Rural Teachers in Project Launch

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The success of Project Launch, a teacher induction program sponsored by a regional teacher center and a consortium of universities, is compared for rural and non-rural participants. Indicators of success include teacher accomplishment of action plan goals, teacher self and mentor assessment of teaching strengths related to action plan goals, profiles of teaching strengths, and retention in teaching. Measures of teaching strength are related to INTASC standards. Rural participants differed significantly from non-rural participants in their lower self-perceived accomplishment of action plan goals. Rural participants were significantly more likely to move from their 1st positions after 1 year, but their attrition was not significantly different in later years. Ways to structure induction programs more effectively for rural participants are proposed.

National teacher shortages call rural educators to contemplate the conditions that induce teachers to begin their careers in rural schools and to stay there. Factors in rural teacher retention considered in the literature include salary and other conditions of employment (Rude, 1997), characteristics of candidates such as place identification and commitment to a rural lifestyle (Boylan, Sinclair, Smith, Squires, Edwards, Jacob, O'Malley, & Nolan, 1993; Collins, 1999; Hoover & Aakhus, 1998), and teacher preparation and professional development (Boylan & Brandy, 1994; Ludlow, 1998). This article focuses on the success of Project Launch, a regional induction program, for participants who began their careers in rural schools.

"Rural" in this case refers to schools located in geographically distinct communities ranging in size from 1000 to fewer than 300 and located 20 to100 miles away from a major population center. Although many of the communities were declining in size, each was grounded in an agricultural tradition that valued and sought to preserve locally controlled schools. Their schools enrolled from 35 to 300 students, assuring that any teacher employed was without a colleague at the same grade level or subject. "Non-rural" refers to schools located in two districts that served the major population center of 65,000 people. Teachers in reservation schools were not included in the comparisons developed here.

Project Launch started in 1996, when the Bismarck Mandan Area Teacher Center and the North Dakota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education secured Goals 2000 funding for a program to support new teachers in a 13-county area. This region employs graduates of all of the state's nine schools of education. A team of teachers, administrators, and teacher educators designed the program in its planning year, and teacher educators continue to work with the project director, a former school administrator and teacher center director, in its implementation.

Project Launch employs one-to-one mentoring and daylong conferences to support new teachers in the school districts that choose to participate. To be eligible for participation, a teacher must be on a first-year contract to teach full-time in an assignment that involves group instruction, excluding persons in roles such as speech clinician and librarian. Before the start of school, principals designate a mentor teacher for each new teacher participant. The pairs of teachers meet weekly for interactions on topics related to implementing an action plan and responding to immediate concerns. All participants, new and mentor teachers, gather for four days of large and small group programming designed to address needs identified by participants. A framework for teaching similar to the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC, 1992) standards provides a common conception of teaching and is used in assessing outcomes.

Project Launch began in 1996-1997 and has continued through 2001-02. In its first four years, 104 new teachers completed the program in cohorts ranging from 25 to 29. Of these, 72 (69.2%) began their careers in Bismarck or Mandan, which comprise a single metropolitan area, and 25 (24.0%) began their careers in rural schools. Rural participants were not evenly distributed across the cohorts, with 2 rural participants in 1996-97, 7 in 1997-98, 8 in 1998-99, and 8 in 1999-2000. All new teacher participants were recent graduates of traditional teacher education programs, with 86% graduating from one of the nine programs in the state, including 47% from the only institution of higher education in the service area of the teacher center.

This article focuses on the success of Project Launch for the rural, as compared to non-rural, participants as indicated by four factors: (a) their accomplishment of action plan goals, (b) their confidence, and that of their mentors, in the strength of first-year teaching performance related to action plan goals, (c) their profiles of self-assessed teaching strengths, and (d) their retention in teaching. Examination of the Project Launch data is prefaced by a review of recent literature about rural teacher induction programs and by description and justification of the methods used to measure the success of Project Launch. Findings are presented and followed by discussion of their implications for delivery of induction programs that serve rural participants separately or as part of a larger group and by recommendations for conducting such programs.

