


1974

Report on Leadership to Castres, France

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International Training

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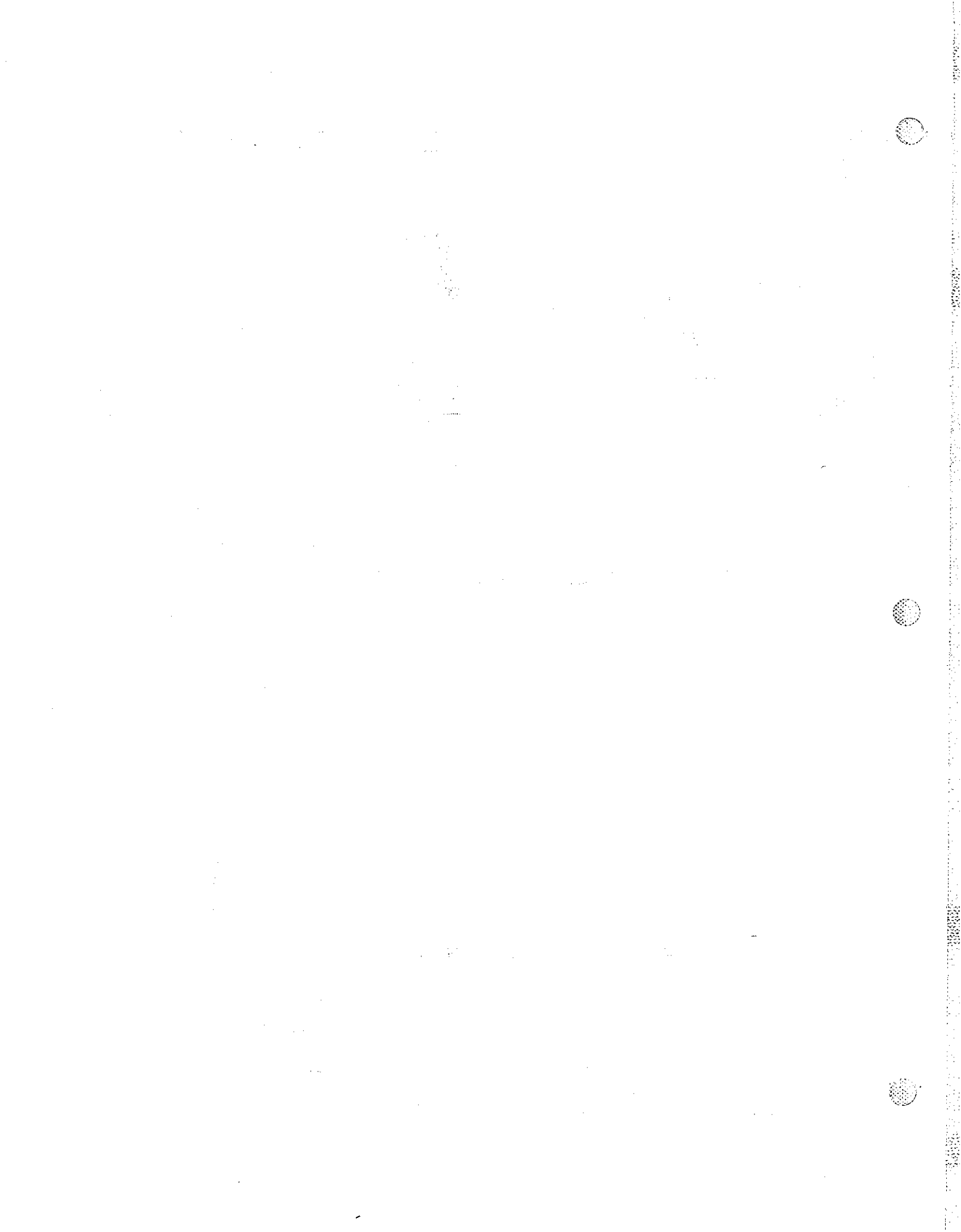
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REPORT ON LEADERSHIP TO CASTRES, FRANCE

Enid Larimer Dangerfield

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

February 1974



This report by Enid Larimer Dangerfield is accepted
in its present form.

