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Saints Action Research Program As Professional Development: A Program Evaluation

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SAINTS ACTION RESEARCH PROGRAM AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A
PROGRAM EVALUATION

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By

Derek S. Porter

December 2021

SAINTS ACTION RESEARCH PROGRAM AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A
PROGRAM EVALUATION

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Dedication

For all those who love learning to such an extent, teaching becomes inevitable.

Acknowledgments

With sincere gratitude to...

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Abstract

Action research (AR) is a form of systematic inquiry by which practitioners address their own problems of practice. Professional development (PD) is a means by which teachers contribute to school improvement and student achievement. Too little research has gathered the qualitative perceptions of former participants in action-oriented professional learning programs, particularly in the realm of single-sex independent schools. This study's goal, therefore, was to gain insight into how teachers recall experiencing action research as professional development. Two evaluation questions guided the study: (1) To what degree does the Saints Action Research Program reflect an effective model of professional development as evidenced by each of the five levels of Guskey's model for evaluating professional development? (2) What are the perceptions of program alumni and the instructional leadership team regarding the advantages and limitations of participating in the Saints Action Research Program? To answer both questions, I generated data from four sources: (a) a participant survey, (b) semi-structured participant interviews, (c) a document review process of participant research briefs, and (d) a group interview with the instructional leadership team. Collectively, their experiences revealed that they practice action research as a multi-step process. However, the process is not ongoing, nor does it account for student learning outcomes. Instead, action research is time-consuming because the program requirements do not sufficiently differentiate based on participant needs. Ultimately, these findings offer strong support for discontinuing the current iteration of the evaluand; fill a qualitative gap in action-oriented teacher-led projects; and offer facilitators of professional development insight into how these teachers understand and practice action research as professional development.

SAINTS ACTION RESEARCH PROGRAM AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A
PROGRAM EVALUATION

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

The report “Teaching at Risk: A Call to Action” released by The Teaching Commission (2004) reminds us that teaching is “our nation’s most valuable profession” (p. 12). It forcefully suggested that “helping our teachers to succeed and enabling our children to learn is an investment in human potential, one that is essential to guaranteeing America’s future freedom and prosperity” (p. 11). One of the most ubiquitous systems currently operational for school leaders to ensure our nation’s future is professional development (PD). So, how might we know that our teacher PD is effective?

One approach has been to evaluate our policies and practices through a set of research-based standards for effective PD (Darling-Hammond, 1997, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Learning Forward, 2020; Wilson et al., 2001). Darling-Hammond, a modern thought leader in the field of education, has compared student achievement, student demographic data, and state comprehensive teacher quality policies for six states: Connecticut, Georgia, New Jersey, North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia. After implementing teacher quality policies including effective PD, half of the states (Connecticut, North Carolina, and West Virginia) experienced improved student achievement. This led Darling-Hammond to conclude that student achievement gains were higher in states with policies that intentionally sought to advance the quality of their public teaching faculty (Darling-Hammond, 2000, 2006). This is the potential power of professional learning in schools.

Wenglinsky (2002) found that teachers who received effective PD implemented more active teaching, which increased student achievement. Therefore, it behooves all educational institutions, public and private, to consider the data that resoundingly conclude that teacher quality improves student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Goe, 2007; Hallinger & Kulophas, 2020; Hervey, 2017; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Tuytens et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2001).

Kennedy (2016) acknowledged, “PD is required by virtually every teaching contract in the country, and teachers participate in PD every year” (p. 945). However, she examined the popular tacit link between PD and improved student learning outcomes (p. 945). Rather than assuming PD programs work, Kennedy heralded a compelling call for more evidence using rigorous research design standards. This study was one attempt to answer the call.

Program Description

St. John’s School (a pseudonym) was founded in the early 1900s in a mid-size metropolitan area of Virginia. It is a single-sex, religiously affiliated college-preparatory school for junior kindergarten through 12th grade. Its newly articulated mission proclaimed that the school “knows, loves, and celebrates boys, promotes their pursuit of excellence, and prepares them for lives of honor and integrity, service, and leadership.” (St. Christopher’s School, 2020). In 2020, St. John’s enrolled about one thousand boys from approximately 60 zip codes in central Virginia. According to the assistant head, “professional development is a means through which teachers enhance knowledge and skills that should lead to school improvement and increased student achievement” (S. Mansfield, personal communication, August 19, 2019).

Context

St. John's School strove for excellence and sought to make an enduring difference in the lives of its boys. To support its faculty, there were compulsory PD programs. Mizell (2010) of the professional learning association Learning Forward addressed why there were complaints about PD: "Professional development may not consider educators' varying levels of motivation, interest, knowledge, and skill. Poorly conceived and ineffectively implemented professional development leads to complaints" (p. 20). In other words, PD in schools needed to strategically support teachers as individuals to continuously strengthen their practice.

St. John's took intentional steps to make PD experiences teacher-driven through providing choice of professional goals. During the 2019–20 school year, teachers were asked to form specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound (S.M.A.R.T.) goals (University of Virginia's Human Resources Department, n.d.). This was an example of compulsory teacher-centered PD by leaving room for a teacher to identify a goal specific to their context and experience. The teacher-selected area of PD focus was reviewed informally one-on-one with the department chair at irregular periods throughout the academic term. However, there was no attachment to evaluation. Although teachers were given choice, they were not held accountable for meeting nor making any demonstrable progress toward their stated goal. The school had no review process to evaluate the effectiveness of its PD offerings nor their impact on student learning outcomes.

Description of the Program

The Center for the Study of Boys was the research branch of St. John's School. The Center for the Study of Boys was established with donations in 2014. Its aim was to enhance the school's participation as a global thought-leader on best practices for boys' education. To

achieve this end, the Center for the Study of Boys offered several PD opportunities, including the evaluand of this study, SARP.

SARP was led by one director, one head instructional coach, and two assistant instructional coaches who annually led a small cohort of faculty participants through the action research (AR) process. The director's formal responsibilities included accountability to the Board of Governors and representing the program's interests in meetings among St. John's senior administrative team. The director also publicly promoted the program in faculty-wide meetings and oversaw SARP's reputation and the recruitment of participants. Furthermore, the director allocated program funding for meals, materials, and stipends.

The head instructional coach facilitated all teacher-participant activity and implemented the program content, including defining AR, designing the PD content, and guiding each cohort through the process. The head instructional coach hosted and scheduled all group and individual sessions and ensured that each participant was prepared to successfully present their professional learning to their colleagues.

The assistant instructional coaches were added to the instructional leadership team in 2017 to help with the discharge and implementation of the aforementioned coaching duties. Their responsibilities often included proofreading drafts of participants' writing to ensure they conformed to the Modern Language Association (MLA) format for future publication on the Center for the Study of Boys website, supporting participant research, and helping to construct literature reviews.

Participation in the SARP program came with three primary commitments. First, participants attended all group sessions, which usually convened once per month an hour before the regular school day. Second, participants completed a written component known as the

research brief consisting of seven sections: (a) the relevant participant demographic information, (b) the area of study, an abbreviated literature review, (c) a methods section explaining the intervention, (d) a discussion of findings, (e) an explanation of how those findings might be put into practice, and (f) a list of three to five references.

Finally, all participants presented to the faculty in a culminating PD event in March. This experience took place on the Monday after Spring Break, which was designated a professional workday. The format was breakout sessions, which the whole faculty signed up for in advance to attend two SARP presentations of their choice. The SARP presenters were given two 30-minute blocks to engage their colleagues, which concluded the professional learning experience. At that time, stipends were allocated to each participant. There was no additional meeting, ceremony, or follow-up once these sessions concluded.

History of the Program

The mission statement of SARP was included here to succinctly communicate its history: “Since 2005, [St. John’s] teachers have participated in Action Research projects sponsored by the International Boys’ School Coalition (IBSC). The Center for the Study of Boys is now excited to launch our own Saints Action Research team” (Hudson, 2014). SARP was an endeavor to bring an international AR program in-house. Participation on this team was voluntary, though an administrator may have recommended a teacher based on the annual theme.

Currently, the program was in its seventh year with five alumni cohorts. SARP has seen several significant changes over time. First, the program was entering a saturation point where there would likely be repeat participants. The instructional leadership had considered the next cycle of experiences they might offer. Also, the program always required participants to complete a research brief as part of their experience; however, the design and components of this

brief have varied. These briefs have transitioned from a short private essay into a public, multi-page, multimedia article that is available on the program's website. Finally, a change has occurred in staffing. In 2014, SARP had two staff: the program director and one instructional coach. Now, there are four staff, a director, one instructional coach, and two assistant instructional coaches. The only staffing change in program history was of the head instructional coach after its first year. Otherwise, the instructional leadership team has had no turnover.

Statement of the Problem

SARP has been fully operational for 5 years. In that time, it expanded its staff. In 2020, the program considered the implementation of a second round of AR projects by faculty. Therefore, this program evaluation asked, what evidence was there that this professional learning experience was working? This study sought to investigate this guiding question by gathering the perceptions of the program alumni, and the perceptions of the instructional leadership team. This study was designed to evaluate primarily qualitative data according to Guskey and Sparks' (2000) five-level framework (see Figure 1) to provide evidence of the effectiveness and limitations to AR as a professional learning program.

The 2020–21 school year was unique. Due to the uncertainty caused by COVID-19, SARP was not going to have an active cohort. Instead, the instructional leadership team reflected on the advantages and limitation of the SARP and plan its future.

Figure 1

Five Levels of Professional Development Evaluation

Guskey's Five Critical Levels for Evaluating Professional Development	
Level	Implication
Level 1: Participants' Reaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Helps improve the design and delivery of programs.
Level 2: Participants' Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Validates the relationship between what was intended and what was achieved.
Level 3: Organizational Support and Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some of the best and most promising improvement strategies have been seriously stifled or halted completely because of seemingly immutable factors in the organization's culture (Fullan, 1993).
Level 4: Participants' Use of New Knowledge and Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are participants using the new knowledge and skills to implement the practice as it was intended to be implemented?
Level 5: Student Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changes in teacher practices are sustained only when professional development and implementation is combined with evidence of improved student learning (Guskey, 1982, 1984).

Note. From "Practice Guidelines for Evaluating Professional Development," by T. R. Guskey & D. M. Sparks, 2000, *Evaluating professional development*. Copyright 2000 by Corwin Press, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

Overview of the Evaluation Approach

Program Evaluation Model

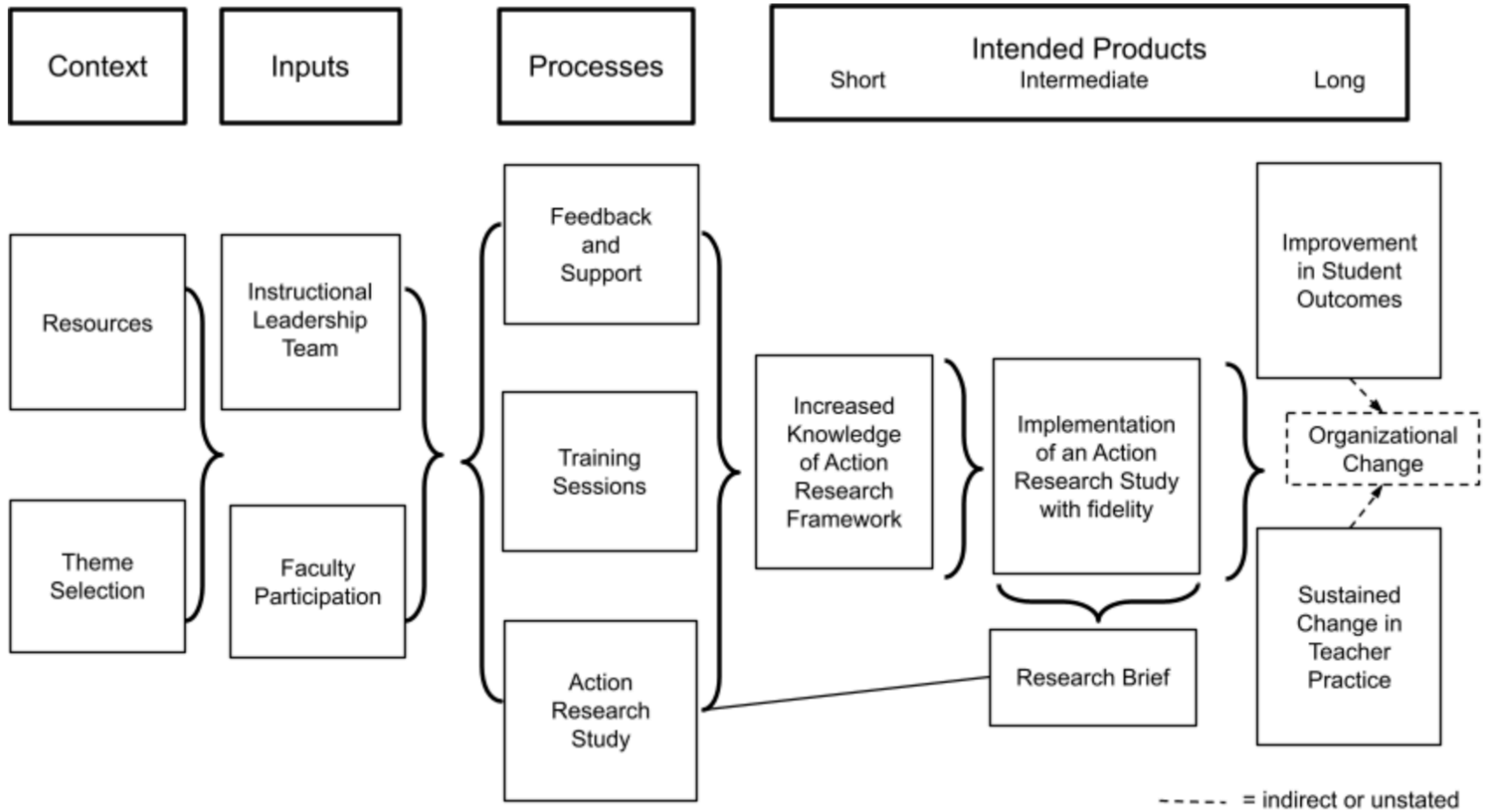
Figure 2 was a logic model of SARP. The logic model depicted how the program operated in practice. The logic model design employed the CIPP (context, input, process, product) model set-up from left to right (Stufflebeam & Zhang, 2017). Because the program director emphasized the need to educate our Board of Governors at the school, the logic model was an attempt to be useful to this end (see Figure 2).

All five levels of Guskey's PD evaluation model were reflected in the logic model. Level 1 was built into SARP's feedback and support process. The instructional leadership team was constantly seeking formal and informal feedback about participant reactions related to the training sessions' location, time, or the refreshments provided. Many of these details enhanced participant receptivity to SARP's professional learning objectives.

Level 2 sought to match SARP's learning intentions with what was ascertained by participants. This was a short-term outcome. By going through the process of conducting an AR study, has the faculty member increased their knowledge of the AR process? Heretofore, this has not been formally evaluated. However, as an intended intermediate product, each participant created a research brief. This was the tangible public deliverable that demonstrated faculty learning to the broader community. Note that the intended product of increased knowledge of the AR process was not necessary to successfully complete the program or the research brief. There was no point in the program at which participants were required to demonstrate their knowledge of the AR framework.

Figure 2

Saints Action Research Program Logic Model



Level 3, organizational support and change, came in the form of two primary contextual factors. Resources were the stock of allocations to SARP meant to ensure effective functioning. They included money, amenities, refreshments, stable Wi-Fi connection, and so forth. Every institution seeks to fund its priorities; therefore, an in-house professional learning program cannot exist without organizational support. The level of organizational support was subject to change, and the program was in a formal review period for the 2020–21 academic term.

In addition, SARP was supported through a theme selection process. The annual theme was selected by the Board of Governors under the guidance of the program director. There had been discussion of aligning the theme of the annual IBSC Action Research Program with SARP. However, there was no decision at the time of this study. Organizational change was an indirect long-term product that occurred as a result of sustained change in teacher practice and improvement in student achievement.

Level 4, the call to implementation, had a temporal component. First, current participants implemented their AR study with fidelity and reported their data with accuracy. Further, as alumni, they sustain their use for the knowledge and skills attained during the program. However, this has heretofore not been measured qualitatively or quantitatively.

According to Level 5 of Guskey's model, teacher change was sustained when there was compelling evidence of improved student academic achievement. Without this positive and measurable change in student outcomes, teachers were less likely to alter their habitual classroom practice. This was Level 5 of Guskey's model and the ultimate intended outcome of all professional learning in education.

Stakeholders

SARP had several stakeholder groups. First, there were decision-making stakeholders, such as the program director who was accountable to the Board of Governors and had a summative concern for their approval. This was a significant part of the director's responsibilities, which influenced the utility of this study design. This study was designed with the understanding that its results and recommendations may be presented to the Board of Governors to approve substantive changes to future iterations of the program.

Next, SARP participants could be any faculty or staff who worked directly with groups of students. This was primarily, but not exclusively, full-time faculty. Administrators who co-taught electives or advised, after-school part-time staff, teachers operating in their athletic coaching role, and even the school's head nurse have all enrolled as SARP participants. Their interests were to bring about positive outcomes in their students. Recognizing that this happens through their professional growth, some of them sought opportunities both within and beyond the St. John's community.

Third, the program's instructional leadership team consisted of the four staff members who implemented the program and ensured its feasibility. The director held decision-making power and had a role in guiding programmatic instruction as well. Next, the school's Lower School Learning Commons Librarian served as the second Saints Action Research Head Coach. She was responsible for all of the daily operations of the program, facilitated the AR process, oversaw all correspondences with participants, and guided participants through their individual AR studies. She was also the program coordinator of the IBSC Action Research Leadership Team, which yielded resources and insights that directly benefit SARP.

Completing the instructional leadership team were two assistant instructional coaches, the Upper School Head Librarian and a Middle School History Teacher. Strategically selected from different divisions to assist with data collection and analysis for current participants, the leadership team fulfilled responsibilities as assigned by the program director and head instructional coach.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of AR as PD on teachers' practice. This evaluation was intended to identify both evidence of and limitations to SARP's effectiveness as a professional learning program. In this way, the study was intended to be formative and aimed at improving the program.

Focus of the Evaluation

The focus of this study was to determine to what degree the SARP, implemented at St. John's School, served as an effective teacher PD program. This evaluation procured evidence of and limitations to Guskey's five levels of effective PD evaluation.

The evaluation aimed to gauge the advantages and limitations of participation in this voluntary experience from the perspective of former program participants and the instructional leadership team. Finally, I expected this participant group to offer formative feedback to improve the experience of future cohorts. More specifically, the study investigated the following questions.

Evaluation Questions

Two overarching questions guided this study:

1. To what degree does the Saints Action Research Program reflect an effective model of professional development as evidenced by each of the five levels of Guskey's model for evaluating professional development?
2. What are the perceptions of program alumni and the instructional leadership team regarding the advantages and limitations of participating in the Saints Action Research Program?

The first overarching question allowed me to examine and describe, through a program feedback form (PFF), document review of participant research briefs, and group and participant interviews the coherence of SARP with Guskey's five-level model of PD evaluation and thereby to gauge its efficacy as a model of PD. The second evaluation question allowed me to use the same data collection tools to examine and describe the perceived valuation of participation in the evaluand. Findings from both questions were expected to contribute to recommendations intended to strengthen and sustain the program.

Definitions of Terms

- Action research is any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors, or others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process or environment for the purpose of gathering information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how their students learn (Mertler, 2017, p. 4).
- Effective teacher professional development is determined by the goals of the learning, characteristics of the learners, their comfort with the learning process and one another, their familiarity with the content, the magnitude of the expected change,

educators' work environment, and resources available to support learning (Learning Forward, 2020).

- Action research as professional development is when teachers engage in continuous instructional improvement. Through AR, progress is monitored through the investigation of student data that inform their decision-making in the classroom (Mills, 2007).
- Participant perceptions of professional development according to Guskey and Sparks (2000):
 1. Participants' reaction is the level of satisfaction the participants feel about their PD experiences in SARP.
 2. Participants' learning is the level at which the participants acquire the intended knowledge and skills through PD offered by SARP.
 3. Organizational support and change are the level at which the school shows support for SARP by allocating resources and incentives. This level is also concerned with the school's willingness to change.
 4. Participants' use of new knowledge and skills is the extent to which the participants applied their new knowledge and skills in their classroom teaching.
 5. Student learning outcomes are participants' perception of how their learning through SARP affected student performance or achievement.
- Teacher change is when the teacher's beliefs and attitudes change as a result of student learning outcomes. Student outcomes are affected by teacher changes in

classroom practices. Teacher practices change as professional learning occurs (Guskey, 2002a).

- Voluntary professional development involves optional professional learning opportunities that are not required by faculty contract.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Professional Development

Purpose and Definition of Professional Development

Most professions train their employees. In the field of education, professional development (PD) is a broad term referring to many types of formative experiences related to an individual's career. In this study PD was considered fundamental to employee development and improvement, including for teachers. Mizell (2010) stated the common purpose of PD was “to learn and apply new knowledge and skills that will improve their performance on the job” (p. 3).

Baird and Clark (2018) provided a broad definition of teacher PD: teachers, with a common student outcome or content focus, coming together to improve outcomes for students (p. 327). According to the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2008), PD included a variety of methods and approaches, but the dual intended outcomes of school improvement and student learning were clear and essential.

Borko (2004) provided a seminal work that laid out the terrain of research on teacher PD. At that time, the teaching industry was only beginning to learn about exactly what and how teachers learned from PD. Researchers were investigating the impact of teacher change on student outcomes (Desimone et al., 2002; Fishman et al., 2003). Garet et al. (2001) built upon the work of national institutions, such as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1989), National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996), and National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (1991), to identify the six features most essential to a high-quality

PD experience. “We integrated and operationalized the ideas in the literature on ‘best practices’ in professional development to create a set of scales [that] empirically tested these characteristics to examine their effects on teacher outcomes” (Garet et al., 2001, p. 918). What emerged from this era were several lists of attributes and characteristics thought to define effective PD.

The major PD research institutions assumed PD effectiveness could be limited to a fixed set of quantifiable features. In their place, more complex frameworks emerged. The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) was a case in point. In their transition to Learning Forward, they moved away from providing educators with a list of standards. Instead, the complicated work of integrating theories, research, and models of human learning was at the forefront of what contributed to the effectiveness of teacher PD (Learning Forward, 2020). According to Learning Forward (2020), PD design depended on several factors, including “the goals of the learning, characteristics of the learners, their comfort with the learning process and one another, their familiarity with the content, the magnitude of the expected change, educators’ work environment, and resources available to support learning” (para. 1). A PD designer’s grasp of these elements plays a significant role in the effectiveness of the professional learning program.

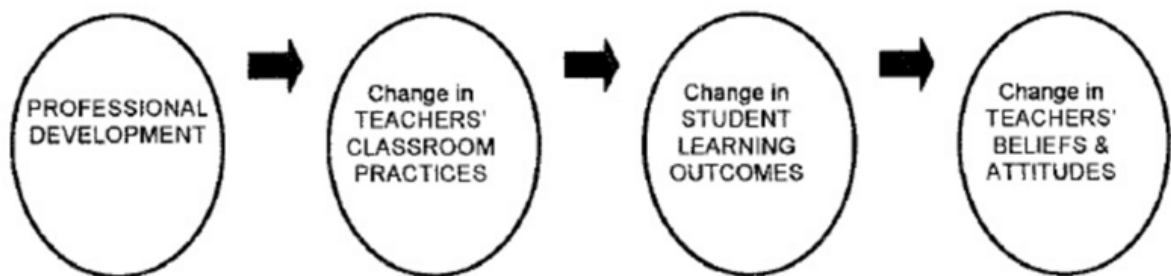
Díaz-Maggioli (2004) was representative of where the field of teacher PD was trending. His guide to teacher-centered PD promoted hands-on activity to break away from traditional, more passive PD experiences. His definition of teacher PD emphasized participant empowerment and ownership of their professional destiny. “Professional development can be defined as a career-long process in which educators fine-tune their teaching to meet student needs” (p. 1). This study evaluated the Saints Action Research Program (SARP), an opportunity our institution provided to all faculty members to improve their practice.

Teacher Change

In 1986, Guskey argued that most teacher PD did not account for what motivated teachers to actively engage, nor did it provide the process by which teachers most naturally change (Guskey, 2002a). His model of teacher change openly refuted the sequential notion that attitudes must change prior to behaviors (Guskey, 1986, 2002a). Instead, he found the opposite to be true. Teachers were motivated by successful implementation. Bona fide results with students acted as a catalyst for teachers to change their beliefs and attitudes. Figure 3 depicted Guskey's Model of Teacher Change.

Figure 3

A Model of Teacher Change



Note. From “Professional development and teacher change,” by T. R. Guskey, 2002, *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 8(3/4), p. 381–391 (<https://doi.org/10.1080/135406002100000512>). Copyright 2002 by Taylor & Francis Ltd. Reprinted with permission.

According to Guskey and Sparks (2000), there were three constructs to consider when asking teachers to incorporate new knowledge and skills into their practice. First, stages of concern were derived from the Concerns-Based Adoption Model of change (Hall & Loucks, 1978a, 1978b). The seven stages of concern represented an important affective dimension in the teacher change process (Horsley & Loucks-Horsley, 1998; Rinehart & Lightle, 2018). Having an

understanding of participants' emotional response to the change process helped school leaders not only implement their vision more smoothly but also understand the needs of those they led (Benson, 2015; George et al., 2008).

Second, levels of use were also derived from Hall and Loucks (1978a, 1978b) Concerns-Based Adoption Model of change. It focused on the behavioral aspects of the teacher change process (Hall et al., 1975). The eight indicators of levels of use progressed from nonuse to renewal. "Individuals at higher and more complex levels of use typically have a more comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of the innovation or change" (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 185).

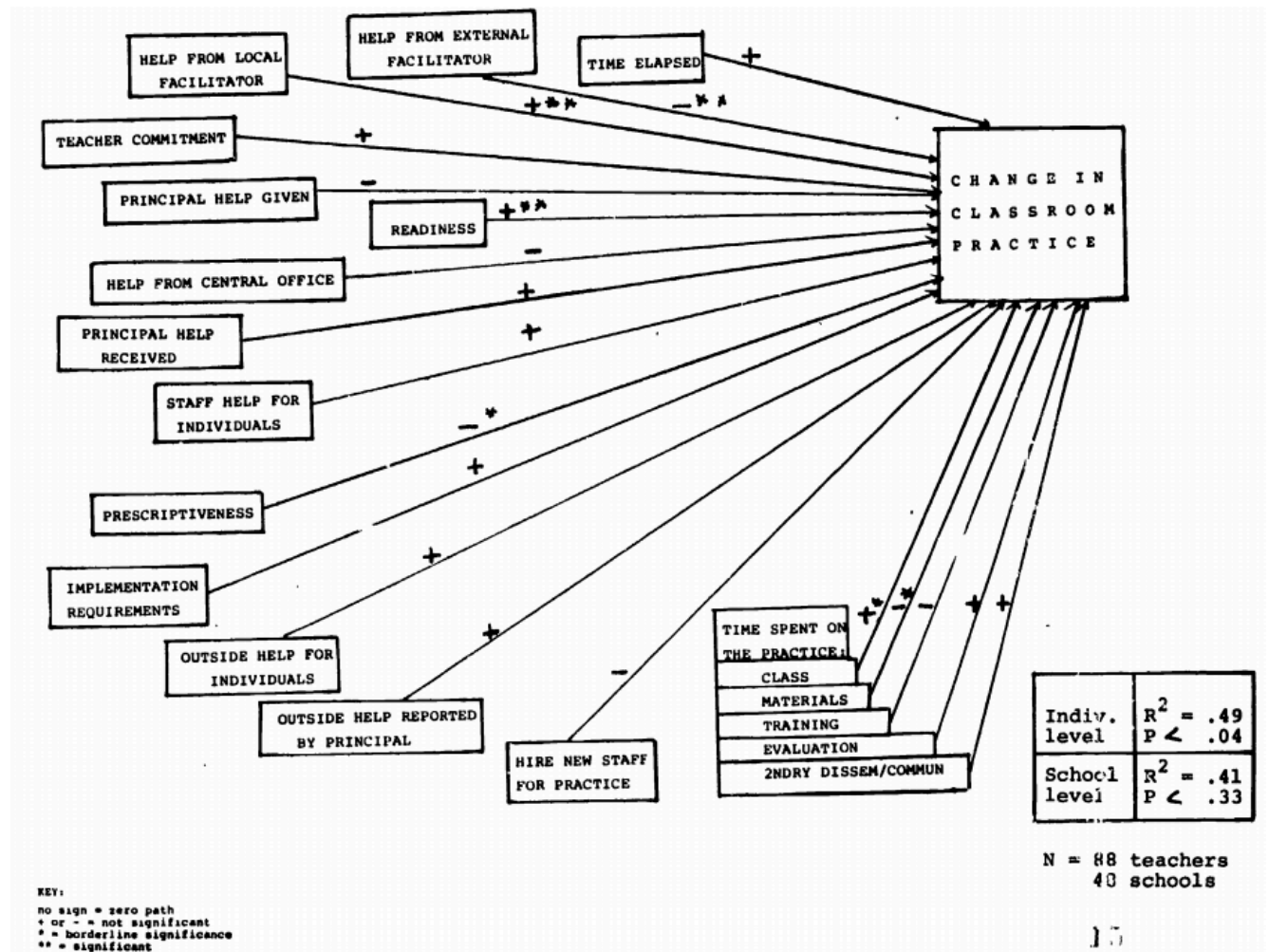
Thirdly, differences in practice were about observable change. It often required pre and post data. It should be clear what a teacher was doing prior to the intervention in order to gauge an accurate measure of its effectiveness (Joyce, 1993). We cannot expect an impact on student learning unless a real change in teacher practice occurred. Further, this study sought to connect that change with participation in SARP while mitigating the potential influence of other extraneous factors.

Crandall et al.'s (1982) study of dissemination efforts supporting school improvements examined 61 innovative practices in schools and classrooms in 146 districts in the United States. One element they analyzed was teacher adoptive tendencies. "Our research focused on attempts of teachers to gain increased traction by choosing and using a new practice to improve their instruction" (p. 3). They separated the participants into two groups based on the perceived degree of change. The result was that minor changes could not be easily influenced by PD. "We achieved a significant result ($R^2 = .45$, $p < .04$) for the group of 75 users in 52 sites whose innovation attempts were quite modest" (p. 8).

Major changes, however, may be significantly influenced by PD. Figure 4 provided evidence that classroom use of the practice, individual teacher commitment, and hands-on support from the local facilitator work positively in tandem. Crandall et al. (1982) concluded, “What we see are two distinct but interdependent patterns, one leading to teacher or instruction-related variables (e.g., commitment and mastery), the other to organizational variables (e.g., organizational change)” (p. 19).

Figure 4

Factors Influencing Change in Classroom Practice by Teachers for Whom the Innovation Implementation Required a Major Change



Note. From “Models of the school improvement process: Factors contributing to success. A study of dissemination efforts supporting school improvement,” by D. P. Crandall, J. E. Bauchner, S. F. Loucks, and W. H. Schmidt, 1982, Department of Education, Office of Planning, Budget, and Evaluation (<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED251918.pdf>). Copyright 1982 by The Network of Innovative Schools. Reprinted with permission.

SARP challenged its participants to make one major pedagogical change to their practice to address a reoccurring issue. The duration of the intervention was expected to last from two to three months with several data collection methods employed to ascertain the intervention’s

impact whether positive, negative, or neutral. Each participant sought a positive change.

Therefore, the literature review component of SARP was crucial. Participants often moved from intuitive pedagogical decision-making to a more intentional process through implementing a grounded intervention. Bolster (1983) put forth new pedagogical principles most likely to be received by teachers when they have been proven to work (p. 298). Therefore, school leaders who were concerned with school improvement must be concerned with their faculty participating in programs that, by sound methods, work. The best way to change teacher behavior was with proven best practices in the classroom that convinced them through directly benefiting the students.

There were three implications for PD. First, teacher change was a complex process (Guskey, 2002a). Teacher PD often faced reservations from teachers who are unconvinced about merit and worth. They feared the innocuous or detrimental results of testing out the latest trends in teacher PD, even if they were research-based. According to Guskey and Sparks (2000), “attitudes must at least change from cynical to skeptical for any change in practice to occur” (p. 140).

Second, teachers needed to have a data-informed practice, knowing how their instruction was perceived by students (Crandall et al., 1982). When a teacher was convinced that this PD intervention was leading to improved student learning in their classroom, their attitude followed positively (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 141). Finally, PD was on-going. Teacher change took time, so there needed to be consistency and sustained accountability, which was formative administrative support (Crandall et al., 1982, p. 21). One way to achieve these goals in teacher PD was through employing AR.

