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# Leadership in Mexico: A Guide to Reassessing the MAT Student-Teaching Experience

Danuta U. Guzowski  
*School for International Training*

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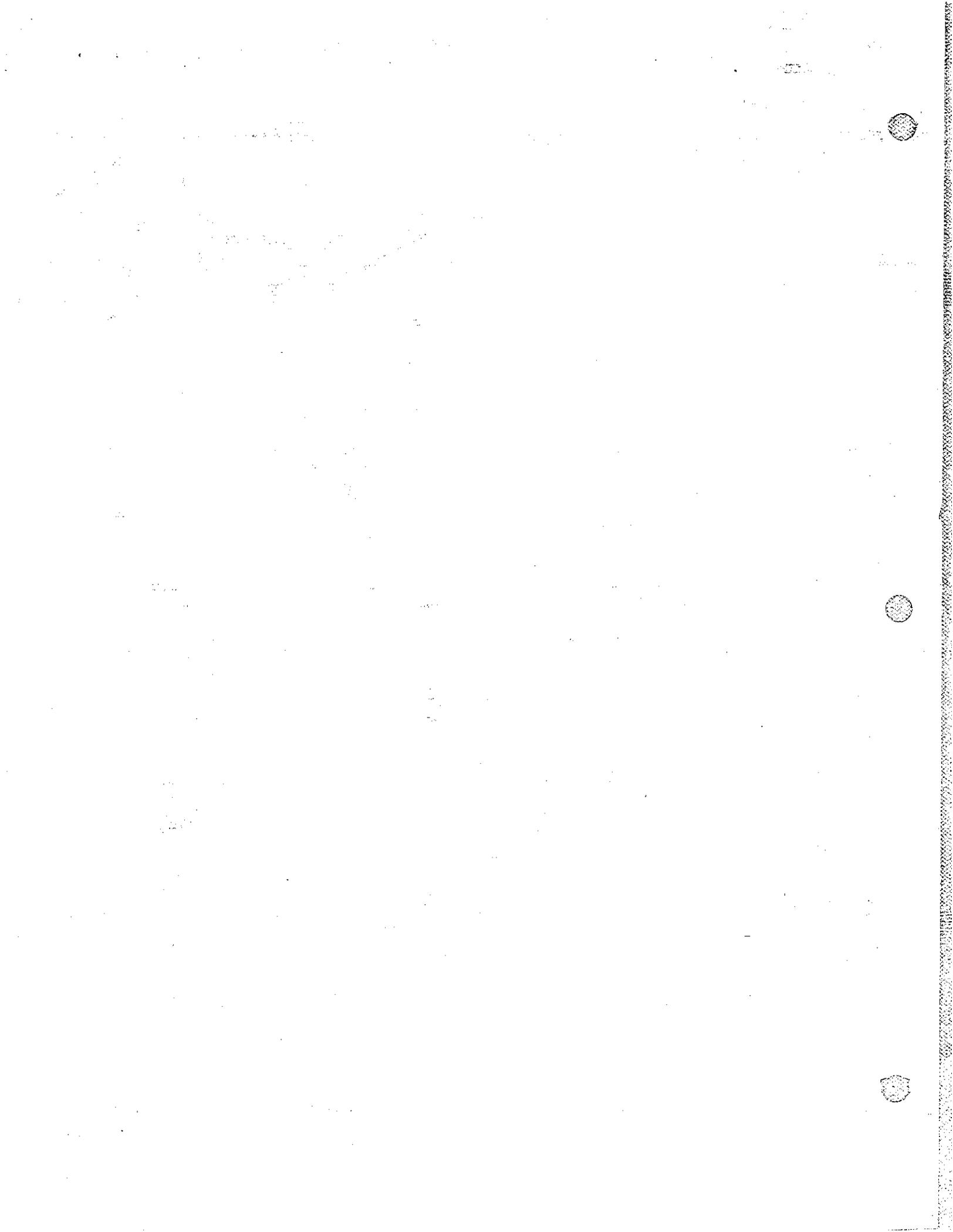
LEADERSHIP IN MEXICO: A GUIDE TO  
REASSESSING THE MAT STUDENT-TEACHING EXPERIENCE