Recent Literature on Induction and Retention of Rural Teachers

A recent study of induction practices in urban schools confirmed that most large school districts provide programs to support new teachers that were described as "formal, in-depth, and sustained" (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). Typically locally funded, these programs provide one-to-one mentoring and needs-based learning aimed at improving new teacher performance and acculturating new teachers to the norms, procedures, and values of the district. Effective programs do improve teacher retention although Fideler and Haselkorn acknowledged that an induction program is no "magic bullet" (p. 69).

Providing formal, in-depth, and sustained induction programs for new teachers in rural schools presents some challenges that are different from those faced by urban districts. Small numbers make it hard to amass the fiscal and human resources required to deliver a program and to keep it going year after year. Selection of appropriate mentors is complicated in small schools by inability to match grade levels and/or subject fields and, in some cases, by conflicts between expertise and proximity in mentor selection. Administrators leading program development may not be aware of the growing literature devoted to the early career development of teachers nor of characteristics of successful programs. Nevertheless, a number of states, 27 as of August 1996, mandated or supported voluntary induction practices (Fideler & Haselkorn, p. 97), requiring renewed attention to how such programs may be best organized in rural settings.

Recent literature includes descriptions of programs to support new rural teachers. Cruseiro and Morgan (1999) described a program organized by a university to support rural graduates teaching in the Nebraska panhandle with visits from teacher education faculty. Hersh (1996) reported on a rural Ohio program that employs a full-time mentor to work with buddy teachers to assist entry-level teachers. Heinicke, Henrie and Gronewald (1998) provided artifacts from the training component of a Nebraska-based program of support for beginning teachers whose structure is similar to that of Project Launch. A North Carolina program described by Henson and Shapiro (1999) used videoconferencing to link rural teachers for intensive professional development and subsequent interactions of groups of new teachers and mentors. A university graduate program provides the context for Sebastian's (1997) description of a distributed program for preparation and support of rural special education teachers in Utah. In these reports of programs, only Henson and Shapiro included evaluation data other than participant comments. They reported improved participant retention compared to mean district retention rates and participant perception of affinity for the professional community developed through the project.

The low incidence of systematic attention to program results in these recent reports is reminiscent of the work of Durbin (1991) who noted that only six of 23 induction programs studied kept records of teacher retention, and in some cases, the measure used was statement of intention to continue teaching rather than actual reenlistment. Blackburn (1977), one of the four studies examined by Durbin that included a control group, showed significant differences in retention that favored participants in a small rural induction program. Attempts to measure the effect of induction programs on teaching performance were found even more problematic because of lack of consistent definitions of or expectations for good teaching (Durbin, p. 49). In general, the literature on teacher induction continues to provide program description but not systematic program evaluation related to major program goals.

The 1992 release of the INTASC standards offered a new tool for articulating and assessing the knowledge, skills, and performance of beginning teachers. Developed with reference to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the INTASC standards have come to be widely accepted in defining the goals of preservice teacher education programs and assessing the work of beginning teachers. INTASC standards contributed to the evaluation of Project Launch by providing a paradigm for common expectations of new teachers that was not available to earlier researchers.

Three studies of teacher retention influenced this study of the retention of Project Launch participants. One was a national school staffing study based on interviews of stratified samples of teachers in two successive years (Whitener, Gruber, Lynch, Tingos, Perona, & Fondelier, 1997). The National Center for Educational Statistics researchers classified their informants as stayers in their original schools, movers to other schools, or leavers from teaching. They estimated that of the 2,555,781 public school teachers for whom 1993 was the base year, 7.2% moved to different schools and 6.6% left teaching the following year. Of public school teachers in their first year of teaching in 1993, 11.1% had moved to other schools and 9.3% had left teaching when they were contacted in 1994, a retention rate of 79.6%. Of public school teachers in their second, third, or

fourth years of teaching in 1993, 12.7% had moved to other schools and 7.8% had left teaching when they were next contacted (p. 6).