AR as PD

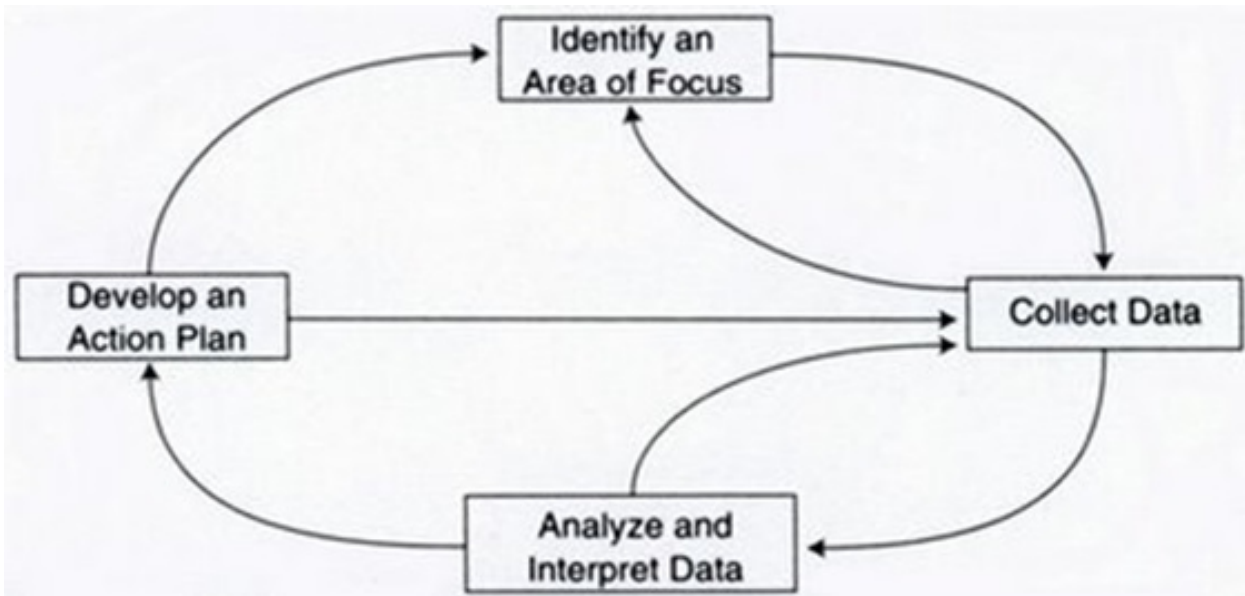
AR in Education

In their seminal text, Reason and Bradbury (2008) credited Kurt Lewin as the founder of “action approaches” to management and organization. Lewin (1951) believed that knowledge forms as humans participate in action. This was a stark contrast to positivist approaches that claimed knowledge is objective and best observed by a third party that distinguishes themselves from the particular phenomenon to be studied. “In his classic formulation of field theory, Lewin held that environment influences behavior, the context within which it occurs” (p. 78). Based on Lewin’s premise regarding AR, the meaning of knowledge resided in social constructs and contextual values (Miller et al., 2003).

Therefore, in the field of education, AR involved teachers constructing their own knowledge. Farrell and Weitman (2007) provided examples of teachers engaged in AR projects to illuminate their importance in the development of professional identity in individual teachers and the culture of schools. Through AR projects “teachers learn to look into their classrooms, examine those classrooms through new individual and personal lenses, and initiate bottom-up changes that lead to increased teacher knowledge, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and, therefore, more meaningful professional development” (p. 38). Figure 5 graphically depicted a common AR process in four steps (Mills, 2007). AR engaged teachers in a four-step process: (a) identify an area of focus, (b) collect data, (c) analyze and interpret data, and (d) develop an action plan.

Figure 5

A Dialectic Action Research Spiral Outlining the Four-Step Action Research Plan



Note. From G. Mills, 2007, *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher*. Copyright 2007 by Merrill/Prentice Hall. Reprinted with permission.

According to Hudson (2014), a SARP project began with problem identification initiated by the teacher. The problem centered on an annual theme determined by the Board. Classroom teachers selected the focus of their PD experience then implement this four-step cyclical AR process (Mills, 2007). The process began with teachers' questions and aimed at influencing practice, affording the opportunity for teachers to have greater responsibility for directing their own PD.

AR empowered the classroom teacher with a standardized process for addressing a specific problem of practice, which can be iterative (Mertler, 2017).

Action Research is simply a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice for their own practices,

their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out. (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 162)

However, aligned with Guskey, this went beyond solely increasing the knowledge base; AR necessitated a change in practice. This allowed teachers to take a methodological approach to innovation by gathering data and analyzing their profession to construct what was most effective with those particular students in their context (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009; Mills, 2007; Stringer, 2004).

Models of AR as PD

Pre-service. AR is a powerful tool that can transform teacher-student relationships (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009; Miller et al., 2003). There were several models that AR as PD might take. First and most prevalent was field experiences offered to pre-service teachers. Often these experiences were facilitated and advised by university professors and post-service teachers. These experts came alongside pre-service teachers to ensure adherence and fidelity to the process. According to Kennedy-Clark et al. (2018), the primary benefit of AR as PD for pre-service teachers was “the opportunity to dovetail ideas and theories from theory-based courses with their own experience of observing and teaching in classrooms, particularly, in relation to their teaching areas” (p. 40). According to Mooi and Mohsin (2014), engaging pre-service teachers in AR made them more aware of student learning, classroom complexity, and their agency.

AR was used in many teacher preparation programs around the world to promote reflection, inquiry, and a sense of efficacy in pre-service teachers (Chant et al., 2004; Levin & Rock, 2003). In a study by Kennedy-Clark et al. (2018), four pre-service teachers completed an AR project during a 10-week professional experience. Their conclusion was, “the wide variation

in school and classroom contexts that the pre-service teachers encounter on their professional experiences means that it is difficult to articulate a one-size-fits-all approach to the action research” (Kennedy-Clark et al., 2018, p. 54). At a minimum, this affirmed that there is no idyllic model for AR as PD. However, here was the most common sequence.

According to Kennedy-Clark et al. (2018), in Phase 1, participants were guided to identify a pedagogical concern. This was often supported by the collection of baseline data. The issue was then reformatted into a research question. In Phase 2, participants designed and implemented an action plan to address their research question. This phase also included data collection to show impact or change. Finally, Phase 3 focused on data analysis and assessment, often concluding with recommendations for future cycles of AR inquiry. The depth, duration, and deliverables for each phase depended largely on institutional preferences and which AR model they adhered to (Chant et al., 2004; Levin & Rock, 2003).

In-Service. There were three primary AR models for in-service teachers at schools seeking to provide their faculty with meaningful, self-directed, on-the-job training. First, teachers accepted AR studies under the guidance of a third-party organization using, for example, book, in-person, or virtual formats. Organizations such as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) published guides for school improvement through the AR process (Calhoun, 1994; Sagor, 2000). These programs can be purchased and implemented at the division level.

The International Boys School Coalition (IBSC) offered member schools the opportunity to send teachers through an immersive experience during the summer months. Oftentimes, these associations required authorization from a participant’s administrator in the form of a letter of recommendation to be submitted with their application. Once admitted, the third-party

organization facilitated the professional learning experience from problem identification through the reporting of the findings. The participant was often encouraged to complete their AR project in their current professional context.

Secondly, an in-service teacher had the choice to continue their education. In their program of advanced study, they may have encountered the AR process. One example is highlighted in a study conducted by Rogers et al. (2007). The sample consisted of 114 experienced teachers enrolled in a Master of Education program. The study collected AR projects submitted at the end of the teachers' course of study. The researchers' finding was that "action research has the potential to persuade teachers to look at children's learning and behavior problems with a new lens" (p. 218).

AR is a relationally transformational process because it centralizes students in pedagogical decisions. These teachers intentionally made an investment in their relationships with children by (a) establishing connections that had not existed; (b) developing a better, more measured, and critically examined understanding of who their students were as learners; and (c) empowering students at various learning levels with a voice in what works and what does not in their learning (Rogers et al., 2007, p. 219).

One common issue with these first two experiences was that knowledge was coming into the classroom from the outside rather than being generated from within. These programs often pulled participants from diverse placements, so each participant might have been the only one from their division to experience AR as PD. Therefore, it could be challenging to witness sustained results once the third-party influence was removed. This was a concern given the money schools often invested to send their teachers to conferences or to acquire continuing education credits.

There was one more model of AR as PD that was cost effective and probable to produce lasting results. AR studies as PD was conducted in-house as part of a comprehensive school improvement plan. In alignment with effective PD practices (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Desimone & Garet, 2015), it centered on student outcomes. Successful iterations started with what they expected students to learn and do based on the PD experiences. Based on Mertler (2019), like other models of effective PD, AR compounds its positive effects when the following elements are present: (a) teacher learning was ongoing; (b) the faculty pursued it collectively and actively; and (c) all faculty were given the opportunity to experiment, observe, receive feedback, and analyze student and collegial work (p. 269).

Studies of AR as PD

In their experimental design, L. Cohen and Byrnes (2007) used two instructional strategies to attain third-grade vocabulary acquisition. Their quantitative data reinforced the theory that AR projects have the ability to transform classroom practice. At the time, this was a unique approach that gave considerable evidence for the value and benefits of undertaking AR projects by in-service and in-house teachers.

Additionally, at the division level, school leaders used AR to measure school improvements in student learning to determine the effects of their localized AR projects. Calhoun's (2002) study of teachers engaged in AR projects convinced her of its potential to transform district PD. "[AR] can replace superficial coverage with depth of knowledge and generate data to measure the effects of various programs and methods on student and staff learning" (p. 18). District-wide initiatives may have witnessed collective benefits where "studying specific domains of student performance and... instructional practice become a way of life" (p. 19). In fact, AR studies have been employed beyond the classroom to division-level

change initiatives such as student motivation (Caskey, 2006) and empathy culture through art (Bradshaw, 2016). Many of these large aforementioned studies used quantitative data, sampling, and effective sizes to substantiate their argument in favor of AR as PD.

Researchers in the field conducted statistical meta-analyses (Hedges & Olkin, 1985). They gathered evidence from a variety of PD program evaluations to support their identification of characteristics that repeatedly revealed a positive effect size (Desimone et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Lloyd et al., 2015; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010). In most of these instances, teacher PD effectiveness was scored by an index of participants' satisfaction or knowledge increase. Rarely, however, were all five levels of Guskey's model represented. Often, two measures significant to this study were omitted. First, much of the AR as PD research did not attempt to understand teacher change (Level 4). Second, given its centrality to the profession, the impact on student learning was also surprisingly neglected at times (Level 5; Guskey & Sparks, 1991). Therefore, the result of much of the research from that last 30 years was often a prescriptive list of "general practices described in broad and nebulous terms" (Guskey, 1994, p. 5). This study aimed to go further.

Although AR as PD provided opportunities for new learning, the research said little about teachers' perceptions of AR as an activity that changed their practice or improved student learning outcomes (McNiff, 2002; Guskey, 2002b). Therefore, it was necessary to gather the attitudes of former participants. In sum, these selected research studies provided a rationale for the present investigation. This study sought to add to the field the lived experience and feedback from a small group of teachers who have participated in AR as PD.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of PD

Characteristics of Effective PD

For the past 30 years, educational researchers focused on what makes PD effective and ineffective for both pre-service and in-service teachers (Garet et al., 1999; Guskey, 2002a; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Killion, 1999; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2001; NSDC, 2001; Richardson, 2003; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Emerging from this seminal research were several frameworks. Guskey and Huberman's (1995) *Professional development in education: New paradigms and practices* was recognized by the NSDC as the book of the year in 1996. Part of the researchers' work sought to synthesize why PD had been ineffective in the past (D. K. Cohen & Hill, 1998; Kennedy, 1998; Wang et al., 1999). Sykes (1996) characterized the inadequacy of conventional PD as "the most serious unsolved problem for policy and practice in American education today" (p. 465). In an ideal system, all teachers would have access to high-quality PD. Guskey (1994) posited that the outstanding conundrum in PD evaluation research was our quest for "one right answer" (p. 5). Kennedy (2016) confirmed the persistence of this issue, "there is no single, overarching theory of teaching or of teacher learning" (p. 946).

Some authors considered high-quality PD to be the most effective means of increasing teacher effectiveness in the classroom (Garet et al., 2001; Desimone, 2009; Desimone & Garet, 2015). Guskey (1986) stated that teachers attending PD opportunities hoped to gain "specific, concrete, and practical ideas that directly relate to the day-to-day operation of their classrooms" (p. 5). If he was correct, then we must provide models of PD for in-service teachers that satisfy these attributes. They must equip educators for their daily responsibilities, and they must connect to the curriculum we deliver to students.

A well-prepared teacher is more effective, and therefore, has the most significant impact on student learning (Killion, 1999; Hervey, 2017). “When the content of professional learning integrates student curriculum and educator performance standards, the link between educator learning and student learning becomes explicit, increasing the likelihood that professional learning contributes to increased student learning” (Learning Forward, 2020). Therefore, the effectiveness of SARP was evaluated in this study.

PD Program Evaluation Models

Guskey was influenced in the design of his professional learning framework by the seminal work of Kirkpatrick (1959, 1977, 1978, 1998) in the business industry. Kirkpatrick developed a four-level system for evaluating training program reactions, learning, behaviors, and results.

The first level of reactions focused on participant satisfaction. How did participants feel about the program? This level was often examined by PD facilitators using a feedback survey. However, this was only the first factor to consider when determining the effectiveness of a program. Second, learning consisted of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are acquired as a result of the PD experience. These were often measured against the originally outlined objectives. Level 3 was a specific job-related action. To what degree could an on-the-job behavior modification be identified? Finally, results were the deliverable and measurable improvements in areas such as productivity, quality, costs, turnover, and customer satisfaction (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006).

Guskey built upon this foundation by applying it to K–12 education to specifically evaluate the quality of teacher learning experiences. Guskey (1986) arrived at three primary implications for Kirkpatrick’s model. First, “Recognize that change is a gradual and difficult

process for teachers” (p. 9). Teachers are human, and if change was the goal , we must acknowledge that change often yields anxiety. Therefore, the personal concerns of teachers undergoing a PD experience should be addressed in a direct and timely fashion. Second, “Ensure that teachers receive regular feedback on student learning progress” (p. 9). Teachers needed affirmation that their work matters. They needed direct evidence that the PD facilitator they trusted knew what they were taking about and that students were showing improvement. Lastly, “Provide continued support and follow-up after the initial training” (p. 10). It was rare that any teacher would move from a short PD experience to direct application in their classroom. It was more likely that the productive things they learned will be dormant unless there was follow-up and accountability.

More recently, Guskey has focused his research on student achievement (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 76). This work has led to the ongoing revision of his framework. It was significant to note that the five levels in the Guskey model are hierarchical, proceeding from simple to more complex. In each succeeding stage, the process of data collection and analysis typically demanded the investment of more time and resources. Although each level builds upon the previous, results at any level did not forecast the outcomes at any other level. SARP was evaluated according to these five levels: (a) participants’ reactions, (b) participants’ learning, (c) organizational support and change, (d) participants’ use of new knowledge and skills, and (e) student learning outcomes. Figure 6 outlined the research framework methodology (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 79-81).

Figure 6

Five Levels of Professional Development Evaluation Methodology

<i>Evaluation Level</i>	<i>What Questions Are Addressed?</i>	<i>How Will Information Be Gathered?</i>	<i>What Is Measured or Assessed?</i>	<i>How Will Information Be Used?</i>
1. Participants' reactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did they like it? • Was their time well spent? • Did the material make sense? • Will it be useful? • Was the leader knowledgeable and helpful? • Were the refreshments fresh and tasty? • Was the room the right temperature? • Were the chairs comfortable? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaires administered at the end of the session • Focus groups • Interviews • Personal learning logs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial satisfaction with the experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve program design and delivery
2. Participants' learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did participants acquire the intended knowledge and skills? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper-and-pencil instruments • Simulations and demonstrations • Participant reflections (oral and/or written) • Participant portfolios • Case study analyses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New knowledge and skills of participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve program content, format, and organization

<i>Evaluation Level</i>	<i>What Questions Are Addressed?</i>	<i>How Will Information Be Gathered?</i>	<i>What Is Measured or Assessed?</i>	<i>How Will Information Be Used?</i>
3. Organization support and change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the impact on the organization? • Did it affect organizational climate and procedures? • Was implementation advocated, facilitated, and supported? • Was the support public and overt? • Were problems addressed quickly and efficiently? • Were sufficient resources made available? • Were successes recognized and shared? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District and school records • Minutes from follow-up meetings • Questionnaires • Focus groups • Structured interviews with participants and school or district administrators • Participant portfolios 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organization's advocacy, support, accommodation, facilitation, and recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To document and improve organizational support • To inform future change efforts
4. Participants' use of new knowledge and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did participants effectively apply the new knowledge and skills? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaires • Structured interviews with participants and their supervisors • Participant reflections (oral and/or written) • Participant portfolios • Direct observations • Video- or audiotapes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree and quality of implementation • To document and improve the implementation of program content 	

<i>Evaluation Level</i>	<i>What Questions Are Addressed?</i>	<i>How Will Information Be Gathered?</i>	<i>What Is Measured or Assessed?</i>	<i>How Will Information Be Used?</i>
5. Student learning outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the impact on students? • Did it affect student performance or achievement? • Did it influence students' physical or emotional well-being? • Are students more confident as learners? • Is student attendance improving? • Are dropouts decreasing? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student records • School records • Questionnaires • Structured interviews with students, parents, teachers, and/or administrators • Participant portfolios 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student learning outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cognitive (performance and achievement) – Affective (attitudes and dispositions) – Psychomotor (skills and behaviors) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To focus and improve all aspects of program design, implementation, and follow-up • To demonstrate the overall impact of professional development

Note. From “Practice Guidelines for Evaluating Professional Development,” by T. R. Guskey, & D. M. Sparks, 2000, *Evaluating professional development*. Copyright 2000 by Corwin Press, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

Level 1 was about gauging teachers' initial reactions to the SARP professional development experience. This was undoubtedly the most ubiquitous form of PD evaluation because it was a quick and straightforward way to collect feedback. The intent of Level 1 was to thoroughly explore the initial satisfaction of participants. Did they like the PD? Information about participants' initial satisfaction with SARP could help improve the design and delivery of the specific activities that comprised the program. Finally, it was an ideal place to start and return to in the assessment of subsequent levels. Level 2 proceeded beyond participant reactions to collect self-reported judgments of their own learning. What did participants learn during their time in SARP? The fundamental goal of Level 2 was to document the learning outcomes of participants to determine their relationship to the program's intended outcomes. Level 3 shifted the focus of this study from those who experienced PD to those who administered it. Beyond the individual performance of PD facilitators, Guskey and Sparks (2000) argued that there were "organizational variables" that could be manipulated by the SARP instructional leadership team. The critical question was, "What is hindering our teachers' opportunity to derive the maximum benefit from this training?" This was a corporate-level question that no single person can answer because it intrinsically attempted to identify blind spots in implementation. To what degree was there support and willingness to change within the organization? This required accountability, monitoring, and listening.

According to Guskey and Sparks (2000), organizational support and change encapsulated seven broad constructs: (a) organization policies, (b) resources, (c) protection from obstruction, (d) openness to experimentation and alleviation of fears, (e) collegial support, (f) administrative leadership and support, and (h) recognition of success (p. 152). Organization policies referred to the experience of "teachers attempting to implement a new instructional approach or to

restructure the learning environment for students may discover, for instance, that certain school policies contradict their efforts” (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 153). Next, there was no organizational support or change apart from the allocation of resources. This included physical resources such as supplies, stipends, and facilities, but also intangible resources such as time, information, and expertise (p. 154). Third, protection from intrusion meant an organization should guard its people from the constant threats to focus, time, and energy (p. 155). Fourth, risk was always a part of change. Organizations sought to manage risk. According to Guskey and Sparks (2000), “An openness to experimentation, coupled with alleviation of the fear of reprisal should things not work as expected, is an essential aspect of organizational support” (p. 156). Fifth, “those involved in change need to know their efforts are valued and honored by colleagues, and that ample opportunities for collaboration and sharing will be provided” (p. 157). This was collegial support, and it helped keep PD participants from the sense of isolation. Sixth, administrators strongly influenced the school’s culture and faculty perspectives toward PD and professional improvement (p. 158). Therefore, their buy-in or resistance was a major determining factor in the effectiveness of any PD program. Finally, professional efforts to grow could be recognized and honored in many significant ways. According to Guskey and Sparks (2000), “the primary motivation of most teachers for participating in professional development is a desire to become better teachers” (p. 161). Recognizing the efforts of specific faculty in a timely manner reinforced mission fulfillment, and it was critical because the work to change was hard and uncomfortable.

Further, Level 3 influence went in both directions. SARP was designed to influence the mission fulfillment of the school through positive student outcomes (Hudson, 2014). This

necessitated long-term change as SARP sought to create a teacher research culture that featured sustained improvement of teacher practice and student achievement.

Level 4 was all about action. To what degree were the participants using their new knowledge and skills in the classroom? Has learning from Level 2 led to change in practice? One challenge at this level was to set systemic organizational concerns aside to isolate implementation. A second challenge was fidelity. I could not expect to see the same behaviors from all teachers who completed the PD experience. Guskey and Sparks (2000) advised evaluators to use “clear specification of indicators that reveal both the degree and quality of implementation” (p. 84). Further, Guskey claimed that direct observations or reviewing videotapes of teacher instruction would yield the least biased data. However, this was not currently an aspect of SARP. Finally, timing was essential. There was an interval between the training and when an observer could reasonably expect to see change in practice. In this study, all participants were one to three years away from their PD experience. To date, there have been zero formal check-ins with participants to gather data points that would determine the program’s progress toward long-term outcomes for teachers.

Level 5 investigated the impact of SARP on student learning outcomes. These outcomes were classified in three broad categories: (a) cognitive, (b) affective, and (c) psychomotor. “Cognitive learning outcomes relate to the students’ achievements and accomplishments” (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 212). This included student demonstrations of acquired knowledge, abilities, or skills aligned with the action research intervention. “Affective learning outcomes are the attitudes, beliefs, feelings, or dispositions that students might be expected to develop” (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 213). This included new attributes teachers aimed to develop as well as preexisting characteristics which teachers sought to reform. Finally, “psychomotor learning

outcomes describe the behaviors, actions, or practices that we want students to acquire” (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 213). The focus here was on what students did with what they have learned. There might have been a development of positive or healthy habits based on this AR intervention.

Overall, the essential questions to ask at this level included, are we deriving a return on investment with this PD program? Have students been helped or harmed by what our teachers have learned in SARP? In a future study, I recommend asking SARP participating teachers to demonstrate the effect of their AR project on students in their classroom by videotaping a lesson and systematically reviewing the film with these three categories as a guide.

Summary

In conclusion, the primary purpose of teacher PD was to develop a school culture of continuous improvement to achieve the best possible student outcomes (Desimone et al., 2002). For decades educators and researchers were debating how to define what makes a PD experience effective. Many arrived at the consensus that PD was only as valuable as its usefulness to those who receive it (Learning Forward, 2020). This position was in part grounded by the work of Thomas Guskey whose framework guided this study. AR is one model of professional learning that puts teachers into the driver’s seat of their own PD, and this study added to our understanding of the effectiveness of an in-service AR as PD experience (Mills, 2007).

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This chapter presented the research design of this study, addressing its paradigm, participants, protocols, data collection, data analysis, and study quality indicators. Using the social constructivist and pragmatic paradigms, the design relied on a qualitative research methodology to make formative assessments of the evaluand (Teater, 2015).

This study sought to contribute to the literature by adding qualitative meaning to the quantitative and longitudinal results gained in previous studies of effective PD (Boyle et al., 2005; Desimone et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Zepeda, 2013). It also built on our understanding of AR as PD for in-service teachers. In order to highlight their voices, I selected various methods—a PFF, document review, a group interview, and participant interviews—to analyze the degree to which SARP met the five levels of PD evaluation (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 78).

Evaluation Questions

1. To what degree does the Saints Action Research Program reflect an effective model of professional development as evidenced by each of the five levels of Guskey’s model for evaluating professional development?
2. What are the perceptions of program alumni and the instructional leadership team regarding the advantages and limitations of participating in the Saints Action Research Program?

Table 1 outlines the methodology alignment of this evaluation.

Table 1*SARP Methodology Alignment Table*

Evaluation Question	Evaluation Level	Data Collection	Data Analysis
To what degree does the Saints Action Research Program reflect an effective model of professional development as evidenced by each of the five levels of Guskey’s model for evaluating professional development?	Level 1 is participant reactions	Program feedback form	Descriptive statistics Template analysis
	Level 2 is participant learning	Program feedback form	Descriptive statistics Template analysis
	Level 3 is organizational support and change	Group interview	Template analysis
	Level 4 is use of new knowledge and skills by participants	Document review Participant interviews	Template analysis
	Level 5 is student learning outcomes	Document review Participant interviews	Template analysis
What are the perceptions of program alumni and the instructional leadership team regarding the advantages and limitations of participating in the Saints Action Research Program?		Program feedback form Group interview Document review Participant interviews	Template analysis

Note. SARP = Saints Action Research Program.

Program Evaluation Approach

Social constructivism was a paradigm that was particularly congruent to the evaluation questions. Social constructivism provided a theoretical basis for understanding how worldviews were individually unique yet created through societal interaction. Societal structures such as history, culture, laws, and grouping norms have the meanings that individuals created together (Teater, 2015).

This study had a pragmatic orientation (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). During its first 5 years, SARP was never formally evaluated. This study was an opportunity to gather performative feedback that was formative, but it did not set out to inform any summative judgements. The data collected and analyzed in this study had the intent of improving the PD experience and outcomes for those who participate in future cohorts.

Participants

The program's current iteration held five cycles with 29 total participants. The annual number of teachers who completed this PD opportunity ranged from two to eight. Table 2 included program relevant demographic information about SARP's alumni. It included a diverse pool of faculty with a variety of years of experience and subject assignments K-12. The only requirement was that a participant taught at least one class of boys during the year of participation in SARP. To date, there have been 14 lower schoolteachers, five middle school teachers, and nine upper school participants in SARP. Beyond these traditionally assigned teachers, there has been one all-school music director who served in more than a single division (see Table 2).

This evaluation drew upon the experiences of the former participants in SARP, including the three not currently employed by St. John's School. However, only the most recent three

cohorts were invited to participate in document review and participant interviews. Participants from the first two cohorts were excluded because they had a different instructional leadership structure while the program was in its infancy. The most recent three cohorts, comprised of 15 total participants, represented the best sample of SARP alumni because they shared a like experience under the same instructional leadership structure with similar expectations.

Table 2*SARP Alumni*

SARP Year	Theme	Research Brief Title	Division and Subject	Hire Year
2016	The voices of boys	Goal setting and reflection	Upper school English department chair, teacher and coach	1988
2016	The voices of boys	Students as self-advocates	Upper school house dean, teacher of history and religion, and coach	2014
2016	The voices of boys	Boys and human dignity	Middle school history; Middle school drama	2013
2016	The voices of boys	Writing jams	Middle school teacher of English and coach	2012
2016	The voices of boys	Learning new music	All school music department coordinator; Middle and lower school choir director; Upper school glee club assistant director & Beaux Ties co-advisor	2009
2016	The voices of boys	Doing the math in physical education	Lower school physical education	---
2016	The voices of boys	Building stories, building confidence	Lower school teacher of grade 5	2014
2016	The voices of boys	Motivating writers	Lower school reading specialist/academic support services	1997
2017	Collaboration and the power of successful learning groups	Relational teaching with lower school boys: what works for teachers, boys, and parents	Lower school teacher of grade 1	---
2017	Collaboration and the power of successful learning groups	Collaboration, choice, and a love of reading	Lower school teacher of grade 2	2011
2017	Collaboration and the power of successful learning groups	Building community	Lower school co-teacher	2005
2017	Collaboration and the power of successful learning groups	A team effort: creating a mindfulness proposal	Upper school academic resource teacher	2006
2017	Collaboration and the power of successful learning groups	Collaboration and conflict management	Middle school teacher of history and coach	2015
2017	Collaboration and the power of successful learning groups	Moving boys towards collaboration	Upper school teacher of science and coach	2010
2018	Boys and adaptability in a changing world	Orchestrating interest in mundane tasks	Middle school teacher of music and all school band director	1989

SARP Year	Theme	Research Brief Title	Division and Subject	Hire Year
2018	Boys and adaptability in a changing world	Boys and online learning	Upper school instructional technologist, coordinator of BUILD	2011
2018	Boys and adaptability in a changing world	Baby Jesus and ESPN	Lower school chaplain	2017
2018	Boys and adaptability in a changing world	Students practice controlled chaos in the world language class	Upper school teacher of French, Spanish, and English; Director of X-term	2000
2018	Boys and adaptability in a changing world	Understanding your mindset as a tool for goal setting and increasing independent learning	Lower school technology coordinator/learning commons; Lower school teacher of grade 4 and coach	2016 & 2014
2019	Boys and stories: pathways to learning	Sharing stories of struggle: promoting academic resilience in a chemistry classroom	Upper school house dean, teacher of science, and coach	2015
2019	Boys and stories: pathways to learning	Harnessing the power of struggle and mistakes to write a story of success	Lower school teacher of grade 5	2011
2019	Boys and stories: pathways to learning	Working in collaborative groups and sharing personal stories impacts relations in 4th grade boys	Lower school teacher of grade 2	2012
2019	Boys and stories: pathways to learning	Can I tell you something? Oral storytelling has a positive impact on 1st grade boys' writing	Lower school teacher of grade 1	2005
2019	Boys and stories: pathways to learning	Using familiar folktales and fairytales to enhance the process of language acquisition with 1st grade boys	Lower school teacher of Spanish	2013
2019	Boys and stories: pathways to learning	Engaging grade 8 boys with stories that encourage reflection on biblical themes	Middle school chaplain; Teacher of Bible	2000
2019	Boys and stories: pathways to learning	Acquiring a world language through storytelling: the effects of gestures and pictures	Lower school teacher of Spanish	2000
2019	Boys and stories: pathways to learning	Building confidence and competency in grade 3 boys: the effects of digital storytelling	Lower school academic support services	2008
2020	Developing agency: boy voice and choice	Promoting agency in grade 12 boys: choice in senior privileges	Upper school teacher of mathematics; Grade level chair	2016
2020	Developing agency: boy voice and choice	Engaging the grade 11 boy: giving voice through choice design tasks in physics	Upper school house dean and teacher of mathematics and science	2017

Description of the Program Evaluation

Program Feedback Form. At St. John’s School, at the time of this proposed study, we had recently finished our 10-year accreditation process with the Virginia Association of Independent Schools. As part of our self-study process, a survey was issued to all stakeholder groups: board members, alumni, current and former parents, faculty, staff, administrators, and students. As a school, we spent a full year of PD analyzing this data by department, and we set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (S.M.A.R.T.) goals that structured accountability measures at the department level. Due to this contextual reality, I committed to using the term “program feedback form” (PFF) instead of survey. Furthermore, this data collection tool was refined for brevity in distribution and collection. Given the small sample size of this study, the PFF was issued to the entire SARP alumni population of 29 participants. The Google Forms platform was selected due to its familiarity in this context.

Document Review. During their participation year, each SARP participant completed a research brief consisting of seven sections: (a) a title for the study followed by the participant’s name and teaching appointment; (b) the area of study along with the problem of practice; (c) an abbreviated literature review of what the research tells us about the identified area of study; (d) a short methods section explaining the intervention or change in practice, plus the method of data collection; (e) a discussion of the participant’s findings analyzing the data they collected; (f) recommendations for some meaningful and intentional change in their practice based on the study results; and (g) a list of three to five references that were discussed in the literature review.

Over time, these briefs evolved in their design and function. Initially, they were completely participant constructed. The following year, the instructional leaders provided a template to standardize the structure, while instilling a more concrete timeline of completion.

Anecdotally, the most recent three cohorts enjoyed the added formatting and the design oversight provided from an outward facing public relations and marketing department. Therefore, a delimitation of this study was that I did not review documents prior to the most recent three cohorts because the quality and form were significantly different.

Interviews. All interviews in this evaluation were semi-structured interviews. This was the primary data source for this study. To best address Level 3 of Guskey’s model, I hosted one group interview with the members of the instructional leadership team. These program leaders were best positioned to discuss broader institutional support, and they have the authority and responsibility to recommend changes for the benefit of future participants.

At Levels 4 and 5 of Guskey’s model, participants from the most recent three cohorts were invited to participate in a one-on-one interview. “Conducted conversationally with one respondent at a time, the semi-structured interview employs a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions” (Newcomer et al., 2015, p. 493). For triangulation, I validated these narratives with a document review of their research brief.

Interviews were unmediated, which means I collected the feedback directly from program users and facilitators. No one was interviewed who has not directly experienced SARP. Prior to conducting the interviews, the interview protocols were piloted with one non-participant to check duration and the proper functioning of recording and transcription equipment. Most importantly, pilot testing was the final step in refining the interview guides (Newcomer et al., 2015, p. 496).

Role of the Researcher

I took the role of a research-participant. I am one of two assistant instructional coaches for the program. However, my role continues to be minimal. My contributions have been much

more in the mode of providing one-to-one teacher support by going into the classroom and assisting participants in data collection. As an alumnus of the program, I am invested in evaluating the program earnestly to provide critical improvement feedback. Nonetheless, as a researcher, I am cognizant of how my presence may cause bias. In fact, I designed the following steps to minimize my influence on the implementation and results of the study.

To minimize bias in this study, four steps were considered. First, in 2017, after completing my own project as a participant during the 2015-16 academic term, I was invited to serve as an assistant instructional coach. At the time, the reason for inviting me to join the instructional team was to preserve a desired coach-to-teacher ratio of 1:3. This formal appointment increased my access to and understanding of the program. Therefore, I only invited alumni from the 2018, 2019, and 2020 cohorts to participate in the interview process. This was important because no one who went through the program with me as a colleague was invited. Also, these three cohorts had a uniform experience of the current SARP model with me as an assistant coach.

Second, bias was minimized by not collecting data from current participants who would be influenced by my leadership. SARP was a financially incentivized PD opportunity, so participants and the instructional leadership team received compensation in the form of a stipend that was added at the conclusion of the program each year. None of the participants in this study was currently in SARP at the time of data collection. None directly reported to me or had any other power relationship. We were colleagues. All of them successfully completed the program and moved forward. This eliminated the conflict of interest that might be felt by a colleague who relied on professional coaching or services offered by the program. As previously stated, SARP

offers no type of on-going support or follow-up, so I asked alumni to speak on a professional learning experience fixed in the past.

Third, I did not design this study in isolation. My bias was under constant surveillance of non-SARP faculty as well as third-party educators not affiliated with St. John's School. For example, the interview protocols were reviewed by a third-party who had no interest in the program. Also, these data collection tools were tested on a faculty member who, though aware of the program, never elected to participate. These steps helped establish the validity and reliability of this study.

Fourth, I submitted to a peer debriefing process with a colleague who had no interest in the findings of this study. As Lietz and Zayas (2010) suggested, "Peer debriefing can help to promote reflexivity allowing researchers to become more sensitized to the effects of their socio-political position" (p. 196). Also, this practice has long been useful for "exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308).

I intended to meet with this disinterested colleague for an informal ten-minute debrief three times in the data collection phase: prior to interviewing, at the midway point, and at the conclusion. Also, there were three meetings scheduled in the data analysis phase: during participant interview analysis, during group interview analysis, and at the conclusion of all analyses. According to Chenail (2011), these structured check-ins held three benefits. First, personal feelings were given a space to come to the surface. This helped us identify implicit bias, especially a priori assumptions about specific research participants. Second, the researcher was

free to divulge what they know about the study. This was accountability. It helped prevent data from piling up unchecked and kept the study progress on a shared schedule.

