firstly like to begin by describing my own career background and teaching specialisms of relevance to the sabbatical before moving on to a more detailed consideration of more specific issues and reflections arising from my sabbatical term at NUS.

I am a native speaker of English originally from the United Kingdom. I have worked abroad for almost all my adult life, mainly in Sweden but also in the Middle East in the late 1980s. All my academic qualifications were obtained universities in the UK (Durham, Exeter and Birmingham). With the exception of the time when my children were small, I have always been very active in internationalization and participation in international exchanges especially since I began working at Linnaeus University in 2009. I have also worked in Ethiopia, Indonesia, Japan and Ecuador and participated in international conferences in my subject area, Applied Linguistics and TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language). I am a qualified primary school teacher with UK teacher status from the beginning although my teaching experience and career in the UK was relatively short.

The bulk of my teaching experience has been in Sweden, where I was recruited directly from the UK by the study organization *Folkuniversitetet* to teach English in its local adult study centres in Eskilstuna and Kalmar. At university level, I have 25 years' experience in Halmstad (Högskolan i Halmstad) and more recently in Kalmar and Vaxjo (Linnaeus University) where I have taught English mainly within the teacher training programmes at primary and secondary level.

I have a particular interest in EFL teacher training / education, online and blended course design, the use of ICT and all forms of digital technology in the English language classroom.

2. Practical issues: arrival in Singapore and accommodation

My first contact with NUS was in December 2021 following STINT's approval of my application on 16th December. The department in Singapore was quick to secure accommodation at the University's Kent Vale apartment complex for visiting academic staff. I was also assigned a contact, Associate Professor of Linguistics Dr Rebecca Lurie Starr, within the Dept of English, Linguistics and Theatre Studies. During the Spring 2022 term, Rebecca and I had two *Zoom* meetings in which we discussed practical details of the teaching sabbatical,

including the choice of teaching modules which would be suitable in relation to my background and expertise. I felt that *Zoom* was a good platform to iron out these details/ issues, rather than travelling to Singapore for a physical planning meeting, especially as the country was still subject to stringent Covid restrictions at the time (Spring 2022).



Kent Vale apartment complex

We left Sweden on July 23rd, flying directly from Copenhagen to Singapore (Changi Airport) and moved into our one bedroom apartment at the Kent Vale facility on July 25th. We were immediately very impressed with the accommodation and facilities at Kent Vale. Although small, our 7th floor apartment was modern and clean. Although the kitchen area was relatively small it was still possible to prepare simple meals. However the presence of very cheap ‘Hawker’ food stalls nearby at the West Coast Food Centre meant that it was seldom necessary to cook at home. Kent Vale has a very high standard of facilities including access to two swimming pools, essential given the extremely hot climate, a breakfast room where an excellent breakfast was served on a daily basis, a reading / relaxation lounge and extensive facilities for training including a gym / fitness room and squash courts. Kent Vale is also very well served by the University’s free bus service to the nearby Kent Ridge campus and MRT train station and the centre of town roughly 40 minutes away. Given the hot climate even a relatively short walk to the nearby campus office could be a grueling experience; usually I took the bus in the morning and walked home in the evening which was downhill.



Kent Vale ‘Pool by the woods’

Kent Vale residents included visiting academics on short and medium term sabbaticals in addition to younger staff on tenure track appointments. There are good facilities for tenure track academics with younger children including a crèche / pre-school. For staff with older children, a fleet of minibuses picks children up from the Kent Vale Arrival Plaza and ferries them to their schools further afield.

3. The National University of Singapore

NUS is by any world standards a very large, campus-based, highly prestigious and fabulously wealthy institution of higher education. The University is ranked very highly in Asian and worldwide evaluative exercises. The main Kent Ridge campus housing my department is set in beautifully landscaped verdant gardens



of tropical foliage. There is seemingly every facility here on campus one could wish for including an extensive and efficient bus system as mentioned above, canteens and restaurants and a central library. There are additional campuses at Bukit Timah housing the Law Faculty and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and Outram, home to the Duke-NUS Medical

School. Overall, the university consists of 13 undergraduate and 4 graduate schools, with some 32,000 students enrolled, of which 12,000 are studying at postgraduate levels. There is a very high percentage of international students (25%) studying at the university at both under- and postgraduate levels.