Two other studies included attention to rural teachers. Harris (1991) surveyed principals and remaining and departed teachers who began their careers in North Dakota in 1986, 1987, and 1988, finding an attrition rate after one year between 77.6%, as reported by principals, and 70%, as reported by the beginning teachers. Although the principal survey did not distinguish between movers and leavers, teacher responses indicated that a majority, up to 70%, of the non-stayers had moved to other teaching posts. Thus, for the time period studied, the rate of moving by the state's public school teachers during or after 1 year of teaching was estimated at 15.7% and the rate of leaving at 6.7%. Teachers who began their careers in communities smaller than 1,000 were significantly more likely than others to leave, and so were teachers who began their careers in the northwestern part of the state, the region with least economic growth. Also, this study showed that teachers whose schools or districts made systematic provision for professional development were more likely to stay for a second year. Like Harris, Tatel (1997), in a follow-up study for Teach for America, found stronger retention for urban than for rural participants.

Methods for Measuring Success and Retention of Launch Participants

Undertaken with Goals 2000 funding, Project Launch aimed to improve standards-based teaching and learning. In a state with strong traditions of voluntary assessment, the introduction of standards into Project Launch was unobtrusive. When the project began, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction had recently developed curriculum frameworks for voluntary adoption by school districts. These were made available to participants whose action plans involved lesson or curriculum development. Also, we introduced the INTASC standards, modified slightly by the planning group to the format reported in Figure 1, the Project Launch Framework for Teaching, a tool for thinking about teacher performance.

Figure 1.

Framework for Teaching: Project Launch

Before developing an action plan, teacher partnerships are asked to consider the framework for teaching endorsed by the project planners. We are committed to a complex vision of teaching and encourage you, in your work together, to seek to develop your teaching in ways that show that new (and experienced) teachers...

1. Understand the content and approach of the subjects taught and design learning experiences which involve students in learning subjects meaningfully.
2. Understand child and/or adolescent development and provide learning experiences which support the intellectual, social, and personal development of students.
3. Use cultural appreciation and understanding to enhance student learning and to foster development of learning communities which include students and their families.
4. Understanding how students differ in their approaches to learning and provide opportunities for learning which are adapted to individual student differences.
5. Understand and use a variety of methods or strategies, which include applications of technology, to encourage critical thinking, problem solving, and demonstration of learning.
6. Use understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages students to interact constructively, to engage actively in learning, and to accept responsibility.
7. Use knowledge of communication techniques to foster inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.
8. Plan instruction based on knowledge of the subject, the students, the community, and the goals of the curriculum.
9. Use formal and informal assessment to evaluate student learning.
10. Reflect on their teaching and its effect on students, parents, the school community, and the school district, and seek ways to grow professionally.
11. Foster relationships with school colleagues, parents, and the school community to support student learning and well-being.

The Framework for Teaching was used in several ways. First, it was introduced to participants as the common local definition of desired new teacher performance. Participants were invited, in formulating action plans, to choose goals related to elements of the framework. Second, as part of the project's final evaluation, new teachers were asked to identify the 5 elements of the framework in which they were most confident and mentor teachers were asked to state 5 elements in which they were most confident of their first year colleagues' performances. In the fifth year, rubrics similar to Danielson's (1998) were introduced as part of the assessment of teaching process. Use of the Framework for Teaching offered participants and leaders a common way of thinking and talking about teaching that has the potential to dovetail with systems of licensure testing related to INTASC standards.

Data collected and analyzed through the lens of the Framework for Teaching offer several ways of looking at

the success of Project Launch for rural participants. In this article, we consider, in addition to teacher retention, the following questions:

1. How successful were rural participants in carrying out action plans based on three goals for teaching development, compared to non-rural participants?
2. How consistent with areas of confidence in their teaching performance were the action plan goals of rural teachers, compared to non-rural participants?
3. How consistent were the self-reports of new teachers about their performance with the perceptions of their mentors?
4. How did profiles of teaching strengths that emerged from self-assessments of rural new teachers compare to profiles of non-rural participants?