Third, I was cognizant of the merits of being patient during the interviewing process. It is easy to rush through the data collection process, which harms the results. However, having the experience of being interviewed helped me occupy the roles of inquisitor and listener. In this setting, I became the respondent and explored the difference between being and not being heard. This was intended to foster empathy and attentiveness to the data collection and analysis processes.

There were four design elements built into the data collection process to protect this study. First, Guskey's levels of effective PD were concealed from all study participants. Second, the interview protocols were screened by a third-party expert who has no affiliation to SARP. Third, interview questions were practiced on a non-participating teacher at St. John's. This person was familiar with SARP but not a part of the three cohorts analyzed in this study. Their feedback was used to strengthen the protocols. Finally, member checks were offered to participants. They were asked to assure the accuracy of the transcription and the portrayal of participant responses post-analysis.

Data Sources

A PFF, document review, a group interview, and participant interviews were used in the study to answer both evaluation questions (see Appendix A for full data collection tools).

Program Feedback Form

A program feedback form (PFF) was used as a data source for levels one and two of Guskey's model. Intentionally, the format was modeled after the ASCD Professional Development Evaluation Form (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 108–109).

For each level, the questions were of two types. First, there were Likert scale questions, which provide instantaneous and unidirectional data. There were 16 total rating scale items. Second, there were open-ended items aimed at two targets. First, I wanted narrative feedback to supplement the Likert items. Also, stand-alone open-ended items, gathered participant perceptions of their own reactions (Level 1) and learning (Level 2). There were 18 total open-ended items. All questions were organized by the three stages of participation. First, the opening section of questions were based on the initial summer training that inducted participants into the AR process. Next, the middle section of items was based on participant experiences during the AR program. Finally, the final section of questions gathered participant perspectives on their reactions and learning since completing the program.

Document Review

The document review process involved reading and annotating participant research briefs with intent prior to the participant interview experience. This helped activate prior knowledge because it had been one to three years since the participants engaged in the program. My reading concentrated on the following four sections of the brief: (a) area of study, (b) methods, (c) findings, and (d) putting findings into practice.

According to the SARP Document Review (see Figure A2), I read for three types of evidence. Level 4 of Guskey's model was split into two distinct inquires. The first part of Level 4 focused on how well participants understood the four elements of the AR model (Mills, 2007). The four levels are: (a) identify an area of focus, (b) collect data, (c) analyze and interpret data, and (d) develop an action plan. The second part of Level 4 concentrated on the AR project they completed in SARP. Third, Level 5 of Guskey's model focused on participant perceptions of student learning outcomes.

Next, as part of the template analysis process, which is described in the data analysis section, preliminary codes and themes were developed. “Throughout the evaluation and analysis process, it is critical that the researcher remain open to new interpretations and insights” (Newcomer et al., 2015, p. 192). To code, I highlighted each of the three types of evidence in a different color on the research brief. Ultimately, the document review process was triangulated to strengthen my most important data collection tool, participant interviews (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1991 as cited in Newcomer et al., 2015, p. 191). This process informed my live follow-up queries because, as an interviewer, I became acquainted with each project. I was empowered to ask more narrow follow-up questions to elicit information about change in teacher practice and student outcomes (Levels 4 and 5 in Guskey’s framework) for each participant.

The document review process concluded after all data from this study has been collected and analyzed. The template of preliminary codes and themes initially developed underwent a series of iterations to account for each new participant interview as well as the PFF and group interview responses. However, the final version of the template did not explain all the data. Instead, it accounted for most teacher interpretations of their PD experience with SARP.

Interviews

Interviews were selected as a primary data source because “their open format presents opportunities for both intended and unintended outcomes to be revealed” (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 105). Also, when semi-structured, the interview guide was flexible with space for intended and unanticipated outcomes. Both evaluation questions were addressed through the interview process.

Galletta (2013) and Newcomer et al. (2015) guided the development of both the SARP Group Interview Protocol (see Figure A3) and the SARP Participant Interview Protocol (see

Figure A4). Mager (2007) and Pascale (n.d.) were employed to design the tables of specifications (see Tables B1, B2, B3, B4, and B5 for the specifications used to inform the construction of both the group and participant interview protocols).

Group Interview. First, the SARP instructional leadership team were invited to participate in a group interview. The SARP Group Interview Protocol (see Figure A3) was used to gather data on the nine phases participants experienced while connected to the program: (a) the initial summer training, (b) identification of an area of study, (c) the plan the action, (d) implementation of the action plan, (e) evidence of outcomes, (f) drawing inferences based on the evidence, (g) commitments to future practice, (h) reporting, and (i) alumni. The interview questions were aligned with a specific phase of the program and designed to help the instructional leadership team recognize the internal criteria employed when making decisions.

Participant Interview. The SARP Participant Interview Protocol (see Figure A4) began by gathering basic context information such as date, time, location, name of interviewee, AR participation year, and years of teaching experience. Next, there was a set of directions for interviewer adherence followed by the interview agenda. It began with introductions. The participant was welcomed, and then digital recording equipment was tested for adequate functioning. The purpose and process of this interview was reviewed along with a two-prong definition of effectiveness. Finally, the interviewee confirmed the reminder that our session was scheduled to last approximately 1 hour.

The formal questioning segment was structured in the same manner as the document review process for coherent data analysis. Level 4 of Guskey's model was split into two distinct inquires. Part A focused on how well participants understood the four elements of the AR model

(Mills, 2007). Part B concentrated on the AR project they completed in SARP. Level 5 of Guskey's model focused on participant perceptions of student learning outcomes.

Furthermore, since this was my primary data collection tool, it aligned with the nine phases of the program used in the group interview. The guiding questions were numbered, but they did not have to be asked in sequence. The follow-up probing questions were organized alongside the primary prompts they modified. To the right of the follow-up question was a checkbox. This box was marked if the question was included during an interview session. The creation of the tables of specification (see Appendix B) for each interview protocol helped with coding during the data analysis phase.

Newcomer et al. (2015) suggested, "to end on a substantive note, consider concluding by returning to a short, easy, program-related question, perhaps about the future" (p. 499). This was what I attempted to do through the placement of questions on the protocol. In conclusion, participants were invited to weigh in with their recommendations to improve the effectiveness of SARP. Reminders of confidentiality were included due to the sensitive nature of the questions and the desire for candid responses.

Data Collection

Program Feedback Form

The Saints Action Research Program Feedback Form (see Figure A1) was distributed electronically to all participants via email using a Google Form. Google was selected due to the community's familiarity with it and to increase the response rate. Participants were informed of the length, but no incentive was offered for completion. Participants had two weeks to complete the form. One week after distribution, a follow-up email was sent to ask for additional responses to be submitted within one week. A second reminder was issued 24 hours before the pre-

determined due date. This gave a firm deadline with two promptings, which were designed to improve the response rate.

Document Review

Document reviews were conducted by the researcher using the research brief of each participant that agreed to participate in a one-to-one interview. Document reviews were initiated prior to the start of the interview, but they were not considered completed until the end of the data analysis phase (see Figure A2).

Group Interview

The instructional leadership team participated in a group interview. In the initial contact, which was made via email, I used Pick-a-Time, a free scheduling software, to assist in determining mutual availability. Ultimately, we met over the summer via Zoom.

As consent was obtained, the team was informed that we were looking for indicators of the effectiveness of this program (Yarbrough et al., 2011, p. 29). I audio recorded all interviews, and St. John's School offered to have the interviews professionally transcribed at no cost to the researcher. Participants were reassured that their recorded responses would not be disseminated. The transcripts were shared directly with them by me, and their identity kept anonymous in all writing and reporting. Template analysis was used to analyze these data (Brooks et al., 2015).

Finally, facilitator actions during the meeting were essential to collecting reliable and valid data. This included gestures such as eye contact, wait time, and checking the mic volume on Zoom. "Ample opportunities are provided for participants to clarify or extend their responses, adding any information believed to be relevant" (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 105).

Group Interview Questions. The SARP Group Interview Protocol questions were designed to align with the nine phases of the program (a) the initial summer training, (b)

identification of an area of study, (c) the plan the action, (d) implementation of the action, (e) evidence of outcomes, (f) drawing inferences based on the evidence, (g) commitments to future practice, (h) reporting, and (i) alumni (see Figure A3). In the group interview protocol, there was one guiding question for each phase except for Phases 3, 5, and 9.

At phase 3, I wanted to better understand two aspects of planning, curricular lesson planning and literature review. Therefore, I isolated each in its own guiding question. At Phase 5, I was interested in two aspects. The first question aimed at evidence of participant action. The second question aimed at evidence of student learning. At Phase 9, I wanted the instructional leadership team to operationally define the responsibilities of an alum. Furthermore, the team distinguished which projects might have been exemplary and how they could be promoted. The battery of questions concluded with two guiding questions on Evaluation Question 2.

Each guiding question had one or more probing questions. They served three primary purposes. First, probing questions were used to inquire about the possibility of an opposite. For example, in Phase 1, probing question two states, “What is not effective about our summer training?” This was significant because the absence of effectiveness was considered an opportunity for improvement. Second, probing questions allow a researcher to go deeper into a particular topic, while not requiring that each probing question be posed. For example, in Phase 3 guiding question three, the probing question stated, “How do we know?” Assuming the team did not initially state how we knew AR teachers were planning lessons that align with their plan of action, I had a reminder to ask. Finally, probing questions were employed to ask a related inquiry. For example, in Phase 7, the guiding question stated, “How might we know if participants follow through on their commitments to future practice?” The two probing questions focused on related resources, administrators, and faculty meetings, that might have helped a

participant fulfill their commitment to a specific change in their future classroom practice.

Ultimately, data collected from the group interview was used to strengthen my most important data collection tool, the participant interview.

Participant Interview Protocol

When interviewing, it was critical to adhere to the protocol. The formal interview process was conducted throughout four essential phases (Corbin & Morse, 2003, as cited in Mertens & Wilson, 2012, p. 380). The pre-interview phase focused on recruitment. In the initial contact, which was made via email, I tried to determine interest and capacity to participate. Each participant was informed that we were looking for indicators of the effectiveness of this program (Yarbrough et al., 2011, p. 29).

I informed each participant that I plan to meet with them one on one. We met on Zoom for their comfort and convenience. Pick-a-Time, a free scheduling software familiar to all participants, assisted in determining mutual availability. As an ethical consideration, propriety demands informed consent be granted by all participants (see Appendix C). Through Zoom, I audio recorded all interviews, and St. John's School offered to have the interviews professionally transcribed at no cost to the researcher. Then, I used template analysis to analyze these data (Brooks et al., 2015).

Consistent with Yarbrough et al. (2011), the informed consent form and a scheduling request was sent in a single email (p. 119). All reply emails from participants were attended to within 24 hours of receipt. If I did not have the answer, I obtained it on their behalf and circle back. If the question required a more in-depth explanation, then I confirmed the best medium to communicate an appropriate response. Finally, anyone who had not responded to this email

within one week was sent a follow-up email and a phone call using the number listed in the school directory.

The interview itself had three fluid phases. According to Newcomer et al. (2015), “Interviewers should establish a positive first impression” (p. 500). I attempted this with professional dress, including a dress shirt and tie, as well as opening the Zoom room 10 minutes prior to our scheduled start. I greeted the respondent energetically and thanked them for making time for this interview. This was the tentative phase. The emphasis was placed on building trust.

I spoke with my direct supervisor about the potential meeting times in a manner that prioritized the participants. I was flexible and attempted to meet each participant’s primary choice of time and location. Many teachers are busy, so I accommodated by meeting mornings, afternoons, and evenings.

The immersion phase was a delicate time of direct questioning. When asking questions, Newcomer et al. (2015) highlighted tone as a key component. An effective interviewer strives to control their tone, body language, and facial signaling. I aimed to come across relaxed and interested. As an interviewer, I did my best to keep from being shocked, distracted, or too casual. I hope I came across as open-minded, generally knowledgeable, and empathetic to provide the greatest chance of relaying a high familiarity with the interview questions so that the sequence could fluctuate in real-time seamlessly without losing momentum. It also helped to pilot test the interview agenda on a non-participant in the study to learn from the post interview debrief and reflection. To maintain engagement and obtain honest complex feedback from respondents, I used active listening techniques such as concise restatement and body language to gesture for elaboration. I strived to never interrupt a respondent and attempted soft segues to refocus responses tangential to the research scheme. The final phase of the interview protocol was the

closing. Near the end of each session, I considered requesting a pause to review the interview agenda to ensure that all major questions had been offered. When time was running low, I made the decision to omit some questions.

Within 24 hours of the interview, I reviewed my interview notes to clean and clarify any marks or abbreviations while they were fresh. All notes taken by hand were photographed and stored digitally. Also, a one-paragraph personalized thank you email was sent to the respondents. Newcomer et al. (2015) advised “this extra expression of appreciation makes a difference in how respondents remember the experience” (p. 503). Galletta (2013) suggested that an interview protocol is a living document, responsive to feedback in the field. Whether it was the sequencing of questions or adding context to a particular topic to assist the respondent, modifications were a part of the interview process. To that end, I reassessed my interview protocol after the first interview and annotated all changes.

Participant Interview Questions. To develop the semi-structured interview questions, I considered asking only sharp and pointed questions based on a priori themes in a structured format. However, upon further thought, I opted for a different approach to better serve the purpose and context of the study. Our institution is loosely coupled, and as a peer teacher and assistant instructional coach in the program, I must maintain a friendly working relationship. To facilitate a relaxed yet productive conversation is a skill that requires tact and listening skills. Effective interviewers must make mid-course corrections while avoiding tangential banter. However, the semi-structured format seemed more desirable and likely to elicit more thoughtful and contextually rich responses while simultaneously building trust.

In addition to being screened by the Director of SARP, all questions were piloted on one non-participating teacher. First, I sought out a teacher who has worked with the IBSC Action

Research Program in a cohort not included in this study. This teacher was familiar with the program and its language. Their experience and feedback would have been insightful.

Unfortunately, this person was unavailable due to factors beyond our control, so I pursued a teacher who had no affiliation with the program. I explained the data collection process and shared the questions for their honest feedback. Their criticism was worthwhile. Their perspective was a part of a revision phase, which occurred before collecting any data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an essential process for maintaining credibility and dependability. The following section details the analysis process of each data source.

Program Feedback Form

Creswell and Creswell (2017) informed the data analysis of this survey (p. 156). The Saints Action Research Program Feedback Form (see Figure A1) has 50 total items. These items were broken into three types. First, Likert items were used to measure respondents' attitudes toward specific statements. To analyze the data, responses were coded as follows: 1 (*strongly disagree*), 2 (*disagree*), 3 (*neither agree nor disagree*), 4 (*agree*), and 5 (*strongly agree*). Likert-type data are ordinal data, which means one score is higher or lower than another. Therefore, frequency count, median, mean, mode, and range were the most appropriate ways to analyze this survey in my context. In the Summary of Rating-scale Items from the Program Feedback Form, I report these findings (see Appendix D for a figure which presents the descriptive statistics for each prompt including a frequency table, median, mean, mode, and range).

Even though I did not know the distance between the potential selections, there was value in deriving the mean to look for extremes. An average closer to 1 means there was a quorum of disagreement. An average approaching five reveals the opposite. Means near 3 could have a

variety of valid interpretations based on itemizing the data. There might have been polarization if most respondents selected 1 and 5 frequently. However, respondents might not have felt strongly about the subject or been undecided at the time the survey is administered. There were 16 total Likert scale items. Following each, there was an optional prompt for comments. Comments were used as qualitative interpretations of the quantitative entries.

The remaining eighteen questions invited longer typed responses for evaluation question one and evaluation question two. These questions, while mandatory, were preceded by a brief header stating, “In the open-ended section below, please submit a minimum of one complete sentence for each item.” All open-ended responses were analyzed using template analysis, a type of thematic coding which is defined and described in the interview section below.

Document Review

Template analysis was used to analyze the research briefs of those participants who also accepted the opportunity to interview. This type of thematic analysis allowed for an opportunity to put the research brief in conversation with its author. Each brief was cut, color-coded, and sorted. What is learned from the document review process (see Figure A2) customized the participant interview experience, and the participant interview further supported my understanding of each research brief.

Interviews

Rev, a professional digital transcription service, was employed using financing from St. John’s School to take the audio recording files and create editable written documents. To make meaning from scores of digital pages, I first preserved the raw audio files on Google Drive. With knowledge of the challenge to feasibility, it was critical that I replayed and listened to each interview reflectively. The transcription was digitally checked for consistency with the audio

recording. Next, the transcription was printed. The paper pages were noted for tempo, cadence, energy, and inaudible verbal sounds on the recording. This added rich layers of data to the discussion as the contextual features and tone were recalled.

Descriptive methods were used to analyze open-ended PFF items, document review, and interview data (Newcomer et al., 2015). “Descriptive methods of analysis focus on summarizing the information into a form that can then be compared and contrasted” (p. 572). Brooks et al. (2015) describe template analysis: “Central to the technique is the development of a coding template, usually on the basis of a subset of data, which is then applied to further data, revised and refined” (p. 203). The six procedural steps that I used to analyze the interview transcripts are described here.

First, since this was a small data set, I read all transcripts at least once. Second, there was a preliminary coding stage when I used highlighting to color code phrases according to a priori codes, which contributed to my understanding. “In Template Analysis, it is permissible (though not obligatory) to start with some a priori themes, identified in advance as likely to be helpful and relevant to the analysis” (Brooks et al., 2015, p. 203). This deductive approach was less labor intensive than every code being emergent. Third, emerging codes were clustered into categories. These categories were sorted into themes. Themes housed several related categories. Fourth, I defined a coding template from a subset of the data. This was similar to the a priori codes, but it emerged for the current data. Also, the opportunity was given to revise, remove, or add additional codes to look for within the remainder of the data set. To create the most reliable template, a diverse subset was used to inform the creation of a template. This study intended to use interview transcripts and PFF data from participants to define the template early in the data collection phase. Fifth, the template was applied to a novel transcript and edited as necessary.

Brooks et al. (2015) counseled, “The researcher examines fresh data and where material of potential relevance to the study is identified, he or she considers whether any of the themes defined on the initial template can be used to represent it” (p. 204). If it did not fit the template, new themes were added at any time. For feasibility, up to three new transcripts were considered before modifications to the boilerplate template attained permanence. Therefore, the template went through several iterations. Sixth, I employed the resulting template to review the full data set. My goal was not to arrive at a fully perfected template that accounted for all of the qualitative data. However, “a good rule of thumb is that development of a template cannot be seen as sufficient if there remain substantial sections of data relevant to the research question(s) that cannot be coded to it” (p. 204).

According to Mertens and Wilson (2012), “codes are the building blocks of qualitative data analysis” (p. 445). Although I allowed for emergent themes, from a pragmatic perspective, a priori codes were developed (see Table 3). For data connected to Evaluation Question 1, I looked for three indicators. First, Level 4A focused on how well participants understood the four elements of the AR model (Mills, 2007). The four parts are (a) identify an area of focus, (b) collect data, (c) analyze and interpret data, and (d) develop an action plan. Second, Level 4B concentrated on the AR project they completed in SARP. Third, Level 5 of Guskey’s framework was about participant perceptions of student learning outcomes. Each of these three indicators was coded.

Evaluation Question 2 had three a priori codes embedded. I listened for the advantages and limitations of the program. Also, I prompted participants to recommend improvements if this information was not volunteered.

Table 3*Evaluation Questions With A Priori Code Alignment for Data Sources*

Evaluation Questions	A Priori Codes
To what degree does the Saints Action Research Program reflect an effective model of professional development as evidenced by each of the five levels of Guskey’s model for evaluating professional development?	All a priori codes have been adapted from Guskey and Sparks (2000, p. 79–80)
What are the perceptions of program alumni and the instructional leadership team regarding the advantages and limitations of participating in the Saints Action Research Program?	Perceived advantages of participation Perceived limitations of participation Recommendations from participants
Guskey Level	A Priori Codes
Level 4 is participants’ use of new knowledge and skills.	Level 4A is the action research model Level 4B is the action research project
Level 5 is student learning outcomes.	Participant perceptions of student learning outcomes

Note. Emergent themes were identified and reported for each evaluation question.

In template analysis, “these [codes] are always tentative, and may be redefined or removed if they do not prove to be useful for the analysis at hand” (Brooks et al., 2015, p. 203). This was true of a priori and emergent codes. Therefore, iterations were tracked and reported throughout the data analysis process allowing the researcher to revert to earlier iterations.

Internal and External Validity

The most pressing threat to internal validity was history because all of the participants were engaged in other PD requirements and opportunities at the time of participating in SARP. Mertens and Wilson (2012) recommended “having two groups all of which experience the ‘history’ event(s), but not all of which experience the experimental treatment” (p. 308). In this evaluation, we did not have this type of control in place; however, it was worthy of further

attention. I recommend that in a future study, St. John's School replicate this study with other PD programs or a stratified sample of its teachers from each division.

It was perhaps an even more significant challenge to control external validity due to the nature of the teacher selection process. SARP was a volunteer program, which was a threat to external validity. When considering the process of change, the alumni who completed the training in the first 3 years were innovators and early adopters (Hall & Hord, 2001). We have not yet achieved a majority of faculty participation to help us accurately generalize results. Therefore, the results found in this study are limited to the cohorts invited to participate. They do not explain the experience of previous or future cohorts. I recommend a forthcoming study of teachers who demonstrate characteristics of resisters (Fullan, 2003).

Fullan (2003) gave us two reasons to identify resisters early, "first, they sometimes have ideas that we might have missed... Second, resisters are crucial when it comes to the politics of implementation" (p. 6). In short, resisters provide insight that can make programs more effective. This study did not intentionally include any of these dissenting views. However, it would make for a more robust understanding if further investigation was conducted into why many faculty members have opted against participation in SARP.

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

Delimitations

The most critical delimitations in this study were those that protected participants. I was assuming that the culture of the school was one that valued honest and constructive critique. Especially since this was a voluntary PD experience, the participants should have had no fear, as their direct supervisor of their teaching appointment would not see any of their responses. Finally, the consent form offered the opportunity for each participant to select a pseudonym as a

further layer of confidentiality (see Appendix C). This ensured that only the participant and researcher knew their identity.

Second, I hosted a single group interview. The instructional leadership team was the only stakeholder present. According to Newcomer et al. (2015), “the rule of thumb is to hold three or four groups with each type of participant for which you want to analyze results” (p. 511). The size of this study was too small for any subsets to be compared or isolated. Therefore, the group interview was a supplementary data source that informed the semi-structured interviews and Guskey Level 3.

Third, there were delimitations to the stakeholders invited to participate in three ways. First, no members of the board of governors, division administrators, or students were included as a data source for this evaluation. They were not interviewed, and any informal feedback was not considered as evidence we were willing to accept.

Finally, there were potential SARP participants who were neutral or even harmed by the establishment of this program. We had teachers who never displayed any interest in the program. Although I wondered why this was so, this inquiry was not part of this study; instead, this served as a recommendation for future research. Not all program alumni were eligible to participate in the semi structured interviews. Only participants who were from the most recent three cohorts and were invited. In conclusion, “evaluators must consider what kind of information is most important and how that information can best be obtained with the resources available” (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 106).

Limitations

There were five immediate limitations to this study. First, the study was too small to apply its results beyond the confines of this specific participant group. The socially constructed

experiences of these cohorts genuinely belong to them with all of their idiosyncrasies. Therefore, though recommendations were provided, the guarantee that they will prove or improve the effectiveness of SARP cannot be given.

Second, due to cost, the classic economic challenge of quality versus quantity applied. It is not affordable to offer high-quality PD to every faculty member in a school district, even if you limit by discipline to achieve the most value. However, as moral leaders in education, we should resist the temptation to dilute the quality of experiences we provide for our front-line teachers. This study worked with a program that is voluntary with small annual cohorts by design. However, it requires a budget, and participants were paid a \$500 stipend for their participation. We listened to the feedback of our participants, but this study did not guarantee a change to the financial support of the program.

The third limitation was timing. All the data used in the study was collected after the PD activities ended for the participants. Guskey and Sparks (2000) posited, “delaying evaluations in this way allows participants to reflect more carefully on how things went and what they learned” (p. 103). This was disrupted by COVID-19, which prevented the most recent cohort from experiencing closure. They were gearing up to give their presentations to the faculty immediately following spring break. However, in-person gathering ceased before they made it back. Instead, we concluded the 2019-2020 academic term in a distance learning model. This was a limitation to the study that could not be anticipated.

Fourth, my lack of experience as an interviewer was a limitation. According to Newcomer et al. (2015), “skillful moderators make facilitation look easy.” Even with pilot testing and member checks, data collection was limited by my expertise. Soft skills such as wait time, appropriate eye contact, tone, and controlled reactions to unexpected comments all take

practice. Even with good intentions, I did not come to this study with interviewing in my professional toolkit. Being intimately familiar with the data collection protocols was one more action I took to offset this limitation.

One final limitation was that this study was based solely on participant perceptions. Respondents might have been inhibited by the recording of our interviews. Intentionally or unintentionally, comments and interactions were likely altered. “We must also remember, however, that no matter how carefully professional development activities are planned or how comfortable participants are made to feel, not everyone will be completely satisfied” (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 98). Nevertheless, effective school leaders are intentional about their planning because they value learning outcomes for their faculty, who directly impact the students daily.

Assumptions

I held the assumption that this evaluation gathered evidence of more than the mere entertainment value of SARP. Generally, PD facilitators who are more fun, optimistic, and entertaining rate higher than those deemed dull and boring. Guskey and Sparks (2000) provide guidance here: “a carefully constructed evaluation questionnaire or well-crafted interview procedure measures far more than participants’ simple delight with the experience” (p. 119). I trusted the quality of the data sources to accomplish this. Second, I assumed all respondents were relatively comfortable being recorded. This might not have been the case. Therefore, I was prepared to take notes. This was done on printed copies of the interview protocol while hosting a Zoom interview session. I assumed taking notes was not a distraction for the interviewee. Overall, I expected a substantial amount of positive feedback about SARP. “The research show that comments tend to be more favorable when the content addresses specific problems and

offers practical, relevant solutions that can be implemented immediately” (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 96; see also Doyle & Ponder, 1977; Fullan, 2007). My researcher bias leaned this way.

Ethical Considerations

No one in the St. John’s School community accessed the recordings and transcriptions except me. “Because face-to-face interviews deny anonymity in responses, the interviews must assure participants that their comments will be presented in summary form only and that no individual will be identified in reporting results” (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 105). This was a critical consideration because I hoped to create a brave space where evaluation participants could recount their experiences with freedom and candor.

There was also concern about minority perspectives that arose in the qualitative data. On this point, and in my context, Newcomer et al. (2015) was insightful. “Ordinarily, omit the highly unrepresentative outliers, unless for some reason a particular comment, even if rare, should be conveyed to decision makers” (p. 504). In this small study, minority perspectives were reported. However, given the data analysis process, there were pieces of data that did not fit into any code, category, or theme, a priori or emergent. These minority data points were not included in the findings unless they were particularly noteworthy in the mind of the researcher. Reasons for inclusion included their contrarian nature or the direct refutation of a theme, “the outcome of categorizing and reflection by the evaluator on salient patterns in the data” (p. 564).

Finally, I was one of the members of the instructional leadership team. Therefore, I acknowledged the proprietary bias I exerted on the small group discussion. However, to mitigate this bias, my primary focus was on assessment of contributions as they relate to the change of teacher practice for the benefits of students. This required tactful redirection and moderating the group to keep us on track. This was a common goal, and the administration acknowledged a

vested interest in hearing honest and critical feedback. Given the size of the participant group, I believe SARP alumni might have been uncomfortable, even with assurances of confidentiality, providing critical feedback on their employer.

Advance Notification

One critical organizational feature of this study’s timeline was to provide advanced notification. This is often neglected; however, it was a wise step when dealing with busy schedules and assessing cognitive learning (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 134). Evaluators must be careful about catching stakeholders off guard. Therefore, an announcement was provided via email with the intended learning goals. The purpose was to protect the learning outcomes of participants. “Advance notification of such an assessment...can enhance both their reactions and their learning” (p. 135).

Plans for Communicating Results

An effective PD experience is a successful learning experience for several stakeholders. The reporting phase unfolded with three distinct audiences, as illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Audiences for Reporting in Sequence



To remain transparent in my disclosure, this report was presented first in written form to SARP's instructional leadership team. The team stood ready to refine the program based on valid research and recommendations that could be approved by the St. John's Board of Governors. If approved, the evaluation would be tailored in scope and format to an oral presentation. The verbal delivery was accompanied by a single-page handout given to all of the senior administration who attended. The senior administration is comprised of 21 total members and led by the headmaster. Finally, the results were made actionable for the St. John's faculty who work directly with our primary beneficiaries: students.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the Saints Action Research Program (SARP) evaluation findings. Two evaluation questions structured it. Evaluation question one stated, to what degree does the SARP reflect an effective professional development (PD) model as evidenced by each of the five levels of Guskey's model for evaluating PD? This question had five distinct sub-sections based on Guskey's model of effective program development evaluation, (a) participant reactions, (b) participant learning, (c) organizational support and change, (d) use of new knowledge and skills by participants, and (e) student learning outcomes. Level 4 was further split into two sections. Level 4, part A, was knowledge of action research (AR), and Level 4, part B, was commitment to using AR.

Evaluation question two stated, what are the perceptions of program alumni and the instructional leadership team regarding the advantages and limitations of participating in the SARP? I selected various methods—a program feedback form (PFF), document review, a group interview, and participant interviews—to analyze the degree to which SARP met the five levels of PD evaluation (Guskey & Sparks, 2000, p. 78). The data were presented in themes, both a priori and emergent, ascertained through thematic analysis of all data sources.

To answer both evaluation questions, I generated data through four data collection tools. First, a survey containing 50 total rating-scale and opened ended items was completed by 20 participants comprised of members from four out of five program cohorts. The cohort from year 2020 only had two participants who completed the program, and neither of them opted into this

study. Second, 10 participants from two of the three most recent cohorts consented to participate in semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and all interviews were conducted via Zoom. Third, in preparation for the participant interviews, each of their research briefs underwent a document review process. Finally, a group interview was conducted with three of the four members of the instructional leadership team. Collectively, these data sources revealed many common perspectives on SARP, providing an insightful reflection on the program's advantages, limitations, and opportunities for improvement.

This chapter presents those findings, relying heavily on the perspectives of program alumni. The findings were organized into nine sections. In most instances, I provided the number of participants who articulated a position on the topic. For instance, if 13 of the 20 teachers shared thoughts about SARP, then that number was given in the opening paragraph for that finding. If there were alternative or dissenting views, I have included those as well. The reader should infer, therefore, that the remaining teachers did not significantly address the topic. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the findings.

Evaluation Question 1

To what degree does SARP reflect an effective PD model as evidenced by each of the five levels of Guskey's model for evaluating PD? To present the findings, each of Guskey's five levels will be taken sequentially. All four data collection tools—a PFF, document review, a group interview, and participant interviews—worked together using the template analysis process and descriptive statistics to arrive at the following themes (see Tables E1, E2, E3, E4, and E5).

Participant Reactions (Guskey Level 1)

The first level of evaluation looked at participants' reactions to the PD experience. By design, the incidents related to Levels 1 (reactions) and 2 (learning) were delineated by three stages of participation. The first stage was the initial training in action research the summer before they began the program. Second, I inquired about experiences during the eight-month action research program. Finally, since I was dealing with alumni, I sought to gather their reflections since completing the program. Each stage was considered, and themes are presented in this chapter. The summary of the rating-scale items from the PFF has been reported (see Appendix D).

Participant Reactions About Initial Summer Training Prior to Beginning SARP.

The initial summer training took place over two consecutive days. The goal was for participants to gain both knowledge and clear expectations before beginning their participation year. To define and clarify what action research is, book chapters from leaders in the field were shared with participants in May preceding their participation year. The second part of the objective was to level-set expectations. The instruction leadership team sought to outline the scope of the program, including its deliverables.

As They Began the Program, Participants Reacted With Excited and Nervous Energy.

Nineteen out of 20 respondents to the PFF either agreed or strongly agreed that the summer training left them excited about undertaking AR in their classroom. Todd explained, "The summer institute and the collaboration that happened at the trainings was energizing. I couldn't wait to get started." This also emerged in the interviews. The first question was, "What new ideas did you take away from the initial summer training session?" In responding to this question, many candidates had a cheerful intonation. Anna said, "At summer training, I gained a

wealth of information about how to implement my action research in the classroom.” This recollection with enthusiasm by program alumni is significant. However, a lone respondent neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement on the PFF.

While ebullience was a common reaction experienced by many alumni who completed the PFF, others expressed more complex emotional responses. Julian tempered, “Yes, excited, but also trepidatious about taking on something else during soccer season (a peak time of extra work/stress for me each year).” Four of the 20 respondents used the voluntary comment section to share the nervousness they recalled. Sarah said, “I was nervous that my kindergarten boys would not be able to respond to the exercise.” Similarly, Ingrid voiced concerns related to student readiness that emerged during the summer training. She affirmed in a PFF response, “I was very nervous; I knew I could not start from day 1 my actual action. The students need about 6 weeks to review and get familiar with the classroom and Spanish.”

While the prevailing reaction to the summer training was excitement, there was also nervousness. SARP asked participants to carry an additional responsibility during their participation year, and the data presents a type of uncertainty that came with the enthusiasm of navigating a new experience.

AR as PD Offers a Collaborative Community. Each participant in SARP had their individual AR project based on their interests that emerged from their work with students. However, from the beginning, participants in SARP completed this PD within a collaborative community. The PFF asked, “What did you like about the summer training?” Phrases such as “with colleagues,” “one another,” and “ability to connect” were used 18 times by 16 different participants. Chuck submitted, “I really enjoyed connecting with my peers across divisions and

learning about their AR questions and plans.” Denise also offered, “I enjoyed brainstorming ideas with colleagues and fine-tuning my focus before the school year began.”