Date: March 15, 1974

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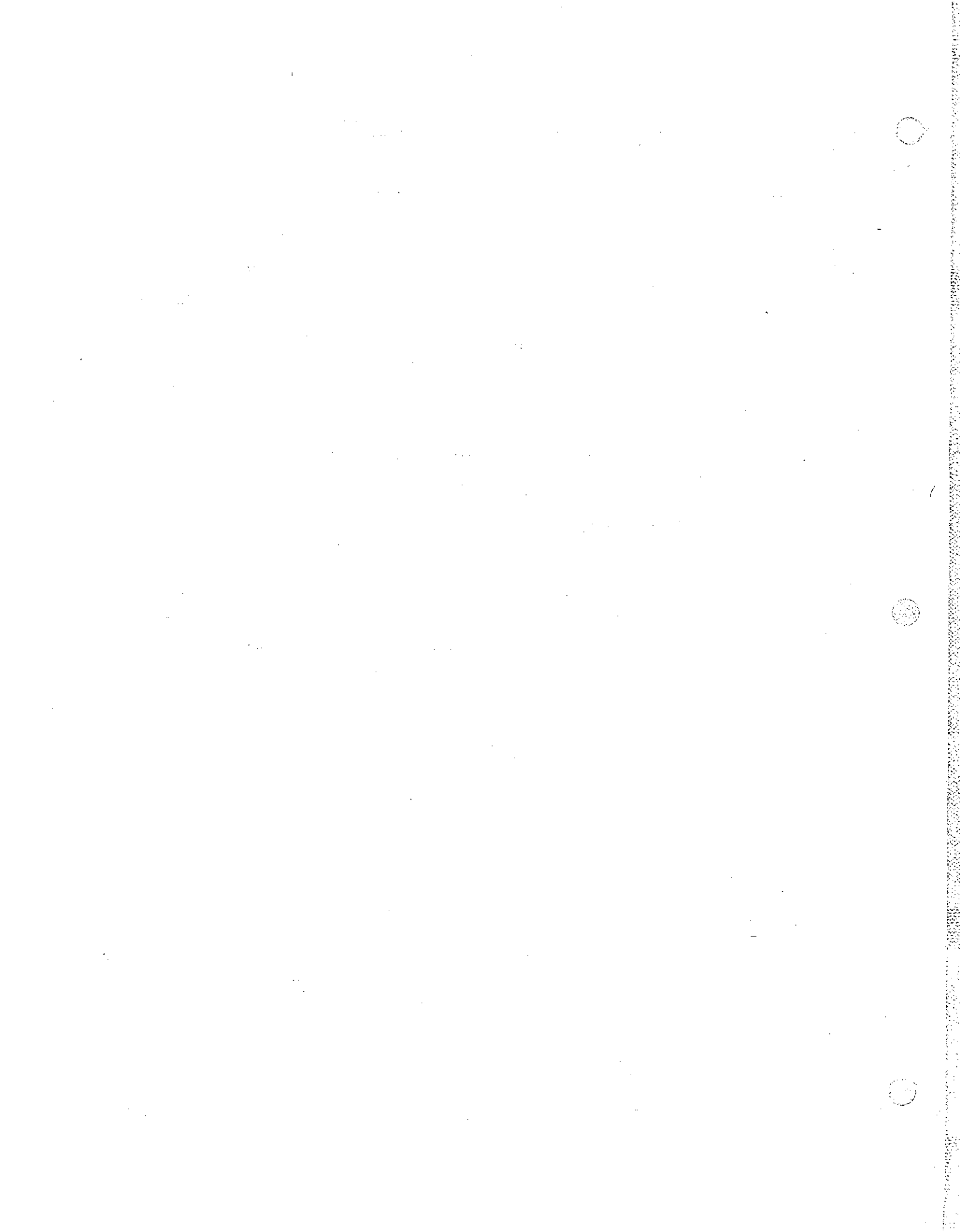