by

Danuta U. Guzowski  
B.A. Emmanuel College 1970

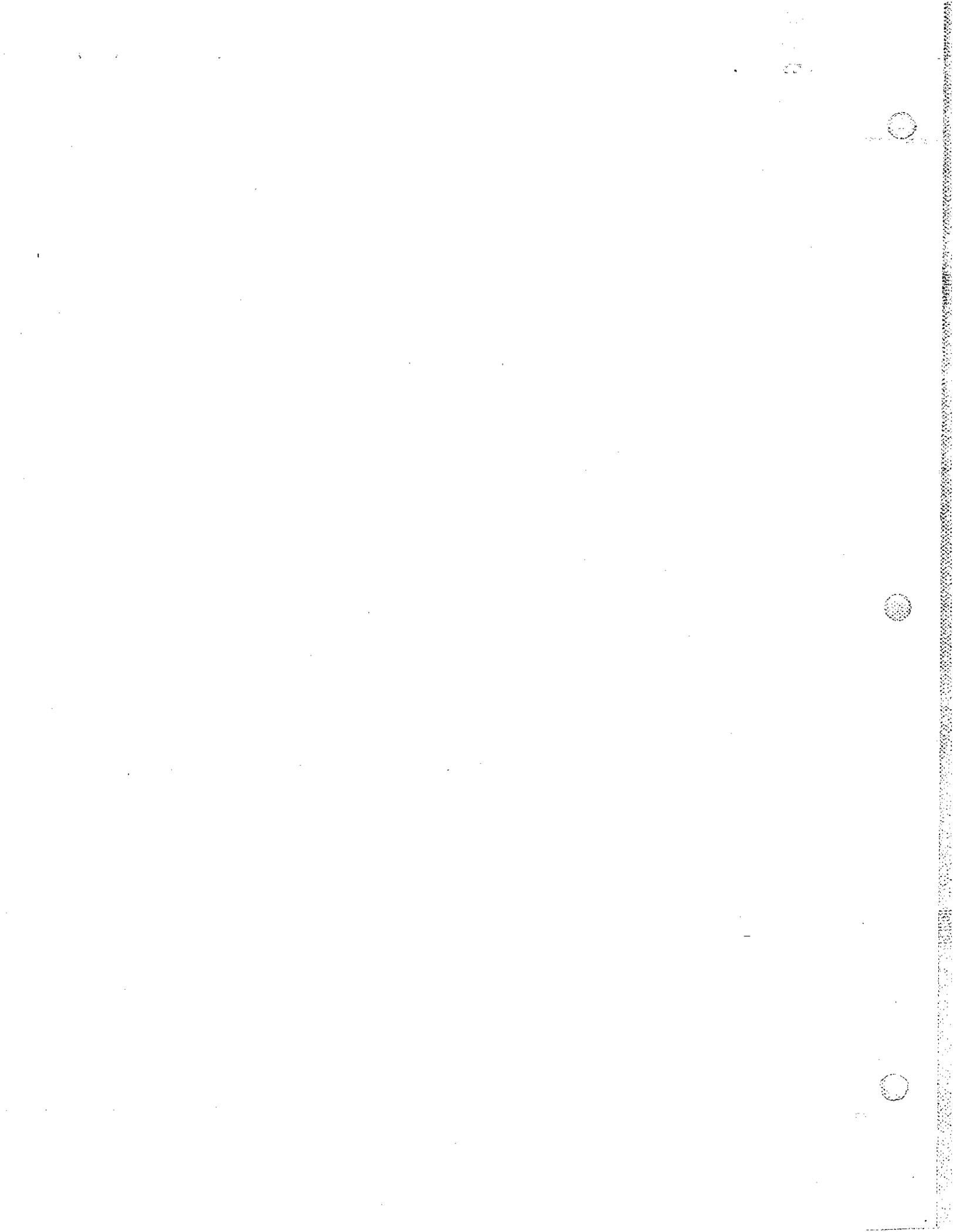
"Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the  
School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont."