4. Teaching at NUS

During the early part of its development, NUS saw itself primarily as a teaching establishment, playing an important role in the provision of a skilled and educated workforce as Singapore expanded in its early days of independence. This situation existed roughly up until 20 years ago, when the University made the decision to strive for a much greater research presence in the increasingly competitive world of higher education. Over the last few years, there has been a realization that perhaps the pendulum had swung too far in the direction of research, resulting in a need to redress the balance in favour of a greater focus on undergraduate and postgraduate teaching.

With an island population close by of nearly 6 million on its doorstep in a geographical area only roughly 70% of Öland, there has never really been a need to develop online teaching beyond the campus apart from the emergency provisions of the recent Covid epidemic. The university has dabbled in the MOOC boom of the late noughties but has not really invested in purely online / distance courses as its 'catchment' area is on its doorstep.

The development and application of teaching practices is largely in the hands of a central pedagogical unit, *The Centre for Development of Teaching Learning*

(CDTL) which organizes training for newly employed teaching staff. Many of the newly recruited staff are primarily novice researchers with little or no teaching experience when they begin their careers at NUS. One aspect that I liked about NUS is that new employees are given the choice between a *tenure track path* with a focus on publication and research and an *educational track* where members of staff focus more on teaching, pedagogical development and course design with fewer demands on publication. I think that such a division would be useful to implement at Swedish universities, recognizing that not everyone is seeking a purely research-based career, good news indeed for individuals who regard innovation in teaching and course development as their calling.

The tenure track programme was formerly 9 years from the taking up of the position but has recently been shortened to 6 years. During this period, academic staff are expected to reach a level of publication roughly the equivalent of an associate professor or in Swedish terms *docent*.

Roughly 2 or 3 years into their careers, academic staff are required to attend a 3 day intensive course which focuses on areas such as pedagogical and course development for the higher educational sector encompassing broadly what might be referred to as the ‘scholarship of teaching’. An essential aspect of this intensive



course is to be able to reflect on the teaching experience gained during these two initial years. As staff members continue on their paths to tenure, further pedagogical input from CDTL is given in the form of roughly monthly seminars which are obligatory.

The university has responded to the additional demands made by the increasingly digitalized nature of higher education by setting up the *Centre for Instructional Technology* (CIT). CIT broadly makes the major decisions regarding the choice of digital tools and resources, VLEs, design of MOOCs etc in consultation with CDTL and the academic departments involved. An illustration of this is the recent decision to abandon the in-house developed *LumiNUS* VLE in favour of Canvas which has become increasingly common worldwide at university level.

The current pedagogical focus of the university is blended learning. CDTL in conjunction with CIT are currently engaged in a drive to promote blended learning amongst teaching staff. Each faculty has extensive technical resources under the auspices of CIT to assist academic staff in the production of video and

other ICT-based resource which are essential aspects of blended learning using a VLE and *f2f* teaching.

5. The Dept of English, Linguistics and Theatre studies



Entrance to the department building



Dept of English, Linguistics and Theatre Studies administrative office

The Dept of English, Linguistics and Theatre studies is a very prestigious department ranked currently 10th in the world in terms of linguistics, 21st in literature and 41st for theatre studies. The department dates back to the colonial days of 1929 and is thus one of the oldest at the university. There are three undergraduate majors and three graduate programmes offered by the department. The range of book length publications written by the department's scholars is very impressive (see picture of departmental display cabinet below) in addition to extensive scholarly article production and participation in worldwide academic conferences.



Book production by the departments scholars in literature, linguistics and theatre studies

In linguistics, broadly my specialism, the department offers an extensive range of degree course modules, ranging from traditional philology (language history), syntax and phonology to more recent linguistic subfields such as bilingualism, language and gender and language policy. Singapore's strongly multicultural demographical profile lends itself readily to the department's strengths in sociolinguistics, contact languages and the position of English in southeast Asia. There are no regularly offered modules addressing directly the teaching English as a foreign or second language, my chosen field.

My overall impressions were of a relatively traditional department with a modular course organization, a format which I recognized from my own home department at the University of Birmingham, UK. However whereas many British university English degree programmes have an almost exclusive focus on literature, the NUS department has separate degree programmes for literature and language/linguistics. As mentioned above, there are no pedagogical or *didaktisk* contents in any of the modules, which are purely focused on academic subject contents in literature, linguistics and theatre studies. This situation can be contrasted with a provincial Swedish university like LNU in which teacher training and practical school internships are interwoven with academic literature and linguistics contents.

The department does not offer any 'standalone' distance/ online courses or modules and is thus 100% campus-based. This situation is in stark contrast to the Dept of Language at LNU where online / distance courses have always played a significant role alongside campus courses.