To answer these questions, we used data collected from 97 first year rural and non-rural participants in Project Launch during its first 4 years. Data generally available for each participant included (a) a three-goal action plan developed with the mentor teacher, (b) a final evaluation report that included an item that asked new teachers to list the 5 elements of the Project Launch Framework for Teaching in which they are most confident of their performance in the first year, and (c) a final evaluation from the mentor teacher which included a parallel item. Some final evaluations were missing for the 1998-99 cohort. In that year, due to administrator reports of difficulty finding substitute teachers, the wrap-up session was held on a Saturday. Reduced attendance led to failure to collect final evaluations from some participants. Additional data, available for about half of the participants, consisted of brief papers submitted by those enrolled for university credit. The papers reported actions taken and successes noted by new and mentor teachers in completing their action plans.

Research questions were addressed by comparing statistical differences. Before this could be done, however, two sets of data required quantification. First, the action plan goals formulated by participants had to be classified according to the Project Launch Framework for Teaching. For many goals, classification was straightforward. For example, “incorporate more teaching methods that require use of kinesthetic and auditory modalities in quiet work areas” was classified as Framework 5, Variety of Methods. Where classification was uncertain, the action steps indicated by the participants sometimes clarified the intent of the stated goal. All goal classifications were revised in 2000 after development of a rubric that has been used in more recent years to assess participant growth in each element of the Framework for Teaching.

The classification of action plan goals by the Framework for Teaching for all 104 participants is shown in Table 1. Column 1 shows that the most commonly chosen areas for initial goals by all participants were Framework 11, Building Relationships (53.8%); Framework 6, Learning Environment (38.5%); Framework 10, Professional Development (37.5%); and Framework 1, Application of Content (30.8%). Another construct used in data analysis was “profiles” for new teachers based on their statements of areas in which they were most confident of their teaching performance. The procedure employed was inspired by a q-sort of items about preparedness to teach used by Housego (1994) to cluster preservice teachers. For Project Launch participants, the elements of the Framework for Teaching associated with their statements of greatest confidence in first year teaching performance were examined, searching for patterns. Patterns based on common and absent elements were identified and revised to meet the criterion that each teacher’s data fit only one profile. Using this method, the profiles described in Appendix B were identified.

Table 1.

Percentages of All and of Rural and Non-rural Project Launch Participants Selecting Action Plan Goals by Framework Category

	Framework	Total	Rural	Non-rural
1.	Application of Content	30.8	24.0	36.6
2.	Developmental Competence	6.7	12.0	5.6
3.	Cultural Competence	7.7	4.0	2.8
4.	Individual Differences	19.2	20.0	16.9
5.	Variety of Methods	25.0	16.0	28.2
6.	Learning Environment	38.5	36.0	39.4
7.	Classroom Communication	2.9	0	4.2
8.	Curriculum Planning	28.8	32.0	29.6
9.	Use of Assessment	11.5	12.0	29.9
10.	Professional Development	37.5	40.0	35.2
11.	Building Relationships	53.8	72.0	50.7

Information about the retention and attrition of Project Launch participants was collected through annual fall telephone calls to school offices to ask whether former Project Launch participants remained in the school or district, and, if not, what was known about their current employment. In some cases, additional calls verified place of teacher employment in another school district in the state. We were not able to construct a control group of comparable synchronous beginning teachers, because all new teachers in the largest school district participated in Project Launch. Thinking to match teachers who had begun their careers in the same districts prior to the start of Project Launch, we found that they were not comparable either, since 1996 marked the first employment by many participating schools of teachers without prior contracted teaching experience.

Findings from Comparison of Rural and Non-Rural Participants

Success in Completing Action Plans

Sixty-eight of the new teacher participants and/or their mentors submitted brief papers about actions taken to meet action plan goals. Data were available from at least one member of 19 rural and 46 non-rural teacher pairs. Goals were classified as "met" or "not met" based on the statement of the new teacher or the mentor, if new teacher data were not submitted. Table 2 shows the numbers of rural and non-rural teachers who reported success in attaining three, two, one, or none of the goals formulated. Differences in reports of the extent of goal attainment were significant in favor of the non-rural participants, at the .001 level, using Kendall's tau-b.