September, 1975



This report by Danuta U. Guzowski is  
accepted in its present form.

Date Sept 24, 1975 Advisor Alvino E. Fantini  
Alvino E. Fantini



During my first meeting with Barbara de Gomez to receive general orientation regarding the Focus Group which I was leading, I was told that the Mexico Experiment Office was dissatisfied with several of the MAT's who were student-teaching in Mexico during the summer. One of the major reasons was a failure, on the part of the MAT student-teachers, to exhibit professional responsibility in regards to completing a certain teaching period. It seems that they were completing their allotted teaching hours in a time-period shorter than the one understood and agreed upon by the Mexico Office and its representatives in the various towns. Another cause of dissatisfaction was the social and cultural behavior of some of the MAT's -- acceptable in the U.S. but not acceptable in Mexico. Excessively independent behavior exhibited by the female MAT's was the foremost complaint. Related to this was the general lack of consideration and respect for the wishes and sensitivities of the Mexican host families, the local representatives, the local schools, and the Mexico Experiment Office.

What had all of this to do with me, a group leader? Well, I had been an MAT experimenter/teacher during the winter of 1975. And I had known before returning to Mexico that, as a leader, I would be faced with preparing my group members for many of the same situations I had encountered as an MAT. Furthermore, I sympathized with Barbara de Gomez's dilemma -- the possibility of losing communities

for the Experiment because of cultural friction and misunderstanding. The complaints Barbara de Gomez presented did not surprise me. Having been through my student-teaching experience, I knew they were valid. Yet, at the same time, I also understood the reasons for what happened with the MAT's, and much of it could have been avoided with adequate orientation and preparation for teaching in Mexico.

After considering what Barbara de Gomez had to say about the MAT's in Mexico and the possibility of discontinuing the Student-Teaching Program there, I discussed the situation with Al Fantini, who is both Director of the Department of Language Education at SIT and Site Director at Oaxtepec, where my Experiment group had language training and orientation in Mexico. It was with his encouragement and suggestions that I decided to direct my report on leadership in Mexico to a re-evaluation of the MAT Program.

I personally feel at a great advantage in doing this, because I have experienced Mexico in several different ways: as an experimenter in three homestay situations, as a teacher, and finally as a group leader. Each of these experiences has provided me with a different perspective of Mexico. I have been able to use each separate experience as a point of reflection and comparison with my other Mexican experiences, thereby enriching their total value for me. My role as a Mexican "daughter" was basically passive,

accepting the role as defined by my Mexican families. As a "teacher", however, I took on a different role, that of active participant and decision-maker in Mexican society. As a "leader", I had to apply all I had learned previously about Mexicans and Mexican culture to advising my group members -- a difficult, yet exciting, role. I felt half-Mexican while doing this because I was constantly explaining the Mexican viewpoint. Yet, at the same time, I understood completely the cultural reactions of my American group members. Whereas as a "daughter" and a "teacher" I felt that things were done to me, or happened to me through the actions of others, as a "leader", I could step back and observe the action and maintain a more objective outlook. It was from this position that I looked back and was able to see why problems did develop for the MAT's who elected to go to Mexico for their student-teaching.

Let me list some of the problem situations that came up with both my high-school group members and with MAT's. Neither are they over-generalizations, nor are they far-fetched. They form a part of my actual experiences as experimenter, teacher, and leader in Mexico. These situations are listed in the form of value judgments made by both Mexicans and Americans about each other. Because they are value judgments, there is a counter-response to each assertion, that is, the other side of the situation.