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Introduction

The following report on my independent professional project covers four topics:

- 1) preparation for departure overseas
- 2) how the group worked within itself
- 3) how the group and its members functioned during the program
- 4) what the leader contributes to the group

Getting to Know You

The following account of orientation problems and triumphs comes from a journal that I kept during the orientation and language learning at Vermont Academy.

Thursday, June 14

Parents, kids, buses arrived. We leaders were kept busy running from one new arrival to the next. Our group had a short pre-dinner meeting during which I was bombarded with questions about travel arrangements, why they hadn't heard from the families, etc. We broke for a picnic dinner on the lawn. After dinner there was a long, rather boring demonstration of Rassias' ALM. After the groups had squirmed through that, we had a meeting to discuss our camping trip. I ran into some problems with several members of the group challenging me:

--"How long has it been since you've been to France?"

Leader--"Eight years."

--"How can you know what it's like now then?"

--"We want our whole orientation in French."

Leader--"Well, group, do you feel that you have full working competency in the French language?"

--"What's the matter? Can't you handle it?"

We were sitting in an alcove with an open fireplace between us and another group:

--"Can we go over there? He seems to know the answers, and you don't."

This is how I became acquainted with two members of my group, Frank and Leslie, authors of the above dialogue. Then I told them about a language proficiency test we would all be taking.

--"Then we'll know where we stand with you."

I asked Frank what his problem was, since I was dumbfounded at his performance the very first evening. Somebody in the group started to sing the first few bars of "Getting to Know You" ironically. After the meeting was adjourned, I stayed to talk with Frank to find out what could make him act this way the first night. He and I reached some sort of an understanding. There are several people in the group who are extremely tense about:

--the homestay being a success

--being able to communicate in the language

--the unfamiliar; they seem to be scared of the Experiment experience, so they keep hammering away at me for details

Friday, June 15

We had language tests after breakfast and I met with the kids at 11:00 a.m. I decided to tighten up and also

give them a facts, figures and forms briefing, during which I also ran down the rules, facilities of Vermont Academy, program details, and passed out more forms. I had little trouble with the rudeness and challenges made the previous day. Perhaps they had relaxed a bit. After lunch we began language classes, and I found myself monitoring the same class to which Frank and Leslie, two of my potential problem people, were assigned. I think it will provide a good non-threatening way to get to know each other, and I can now understand why those two were so uptight about my French. It's theirs that really worries them, and with good reason.

After class a tearful member of the group came to me, and we went off to talk. She doesn't want to be here, her parents are pushing it, and she feels guilty, but she cannot do it. I told her that if she were merely apprehensive, we would help her get over her fear, but she said that she had no desire to try to make the Experiment work, and if forced to go she would plod through the summer like a zombie and might even crack up. She wasn't far from that today. She had been in an overwrought state ever since she arrived--shaking, crying, and was exhausted. I managed to get the nurse to see her and give her some tranquillizers. She still couldn't rest. We tried calling her parents but couldn't reach them until midnight. They weren't very happy or supportive about her decision to leave, but they did finally accept her decision to come home. I had stayed with her from 4:00 p.m. until 12:30 a.m. The rest of the group was on its

own that evening.

Saturday, June 16

Arrangements were made for Susan Tobias' departure and she left after lunch. I hope she'll be all right but I have some doubts.

After dinner we had a group meeting and things are better. The two or three dominant personalities are giving way to other opinions as the additional group members gain confidence and assert themselves. Frank tried his personal assaults tonight, but was jumped on by three or four people. He retreated, and we got on with the business of discussing our informal trip. These kids! They don't know what they want, but they certainly know what they don't want. They sit back waiting for me to set up and lob out ideas so they can criticize and squash them, yet they have no ideas of their own to share.