During the participant interviews, the theme of collaborative support from the beginning emerged in response to the following prompt. “Are there any skills that you took away just from that experience that you're still using today?” Karen responded, “Ellie did it the same year I did, and it really opened up some trust and communication and collaboration.” This was the community building SARP aspires to realize. Karen continued:

Ellie's the one in the language department most willing to try new things, most willing to reach out for collaboration on stuff that may be tech related, and some of that I think she trusts me because I'm a language teacher too. So she knows that I can see that side of it, but I feel like SARP really created a sense of trust that made it easier for the two of us to collaborate on things.

Collaboration was the most cited advantage of the summer training in the program. As educators, we had meetings with our colleagues throughout the academic year. However, institutional time to connect with other teachers was often limited to the department or division to which a teacher is assigned, which is not the same as a collaborative community. On the contrary, each SARP cohort was cross-divisional. Carly explained, “I really enjoyed spending time with colleagues from other divisions and hearing what questions they were considering in their own classrooms.” This was a decided change within the culture of St. John’s School as three teachers recalled a more competitive teacher work culture. Karen explained:

It was just very much a culture of like, not collaboration. It's like, "Well, I have this idea, and it's a good one, so let's do this." Nothing about like, "Hey, if we all bring our own good ideas together, it's going to be better." It was this weird competition thing, and that, for

me, has never been the way that things work the best. So, I think that that piece [of the program], it is important.

This sense of competition kept one participant from having the confidence to trust share and begin addressing an authentic classroom concern. Instead, she held back and chose to pursue an AR project with more predictable outcomes. Carly disclosed:

I feel that it pretty much was something I had tried that I wanted to make sure was working correctly. But it didn't change my classroom that much. If I had gone with my original thought, which was taking that extra risk, then yes, that would've been a little different. I wish I would've done that.

Thus, some participants seemed to feel that a play-it-safe approach was better than the innovation espoused by AR. According to participants, collaboration was a key element of teacher PD. Some have experienced the restrictions caused by the competition of ideas, so they held up ideation as a refreshing alternative. Trust and a sense of support were also prerequisites to revealing a persistent problem you were having in your practice. Or even to arrive at the place where participants could permit themselves to try something new without fear of appearing a certain way if it did not work out well. SARP intended to offer a way to build a safe and supportive space, a collaborative community.

Participant Reactions to Undertaking the AR Process. A SARP cohort met once a month before the school day between September and March. These meetings aimed to maintain the pacing of participant AR projects toward the firm completion deadline in March. The culminating capstone to complete the program was two-fold. First, there was a written research brief that was reformatted and posted online by the digital marketing team of the school. Second,

two consecutive presentations were given to faculty in a breakout session format on the teacher workday following Spring Break.

Participants Expressed Concern About the Amount of Time Required of SARP. The scope and tone of the monthly meetings could feel like a quick early morning check-in. During the participant interview, Todd vented:

The early morning meetings were tough because, and it might just be my situation, oftentimes, I'm going to be here till 5:30 pm, if not later, for extended day. And to start that early is a long day. Remember we were meeting at like 7:15 am.

Though no other participants vocalized it, many faculty and staff have professional duties on-campus after school, for one semester or more per year. This could include but is not limited to coaching, tutoring, or PD on or off-campus. From the instructional leadership team perspective, therefore, finding a common time to meet was a challenge. Lilith stated in the group interview:

I think the biggest challenge is more scheduling than challenge while we're together. And so, we have learned that it's helpful to have those dates from the beginning of the application process, so they know and they're no surprises, but things come up.

The Assigned Role of the Participant Matters. The teaching assignment a participant held at the time of their participation in SARP seemed to impact their experience. One did not have to be a classroom teacher to participate in SARP. The requirement was that a teacher or staff member have weekly instructional time with one group of boys. However, the program expectations did not differentiate. Mark, the lower school chaplain, put it this way, “The AR was directed towards working with groups [of students], and I am not a classroom teacher, so I found the task somewhat challenging for that reason.” A technology coordinator, when responding to

the survey question “What about AR was confusing?”, stated, “figuring how to complete my Action Research without being a classroom teacher.”

Furthermore, not all classroom teachers reacted in a unified voice. Therefore, being a classroom teacher, as opposed to a coach or after-school employee, was insufficient to alleviate this disparity. SARP has had several participants whose assigned duties were atypical of core instruction teachers, and these elective teachers shared their voices. During the interview, Carly spoke from her experience:

I think it's harder for us in the lower school to have that opportunity because we are ... I mean, especially if you're in a discipline area, it's different than middle school in that sense, I believe, or when I taught at the high school level, I had my department, so I always had an opportunity to share ideas. I mean, I have Ingrid, and we do, but we're always teaching... It's harder. It's harder to really share the ideas. If you're an art teacher, or you're just a religion teacher, you don't have that team in this sense.

Ingrid, a Spanish teacher in the lower school, expressed pacing concerns:

I couldn't collect data of what I wanted because my focus was on first grade students to bring them to classroom procedures, routines, this is how we sit, this is how our classroom is spaced. And I don't have them every day, I had them two times a week for 40 minutes, so it was a time restriction, so I felt like I couldn't start my action research.

To temper this comment, as a follow-up question, I asked her to use hindsight, “Do you think you could've taken the big risk on your first time through [AR] with the time and access constraints?” Carly replied:

Pre COVID, I would've said no. After everything we've done as educators, I would say, 'Absolutely.' I mean, I can't say there's nothing we can't do after the year we've done. So yeah, I would've said no, but now I will say, 'Absolutely. I could've done it.'

To a degree, the instructional leadership team was aware of the different needs, skills, and perspectives their participants bring. Judy, the program director, acknowledged when asked to give an example of the program's ineffectiveness:

I wonder if differentiation is sometimes a challenge because I would imagine that some people who've had some research experience catch on more quickly or don't need as deep of a dive. Whereas others I think these concepts as we know are things that you could cover in semester long year, long college courses. And so, to be able to deliver the content in a way that works for every participant, I would assume is probably a challenge.

Judy understood that not all participants came to the program equally, and it was a challenge to meet them where they were. She focused on their comfort with research skills, but this principle could be applied to a host of demographic and professional factors.

Participant Reactions After Becoming an Alum of SARP. As previously stated, participants have officially completed the program once the instructional leadership team accepted their research brief and their presentations rendered. There were no official responsibilities or expectations placed upon participants once the program was complete, and none of the faculty have participated in the program more than once. When discussing the role of our alumni with the instructional leadership team in the group interview, Lilith agreed, "I do think there is room for growth there." Judy, the program director, continued this thread of discussion candidly:

As we move forward in the next 5 to 10 years, I would love to think about ways we can better leverage the excitement, energy, and experience of our Saints Action Research alumni. The other piece of it too, which it always comes down to is I think we're idea rich and we're time poor... And so, do we put our time and energy into the current cohort, or how could we perhaps branch out in a way to better support or even involve alumni. And maybe it wouldn't take a lot of time. But I do think with the time demands that are already on all of our plates, I think it's... And frankly, it hasn't been a priority.

The instructional leadership team did not prioritize SARP alumni, but they shared two opportunities that might have been feasible to offer the alumni body. First, the instructional leadership team could facilitate a pathway toward publication in an education journal. Second, we might suggest an alum present at a conference. There was discussion of the benefits of pursuing either track collaboratively, encouraging alumni to combine and reanalyze their findings to make sense for new stakeholders. An emphasis was placed upon the idea that it was never too late to share what they have gained from SARP with a broader audience. But these were ideas expressed about possible future strategies, not an explanation of past practice.

The Relative Permanence of the SARP Experience. When asked on the PFF, “What did you NOT like about the summer training?”, 50% or 10/20 respondents had nothing negative to volunteer offer. This was reinforced during the interview phase when Vincent confessed, “I honestly can’t think of anything I didn’t like about summer training.” Also, toward the end of the participant interview, Carly was asked a similar question about SARP more broadly, “What do you not like about Action Research? That can be the program, and that can be the process. Or in your experience, what do you not like about Action Research?” Carly responded, “I don't think there was anything I didn't like. I mean, yeah, it was a great time.”

This general sense that SARP was good PD reflects the relative permanence of the program experience. During the participant interviews, alumni had difficulty distinguishing moments from various program phases when asked directly. When asked what new ideas he took away from the summer training, Todd conceded, “I don't remember any new initial ideas. If they did present an example to us, I don't remember it.” Similarly, Sarah stated, “I honestly cannot remember the summer training.” Further into the interview, when asked about the faculty presentation.

Patty said, “I don't remember exactly what I put in my presentation because it's been a couple of years. But I do remember that I liked sharing my information and what happened in the classroom.” Patty did not remember the word-for-word content, but those slides were likely housed on Google Drive. Instead, what has stuck with her is the enjoyment of sharing this work with other teachers. Patty recalled the satisfaction of reporting out and being in the audience on different years to listen. “It was neat to hear from my other colleagues, ‘Oh, the boys do this in science class, or they do this.’ That piece of Action Research, I truly enjoyed.”

While participants did not remember details of the summer training, the final presentation, or other milestones in between, the data indicated the long-term goal of developing a teacher research culture where participating and non-participating teachers could learn from one another was germinating. Lisa reflected, “I did feel that the colleagues that had done Action Research in the past were interested in my project.” However, Chuck tempered, “there was not a ton of interest [from colleagues] during the research, but after I reported my results to the faculty, I had a great deal of interest in my findings.” This type of recall demonstrated that a sense of or feeling for the work of AR that persisted with participants. While the event details became fuzzy

over time, the sense of connecting with colleagues as the participants were seeking to grow professionally endured.

Participant Learning (Guskey Level 2)

Participant Reflections on Their Learning Process During Initial Summer Training Prior to Beginning SARP. The second level of evaluation looked at participants' learning during the professional development experience. One delimitation of this study was the use self-reported data from participants rather than more objective types of measures, such as performance assessments or observations of participants in practice. As a reminder, the findings from the rating-scale items were reported (see Appendix D). This subsection presents the findings from the PFF and participant interviews related to what participants learned during the initial summer training. Themes below that were related to the instructional leadership team could also fit in Guskey Level 3 Organizational Support and Change. However, they have been placed here in Level 2 due to their correlation to the data source from which they were derived, namely The Saints Action Research Program Feedback Form (see Figure A1). Level 3 by contrast reflects, more squarely, the perceptions of the instructional leadership team rather than how they are perceived by program alumni, which was captured in the findings that follow.

Participants Brought Varying Levels of Prior Knowledge of Action Research to SARP. Participating teachers had various perspectives of their prior knowledge of AR before enrolling in SARP. Five teachers claimed they had little to no previous contact with AR, according to the PFF. Ten participants acknowledged that their AR experience was limited to the work and presentations produced by previous SARP cohorts. Of the remaining five, two completed AR projects as a requirement of a master's program. Another two were participants of other AR

projects, so they could observe before conducting their own. The final one had participated in AR as PD in another school setting prior to joining SARP.

From the participant interviews, Ellie recalled the benefit of having done graduate-level work before taking on this sort of PD. “I think that ... had I not gone to graduate school; it would have been fuzzier in my memory the whole project ...I was very much a super nerd and a very organized student. So I think that's helpful.” Amber also credited graduate school for setting her up for a smooth transition into the program. She shared:

I felt like coming into it, I wasn't too far off of coming out of grad school where I had done action research for my thesis, which was also centered around applying technology in an elementary school classroom. So I was, I don't know, 5 years maybe-ish, maybe more after grad school. So I felt like I had a decent idea about what action research was just because it was such a big part of graduate school for me not long ago.

Prior knowledge made the initial summer training a smaller conscious cognitive jump; however, a lack of formal education did hinder one participant. Todd had never heard of AR before signing up for SARP. Throughout our interview, at various points, he questioned the validity of AR. In the example that follows, he used the analogy of a sports team. The instructional leadership team were the coaches, and AR as PD was the product.

I'd want the coach who's had 14 years straight of winning seasons, instead of just somebody coming in and saying, "Oh, I'm going to give you how to have a successful season." You're like, "You are? Have you had one? I mean, show me your product.

For other participants, the summer training was a refresher on what they had completed at the college level. To others, it was their opportunity to do what they had witnessed a colleague complete. Still, to others, it was brand new. What a participant knew about AR and their trust in

the AR process influenced their readiness for and openness to learning about AR during the summer training.

The Instructional Leadership Team Needs to Provide Direction More Than Knowledge and Skills. The majority of respondents on the PFF agreed that it was essential to have a clear mental map pertaining to the program parameters of SARP. This communication was the responsibility of the instructional leadership team. However, the effectiveness had mixed results. According to Ellie, “It was easy to understand the concept of having an idea that you wanted to test in the classroom and developing lessons to test the idea.” When asked if the summer training provided them with all the knowledge and skills required to do the AR in their classroom, 16 out of 20 respondents affirmed or strongly affirmed that it had. Twelve of these respondents had completed AR projects before they participated in SARP. Karen commented, “I had already done multiple action research projects, but it was helpful to know what the expectations for this one would be.”

Amber was a participant in the International Boys Schools’ Coalition (IBSC) AR team simultaneously with SARP. I wondered if keeping the directions of the two programs distinct was a challenge. She reasoned:

Yeah, and the focus was the IBSC one because it was on a grander scale and everything that was involved in the Saints Action Research, it all lined up properly, so there was really no need to differentiate... I don't at all feel like they were two separate entities. I felt like it was all one big action research with the IBSC being the grounded focus so then you just took pieces out and applied that to the Saints Action Research.

Amber experienced proper alignment between the international and local level programming, barely distinguishing between the two and marking the international program more prominent.

Thankfully, the head coach of SARP worked as an advisor for the IBSC program at the time, so this alignment was intentional. Karen also participated in both programs. When asked, she said:

I had done multiple action research projects before that, so the whole like, ‘This is what you're going to be doing, and this is what it means,’ and all that was stuff that I already knew, but it was good to see how it would fit into our context at school.

For the IBSC team, then, the instructional leadership team was demonstrating alignment between the programs.

For three of the remaining respondents of the PFF who neither agree nor disagree, Lisa stated that clear direction superseded knowledge and skills, “Since I already had a clear sense of direction, I was less worried about having the knowledge and skills sorted out.” For those with less prior knowledge then, clarity from the instructional leadership team helped participants continue acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful. Vincent added, “I don't think any of the action research was confusing, and it was challenging, but not confusing.” The cognitive capacity to understand AR was less of a concern to participants than feeling prepared and supported to take on the task.

Further, the more that could be known about the task from the beginning, the better because not all participants felt they had received a sufficiently clear direction. Todd tempered, “I believe I needed a little more direction regarding the available tools and how to use them to locate previous research that I could synthesize with and use to direct my work.” Vincent detailed several specific tasks he would have liked addressed during the summer training:

At summer training, I gained a wealth of information about how to implement my action research in the classroom. In reflection, I wish I had created surveys, interview questions, and additional assessment tools. It would have been beneficial going into the school year

with the initial survey complete... Seeing sample questions or working with the group to brainstorm samples would have been useful.

Perhaps Katy put it most succinctly, “the summer training was a great start; however, I needed the monthly sessions and the one-to-one support to complete my research.”

Participants Need to be Confident That They Will Receive Support From the Instructional Leadership Team. Nineteen out of 20 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they knew what a successful AR project looked like by the conclusion of the summer training. Sarah submitted, “I loved the collaboration and the support from our leaders and librarians. With their support, I feel like we had everything at our fingertips! Thank you!” In addition to direction, participants highlighted the value of having an assurance that the implementation of their AR project would be successful. On the PFF, Denise recalled, “I felt confident after the training that I was ready to tackle my action research.”

While this sense of support likely came from many places, respondents regularly identified one. Eight cited the support from their instructional leadership team as the motivating factor of this confidence. Julian agreed, knowing his instructional leader would “keep me in line if the SAR project was deficient in some manner.”

From the participant interviews, Megan mentioned that the coaches not only held her accountable for completing the project, but they also enhanced the quality of her project:

The Saints Action Research Team kept my feet to the fire because I get excited about doing and making changes. Follow-through isn't always there. So, having people in place to help support, check-in, and really help elevate what I was doing to a different level that could not have been done on my own.

Ingrid focused on the coaches' willingness to provide additional individualized editing for her during the writing process because English was her second language.

I felt very well supported, like Lilith, Margret, maybe you edited mine too. I think that you guys were amazing, because I was like, "Oh my gosh, I need a ton of editors." I know what I wanted to say, but I don't know the fanciest way to say this. So, I feel very supported on that regard, on the writing part.

Participants at the start of SARP were motivated in large part by the instructional leadership team. However, within this confidence also lied the acknowledgment that AR was learning by doing, and the instructional leadership team, while supportive, was not doing the professional development.

Participants' Reported Learning While Undertaking the SARP Process. In this section, we explored how participants learn during SARP.

Participants Learn AR by Doing AR. When asked about their knowledge of the AR process, the majority of respondents, while vocal about the benefits of training and the approachability of the instructional leadership team, kept coming back to the active part of this PD program. Patty captured it succinctly in a phrase on the PFF, "There is no substitute for doing!" Mark illustrated, "it was absolutely a case of immersion learning, and it reminded me of student teaching in that respect. I went in with ideas and plans and learned how much I had to learn!"

During the participant interviews, I asked, "What is action research?" in various ways and at different points in the conversation. Ellie gave a candid definition that reveals how she did AR during her participation year:

Action Research, what is it? Well, for me, it definitely was real-time research that I could see unfold in front of me based on what I chose to do or not to do with the students. So, for me, it was a great excuse to experiment professionally with students in a way that was responsible, as opposed to a lot of the times I'm like, "I'm going to try that. Oh, damn, that didn't work. That's too bad.

AR felt experimental. However, it was not irresponsible. The process was designed to help teachers improve based on student feedback, so mistakes were meaningful. Mark put it this way during the interview:

Action research is taking the time to consider, so what am I going to do with my students? What will give me data that I can collect and that will be helpful for me. I use my classes as guinea pigs all the time, poor guys. Like, "I want to try out this new thing and I want to try out that, and get feedback from them on how it worked," but I think that's what teaching should be, is you're constantly trying to improve your practice, and so coming up with different ways to sort of get data and what to do, like what actual action I'm going to do that will be different, so I can get data and see what happened.

Anna answered in her way, "[AR] means learning about a facet of your teaching that you want to get better at by employing some new techniques, new skills, new approaches with your students." According to these participants, AR was learning about a specific part of your teaching through designed consideration (data collection and analysis) of how students respond to your professional practice.

Participants' Reported Learning After Becoming an Alum of SARP. In this section, we reported participant conceptions and applications since completing the program.

Participants Current Conceptions of AR. Fourteen participants agreed that the AR process started with identifying an area of interest, often in the form of a question on the PFF. Ebony typed in, “Action research is a process of in-depth inquiry of an area of interest.” Carly summarized what she learned of the AR process on the PFF:

Action Research is a method of inquiry where educators explore a question or idea that they think might impact their way of teaching and spend time researching the question or idea. They put the idea into practice and analyze it by collecting data.

When asked during the interview phase to define their current conception of AR, similar characteristics emerged among participants. Seven out of the 10 interviewees recalled four steps of the AR process, problem identification, literature review, data collection, and data analysis. In general, Thomas reflected, “Action research helps teachers become better informed through a more precise means of reflecting on work they’re already doing—and can then perform better.” Patty shared, “So, I believe it's when the teacher has a question and wants to try to figure out either why something's happening.”

In AR, this area of interest was essential and must be rooted in research. Chuck explained, “AR is grounding your idea in the information others have found before attempting it in your classroom.” The literature review became the guardrails to create your plan of action. Anna recounted:

AR is a process in which a teacher or researcher post a quest or hypothesis and go through the process of reviewing literature and developing a plan for data collection and then analyzing the data to reflect on his/her findings.

The plan was executed and revised in real-time as participants tested the action. Vincent highlighted, “Action research is professional development that works in real-time and that allows

teachers to see if and how their research works in the classroom.” Teacher change to become more effective with students was the aspirational goal of AR as PD.

Participants Voluntarily Applying SARP to New Problems of Practice. One essential part of mastery was being able to apply what we were learning in new situations. During the interviews, participants were asked to share their ideas for future AR cycles. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Carly shared that she completed her second cycle to arrive at useful conclusions related to her original AR question.

So, initially, I didn't take the big risk, and then I took it during COVID, so it's kind of an interesting thing how it worked itself out. I actually did it, and yes, it does work. And yes, my original Action Research question, I answered it this year, so they love the culture piece in the stories, and they love it.

Carly was the only respondent who acknowledged completing a second cycle to build upon her work in SARP. However, several examples were offered during the interview phase of teachers applying their findings to new problems of practice. For example, an elementary division alum noticed her students identified as builders but not as writers, so she paired construction activities with the writing process for her first AR cycle. Then she took the results from the first cycle and independently applied construction activities to mathematics as well.

On the contrary, Megan did her first cycle on an issue she was having in mathematics, but she would like to shift her focus to social studies in a future cycle. During our interview, she thought it through on the spot, wondering, “How others do project-based instruction within the guidelines of the national standards and ancient civilizations. So, that would probably be where I would look. With math, I'm feeling pretty good about how things are going.”

Anna believed she could take the AR cycle and apply it in a new instructional context. During our interview, she considered her first AR project as a band director and how a future AR cycle might be applied to her primary role as a music teacher.

It's kind of funny because band is a sideline of my job because every single day, I meet with my music students. Band is only two or three days a week depending on which group it is. I feel like I'd want to do something in my music classroom next time... I love teaching the music class because I get to know every boy in sixth or seventh grade, and I'm someone who likes to know everyone in the building, and be able to say hi, and call them by name and that kind of thing, so that was something I didn't realize I would just love as much as I do.

When asked about knowledge and the skills she was still using today, Patty explained:

I think better note-taking, which is important to think about when the boys are struggling. If I notice he's talking a lot more than he's writing, I can look back in my notes. That's helpful. And we know with parent conferences too, doing that helps. So better note-taking is a skill.

Participants learned various knowledge, skills, and processes during SARP, and much of this learning applied to different areas of interest and instructional roles.

Organizational Support and Change Related to SARP (Guskey Level 3)

The Summer Training Provides Time to Design the AR Project Before Implementation During the School Year. The instructional leadership team hosted summer training to design AR projects for the coming school year. The first question during the group interview was, “How effective is the initial training in the summer?” Judy deferred to Lilith, who described:

I think that it has been extremely effective because when our participants our researchers sign-on, they know that they have been interested in the theme, but most of them have not known how to develop a research focus, a research question. And so, we use that time to do a lot of rich discussions that helps them work together to fine-tune that measurable research focus. They might know what they want to do, but they might not have a strong understanding of how to measure it and what they want to measure. And so, I think the time together to collaborate, to brainstorm, and work on those research questions, one, is really important.

The summer training was essential because it was a specific time set aside to take participant ideas from an interest towards a research question. During the summer training, the AR process was laid out from start to finish to build a conceptual roadmap and set expectations.

On the PFF, Thomas said, “We had unencumbered time to commit to learning about the [AR] process.” Six participants valued the summer for training due to the uninterrupted time it provided. The life of a teacher during the academic term requires a daily rhythm, and Carly suggested that these teacher routines might inhibit growth and PD effectiveness. During the interview, she stated:

[Summer training] was not rushed like things are during the school year. I could fully focus on my ideas and start to develop a plan without being distracted by the daily preparations that have to take precedence during the school year.

During the group interview, Judy affirmed Lilith’s stance and seemed to be in touch with much of what the participants expressed:

I absolutely concur. I would add just from a logistical or pragmatic standpoint; I think part of what makes the summer training effective is the fact that it's in the summer. So

being removed from the busyness of the end of the school year. Once the team has been chosen, or from the beginning of the school year, folks need to focus on getting things ready for the boys to enter school. So I think having it as a summer training is especially effective to allow for focus and allow for really intensive work.

In addition to circumventing the competing demands of the school year, the summer training also provided an unhurried space. Three respondents used the phrase “not rushed” to describe the summer training on the PFF. In this more laidback environment, Katy shared that she “had time to really think about and reflect on my topic,” and Amber agreed, “we had time to discuss and ask questions.” This “jumpstart,” as Emily put it, set up cohorts to be more prepared to carry out their AR projects during the school year. However, it did come with a price. Patty expressed, “I did not like to have to plan my summer around this training so much; however, I knew what I signed up for.”

The Instructional Leadership Team Supports Participants by Providing Asynchronous Structure. SARP’s structure was model after the IBSC’s AR Team. Lilith was the program coordinator of the IBSC’s AR team. She also served as the head coach of SARP. Lilith explained:

I think having modeled this off of the way that we train with IBSC, and trying to put everything together, I do think as we evolved, we realized that some parts like data analysis could be more asynchronous... We had the luxury of all being together on the same campus.

Even though we were in the same geographic space, there was a limited amount of available time. Ebony stated on the PFF, “I would have enjoyed meeting more often, but it's hard to find a

time everyone has in common.” Therefore, SARP provided asynchronous structure from its inception.

SARP’s PD model was based on the IBSC; however, since its establishment in 2014, the program has had to develop distinct features that made it viable at St. John’s School. I attempted to summarize our position as an instructional leadership team, which emerged from the group interview.

It's an opportunity that we couldn't have any other time and the rhythms that our school has. And even though the structure is modeled after the IBSC, and there's some heritage there, we're evolving, and we're becoming much more contextualized. Does that seem to capture some of what we're saying here?

Lilith and Judy responded in the affirmative.

The primary forum for asynchronous communication between participants and the instructional leadership team was the research brief template, which was not an element of the IBSC program. The research brief template had three sections. The first section guided the participant through developing a research question based on their area of interest and the relevant literature. This section was given as an assignment from the summer training, and it was due the first week of September. The second section was on methods and ethical considerations. It was due in mid-October. The final section was on data analysis and putting those findings into practice. It was expected in late January. Each section had two or three questions, which participants answered in narrative form. The deadline associated was designed to keep the cohort on pace. Lilith reflected on using the research brief template:

No, we do not go in every action session; it's just not feasible for us to do that. But I do set the expectation. Where ones have not been as strong, it's when they are not detailed in

that research brief template prior. When I know a project is going really well, it's because I can see that the teacher has put thought into what they're doing and the action, and I've been able to have a discussion with them about it.

The research brief template was the primary tool used to inform one-on-one meetings between participants and their coaches. When asked on the PFF, “During the program, who did you discuss your project with?” Fifty percent of respondents mentioned Lilith by name as a primary discussion partner. Chuck said, “I worked closely with Lilith.” Lisa recalled:

During my research, Lilith provided ongoing support. My 2nd-grade team was very supportive and helpful as I shared ideas. I also utilized our Learning Commons team to help me find great books for the classroom and implement technology tools for sharing book recommendations.

Vincent posited, “Lilith was a fearless leader. [My administrator] let me take many hours with small groups of boys during many class days. [Lilith] was unbelievably generous with me filming and having others come in to observe etc.” To conclude, Ingrid included, “When Lilith came to observe my classroom, we were able to compare notes afterward.”

Therefore, the head coach role was valued by participants as indispensable to the success of the asynchronous structure. Lilith finished her train of thought with a consideration of the limitations of the research brief template:

When they don't fill that out, I don't really know exactly what's happened, and that's occurred, not often, but sometimes there have been one where that's stayed blank, and you just cross fingers and hope. But there's only so much you can do. So we do try to have expectations. Just like with the IBSC, that participants submit their plans so that we can help them. We can support them; help guide them and offer feedback.

Even though the instructional leadership team saw the research brief as the primary coaching mode, none of the participants mentioned the research brief template in any of the data sources. Instead, their focus seemed to be on two things: (a) the real-time availability of their coach, and (b) the resources and written instructions presented and shared with them during the synchronous meetings.

Beyond monthly meetings, the rest of their PD experience was asynchronous and independent. Therefore, based on participant feedback, the instructional leadership team provided adequate resources. Lisa said, “The team leading the presentation provided a wonderful Google Slides presentation that walked me through the process, and I could return to it later when I was in the middle of my research.” Ownership of the PD was demonstrated through asynchronous engagement. Regarding the Google Slide presentation, Megan extended, “I still use them today when I want to research an idea.”

Leadership Roles Are Unclear to the Participants. When the PFF asked if “the administrative team provided helpful support to me as I undertook my AR project,” 17 out of 20 respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. Two were in the middle, and one respondent strongly disagreed. On the affirmative side, Julian, a teacher in the Upper School, recalled how the structure worked during his participation year:

My recollection is that Dora was the program leader; Lilith and Mara offered critical support for locating articles. As Mara was then new in the Upper School, I directed my 'needs' to her and didn't really interact with Lilith much. Judy had a position of oversight, but I don't recall her doing much after we were first 'courted' and 'feted' in April & May of 2015 to agree to participate.

As stated in the previous section, much of the positive voice came because people generally liked and had adequate access to Lilith, the head coach. Megan commented on the PFF, “She always took my concerns seriously. Also, she never made me feel bad for asking for help.”

On the contrary, there were four written comments on the PFF, which made it apparent that participants did not have a clear delineation between the instructional leadership team and their administrator nor the roles of individual members of the instructional leadership team.

Ebony expressed, “One of the main team leaders worked nearby. She was always available to answer a question or help me when I was stuck.” Ebony might have been supported by leaders who understood this additional role, even though there was no formal connection to SARP. One delimitation of this study was how it only accounts for formal participant support systems built into the program design. It did not seek to understand all support a participant might receive from personal or professional relationships outside the program.

Therefore, it was not clear how the participants understood the titles and roles of the instructional leadership team. Julian observed, “My memory is poor here, and I don't recall the moniker of 'Coaches' being used.” Mark remarked, “Collecting data such as photos, videos were challenging while with the boys.” Typically, data collection was not an administrative responsibility in SARP, so this quote's connection to administrative support was unclear. He might have felt supported by leaders who understood this additional role their teachers were taking on each year.

In addition to the confusion, participants were generally optimistic about their division administrator. Sarah shared, “[My administrator] was very supportive and encouraging of my Action Research work,” yet some cited specific ways they would challenge the administration to

be more involved. Amber discussed administrative awareness and what it communicated to participants in the interview:

Not that I feel like they didn't respect our time, but it wasn't anything that administrators were doing wrong; I just think that they weren't as aware as they could have been, and I think that that has probably changed now as the Saints Action Research has become more of a thing since ours was so IBSC-focused. I do feel like there needs to be more collaboration and respect between the administrators and the teachers who take this on are doing it, not selfishly, but in an effort to help the school move forward. So there needs to be almost like a “thanks” for that by providing time and appreciation to the teachers who are willing to do that.

On the PFF, Karen spoke directly, “I felt my principal was enthusiastic about my representation on SARP. I don't recall much else ‘support’—nor was I looking for it or further validation.” During the interview, Karen was much more candid about wishing her principal had become more involved in understanding her project and the scope of the program's expectations:

One thing that I found disappointing was that... and I'm not sure I know how to fix this, but I just felt like... Tim didn't see my presentation, and he went to a different one, and I think I put that in the ... or at least mentioned it, in the survey you sent me. I feel like there's a disconnect, or at least there was when I did it. That may not be true now, but I feel like there's a disconnect between the work that we're doing and how it's actually ... I'm not sure Tony even knew what my question was or that I was even doing it, so I think that's a big sort of disconnect.

The participants wanted administrators to be generally supportive and aware of their investment in their development. Another concrete way teachers were requesting support from administrators was to have company time do this job-relevant work. Thomas explained the value:

The most effective thing that administrators can do it to provide time to participants, which as we all know is so difficult, especially in the Lower School. As Lower School teachers, we are so locked into our day. Middle and Upper school teachers often has afternoon commitments. I know we had meetings throughout the year to check in with one another, but how great would it be to have the opportunity to observe your colleagues research in action. That would make your collaborative group meetings so much more meaningful.

Based on the data set, participants saw administrators like those who indicated value by their physical presence, mental awareness, and structure of time in the building. Furthermore, there persisted evidence of confusion over who the instructional leadership team was and how SARP related to other administrators on campus.

Participant Conversation Partners During the AR Process. When asked on the PFF, “During the program, who did you discuss your project with?” Amber responded, “The entire Lower School faculty and staff, students at the University of Richmond, as well as teachers across the divisions.” This ideal experience was an outlier. Generally, four primary conversation partners emerged. First, participants in SARP talked to one another. Six out of 20 respondents input a statement on the PFF that was synonymous with “I discussed my project with the Action Research team.” This was the strength of a cohort model. Chuck responded to the survey about struggling to find his place and the courage he gained from the other participants. “There are so many resources available to teachers. I was reluctant to put my project in place, so the action

research team helped give me the courage to jump in with the new ideas.” This was the type of empowerment SARP aspired to provide for all teachers at St. John’s School. In fact, Megan recalled her cohort standing up the instructional leadership team:

The one thing I got really tickled was that in December, they said, "Well, this is really great, and we think you should present to parents, too." And, I'm like, "Whoa. That's not what I signed up for. Don't change the rules on me on the end." And, I think as a team, we pushed back.

This was a partnership and aspirational group identity development. However, others did not feel connected to the team:

I did not make much attempt to cross over with my SAR Team members (though we were encouraged to do so) simply because I rarely saw them and didn’t feel I knew any of them well enough that it would be organic to have a conversation about “my” project (which I was learning few colleagues outside of the AR Team, if any, really paid any attention to).

The second conversation partner was the other teachers who did not participate in SARP. Nine out of 20 respondents shared similar experiences as Anna, who said on the PFF, “my grade team was very supportive and helpful as I shared ideas.” I asked Megan in the interview about how she has been using her take-a-ways from SARP. She replied:

I don't know if I can attribute it straight to action research so much as to our peers have changed with whom is with the fifth-grade team, and we as a group have people on it who are more aware of the power of reflection.

During our interview, Patty shared with enthusiasm:

I do like; I think the time that you spend talking with a colleague and doing those things is the most beneficial because it really helps you solidify your ideas, you're thinking, hearing somebody else's perspective. I enjoy that. That's one of the reasons why I continue to do adjunct teaching because I like sharing what I know with others but then having them ask me questions. It helps me reflect. And I think that's something that keeps me fresh.

This was an ideal situation, but one alum stated that he only shared, “Little with anyone else—I did not feel I had a kindred spirit at [the school] who shared my interest or passion in this field.” He did not find a conversation partner.

One point of resistance Emily encountered when attempting to share her AR project, was the nervousness that accompanied her public speaking.

I was very nervous about (presenting) in front of my peers. They were so kind and so supportive that it's only good memories on this side of it. I know... I know I was nervous, and I know I was uncomfortable with it, but such wonderful support from everyone that what I'll... My only takeaway is very positive.