I. Mexican Viewpoint: "The American is too quiet; he appears apathetic, bored, and generally uninterested in the Mexican way of life. He must be sad or homesick."

Counter-response: Perhaps the American seems quiet because he does not have enough confidence in his language ability to actively participate in a conversation. Or perhaps he does not even know what is going on. Or perhaps he is not talkative in general.

II. American Viewpoint: "Mexicans waste too much time just hanging around, shooting the breeze."

Counter-response: Mexicans regard socializing as a major part of their daily lives; and this does not mean only the social amenities, but really getting to know each other. Is talking really a waste of time, or are you getting to know someone better and are you learning something from this human encounter? Think about it!

III. Mexican Viewpoint: "My American son eats so little. The food I serve in my home must be very different from what he is used to, and I suppose he does not like it very much."

Counter-response: Perhaps the American son eats little anyway, or little compared to what his Mexican family eats. Perhaps his meal schedule in the States has not prepared his stomach to accommodate the large amounts of food served at the afternoon meal in his Mexican home. Perhaps he comes from an environment that does not necessarily adhere to the motto: "If you love me, feed me."

IV. American Viewpoint: "My Mexican family always says they are going to do something and they never do it. They are always disappointing me. They have told me four times that they will take me to visit Mexico City with them. I have made my plans for the trip, stuck around the house, and we have not gone yet."

Counter-response: Perhaps what your family makes are not really promises but simply "wouldn't it be nice" suggestions that you take for promises. Perhaps the spoken word is not taken as seriously in Mexico as in the States.

V. Mexican Viewpoint: "Our American daughter comes and goes as she pleases. We worry about her coming in late at night. Of course, we trust her, but we do not trust the fellow she goes out with. We would never force her to

come in at a certain hour, but this situation upsets us."

Counter-response: Perhaps the American daughter feels that if her Mexican parents do not object to her going out often and staying out late, she might as well do it. Well, why then don't they come out and say what they think? Perhaps out of courtesy and shyness they cannot confront their daughter directly. Shouldn't she realize what she is doing? Perhaps the American daughter should sense this from the gentle suggestions of her Mexican parents.

There are a hundred more situations that can come up. Covering them all, I believe, would be like giving prescriptions for specific ailments, after they have fully developed. Why not try for a bit of preventive action so that these situations do not have to develop?

This brings me to the next phase of discussion: ATTITUDES. I believe that providing specific solutions for the various situations which may crop up in Mexico is not adequate. It is my opinion that individuals who possess an attitude of cultural understanding, with respect and tolerance for others, will be very well equipped to handle mostly any situation that may come up. Attitudes are all-encompassing; and helping MAT's develop appropriate cultural attitudes will provide them with the cultural tools they need for day-to-day existence in Mexico. This suggestion attempts to aid the MAT, as "experimenter," to realize the philosophy of the Experiment:

Central to Experiment philosophy is the commitment to live together **BY LIVING TOGETHER**. In becoming a member of another family, the Experi-

menter's goal is to accept the members of the family as they are. He must consider the expectations of the members of his family and be open to experiencing fully a new set of values; just putting up with and tolerating the differences is not enough. He must be prepared to give of himself to his new family and to share their life AS THEY LIVE IT -- not as he wishes they lived it. Whatever inter-actions take place among the group members, their leader, and host families during this period, they should be geared to enhancing the possibility of each Experimenter becoming a functioning part of his family unit.<sup>1</sup>

Since the MAT student-teacher in Mexico is required to have a homestay before his/her practice-teaching and have another homestay while teaching, the above constitutes a very important aspect of preparing MAT's for Mexico . . . an aspect which, I believe, does not receive enough emphasis in the MAT Program.