We spent some time role-playing case studies with great success. At least something worked tonight.

Sunday, June 17

After Sunday brunch we met in front of the girls' dorm and went down the river to the covered bridge. It was rough going. Dianne and Susan Krout didn't even try. They took the highway. The rest of us waded, slipped on rocks, clambered up and down poison ivy-laden banks, over branches and through burrs. Barbara Burrell, an overweight city girl with no sense for the outdoors, slipped and slid, fell in the water several times, didn't know how to go down an embankment or walk on a rock, but she stayed with us, and she did it with good humour

and perserverance. She kept calling herself an all-around klutz, but that's not what anybody else on that hike thought. We were impressed! We had a picnic at the covered bridge with cheese and wine. The group was warm and friendly today. Frank lay down in the middle of the river, and we threw pretzels into his mouth.

Monday, June 18

Frank is baiting our teacher, Annie Suquet, in class, but she gives it right back to him. Leslie and Frank are the pushiest and most inconsiderate members of our group, but they are also the liveliest. Their French is very poor.

We had a meeting after dinner during which we mentioned prejudice in France. Two Jewish girls are apprehensive, but I said that it's unlikely that they will encounter any problems. We saw Hunger in America which made one girl feel guilty about going to France. Our group talked about this for a while, but nobody seemed to have much to say. Another girl came to my room this evening to say that she might have V.D. Well, we'll have to check that out before we leave.

Tuesday, June 19

I took our tentative V.D. case to the doctor this morning, and she got shot full of penicillin, just in case. We had our first volleyball tournament game, and the Dindons Castrais had fun, but lost. The game was our meeting. After that some of us sat around and just chatted.

Wednesday, June 20

Valerie left this morning for the duration of the language

training due to a billing mishap, but we'll pick her up again in Paris. She's an asset to the group--tough, good sense of humour, down-to-earth. We need people like her. Frank and Leslie are getting me down. After dinner I went over to play our consolation match in volleyball and enroute I saw two girls carrying Susan Krout to the infirmary. Her foot had started to swell and hurt for no apparent reason, and now she couldn't walk on it. I stayed with her until the nurse came and then went to check on the Dindons. Frank was bitching and stepping on everyone's feelings, depressing our team. They had already lost one game, and the second game was just beginning. Frank said, "Well, we've lost one, and we're about to lose the other." And they'd just started the second game. Then Frank stomped off. We were planning an onion-soupmaking party, so I saw him later and told him. He said, "I'm sorry, but I don't believe I care to go." So he chose to go to Saxton's River laundromat instead, and Leslie went with him. We had fun that evening. David revealed a mischevious streak when he volunteered to go off to get some paper cups for the soup and returned with table service for ten which he had borrowed from the dining hall.

Leslie refuses to speak to me in English, which I think is a shield because her French is not a reasonable vehicle for communication.

Thursday, June 21

I took Susan Krout to the Rockingham, Vermont, hospital for x-rays. Something wierd must be wrong with her foot. I asked Frank to give out the mail, since I wouldn't be back for lunch,

and he pushed the chore off on Leslie who didn't do it either. That evening we had a meeting and it lasted an hour and a half, mostly Frank screaming. The way he sees it is that he's spending all this money for the program, and he's not getting the kind of orientation he wants. When I asked him what kind of orientation he wanted, he said that's for him to know and me to find out. Leslie doesn't want anything to do with the group. She says that the group might be useful to her later if her homestay doesn't "work out", but right now she'd rather play tennis. Frank got very belligerent. And Leslie says that she's spent six months in heavy self-analysis, so she can really "introspect." Frank thinks that we are all a waste of his time. I am tired of these two children monopolizing the group time. Nobody else in the group had much of anything to say in this meeting or registered much reaction beyond impatience.