My overall impression of the department was that it was very quiet with many colleagues choosing to work remotely unless they had campus teaching or a seminar scheduled. How much of this was a function of the work culture in Singapore in general and how much was due to a continuation of working from home which was introduced as part of the Covid restrictions is difficult to say. The department also lacks a staff / coffee room which might otherwise have served as a hub for informal conversation and interaction. The nearby lunch canteen called *The Deck* (see photo, right) was enormous and anonymous at the same time.



The Deck canteen with space for more than 500 students

It was more difficult therefore to interact informally with colleagues face-to-face to discuss issues relating to teaching. Another aspect was that there was only one departmental meeting during the term and this took place in *Zoom*. I never met the majority of the department's approximately 40 members of staff physically during my time in the department.

In my Swedish department, there are 8-9 obligatory meetings per term; perhaps there could be a more sensible balance between these two extremes.

6. Teaching in the Department

6.1 General

As part of my teaching responsibilities at the department, I was offered the possibility of choosing two modules from three for the MA programme: *Language History*, *Explorations in Applied Linguistics* and *Second Language Writing*. With my background in applied linguistics I chose the last two modules as my knowledge of historical linguistics relating to English was not sufficient for a module at this level. There are clearly differences between my own background in practical aspects of language teacher training which is strongly vocational and school-focused and the more academic, theoretical/ descriptive linguistics profile of the department in Singapore. Fortunately this was not a problem. I was grateful to the department for 'dusting off' two old 'mothballed' modules which I believe had also been taught by a former temporary member of staff on a sabbatical which were sufficiently practical to fit my profile. Neither of these modules is part of the regular range of modules for the MA programme.

The first part of the preparation was to re-write and update the two older original syllabus documents. This involved updating syllabus aims and goals in the syllabus document as well as selecting suitably up-to-date literature which would be easily available to the students. Overall I found the process of re-writing and editing the syllabus relatively straightforward compared to the exhaustive and excessively bureaucratic process of drafting, revising and re-drafting in Sweden, as was the process of seeking approval for the revisions from the department.

In specifying the syllabus for both modules, I also described in detail the week by week focus for the modules, specifying the main theme in each session. I also linked each weekly theme / content area with a series of supplementary research articles.

My overall thinking with regards to the modules was to aim for a take-home, ‘open book’ examination type of approach to assessment focusing on academic research writing and the demonstration of wide reading around a specific subject. I thus avoided the temptation for traditional room exams which sometimes focus too exclusively on the memorization and regurgitation of declarative knowledge. I saw my modules as laying out a pathway towards the writing of an MA thesis at a later date and possibly even a future PhD research proposal. Another aspect of my planning was to bring in a formative aspect of assessment, rather than leaving everything to a final ‘high stakes’ assessment at the end of the course. This was realized through regular forum postings and a mid-term response paper assignment.

The breakdown in terms of assessment for both modules was as follows:

component	breakdown as percentage of final grade
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • final paper (2 questions- A: research proposal; B: choice of one from 10 content question alternatives) 	60%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • midterm response paper 	20%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • forum posting: selection of one from 11-12 weekly forum postings 	10%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attendance / active participation 	10%

These assessments were added up into a maximum of 100 pts, to be converted into a letter scale from C to A+ for the calculation of the grade point average (GPA).

One of the difficulties I encountered was a clash between the more open process of assessment and feedback which I use in Sweden, involving the detailed provision of feedback in the margins of the students' work and the situation in Singapore, in which the department goes to great lengths to ensure confidentiality in the assessment process. The problem here was that I gave detailed feedback on an early mid-term assignment only to be told that it was not normally the done thing to return work with comments to the students. There was therefore an inconsistency between the early assignment with feedback and the later assignments without comments.

Another problem was that I was not allowed to have a submission date for coursework after the end of the modules which I found strange. This left me in the odd situation of having a final session hours before the final deadline. We eventually decided to cancel this final session.

6.2 The students

In both groups, the majority of students were international students at MA level, arriving in Singapore mainly from mainland China and Hong Kong. Singaporean students were actually in a minority in these groups. Students had essentially completed bachelor level degrees in English, with no specialism in either linguistics / language or literature. Both groups included students who had completed a bachelor's dissertation in literature rather than linguistics. Most students seemed to be relatively unfamiliar with more practical approaches to linguistic study, coming from a more traditional background focusing on theoretical / descriptive linguistics.

