During my second week on placement at ECP, I had the opportunity to observe several Theory of Knowledge Lessons. These lessons are an integral part of the IB curriculum, and cover humanities with the aim of getting pupils to think critically about their knowledge and its sources. I observed a first year lesson, facilitated by the headmaster, in which pupils worked in their teams writing up their reports about an exciting 'mission to mars' that has been simulated using technology for the past few months. The pupils had been to a virtual reality Mars and had just landed back on earth, and were all really engaged and taking responsibility to their own learning. It was a great chance for me to meet the pupils and talk to them about what they enjoyed about the project and how it could be improved. I was surprised to find that they unanimously would have preferred more autonomy over their missions and would have liked more opportunities to work collaboratively and communicatively with other teams. This contrasted starkly with the general attitude of pupils I have experienced in England, who often prefer to keep themselves to themselves and have learning delivered to them directly, especially since Covid. This was very encouraging for me as, with my new role as PSHE teacher, I am very interested in tackling the negative effects of the pandemic and continually thinking of creative and interactive ways to engage pupils in working more collaboratively to enhance their social skills. I also observed several other TOK lessons with the erudite Dr. Young, who taught history and changing times to third year pupils. Again, I was inspired to see the levels of maturity and independence pupils took in their own learning, with pupils having the freedom to work on their devices in the school library and gardens. The relationships and trust between staff and students at ECP is exceptional, and education is very much respected here! Such are the environment and attitudes-to-learning that I am committed to re-create in my own classroom in England- so thanks to the ECP students for demonstrating how effectively it can be done! Besides learning a lot myself about Czech history and culture through the lessons, I also learnt a great deal about the IB's focus on international-mindedness, and TOK's aim of equipping young people with the skills to analyse, critically assess and 'think outside the box'. Among the silence during study, you could almost hear the cogs of pupils' brains whirring away! It struck me just how philosophical in nature the TOK lessons and the structure of the IB more generally are, and having a background in philosophy, it was really valuable to see it in action through the lessons and learning I observed.

In our CPD sessions for the week, we explored with our mentor how the IB is assessed, which is completely different to what we are familiar with, so it was great to find out the different methods of assessing pupils progress as I have found that our GCSE system often fails to consider the talents and efforts of young people in other areas. What I found particularly impressive is the CASS element of the IB programme, in which young people commit to 150 hours of active community service. I must admit, the structure of the IB is rather complicated and confusing, but I gathered that the overall aim is to form well-rounded young people, with skills gained from multiple different areas of education. We compared the points system to our university requirements in the UK, and for my course I would need 36 IB points. On Tuesday we had a CPD session about the IB approaches to teaching and learning which was incredibly useful. I became familiar with the lenses through which IB teaching and learning is facilitated to develop pupils thinking, communication, social, self-management and research skills. These are the lenses and focus areas that will certainly influence my own future planning and pedagogy. Nevertheless, several of the approaches themselves chimed with what we have been familiar with through university and placements in school in the UK, such as using assessment, differentiation, collaboration to shape our teaching and lesson planning. However, what I really like about the IB approaches to teaching and learning is the practical application of enquiry, global contexts, reflection and critical thinking and conceptualised understandings of topics from different angles. To me, it makes students far more than learners… enquirers, discerners, explorers, even philosophers! It just seems a broader and more balanced educational philosophy. We did a little activity whereby we had to think of different names and ideas associated with a coffee cup. It got us thinking

‘outside the box’, which is the main aim of the IB programme, and was a useful and interesting exercise I asked to borrow for my own lessons back home!

Towards the end of the week the whole school community came together for the annual sports day- quite different to sports day in England- no eggs, spoons (or rain!)- just blazing sunshine and a chance for staff and students to have a day of sports skills and fun. In addition, we had the honour of joining the governors in enjoying a drama production from fourth year students which demonstrated the effects of covid and the supportive community and continuity the school provided throughout it. We had chance to ask questions, and I was once again struck by the students levels of maturity, communication and social skill. However, my second week was crowned with the school’s Asian Festival, which I was keen to get involved with as I wanted to support our pupils, and the two poor Indian children the event was sponsoring through the Catholic Archdiocese of Prague’s global charity, Caritas. Not to mention the delicious Asian food prepared by the students, and the social time afterwards.