Emily faced her fears. In the end, she was received. However, another colleague experienced a linguistic barrier that was immutable.

Ingrid, for whom Spanish is her primary language, also spoke in the interview about the anxiety that came with trying to share her AR project before a group of peers. She disclosed, “I feel very insecure when I'm in front of grownups and talking to a panel or presenting an idea the whole time, checking my pronunciation, and I can see the faces that they don't know what I'm saying.” Ingrid was frank about her linguistic obstacles to finding professional conversation partners. She continued, “A lot of times, people try to be very polite, but a lot of times, people

it's like, 'Just say if I messed up. A TH, or an S, or whatever.'" Within a well-mannered work environment, Ingrid did not have many people who were direct in acknowledging her accent and the barrier it created for their comprehension. Instead, they attempted to conceal their misunderstanding, which Ingrid was familiar with detecting. Her discomfort was only made worse when presenting to a group of her colleagues. "If I'm nervous, I tend to speak even faster, making it harder for the person receiving the information to process." Many people felt anxiety connected to public speaking; however, language, an essential component of culture, can become a barrier to participants feeling engaged with a colleague about their study.

The third type of conversation partner was the librarians. "I also utilized our Learning Commons team to help me find great books for the classroom and implement technology tools for sharing book recommendations with students," Ingrid added during our interview:

I know that they showed us the website and where to find all the articles that we would read, and we discussed what action research is. And I have a very brief memory of trying to connect action research to my graduate work. So college worked a little bit different back home... I went to school for business, so my thesis was on procurement in the oil industry, how the process of procurement works and how effective it was. So I know that it doesn't have to do a lot with the actual action research that I did. Still, it was that mental process of like; I have a question. I need to read about it. I got to figure out what other people did before me and other research, then try to come up with some data, analyze the data, and come up with a conclusion or findings, or what I discover, or a better process for this.

Librarians were essential to SARP because two out of four SARP instructional leadership team members also served the school as librarians. Five participants admitted to struggling to complete their literature reviews and needed their professional assistance. Lilith stated:

These teachers are not writing dissertations. We have not asked for even the IBSC where they're writing a pretty significant literature review. But this is something that they spend quite a bit of time doing. And so in our research brief, we have asked them to reference literature but not in... It's more about the overall, at least going there in the first place, and considering it, trying to teach them to go to the literature if they're curious about something. And again, I agree with Judy; it's more of a process. It would take a really, really long time to pick your research focus, and then people spend months going through the literature as the prior. And this is small scale.

Even though it was small-scale research, basic conformity to the APA style guide became a barrier for participants. Lilith disclosed the need place upon librarians to step in and assist with the writing revision process.

The APA referencing, which for many is completely foreign. Because typically even in their... Depending upon what they majored in, many are still in the MLA, if they're teaching in our upper school. So that whole referencing is a challenge for them. And that is something that you could spend weeks going through. So you can give them the resources, but I find that's something that we end up helping them with quite a bit in just editing it.

Lilith also recalled the positive influence of the literature review to change an AR project focus.

The literature definitely can help them change direction as well. Because once they... And it depends on the researcher, but those who are passionate about their ideas, and really

dive in and start reading study after study, I've seen direction change based on that as well, which is a good thing.

The fourth conversation partner was the IBSC. Each year one participant in the IBSC's AR program was also a part of the SARP cohort. These participants had added responsibilities and expectations imposed by the IBSC; however, they also had an advisor and an international team of teacher-researchers with whom they were in regular contact. On the PFF, Amber cited her IBSC advisor as a person with whom she discussed her work. Katy contributed, "I worked on the IBSC research program, as opposed to the Saints Action program, so I would imagine that my collaboration was on a global scale while others' were within our own community."

Lilith would like to share the benefits of international partnerships with future cohorts of SARP:

But one of the things that we said with our new cohort is we want to maximize our international relationships. And I think there's room, whether it's people who have already been through our program and previous IBSC researchers who understand the foundation of action research. Still, perhaps they embark on a project together. If we had a way to pair teachers with similar interests and curiosities about their discipline or boys and have them conduct parallel projects. So there are opportunities there as well.

Beyond the program design and organizational support structure of SARP, participants identified other stakeholders they were connecting with and utilizing as a soundboard for their projects.

Participant conversation partners were also an example of how participants ascertained new knowledge and skills (Guskey Level 4). However, since it emerged from the Group Interview, it was placed here to adhere to the design of the study outlined in Chapter 3.

Use of New Knowledge and Skills by Participants (Guskey Level 4)

Levels 4 and 5 of Guskey's PD model were addressed in part by each of the four data collection tools designed in this study. However, not all data sources bore equal weight. For all the reasons stated in the methodology chapter, privilege was given to the ten participant interviews. Reasons included their recent participation with similar programmatic structures, supports, and expectations. I analyzed the participant interviews with triangulation from the PFF, document review, and group interview to arrive at the following themes. Level 4 was split into participant knowledge of AR (4A) and their commitment to using the AR process (4B).

Participant Knowledge of AR.

AR is Best Practice. Each interviewee was asked, "Based on your understanding, how do you do action research?" Anna stated, "It was an effective way to affect change in my teaching." Many respondents saw AR as effective PD. Further, a best practice is an approach or framework that these teachers have generally accepted as superior to alternatives because it produces results, in this case, with students. Ingrid said, "It allowed me to analyze the best practices for teaching a world language." Carly affirmed, "I learned a lot about how to engage students more effectively." Anna compared AR as PD to other PD she had experienced in her 32 years at St. John's School:

Okay. I didn't know what action research was, but I've been someone who's always loved professional development in any form. They used to send the whole school, all the faculty to a [Virginia Association of Independent Schools] conference, and we would all go downtown to the convention center, and we would all sit through the different things and take the bus down, it was a whole thing. So many teachers were complaining about it, and they're not getting anything out of it. I'm like, "I'm a band director; if I can get

something out of it you can get something out of it." Nothing applies specifically to music, every now and then, they'd have a really good music or arts-focused thing, but it's just all about being a better teacher, not your subject but just being a better teacher. I think action research actually was a better professional development for me because I could make it music-focused, or even better make it band-focused, which was really valuable.

In all, when asked directly about the goals of SARP on the PFF, 13/20 respondents mentioned using research to improve one's instructional practice.

AR has two components that emerged from the data, which made it a practical approach to PD. There was research and implementation, and both occurred within the community. Megan expounded during the interview:

One of the goals of SARP is to help colleagues analyze the best pedagogy for teaching boys. Another goal is to create an opportunity for colleagues to connect with each other and grow professionally. Probably the most important goal is to help educators create a mindset of Action Researchers as they prepare modules (units of study).

First, consider the role of research. On the PFF, Emily commented, "I enjoy doing research in my classes to be a better teacher." Lisa "enjoyed reading academic articles and other research similar to my AR." Other participants found the research process grounding for vetting their plethora of ideas. It also gave them access to potential outcomes before testing them in the classroom. Patty affirmed in our interview, "you read what other people have said and done and then try out some things in your class."

Second, AR was about implementing an action that the teacher has researched ahead of time. Todd conceptualized AR implementation this way:

Well, I saw it as, it was researching the boys in real-time, in class, during the school year, with a target in mind, but you didn't know if they were going to respond to the content you were giving them. So the action was this material presented by the teacher in a classroom setting. How did the boys actually receive it? You could track it in real-time, across time. They didn't know it was coming, so they hadn't... It's going to be the acid test in a lot of ways.

Carly said AR was learning if a particular intervention worked for the boys you teach. AR was “Having an idea that something could work in the classroom, and then putting it into action, and then trying to analyze it and see if it actually worked.” Many educators who had never heard of AR related to this plain phrasing.

A sense emerged from the data that AR was simply what effective teachers did, whether or not they had formal knowledge of the AR framework and the step-by-step methodology. In a more communal and casual sense, Ellie reflected, “We are all action researchers, whether we articulate the titled or not. Try a strategy. Notice what did/didn't work for your students. Reflect. Adjust strategy. Try again.” In the interview, she went into more detail:

We should all be action researchers in our classrooms all the time. As we read books and articles, or attend professional developments, I think we naturally think about what tangible ideas or lessons we can bring into the classroom. Action research helps you to be intentional and reflective in those best practices.

Some alumni felt they had internalized the AR framework in a manner that felt comfortable for them. However, this posed a challenge to the instructional leadership team. Lilith explained during our group interview:

I tend to see researchers come in wanting to change the world with their projects. And so it's too big. And this is a small-scale research project, and we're trying to teach them that this would hopefully continue, as they... Action research is cyclical, and so this is one iteration of their study. And so, I think when I see changes, they may have had to narrow their focus a bit, or maybe they wanted to measure two or three behaviors, and they've had to decide to focus on one, just one. And sometimes, another part of the action, or any research, is it feasible?

Patty felt this tension as a participant:

For me, the collecting data part is the part that I think I'm still, I guess, not as strong in that part. I guess it was hard trying to do that, and Lilith and I talked a lot. I think I tried to do too much when I was doing this. I was trying to do this and then collect data, and I overwhelmed myself, and she pulled me back and really helped me with that.

SARP was a small voluntary program, and it aspired to equip teachers to become the educators who conduct research to improve their instructional practice as described by Ellie. However, this was a highly involved process that could become overwhelming, as in Patty's experience. To help with both, Amber argued that this process needed to be formalized into a step-by-step framework that practitioners could repeat as a best practice.

I think without that formalized process, you're going to skip a step. You're going to miss something that is an integral part of action research, and I think the moment you leave one piece out, the data collection becomes completely unusable. So, while we often think that we're doing it naturally in our classrooms, and we very much are to an extent, I think when it comes to formal research, each part is essential. So, if you try to do it naturally

and leave something out, I just don't think that your data collection can actually be used the way you want to. So, I think it is important to use the steps.

To the alumni of SARP, AR felt like something they understood. Although, they may have internalized it, a reliable method was exercised with fidelity to the framework provided during training. There was little evidence from the data to suggest that alumni were practicing the four-step AR process.

For Participants, the AR Process is More Important Than the AR Model. The word “process” was used 64 times on the PFF by eighteen of the participants. More than displaying knowledge of Mills’s (2007) four-component framework of AR, alumni spoke about the process they underwent. Denise phrased it this way on the PFF, “The training was very helpful, but I also think I learned as I went through the process.” Todd clarified that the experience of SARP was best understood not as a one-off experience but as an iterative journey. Todd commented, “The process was broken in steps, and I did not feel overwhelmed with all the information about the research and the process.” The goal of SARP training then was to lay out the steps of the process so that participants had accurate parameters for their AR project.

Throughout hosting five cohorts, the SARP instructional leadership team evolved in how they assisted participants in navigating this PD opportunity. Julian, from the first cohort, recalled:

Having been in the first AR group, everyone was still getting his/her feet wet and discovering what needed to be done. I needed a little more direction regarding the available tools and how to use them to locate previous research that I could synthesize with and use to direct my work.

Judy, the program director, shared her insights on the importance of being patient with the participants and the program more broadly because the refinement process takes time. SARP was too temporally constrained to reach an aspirational depth of proficiency within the research process.

I feel like my experience was learning how to do a literature review and use scholarly research and empirical studies to inform practice. That's something that, as a professional and as a grad student, I learned over time. I really feel like in order, just like we would with youth in terms of educating them, I feel like that has to be considered over a much lengthier amount of time and guidance.

One measure of mastery was the ability to transfer knowledge. When asked on the PFF if “I could teach a colleague how to undertake action research in their classroom.” Six out of 20 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. This was 30%. When given a chance to explain, some appeared reticent that the instructional leadership team would be asking them to sign-up or commit to training other teachers. Three were delighted to support to any degree necessary, and others arrived at the conclusion that with a quick refresher, they would be confident to explain the concepts and process.

This revealed a pool of trained professionals within our school who stand ready and interested in engaging their colleagues. However, there was also an unease with that proposition. Katy stated, “It has been a few years since I went through the formal process, and the ability to develop a question still makes me apprehensive.” Whether or not a crash course could alleviate a majority of these types of alumni concerns remains unseen. However, there was a desire among alumni to share or spread this process among their colleagues. However, as reported, Amber stated previously, “I think without that formalized process, you're going to skip a step. You're

going to miss something that is an integral part of action research, and I think the moment you leave one piece out, the data collection becomes completely unusable.”

Although participants claimed the process was the priority, when asked on the PFF how they’ve continued to use AR since completing the program, 50% of respondents explained activities they have continued to operate. These activities were part of their plan of action during their participation year. They were tested and found to produce the desired effect with students, so many alumni have spent their time since the program repeating this same action plan with new students. Anna explained, “I continued the gamified approach for the next year with middle school, then used it one year with my lower school beginners.” AR for many alumni then had become something static and recyclable rather than dynamic exploration of new problems in their practice. Further, two alums were honest in stating that they have not done any action research since completing their cohort.

Participant Commitment to using AR.

To What Degree are Program Alumni Continuing to Use AR. Action research was theoretically designed to be cyclical. Ebony, an alum from the second cohort of SARP and a teacher of 15 years’ experience at St. John’s School, stated, “My action research continues to inform my teaching still.” When asked on the PFF if Action Research is relevant to their professional responsibilities, 18 respondents strongly agreed. One veteran teacher punctuated, “We need to keep learning new skills as teachers. My approach to my students now is very different than it was 30 years ago.” As an open-ended response on the PFF, Vincent appreciated, “AR is relevant and integral to one’s current instruction.” Concretely, Patty added, “Beyond writing, I began to reflect and consider other places in the curriculum where I could thoughtfully integrate building activities.”

During the document review of the “Putting Findings into Practice” section, all ten participants decided to maintain the change they made to their instructional practice through SARP. Karen wrote, “I will continue to build our parents and students into the [Global Online Academy] community by having a meeting with parents at Parents’ Night. I will also gather the boys regularly to connect and share best practices for success.” Megan, a teacher of 20 years, also shared ideas to take on another cycle of AR. She said, “Having the boys use positive, supportive vocabulary with each other is a theme I will build upon and continue to incorporate into daily instruction.” Finally, Carly submitted, “It would be interesting to do a similar study with other students to see if similar observations and results are obtained.” Reading these comments before conducting participant interviews enabled the emergence of this theme.

This study considered the use of AR beyond the year of SARP participation. On a separate survey question, this train of thought continued. Thomas stated, “The goal of SARP being to help teachers explore PD in an active, in-depth, and long-term manner that can be shared with others.” One veteran teacher realized that the discipline of reflection could have varied applications for teachers. “The process of being increasingly reflective about something I had already been doing for many years made me realize how valuable the AR process is for the instructor—and can be channeled in so many different ways.” This revelation was foundational to keeping teachers engaged in the AR process once their PD training was complete.

The PFF asked, “Since completing my first action research project, I have used the AR process at least one other time.” Thirteen out of 20 respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. However, six disagreed or strongly disagreed. Of those who disagreed, four wrote comments explaining that they did not conduct AR. Each of those four had volunteered to participate in some form of PD to improve their practice. Karen shared, “I do occasionally do

research, and last summer I did three weeks of Global Online Academy classes, which involved a lot of independent work, but it was not AR.” Chuck pointed to other PD opportunities.

I wouldn’t say that I used the AR process in its entirety, but I can think of two specific times where I have definitely used those skills learned to be reflective and intentional in my classroom. Those were after attending a Guided Math professional development and the People of Color Conference.

SARP alumni engaged portions of the AR process like Chuck, but none demonstrated a structured AR cycle. Instead, many were like Vincent, who commented, “I consider the process constantly!” Out of the interviews came compelling stories of alums borrowing parts of the AR framework and integrating them into their professional toolkit. For example, Ebony mentioned using the processes of data collection and evaluation consistently in the classroom. Perhaps the best example came from a high school teacher. Julian shared:

Every year, and in a more concise and articulate version than before my SAR project, I have become a big fan of having the boys help hold themselves accountable for their short-term goals. Our doing so has increased the positive team chemistry.

Lilith, the head coach of the program, affirmed this type of piecemeal use of the AR process:

I mean their overall objective, obviously, is to teach the whole boy, and be present for the boy through their content, and the social-emotional development, and whatnot. And so, it just seems where you can take parts of the research process and again integrate that into the day. A structured continuous research project for everything you do is demanding, and there's not enough time.

Unfortunately, the first step in the process to be dropped by alumni was the literature review.

Chuck gave powerful insight into why that might be:

The outside research part was a little confusing. I didn't know how to access the research I needed, and then once I'd finished reading it, what the team really wanted me to do with that information. I knew how to use it to guide my research once I found it, but at the time, there was no other directive revolving around the outside reading, so it felt a little loosey-goosey.

Judy represented the instructional leadership and weighed in to offer a reason for participants finding the literature review to be a struggle:

To have folks go to the literature and then come back and discuss much like I think we're going to be doing now with the new program of Saints Research fellows. But I just think it's really, really hard for folks to wrap their heads around what it means to use scholarly research in order to inform their practice. Because the other piece is so much easier to grab the article, the blog post, or the podcast. It just makes so much sense and is presented in a user-friendly way. I think it takes a lot of time and practice to dissect and understand a 12-page empirical article.

AR did not end after your SARP participation year. Chuck stated, “the process of going through action research created new questions and discoveries.” Vincent agreed, “as you research, you end up with more questions.” These new questions could then be taken independently by SARP alumni and used as new action plans.

SARP Transition Their Instructional Practices in the Classroom From Intuitive to Intentional. Once again, it was emphasized by the majority of respondents on the PFF that AR was what good teachers did. However, how intentional does the AR need to be to hold value for participants? In the open-ended section of item seven of the PFF, Mark wrote, “I understood that AR would formalize many elements of what my ‘gut’ instinct had told me to do with my

students. (I was surprised how much more I learned by going through the process).” Ellie echoed, “I learned an immense amount about action research. I think the biggest lesson I learned was about being very explicit and clear about my instructional practices and teachings to the boys.”

AR as PD provided a structured approach to selecting and implementing instructional practices. It formalized and rooted what many practitioners already found intuitive. Therefore, intentionality was about more than helping teachers visualize what they are doing. And it could also help students see what their teacher was up to as well. Via the PFF, Julian shared an important lesson:

I was shocked how little transfer there was to what the guys actually knew and understood by my ‘old’ methods. When I began asking them directly to explain what they understood about the process (whereas I had kept shepherding them in years prior as I had helped them shape/set their goals).

Not only did SARP help best practices become explicit rather than implicit for both teachers and students. It also narrowed the focus to a particular problem of practice so that teachers could consider making changes. Katy offered in the interview:

I loved the idea of intentionality and focused on one action item. Sometimes as teachers we can get caught up in the whole picture (as we should in many cases). Action Research allowed me to really hone in on a skill I was interested in learning more about.

Four participants mentioned this notion of adjusting one variable in a significant category at a time. Megan indicated in our conversation that AR was grounded in having an authentic question that centered on the boys’ learning and only altering one variable of her professional practice at a time. She advised, “Be intentionally reflective about the process/art/science of teaching &

coaching—deep enough into the process that you can make an informed decision about adjusting with the ultimate purpose of improving your craft and command of the content & delivery.”

This scientific approach to teaching allowed educators to observe their impact on students and make minor adjustments. However, this type of classroom-specific PD was not without its drawbacks. Lisa indicated, “While MOST interest was positive, I perceived there to be some negative energy, as what I was doing was different from my grade-level colleagues.” Lisa observed a reduction in her relational capital among her grade-level team. She believed this was because, for the participation year, she did something different from the group. Affiliation with SARP caused her to stand out, but not in a way that was solely affirming. SARP was structured for individual AR projects, and a teacher only selected one of their assigned sections to collect data on, even if they teach multiple sections of the same course. This meant the treatment or action was small and relatively isolated. The program did not account for these consequences at the department or grade level, which is an opportunity for improvement since one of SARP’s aspirations is to contribute to a teacher research culture at St. John’s School.

AR as PD is One Among Many Effective PD Options. When asked if “Action research is an effective means of professional development for me.” Sixteen out of 20 participants strongly agreed. This was the largest collection of strong affirmation responses on the PFF. The number one explanation offered by respondents in the comment box was the ability to choose the focus of their PD. Thomas articulated a representative response, “Again, I appreciate that I was permitted the flexibility and autonomy to choose my SAR project.” Sarah affirmed, “Absolutely! The choice and focusing on a topic that had meaning for me was very effective.”

More precisely, AR as PD was defined at St. John’s School to be a method to target a particular idea of interest. Sarah narrowed, “I learned a lot in a specific area that is important for

teaching the age group of my students.” AR at St. John’s School was seen as a guided process to address an area where the participating teacher felt a need. Anna disclosed, “I needed to find new ways to motivate band members to practice.” Patty, after over 20 years of teaching literacy, was seeking how to become more effective.

I’ve always had a love of teaching reading and pursued my master’s degree in that area. I knew the importance of providing choice for my boys, but I needed to find a way to make that independent reading time more effective.

The PFF also asked if “Action research helps me explore important ideas relevant to my professional practice as a teacher.” All 20 respondents agreed with this statement, and fifteen strongly agreed. This was where the knowledge of AR (4A) and the commitment to it (4B) coalesce. Megan pointed out, “This strikes me as a fundamental tenant of the purpose of AR.” Karen owned the AR process, “Since I did my AR, I had a couple other questions/hypotheses that I have researched using the AR framework.” SARP presented a recipe that professionals may pull from at their discretion.

One person disagreed about whether AR was effective PD for them, adding an enriching perspective on AR as PD. “Very effective, but also very time-consuming. It’s not something I can see myself doing on a consistent basis, but rather when I have a problem to solve or a question to chase.” Perhaps this was what AR as PD was in this context. It was a tool teachers could use to address problems of practice rather than something that consistently spirals, interweaving into teacher practice.

It was important for this study to gauge how AR as PD measured up to other forms of PD. When asked on the PFF if they preferred AR above other types of PD, the results were significantly undecided. Sixty percent of respondents selected a three on the rating scale, the

highest in this category out of the entire survey. It was significant to say that no respondent disagreed, and when asked, Amber offered insight.

I can't say I agree with this. I enjoy variety in my PD experiences, particularly opportunities to talk to people in roles similar to mine outside our school. Unless one is selected to the IBSC AR position, the [SARP] experience is more insular.

Some respondents liked workshops and seminars; others, like Amber, noted the enjoyment of attending conferences and interacting with a broader community of educational thinkers.

Two interview participants agreed that PD should not be viewed in a competitive relationship. Emily reconciled, "AR in conjunction with other types of PD is best. I would never want to limit PD to AR only—too exhausting!" In a slightly nuanced manner, Mark considered how other types of PD might drive an AR project. He offered, "I have found that professional developments can often provide a spark that can lead to Action Research in the classroom. I think they go well together and are both important." Chuck summed it up, "I do enjoy and appreciate AR; however, I think it's an appropriate complement (not replacement) for other professional development activities." AR then can be a next step taken by PD-inspired faculty to act out or test what they have learned, making it a welcome addition to the professional learning toolkit.

Participant Perceptions of Student Learning Outcomes (Guskey Level 5)

The fifth level of evaluation considered participant perceptions of student learning outcomes. According to Guskey (2000), for teachers to change, they needed to see results with their students. Julian asserted, "my SAR Project has definitely strengthened and improved what I do and how I work my students and players. Because it was already something I was passionate about, the crossover effect was immediate." When asked open-endedly on the PFF, "How did

AR impact or not impact your students?” There were 17 positive written responses, two inconclusive responses, and one negative response.

On the positive end, Vincent remarked, “Throughout the year, I used the same techniques to encourage kind behavior from the boys.” Anna expanded her application of using point systems to motivate students to practice their band instruments. “I have used different forms of gamifying in my classroom since my project, and it does help motivate the middle schoolers.” For Katy, the timing could not have been better. She reflected, “I’m still doing project-based learning, especially during the pandemic!” During her time at St. John’s, Emily began to have student outcomes inform her goal-setting work. To summarize, Ebony typed in a general affirmation, “I use what I learned all the time in my classroom.”

One of the two inconclusive comments stated, “A few students practiced more. I think those students were already motivated to do well.” The second comment emphasized the same limited impact but in a different tone. “Three families sent emails to me at the end of the year sharing some of the changes they saw in their son’s attitude about math.” Taken literally, it seemed generally positive, but it was not clear how the remaining students were impacted.

The negative response stated, “I am unsure how much my AR project impacted my students due to the fact that I never introduced it in a classroom.” This one respondent had a negative experience with the program because their role was one-to-one tutoring. The program was structured for classroom teachers, so I speculated that this alum had a hard time applying much of the training to their work based on the data reviewed. Simultaneously, they never sought help during or since the program to adapt AR to suit their professional context. Aside from that outlier, many of the respondents had positive examples of AR developing self-confidence as

writers, empathy in collaboration, love of reading, and much more in the boys of St. John's School.

AR as PD Changes Teachers. The PFF asked to what degree “students, at the time, benefited from my use of Action Research.” Thirteen out of 20 participants strongly agreed. Many of these, as Guskey indicated, changed how they worked with students as a result. Lisa connected, “I do think our Book Talks encouraged an interest in reading, and I continue to carry many of those ideas and skills learned through my action research in my classroom today.”

What was noteworthy here was that AR as PD was not about giving teachers activities. Instead, it was about coaching teachers through a process that they owned and were empowered to replicate. Katy explained it well combining her knowledge of AR (4A) and her commitment to it (4B) to yield application to her daily duties as an educator. “I continue to consider the PROCESS of action research and apply it to our lesson planning. I am constantly reflecting, “What worked?” “What didn't?” “Who did this lesson work (or not) for?” “Why?” “What one variable can I change that will make a positive difference?”

Teacher change happened through AR as teachers yielded to the needs of the students in their context. Lisa agreed, “Action research is the willingness to listen and observe your students and then acting on what you see/hear to improve your instruction.” During her interview, Megan shared a quintessential story of what SARP was initially designed for teachers to partner with students to achieve learning outcomes. I asked, “How did you arrive at your study topic?” She replied:

I stumbled upon some different ideas about growth mindset, particularly with Boaler. Jo Boaler writes on the power of mindset and how that can affect how students perform...

I'd had a boy who really was down on himself as a math student. He was like, "I don't do

this." I mean, he was like, very clear. You know? So, this is a 10-year-old announcing, "This is not me. I don't get it. I will do what I need to do to stay afloat. But I don't like math. I truly don't like math." It was a very visceral, very strong reaction. I was always trying to figure out how can I change his perspective on things?

Megan did not simply observe pessimism in a student. She was curious about it. And because she was already engaging with research to inform her practice before joining SARP, she knew academic support for this student did exist, even if she didn't have access to it at this stage.

Megan continued:

They announced the new action research topic, and they talked about stories. I was like, okay. The question for me became how I take what they're asking for and reframe it so I can get the support and the resources and the opportunity to do action research on the question that's bothering me... This boy has a story about how he views math. Let's see if we can rewrite the story. That was how I took it, which was not how I think it was originally intended.

Megan did not let the annual theme or assumptions about what the instructional leadership team intended to inhibit her from addressing the question she had about one student. This was even more surprising because she applied in April, and she would not start SARP until the following academic term. Therefore, Megan joined SARP more than to help that student. The struggle of that student led her to take an initial step toward becoming a more effective teacher.

Megan concluded by sharing a tip on how she helped students who displayed a fixed mindset.

The incorporation of and the power of such a simple word as yet. So, when a boy says, ‘I don’t get it.’ And, we go, ‘Yet.’ So, vocabulary has continued to be one area that has been a thread woven through to today.

Megan’s change in the words she speaks in the classroom is impacting the experience of students who struggle in her classroom. AR as PD has the potential to change teachers’ professional practices.

AR as PD is Student-Centered. Eight out of 20 participants selected their area of study for SARP based on what they believed would benefit their students. Traditional PD focused on giving workers information and skills to make them more effective in their roles. However, some teachers put the people they were investing in at the forefront of this PD decision. Patty answered:

I selected my study by watching and listening to my boys. They love to build, and I heard them repeatedly tell me how much they didn’t want to write. I began to wonder if I could positively motivate them to write by integrating a more positive (preferred) activity. Also, Ingrid felt “the boys were spending more time looking for books than they were reading and enjoying them.” According to alumni, helping students overcome an observed struggle motivated teacher participation in SARP.

Further, the decision to make their PD student-centered also led teachers to make the learning more student initiated. Emily illustrated, “I learned to listen more to the voices of my students. I thought I was doing so beforehand, but my AR really helped me evolve more from the “Sage on the Stage” position to a learning coach approach.” Amber agreed, “SARP definitely forced me to collaborate with my students instead of teaching to them at all times.”

Not every SARP participant sought this path. Many opted to participate in the program due to their academic interests, experience with AR in graduate school, or curiosity about the annual theme. These were valid, but they are missing the student relationship. Anna stated, “the biggest tool that I use in my classroom is storytelling, so the year that the theme was storytelling, it made logical sense for me to be a part of that study.” This would be a teacher-centered PD because there was no indication of how students experienced storytelling in the classroom. The SARP instructional leadership team has an opportunity to determine what ought to drive teacher participation.

During the group interview, I asked the instructional leadership team, “How do we know that participants implement their action plan with fidelity?” Lilith began:

Well, other than observations we... So the research brief template is where we have dates where certain things are due at certain times, and that's an opportunity for us to get a sketch of what it is that they intend to do. And if it is not detailed enough, then we have a chance to have a conversation, commentary alongside the Google Doc. I love seeing focus group interview questions, survey questions prior. It is not something that we make them do, but we strongly encourage, and many times researchers will send me, "How does this survey look?" And it allows me to make sure that they are collecting data that relates to their question.

Her initial pause was of interest to this study because parents sign consent forms for a specific project to be administered with their child. However, can we verify that what was proposed is faithful to what students are experiencing? Laura continued wrestling with the question by acknowledging a delimitation of the program:

No, we do not go in every action session. It's just not feasible for us to do that. But I do set the expectation. Where ones have not been as strong, it's when they are not detailed in that research brief template prior. When they don't fill that out, I don't really know exactly what's happened, and that's occurred, not often, but sometimes there have been one where that's stayed blank, and you just cross fingers and hope. But there's only so much you can do.

Judy declined to answer, saying, "I don't have anything to add to that. That was great." However, as I moved the conversation forward, Lilith arrived at what she felt should motivate teachers to participate in SARP:

The researchers capture the boys' voices through video. Because again, this is qualitative research. That shows that they've been doing the action because the boys are telling you. And that's one of the best ways to offer validity when they're saying, "Well, I did this, and this is how I..." Then they're showing that. That's proof right there. So we always encouraged boys' voices, boys' voices, boys' voices.

Judy, a program lead, did choose to contribute a complimentary comment at that time to build upon Lilith's remarks. Judy added:

In terms of evidence of effectiveness, or what we know from what the boys experience, I think the teachers over the years have done a really beautiful job, which is providing work samples. So whether that's photographs, or writing samples, in addition to things like focus groups and surveys, I think when we can see the products of the boys have created, whether that's creating a story, or whatever it may be, I think that's always a great indicator of what the boys have really experienced, or what they've gained.

To be student-centered meant that students have a voice. For students to have a voice, a teacher listened and facilitated spaces where students were also invested in hearing from one another.

Since completing SARP, Ellie has been in a new role as a community and inclusion coordinator on our campus. After teaching at St. John's for 21 years, she earned this role by creating a new class co-taught upper school elective, "Richmond 2050." In our interview, she was nearly on a tangent when I asked her a follow-up question about compensation. She responded by sharing with me some of her student survey data from her new class:

I'd never heard of redlining. But what we did throughout the year is to superimpose the map of Richmond onto the redlining map, and we would find time and time again, "Oh, food deserts are a result of redlining?" "Oh, transportation desert where it's needed the most interesting." So, health issues, their biggest health issues are right here around, "Oh, the highways divided them. Oh, now everybody's breathing in carbon monoxide." Who lives in the [public housing] courts? "Oh, fantastic. Oh, redlined"

Ellie spoke with passion about a lightbulb moment she knew needed replication. This was putting students at the center of our curricular design. She concluded, "So the student survey I gave like I almost burst into tears I was just like, 'Thank God.' It's like, we got through to them that there's a hidden history, and we bared it for them to see in their own city." When I asked what was next for the course, she replied:

I'm meeting tomorrow so we can tweak it. Because I think the main thing we were missing was having guest speakers because we want to show the resilience of the people who live in these areas, who have overcome things that many of our students have not had to overcome. Although we have lots of students of all sorts of backgrounds who've...

had to overcome many hurdles, we can't forget that ever. So yeah, we're going to tweak it, and we'll move forward with that.

This teacher was investing her summer break into additional voluntary co-planning meetings so that her class could be more enlightening for the students.

When asked if their future student would benefit from their use of AR, 15/20 respondents strongly agreed. Five respondents decided to add a comment to clarify their response, and in this instance, no one was student-centered. Julian deposited, "As good teaching is a never-ending ascension, I hope I will continue to tweak, modify, and improve in my delivery of this content." Anna affirmed, "I have continued to try and use the oral storytelling as a prewriting strategy in my classroom, but not to the same extent as I did during the research phase." These were just two examples of teachers continuing to place themselves at the center of their AR. In AR, there was an emphasis on teacher actions; however, the goal of this question was to emphasize the benefits students received. Karen vented during our interview:

I think there are so many schools that are adapting their curriculum so that it's not like biology 101, it's like there are different ways of looking at biology so it can be more about what kids are interested in, and that's just one example. However, schools are doing that, and I feel like we're just still ... I mean, we teach a whole year of British literature, for God's sake. Is it 1965? I don't even know what to do with that.

There certainly could be many teachers who understood this and chose not to articulate it here; however, some teachers could use additional training on allowing student voice to inform professional decisions in the classroom.

Student Academic Enjoyment is the Primary Outcome Sought by SARP

Participants. As an educational institution, St. John's did not practice leaning on academic assessments or numerical data to measure student outcomes. Instead, student excitement and parent satisfaction were two elevated sources of affirmation of teacher practice. This was a minor theme that emerged through the analysis of a segment of the data.