My high-school group members more or less easily fell into the roles of "sons and daughters" of Mexican families because they maintain the same roles in the U.S. However, the MAT, who in my class averaged in the mid-twenties, has not carried this role for several years. He/She had been working, going to school, and travelling quite independently and found it extremely difficult to accept the basically passive and obedient role attributed to a son or daughter in a Mexican family. The Experiment's aim is not

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1. The Leaders Handbook, (The Experiment in International Living, Brattleboro, Vermont, 1974.), p. 10.

to change the attitude of the family, as stated in its philosophy. It is instead up to the MAT as Experimenter to change, to adapt. Perhaps the MAT, by being made aware of this situation can be oriented and prepared for it, and thereby will derive a better experience from it. And then perhaps those problems mentioned by the Mexico Experiment Office can be avoided.

What the MAT needs, I believe, is a coherent cultural orientation before he/she leaves for Mexico. There are those who would suggest that a person in his/her mid-twenties is mature enough to make the adjustment to living and working in a new culture with a minimum of preparation. I would tend to agree, moreso, since all candidates accepted to the MAT Program are required to have had a previous overseas living experience. But, and this is important, for the most part these individuals were living on their own, not as members of families. And it is not the teaching situation that has proven to be the major problem in Mexico (although there was a definite misunderstanding this past summer), but the relationships MAT's have with their families.

Barbara de Gomez also mentioned a point worth considering in planning MAT orientation to Mexico. It is that no matter how mature an individual may be, and no matter how successful he/she is in his/her own environment or society,

when he/she is deprived of the usual and customary in his/her daily life, a disorientation occurs and a resulting loss of self-assuredness and confidence. And the individual's resulting reactions may be those that we would attribute to a less mature individual. We become, in a sense, children when we enter a new culture. The rules lived by are new; and we must learn them to be accepted and allowed to function in this new culture. If we choose this path, life will be relatively easy; but if we reject it, what results, among other things, is depression and a hostile attitude to the new environment and the people around us.

There is one other area I would like to discuss before presenting my suggestions for preparing MAT's for Mexico. And that is the attitude of the MAT toward Mexico as a student-teaching site. Mexico is very easy to "fall into" because everything is arranged for you: your job, a place to live, i.e., your family. There are no inquiries to be made -- no doubts as to whether you will be accepted, as is the case in other countries. All you have to do is fill out an Experiment application and write a "dear Family" letter. The ease with which this is accomplished has, I believe, contributed to the situation that many MAT's may ~~not take teaching in Mexico too seriously.~~ This added to the fact that English is not taken seriously in most of the public schools of Mexico contributed to the develop-

ment of a situation such as the one mentioned by Barbara de Gomez, of MAT's getting through their hour-requirements as soon as possible.

Therefore, I feel it would be advisable to incorporate a "cultural orientation" into the MAT Program as a requirement for those considering Mexico as a student-teaching site. The question is what form would this "cultural orientation" take. What I can do is simply to offer a possible format and suggestions for its implementation.

First let me review the underlying philosophy of the MAT Program so as to keep the format and suggestions consistent with that philosophy. We, the MAT Candidates, receive a Handbook at the commencement of our program. It contains general administrative and specific programmatic guidelines for our continued reference throughout the program. We read that "SIT serves the purpose of EIL by administering a variety of educational programs."<sup>2</sup> One of these programs is MAT. As stated, the purpose of EIL-SIT is "To foster international and intercultural communication on a person-to-person level and thereby promote peace." (ibid). MAT's interpretation of this purpose is found in its stated goal: "TO EDUCATE PROFESSIONAL HUMANISTIC LANGUAGE

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2. Department of Language Education, MAT Handbook, Second Edition, (School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont, 1974), p. 1.