Both modules which I will describe in more detail below would in European contexts attract pre-service or in-service language teachers. While some students had some rudimentary EFL teaching experience in the form of short internships in their home countries, they could not in any case be described as student teachers in the Swedish sense having enrolled on a teacher training programme. Having said that a few students were qualified teachers, some with international teaching experience.

The teaching challenge represented by these modules was therefore to cover some of the more practical aspects of linguistics including language teaching methodological topics for an audience of mainly non language teachers.

6.3 Student proficiency levels

With a long career in language teaching all over the world, I have always been interested in comparing general levels of English language proficiency among

students in different countries and the situation regarding proficiency was certainly interesting in this Singaporean context.

In 25 years of teaching at university level, I must say that both groups constituted probably the highest collective level of written proficiency in English that I have ever personally encountered. While Swedish students often struggle to write grammatically accurate, coherent and properly referenced academic texts, I quickly realized that this was not a problem for the students on my Singapore modules. With one or two exceptions, all the students displayed an excellent command of academic writing conventions and referencing using either the Harvard or APA systems used in linguistics, structuring their arguments with a high degree of textual coherence and cohesion. Students also showed evidence of wide reading around the subject in addition to the prescribed coursebook references. In Sweden, university teachers of English sometimes devote substantial amounts of time to developing academic writing skills which are often underdeveloped from school. I was also impressed by the depth and breadth of their knowledge of linguistics and its historical foundations as an academic subject.

While writing proficiency as a skill was well developed, the same could not be said for oral proficiency. I struggled to understand students when they replied to questions in class and it almost became an embarrassment at times. These difficulties have a linguistic explanation. The English of Mandarin speakers tends to be what is called *syllable-timed*, where each syllable in an utterance is stressed equally. Native speakers of English however use what is called a *stress-timed* pronunciation, with both stressed and unstressed syllables occurring at roughly equal time intervals in the utterance as shown below:

Mandarin-influence English: every syllable stressed (in bold)

I want to go for a walk in the park

BrE / AmE- certain syllables stressed, mainly corresponding to content words like verbs and nouns.

Native-speaker/ native-like English: stress-timed syllables

I want to **go** for a **walk** in the **park**

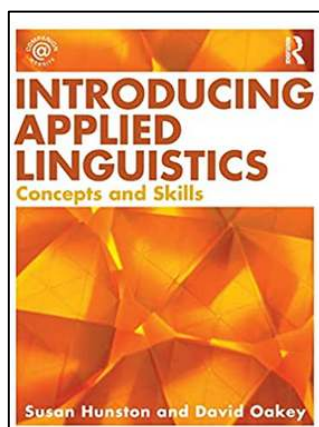
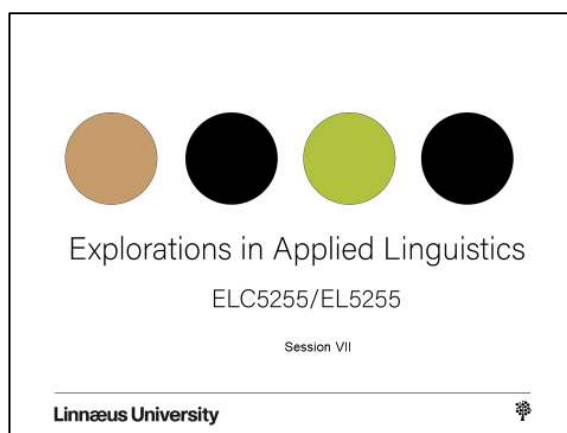
What this means in practice is that Mandarin-influenced English can be extremely difficult to understand despite being syntactically and lexically correct.

7. Teaching modules

7.1 Module ELC5270/EL5270R Explorations in Applied Linguistics

I decided to base this module on the outline of my own MA degree in applied linguistics, which I completed 25 years ago at the University of Birmingham but obviously with updated research and new scholarly trends. Applied Linguistics is essentially the application of linguistic tools of analysis to a variety of ‘real world’ problems and areas of application include language teaching,

critical discourse analysis, lexicography, forensic linguistics and translation studies to name but a few. Worldwide, Applied Linguistics is a subject typically studied as an MA with the majority of students enrolling with some form of practical language teaching background (eg the *Cambridge TESOL CELTA* and *DELTA* teaching certificates etc) or work experience as a study pre-requisite. At the same time, the subject over the past thirty years or so has developed to embrace many relatively loosely defined areas of practical linguistic study and analysis such as bilingualism, multiculturalism and language policy. Applied Linguistics has become a truly multidisciplinary subject area.