Patty observed, “my students were enthusiastic about my AR goals and became far more eager to write and share what they wrote.” Anna affirmed, “The boys really enjoyed the AR and the stories, and they also really enjoyed when I shared the results with them of what I observed in class.” Finally, Amber shared, “three families sent emails to me at the end of the year sharing some of the changes they saw in their son’s attitude about math.” Megan mentioned towards the end of our interview:

The joy that they had with working together was amazing, and the problem-solving that they were doing was incredible. I thought, I would love that to be something that they do at least once a quarter, if not once a month, where they took those concepts and they looked at how they could apply it in a way that made math truly come alive for them.

Karen was an instructional technologist, and her AR project focused on an online learning platform available to upper school students. During our interview, she raised a concern about how the school course offerings and requirements did not always align with student interest:

We don't have enough space for boys if they're passionate about sometimes that isn't English, history like any of the five main ones. If those are what you're passionate about, then you're good, but if not, then it's always an add-on, and we wonder why we have trouble getting kids who are into the arts. I mean, if you know, you're going to come here, and it's not important enough that it can replace something else and you could actually

have a free period, that sends a message. That sends an unwritten... I guess it is written in the curriculum, but that sends a message that it's an add-on, that it's not important, and that it's something above and beyond what we think our experience should be.

None of the respondents mentioned students' grades or academic scores more broadly in terms of student benefit. In an interview, Emily elaborated on her qualitative findings.

The boys who participated ended the year as enthusiastic writers and viewed themselves as such. That felt like such a huge win. Now, it continues to impact my students yearly through our Spring multi-genre project. The boys have an opportunity to stretch their creative writing muscles around a topic that they really enjoy, and many of them say that it changes the way they feel about the writing process.

As observed by the teacher, positive student engagement had a strong correlation with student attitude towards learning. The more optimistic or extroverted the students presented in the classroom; the more learning is assumed to be occurring. This was especially true if these moments of enthusiasm made it home to be observed by a parent. Patty posited, "I like to think my AR impacted students. While the results were inconclusive, I love the discussion the boys were having and the respectful and kind manner in which they were collaborating."

One piece of data challenged this theme. Amber, in discussing her ongoing work with growth mindset, stated:

For lack of a better word, I've become much blunter with the boys, as far as talking to them. "This is something that comes easily to you, whereas this is not something that comes easily to you, and that's okay. That means that your goal for the thing that comes more easily to you is going to be a very different goal than for the other thing that doesn't come as easily for you." So, I've just realized over time that you can have those

conversations with these boys. They don't need to think that they're awesome at everything, and they shouldn't think that they're awesome at everything at this age. So, I think I have seen it change because I have just naturally done things a little bit differently in my classroom since then.

Amber found that she needed to challenge the ego of some of her students to make academic progress. She was focused on their long-term academic resiliency, but this was not to be viewed as opposed to student enjoyment. However, this piece of data was an outlier within this theme.

Evaluation Question 2

Evaluation question two was about the perceptions of program alumni and the instructional leadership team regarding the advantages and limitations of participating in SARP? All four data collection tools—a PFF, document review, a group interview, and participant interviews—worked together using the template analysis process to arrive at the following themes (see Tables E6, E7, and E8).

Advantages of SARP

According to participants, there were four advantages to participating in SARP. Anna concluded during our interview, “The Saints Action Research Program gives you confidence and a method for implementing new ideas.” As Anna indicated, some of the advantages of SARP are less tangible, such as confidence, collegial relationship, and the lessons gained from the choices participants make. However, other advantages were more concrete such as information on how to do AR or meeting with a mentor to ask questions which arose.

SARP Provides an Opportunity for Mentorship. The most popularly cited advantage of participating in the program was the relationship between the instructional leadership team and participants. The nature of this relationship was best characterized as mentorship. As

mentioned in this chapter, the primary person identified by the participants as the leader of the program due to their provision of the most direct support was Lilith, the head coach. When Katy reflected on her AR project and the mentorship of Lilith, she began, “Lilith was a fearless leader.”

Lilith was an informal mentor that gave participants a boost as they encountered an obstacle in the AR process. Ingrid remembered having difficulty selecting which stories to use in Spanish with her students, “So Lilith already knew that I was doing all this. So, she was the one like you're already doing it, let's get it.” Lilith affirmed what she saw in the work Ingrid was doing, and it helped her move forward. However, it was not a one-and-done moment. My follow-up question with Ingrid pivoted to focus on the limitations of the program. She responded with how Lilith employed a different mentoring skill to keep her, once again, on track:

My only negative is the time. So, during the second part of my action research, Lilith was like, "You don't have time for it." So, my first part, something like the folk tales that we hear in the United States... And then I wanted to try to branch out and use some folk tales that they were unfamiliar with from Spanish-speaking countries. We have some folk tales that I grew up listening to, which still had similar elements but to make it more cultural. We could compare and contrast, and Lilith was very honest since the beginning. She said, "You don't have time to do all this." You need to just cut it to this to be successful.

Because I only meet two times a week, and I had to have all my data by December. As previously stated in this chapter, Lilith spoke about using the research brief template as a pathway towards asynchronously tracking participant progress during the AR project. “The research brief template is where we have dates where certain things are due at certain times, and

that's an opportunity for us to get a sketch of what it is that they intend to do. And if it is not detailed enough, then we have an opportunity to have a conversation.”

Mentoring occurred not only top-down but also laterally. Katy indicated on the PFF, “The mentors were my colleagues, and they really support me in every step.” Vincent agreed, “The camaraderie and teamwork make the research more fun, and it’s easier to learn from others who are in the same boat.” Several colleagues have participated in other AR studies prior to this one, including in graduate and professional settings. This afforded newcomers to AR like Chuck “the general idea of what it was all about before participating.” It was to the advantage of SARP to have diverse cohorts’ representative of varied years of experience and prior knowledge with AR.

SARP Provides an Opportunity for Collaboration. Mentorship was cited as an essential advantage of SARP followed by collaboration. When asked directly about the advantages of participating in SARP, 50% of respondents mentioned the concept of teamwork via survey. Lisa highlighted, “Working with a team of your peers and learning with and from them are great advantages—growing and learning.” A version of the word “collaborate” appeared in the PFF open-ended section 11 times by nine of the twenty respondents. Many other respondents employed synonyms like “community,” “team,” and “group.”

In the previous section, we established lateral mentorship. By collaboration, we wanted to distinguish this by pointing out the emphasis in this theme on peer teachers, working together in groups, to build a sense of belonging amongst the team. As Patty succinctly put it, “The benefits of AR are getting to know colleagues and gaining knowledge that helped me become a better teacher.” Notice, Patty did not assume that getting to know her colleagues better would make her

a better teacher. The value of a cohort model was the opportunity for participants to transfer job-specific knowledge from one participant to another.

Carly felt something beyond the perfunctory transfer of knowledge and skills between colleagues. She recalled “professional growth and a sense of community.” This data was evidence toward one of SARP’s long-range goals of sustaining a teacher-researcher culture.

Prerequisite Knowledge is not Required to Participate in SARP, but it Helps. When asked in open-ended format on the PFF, “What did you know about Action Research prior to beginning the program?” There were three types of responses that emerged from the data. First, five respondents indicated that they knew a lot. Second, five respondents acknowledged knowing nothing about action research. Lastly, ten neither agreed nor disagreed.

To begin, five respondents claimed to know “very little.” One of them indicated on the PFF that a close colleague had completed the IBSC, stating, “I knew very little other than John Doe had done something with the IBSC (I think JT’s project preceded mine—my memory is foggy).” When I looked it up, John Doe had indeed been a member of the IBSC cohort in 2020, which was two years after the respondent had participated in SARP. Another respondent said, “I was not really sure what to expect, but thought it would be a fun process.” While this was a positive attitude, this respondent had no knowledge or skills for conducting research that would have helped them navigate the program.

When a faculty member applied to participate in SARP, there was no expectation from the instructional leadership team to have prior experience with an AR framework. Participants identified that AR centered around “real-time” learning from what you were already doing. According to Megan’s interview, “An advantage of participating in the Saints Action Research Program is that the research is based on your classroom practices.” Denise affirmed in her PFF

response, “Saints action research allows you the time to learn more about and implement something that is unique to your interests and your classroom.” While some participants reported an unfamiliarity with the framework for AR, many of them felt comfortable with their professional role in the classroom. Therefore, according to participants, you did not need to come to SARP with prerequisite knowledge or skills. Instead, a participant needed to bring an authentic professional curiosity. Ebony explained her conception of AR:

Action research, to me, is finding something that you are interested in developing or improving on in your classroom. What are you curious about? What questions can you ask as an educator? Then using that inquiry, you research that particular topic and find ideas you want to bring to the classroom. Implementing those ideas and observing, talking to, and allowing the boys to reflect and share on their learning as well.

Participants should have known coming in what they want to know about their professional practice with students.

Second, there were several folks who had completed AR projects before in university or other PD settings. They were like Amber, who established that she had participated in an AR study earlier in the interview. “I felt like I had a decent idea about what action research was just because it was such a big part of graduate school for me not long ago.” Karen went into greater detail about her prior experiences with AR in response to my question, “Do you recall when the first time was that you heard about action research? What that experience was?”

Yeah, the first one I ever did was my master's thesis at the University of Florida. My masters is in curriculum instruction with an emphasis on using technology in a K to 12 classrooms, the longest description ever, but for our final master's thesis, it was an action

research project, which I found really helpful because it was something that I could do in my practice.

The content and process of AR were more familiar to these participants. Karen continued confidently:

I did a really good job of collecting all the data and finding different ways to get data and all that kind of stuff, but then the actual like, "So now what do I do with it?" So that was really the first time I had coded any data or sort of pulled it that way, and I actually really enjoyed that part of it.

Consequently, the experienced participants described the summer training as a refresher. Amber stated, "I think one of the best parts of that first summer portion was them (the instructional leadership team) to layout in straightforward form what each specific step that was of action research."

Beyond a simple reminder, SARP also had a distinct set of expectations that were unique to the program. Karen went on to delineate her AR experiences:

I did the one as my thesis, which was a huge deal, and then the IBSC one is over a year and a half. It was a lot, so I felt like, for what we could do in the moment, it was the right amount of work based on the timeframe we had. Under the expectations, I felt like, in some ways, it's a smaller action research project, but I think it made sense for it to be that considering all the ... we want it to be approachable and applicable people are willing to do it, right?

SARP was described as the "shortest" and "least involved" version of AR experienced participants had conducted. However, the core elements that made it valuable seemed to remain

for Ellie. She saw it this way. “It helps you get a fresh look at how you are doing things, and you get to examine new approaches to how you are working in the classroom.”

Prior knowledge helped experienced participants with the framework and design of their AR project. However, it was not predictive of the study outcomes because AR is contextual, and results from previous projects are not intended to be replicated.

Finally, the largest group of respondents were somewhere in the middle. 50% of respondents to the PFF expressed some exposure to AR during their time as an educator for St. John’s School. Eight respondents specifically cited the projects and presentations of other SARP cohorts as sources of their exposure to and understanding of SARP. Mark said, “I had seen previous presentations by peer teachers and wanted to learn more.” Beyond SARP, the school maintained a culture of doing AR in the classroom. Vincent reflected, “I felt prepared and informed before I began the journey, and it helped that there was a practice of doing action research at the school.”

To conclude, one participant indicated engagement with AR within and beyond St. John’s School. Emily added on the PFF, “I was familiar with action research because I had some colleagues outside of the school and at [St. John’s] had participated in Action Research.” Therefore, while prior knowledge was beneficial, it was not a requirement, and SARP was designed as though a teacher has no prerequisite experience.

SARP Participants Make a Deliberate Choice to Become a Better Teacher.

Participants voluntarily applied for SARP. Julian hoped through the PFF, “I feel [SARP] has made me a better teacher & coach, has deepened my interest in the field of motivation and stoked my fire for more teaching & coaching (an element I’m hoping was not lacking beforehand).” The SARP alumni, as a group, were proud of their participation. Chuck submitted, “One advantage of

participating in the AR program is to learn about yourself working in a group and learning from peer teachers.” Everyone in SARP wanted to be there. If not, they often opted to discontinue within the first month of the school year. This had happened during three of the five cohorts; however, the instructional leadership did not document those names nor complete exit interviews to understand why potential participants discontinued the program.

The majority of the alumni from SARP recalled deciding to apply based on a connection they made between their relationships to students and the annual theme presented by the instructional leadership team in March. During our interview, before I could ask, Ingrid was elucidating the connection for us. She started by explaining the process of language acquisition. “You need to be able to listen to the language a lot, to be able to process, to be able to speak.” Then, she questioned, “So how do I take that to my first graders?” Next, she articulated the emotions that accompanied not knowing how.

I was very uncomfortable because I didn't know the steps to the storytelling or the story drawing or any of that. But I had done it before with kindergarten, and I was like, ‘I just got to go for it.’ It's a very humbling experience because it's always room to grow. This context was vital to understand her professional attitude and state of mind because without prompting, Ingrid went on to share, “And that's when Laura said about the action research and all that, I was like, this is my opportunity to actually be serious about collecting data and to see if this actually work as I think it works. And that's what I was so driven by choosing my first graders to do this.”

In this way, SARP became a space where participants could begin seeking answers and understanding. Carly shared a related process as she and Ingrid taught Spanish in the lower school and participated in the 2019 cohort together.

So third grade got to read their first novel, and I never thought I could do that with third grade, but the visuals are what really made it happen. We talked about that in class, which really helped because my fourth graders read two novels. I've never done reading in third and fourth. And I think Ingrid may have shared that she did a little bit of that as well this year... I mean, they would be looking at me, where I would have them act it out. I still did that piece, but obviously for the kids at home, it's a little different. But they were still kind of following along. So I felt that if the visual piece wasn't for that, we wouldn't have made it through COVID.

Further, participants could not select all of the roles they have at St. John's School. Instead, SARP required them to isolate a single group of students with whom to conduct their action and collect data. I asked a follow-up question on this idea to Karen during her interview. I said, "I know the big annual theme was boys and adaptability, but how did you land on the [Global Online Academy] as opposed to your French class or some of the other roles that you have at the school?" She considered, then responded:

Yeah, so I think, for me, it was just the big need at the time because, I had, at that point, I had a bunch of boys taking it, maybe even the biggest group we have had, and I just really wanted it to be more successful for them because it was very hit or miss. It was very much like it was the best thing the kid ever did, or there were two kids that, at some point, I met at school and bribed them with pizza so that they would sit there and do their work... So it definitely was a need for me.

The fact that SARP was voluntary increases the buy-in from the cohort. The faculty drove their own PD. The teacher's sense of control over their own professional learning was valued within this academic community. As previously mentioned, PD-choice was not exclusively sought;

however, it was an appreciated opportunity. Because it met a felt need, SARP had the potential to build trust while empowering teachers with relevant research. Thomas explained, “You have a team that can support you. You take time to reflect on best practices in your classroom, and you are more focused in your instruction.”

Participants intentionally decided to set time and space aside in a group to become more effective in the classroom. Ebony had a habit of doing this through various means each year:

I love finding different opportunities to grow and learn as a teacher. I always try to find one thing to focus on each year to widen my skills in the classroom, whether it be through professional development, Curriculum Academy, Action Research, targeted curriculum needs, etc. I think it's so important to continue to grow and learn as an educator.

SARP may not have produced these same results if it was a mandated PD program. Part of its power lied in the opportunity it presented participants to self-select. Three participants in this study mentioned that all teachers should be required to participate in putting research into action.

However, Mark presented a defense during our interview:

The Saints Action Research Program offers teachers an opportunity to look at one's teaching approach. To focus on one topic, he is especially interested in, reflecting on one's teaching to help shape his teaching to provide a full and rich experience for his students.

I concluded this section with a summary of the advantages listed by Julian, “working in cross-divisional groups, discussing my observations and questions with an AR team, and directly applying what I am learning from my students to facilitate a more effective learning experience.”

K-12 teaching, generally, is a top-down industry where responsibilities are assigned. This happens with class rosters, parent-teacher conferences, and a myriad of other moments

throughout a traditional school year. SARP provided participants with an option to make a deliberate choice to become a better teacher.

Limitations of SARP

The PFF asked participants, “What are the limitations to participating in the Saints Action Research Program?” According to participants, there are several limitations to participating in SARP. To begin, Chuck considered, “It’s a long process for one aspect of research, and at the moment, it feels like a lot of work for just one question when there are so many things that need work.” This challenge with maintaining interest in a single area of instructional practice that Chuck felt was directly opposed to the experience of other respondents.

Karen lobbied, “I would have enjoyed meeting more often, but it’s hard to find a time everyone has in common.” Should SARP have met more frequently, or were we already overwhelming participants? Perhaps the answer was to affirm both as valid experiences. These types of tensions emerged from the data, and this section introduced the limitations of participating in SARP.

SARP Participants Do Not Have Enough Available Time. The most widely cited limitation to participating in SARP was time. It was mentioned by 13 out of 20 respondents when asked to name the limitations on the PFF. Eight of those 13 listed time as their only limitation. Two of the remaining five paired time with an issue outside their control, such as teaching duties, limited prior experience with AR, or not knowing which questions to ask until after encountering an obstacle.

There were three primary ways in which participants conceived of time as a limitation. Each presented an opportunity for program improvement. First, participants underestimated the

time it took to conduct specific qualitative data collection and analysis methods with their students. Lisa explained on the PFF:

Time is a limitation. I wish my research program was longer than the 8–10-week period. I wish I could have extended my research across a longer period of time. I did find that interviewing boys took longer than anticipated. While hearing the boys' voices and reflections about what they learned was great to hear, the process was much longer than a multiple-choice questionnaire.

Lisa had received the message Lilith liked to communicate to the cohorts about the seminal importance of including boys' voices unfiltered as a data source. In our group interview, Lilith articulated:

Sometimes the baseline information from their boys will cause the research direction to change. Because this is a very participatory type of research. And so, if the boys tell them from the beginning that this is an area that they are interested in, are curious about, or struggle with, that might change the direction. So I've seen that happen as well, based on really listening to the boys' voices.

AR is responsive to the voices of students in the classroom. This made it difficult to predict just how much time it would take to complete because the action plan must be flexible to the feedback and input of the students. While this presented a challenge to particular data collection and analysis methods, the instructional leadership team's stance was that it added value when reporting the findings and refining the next steps. Lilith shared how she advised her cohorts:

You (SARP participants) are being very transparent about how you arrived at your findings. You've collected data, and this is how you came to these findings. So there's evidence to support it. And I think that is very powerful, more so than just... I mean, I

love going to conference presentations where I hear about a cool thing that they did. But there's nothing... Again, this baseline information is back to the boys' voices, but having evidence from the boys and knowing that you arrived at whatever your conclusions are based on these responses. You're transparent, and then the research brief shows you how you arrived at your findings.

Several participants during interviews expressed coming in with different expectations that were only realized as they were implementing their AR plan. When thinking in hindsight about the summer training, Sarah responded on the PFF, “I had a much stronger understanding of what it COULD look like, but until I started the process with my students, I couldn't be sure what the research project would look like.” As previously cited by Amber, “In reflection, I wish I had created surveys, interview questions, and additional assessment tools.”

Therefore, the time Lisa invested into hearing her students' voices was perhaps the most valuable part of the PD from the instructional leadership team's perspective.

Second, participants presented examples of relying on other faculty and staff to provide the availability needed to complete their AR project. One elementary teacher mentioned the need to rely on the teacher assistants as a limitation. Sarah recalled:

The SAR project did indeed demand a lot of time—though I enjoyed the work I was doing. I did have to rely on my assistants more as I was recording audio or video from the boys about the process during the fall season.

Julian, whose AR project focused on goal setting with the Varsity Soccer team, mentioned his assistant coaches as constant conversation partners throughout the process. Karen and Amber both described their AR experiences with the IBSC as collaborative because they partnered with another faculty member. In our interview, Amber disclosed:

Actually, it really was not nearly as overwhelming as I anticipated it was going to be. After the summer, I was like, "Ooh, the writing part, it's going to be a tremendous undertaking." That was the nice thing about the collaborative part. I felt like you always had a constant partner who could give you feedback and put you back on track if you needed it.

The SARP instructional leadership team recognized the amount of time it could take to design and facilitate the learning experiences, conduct the methodology, and draft a report of findings simultaneously. Over the years, the scope and sequence of the program went through several iterations. Lilith spoke to this during our group interview:

I think having modeled this off of the way that we train with IBSC and trying to put everything together; I do think as we evolved, we realized that some parts like data analysis could be... We had the luxury of all being together on the same campus. And so, I have appreciated coming back together and getting the time where we could have coverage for these teachers to come back together for in-house training for the data analysis piece. It made more sense to do that after the fact. And so, we touch on it in the summer training. But I am again, showing that we value this work they're doing by giving them the time to come together again as a group for an in-depth session. In December, late November, we've done that.

The instructional leadership team had convinced the senior administration team of St. John's of the value of this work. Agreeing to invest, they have provided substitutes, so participants could attend training. They have also offered individual professional days, so participants had uninterrupted availability.

Furthermore, each of the members of the instructional leadership team has partnered with teachers to provide support. So that it was not all added to their assistants. Emily remembered, “Having the amazing administrative team was important to the outcome. There are only so many slots available each time to provide the intensive support needed to produce a quality research project.” Despite all of the great teamwork and pulling together behind the scenes, time and availability from both a participant and program leader perspective remained the primary limitation.

Finally, there was an issue with the scope that impacted only one or two members of every cohort. There were those participants who worked with both the IBSC and SARP simultaneously. I conducted individual interviews with two, Karen and Amber, out of six participants who completed the IBSC’s AR program and SARP at the same time. Amber testified about which program she prioritized, “I worked on the IBSC research program, as opposed to the Saints Action Research Program, so I would imagine that my collaboration on a global scale while others worked within our community.” Those who applied to participate in the IBSC program required a recommendation from the Head of School. However, they were not informed that they would expected to participate in SARP if they were accepted. Amber continued:

I felt like we focused on the IBSC, and then whatever we could take from that and apply to the other one was fine. I don't at all feel like they were two separate entities. I felt like it was all one big action research with the IBSC being the grounded focus, I guess, and then you just took pieces out and applied that to the Saints Action Research.

Lilith, who worked within the leadership of both programs, described SARP as “small scale” six times during our group interview. This was an on-going area of friction between the instructional leadership team and these participants. The leaders’ stance was that SARP was already a

simplified version of a more robust international AR as PD program. However, participants still feel as though they did not have the available time to get everything out of the program that they desired.

SARP Participants Do Have Extra Work. The second most pronounced limitation of this program was the sense of added responsibility it created. Seven out of 20 respondents expressed this in various forms. During his interview, Todd remembered being surprised by how involved the program was. “I was aware of the program, and the research other teachers had done in their classroom. I wasn't as aware of the multistep process researchers took to gather and evaluate the data.” Several terms were employed in the data, such as “pacing,” “busy,” “so much to do.” However, Ebony delineated:

I can't really say anything I didn't like about the summer training itself, except that it probably would have been good to have the support to go ahead and find the outside research we needed and get started on it. Trying to find articles and fit them in during the school year while I was simultaneously conducting my research made the process feel more burdensome than it needed to be.

Beyond the tasks required by those teachers who volunteered to participate the program, there is a sense of anxiety and stress that accompanied the program. Ingrid recalled, “I was very nervous; I knew I could not start [my AR project] from day one. The students need about 6 weeks to review and get familiar with the classroom and Spanish.” Sarah went even further in thinking about student readiness, “I was nervous that my kindergarten boys would not be able to respond to the exercises unless I invest effort in differentiating each one.”

Extra work then was closely related to time. However, there was no guarantee that additional time would alleviate the anxious sentiments recalled by alumni because part of the

issue was the age-appropriateness of the students who were participating in the AR projects. The participants voiced a desire for more upfront guidance to prepare materials for their class that they felt confident using.

SARP Lacks Visibility Within the School Community. A final limitation to the program was its visibility within the St. John's community. The PFF asked directly about the limitations of SARP, and Mark disclosed, "participating in AR can feel isolating, especially if others on your grade level/department are not facilitating similar activities." Ingrid requested, "More time, more group interactions, more input or even interest from the divisional admin team. I think it feels like something separate from what our divisions are doing." SARP did not have a formal means of involving non-participating members of the St. John's community. Many of them heard the announcements, saw the presentations, and received a newsletter containing a link to last year's research briefs that the marketing department had polished. Ann was able to lucidly present her negative experience with the marketing department revising her work for publication.

I did a video interview with [the marketing director] that year, and it was interesting because he was asking questions... They didn't really, his questions didn't help me explain what I had done, so I left that interview kind of like, "Whatever ..." It's just like the school owns all this now, I don't care, they can do what they want. When I looked at the brief, the title of the brief was Orchestrating Interest in Mundane Tasks, and I was like, "That's not even my title." My title was Orchestrating Interest in Getting Students to Practice... I know it has to be reworded to reach the broader education audience.

During our interview, I paused to affirm, “That's very powerful; I'm just making a note of that for the recommendations going forward because I think that's really important, especially just from an intellectual property standpoint.” She was appreciative of my support and went on:

Anyway, I got a lot out of the program, but it seemed to change at the very end to fit a broader audience. At that point, I had just kind of resigned myself to the fact that it's fine, I did it, I got something out of it, now the Center for the Study of Boys PR, marketing, whoever is just going to run with it the way they see fit. It doesn't even belong to me anymore, it doesn't matter, so I just kind of gave up ownership of it and let them do whatever without getting too upset about it. It just seemed easier that way.

Anna was the only participant in this study to express this type of experience.

Two stakeholder groups that were asked about directly on the PFF were administrators and colleagues because they were daily within the program's proximity. Three participants communicated that their administrators were unaware of their AR project. Denise said on the PFF, “I think the administration is supportive of this type of research. It doesn't really have an impact on them. I did my research as a part of the regular day and curriculum. I contacted the parents for permission. I presented my research on a professional day.” In the participant interview, Karen recalls wishing her administrator attended her presentation:

One thing that I found disappointing was that... and I'm not sure I know how to fix this, but I just felt like... (my administrator) didn't see my presentation. He went to a different one, and I think I put that in the... or at least mentioned it, in the survey that you sent me. I feel like there's a disconnect, or at least there was when I did it. That may not be true now, but I feel like there's a disconnect between the work that we're doing and how it's

actually... I'm not sure [my administrator] even knew what my question was or that I was even doing it, so I think that's a big sort of disconnect.

When prompted on the feedback form to answer, “colleagues in my division showed an interest in my action research project.” Fifty percent agreed or strongly agreed; however, four disagreed, and a single person strongly disagreed. This lone strongly disagree respondent marked that option regularly throughout the survey, perhaps because they had a negative experience with the program. This question also had 25% indifference. The bottom line appeared to be that participation in this PD was not well-integrated into the life of the school. Sarah in the elementary school acknowledged, “I don’t really know if anyone knew I was working on it.” Anna said that her auction caught a good amount of attention; however, it was not the point of her AR study:

The fun part was the auction, and that's really what caught everyone's attention which is kind of funny because that was just the fun thing at the end. Really for me, the most important part was can I help motivate kids to practice, and that's just an age-old band director question. Honestly, we still don't know. I feel like maybe a few teachers knew about it, but I don't think a whole lot of teachers knew about it.

In Anna’s experience, many members of the St. John’s community missed the point.

There was undoubted invisibility to participating in this program. Ellie in the high school added, “SARP was announced in August that we (‘the team’) were working on SAR, but I don’t think many upper school colleagues understood what that entailed—and many folks, I think, forgot about it quickly.” Carly wrote in on the PFF, “Share more results of findings with faculty to help them really see what the program does.” However, it may or may not have been sufficient to bring up SARP more frequently. As Ebony from the middle school felt, “As the school year

gets going, my colleagues were very supportive. However, at times I felt this was something else for them to hear about or to support.” The fatigue then was that SARP was being reduced to announcements and updates for non-participating members. Karen concluded, “It's almost even a little just disappointing that you've done all this work, and you want to feel like it's been done for the reason that will affect people other than just you.”

Ellie recommended how best to address this issue of invisibility:

I would suggest that AR is integrated into the 3-year observation cycle implemented by the curriculum and instruction team. This would ensure that every teacher is a part of AR every three years, and it's not just for those who choose to do it.

This recommendation could inform non-participating faculty members of St. John's School, making them more aware of AR as PD. However, it would dissolve the need for SARP in its current iteration.

Recommendations for SARP

Participants provided robust and practical recommendations for improving the effectiveness of SARP. Table 4 displayed the prominent themes derived through template analysis. The number of respondents who articulated each theme out of the total respondents was presented for each data source. The far-right column held the total number of respondents who communicated the corresponding theme. Five out of 20 participants, when asked directly on the PFF, “What recommendations do you have to improve the program,” chose not to enter a recommendation. Thomas stated, “I don't have any recommendations at the time for improving the program.” This study did not attempt to explain why this was.

This section relied both on the direct recommendations questions and recommendations that emerged in response to other questions on the PFF and interview data sources. The analysis

went beyond the responses to the final question on the PFF. The lack of answers to this prompt was not an indication that a particular participant lacked recommendations. On the contrary, nearly all participants previously stated recommendations while addressing a previous question. To be clear, none of the suggestions represented the perspectives of all SARP alumni.

Table 4

Recommendations to Improve the Effectiveness of SARP

Theme	Data Sources				Total Respondents
	Program Feedback Form	Group Interview	Document Review	Participant Interviews	
SARP should be differentiated	17/20	3/3	0/10	10/10	20
The SARP instructional leadership team should use concrete examples and samples	7/20	2/3	0/10	4/10	11
SARP might alter its duration	6/20	0/3	2/10	9/10	9
Involve non-participating members in AR as PD	3/20	3/3	4/10	7/10	10
SARP should not change anything	9/20	0/3	0/10	0/10	9

Note. SARP = Saints Action Research Program; AR = action research; PD = professional development.

SARP Should be Differentiated. According to participants, differentiation should be coordinated with administrative staff. The PFF asked, “How might your division-level

administrative team provide support to future participants?” The most recommended administrator actions were to host regular check-in with each participant, provide time during the school day for participants to do this work, and give opportunities for program alumni to share their research.

First, participants wanted administrators to check in with them during their participation year. Many participants added the caveat that these check-ins be kept brief given how busy their administrative staff was. Katy narrowed it down to two agenda items, “It might be helpful if they ask questions about how the research is going. Also, any words of encouragement always go a long way.” That was it. Questions and complements would work for Katy. However, other alumni requested a different expression of support from their school leaders. During the interview, Amber expected more awareness and a display of respect for the professional investment participants made to grow as teachers.

I think another connection to that is just making sure that the administration in that division is super aware, not just that you're doing it, but that they are completely aware of the time involved. I felt like when we did it. The admin knew that we were doing it. Maybe we reminded them of it at times, but it almost felt like it was just part of our job to be doing it. As someone who also coaches, I'm a varsity coach, and lower schoolteachers already don't have free periods like middle or upper schoolteachers might. That was a lot for me. Not that I feel like they didn't respect our time, but it wasn't anything that administrators were doing wrong; I think they weren't as aware as they could have been.

Amber was completing AR on an international level and still felt overlooked. As previously mentioned, SARP was a “small-scale” research team that may garner less attention. Amber continued by promoting gratitude to the forefront of how administrators support.

I do feel like there needs to be more collaboration and respect between the administrators and the teachers who take this on are doing it, not selfishly, but in an effort to help the school move forward. So there needs to be almost like a 'thanks' for that. Provide time and appreciation to the teachers who are willing to do that.

Recognizing that administrators were busy, Carly pivoted to the curriculum and instruction team, represented by a curriculum director within each division, as possible school leaders to take on this work. She reasoned:

I think with that position that can help because that person can be that bridge between what we're doing in the session research and getting so it can benefit, not just me, but other people in our faculty and use that position as a conduit to get some of that information back and forth?

The participants did not want to create more work; they were interested in receiving additional support.

Second, as previously mentioned, company time for company work was a principle promoted by the alumni participant group. Because SARP was an in-house PD experience rather than an off-campus conference, several participants felt their involvement should be considered as duties, and course loads were assigned. Emily, who St. John's School no longer employs, shared, "Excuse the participant from extra duties, so they have extra free time during the school day." Anna advocated, "For trimester (elective) teachers, maybe give them one extra free period during the time of their research project in the classroom." I followed up on this comment during our interview, and Anna provided:

Action research just added to what you still have to do, and there were no breaks in what I still had to do. As a trimester teacher, I know my schedule can be manipulated at a

higher administrative level. Suppose the administrator knows at the beginning of the year, and I think I put this in the survey too, that this teacher is doing action research. Is there a way for the administrator to give an extra free period that trimester so that the teacher has some dedicated time to work on action research?

This recommendation may not need to be granted for all future participants in SARP, but only those who work as elective teachers at the time they are enrolled.

Mark mentioned, “Perhaps a half-day or two of sub coverage as participants are wrapping up their research and preparing their presentations?” These requests were practical and shared by over half of the respondents. Time was the number one limitation of participating in SARP. Still, the administration was seen as possessing the ability to manipulate scheduling in a more considerate manner of the program.

Finally, one respondent stated, “The admin team could have past participants share their experiences and also recognize participants for their hard work.” One way to keep the work of SARP alive was by sharing the research participants completed. As previously stated, the research brief and presentation were the capstones of the program. However, participant relationships with SARP might continue beyond. Judy considered how we might leverage this:

I think it was going to be, as we thought about Saints research, we wanted their perspectives as we thought through what the next phase might look like. And so, I think that while alumni have had some opportunities for feedback and so forth, we have not really in any formal way leveraged. And I say leverage because I think they have an awesome experience under their belts. And I don't know participant satisfaction, what those numbers or what that data would say. But I feel like because of the work that you all have done, they come out of the program with really good feelings about their growth

and the program in general. And so, when someone is satisfied with something, that's a great time to think about how we leverage that energy and excitement for professional growth.

Alums like Amber were all for it but also confirmed the importance of alumni involvement maintaining a volunteer status.

I think if there's going to be a role with people who have done it, I would think of it first needs to be optional because like you said earlier, Derek, some people have done it, and then they're like, "All right, done. I'm really not ever touching it again," and that's fine. We have to respect that, but I know that every year, for example, when the Saints Action Research is presented, or the application stuff is brought up. Sometimes they've shown names of people who have done it, and y'all have said, "Feel free to talk to these people about their experience because they have done it before."

While Amber affirmed the intent; however, she was pragmatic about the execution. She challenged the instructional leadership team to formalize the process of how potential applicants engage alumni.