TEACHERS" (p. 5). Further definition of its goal is needed to comply with the purpose of EIL-SIT, and so five areas of competency are identified as pre-requisites for each MAT Candidate in achieving the goal of the Program:

1. Linguistic: The teacher should know a great deal about the nature of language and the specific language he is teaching.
2. Cultural: The teacher of second languages - as opposed to the teacher of first languages - deals with communication across cultures. He must therefore be familiar with the problems of cross-cultural communication and he should have personal experience with another culture.
3. Interpersonal and Social Relationships: Effective language teaching depends on effective interpersonal communication, social awareness and self knowledge.
4. Pedagogical: The teacher must have an understanding of how people learn, how people learn languages, and what techniques, materials can be used to bring about effective learning.
5. Professional: In addition to being an effective, humanistic language teacher within the classroom, the teacher has responsibilities to his colleagues, his profession, and the community. (p. 6).

For the purposes of this report I will expand only on numbers two, three, and five. Numbers one and four are in the technical category and not intrinsically concerned with the theme of this report.

How do these three areas: Cultural, Interpersonal and Social Relationships, and Professional prepare the MAT for his/her student-teaching in Mexico?

The Cultural Area offers Cultural Aspects of Language Teaching, a two-credit module, with an additional credit offered for a short anecdotal paper on the homestay experience. The module is two weeks in duration. There are seminars with guest speakers, group workshops, sample lesson planning, and reading lists. There is one cross-cultural exercise offered ( The Albatross ) and a short discussion of another (NAPI/KEPRA). The course is definitely geared to identifying and understanding the dynamics of teaching in a cross-cultural situation. Its goals state this:

1. To broaden the participants' understanding of the nature of culture and the relationship between culture and language.
2. To identify culturally based aspects of human communication.
3. To consider some of the ways and means for teaching culture. (p. 60).

Its goals do not include "to orient and prepare the participant for living with a family and teaching in the context of another culture." As regards the homestay, the goal is "To experience cross-cultural communication in a particular culture by living within the basic cultural unit - the family." (p. 61). And in the "homestay paper," the MAT is asked "to articulate a communication problem that developed because of cultural differences" (ibid). The experience and possible problems are covered, but no

preparation is offered.

There is a course on Spanish Culture and Civilization offered, but it is given in Spanish during the second semester. Therefore, it does not serve the ESL majors who go to Mexico in the winter.

The Interpersonal and Social Relationships Area offers a Human Relations module but this has not included specific cross-cultural interaction, although the module is wide open to interpretation.

The Professional Area offers intensive Spanish Language courses three weeks before the MAT's leave for Mexico.

There is no formal orientation included in any of these areas.

The MAT's who did their student-teaching during the winter of 1975 organized informal discussions with several English teachers who had also done their student-teaching in Mexico. We also spoke individually with our advisers and other DLE Staff who had been to Mexico, as well as with Mexican MAT's, ISE's, and anyone else we could find who had had contact with Mexico. That was the total of our orientation to Mexico, until we got there and met Barbara de Gomez, who actually provided the only really structured preparation we had. She was open and direct, giving us the Do's and Don'ts of Mexico in rapid sequence. It was very good for specific questions, but forming an appropriate

cultural attitude takes a much longer time. I feel it can and should be done in an on-campus orientation before the internship in Mexico. Under the present program, the MAT's are not as well prepared for living and teaching in Mexico as they could be. With better preparation major problems could be avoided and the MAT would have a richer experience.

The "cultural orientation" I propose for the Mexico-bound MAT's has as its basic assumption that: The MAT student-teacher to Mexico is interested in taking part in a cross-cultural living and working experience in accordance with the Experiment's philosophy of commitment, acceptance, and active participation. Its goal is to orient and prepare the participant to living with a family and teaching in Mexico. Its objectives are 1) Orientation to the patterns of life in Mexico. 2) Orientation to Mexican social and cultural history. 3) Orientation to the Mexican school system. 4) Orientation to the Mexico Experiment's organization and to the requirements it puts on MAT student-teachers. 5) Development of empathy for Mexican culture and people in both general and specific terms.

