

Natasha Tilokani: Student to Ogden Intern... to Teacher?

A Reflective Diary



promoting physics



Simon Langton School

Natasha Tilokani beyond a Student

Teaching is most definitely not what it seems to be: it is an entire world in its own right of preparation, intense work ethic, frustration and immense gratification when done right. Inferring this bold conclusion whilst still being a student has made me understand what it is like to be on the other side of the classroom: it is not only daunting and exciting but so worth it. There is truly nothing like it.

My induction day at the Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys was the beginning of a culture shock, where young male students wore suits and addressed their teachers as “Sir” or “Miss”. As a student from an international British school in the Canary Islands, I was well aware of my experience being rather unique compared to most other schools. The only glimpses of secondary school life in the UK had been through the teachers at my own school: mostly ex pats who moved for the good weather and calm children, and my friends at university who have attended a range of different schools in the UK, including grammar schools such as the one I interned at.

My expectations were very limited as I was unaware of how I would cope in this new environment and adapt to it in order to make the most out of this experience. Nevertheless, I was very open to learning and observing and making sure I had fun.

Careers in STEM Workshop & Shadowing a Year 7 Student

In a single sentence: the year 7s Langton boys are an absolute delight. The STEM workshop was a requirement of the Ogden Trust which required detailed planning. I have understood that teaching is a balanced mixture of how well you comprehend and process information and how well you can make others understand it. The mindset of a successful teacher most definitely revolves around empathy and determination.

The Careers Workshop followed a structure of: introduction for the students to familiarise themselves with us and vice versa; have an open discussion of what they believe STEM to be; use simple demonstrations typically seen in a physics laboratory and ask how they relate to the real world and what kind of job it requires (e.g. static electricity with a balloon and spray painting a car).

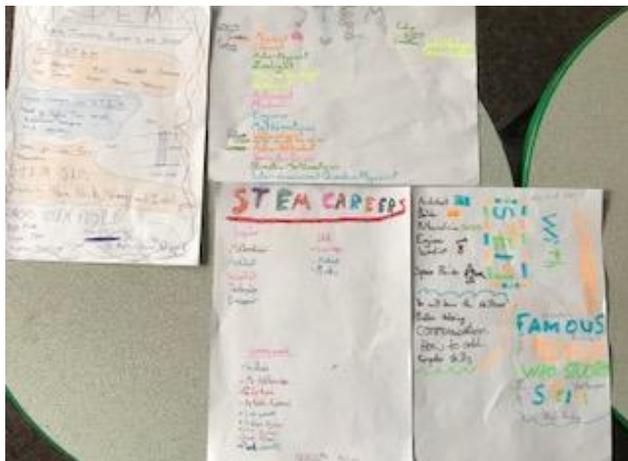
Following a series of five short demonstrations, the students were required to work in pairs on posters answering questions about STEM. This was an opportunity for us to understand what they understood during the workshop especially when they presented their posters. Having carried out the workshop four times, there was always room for improvement and an understanding of how much trial and error goes into carrying out lessons.

When reflecting on the progression of the workshops, the first time could be summed up as being thrown in the deep end but learning how to come up for air because of how lovely and respectful the students were. As we did more workshops, we became more confident and more comfortable. The longevity of each set activity varied due to the different classes:



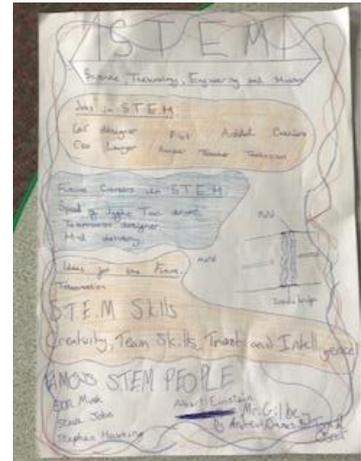
sometimes the students were irritable, or overtly enthusiastic so the initial discussion period was prolonged and other times they were still not aware that the science lesson had begun. Nevertheless, the way in which the workshop was designed, the kind of flexibility to modify and cater to the students was allowed and welcomed – I am not inclined to believe that it threw us off in any shape or form.