The central area of language teaching methodology posed relatively few problems with my background but the ‘fringe’ areas of applied linguistics required extensive preparatory study on my part as they are somewhat outside of my comfort zone and areas of expertise. The two central course texts, *Introduction to Applied Linguistics* by Susan Hunston and David Oakey and *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* by Zoltan Dörnyei were good fits for this type of module and were also available as soft copies which made life easier for the students.

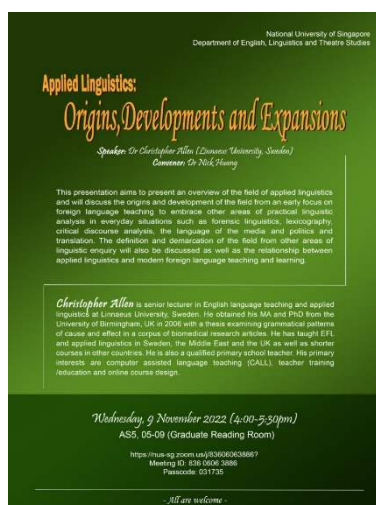
7.2 Module ELC5255 / EL5255R Second Language Writing

In this module, I attempted to put the focus on research into Second Language Writing pedagogy rather than the practical teaching writing in the foreign language writing classroom per se. At least one student had applied for this module believing it to be a course in pure academic writing; I had to explain that this was not my aim given the fact that all students must have already reached a high level in their written proficiency as they had all completed undergraduate dissertations. To accomplish these aims, I used Ken Hyland's excellent *Second Language Writing (2003)* book as a general text and the additional *Feedback in Second Language Writing: Contexts and Issues (2019)* also by Hyland together with his wife Fiona Hyland. As with the Applied Linguistics module, these central texts were supplemented by a reading archive of research articles taken from various research journals.



The module covered the main approaches to the teaching of writing in L2 (foreign language) contexts such as *structure, genre, process, expressivist, functional* etc before moving to focus on second language writers, syllabus design and lesson planning for writing classes, writing tasks and texts, technology in the writing classroom and feedback and assessment in writing. The technology chapter in Hyland required substantial revision (as the book was published 20 years ago) and was partly replaced by the more up to date framework of digital literacy.

7.3 Other activities in the department



Seminar flyer on applied linguistics

On 9th November I held a hybrid seminar for colleagues in the department and PhD students. I include the flyer for the event as created by the department.

The seminar covered the subject of applied linguistics in terms of demarcation and defining issues and was intended to bridge the gap between what I normally teach in Sweden and the more theoretical and descriptive concerns of the NUS department. I also attended a number of interesting linguistic seminars held by the department earlier in the term, focusing on Singlish and the design and tagging of a corpus of

Singaporean English.

8 Reflections on Teaching

8.1 General

The first decision I made while planning the course during the Spring was to remove any form of ‘flipped’ content from my proposed teaching at NUS. Over the past ten years or so, the flipped classroom has been a very important approach in my teaching, taking advantage of gradually improving video technology to produce short videos which contain the essential ‘lecture’ or transmission content of the course. This approach frees up face-to-face classroom time for more interactive and collaborative discussion and problem-solving activities which at the same time give the students opportunities to practise their oral English. I decided instead to plan the NUS module sessions on the basis of more traditional ‘transmission’ lecture content combined with discussion questions. In many respects, my teaching was therefore relatively traditional. I felt that producing video content would also involve a considerable amount of extra work for the Singapore modules, content that would only ever be used once. I also felt that including lecture content in video format would create the problem of filling lesson time with active problem solving activities in relatively unfamiliar subject areas.

For the discussion questions in class, I made use of a number of interactive tools such as *Padlet*, *Wordwall* and *Mentimeter*.



Padlet wall example from ELC5270/EL5270R (applied linguistics) for discussion of reliability, validity and ethical issues relating to research

0:11

colligation		an area of AL with applications in the linguistic analysis of language in the court room, legal contexts etc
forensic		a fixed collocational pattern with a message or instruction
proverb		an approach where learners explore the language and work out the rules for themselves
Monitor Model		the association of two or more lexical items together
collocation		the dimension of register dealing with the subject matter of what we are talking about / writing about
idiom principle		the phenomenon where words share the same grammatical pattern eg V n to-inf
field		a theory of L2 acquisition which postulates two systems, the learnt system and the acquired system one of which acts as an editor of output from the other
inductive grammar		the belief that we store manyfixed combinations of words as a single 'item' in our mental lexicon

Submit Answers

Wordwall example also from ELC5270/EL5270R - 'quick fire' matching quiz serving as a exit ticket at the end of a session in applied linguistics

Go to www.menti.com and use the code 2336 7936

Mentimeter

What factors motivated you to learn English as a foreign or second language?