How can this be accomplished? The implementation of the orientation program assumes the utilization of the wealth of resources found within the SIT community in accordance with its guiding principle: "People learn to live together by living together." or, "learn by doing and

learn from and with each other." (p. 1). I am referring here specifically to incorporating ISE's into the formal and informal activities of the MAT Program. There is always some form of ISE/MAT socializing on campus, but on the whole, it is very superficial. Reasons: MAT's are busy. MAT's do not speak X language. MAT's just do not have the time. If the Program incorporated ISE/MAT interaction, there would be time, because it would be a requirement of the Program. And there are always a good number of ISE's from Mexico on campus. Also on campus are the headquarters of the U.S. Experiment through which any number of resource people could be asked to come and orient MAT's to Mexico; especially former leaders who have had to plan orientation programs for their groups. Al and Bea Fantini have worked in Mexico for a number of years running the Language Camps. Ann Puyana has been MAT supervisor there. Anne Janeway, Ted Gochenour, and Don Batchelder have provided general cross-cultural training for various groups.

For the cultural orientation to be effective it must be an integral part of the MAT Program and not a hit-and-miss affair. What I have suggested above are ideas. Now I would like to present a possible format for cultural orientation using these ideas. This format is proposed for ESL majors who go to Mexico in the winter, since I am most familiar with this experience. I am confident it can

be adapted to the Double major program.

Required Courses: FALL (September-December)

Methods English Linguistics	<u>Sept. - Oct.</u>
Cultural Aspects of Language Teaching	<u>Oct.</u>
Cross-Cultural Training	<u>Nov.</u>
Intensive Spanish Language Orientation to Mexico	<u>Dec.</u>

At the beginning of the Program in September, the MAT would be asked to start thinking about whether he/she wanted to do student-teaching in Mexico, during the winter session. Other options should be presented, so that the MAT is able to select from a number of choices. By the middle of October, the decision should be firm and the MAT can begin his/her preparation for Mexico with C.A.L.T.

Each Mexico-bound MAT would be required to be a tutor/adviser to at least one Mexican ISE (depending on enrollment). Tutoring a Mexican, or an ISE from another Latin American country (if there weren't enough Mexicans), would give the MAT experience in Cultural Aspects of Language Teaching. This experience should be documented and the MAT should receive credit for it, applicable to C.A.L.T. Although classroom teaching is very different from individualized tutoring, the MAT would be better acquainted with linguistic problems that Mexicans encounter than with no exposure at all.

The adviser role would give the MAT an opportunity to get to know a Mexican well and to meet other Mexicans through him/her. Through this role, the MAT would become aware of the cultural adjustments that have to be made by a Mexican to the U.S. This would aid the MAT in seeing his/her own culture from a different perspective, and would also serve as a point of reflection for his/her own adjustments when living in Mexico. The adviser role ideally would manifest itself as a friendship after an initial acquaintanceship period. This experience could be incorporated into either one phase of a Human Relations module, or as part of the Cross-Cultural Training module, or both, with credit being offered.

In November, after the formal C.A.L.T. module is over, I would suggest a Cross-Cultural Training module, two-three weeks in duration. The ICT Program has one. I am not all that familiar with it, but it would be worth looking into. I know it follows along the lines of "Seven Concepts in Cross-cultural Interaction, A Training Design" by Ted Gochenour and Anne Janeway. It would provide the MAT's with general cross-cultural training.

During the three-weeks intensive Spanish language training in December, I would suggest ~~two hours each evening~~ to be spent on orientation to Mexico, incorporating objectives numbers one through four. Objective number five

will be achieved depending on the MAT's progress in the rest of the program. These orientation sessions should involve Mexicans, DLE, MAT, ICT, WIP, and Experiment staff -- anyone who is familiar with Mexico and who could contribute positively to the sessions. Most importantly, these sessions should be coordinated to form a definite program to be as productive and beneficial as possible. Some suggested materials to be used are Case Studies, Role Plays, and other materials found in the Experiment's Leaders Handbook. And, of course, it would be of immense value to obtain a list of typical problem situations involving MAT's in Mexico from Barbara de Gomez. It is she who receives all the complaints about MAT's from local Experiment representatives and homestay families.