But realistically, at least in the lower school, one person finding another person when that person is free to have a quick conversation that really needs to be a lengthy conversation just never actually happens. So I would almost think when you guys get the applications and whoever you pick to actually do it, some of those first couple of meetings that you all have should include alumni of the program. I don't know people who have done it before coming to talk to them about the experience. I don't think it should be just a, "Here are the people who have done it. Go find them on your own."

One other way to consider differentiation was based on the experience with elective and non-classroom teachers. The one outlier on many of the PFF rating scale questions was an elective teacher who the school no longer employs. He said, “participating in AR can feel isolating, especially if others on your grade level/department are not facilitating similar activities.” This experience could have been authentic for a host of full-time faculty members who did not belong to any single department during their year of SARP participation.

The SARP Instructional Leadership Team Should Use Concrete Examples and Samples. According to participants, given the time constrictions of the program, the use of in-house exemplars and samples of data collection tools could help future cohorts. Amber affirmed that the program did well at presenting content; however, there was an opportunity to also present tools.

I gained a wealth of information about how to implement my action research in the classroom. In reflection, I wish I had created surveys, interview questions, and additional assessment tools. It would have been beneficial going into the school year with the initial survey complete. I found the collaboration piece so key to my research. Seeing sample questions or working with the group to brainstorm samples would have been useful. Katy agreed that it would be good to present a tangible example of valid and reliable AR in practice. Judy, without being prompted, spoke to this in our group interview:

I think the teachers over the years have done a really beautiful job, which is providing work samples. So, whether that's photographs, or writing samples, in addition to things like focus groups and surveys. I think when we can see the products of the boys have created. Whether that's creating a story or whatever it may be, I think that's always a great indicator of what the boys have really experienced or what they've gained.

Sarah added, “I would recommend modeling what data collection and analysis could look like.” Without prerequisite experience, it is essential to give participants a clear direction and benchmark examples that communicate expectations on deliverables. The recommendation was to contextualize the training. Patty stated early in our interview, “The training was good but may have been more helpful if part of it was done partially through my research to have some context.”

To conclude, sharing these examples did not need to be added to the synchronous training sessions, but it should be tangible. Ellie offered toward the end of our interview, “I would have enjoyed the opportunity to observe action research in action... either in person or virtually.” The key was for participants to be able to access the learning at a time they were ready to receive it. Megan still used the Google slide deck shared with her during the summer training in 2019. On the PFF, she said, “The Google slide presentations were fantastic. I still use them today when I want to research an idea.” Participants wanted more resources than this.

As a reminder, the instructional leadership team should consider being present when a participant experiences what Chuck did. “The outside research part was a little confusing. I didn't know how to access the research I needed, and then once I'd finished reading it, what the team really wanted me to do with that information.” Many of the participants acknowledged developing their literature reviews and analyzing data at odd hours, so access to guidance asynchronously would be helpful.

SARP Might Alter Its Duration. One suggestion to improve the effectiveness of SARP was to extend the length of participation. Carly, a veteran Spanish teacher, contributed, “I would recommend additional training time.” Given competing demands, it may be more feasible to

extend the commitment of the program rather than increase the frequency of engagements during its current iteration.

Since time was the most cited limitation by participants, one way forward would be to change the length of the program. As Thomas said, “I wish it would have been longer in duration.” Participants envisioned this change in three ways: (a) move the summer training earlier in the summer, (b) extend the program one to three months beyond the March deadline, or (c) transition the program into a 2–3-year commitment.

First, Todd deposited on the PFF, “Research takes time. Starting it in July and diving deeper into the research before the start of school would be a powerful change.” This suggestion by Todd would require the least amount of change for all stakeholders. The instructional leadership team could continue presenting an identical program. They would simply host the summer training in July instead of August.

Second, instead of ending in March, participants could have their culminating events, like the faculty presentation and the research brief deadlines, postponed as late as May or early June. Katy recommended on the PFF, “To extend the time—maybe present the findings May or June.” The cohort presentation format would not necessarily have to change, but a participant who requested to remain anonymous shares why it should.

I will offer that the three 15-minute presentations we made on the March Professional Day seemed like little more than checking a teaser box: there was no way to offer any real substance (particularly as folks often dropped in late). My point here is simply that most faculty will likely forget those 'sampler' sessions pretty rapidly.

Therefore, the AR team needs to consider the purpose of the presentation for its audience.

Finally, the alumni recommended that the instructional leadership team consider dramatically changing the model of SARP to a 2 or even 3-year program. This would allow for not only a more complete and more robust AR cycle but also more cycles. Rarely do we, as educators, get things right the first time, and AR has revision and refinement built into the design.

Involve Non-Participating Members in AR as PD. With five cohorts of experience, perhaps SARP should be expanded to serve more participants each year. During the interview, Megan dreamt aloud. “It would be awesome if we could grow the program so that there was at least one research project occurring on each grade level.” Emily said:

I would suggest that AR is integrated into the 3-year observation cycle implemented by the [Curriculum and Instruction] team. This would ensure that every teacher is a part of AR every 3 years, and it's not just for those who choose to do it.

There were other suggestions for how SARP might serve more faculty members each year. Nearly all of them involved adjusting its current definition of voluntary PD. Still, the sentiment of these suggestions came from a desire by the alumni to see more of their colleagues improve as teachers through the experience provided by active engagement in the program. Mark lends a practical step that would benefit those who never considered participation in SARP.

The only recommendation I have is to provide the opportunity for faculty to get in each other's classrooms to observe. I think it's especially powerful to do this cross divisionally to help us better understand the students and action research as it pertains to each division's unique challenges.

Independent of Mark's design, Ingrid volunteered to participate in a similar process. She said:

I would have liked more teachers to come to observe while I worked with the boys. When [the head coach] came, we were able to compare notes afterward. This was helpful. Other than that, I taped all of my time with the boys to view later. This helped me not miss anything!

To make this happen, the curriculum team and administrators who share the process of evaluating teachers would need to emphasize the importance of peer observation to non-participating faculty who might be unaware of AR, peer observation, or other non-traditional types of PD.

Also, the AR lessons the current SARP participants were implementing could be videotaped and shared with relevant faculty who might be interested yet not participating in a formal SARP cohort. Anna put it this way, “Share more results of findings with the faculty in order to help them really see what the program does.” Through this type of marketing and promotion, the program becomes more visible, making a connection between SARP and non-participating faculty.

In conclusion, access to the decision to conduct AR as a means of PD does not have to be offered exclusively to teachers. Students can begin in elementary school. As the group interview drew towards closure, I summarized the conversation using my notes. Then offered these words, “If you have other thoughts about what could just make the program more effective should we continue it, I would like to hear those thoughts.” Lilith replied immediately:

So, I think that you recapped, you did a great job. I heard everything that we were saying. But if I think about growing the program, I would love to have a wing of what we're doing that really trickled down to the boys. The research project that Judy and I did with the fifth graders, where they led the research. They collected the data; they analyzed it.

And it was small scale, and they did it. I loved them learning how to think like a researcher. And if that is going to be grown out of anywhere within our school, I think we're the perfect place to start.

SARP Should Not Change Anything. On the PFF, Denise entered, “I honestly feel that the program is excellent. I can’t think of anything that I would change.” Alongside the 25% that did not have a recommendation to offer, there were four out of 20 who liked the program just the way it was. Vincent reasoned, “None. It seems to me that the program has grown since 2015-16 and has continued to evolve in positive ways.”

SARP did several things well if nine out of 20 respondents chose not to type in a suggestion for improvement. More than that, Ebony put her advice this way, “I would just continue to encourage all teachers to participate in this awesome program!” Currently, one-third of all St. John’s faculty have participated. This percentage is ever-changing with turnover, so there remains the potential to serve many more cohorts at St. John’s School.

As a summative thought, Carly concluded, “I think the program is well-run, and I think it is impressive that the school supports teachers doing this every school year.” With this mindset, the instructional leadership team should not be looking for items to fix; instead, these findings should lead to optimized effectiveness.

The Essence of AR as PD

Collectively, then, these teachers experienced AR as a PD experience that served multiple purposes: (a) to address a persistent problem of practice or area of professional interest, (b) to change their instructional approach deliberately, and (c) to advance student outcomes. For these teachers, AR as PD provided a process. This process was not strict or something that they

adhered to daily. However, elements were embedded in their sense of what effective teachers did.

In particular, the participants felt teachers should be always learning and seeking to improve. They should be inquisitive and actively seeking to grow professionally. Teachers should use one another in a collaborative community to gain perspective and a sense of support in their development. Teachers should value the voices of their students within the data they collect. Not merely what they observe should inform how they set, approach, and achieve their learning target.

The participants also acknowledged that AR was not the only way to do this; however, it was one helpful approach to be aware of because it was highly contextual and able to be individually applied to a particular teacher's need. The primary drawbacks were the extra work it took to complete a valid AR cycle and the reality of limited time. To close, one advantage worth highlighting was that no prior knowledge was required to succeed in AR if you had appropriate guidance and institutional support. In the case of SARP, this manifested as an instructional leadership team capable of setting clear expectations, assisting with the design, and pacing of the AR project while remaining available to answer real-time questions which emerge.

Summary of Findings

Collectively, these twenty teachers experienced AR independently. The summer training was vital because it provided time for participants to learn AR and begin designing their AR project. To that end, more direct guidance as to expectations of deliverables alongside reviewing exemplars with the incoming cohort would be helpful.

AR was a process with proper steps, which summer training outlined. However, participants internalized and customized the steps to be more relevant and valuable to their

classroom. Each teacher made real-time decisions using their best judgment to determine where students were and what they knew to inform their area of interest. They developed the AR question which guided their study. Teachers were supported on a one-to-one basis by the instructional leadership team.

As they undertook AR in their classrooms, teachers experienced it as a change process. For program alumni, AR became an integral part of their annual teaching experience. None of them practice AR daily, but many still found AR essential to their work, embedded in instruction, and an ongoing, continuous part of effective instructional practices. The students were at the center of the change, and the participants recalled pursuing student engagement and enjoyment as two primary outcomes.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The goals of this chapter are to (a) summarize the major finding presented in Chapter 4; (b) draw conclusions based on the findings by placing them in conversation with each other, at times supported by extant literature; and (c) offer recommendations for the program and action research (AR) as professional development (PD). Furthermore, this chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.

This program evaluation was primarily formative in its purpose and design. This section is organized by the two evaluation questions. Evaluation Question 1 stated: To what degree does the Saints Action Research Program (SARP) reflect an effective PD model as evidenced by each of the five levels of Guskey's model for evaluating PD? The conceptual framework presented in Chapter 1 provides an organizational structure for most of the discussion of this first question. Evaluation Question 2 stated: What are the perceptions of program alumni and the instructional leadership team regarding the advantages and limitations of participating in SARP?

Summary of the Role of the Researcher

I took on role of a research-participant. I was a research coordinator for the Center for the Study of Boys. In Chapter 3, I designed four steps intended to mitigate bias. In this section, I would like to acknowledge the follow-through on each.

First, since I was a participant in the program during the 2015-16 academic term, I only invited alumni from the 2018, 2019, and 2020 cohorts to participate in the interview process. No one who went through the program with me as a colleague was invited to interview. Second, bias

was minimized by not collecting data from current participants. In fact, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no current cohort. Third, I did not implement this study in isolation. I place myself under the surveillance of non-SARP faculty member who is employed by St. John's School. The interview protocols were reviewed by this person. And the Program Feedback Form (PFF) was piloted by their completion. Fourth, submitted to a peer debriefing process with a disinterested colleague who has no vestment in the findings of this study. We met for longer than expected. What I predicted would be brief 10-minute sessions turned into half hour respites. Our sessions ended up being therapeutic as I would simply vent my status, successes, and concerns while conducting this study without receiving any guidance or directive feedback.

Beyond these four steps intended to mitigate bias, I also would like to affirm four design elements built into the data collection process that protected this study. First, Guskey's levels of effective PD were concealed from all study participants except the director of SARP who approved the study. Second, the interview protocols were screened by a third-party expert who has no interest in the outcomes of this study. Third, the PFF was practiced on a non-participating teacher at St. John's School. Finally, member checks were offered and completed by sending the semi-structured interview transcripts to participants. They were requested to confirm the accuracy of the transcription and the portrayal of their responses.

Summary of Major Findings

The findings of the study are reported in Chapter 4. In Appendix F, both evaluation questions are included as well as the themes and a summary of findings organized by the conceptual framework of this study (see Appendix F).

Discussion of Findings

This section of Chapter 5 discusses the study's findings relative to the effectiveness of the SARP as a PD program. All conclusions drawn are tentative and point toward a need for further program evaluation of SARP and additional research of AR as a professional learning model. While this program evaluation is formative in its purpose and design, Guskey and Sparks (2000) present a conceptual framework for evaluating the effectiveness of PD programs as described in Chapter 1.

One traditional approach to evaluating the effectiveness of PD policies and practices has been to use a set of research-based standards (Darling-Hammond, 1997, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Learning Forward, 2020; Wilson et al., 2001). Instead of selecting one set of standards to measure the effectiveness of SARP, this study employs a framework designed to gather five levels of participant reflections on their PD experiences.

According to Guskey and Sparks (2000), there are five levels to participant perceptions of PD. Data on levels one and two were gathered using the PFF. The Summary of Rating-scale Items from the Program Feedback Form has been reported (see Appendix D). While all levels inform the following discussion, levels four and five are central. As a reminder of Guskey's Level 4, participants' use of new knowledge and skills is the extent to which the participants applied their new knowledge and skills in their classroom teaching.

In Guskey's Level 5, student learning outcomes are grounded in participants' perceptions of how their learning through SARP affected student performance. As Guskey and other scholars contend, the ultimate purpose of teacher PD is to improve student learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Goe, 2007;

Hallinger & Kulophas, 2020; Hervey, 2017; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Tuytens et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2001). Therefore, the discussion that follows is an honest and reflective inquiry into the effectiveness of the program for alumni and their students. The four discussion points are:

1. Do program alumni understand the AR framework?
2. Should the AR process be individualized or standardized?
3. To what degree will participants allow the AR process to change their instructional practices?
4. Is AR an effective teacher PD?

Do Program Alumni Understand the AR Framework?

Yes, the former participants in SARP understand the AR framework, with slight departures and misgivings. In Chapter 1, AR is defined as any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors, or others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process or environment to gather information about how their schools operate, how they teach, and how their students learn (Mertler, 2017, p. 4). SARP employs the four-step AR process presented by Mills (2007). The four steps are:

1. Identify an area of focus.
2. Collect data.
3. Analyze and interpret data.
4. Develop an action plan.

In both the PFF and the participant interviews, teachers described their AR framework. Throughout the data, whether formal, planned AR interventions or informal, spontaneous AR actions in response to students, the teachers' enactment of the AR always involved a series of

steps. Even though alumni employed different articulations, there is a clear conception of the AR framework. This demonstrates that SARP is instructing its participants with a grounded AR model, which is understood and retained by participants over time.

Seven out of the 10 interviewees recalled a version of the four steps of the AR process:

1. Identify a problem.
2. Review the literature.
3. Collect data and analyze it.
4. Report findings to stakeholders.

When placing these two AR processes side by side, it becomes apparent that the SARP alumni departed from Mills' (2007) framework in two ways:

1. The SARP alumni added the literature review as its own step.
2. None of the SARP alumni mentioned the development of an action plan, to extend their research beyond a single cycle.

This may be because participants are required to create a research brief, which is synonymous with an action plan. This research brief is made up of the four steps that alumni recalled. Therefore, the distinction from Mills appears to be the effect of how the instructional leadership team has designed its deliverables, namely by required that participants create a research brief.

With the majority of respondents, there was an apparent absence of what happens after their findings are reported to community stakeholders. In Mills (2007), the cycle would repeat as teachers use their findings to develop a new action plan. However, in SARP we conclude the cycle in March. None of the respondents mentioned developing a new action plan. Therefore, nearly every alum stopped conducting AR project cycles when they completed the program.

This is not to say that participants do not continue employing the AR process. The formal structure of the AR framework is lost mainly as our alumni continue their informal applications of AR. Therefore, the SARP experience has relative permanence. The experience is not one and done; however, it only continues at the discretion of the alumnus.

Should the AR Process be Individualized or Standardized?

Those who develop AR frameworks and those who implement them appear to have a discrepancy, which is discussed in this section. The tension is to what degree might the AR process deviate from a framework while maintaining the integrity of the AR process. In SARP, individual preferences have influenced participant practice of the AR process. For program alumni, choice in their AR project was generally more valuable than adherence to a particular model.

To begin, individualization is the status quo for SARP. Based on the following literature, published by professional practitioners of the AR process, strict fidelity to a particular AR model is not required to yield desired outcomes. The higher value should be placed on participant experiences and feedback as SARP attempts to facilitate an AR process conducive to St. John's context.

Action Research is simply a form of self-reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations to improve the rationality and justification of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 162).

According to Julian, even as an alum of the program, this is happening. Julian shared on the PFF:

Every year & in a more concise & more articulate version than before my SAR Project. I have become a big fan of having the boys help hold themselves accountable for their short-term goals. Our doing so has increased the positive team chemistry.

Julian acknowledges that if AR effective, practitioners constantly refine the questions, unearthing nuanced problems to research and address. The AR process is cyclical by design because of its intent for continuous improvement.

SARP as an AR process is effective because individual participants understand the AR framework, which they can employ as a best practice. As Ellie stated in the interview, “Action research is something good teachers are naturally doing in miniature ways all the time.” Mark echoed the same sentiment in this way:

What are you curious about? What questions can you ask as an educator? Use that inquiry to research that topic and find ideas you want to bring to the classroom.

Implementing those ideas and observing, talking to and allowing the boys to reflect and share on their learning as well.

This is the definition of AR Mark has constructed through his experiences, and it details not only his AR framework but a process that has worked for him, and he is conversationally fluent.

Participants seem to advocate for customized forms of teacher AR.

On the other hand, a standardized, as opposed to individualized, AR process is critical because the AR process necessitates a change in practice. Mark is fluent, and Ellie is natural, but are they growing and improving their instructional practices? Many of the participants in SARP demonstrated a lack of change to their curriculum or pedagogy since completing SARP. When asked about ongoing AR, many of the participants simply referred to activities they were recycling or curricular instructional practices they have adopted. By definition, this is not AR.

AR allows teachers to take a methodological approach to innovation by gathering data and analyzing their profession to construct what is most effective with those students in their context (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009; Mills, 2007; Stringer, 2004). The results are not generalizable, so the findings of an AR project should never be assumed to hold with new students or in a new context. Many of the current alumni hold the fallacy of generalizability.

The only outlier on this point was Amber. She advocated for standardization and expressed concern about the usefulness of data collection without adherence to a protocol. She countered, “Without that formalized process, you're going to skip a step. You're going to miss something that is an integral part of action research, and I think the moment you leave one piece out, the data collection becomes completely unusable.”

Mertler (2017) supports Amber’s views from researchers who develop and refine AR frameworks. AR empowers the classroom teacher with a standardized process for addressing a specific problem of practice, which can be iterative. Amber is concerned with faculty implementing AR with fidelity. According to Mertler (2017), AR should be standardized. Avison et al. (1999) contributes:

Explicit criteria should be defined before performing the research in order to later judge its outcome, as should ways to manage alterations in these criteria as part of the process of problem diagnosis, action intervention, and reflective learning. Otherwise, what is being described might be action (but not research) or research (but not action research) (p. 94).

In conclusion, each context is different; therefore, the best way forward is to determine the greater or lesser degree of standardization required. An individualized approach to AR as PD is occurring at St. John’s School without sufficient organizational awareness or support. However,

standardization would demand more design, resources, and oversight. The instructional leadership team of SARP needs to strike an appropriate and purposeful balance between the two to ensure AR is feasible and credible in this context.

To What Degree Will Participants Allow the AR Process to Change Their Instructional Practices?

The data from this study suggests participants will use the AR process in the classroom at their convenience in response to their felt needs. However, will they allow the AR process to act upon them in a manner that may move their instructional practices beyond their habit-formed comfort zone? This section explores four limiters to teacher change:

1. Change is not a program requirement.
2. Change may inspire a fear of loss.
3. The school culture regarding instructional failure.
4. Student learning outcomes motivate teachers, but AR as PD seldom accounts for student achievement.

A first reason why participants do not change their instructional practices is they are never required. As discussed in the previous section, participants value the freedom to customize AR to fit what they are already doing. However, does this liberty limit participant willingness to adapt their instructional practices to become even more effective? During our interview, Carly disclosed her motivations for choosing her area of interest.

I wanted to make sure (it) was working correctly. But [the AR project] didn't change my classroom that much. If I had gone with my original thought, which was taking that extra risk, then yes, that would've been a little different. I wish I would've done that.

Carly chose to play it safe and admitted that she experienced more minor change in her classroom than she knew was needed for her students to aspire to the best possible learning outcomes.

Secondly, Heifetz and Linsky (2017) argued, resistance to change often stems from a fear of loss. As PD facilitators, we may see with clarity a promising future of progress and gain for our participants. However, some participants will see and be concerned about the losses we are asking them to sustain. I followed up with Carly, “Now that you have a really good understanding of the scale of the project, do you think you could've taken the big risk on your first time through?” Without hesitation, Carly replied, “Pre COVID, I would've said, ‘no.’ After everything we've done as educators, I would say, ‘Absolutely.’ I mean, I can't say there's nothing we can't do after the year we've done.” On her first attempt, Carly chose to investigate a research question for which the outcome was predictable. However, through the pandemic, she was able to address and overcome, to a degree, her own fear of not being able to see the finish line. During the COVID-19 pandemic, visibility and control of instructional outcomes has been involuntarily obstructed. Therefore, teachers have experienced instructional loss. However, for some, this adversity has built their confidence.

Thirdly, the school culture regarding instructional failure has a major influence on teacher risk. One participant shared their perspective on risk-taking within the St. John's professional culture:

I have literally learned so much more from epic fails that I have had than from anything that has gone smoothly. I mean, that should be the point, right? And I think what you just said really is helping me frame what I'm saying, which is that it wasn't pushing them enough to where they could fail. I think that is unfortunate, but I think we have this

culture, especially in the upper school, of we are failure averse, and we honor teachers who don't take risks. We honor teachers who do the same thing. We honor teachers who are the ones that aren't on the cutting edge, who aren't trying new things.

SARP changes teachers who want change because they must be open to changing before witnessing any results. However, the culture of the institution hosting the AR as a PD experience plays a significant role in faculty willingness to take instructional risk within the classroom. There is no guarantee that conducting AR in the classroom will yield positive student learning outcomes. The instructional leadership team emphasizes that participants should be open to the data analysis process revealing no change or negative impacts on students. From a researcher's perspective, this information can be equally valuable. However, since our participants are teachers, they have a predisposition to seek to implement and recycle only those activities, which they are confident work for their average student. This behavior is reinforced by a school culture that rewards interminable instructional practices. This institutional predisposition makes SARP less effective as PD. The same aforementioned participant concluded their train of thought:

I think that's just where I get frustrated because what you honor is what you're saying is important, and if we're showing like, "Hey, this person who hasn't changed a thing in his classroom in 25 years," and we're putting them on a pedestal, then that's what we're saying is most important to us. No matter what we say, no matter if we say we want them to be tech-savvy. We can say that all we want, but what you put your money, your time, and your time to, is what you actually find important.

Fourthly, in 1986, Guskey argued that most teacher PD does not account for what motivates teachers to engage actively, nor does it provide the process by which teachers most naturally change (Guskey, 2002a). His model of teacher change openly refutes the sequential notion that

attitudes must change before behaviors (Guskey, 1986, 2002a). Instead, he found the opposite to be true. Teachers are motivated by successful implementation. Results with students, which are valued in context, act as a catalyst for teachers to change their beliefs and attitudes. These results are not required to be positive for teachers to change.

In SARP, we ask teachers to try a new instructional strategy based on a problem or an area of interest; we are not asking teachers to measure student learning outcomes. This limits the program's potential for teacher change because, according to Guskey (2002a), it results with students the greatest motivator for lasting pedagogical transformation. Teacher change is when the teacher's beliefs and attitudes change as a result of student learning outcomes. Student outcomes are affected by teacher changes in classroom practices. Teacher practices change as professional learning occurs (Guskey, 2002a).

In conclusion, SARP does not have a clear articulation of student learning outcomes as a primary goal. Therefore, teacher change is limited. While participants and the instructional leadership team may verbalize aspirations of AR being student-centered PD, the goals are stated in a teacher-centered manner. When asked on the PFF, "What are the goals of the Saints Action Research Program?" Only 3 out of 20 participants mentioned benefits, growth, and learning for students. This widespread omission of students in our collective understanding of the program's mission is limiting teacher change.

Is AR an Effective Teacher PD?

In an ideal setting, all teachers would have access to effective PD. In Chapter 2, Kennedy (2016) confirmed the persistence of this issue, "there is no single, overarching theory of teaching or teacher learning" (p. 946). For over 30 years, educational researchers have studied what makes teacher PD effective and ineffective (Garet et al., 1999; Guskey, 2002a; Hawley & Valli,

1999; Killion, 1999; NCES, 2001; NSDC, 2001; Richardson, 2003; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997).

Emerging from this seminal research are several frameworks.

AR is used as a professional learning model for teacher preparations programs worldwide to promote reflection, inquiry, and a sense of efficacy in pre-service teachers (Chant et al., 2004; Levin & Rock, 2003). Chapter 1 presented a study by Kennedy-Clark et al. (2018). Their conclusion was, “the wide variation in school and classroom contexts that the pre-service teachers encounter on their professional experiences means that it is difficult to articulate a one-size-fits-all approach to the action research” (Kennedy-Clark et al., 2018, p. 54). Therefore, although AR as PD might be effective of some teachers, the outcomes are highly dependent on the presence of certain elements within that PD program for that individual participant.

According to (Learning Forward, 2020), effective teacher PD is determined by the following seven elements:

- goals of the learning
- characteristics of the learners
- participant comfort with the learning process and one another
- participant familiarity with the content
- magnitude of the expected change
- participant work environment
- resources available to support learning

Each of these elements has been explored through Guskey’s five-level framework of PD evaluation to arrive at the provisional conclusion that AR, as currently implemented through SARP, is not an effective form of teacher PD. Although, participants reported having a generally

positive experience with SARP, evidence of the key elements of effective PD were obscure and deficient.

AR can function as PD for any teacher at any grade level, with any subject and number of students because AR is built around teacher curiosity and the desire to improve some target aspect of their professional connection to their pupils. However, this does not make it universally effective. When asked on the PFF for participants to respond to the prompt, “Action research is an effective means of professional development for me,” 16 out of 20 participants strongly agreed. Thomas articulated, “I appreciate that I was permitted the flexibility and autonomy to choose my SAR project.” Sarah affirmed, “The choice and focusing on a topic that had meaning for me was very effective.” As revealed in this discussion the participants in SARP believe it is effective because they have choice and control. However, these are not the most important measures of PD effectiveness. The effectiveness of PD must consider student learning outcomes.

AR is considered a best practice, in part, due to its applicability. However, it cannot be considered best practice in professional learning unless essential elements like fidelity to the AR process, an expectation of sustained change, and the measurement of student outcomes are integrated. Therefore, this study tentatively concludes that AR is not an effective teacher PD when it is not implemented with fidelity to the AR process.

Discussion Summary

This study finds that these three areas—the AR framework, the AR process, changes to instructional practices, come together to conclude the overall effectiveness of AR as teacher PD is lacking within SARP. Each discussion item is phrased as a question because all findings are tentative and invite conversation and future research. These findings about AR as PD have implications for practice and policy.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice and Policy

This study's findings have implications and recommendations for the evaluand, SARP, as well as how teachers practice AR. Concerning AR as a PD model, this section emphasizes the role of school leaders and PD facilitators who train and coach teachers.

The second evaluation question for this study solicited participant perspectives on how to improve the program. Those findings were reported in Chapter 4. This section discusses the implications and subsequent recommendations proposed based on the findings, the literature presented in Chapter 2, and the contextual factors of St. John's School. There are two intended audiences for this section. First, at the program level, this section is intended for the consideration of the instructional leadership team of the SARP. Second, at the policy level, this section is intended for anyone seeking to design, implement, or evaluate an AR as professional learning project.

The Instructional Leadership Team

AR as PD at St. John's School may become more effective if the following recommendations are considered:

1. The instructional leadership team needs to provide direction more than knowledge and skills.
2. The SARP instructional leadership team should use concrete examples and samples.
3. Participants need to be confident that they will receive support from the instructional leadership team.
4. The instructional leadership team supports participants by providing asynchronous structure.
5. SARP provides an opportunity for mentorship.

The implications and recommendations which follow are grounded in five findings from Chapter 4 and apply specifically to the evaluand of this study. The SARP instructional leadership team is constantly seeking formal and informal feedback from its stakeholders, so this section will be submitted for their review.

Use Exemplars and Modeling to Reduce Participant Revision Time. The findings from Chapter 4 have implications that can help reduce the amount of time and effort participants are investing in revision. As a reminder, participants identified time as the most significant limitation to the effectiveness of SARP. Participants reported this request for additional time in three different ways:

1. Participants need a more accurate expectation of how much time it takes to implement qualitative data collection and analysis methods with their students.
2. Time restrictions caused participants to draw upon non-participating faculty and staff to cover some of their responsibilities. The support increased the participant's availability for SARP.
3. A minority of participants in SARP each year are also members of the IBSC AR Team.

To begin with the third concern, the instructional leadership team should consider the role and value of participant who are simultaneously completing an AR project with the IBSC, a global network of single-sex independent schools. To date, the instructional leadership team has not defined nor publicly communicated what those dual program participants contribute or gain that might be unique from other participants, and this is an area for further investigation. With that stated, the remainder of this subsection focuses on the first two issues related to participant time.

In the findings, participants voiced a need for realistic expectations of how much time it takes to implement specific qualitative data collection and analysis methods with students. An implication for the instructional leadership team is to make their expectations more visible and hands-on through presented exemplar AR projects and modeling how to collect and analyze data. Vincent stated, “The instructional leadership team cannot do my project for me, but they can provide guidance and support.” The alumni are asking for concrete examples of what success in SARP looks like. This can be done in two ways. First, the instructional leadership team can present exemplars from previous cohorts. Second, the instructional practices of the program should include modeling AR.

Using in-house samples of data collection and analysis tools could help future cohorts conceptualize their projects. There is an opportunity for the instructional leadership team to present incoming fellows with tools during the summer training. In reflection, Amber realized, for example:

I wish I had created surveys, interview questions, and additional assessment tools. It would have been beneficial going into the school year with the initial survey complete... Seeing sample questions or working with the group to brainstorm samples would have been useful.

Based on the document review process, SARP should build upon the labor and resources generated by previous cohorts. The alumni have provided work samples for the instructional leadership team. Looking forward, SARP can save their participants time if they allow participants to build from and be inspired by those who came before.

Another implication for the instructional leadership team is to go beyond mere avoidance of having participants start from scratch. Instead, provide a target destination by modeling AR.

Sarah added, “I would recommend modeling what data collection and analysis could look like.”

It is essential to give participants a clear direction and benchmark examples that communicate expectations on deliverables. The labor of previous cohorts could potentially cut down on the amount of time and “extra work” the instructional team currently invests into editing and revising participant research briefs. As Judy stated when considering asking our faculty to conduct a literature review:

I just think it's really, really hard for folks to wrap their heads around what it means to use scholarly research in order to inform their practice. Because the other piece is so much easier to be able to grab the article, or the blog post, or the podcast that just makes so much sense and is presented in a way that's really user friendly. I think it takes a lot of time and practice to be able to dissect and understand a 12-page empirical article. So I think that may be part of it, too.

Therefore, modeling how to approach an empirical article is one example of a skill that needs to be added to the summer training.

Finally, a more thorough audit of the current monthly training agendas facilitated by the instructional leadership team is recommended. The instructional leadership team of SARP needs to decide what they want participants to graduate the program with. If the SARP framework, as presented, is an essential take-a-way, then it must be reflected in the design of the research brief and any other deliverables created, sampled, or modeled. The audit might be conducted by a subset of willing alumni with their discoveries and suggestions being reported to both the instructional leadership team of SARP and the curriculum and instruction team for oversight and objectivity. Using previous participant exemplars as modeling, the instructional leadership team

can more effectively ensure that the time and effort participants invest into the program is more productive and intentional.

Differentiate to Provide an Individualized Participant Experience. One implication suggested by this study's findings is to allow for a more individualized experience. The instructional leadership team should earnestly consider objections to their current model, such as, why the entire cohort is expected to conclude the program simultaneously, and why the annual theme is universal for all participants. After all, the AR projects have never been analyzed to draw conclusions about the broader theme. Instead, the program's deliverables have always stopped at the project level; therefore, the instructional leadership team should consider giving more choices by customizing the parameters based on expressed teacher needs and desired student outcomes. This information can be gathered through the application process and revisited and adapted through one-on-one coaching sessions, further implied in the next section.

To a degree, the instructional leadership team is aware of the different needs, skills, and perspectives their participants bring. Judy, the program director, when asked directly about areas of programmatic ineffectiveness responded:

I wonder if differentiation is sometimes a challenge [for us] because I would imagine that some people who've had some research experience catch on more quickly or don't need as deep of a dive.... To be able to deliver the content in a way that works for every participant, I would assume is probably a challenge.

Judy understood that not all participants come to the program with the same background, so there is work to be done in equity. While her remarks focused on participant fluency with research skills, this principle could be applied to many factors within SARP. Therefore, it is recommended that the instructional leadership team consider how best to balance a uniform

cohort experience, which also allows for emphasized participant voice and choice through differentiation.

Another corollary implication involves formalizing the mentorship component of SARP. This could be accomplished in two ways. For example, the instructional leadership team should host periodic one-to-one meetings based on individual participant availability. Still, also, SARP alumni might volunteer to be matched with a current participant in the program. Given the small number of members within each cohort, either approach is a feasible benefit. However, it is recommended to leverage the program's alumni base and continue their engagement and PD as mentors. Participation from alumni would be voluntary mirroring their participation year.