Friday, June 22

Today the kids wanted to change their evening meeting time to 11:30 up to lunchtime, and I said that it was a very poor time for several reasons and would not change it. Then we argued about it for a while. Then we argued about next Sunday's picnic and what to buy. Nobody liked what anybody else liked. I bought the food and cut off the ensuing complaints.

Today a girl who led a year and a half ago to Castres came up to visit, and Castres sounds like a wonderful place to go.

Frank has gotten out and out insulting. He is destroying group morale and beating me down. I must act.

Saturday, June 23

Things have gotten unbearable with Frank. He's very abusive and totally negative. We had a meeting this morning, and he was downright obnoxious. He's destroying group morale as well as my credibility as a leader.

After lunch I discussed the Frank problem with the other leaders and the unanimous decision was, "Throw him out." I didn't know I could throw him out. Joy! I nabbed him right after class, told him that he was obnoxious, I didn't want to argue with him, and if he wasn't a totally different person from this day on, out he goes. Well, he wanted to argue, but I said I refused to discuss it. That was it, but he could talk to one of the male leaders as a neutral person. I think he's really deflated. After that dramatic confrontation I felt remarkably unburdened and went into the Albatross planning session. Ivan and I were the Albatrosians, an exhausting, but thoroughly enjoyable experience. Ron, another leader, said Frank was very co-operative in his Albatross group, so maybe he's changing.

Sunday, June 24

We went to Otter Creek State Park for a picnic en group with some French teachers as guests. Frank was good the whole time, considerate, cheerful, polite, scared. It was Susan Krout's birthday, and she was surprised and pleased with her present, cake and cards. It was a beautiful place. It looked like a Bavarian lake. After dinner we had a meeting authoritarian style. I read off what we will do the rest of the week--no one complained. They seem to want to be told what to do.

Monday, June 25

This morning I met with my kids again. They are responding well to benign despotism, much to my disappointment. I had hoped for a more independent, livelier bunch. But I'm getting quite fond of some of them, and most are becoming good friends with one another.

Friday, June 29

Frank's mother called this morning and wants to know if he can leave the program after the homestay and travel around independently. Bill Luring is going to take care of that. At this point, I could care less what Frank does, except that I've decided to let him come; he's modified his behavior considerably.

Everyone is hyped up for the departure tomorrow. The kids in the other groups are careening off the walls, and so am I, we're all so excited. My kids act like they fly to Paris every week-end.

Today's my birthday; the kids baked me a cake, picked a bouquet of flowers and bought a bottle of wine. Naturally we had a party.

I feel now that I should have been more aware of my very real authority and should have been much stronger with Leslie and Frank. I also found it necessary to adjust my expectations of what a college group should be like to the character of my group. The group needed a strong, decisive, authoritarian leader which I belatedly became to fill their needs. What Leslie

and Frank needed were summer jobs in White Plains and Pittsburgh.

All of the leaders at Vermont Academy liked each other and worked well together. The atmosphere among the staff and leaders at the Vermont Academy orientation site was warm, supportive, and enthusiastic. Marge and Jon Prentiss were beloved and appreciated for their sweet dispositions and efficiency.

The Journey

We left for France under dramatic conditions. It had rained for days, and Vermont was flooding. Our buses came an hour early, and we loaded the kids and left for the airport before the scheduled departure in order to avoid the imminent floods. We more or less invaded Hartford Airport and spent the night waiting for our charter to come in; apparently the plane was still in Budapest when it was supposed to be in Hartford. Be that as it may, we took off on our adventure at 8:00 a.m. the following day and arrived in Paris and the youth hostel by 9:00 p.m. Paris time. During supper--our first French meal, neck bones and greens--Messieurs Pigny and Verboom held a meeting with the leaders during which we were given detailed oral instructions on various relatively important topics. We were so tired that we remembered only some of what was said. Then we had to find beds for our chickadees, no mean task. It seems that the rooms had been reserved for us, but the beds and linen had not. By midnight after long, repetitive and inutterably complicated negotiations, it was finally agreed that my girls would sleep in the men's section of the youth hostel in an improvised girls wing.