Back to the magical city of Prague, and my final week on placement! I’m only just finding my feet, and really cannot believe there is only one week left! Carpe diem has been my mantra, and thankfully, our mentor planned a pretty full week for us at school. On Monday I was given the opportunity by Dr. Young to teach my own lesson in her class, on the philosophy of religion. She kindly gave me some advice to guide my planning as this is the first IB lesson I’ll have taught. Safe to say, it went down a treat! I felt so fulfilled to be back in the classroom inspiring young people through teaching the subject I love! Because religion is relatively taboo in modern day Czechia, and with many young people hostile or indifferent towards religion, Dr Young and I thought it a perfect opportunity to get pupils thinking and talking about a subject they seldom know about. Being a TOK lesson, the learning focus was very much on how religion can influence knowledge. I began by getting students to consider what ‘knowledge’ and ‘religion’ are, before closing the gap and linking the two by considering faith vs evidence; revelation vs reality; scripture vs intuition, personal experience vs external reality and miracles/prayer vs science. Pupils were engaged, and some had some quite strong views and misconceptions my lesson aimed to challenge. Following the IB guidelines, I posed critical thinking questions to them, such as ‘if knowledge is a map, what territory might religion represent’ and ‘can there be any religious knowledge independent of culture?’ Because I am always keen to enhance young people’s cultural capital, I used the example of Prague’s historically Catholic culture, represented by all the statues in the city and on Charles Bridge, to enable pupils to consider their own country’s culture, history and people and the philosophical consideration of the power of religious artwork in informing religious belief. In-keeping with the broad, diverse, balanced and global focus of the IB programme, I feel confident that my lesson successfully drew upon the aim to foster and facilitate conceptualised understandings of topics from different angles, which is one of the key approaches to IB teaching and learning we learnt about in one of our CPD sessions last week. Bearing the literacy focus from my placement school back in England, I ended my lesson by having pupils collaboratively consider contrasting quotes about the topic from Pascal, Sagan and Aquinas to help them view religion and

knowledge from alternative perspectives. In addition, I took my forms PSHE lesson which was a good chance to get to know pupils a bit better and gain an insight into the challenges young people are facing and the support I can provide as a teacher. This week's theme was family life, which is one of the topics I will be teaching in my new school, so I was grateful for the opportunity to teach it here at the ECP.

In our first week, we discussed the ins-and-outs of applying for international teaching jobs with our mentors and with the other trainee teachers who are on placement from Lancashire and Nottingham SCITT's, which was very useful to gain the insights of teachers who have been successful in pursuing their teaching careers here at the ECP, many of whom were in our positions last year! We also had some input from the deputy head who receives and responds to job applications, so it was invaluable to have him share his reflections on what makes an outstanding application. Our CPD sessions during our final week were especially useful and informative, especially bearing future job applications, the IB programme overall and the similarities among differences from our previous and future experience of teaching in English schools, in mind. We explored everything from what it means to be an IB school (particularly useful when comparing to the schools we are familiar with)- with its focus on forming inquiring, knowledgeable, active, compassionate, respectful and caring young people with a commitment to lifelong learning, and creating a better world through intercultural understanding and respect for others and the liberal arts. The IB school is also different insofar as each school can pick and choose its own subjects and topics, and has high expectations including 90% attendance and commitment to learning beyond academic study and the stricter decisions to pass or fail pupils. We also looked at how positive and productive relationships are formed between pupils and teachers, and also how to motivate and engage pupils to take responsibility for their own learning. All of these sessions helped me gain a clearer picture of what IB schools are all about, and how they compare to the schools I am working in back in England. It has been an invaluable experience to enhance my own teaching practice, my understanding of education and my own educational philosophy. I will certainly be borrowing ideas and drawing upon my enlightenment and inspiration from the ECP for my own future career, and who knows, I may even return to contribute what I have learned back to Prague one day. After all, 'Prague never lets you go'! A truly remarkable experience, I cannot thank the ECP, One Cumbria and the University of Cumbria enough!