Table 2.

Percentages of Rural and Non-rural Teachers Who Attained Three, Two, One, or No Goals from Action Plans

	Rural N=19	Non-rural N=46
Attained 3 goals	10.5	52.2
Attained 2 goals	42.1	26.1
Attained 1 goal	26.3	15.2
Attained 0 goals	21.1	6.5

Table 3.

Percentages of Rural and Non-rural Participants Whose Self-Reported Strengths in Teaching Performance Matched Action Plan Goals

	Rural N=22	Non-rural N=62
Strengths match 3 goals	4.5	9.7
Strengths match 2 goals	13.6	30.6
Strengths match 1 goal	68.2	41.9
Strengths match 0 goals	13.6	17.7

Success as Confidence in Performance in Areas of Goals

Another measure considered was the extent to which elements of the Framework for Teaching represented by action plan goals were later cited as areas in which new teacher participants were most confident about their teaching performance. Self-assessments of areas of strength were available for 84 rural and non-rural participants, with the results reported in Table 3. Differences in the extent to which framework elements of action plan goals matched areas of teaching strength favored the non-rural participants but were not statistically significant.

Success as Perceived by Mentor Teachers

Although the measures of success in teaching of first year teacher participants reported here are based on self-assessments, perceptions of mentor teachers were also collected. Chi-square tests applied to group data did not reveal significant differences between new and mentor teacher perceptions of areas of teaching strength except in Framework 3, where new teachers tended to perceive confidence in performance to a greater extent than did mentors. Matches between the perceptions of new and mentor teachers about areas of perceived strength were common, with 64.4% of teacher pairs citing 3 or more

matching elements of the Framework. Comparisons of the numbers of matches of new teachers and their mentors were not significantly different for rural and non-rural teachers. These observations serve to confirm general concurrence of mentor teacher with new teacher perceptions of teaching strengths.

Profiles of Success in Teaching

Percentages of new rural and non-rural teacher participants exhibiting four of the profiles that appear in Figure 2 are presented in Table 4. These profiles account for about 60% of the teachers in the two groups. Although other possible profiles were identified, they were not as distinctive as A, B, C, and D and are lumped together in Table 4.

Figure 2.
Profiles of Teacher Strength

- Profile A: Strengths in 1, 4 or 5, and 6 with no mention of 8. This profile represents perceived strength in use of content in teaching and in classroom management, balanced by focus on the learner either through differentiation of instruction to meet individual needs or use of a variety of teaching methods. The other element most commonly associated with this profile was "9," use of formal and informal assessment. Collaboration in planning the curriculum was not part of this profile, and other related elements, 2, 3, and 7, were absent. This profile seemed to describe the teacher whose frame of reference is his or her own classroom.
- Profile B: Strengths in 1 and 8 with 4 or 6 or 9. This profile represents strengths in application of content in planning lessons and development of curriculum in the context of school expectations, accompanied by strength in differentiating instruction, management of the learning environment, or use of assessment. Mention of these three possibilities was distributed about equally among participants, with most mentioning at least two of them. Few teachers with this profile identified strength in 2 or 7. The profile seems to describe a teacher whose primary goal is getting across the curriculum.
- Profile C: Strengths in 2, 8, and 11. This profile represents an understanding of the developmental characteristics of learners employed in the context of attention to the school curriculum and participation in the school community. This profile was thought to represent a collaborative teacher whose focus is on the school community.
- Profile D: Strengths in any two of 3, 7, or 11 with no mention of 4 or 8. This profile represents some combination of integration of cultural understandings in teaching, of inquiry to promote learning, and focus on relationships in the school setting exercised without strong attention to the school curriculum or differentiation of instruction to address individual differences. Elements 5 and 6 were rarely mentioned by holders of this profile, which was thought to describe a teacher whose focus was on the community as a resource for learning.
- Profile E: Strengths in 1, 10, and 5 or 7 with no mention of 6. This profile represents perceived strengths in application of content and method, with the possibility of use of inquiry as a method, accompanied by openness to growth, but no perceived strength in classroom management. This profile was thought to represent a still forming teacher.
- Profile F. Strengths in any three of 4, 5, 6, or 9 with no mention of 1 or 2. Other elements were mentioned about equally by holders of this profile, which was viewed as procedural in its focus.
- Profile G: Strengths 2, 4, 5, with no mention of 8. This student-centered profile was most often accompanied by perceived strength in classroom management.