To see the bigger world

To watch TV shows without subtitle

Wanting to be a teacher --> English is the trend for teaching

I had to learn English as a subject in high school. English is the most popular language used in the world. It helps me to become an international person.

To get a satisfying grade; to communicate with foreigners

watch NBA

To get better grades at school.

To get good at it to enjoy reading and shows.

Personally, I am interested in imitating how people talk from a very early age and language learning has always pleased me. In the past two years I have also made up my mind to be an

To understand what my favorite

23

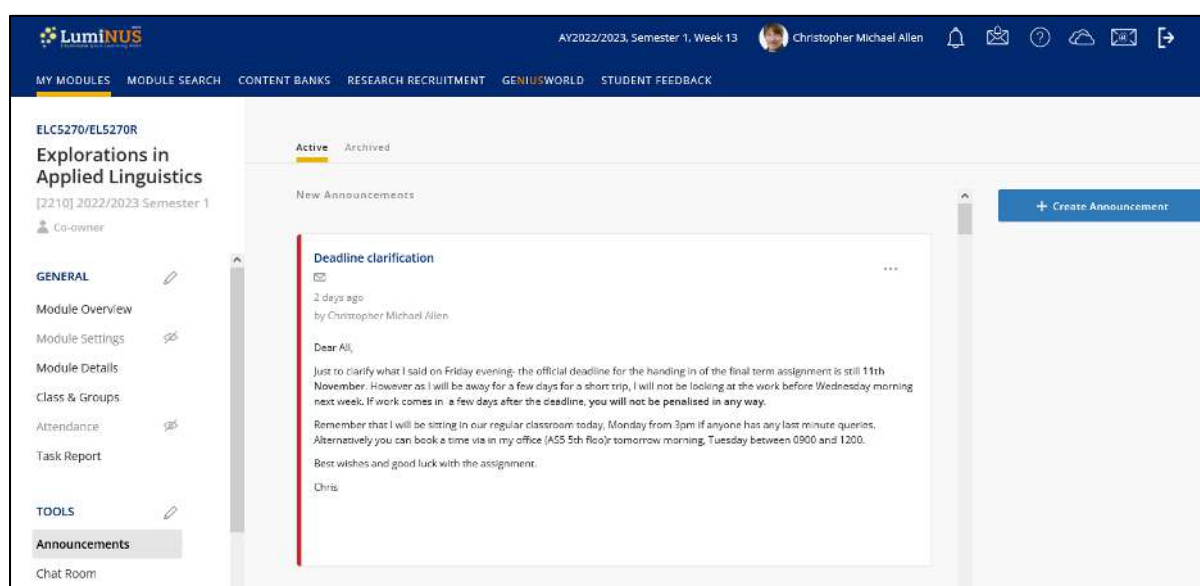
Mentimeter discussion activity from ELC5270/EL5270R

I have used *Padlet* and *Mentimeter* for some years now although not to the same extent as during my sabbatical period at NUS. The main advantage here is to encourage shy or introvert students to make meaningful contributions in the classroom. From my previous experience of teaching in Asian contexts (Japan, Indonesia etc), I knew that deficiencies in oral proficiency might be an issue in terms of students struggling to interact and answer questions in our sessions. Using their computers, students can readily post responses which appear on the projector screen; responses can be easily saved in the form of screenshots or *pdf* files and made available as summaries to the students from the VLE platform. During a midterm course evaluation, the use of these three tools was positively evaluated by the students.

I also used these tools early on in the modules as a form of ‘exit ticket’, which is a common way in schools to assess whether students have ‘caught what they’ve been taught’. In the midterm evaluation however one student mentioned that completing the exit ticket was essentially doing the same as answering the weekly forum.

8.2 The use of the LumiNUS VLE

The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences to which the Dept belongs has adopted *LumiNUS* as an in-house developed learning platform or virtual learning environment. My overall impressions of *LumiNUS* are that it serves as an adequate course or learning management system where the focus is on communicating practical information (via email etc) about the course and also serving as a repository for the submission of student assignments. However I felt that it lacked many of the functionalities from the LNU *MyMoodle* tool I regularly use. *Moodle* is a popular platform all over the world, with a community of developers developing the platform as open source code. It was not clear why NUS have opted to develop their own platform rather than opting for something like *Moodle* which has superior features. My understanding however is that the department is also in a transition period during which the widely used VLE *Canvas* will be brought on line. Given the volume of international students involved, it makes sense to use something like *Canvas* as the platform offers a



Screenshot of LumiNUS VLE, student messaging page

higher level of compatibility with the international student's home digital environment given the adoption of *Canvas* by increasing numbers of European and American universities.