We didn't even try to get the linen; it was too hard. I stayed there with them, and it was great fun the next morning out-foxing the non-plussed males we encountered in the washroom. The hostel, however, was a very shabby and dirty place and did not justify the \$4.00 per person that it cost to spend the night there. In my opinion it was an unsuitable place to take an exhausted group.

That first night in the men's section touched off a series of hilarious snarl-ups that complicated our moves about France. I noticed that my students' first reaction to these messes was generally irritation and frustration, but when I remained relaxed and amused, they seemed to unbend and on several occasions we turned our snafus into some of the most fun we had in France.

The Homestay

The next day we arrived exhausted in Castres. Madame Baille surged up to the train and began leading off members of my group and dispatching them with their families. Soon I was left standing alone on the platform wondering what had hit me. On her way out of the railroad station Madame Baille told me that my family would also soon be there. No introductions had been made, nobody knew who anybody else was, and it was over in five minutes. I was too tired to be annoyed, and, besides, it wasn't my town, but I certainly felt like a left-over pork chop at a meat sale.

Madame Baille turned out to be really nice, though, and we worked well together, I thought. There had been so many groups to Castres in the last three years (eight, I believe) that Madame Baille had mechanized the whole process. She issued directives,

mimeographed in ten-fold, she shipped us off alone on this and that excursion although sometimes two or three French kids were able to come along. She even proposed that I leave for a few days since we were a team, and she had things rolling along smoothly. I felt as if I were one of the kids and decided to get out of the traffic. I informed her that my time and my services were hers, but she was a one-woman show. She even planned the whole farewell party. Written instructions on what to do at the party, what to bring, and where it would be were handed to us on arrival in Castres. She also planned our informal trip, presented the itinerary to us the first week and all the kids were then consulted. I discussed the itinerary with each group member and they seemed satisfied. Indeed we are grateful to Madame Baille because her itinerary for our informal trip was excellent and it covered an area little known to most Americans.

The students were also very pleased with their families. They were very well placed, except for one. Everyone had a wonderful homestay, except for one. This was poor Dianne.

Poor Dianne

A number of things went amiss. Dianne is a quiet, reserved girl who speaks very little French, and she was placed in a voluble Mediterranean family, who brawls at the table and who has also had three Experimenters before. They remember Nancy who spoke such good French, they remember Kay's cuteness and how well she got along with Eveline, the daughter of the family. Eveline had just passed her baccalaureat examinations the day before

Dianne arrived and was in a state of mental exhaustion. The presence of another girl her age in the home annoyed her and she fought constantly with Dianne. Dianne reacted with frustration when the whole family joined in these fights, mostly because she had very little idea what was being said. There were two door-slamming incidents where Dianne fled into her room and slammed the door, offending the host family. Eveline told the family (maliciously, I suspect) that Dianne was on the point of suicide. Mama Amalric panicked and called Madame Baille who believed it, and somehow Paris heard this lurid story. I heard about it the next day, and I talked to Dianne. Of course she hadn't contemplated suicide. On another occasion she had a one-half franc piece made into a silver ring, and Eveline told her family that Dianne had bought a diamond ring. This tidbit also worked its way up the chain of command to Paris. I saw the ring, and it's worth maybe \$7.50. Now Dianne is not a very outgoing person, she is not a warm, bubbly person, but I sincerely believe that she was fighting a losing battle in the Amalric home. When she left she received the following letter from Eveline, which I have edited since it is very long:

"Dear Dianne,

I know that we were not good friends during your stay in my home, and I am sorry. I have been undergoing psychotherapy since the beginning of the summer, and I am very tired. Besides, we have had so many Americans in our home that I feel like a machine repeating and explaining the same things. Your culture is not a novelty to me, you people are not a novelty. I am sick

of Americans in my home..."