Upon arrival in Mexico, the MAT's have a day's orientation session with Barbara de Gomez. She gladly answers any MAT questions. The MAT's first have a homestay of three weeks' duration, all in the same city, before going to their different teaching communities. During the winter, we also had language classes which proved to be less than satisfactory because of the teaching methods used by our instructor. It has been suggested by Al Fantini and Ray Clark of the DLE that self-study of Spanish be used with the assistance of a resource person. That sounds great! I would ask that they follow through on their idea.

Since the MAT's have their first homestay together in one city, I would suggest their getting together formally once or twice a week for discussions on their cultural adjustments. In the Experiment programs, the group members share the same homestay community throughout the summer, and get together once in a while for "rap sessions" with their group leader who fulfills the role of adviser. The MAT's do not have a group leader. What they would have would be a set of guidelines extracted from the Cross-Cultural Training module and the Orientation to Mexico sessions. They can use these guidelines as a format for their group discussions.

Different MAT's have different concerns when it comes to living and teaching in Mexico. For some it is getting along in Spanish, for others it is teaching in a foreign classroom or just teaching; for still others, it is living in a family situation with its demands on the individual. This first homestay period would be a very advantageous time to discuss "homestay" problems that come up. While the group is together it can provide a supportive atmosphere for individuals to share their concerns. In this manner the individual would have the opportunity to benefit from sharing impressions and advice with colleagues before going off alone to the teaching post and a new homestay with their demands and challenges.

We, as MAT student-teachers, had to complete 64 hours student-teaching for any one level. However, we were also committed to teaching for eight weeks in our communities. During the summer, the MAT's adjusted their time committed to the hours they needed - this was unfair to the communities in which they were teaching. Barbara de Gomez will make it very clear that the time spent teaching will be for the duration of the time agreed upon originally. In her orientation she also covers the MAT's relationship with the local Experiment representative. The important point to be brought out at SIT in December, during the orientation sessions on Mexico, is that the MAT student-teacher is under the jurisdiction of the Mexico Experiment, while in Mexico, and not the U.S. Experiment. The Mexico Office will give the MAT support, advice, and help.

For us there was little time to travel between the end of our program and the beginning of spring session in Vermont. There was also no evaluation session with Barbara de Gomez at the end of teaching. She receives our written Site Reports from the U.S. It is a one-way deal, leaving Barbara no way of expressing her opinions directly to the MAT's. I would suggest that one day be spent in Mexico City with Barbara on evaluation. This should be paid for by the Program. After that, two weeks should remain free before having to report back to Vermont. This would allow

MAT's time to travel independently in Mexico, if they so wished. It would be at their own expense. Hopefully, the Mexico Experiment could help with travel arrangements.

Upon their return from Mexico, there would be a formal evaluation session of one day when the MAT's would get together, share their experiences with other MAT's and staff, make recommendations for the next MAT group going to Mexico. The winter group's evaluation would prove beneficial for MAT's going to Mexico in the summer. The results of the evaluation session should be documented and, together with Site Reports, Homestay Papers, and an evaluation sheet from the Mexico City session with Barbara de Gomez, be placed in a readily available file for future MAT Student/Staff reference.

In this report, I have attempted to show the need of a "cultural orientation" for the MAT's going to Mexico to student-teach. They, too, are "experimenters" and are expected to participate successfully in a cross-cultural living experience. This added to the pressures of student-teaching justify, I feel, the incorporation of "cultural orientation" as an intrinsic part of the MAT Program.

I have proposed the assumption, goal, and objectives of an orientation program; and I have offered one possible way of implementing such a program. I am sure there are other possibilities; but, whichever way is used, I hope that this proposal of a "cultural orientation" for Mexico-bound MAT's will be given serious consideration.

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