I personally have a keen interest in the construction of VLE course websites. There is always the question about how much time and energy a teacher can put into a site which will only be used once. I therefore used *LumiNUS* in a more rudimentary/administrative manner than I would using *Moodle* on a Swedish online or blended course. Briefly the main areas of use in Singapore included:

- email communication with students, clarifications, deadline extensions etc

- general course information and breakdown of the module on a weekly basis
- assessment criteria
- platform for the submission of module assignments
- archive of session *Powerpoint* presentations and additional research articles connected to the weekly themes
- weekly written reflection forum used as a basis for assessment

8.3 Overall reflection on teaching

In general I was relatively satisfied with the outcome of the teaching sessions, especially considering that many content areas were outside of my usual subject specialism and expertise. I hope that my modules were of sufficient interest to students with a general interest in linguistics and not just would-be language teachers.

In an ideal situation, I would have liked to have ‘flipped’ much more of the transmission lecture content in the form of shorter videos and concentrated more on problem solving and analysis in the f2f sessions, but my lack of more in-depth knowledge right across the applied linguistic spectrum would have made this difficult.

With regards to assessment, if I did modules like this again, I would probably have included an oral presentation task for 20% of the marks. Oral presentation skills were much less developed among this group of students and would have been a substantial challenge to many of them. Basing my assessment on the submission of written assignments, a strength of the students, led to marks bunching together towards the top of the assessment bands; an oral assignment might have produced a better spread in the point scores.

9 Overall reflections arising from the sabbatical

I set out below a number of reflective themes which have emerged from my time at NUS.

9.1 Prestigious universities and teaching

One of the main aims of the STINT assignment as I see it was to discover and report back on aspects of good teaching practice and pedagogical development from NUS which could be implemented in a Swedish teaching context. As mentioned previously, the STINT sabbatical comes towards the end of my long

career in language teaching within many educational contexts, ranging from schools and universities to companies and public authorities.

I will be honest and say that I did not really see anything new in terms of teaching practice in this department that I was not aware of before. There are a number of possible reasons for this being the case:

- (a) I developed my course modules on my own without any direct involvement of NUS staff
- (b) I did not team teach the modules with an NUS member of staff which might otherwise have resulted in observable synergies and exchange of perspectives
- (c) There were relatively few opportunities to interact with NUS academics due to home working practices
- (d) I was not aware of any platform either physical or virtual in the department for the encouragement of collegial learning

The STINT universities in Asia and the US are undoubtedly prestigious institutions and highly ranked in many international comparative exercises. Presumably a significant foundation of this ranking is research performance as measured by citations, the so-called *h*-index for measuring research productivity for individual scholars, research article production, and grant awards etc. The question remains in my mind however is whether this excellence in research automatically translates into good teaching practice for dissemination to colleagues back home in Sweden. Is a successful researcher automatically a great teacher however you might define the slippery and subjective concept of teaching? Not necessarily. The department here has been very well represented in awards for teaching excellence and my impression here is of a very competent, committed and enthusiastic teaching staff. The problem however is that I have been unable to distill something of this essence to show colleagues in my home department.

Is there an identifiable NUS approach to teaching which can be identified and used for the basis of pedagogical development in Sweden? A few years ago, I visited the University of Northampton in the UK which is relatively low ranked in terms of research output but has specialized like the Open University in the UK in online distance courses. The department there put forward a major blueprint for online teaching, based on researcher Gilly Salmon's *Carpe Diem*¹ model for teachers working together in teams to construct online courses which I thought showed great promise. This would be the sort of innovative approach to teaching

¹ <https://www.gillysalmon.com/carpe-diem.html>

and collegial cooperation that I could share with colleagues back home given our department's focus on blended and online teaching. I am not sure traditional campus teaching is the place to see such innovation.

I think Swedish universities should instead have more confidence in their teaching expertise and experience as part of a genuine international exchange which goes both ways.

9.2 The humanities and teacher training

A clear difference as I have noted elsewhere in my report between Sweden and Singapore is that degree programmes and modules at NUS are more purely 'academic' in terms of their content and are not combined with subject teacher training content, what is sometimes rather clumsily translated as didactics in Sweden (*didaktik*)². At LNU, many of our subjects especially in the humanities would simply not be financially viable unless they are offered as part of a programme leading to a teaching degree. The question which might be asked at this stage is whether there is an advantage to the humanities in terms of adopting the more purely academic focus as in Singapore, the UK or US or alternatively seeing degree programmes in more vocational or profession-building terms.