The few amendments that were carried out from workshop to workshop were reducing the group number working on each poster from four to two, which made a colossal difference: students could actually actively participate in the making of the poster. In addition, an extra emphasis on careers was given during the demonstrations and reducing the requirements for the poster.



Overall, I believe the outcome was successful, our primary objective was to start a train of thought involving how Physics leaves a school makes its way into the “real” world, how it impacts us every day and how we can all shape STEM.

The Langton also requires Ogden Interns to shadow a year 7 student to further understand the dynamic of the school but this time through the eyes of a student. My initial expectations were that of an exhausting and draining day but I was genuinely reminded of how much I love school in general and moreover, how much fun the switching of subject to subject is. During my day of following Alfie around, I attended a range of subjects: Mathematics, History of Ideas, Science, Geography and French. All the lessons were equally interesting, it was exceptionally captivating to see how young age groups learn and how they are taught. I noticed how most of the teachers used a sense of humour to engage with young students and never belittled them which seemed to give a great sense of confidence to the students for them to discuss their ideas openly.



I do however understand that perhaps my presence was a reason for students to act well behaved and feel awkward at times but overall, seeing such young students captivated by a range of different subjects excites me to believe in the well-roundedness of these students. The experience was that of utter and sheer time travel for me, the student I was matched up with, Alfie, very much reminded me of myself – very enthusiastic about school and friendly with everyone.

Helping Closely with Year 7s

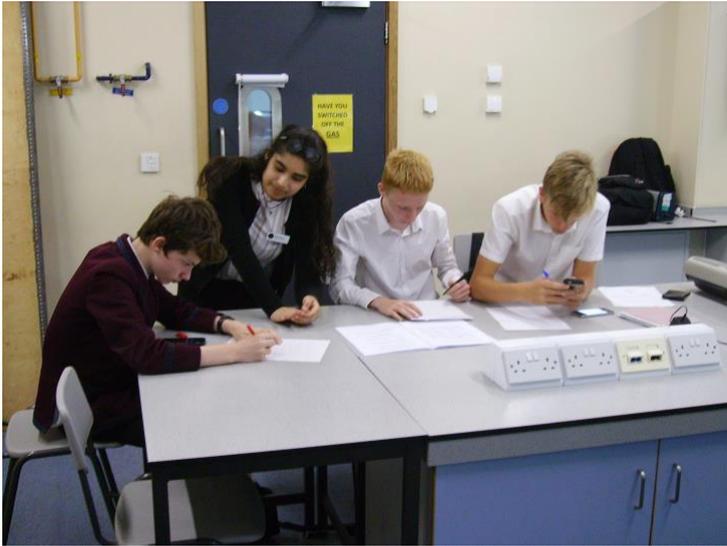
The Year 7s were finishing up on the topic of Electricity and starting their STEM Project when we arrived at the school, which revolved around Sports which was somehow perfectly timed due to the World Cup being the centre of attention of most conversations and “It’s Coming Home” being sung regularly whether it be on the bus or at the playground. These students began investigating the concept of repetitions being directly related to accuracy – from observation I understood that the students seemed quite confident at first and then realised the colossal number of repetitions and refinement required to even remotely approach “perfection” and accuracy.

Despite the project being the same with the different groups, the teachers also differed. Their discipline and teaching styles varied yet they met the same objectives: from ringing a bell for the class to settle down to giving them a single glare and there being pin drop silence. I found the project such a great way to introduce vital skills, such as teamwork, to prosper in any field related to STEM.

Problem Solving Workshop

Zombies and fourteen-year old boys are a great combination. I say this with great confidence and hope to say it forever. Mr. Champion asks that the Ogden Interns prepare a problem solving workshop for Year 9 students. During some brainstorming with my colleague, I came up with the idea of students having to restore and renovate a house. The entire concept required attention to detail, structure and creativity. The workshop was carried out twice: for the lower and higher set; and designed to cover

two one-hour lessons. This workshop involved six challenges where students were organised into groups and carried out three 15-minute challenges per lesson.



The scene set was that of a zombie apocalypse destroying almost everything and everyone except for this house and a bunch of fourteen-year old boys. The range of challenges involved different objectives: teamwork, communication, speed, logic, problem solving (hence the name) and initiative.

