

## IE3 Global Internships: Final Report

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I sat down to write this final reflection on my internship and realized that words have yet to be invented that are large enough, colorful enough or true enough to express what my life has been for the past three months and how much I have changed because of it.

The purpose of this final report is to reflect on my overall learning during my internship experience, but I am very doubtful that the lessons I have learned and the experiences that I now carry with me are anything that can be contained within a report. The learning I have gained is nothing that can be communicated through a few hundred words typed on a page, at least not communicated in a way that a reader can truly grasp the impact of my time spent in Mexico. To express my lessons learned and the person I have now become is impossible, because I do not even fully understand how this experience has affected me.

Through living with a host family in Guadalajara, I was immersed in the culture and language, something that I did not realize had influenced me until I returned home. I have returned to the United States with a greater appreciation for the Mexican culture, something that I thought I possessed before leaving but have a deeper understanding of now. This will prove invaluable to me in my future endeavors as a teacher, as I can now better understand what my students are experiencing as they work to overcome cultural and language barriers. It is also something that has proven frustrating to me, because I have returned to a place where others did not share my experience and thus cannot possibly share my new revelations. They continue to hold their opinions of the Mexican culture, and I now cringe when they say things that are stereotypical yet culturally inaccurate, or make judgments without possessing a deeper understanding of the culture

itself. My mind has been opened due to this time spent living in a different culture and a different world, so to speak.

My cultural immersion was certainly an important part of this experience, but ultimately I chose to go to Mexico to experience teaching in another country, and I certainly came back with more experience under my belt! The internship position that I had signed up for was to be an assistant in the fifth grade class; I felt that in working as an assistant I would have a wonderful opportunity to experience first-hand teaching in this country and experiencing cultural differences within the classroom, but not have the pressure of teaching in this foreign place. I was offered the position of being a classroom teacher before leaving, and quickly turned it down, thinking that there is no way I could handle that sort of responsibility and pressure. However, upon arriving I found that I had to change my tune a bit! I was faced with the challenge of working alongside someone who is not a teacher: no training in education or experience working with children and the hope that in coming to Mexico she would have the opportunity to sightsee. She was certainly a nice person, but when it comes to educating children nice does not necessarily mean very much.

Without hesitation, I stepped in and took over, an interesting contrast to my feelings of fear when offered the job in the first place! I did not even think twice about it, because I knew that it was best for everyone. Although there were some very difficult times, I learned more about teaching in these past three months than I ever have in my many years of volunteering in schools and my time spent studying how to be a good teacher in college. In a way, I am incredibly thankful that this girl was the one hired; had the situation been different and the teacher was an actual teacher who was good at this job, then I would not have gained so much experience and had the

opportunity to step in and take over the class. The fifth and sixth graders of Colegio La Paz were my first official students, and I would not have it any other way.

When researching this program and determining how it could potentially be worked into my education in terms of time and scheduling, I came to realize that it would not be feasible to participate in this internship before actually completing my undergraduate degree. Now that I have completed the education program as well as earned my degree, I realize that if I had done this before graduating I would have gotten less out of it.

Only after going through my entire college experience can I really appreciate what I have achieved and learned. I am able to see how this internship experience can influence how I view my life before leaving as well as how I look toward the life I want to have in the future. I am sure years from now I will continue to have entirely new revelations about my time in Mexico that I could never have appreciated until experiencing even more that life has to offer.

I've always thought of myself as the ultimate student: I enjoyed school, I enjoyed learning, and it is part of why I chose to become a teacher. School was my one and only priority throughout my entire four years of college, as it was the pathway to my future career; how I approached my education would determine my success in that career. In a way, my time in Mexico taught me more than my entire four years of college combined, more than I could ever learn within the confines of a college campus. I arrived in Guadalajara a recent college graduate with a teaching degree, but I left a teacher. I don't like to think of this internship as my introduction into the "real world"- after all, it's just so cliché! - but I suppose that is exactly what it was. If that is the case, then let me quote Louisa May Alcott in saying, "Life is my college. May I graduate well, and earn some honors!"