

Damon Peterson's Fulbright Experience in Singapore

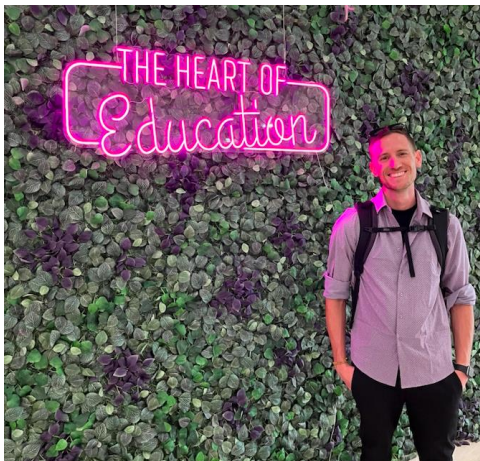
How similar/different have you found Singapore students to be when compared to yours back home?

I generally found students to be a bit more reserved in Singapore than in the United States. This is especially in the case when (they were involved in) sharing in the classroom. In most classrooms that I visited, there were usually a few students in each class who would share when the teacher asked a question. Compared to my classroom back in the United States, more students are willing to share when a question is asked to the class. Another difference that I noticed is that students in Singapore appear to be more independent when it comes to their school work. For example, I often observed students completing their assignments while the teacher either prepared for the next portion of the lesson or checked in with a specific student. This is different from my class back home where I generally have to remind students to stay on task when they are doing independent work. Finally, a similarity that I saw is that both groups of students are curious about teachers' lives. For example, my students back home are very curious of my personal life, i.e., my favorite hobbies, interests, sports, foods etc. It was very much the same in Singapore.



Outside Yuhua Primary School, the final school I was attached to

What was the most unexpected thing about Singapore schools/teachers/students for you?



Resonated with this installation reminding teachers that we are the heart of education

I was surprised to see relatively large classes being taught in whole-group instruction. For example, nearly all of the classes that I observed had about 30+ students. Class sizes in my district decreased since the pandemic to about 20 students. Also, I was not expecting to see classes generally being taught in lecture style, that is, where the teacher instructs from the front of the classroom. This is quite different from the current approach in my district. Teachers there are strongly encouraged to engage students in small group instruction during lesson time.

What are ideas you got from your attachment to Singapore schools/the Singapore Fulbright experience that you wish to take back home to seed and/or implement?

For me, a big takeaway was the learning involved in integrating ethical criticism, literary theory, and philosophy for children into a comprehensive English Language Arts Pedagogy. Not only does each of these disciplines compliment and support one another by effectively teaching critical thinking, reading, writing, and speaking, but I think they also will support students in confronting challenges of the 21st century, including continued globalization and artificial intelligence. I want to take these concepts back home and implement them in the classroom.

Share with us an experience that resonated strongly with you in the course of your professional development journey in Singapore.

The support that I received from the AST Fulbright team particularly resonated with me. I think the team put thoughtful and deliberate consideration into hosting me as a Fulbrighter. For example, they considered my interests in curriculum design and 21st Century Competencies and made a strong effort to ensure I had a chance to explore these interests by scheduling meetings with both offices. Moreover, while I visited those offices, I felt individuals were very welcoming and generous in sharing their knowledge and insight. This was greatly beneficial and was consistent throughout my six months here.



*Celebrations with the AST Fulbright Team
for Chinese New Year*

What was it that you were exposed to in Singapore that culminated in the content presented in TCEF2023?

Through my contact with Professor Suzanne Choo, I was exposed to “ethical criticism”. This was a main component of my inquiry project. I gained a deeper understanding of another component, Literary Theory, through my course “Literary Theory and Teaching” at NIE. Finally, I was exposed to “Philosophy for Children” as well as a pedagogical framework by Ms Suhanna from Kuo Chuan Presbyterian Primary School. Throughout my time here, I came to see that each of these pedagogies complements one another and can be integrated in to the English Language and Arts (ELA) classroom.