



A day in the life of...

# Neil Commons

*In Cambodia's capital city, Phnom Penh, this science teacher pushes his students to complete challenging projects. He fuels their after-school learning with supplies of free popcorn*

I'M WOKEN by my children, fortunately just as my alarm would usually ring. Once we're all dressed and I've checked my eldest son has his tae kwon do kit, I eat breakfast and cycle the short distance to work.

The new housing estate I live on is made up of about 25 four-storey duplexes and all the kids play together in a communal green space, coming back inside for dinner or when it gets dark. It is only when I turn on to the road that I remember I'm in Cambodia: this morning I overtake oxen hauling a cart full of handmade earthenware.

The Northbridge International School Cambodia is an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School managed by Nord Anglia Education, located on the edge of Phnom Penh. I whizz through the large campus and park by the gym.

My first period is free, so I use the time to share Google documents with Grade 11 students (aged 16-17) in preparation for the launch of our Group 4 activity later today. This is a 10-hour, cross-disciplinary project. Groups of students investigate a feature of science: in this case, water. The big shift this year is that I'm trying to meet our recently introduced internal assessment requirements. Groups must now complete the "explore, analyse and evaluate" phases before producing their collective task, which is peer-reviewed by another group. Period 2 is homeroom; I am part of the Grade 10 team. With end-of-year exams approaching, we are working on developing the students' approaches to learning. After lunch, I see my

Grade 10 group again, this time for our Middle Years

Programme science class. They are finishing off a "rates of reaction" investigation. I ask everyone to do their own experiment, rather than replicating one we've covered during the unit or doing the same experiment as a classmate, so my overqualified lab technician is a vital support.

After my final lesson, I meet my advisory group for the final 15 minutes of the day. This time is allocated for advisers to catch up with students and check in on how they're doing. At the moment, student-council election fever has taken hold – campaign posters are plastered all over my whiteboard.

Most of our students are Cambodian and speak English as a second language. Many of their parents did not follow a typical academic pathway (their stories are often amazing), so the expectations they have for their children are very mixed.

This is why I have introduced an after-school learning space, which provides an invaluable environment to support students' progress. Many attend regularly. They work hard and enjoy the free popcorn. My job is to build their confidence by explaining expectations, developing research skills and guiding them through essay templates.

Friday is "date night" for me and my wife, made possible by our extremely reliable babysitter. We call our regular tuk-tuk driver to take us into town, where we meet up with friends (it seems as if another great restaurant opens every month) and catch a local band. ●

## Your day

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