Leslie Wohlman at the Castres Tennis Camp

Leslie Wohlman also had a very unilateral homestay. She stayed with the Bailles, and used them as she would the staff of the Hotel Europa. She came and went as she pleased, had meals at odd hours, used the family friends to take her places. In a way, I think that Madame Baille was asking for this treatment because at the beginning of our stay in Castres I had told her that Leslie was unbelievably self-centered, inconsiderate, and to be aware of these traits. Madame Baille said that things were fine. I visited the family: things were fine. Two inquiries later: things were just peachy. So then Leslie received a letter from her mother giving her permission to leave the Experiment program in the middle of the homestay and hop off to the Riviera. Leslie left without any prior notice to me or to the Bailles. Madame Baille was very upset, and it was then that I learned how Leslie had behaved during the homestay, when it was too late to do anything about it.

Frank

Frank Gaffney also received special permission from Brattleboro to drop out of the group at the end of the homestay and did so. He adjusted quite well to his family and was very happy. His family liked him, and that was the last we saw of Frank.

My Role I

My official role as a leader in the homestay community involved a speech at the mayor's reception and at the farewell party. My role demanded a certain amount of decorum and reserve during the family visits and group functions while in Castres. Madame Baille had pretty much assumed my working duties before we arrived in Castres, but this freed me to be with my group on the excursions they were sent on and to work on problems encountered during the homestay.

My Role II or Leaving Can be Disastrous

I had taken Madame Baille's suggestion that I leave for a few days at face value. Naive soul that I was, I decided to wait to see if things were proceeding smoothly with the homestays, excursions, and informal trip plans. After we had been in Castres for two weeks, I filed the dates during which I would like to be gone with Madame Baille. I wanted to leave for four days to visit relatives. Madame Baille said, "Sure, fine, it helps all my leaders to get away for a while, and we are a team." So seventeen days and no problems after we arrived in Castres, I left on my "authorized leave." Well, this is what happened in four days:

1) Friday: The group goes on a trip to Carcassone. Some group members drift away to do some of their own sightseeing, Madame Baille blows her top, chews them out, and says this is the last Experiment group she'll ever have. Everybody gets back to Castres at 3:00 a.m. and she alone drives thirteen people home.

2) Sunday: Dianne has a fight with her French sister, Eveline, and Eveline tells her parents that Dianne is threatening suicide. They panic and call Madame Baille.

3) Monday: Leslie leaves the group without prior notice, and Madame Baille calls Paris and says she has all these problems, and the leader took off. Paris relays this to Brussels, and Brussels calls Brattleboro demanding my resignation. So, in the wake of my absence, Brattleboro calls me, and tells me that I have broken my "contract" and to shape up. I have several counseling sessions with a tearful Dianne, and hear from Madame Baille that our group is certainly going to be the last in Castres and how I should never have left. So it seems that no matter how smoothly things seem to be going in a group, disasters are surely lurking in the wings if the leader dares to turn his back on his duties, even for one day. Madame Baille was very right: I should never have left the group. The leader must be around and available to his group every day.

The Camping Trip

Our itinerary had been laid out for the camping trip, and after our homestays, we left in a chartered bus with ten Americans and one lone French girl. We had a marvelous time! My kids were very good about speaking French. The itinerary included some of the most beautiful areas in France. We would hit a campsite and attract people at once. We were liked at all campsites because we were:

- a. ten women and one guy

- b. Americans, a fairly uncommon but admired nationality in that part of France
- c. friendly, quiet, and considerate.

I was very proud of the behavior of my group. I was certain at all times that they would conduct themselves in a manner that would be a credit to the Experiment and to our country.