Table 4.
Percentages of Rural and Non-rural Participants by Profile

	Rural N=22	Non-rural N=62
Profile A	36.4	12.9
Profile B	13.6	25.8
Profile C	4.5	8.1
Profile D	4.5	12.9
All Others	40.9	40.3

Table 5.

Percentages of Project Launch Stayers, Movers, and Leavers After One, Two, Three and Four Years of Teaching in Non-rural or Rural Schools

Year Completed	One		Two		Three		Four	
Sample	Non-rural	Rural	Non-rural	Rural	Non-rural	Rural	Non-rural	Rural
N	70	25	49	14	33	7	18	0
Stayers	80.0	50.0	91.8	92.8	81.8	71.4	77.8	0
Movers	8.5	34.6	6.1	7.1	18.2	14.3	16.7	0
Leavers	11.3	11.5	2.0	0	0	14.3	5.6	0
Unknown	0	3.8	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 4 shows that Profile A was more strongly represented among rural new teachers, while Profile B, Profile C, and Profile D were more represented among non-rural teachers. These differences in representation of profiles were not significant at the .05 level although they did approach significance (p=.07).

Teacher Retention

Statuses of 70 non-rural and 25 rural participants in Project Launch after their first year of teaching are summarized in columns 1 and 2 of Table 5.

Although 80% of non-rural participants stayed in their first teaching positions longer than one year, only 50% of rural participants stayed in their first positions. The percentage of teachers who left the profession was no greater for rural than for non-rural participants, but the percentage of movers for the rural group was significantly higher than for Project Launch participants in general ($p<.01$). Nine of the participants who began their careers in rural schools, about 35%, moved to different teaching positions after one year. Of the rural movers, 2 left the state. One of the remaining 7 moved to rural schools of comparable size in other districts; the other 6 moved to larger schools and districts.

Statistics on retention of participants after the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th years of teaching are beginning to become available, with the 1996-97 group of stayers and movers in their 5th year of teaching in 2000-2001. Table 5 reports the status after 2, 3, and 4 years of teachers who began their careers in rural and non-rural schools for whom retention data are available. The final column in the table is empty: neither of the 2 rural participants in the 1996-97 cohort was teaching 4 years after Project Launch participation. After the 2nd year, retention rates for rural and non-rural teachers were similar, and other differences in other years were not statistically significant. Project Launch participants who moved from rural schools after 2 or more years of teaching accepted positions in other rural schools.

Comparing these results to the national study cited earlier (Whitener, 1997), it appears that retention of Project Launch participants exceeded national averages after the 2nd and 3rd years of teaching and was similar to national statistics at the end of the 4th year. In every year, differences in attrition between Project Launch and national groups were due more to moving than leaving for the Project Launch group. In interpreting this data, it should be noted the national study did not attend to new teacher participation in induction programs.

Discussion of Findings

Before considering recommendations for design of induction programs based on findings from this study, several issues deserve more attention. One is the comparability of the goals set by pairs of rural and non-rural teachers at the start of the school year and the extent to which their achievement can be used to assess later success in teaching. Another is the paradoxical nature of the finding that although rural teachers' goals focused heavily on building relationships, their end of the year profiles were less likely than those of non-rural teachers to include collaborative and community-oriented options.

