**Initiating Your Externship:**

I actually got my externship because of my role in the school’s Ambassadors group.  I was leading a tour group of administrators from the Ontario Christian High Schools group, and when I started to talk about externship, they invited me and my group out to Ontario.  I originally said yes simply to be polite because I didn’t actually think that we could make it all the way out there.  But then things started to develop and then, amazingly enough, we were in Canada.

Funny story actually, I’m not truly interested in education, so the teaching-education aspect of this project wasn’t why I joined.  I joined because I wanted to have an international experience, and work my public speaking and ambassador-ship skills.  My real career interest is being in international relations, potentially as a United States Ambassador to a French-speaking country or Chinese-speaking country.

I wouldn’t actually say that I had a specific mentor in the externship, unless it was Will Haase.  I didn’t connect professionally with any one administrator in particular, I simply made the primary networking step of saying yes to them, and they did the rest.

**Doing Your Externship:**

The most important thing that I learned during my externship was the value of culture in a school.  Before this trip I could stand and speak for groups about the priceless worth of our structures and our teachers and the countless other opportunities that we have as students at the High Tech High schools.  However, I didn’t realize how integral the culture we’ve developed is to all of those things.  It is the unbreakable thread that weaves through every minute of our days at school, and the unfailing safety net that gives teachers and admins the freedom to experiment without fear of reprisal.  We students love our school and understand that it is a work-in-progress, and we love that fact.

My biggest surprise during this internship was definitely the welcoming mindset of the teachers that we were speaking with.  I had this imaginary situation set up in my head where we would walk into these schools and have to convince these frightened teachers of the worth of PBL and our alternate learning style.  *Nowhere* that we visited was that the case.

In fact, most places the question wasn’t “why?” or “what?”, it was “how?”.  For the most part these teachers were excited about trying something new and fun, but they were struggling with how to implement it.  They were attempting to just tack the projects on at the end because they didn’t know any other way.  They had curriculums to follow, boxes to check off, and they weren’t sure how to do those things and also incorporate projects.

Our job had suddenly and surprisingly changed from spreading these ideas and messages to explaining how to work with them.  We spent a good amount of time at each school doing project tunings and workshops to really give the teachers an authentic experience of how projects are made.

It is my opinion that the greatest challenge that my group and I faced in helping these schools grow was the standards set forth by the Ministry of Education in Ontario.  I also believe that this isn’t and won’t be an easy challenge to face but I do think that it can be overcome.  The key component of the problem is that education in Ontario, and most of the world to be honest, is that it is very top-down structured.  The board of education in each country or state or district sets these parameters as a way of boxing up education in what they believe is a sealed little container.  They assume it’s sealed and that they’ve now prevented any bad teachers from screwing up, and kept kids from falling through the cracks.

The problem now becomes two-fold.  Firstly, they’ve failed miserably in making a sealed container.  If they were building a raft at sea, they’d sink to the bottom of the ocean within a few minutes.  Kids are falling through the cracks every day in every city in every country across the world and bad teachers roam freely like mosquitos of the education.  Secondly, with their sad attempt at boxing up education in the public system, they’ve almost entirely eliminated good teachers’ freedoms to *be good teachers*.  Now even the good teachers have to follow the set curriculum or potentially risk their jobs trying to do what it best for their students.

The memory that I am most proud of from this entire experience is definitely the after-school staff meeting that we had with the staff at London Christian Secondary School.  When we went there, the idea that really struck the staff and administrators was the internship experience that all the grade 11’s do at our school.  Because of that fact, they worked really hard with us to find a time when they could have their own internship experience, and in the end we were able to help them plan a two and a half week internship time for their grade 11’s next year.  I know that I had a direct and hopefully positive influence on the lives and futures of the students at that school now, and that made this entire trip worth it in my eyes.

**Reflecting On Your Future:**

Through this internship I’ve come to realize a lot more than I thought I would about being an international ambassador/diplomat.  I’ve learned a lot about speaking across cultures, and the priceless value of good word choice.  Sometimes the perfect word is all it takes to really capture people’s interest and their understanding, while at the same time a less-than-adequate word can completely lose your audience.

In the end, I still want to pursue the career path of becoming an international ambassador in university.  I think that it is exactly the career I’m made for.  Speaking foreign languages, dealing in politics, working with incredible people from around the world; working in international relations would be a dream come true for me.