

## Lessons learned on Mexican soil

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100 children gathered around her and the other teachers asking and patiently waiting for their autographs.

"Being a teacher I've never felt like a celebrity until then," she said.

Mrs. Ivey and Mrs. Burnette had the opportunity to meet equally pleasant instructors. The teachers had so much passion and devotion that they would teach two shifts a day. Some would travel an hour and a half to teach in the morning, and then travel the same distance or farther to teach at a different school in the afternoon, all with the hope of seeing their students succeed.

They understand better than most how essential education

is to the children of Mexico, where a large number finish their education with middle school. For most students furthering their education is their only chance to rise above their poverty — a level of poverty that is so severe it would be hard for most of us to comprehend.

When the teachers had the opportunity to visit one of the poorer villages of Mexico, they saw first hand the plight of that deep level of poverty. The families of the area lived in somewhat of a compound that had no windows or even doors. The teachers were invited into a sitting area outside that doubled as the family's cooking space.

In spite of their extremely poor living conditions, the

families opened their home to these strangers and showed their hospitality and respect.

"All we ask in return is that you show just half of this hospitality and respect to the people of my country who are in the United States," the patriarch of one family told Mrs. Ivey. He was one of very few men still left in the area. In a place where family is so highly valued, a large number of children are living in Mexico without their fathers because the men are working in the United States so that they can send enough

money back to for their families to survive.

When the teachers asked a classroom full of students how many had a member of their immediate family who was living and working in the United States, every single hand was raised.

"I now know what \$200 sent back home to Mexico means to a person's family," Mrs. Ivey said. "It could mean the difference between eating and not eating. Their goal is to capture the American Dream, not because they dislike their country, but

because there are simply no other options for them."

Aside from gaining an understanding of Mexico's poverty, the two instructors say they now have a deep appreciation of our own public school system and a greater insight into the Latino population.

They hope to use the knowledge they brought back from their voyage to implement new and improved English as a Second Language programs in Wayne County within the next two years.



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