During the challenges, in both sets, my colleague and I assisted and offered help to all groups, especially because most topics had not been covered during formal lessons. My main observations involved that of seeing how teamwork was carried out under pressure. It was especially of great interest to see how in the lower set, students engaged with activities that were brand new to them such as Sudoku.

Furthermore, noticing how students who have learning disabilities being invited to be involved in the activities by their peers was a great display of the success of the workshop; the activity encouraged students across the board to be involved. My observations regarding the higher set were slightly different. The entire atmosphere was fueled with competition however that led most teams to work together.

Before the workshop, when most of the planning and organization was completed, I was very unsure of the outcome would be. On the one hand, I imagined it being a success because of how quick paced and fun it seemed, yet perhaps being teenage boys, I thought many would think they're 'above' the entire workshop. During the workshops, my main aim was to make sure everyone participated, it is not possible to force someone to enjoy something, but they can't enjoy it if they don't try in the first place.



Overall, the workshop was a success, in fact, I would have loved to do another one if there were no time constraints! The entire process led to my understanding of how many hours it requires to organise such an activity and how it wouldn't be possible for a teacher to construct something like that, but it would be fantastic to always be offered such resources, in order to teach students that a school does not only mean textbooks, homeworks and exams but an entire learning process.

A Day at BASE

BASE is a unique system that the Langton has implemented and perfected over many years. This is a space in the school to assist children with a range of disabilities, some not as obvious as others. Spending an entire day in an environment that is very different to the usual dynamic of the school led me to understand the communal effort of bridging the gap that between children with disabilities and those without.

The team at BASE is a set of experts in a variety of fields, such as linguistics, autism, ADHD, physical disabilities...The entire set of people manage to work together to bring the best out in the students. This visit and short glimpse into the lives of these experts allowed to me to reflect on how much of a patient process is required. The intention is to never convince the student that they are in constant need of an assistant but to remind them that they will have support offered to them so that their experience at school is not more difficult than the other students.

I genuinely believe such a system should be incorporated in all schools when possible; it is such a wrong notion to believe that someone with a disability should allow their disability to become the centre of their lives and that they should automatically be denied of a "normal" school life. Furthermore, the Langton has made sure that all students have a grasp of what BASE is, this ensures that students with disabilities are not excluded or isolated but understood and accepted by their peers.

A School is a Community

Cover Lessons

During the first week of school, one of the science teachers was absent and hence there was a substitute, this teacher taught Drama & English and it was of extreme interest to realise that despite lacking expertise in science, the teacher was able to give out instructions and handle a classroom of Year 7s who were covering Electricity. Honestly, I was expecting an eruption of chaos and a wasted lesson of students chatting and walking around. The cover teacher successfully and very naturally showed the skills required to designate a task without understanding the content of the task via discipline, friendliness and encouragement. The class was enthusiastic about the activity however maybe also because it was a substitute they believed they could get away with some mischief.

Cover lessons are such a common concept that it very much shows how being a teacher does not mean only being an expert in your subject but to apply your skills and abilities in any situation to make sure the school is up and running.

Science Symposium

The Science Symposium organised by The Star Centre of the school was an event to showcase the research projects the sixth form students had been working on. In order for the entire event to be a success, there was a noticeable communal effort, where teachers and students who were not directly involved made sure the school was prepared to host such an event. Having volunteered and then being part of the audience during the presentations, I began to appreciate the great importance given to scientific research in the school. The entire concept of introducing young minds to the mechanisms and discipline involved in research is so vital for them to know whether it is apt for their character and personality prior to choosing a degree or a pathway at university that might not suit them.

Prior to the event, my colleague and I were spectators during practice sessions of presentations. Here, we were able to give feedback which I believe was useful to them as they must have been very used to hearing the same things from their teachers and peers.

Sports Day

Sports Day is fun, that's the best way to describe it, very fortunately it was sunny and warm to enjoy a day spent out on the field either to be participating in sporting events or cheering for your house. The true essence of the Langton was what I experienced on this day: mostly everyone enjoys being part of this community because it is based on supporting each other, competing against each other and hence bringing the best out in one another.

As the school is so big, it was quite hard to see any interaction between year groups so this is the first time I witnessed this. Needless to say, their interactions reinforced the culture of the school and allowed me to appreciate the effort teachers also make into making sure the students are empathetic, kind and understanding.