At first we had assigned teams for pitching tents, buying and preparing food, etc. Our teams worked smoothly, but we soon overlapped on duties. Everyone wanted to help out on the tasks, and we worked even more efficiently as a whole unit than in small teams. Even the bus driver helped us. We were most fortunate in having a good-natured and generally lovable driver accompanying us on the trip. Everyone enjoyed himself on that camping trip!

Return Trip to Paris

Our return trip instructions had been to proceed to Bordeaux and board the train to Paris. When we got there with all our luggage and all ten Americans, our group ticket was not acceptable in Bordeaux, and we were forced to travel 250 miles south in order to use our group ticket that had been bought for Paris-Toulouse-Paris and could not be changed even if I were a relative of Napoleon. Luckily for us, the bus driver just happened to be returning that way in the bus, and we piled back into the bus for our six-hour ride to the Toulouse railroad station. I had to put down an uprising at the news that we were going 500 miles out of our way to get to Paris. One girl was ready to jump ship and buy her own ticket to Paris from Bordeaux, but I marched

them all into the bus after refusing amongst other things to buy another group ticket from our funds for Paris.

Our night train from Toulouse to Paris was nearly empty. We had an all-night party. Everyone brought out a surprise purchased enroute to Toulouse at a meal stop in a small town. We had wine, bubble gum, cake, chocolate, beer. Then we woke everybody up at 3:00 a.m. for stupid story time, the winner being the one who could tell the dumbest story. We were all so tired and sappy that we giggled all the way into Paris. I think those kids will remember that train trip for years.

After we got into Paris and settled in our hotel, we were home clear. Everyone had had fun, general health and dispositions were good, funds were adequate, and I think that we all made some wonderful friends in France and among the group.

Conclusions

One of the things that surprised me greatly during the summer was the extent to which my students looked to me for guidance, pace, and decision-making. They seemed incapable of arriving at a decision among themselves and would degenerate into squabbling until I intervened. Often they would make excellent suggestions but could not act upon them. I was the center support and main figure of the group, particularly during the camping trip and Paris. They wanted a strong, directive leader. They looked to me to make decisions, and they even looked to me to see my reactions to surprise events and minor disasters. Often I felt like a cheerleader or a ship's social director on our camping trip and on our homestay excursions. For instance, during

the camping trip we would go long distances in the bus, and when we arrived at an interesting town or site, I would leap up and say, "All right, who wants to see the town?", and my people would just sit there in the bus. I would jump out of the bus, climb back in, and somebody would finally manage to say, "What's there to see?". There was a set of guidebooks to the area in the bus that only one girl looked at during the trip. These were my college students! The others allowed themselves to be transported and guided from place to place. I needed to push to get that group off the ground.

I think a leader has to lead in his own style, but I found out this summer that it is even more important to adjust to the style needed by the group.

Recommendations

I have two recommendations which might make things a little easier for a leader next year:

--1. Limit homestays to within thirty miles of the homestay town. During most of the homestay I had four members of my group living within ten miles of Castres. The others lived from between thirty and three hundred miles from Castres. This made group activities difficult as well as complicating my contact with certain group members.

--2. Centralize and standardize instructions to leaders. I made a hash of many administrative details during the summer because I was confused by the magnitude and the sporadic intervals at which we were sent instructions. There was a wealth of overlapping requests for information and a lack of communication

between Brattleboro and Paris. I relied on the list of duties in the leader's handbook, but soon found that this is a very incomplete list of duties. Often I was baffled by who got what and when. We had four authority figures: Brattleboro, Brussels, Paris, and the local representative. In my opinion, that is too many bosses, especially when communications are snarled among them.

--3. Don't leave the homestay town for more than twelve hours. Events have a tendency to run away with themselves. Take my own sad, snarled experience to heart, and hang in close to the home-front. Mere physical presence means a lot.

A very wise Frenchwoman told me this summer that "everything arranges itself in the end", which I think was the case with us. We all had a wonderful time, and I hope that the Experiment will agree that "everything arranged itself."