Rural first year participants were significantly less successful than non-rural participants in achieving their action plan goals as measured by self report of goal attainment. One explanation arises from examination of the goals of rural and non-rural teachers, which showed differences in content by Framework, specificity, and agency. Columns 2 and 3 of Table 1 show percentages of rural and non-rural teachers who stated action plan goals by category of the Framework for Teaching. Teachers in both groups were concerned about their own development and about managing the classroom environment, but non-rural teachers chose significantly more goals related to application of content, while rural teachers chose significantly more goals focused on establishing good relationships. Examples of Framework 1 goals that non-rural teachers said they had achieved included, "Team teach

a week-long unit in January that integrates reading and math," and "Learn and choose appropriate dances to teach during the dance unit." Examples of Framework 11 goals that rural teachers said they had not achieved included, "Build school spirit by using Character Counts and involving students in extra-curricular activities," and "Meet to discuss parent teacher conferences, and carry out a special project for parents." Differences in the specificity of these pairs of goals is obvious, with the rural teacher goals each having two parts, only one of which was achieved in early May.

Contrasting goals related to the classroom environment, an area of the Framework for Teaching important to both sets of teachers, included, from a non-rural teacher, "Develop classroom rules and post them with consequences," and, from a rural teacher, "Motivate my students to understand and be aware that education is important." The non-rural teacher achieved her goal. The rural teacher, in spite of efforts that included beginning the day with current events, giving bonus points for relating news to historical events, and building patterns of verbal interaction that included shy and quiet students, stated that her goal was not met because she was unsuccessful in convincing all students that staying in school was worthwhile. Examination of goals achieved and not achieved shows a tendency for non-rural teachers to state more specific goals within the control of the people who framed them. Goals of rural teachers tended to be more open-ended, leading to multiple emergent solutions that were sometimes not fully realized or sustained. Since they often focused on relationships, goals of rural teachers were more dependent on responses beyond the control of the teachers who developed them.

Given these observations about the more expansive and less controlled nature of the goals of rural teachers, it is not surprising that rural teachers were less likely to feel their goals had been achieved or to see the Frameworks behind their goals as areas of strength at the end of the first year. It should be noted that achieving action plan goals or relating them to teaching strengths was never articulated as an objective of Project Launch. Action plan goals were posited merely as tools for guiding the interactions of mentors and new teachers. Still, the assignment for the university course paper was to write about implementation of the action plans, and there is a tendency, we think, in schools and in humans to associate achievement with goal attainment. Perhaps participants in Project Launch would be helped in the future by examples of goals that led to challenging yet achievable action plans for pairs of teachers in different situations.

Rural teachers, as they started the school year, were significantly more likely than non-rural teachers to focus action plans on goals related to building relationships with parents, colleagues, and the community to promote learning. In spite of this, at the end of the year, rural new teachers were more likely to reflect Profile A, a profile balanced in consideration of content, classroom management, and student response, but one that tends to keep the focus of the teacher in the classroom. Teachers with this profile do not embrace the collaborative curriculum work featured in Framework 8. Rarely do their areas of confidence include the tentative formulations of practice suggested by Frameworks 2, 3, or 7. At the end of the year, new non-rural teachers were more likely than rural teachers to reflect profiles that included Framework 11, with its focus on relationships, or Framework 8, with its emphasis on collaborative planning. In spite of initial interest in becoming part of the school community, it appears that rural teachers did not find strongly collaborative or community based ways to do their work.

The tendency toward self-contained teaching is supported in rural schools by the unique assignment of each teacher within the school. Mentors of rural teachers in Project Launch did not teach the same grades or subjects as their mentees. The uniqueness of each teaching assignment prevented the kind of day-to-day sharing of curriculum that occurs when mentor and mentee teach the same grade or the same subject in the same district and meet every week to plan together, as often occurred in larger school settings.