Extended Project Qualifications

Dissertations when you're seventeen are either a nightmare or a dream, depending on what you are like. At the Langton, EPQs are non-optional and they involve a presentation worth about 12% of the final grade. My colleague and I, had the great pleasure of serving as an audience for quite a few of these EPQs. Here, we asked questions and more than anything, were given a glimpse into the kind of level of work expected from the sixth formers. This experience made me feel more involved in the school as I not only interacted with the younger age groups but the older ones as well.

Helping Closely with Year 8s

The Year 8 class was a journey: on the first day they were enthusiastic about my colleague and I shadowing their lessons and as time progressed they seemed to be more and more comfortable around us, asking us for help, wanting opinions and most importantly being themselves. Being directly involved in their STEM project: Rockets, was truly exciting. In fact, we were asked to prepare a part of one of the lessons: explaining Newton's Second Law.

The lesson was in the afternoon and was organised by carrying out a demonstration: seeing the impact of two balls of identical shape and size but different mass when dropped from the same height in sand. We split the class into two groups and both Gillian and I carried out demonstration in different corners. In my group, I realised how having a student with substantial levels of hyperactivity and it being a rather warm day, caused a domino effect; keeping my designated group calm was rather difficult because they were irritable but towards the end of the demonstration all of them contributed and then settled into their seats. Personally, I considered it quite the accomplishment and began to further reflect on how teachers spend time disciplining students and how the complexity of the matter revolves around the fact of how all students respond to different discipline techniques.

How does one cater their teaching style to thirty students who most likely do not learn and understand things the same way? Different teachers had different methods – from whiteboards, to copying off the board to demonstrations to discussions...the range is what is needed to try and get the maximum number of students engaged during the lesson.

Biology and Poetry become One

The Bio-Poetry workshop was organised by Mr. Holloway and Dr Askey and involved students from other schools in Canterbury as well, showing a healthy mix of different schools. The workshop was a great way to start combining ideas and fields so that students don't see their subjects as complete separate entities but as fields that can work together when some creativity fuels this fusion. The structure of the workshop was a great way for us to have an idea of what would work for the Careers and Problem Solving workshops, such as discussions and activities done in pairs.

Miss Tilokani has a Nice Ring to It

The final verdict: would I like to be a teacher? Absolutely. Seeing young students thriving, learning new concepts and applying them differently entices me and more than anything working around children genuinely warms my heart.

Working with the Year 7s and Year 8s was my main source of joy during this internship, I loved seeing their dynamic, enthusiasm and constant curiosity. Seeing such inquisitive young minds is what I believe would motivate me to take this up as a career and make me want to work hard at not only unlocking their potential but show them the beauty of learning. Interacting with different age groups constantly really forces you to think outside of the box. Being at university, it is often easy to forget that the opinions and perspectives you are exposed to are solely from one age group (people usually the same age as you), so being at a school and constantly diving in and out of lessons with students of different ages really allowed me to appreciate a new range of ideas and opinions.

Nevertheless, being only twenty years old, I believe I need some experience in other fields in order to give the students I have in the future a well-rounded view of the world in the classroom. I say this mainly based on the teachers I had at my own school and those I have seen at the Langton who had an enormous sense of emotional maturity and patience, which I often think that even though these values come through experience, I am nowhere near having that of what I believe is required. This internship made me realise that despite having overt levels of enthusiasm I can also be very compassionate and patient, which is what I believe are the correct initial traits to have to be a great teacher. There is still a long way to go for me to be the teacher I would like to be but I think I am heading in that direction.

I would like to give thanks to my supervisor, Mr. Champion, who made the entire experience extraordinary, reminding me of my own physics teacher who is the very reason I decided to study Physics at university. Mr. Champion's enthusiasm and kind nature is what every student who wants to prosper in this field deserves. His teaching style very much sharpens the importance of quality teaching needed to shape generations of bright and well-rounded humans. Furthermore, to Gillian Harte, the other intern and my Ogden buddy who made adjusting to the school a lot easier, was of great help and company every day and made the entire experience a lot less daunting. Lastly, Dr. Amnah Khan for allocating me in such a wonderful school. All of the students and staff at the Langton made my first summer in the UK one to forever appreciate and treasure. Thank you is a huge understatement.

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