Somewhat informally, it might be interesting to see some of the differences between these approaches.

American 'liberal arts college' tradition	the British / NUS tradition	the Swedish 'professionalized' tradition
students choose from a broad range of small specialized courses with a highly academic context divorced from any consideration of the workplace applications for specific professions.	students pursue a single degree subject for the duration of their programme; if they decide later on to become teachers, they undergo a graduate conversion programme such as a PGCE	combination of academic content linked to work-related aspects such as of teaching practice placements in school or work-place internships
academic focus	academic focus	professional / vocational focus within a teaching degree programme

² I prefer the translation *as the theory and practice of teaching*

My personal belief is that universities are better off concentrating on the purely academic / research aspects of the subjects they are teaching, like the American and British/ Singaporean traditions described above. Obviously some degree programmes will always have a work-/ job- related focus such as in medicine or nursing but for the humanities I believe the best option is to for a focus which sees the subject in more purely academic and abstract terms, serving to develop generic skills in terms of critical thinking, independence, self-discipline, time management and communication rather than attempting hands on training for a specific workplace.

The problem with the Swedish tradition for the humanities is that there is a danger of forcing young people down a specific career path too early on in terms of signing up for a profession-based degree programme which they may regret later on as their life situations change. In Singapore, it is possible for students to pursue a degree in English literature or linguistics and still have a range of career options open to them, not just English language teaching at a school or working as a translator. Here the grade point average or GPA is all important; a good score here can still open doors to the financial, legal, civil service and media sectors. I remain to be convinced that academics are the best at training specifically for the workplace especially when they may have been working in the ivory tower of academia for many years.

9.3 'Deep-' and 'shallow end' internationalization

It would seem to be the case that all universities nowadays have some sort of mission statement outlining their future visions and priorities and one of these main priorities is internationalization in an increasingly globalized world. In this respect NUS is a truly international university not just in terms of student recruitment but when offering opportunities to internationally prominent researchers. NUS has the financial muscle to invite to Singapore virtually any leading researcher for a period in residence on a longer sabbatical and has a well developed infrastructure of high quality accommodation in order to realise this aim.

A feature of the NUS internationalization approach is what I call 'deep end' internationalization. An example here is NUS's approach of actively headhunting for young, promising researchers from the world's universities with a particular focus on Europe and US. NUS representatives visit young researchers in their home department, in the final stages of their PhD projects. Often, NUS is looking for young researchers who have already negotiated a deal with a publisher to turn

their PhD thesis into a book manuscript. The researcher is then offered the opportunity to come to Singapore and apply in international competition for the tenure track programme. Alternatively promising undergraduate and masters students from within NUS departments themselves can apply to be sponsored by NUS for their PhDs crucially in a different country. Crucially these students are encouraged to widen their horizons beyond the corridors of their home departments, gaining much needed international experience and contact into the bargain. However this is no guarantee that the returning students will automatically receive a tenure track position upon their return as they will still need to compete with external candidates in the highly competitive selection process.

This situation can be compared with that in many Swedish university departments where there may be a certain amount of academic ‘inbreeding’. An article a few years ago in the Swedish daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*³ pointed to the problem of a lack of mobility among staff who stay in the same department from undergraduate up to doctoral level and beyond. Should Swedish universities adopt a more hard core policy in terms of actively recruiting international colleagues or are we satisfied with internationalization in shallow end terms, with staff merely attending international conferences once per year or entertaining visiting colleagues at a restaurant?

I would see a more aggressively international recruitment policy as providing the basis for universities to improve their rankings which are often based on research production. However in my Swedish department which is heavily dependent on teacher training, it would always be necessary to have some ‘domestic’ members of staff who are familiar with the culture of the Swedish school system. The question is where the balance lies therefore.

10. Final remarks

Once again we would like to express our profound gratitude for the opportunity which STINT has provided to experience such an incredible country as Singapore. I may not have uncovered any new pedagogical approaches but the time in Singapore has led to a great deal of much needed reflection on my own career and the context of Swedish higher education against the backdrop of a world leading university.

³ <https://www.dn.se/debatt/replikor/lag-mobilitet-inom-den-svenska-akademin/> retrieved from *Dagens Nyheter*, 14th Dec 2022