Under the best of conditions, new rural teachers faced barriers to collaborative or community oriented styles of work. In some cases, teachers reported that their participation in Project Launch was a source of conflict in their schools because colleagues were envious either of their chance to spend time away from the school or of the support for career entry that they had not experienced. These observations support the findings of Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) about the difficulty of promoting collaboration, cooperation, and community in rural schools. The belief of the Schmucks that administrators must take the lead in establishing a vision of change and collaboration in rural schools and communities was supported by rural participants in Project Launch, whose most frequent recommendation for improvement of the program was that administrators be required to attend either the introductory meeting or all sessions as a means of assuring support for the level of mentor involvement required to implement action plans powerful enough to improve teaching.

In spite of barriers to collaborative work in rural schools, Project Launch partners did find ways to collaborate on action plans. Strategies used successfully by partners who taught different grades and/or subjects in rural schools included the following:

1. Combining two elementary classes for joint projects periodically throughout the year. Joint activities included art production, reading buddies, a field trip, learning centers, cooking, a field day, and having one class create learning activities for the other.

2. Using knowledge or skills of the new teacher as a starting point for curriculum. A new teacher helped her class and that of her mentor

to use Power Point in presentation of projects resulting from research lessons that the mentor helped to structure.

3. Having the mentor participate with the new teacher in first time experiences related to placement for a struggling student, including contacting a regional specialist, meeting with a counselor, attending a staff consultation meeting, and looking in a resource center for adaptive materials.
4. Sharing with other teachers valuable aspects of Project Launch such as a speaker, resources, and action plans.
5. Providing a learning resource for the entire school. One pair got involved with the state Council for the Arts and brought a music lyceum to the school and community. Another borrowed a trunk of locally relevant resources from the state historical society. Another developed a "guest reader" program for the whole school during Reading Month.

This list suggests that rural partners might have been well served in Project Launch by some discussion of action plan strategies that have worked across grades and subject areas.

The generally positive experiences of new teachers in rural schools did not prevent 50% of them from leaving their first schools after one year. The statistics in Table 5 show that rural participants in Project Launch were retained in teaching at the same rate as non-rural participants and that, after the first year, they were retained in rural schools at approximately the same rate. Project Launch participants generally have stayed in the profession. Only 4 of the 25 participants who began their careers in rural schools left teaching during the period of this study, an 84% rate of retention, compared to 82.9% for a stratified national sample (Whitener, 1997). Based on the work of Harris (1991) and Tatel (1997), we would expect a lower rate of retention if the national group had been rural.

Summary and Recommendations

Focusing on the success of Project Launch for rural participants, this study examined several indicators. Although significantly fewer rural participants successfully completed action plans, goals of the rural participants tended to be broader and more wholistic than those of non-rural teachers. There was a tendency for fewer rural teachers to view the areas of their action plan goals as areas of strength at the end of the school year, and this trend was supported by the observations of their mentors. Rural teachers were more likely, at the end of the first year, to show profiles of teaching strengths that supported autonomous practice. Although 50% of rural participants left their first schools after one year, they were retained in teaching at the same rate as non-rural teachers and tended to remain in rural teaching in later years.

Reflecting on these findings, we offer these observations as suggestions to educators designing programs of support for first year teachers in rural schools.

1. A regional, multi-district induction program managed by a teacher center and requiring four days of large group interaction and approximately 25 hours of interaction with a mentor is an effective format for supporting new teachers from rural schools.
2. Goals of induction programs must include new teacher development of excellent teaching skills as well as retention in local schools and districts.
3. Specification of action plan goals helps to structure interactions between new teachers and their mentors. Guidance in formulation of action plan goals might help new teachers and mentors to articulate goals that are challenging, yet achievable.
4. Use of a Framework for Teaching based on INTASC standards helps participants to focus on teaching performance when setting goals for joint action.
5. Rural teachers need models of supportive interaction where mentor teacher partners are not matched by grade level nor subject taught.
6. Rural participants in extended professional development programs need to find ways to share benefits of the programs with colleagues.
7. Joint action planning by a pairs of teachers who are part of a wider support system has the potential to help break down barriers of isolation for teachers in rural schools, but active administrative support is also required for implementation of more collaborative visions of teaching practice.

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