Re-Purpose Monthly Meetings and Begin Participant Check-Ins to Improve Coaching and Support Individual AR Projects. What can we, the instructional leadership team, do during the weeks without formal meetings? The first recommendation is for the instructional leadership team to begin gathering feedback from participants. To be heard, rather than surveyed, a brainstorming session with the next cohort of participants might better discover their specific needs and expectations. The group discussion could happen as early as the spring after completing the application process and before summer training. The feedback should center on two objectives:

1. To improve as PD facilitators and instructional coaches, and
2. To increase understanding of how to offer individual support to guide AR projects.

Another implication for the instructional leadership team is to re-purpose the monthly meeting. Consider what type of formalized processes or systems could be enacted to support participants in implementing their project. The monthly meetings can be characterized as a 30-minute workgroup with three phases. The first 5-10 minutes are fill with welcome, affirmation,

and updates from the head coach, and the next 15-20 minutes are open of cohort support of individual AR projects. The final five minutes is used as a wrap-up to explain the next steps.

The lion's share of the monthly meetings is spent addressing a theme such as writing a research question, literature review, methods, analysis, or reporting that is relevant to every participant. The current instructional strategy is group analysis of one participant's work at a time. This usually yields a plethora of ideas and perspectives. However, it rarely leads to a decision unless it has been made by an instructional leader. To increase participant ownership over the decision-making process, while also making better use of our limited time as a cohort, it is recommended to switch from going project by project to presenting exemplars and modeling as discussed in the previous section.

Not all participants have identical research support needs. Therefore, individual coaching is more effective in this context. For example, Ingrid wondered, "how to prove my findings." Thankfully, she was able to have the head coach in her division, and they partnered on her AR project more closely than other colleagues in this cohort. However, Carly, who was in the same cohort and also taught Spanish, navigated a similar challenge on her own: "Initially, analyzing the data and forming conclusions was challenging. But once I began to identify the trends, I noticed from the data, it became easier to see how the data helped me draw conclusions." Carly did not opt into nor feel a need for individual coaching. Instead, the data led her to the conclusions. Therefore, individual coaching needs vary.

An asynchronous check-in may more effectively facilitate the individual needs of participants to increase participant accessibility to coaching and avoid the sense of adding meetings or time wasted for the group. During our interview, Todd revealed:

Speaking candidly, I remember one of our first meetings, we got here at like 7:15. Seven minutes later, I felt she said, "Well, that's all I have for you." And I was like, "Come on. Don't do this to me. Don't get me here for that." So, if you're going to make people do get up that early... make sure you're utilizing every minute and no fluff.

In this instance, Todd did not see value in the roundtable group analysis check-in that followed Lilith's opening remarks. His expectations were not met, and he left this meeting disappointed, as though his time had been wasted.

Part of this may come down to participant preference. In the current iteration of the program, one-to-one coaching is mandated for some struggling participants. However, in this section, individualized coaching is an offer to all participants. Consequently, moving attention to individual projects away from the required monthly meeting, may negatively impact equity. Since monthly meetings are attended by all members of a cohort, there is an equitable level of accessibility to the instructional leadership team. However, the recommended change could lead to foreseeable challenges such as finding mutual times and neutral spaces to meet. To anticipate this, it is suggested that the instructional leadership team use an automated scheduling software. Also, to promote equity, the Center for the Study of Boys should host a common meeting location.

Currently, the instructional leadership team offers an open invitation of general availability for participant support. They track participant progress asynchronously through the research briefs and only schedule meetings with those identified as struggling or needing additional assistance. Instead, the instructional leadership team should gather feedback from each cohort to develop as coaches and differentiate their instructional practices from year to year.

In this COVID era, it is imperative that SARP be capable of going virtual. Much of the program's mission is fulfilled asynchronously by teachers doing AR in their respective classrooms. Still, the instructional leadership team should review their summer training, monthly meetings, and one-to-one coaching to optimize delivery in both digital and hybrid formats.

Define Administrative Support. One implication suggested by this study's findings is for the SARP instructional leadership team to rethink its relationship and expectations surrounding administrative support. As presented in Chapter 4, participants expressed a desire to have administrative awareness and involvement, so here is one way that might become feasible at St. John's School.

First, let us clarify the purpose of this support. According to Sullivan and Glanz (2005), administrators should participate in the process of engaging teachers in instructional dialogue to: (a) improve teaching, and (b) increase student achievement.

Therefore, effective administrative support shares two vital goals with effective PD. Excessive checks, micromanaging, or unnecessary restrictions may hinder teachers' creativity with system demands to conform to formal or perceived expectations. The instructional leadership team should make this distinction evident if they move forward with increased administrative support.

Administrative support will also address the concern raised by participants and reported in Chapter 4 about the visibility of SARP. One participant stated, "I do not remember the administrative team being a part of my Action Research." Also, Ebony articulated an expectation of increased administrative attention and accolade be given to this program and its participants. Some program alums felt overlooked and taken for granted, and this study suggests that

organizational awareness must precede meaningful involvement from non-participating stakeholders.

Therefore, I would like to present two models for how this might be enacted. First, there are seven monthly meetings under the current model of SARP. Each meeting is approximately 30-minutes before our professional responsibilities surrounding the academic day begins. Three of these meetings could aim to include the presence and engagement of an administrator. A proposed schedule might consist of: (a) the initial meeting, (b) one meeting during data collection and analysis, and (c) one final meeting before reporting the findings.

This would allow two definitive check-ins with division level administrators, or their appointed curriculum and instruction team lead, while balancing flexibility by providing administrators the choice to select a meeting to attend over 5 months. These touchpoints would raise awareness, allowing for more intentional partnership opportunities to be revealed. At St. John's, this model of engagement tends to be preferred as opposed to mandating specific administrative actions.

Secondly, the responsibility of keeping their administrator informed could be placed on the participants. Sixty percent of participants strongly agreed that “The administrative team provided helpful support to me as I undertook my AR project.” This data from the PFF is supplemented with written comments such as, “They were helpful every step of the way, very encouraging.” Also, “I felt [my administrator] was enthusiastic about my being an Upper School rep on the Saints Action Research Team. I don't recall much else 'support'—nor was I looking for it or further validation.” Bearing this in mind, perhaps administrative awareness could be differentiated with participants taking the lead. In this model, the instructional leadership team would once again coach, and we would provide expectations and strategies for how engagement

might be most effective. However, as opposed to the first model, this allows participants to have a voice and define their comfort level with having their employer involved in their classroom PD.

The second model would be my utmost recommended path forward due to the nature of how SARP needs to be strengthened. SARP participants need to take more evidence-based risks. However, I am concerned about the impact increased formal administrative involvement could have on participants. Teacher anxiety may be a deterrent. According to Ali et al. (2016):

During monitoring, the psychological reactions of teachers are different from one another. Some teachers claimed to be unaffected by the presence of officers, while others admitted to experiencing varying degrees of panic. Teachers' anxiety is associated with the phenomenon of being observed during teaching, and they are conscious of an evaluative presence. (p. 4)

The instructional leadership team seeks to reduce panic and anxiety during this PD experience; however, the presence and oversight of an administrator may make teacher performance feel evaluative. SARP participation is voluntary, and the program's mission is to equip teachers to leverage research to address their problems of practice. The instructional leadership team should consider the models presented and define the type of administrative support that they believe will best yield mission fulfillment.

Facilitators of AR as PD

This study's findings also have implications for school leaders of PD beyond St. John's School. This section is designed to provide broad implications and recommendations for facilitators of AR as PD.

AR is a highly contextual form of PD. More specifically, it can be classified as a model for teacher-led PD. Díaz-Maggioli's (2004) definition of teacher PD emphasizes participant empowerment and ownership of their professional destiny. "Professional development can be defined as a career-long process in which educators fine-tune their teaching to meet student needs" (p. 1). AR as PD is when teachers engage in continuous instructional improvement. Therefore, this study recommends leaders regularly remind their participants of why AR matters. The following section provides two key implications. First, AR as PD is most effective when student learning outcomes are explicitly emphasized. Second, AR as PD in schools can encompass three levels of approach, individual, collaborative, and schoolwide.

AR as PD Must Emphasize Student Learning Outcomes. This study's findings also have implications for school leaders, particularly in their roles as PD facilitators. As described in Chapter 1, the goal of all PD is to yield student outcomes. Baird and Clark (2018) provide a broad definition of teacher PD: teachers, with a common student outcome or content focus, coming together to improve student outcomes (p. 327). According to the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO, 2008), PD can include a variety of methods and approaches. Still, the dual intended outcomes of school improvement and student learning are clear and essential. In this study, SARP did not measure the impact participants have had on student learning outcomes. This is the most crucial recommendation, and it applies not only to the evaluand but to all AR as PD initiatives. To increase its effectiveness, SARP should move towards a student learning outcomes approach to AR as PD.

Student outcomes from this program evaluation are not definitive. Findings presented in Chapter 4 demonstrated that none of the respondents mentioned students' grades or academic scores more broadly in student learning outcomes. Emily and other alumni presented qualitative

findings such as positive incidents of student engagement and positive parent feedback assuming these anecdotal data points were evidence of curricular and instructional success. Learning is presumed without assessment of student knowledge and skills. This is a missed opportunity that could improve the effectiveness of AR as PD if the achievement of learning outcomes for students were the central objective. It must center on student outcomes in alignment with effective PD practices (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Desimone & Garet, 2015). As Lilith stated, the most effective projects in SARP center on the boys. “I mean their overall objective, obviously, is to teach the whole boy, and be present for the boy,” said Lilith. Successful iterations of in-service AR as PD start with what they expect students to learn and do based on the PD experiences.

Increase AR Approaches and Their Integration Into PD. AR is fundamentally about problem-solving (Calhoun, 1994. Carr and Kemmis (1986) viewed AR as a process for changing individual teacher practices, which is the evaluand’s current application, and as a method of social transformation to be carried out collaboratively with participants and stakeholders. Long-term, AR as PD aspires to offer a collaborative community that focuses on curating and generating research on the best instructional practices that are proven to yield student learning outcomes.

Another implication for school leaders who facilitate PD is the importance of conducting AR on several levels. According to Calhoun (1994), there are three levels of AR approaches:

1. Level 1 is individual teacher AR.
2. Level 2 is collaborative AR.
3. Level 3 is school-wide AR (p. 62).

Each differs in purpose, emphasis, and results. When choosing which type is appropriate, five elements should be considered: (a) the purpose and process, (b) the external support, (c) the kind

of data your desire, (d) the audience you are reporting to, and (e) the potential side effects (Calhoun, 1994, p. 63). A close consideration of the five elements will help determine which AR approach is most appropriate to address the problem participants bring to your PD program.

A final implication for school leaders who facilitate PD is the compound value of weaving AR approaches into preexisting areas of PD. For example, at St. John's, SARP alumni have found ways to apply the AR process to their annual S.M.A.R.T. Goals, amended teaching assignments, and other roles as athletic coaches and student club advisors. Therefore, instructional leaders should seek avenues to integrate the AR process into school life. As Ellie recommended on the PFF:

I would suggest that AR is integrated into the three-year observation cycle implemented by the curriculum and instruction team. This would ensure that every teacher is a part of AR as PD every three years, and it's not just for those who choose to do it.

Three other participants in this study mentioned that all teachers should be required to put research into action, and Megan experienced mandatory AR as PD at a previous school:

They did it whole school. Their professional days, that's what was done... We weren't allowed a topic of choice. That was the difference. Because we were working as a group, though, on a particular question, they were able to bring in, like, experts to come in and have a conversation with us so that we would get a... You know, it wasn't just me digging into paperwork, but you had a person there who was sharing their perspective on it, which was nice... The whole grade would have substitutes come in, take over the boys, and you worked during the day.

As previously stated, AR as PD is highly contextual, and I recommend PD facilitators consult their stakeholders as they develop a program that works for them. Start small, focus on

measuring student outcomes, and design your program with the freedom and empowerment of teachers do AR on the individual, collaborative, and school-wide level.

Recommendations for Future Research

This program evaluation was designed to address questions related to the effectiveness of the SARP. It also contributes to our understanding of AR as PD more broadly. However, it also raises questions. This section discusses some of the genuine inquiries that arise from this study as potential topics for future investigation.

Quantitative Studies on Student Learning Outcomes

The findings from this study are tentative and intend to direct interested parties toward further program evaluation of SARP and additional research of AR as a form of PD. AR as PD provides opportunities for new learning, yet the existing research says little about teachers' perceptions of AR as an activity that changes their practice or improves student learning outcomes (McNiff, 2002; Guskey, 2002b). Therefore, student outcomes from SARP are not definitive, and future research would need to be gathered to include quantitative measures of student performance.

Many of the quantitative studies are focused on school, district, or state-level improvement, not student learning outcomes through teacher participatory AR studies (Bradshaw, 2016; Caskey, 2006; Calhoun, 1994, 2002; L. Cohen & Byrnes, 2007; Rogers et al., 2007; Sagor, 2000.) Specifically, future research might explore more fully the connection between individual or collaborative teacher AR projects and student academic performance.

To What Degree is AR an Equitable Form of PD?

Future research might take up questions of equity within AR as PD. This study found that coaches, tutors, and elective teachers experience unique limitations to AR as PD. Coaches

generally have less available PD time immediately after-school than non-coaches. Tutors often meet with subsets of the general population due to academic deficient. Electives, though typically conceptualized as student choice, are classes that meet for fewer total days and students than core instructional classes required for every student for the entire academic year. What impact on equity do these distinctions in role have? Phrased another way, what does equity look like in an AR as PD program that includes educators implementing AR outside the traditional classroom?

Resistors to Participation in AR as PD

An extension of this study would be to delve into how non-participating teachers arrive at their understanding of AR more generally and SARP to be specific. Within this bank of non-participating teachers, I am most interested in the resistors. Fullan (2003) gives two reasons to identify resistors and gather their input. First, the resistors possess ideas to improve AR as PD that instructional leaders and early adopters have missed. Second, resistors often hold insight into the relational politics and power dynamics operating behind the scenes (p. 6).

This program has not yet achieved a majority of faculty participation to help us attain indirect long-term goals such as building a teacher-researcher culture within St. John's School. Therefore, the results found in this study are limited to the cohorts invited to participate. I recommend a forthcoming study of teachers who demonstrate characteristics of resistors (Fullan, 2003). While this study did not intentionally oppose dissenting views, it would make for a more robust understanding of SARP if further investigation was conducted into why many faculty

members have opted against participation. In short, this future research study with resisters has the potential to complete the narrative or contextualize the findings from this study.

Standardization Versus Choice in Teacher Participatory AR

Another extension of this study that is of particular interest to me would be to delve into the question of standardization versus choice in the AR process itself. To what degree are teachers given choice as researchers? How prescriptive is the AR process when valid and reliable results are intended? An interpretive phenomenological study that explores why teachers conceptualize and practice AR as they do may offer insight into what experiences have shaped those views. Furthermore, the study would likely have significance for initial and continuing teacher PD.

The Effectiveness of AR as PD in a Longitudinal Study

A final recommendation to extend this study would be to conduct a longitudinal cohort study, which follows a single group of AR as PD practitioners for three or more AR cycles rather than a single AR cycle, which is a delimitation of this study. Longitudinal studies allow for direct observation and checkpoints rather than relying solely on perceptions and self-reported data. With an intentional yet amendable focus, a researcher may observe how a particular outcome came to be. While this study was limited by the relative permanence of alumni not recalling past events, a longitudinal study can employ observation and recording as evidence over time to attain a higher level of validity.

Summary

Scholars have much more to learn about AR as PD, and it will be practitioners whose perspectives need to be heard and attended to. This study's goal was to gain insight into how selected teachers experience AR as PD. By exploring their experiences, this study sought to

discover what meaning selected teachers ascribe to AR and to elevate their voices in the conversations about teacher-directed PD.

Twenty teachers joined me in this study. They generously invested time, sharing their reactions, learning, changes, challenges, perceptions, and suggestions around this complex evaluand. Due to their rich recollections, sentiments, and anecdotes, these teachers tentatively revealed that AR is not an effective form of PD. Room remains in the research for teacher conceptions of AR, particularly using quantitative student achievement data at the classroom level. Virtually no research is available on single-sex independent schools' use of AR as PD. This study offers one contribution; however, more attention is highly recommended.

The lived experiences of AR as PD offer administrators, curriculum and instructional leadership teams, and educational researchers' insight into how these teachers understand and practice AR in the classroom. I hope that their voices will be heard as a valuable contribution to the conversations about teacher-guided development needed as educational professionals strive to realize the full potential of student learning outcomes.

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Appendix A

Data Collection

Figure A1

Saints Action Research Program Feedback Form

The Saints Action Research Program Feedback Form

Directions: Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement below. Indicate your answer by clicking the numbered circle next to the item.

* Required

The Initial Summer Training

The questions in this section are each related to your initial experiences with action research and the professional development administered prior to your participation year.

1. At the summer training, I gained all the knowledge and skills required to do action research (AR) in my classroom. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
strongly disagree strongly agree

2. Comments

3. After learning about action research during the summer training, I was excited about undertaking AR in my own classroom. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
strongly disagree strongly agree

9. Initially, why did you apply to participate in the Saints Action Research Program? *

10. What did you know about Action Research prior to beginning the program? *

11. When you were first introduced, what about action research was easy to understand? *

12. What about action research was confusing? *

4. Comments

5. By the end of the summer, I knew what a successful Action Research project looked like. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
strongly disagree strongly agree

6. Comments

7. Action Research is relevant to my professional responsibilities. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
strongly disagree strongly agree

8. Comments

13. What did you like about the summer training? *

14. What did you NOT like about the summer training? *

During the Saints Action Research Program

The questions in this section are each related to your experiences with action research and the professional development administered during your participation year.

15. The coaches modeled action research. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
strongly disagree strongly agree

16. Comments

17. The administrative team provided helpful support to me as I undertook my AR project. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
strongly disagree strongly agree

18. Comments

19. Colleagues in my division showed an interest in my action research project. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
strongly disagree strongly agree

20. Comments

21. My students, at the time, benefited from my use of Action Research. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
strongly disagree strongly agree

27. What are the goals of the Saints Action Research Program? *

28. How did you select your area of study? *

29. What did you learn along the way about action research? *

30. How did AR impact or not impact your students? *

22. Comments

23. As I undertook my Action Research project, I learned more about the Action Research process. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
strongly disagree strongly agree

24. Comments

25. I was able to apply what I learned about action research to my classroom. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
strongly disagree strongly agree

26. Comments

31. How might your division level administrative team provide support to future participants? *

32. During the program, who did you discuss your project with? *

Since completing the Saints Action Research Program

The questions in this section are each related to your perspective on action research and the professional development since your participation year.

33. Since completing my first action research project, I have used the AR process at least one other time. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5
strongly disagree strongly agree

34. Comments

35. Future students will benefit from my use of AR. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree strongly agree

36. Comments

37. I could teach a colleague how to undertake action research in their classroom. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree strongly agree

38. Comments

39. Action research helps me explore important ideas relevant to my professional practice as a teacher. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree strongly agree

40. Comments

41. Action research is an effective means of professional development for me. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree strongly agree

42. Comments

43. I prefer action research above other types of professional development. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree strongly agree

44. Comments

45. Based on your current understanding, what is action research? *

46. How have you used action research since completing the program? *

47. What do you wish you knew prior to participating in action research? *

48. What are the advantages of participating in the Saints Action Research Program? *

49. What are the limitations to participating in the Saints Action Research Program? *

50. What recommendations do you have to improve the program? *

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Figure A2

SARP Document Review

<p>Level 4A: The Action Research Model</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What evidence is there that participants understand each of the four elements of Action Research?2. What evidence is there that participants do not understand each of the four elements of Action Research?
<p>Level 4B: Action Research Project</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What evidence is there that participants used the Action Research process?2. What evidence is there that participants did not use the Action Research process?3. What evidence is there that participants learned about (the annual theme)?4. What evidence is there that participants did not learn about (the annual theme)?5. What recommendations are provided for future action research cycles?
<p>Level 5: Participant perceptions of student learning outcomes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. According to the participant, did their students learn more, less?2. What evidence is there of student learning outcomes?3. What evidence is there that participants would make use of student learning in their teaching beyond the completion of the program?4. What evidence is there that participants would not make use of student learning in their teaching beyond the completion of the program?

Note. I did not collect or analyze research briefs from before 2018 because the quality and form were significantly different. This is a delimitation of this study.

Figure A3

SARP Group Interview Protocol

Date: _____
Time of Interview: _____
Place: _____
Interviewees:
The SARP Instructional Leadership Team members present: _____

Interviewer Directions: This is a semi-structured group interview. It has 14 guiding questions and tiered optional probing questions underneath the guiding question they modify.

INTERVIEW AGENDA

Welcome Instructional Leadership Team
Test the digital recorder
<p>Introduce the purpose and process of the interview</p> <p>As a team, we are interested in the effectiveness of the Saints Action Research Program. Today, we are focusing on the nine phases of participant experience. Also, this conversation is concerned with how this might change going forward.</p> <p>The nine phases of the program are</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Initial summer training2. Identification of an area of study3. Plan the action (includes the literature review and lesson planning)4. Implementation of the action plan5. Evidence of outcomes6. Drawing inferences based on the evidence7. Commitments to future practice8. Reporting (includes the research brief and faculty presentation)9. Alumni <p>Nothing you say today will be shared with anyone at our school. They will not receive any copies or versions of this conversation. I will be using this experience for my dissertation, and the findings and recommendations will serve to strengthen future iterations of research professional learning.</p> <p>After this interview, you will also be supplied with a transcript of our conversation to review at your convenience for approval. Do you have any questions about our pledge of confidentiality?</p>
Obtain verbal consent to proceed

Interview Questions
(1) How effective is the initial training in the summer?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are our goals during this time? • What is not effective about our summer training?
(2) How do participants identify an area of study?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often do participants change their area of study? • What reasons have we provided for redirecting a participant?
(3) To what degree are AR teachers planning lessons that align with their plan of action?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we know?
(4) What evidence do we have of teachers reviewing a body of research literature to inform their teaching practices?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what degree are participants benefitting from conducting a three to five source literature review?
(5) To what degree is an AR teacher's plan of action implemented in the classroom?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we become aware when the AR plan of action is not implemented with fidelity? • How do we encourage mid-course correction?
(6) How do we know if participants' action in the classroom was effective?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we know their action was ineffective? • How do we know data collected by our participants is valid?
(7) How do we know if participants have impacted student learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What evidence do we have of improved outcomes for students?
(8) How do we ensure inferences drawn based on the data are reliable?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which data analysis techniques do we teach?
(9) How might we know if participants follow through on their commitments to future practice?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What role do administrators play?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What role do department and grade level meetings play?
<p>(10) Why do participants report on their study?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First in the form of a research brief • Also, with a faculty presentation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the research brief directly benefit non-participating teachers? • To what degree are the faculty presentations effective? • How might these results be shared more broadly?
<p>(11) What are the responsibilities of our program alumni?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What evidence do we have of our program alumni continuing to use the AR model? • How do we support alumni who do not want to continue using action research? • How might action research have a more impactful role in each division?
<p>(12) Which projects should we advocate for to be models for their department or grade level?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a difference in the lower, middle, and upper schools? • Is there any difference by subject area?
<p>Conclusion</p>
<p>(13) How do teachers feel about SARP?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they seem to like or not like it? • Do they believe in it or not? • To what degree are we sending a consistent message? • To what degree are we giving them enough time, space, resources? • Is there a difference in the lower, middle, and upper schools? • Is there any difference by subject area?
<p>(14) What other recommendations might we offer to increase the effectiveness of SARP?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What should we continue? • What should we discontinue? • What resources do we need? • How much time would be required prior to the implementation of these changes? • Whose buy-in do we need for sustained change?
<p>Explain the next steps and thank participants</p>

Note. SARP = Saints Action Research Program; AR = action research.

Figure A4

SARP Participant Interview Protocol

Date: _____
Time of Interview: _____
Place: _____
Interviewee: _____
Action Research Participation Year: _____
Years of Teaching Experience: _____
Duration: Approximately 1 hour

Interviewer Directions: This is a semi-structured interview with guiding questions and tiered probing questions organized underneath the major question they modify.

INTERVIEW AGENDA

Introductions
Welcome participant
Test the digital recorder
<p>Introduce the purpose and process of the interview</p> <p>I am interested in learning about the quality of professional development offered to the faculty. Specifically, given your participation in the Saints Action Research Program, I am interested in how effective this program was in your experience.</p> <p>By effective, I am interested in three things primarily:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How well do you understand what action research is?2. How you have changed as a teacher as a direct result of this program?3. How your students are impacted as a direct result of your participation? <p>Nothing you say today will be shared with anyone at our school. They will not receive any copies or versions of this conversation. I will be using this experience for my dissertation, and those findings and recommendations will be reported to the leadership team. However, your name will not be mentioned. If a direct quote is used, the pseudonym on your consent form will be used.</p> <p>After this interview, you will also be supplied with a transcript of our conversation to review during the next two weeks for your approval. Do you have any questions?</p>
Give approximate duration and obtain verbal consent to proceed
Interview Questions

(1) What new ideas did you take away from the initial summer training session?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you learn about Action Research?
(2) Based on your understanding, how do you do action research?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your conceptualization of Action Research? • What evidence is there that participants understand each of the four elements of Action Research?
(3) What process did you use to select your area of study?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did anyone influence your decision?
(4) What skills did you gain in the program that you are still using in the classroom?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you provide an example from this year?
(5) What about Action Research do you not like?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What aspects of the program rubbed you the wrong way? • What about Action Research do you still wonder about?
(6) What did your project teach you about action research?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How else might you have obtained equivalent learning?
(7) What did you learn about (the annual theme) from your project?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How else might you have obtained this learning?
(8) Based on your experience, recall a typical experience implementing action research in the classroom.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you know if things were working? (data collection) • How did you make sense of the information you gathered? (data analysis)
(9) Let's talk about the conclusion of your action research project.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First, please recap your experience with the research brief • Also, walk me through how you experienced the faculty presentation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what degree has your research brief directly benefited your non-participating colleagues? • How effective was your faculty presentation?
(10) Tell me about what you have done with action research since completing the program.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you currently undertaking an AR cycle? If so, tell me about it. • Future action research cycles

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you need the support of a program to conduct action research in your classroom?
(11) Would you engage in action research again?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why or why not? • Do you believe it will improve student outcomes?
(12) Do you believe action research helps students?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain your answer.
(13) During your action research project, did your students learn more, less? Please give me an example.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What evidence is there of student learning outcomes?
(14) To what degree will future students be impacted by your participation in this program?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will they be better off? worse? • What might you do differently next time?
Conclusion
(15) Remember that all feedback will be kept anonymous. What recommendations might you offer to increase the effectiveness of the Saints Action Research Program?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the next steps and thank the participant for their time.

Note. SARP = Saints Action Research Program; AR = action research.

Appendix B

Tables of Specification

Table B1

Table of Specifications: Group Interview Evaluation Question 1

Evaluation Question 1		
Phase of Program	Guiding Questions	Probing Questions
1	(1) How effective is the initial training in the summer?	1. What are our goals during this time? 2. What is not effective about our summer training?
2	(2) How do participants identify an area of study?	1. How often do participants change their area of study? 2. What reasons have we provided for redirecting a participant?
3	(3) To what degree are AR teachers planning lessons that align with their plan of action?	1. How do we know?
3	(4) What evidence do we have of AR teachers reviewing a body of research literature to inform their teaching practices?	1. To what degree are participants benefitting from conducting a three to five source literature review?
4	(5) To what degree is an AR teacher's plan of action implemented in the classroom?	1. How do we become aware when the AR plan of action is not implemented with fidelity? 2. How do we encourage mid-course correction?
5	(6) How do we know if participants' action in the classroom was effective?	1. How do we know their action was ineffective? 2. How do we know data collected by our participants is valid?
5	(7) How do we know if participants have impacted student learning?	1. What evidence do we have of improved outcomes for students?
6	(8) How do we ensure inferences drawn based on the data are reliable?	1. Which data analysis techniques do we teach?
7	(9) How might we know if participants follow through on their commitments to future practice?	1. What role do administrators play? 2. What role do department and grade level meetings play?
8	(10) Why do participants report on their study? • First, in the form of a research brief	1. How does the research brief directly benefit non-participating teachers? 2. To what degree are the faculty presentations effective? 3. How might these results be shared more broadly?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Also, with a faculty presentation 	
9	(11) What are the responsibilities of our program alumni?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What evidence do we have of our program alumni continuing to use the AR model? 2. How do we support alumni who do not want to continue using action research? 3. How might action research have a more impactful role in each division?
9	(12) Which projects should we advocate for to be models for their department or grade level?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there a difference in the lower, middle, and upper schools? 2. Is there any difference by subject area?

Note. Phases of the Program: (1) Initial summer training, (2) Identification of an area of study, (3) Plan the action (includes the literature review and lesson planning), (4) Implementation of the action plan, (5) Evidence of outcomes (includes data collection), (6) Drawing inferences based on the evidence (includes data analysis), (7) Commitments to future practice, (8) Reporting (includes the research brief and faculty presentation), (9) Alumni (what persists after you complete the program. AR = action research.

Table B2

Table of Specifications: Group Interview Evaluation Question 2

Guiding Questions	Probing Questions
(1) How do teachers feel about the Saints Action Research Program?	1. Do they seem to like it not like it? 2. Do they believe in it or not? 3. To what degree are we sending a consistent message? 4. To what degree are we giving them enough time, space, resources? 5. Is there a difference in the lower, middle, and upper schools? 6. Is there any difference by subject area?
(2) What other recommendations might we offer to increase the effectiveness of the Saints Action Research Program?	1. What should we continue? 2. What should we discontinue? 3. What resources do we need? 4. How much time would be required prior to the implementation of these changes? 5. Whose buy-in do we need for sustained change?

Table B3*Table of Specifications: Participant Interviews Guskey Level 4*

The Action Research Model		
Phase of Program	Guiding Questions	Probing Questions
1	What new ideas did you take away from the initial summer training session?	What did you learn about action research?
2-6	Based on your understanding, how do you do action research?	What is your conceptualization of action research? What evidence is there that participants understand each of the four elements of action research?
2	What process did you use to select your area of study?	Did anyone influence your decision and, if so, how?
9	What skills did you gain in the program that you are still using in the classroom?	Can you provide an example from this year and explain it?
The Action Research Project		
7	What did your project teach you about action research?	How else might you have obtained equivalent learning?
7	What did you learn about (the annual theme) from your project?	How else might you have obtained this learning?
4-6	Based on your experience, recall a typical experience implementing action research in the classroom.	How did you know if things were working? How did you make sense of the information you gathered?

8	<p>Let's talk about the conclusion of your action research project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First, please recap your experience with the research brief • Also, walk me through how you experienced the faculty presentation 	<p>To what degree has your research brief directly benefited your non-participating colleagues? How effective was your faculty presentation?</p>
9	<p>Tell me about what you have done with action research since completing the program.</p>	<p>Are you currently undertaking an action research cycle? If so, please tell me about it. Do you need the support of a program to conduct action research in your classroom?</p>

Note. From "Level 4: Use of New Knowledge and Skills," by T. R. Guskey & D. M. Sparks, 2000, *Evaluating professional development*. Copyright 2000 by Corwin Press, Inc.

Table B4*Table of Specifications: Participant Interviews Guskey Level 5*

Phase of Program	Guiding Questions	Probing Questions
6	Do you believe action research helps students?	Explain your answer.
5	During your action research project, did your students learn more, less?	What evidence is there of student learning outcomes?
7	To what degree will future students be impacted by your participation in this program?	Will the student be better or worse off? What might you do differently next time?

Note. From “Level 5: Student Learning Outcomes,” by T. R. Guskey & D. M. Sparks, 2000, *Evaluating professional development*. Copyright 2000 by Corwin Press, Inc.

Table B5

Table of Specifications: Participant Interviews Evaluation Question 2

Guiding Questions	Probing Questions
What about Action Research do you not like?	What aspects of the program rubbed you the wrong way? What about Action Research do you still wonder about?
Would you engage in action research again?	Why or why not? Do you believe it will improve student outcomes?

Appendix C

Consent Form

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM
SAINTS ACTION RESEARCH PROGRAM AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A PROGRAM
EVALUATION
The College of William and Mary

I, _____, agree to participate in a dissertation study regarding my experiences with the Saints Action Research Program. The purpose of this study is to better understand my reactions, learnings, and skills gained from the program. The researcher is also interested in my experience of organizational support and change from the time I participated until today. Finally, this study will ask me about the student learning outcomes that resulted from my participation in the Saints Action Research Program.

As a participant, I understand that my participation in the study is completely voluntary. Therefore, I can withdraw at any time with no consequences. Only teachers from the most recent three cohorts are being invited to participate in a semi-structured interview.

I understand that the interviewer has been trained in the research of human subjects, my responses will be confidential, and that my name will not be associated with any results of this study. I understand that data will be collected using an audiovisual recording device and then professionally transcribed for analysis. The recording and transcription will be safeguarded, so my true identity will not be associated with the research findings.

I understand that there is no known risk or discomfort directly involved with this research and that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation at any time. I agree that should I choose to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the study that I will notify the researcher listed below, in writing. A decision not to participate in the study or to withdraw from the study will not affect my relationship with the researcher, the College of William and Mary generally or the School of Education, specifically.

If I have any questions or problems that may arise as a result of my participation in the study, I understand that I should contact Derek Porter, the researcher at 651-485-4556 and dsporter@email.wm.edu, Dr. Christopher Gareis at 757-221-2319 and crgare@wm.edu or Dr. Tom Ward, chair of the Education Internal Review Committee (EDIRC), at 757-221-2358 or EDIRC-L@wm.edu.

My signature below signifies that I am at least 18 years of age, that I have received a copy of this consent form, and that I consent to participate in this research study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

THIS PROJECT WAS FOUND TO COMPLY WITH APPROPRIATE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND WAS EXEMPTED FROM THE NEED FOR FORMAL REVIEW BY THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE (Phone 757-221-3966)

Appendix D

Summary of Rating-scale Items from the Program Feedback Form

PFF Section	Prompts	Descriptive Statistics						
		Frequency Table			Median	Mean	Mode	Range
Before	At the summer training, I gained all the knowledge and skills required to do action research (AR) in my classroom.	Value	Frequency	Frequency %	4	4.15	5, 4	3
		2	1	5.00				
		3	3	15.00				
		4	8	40.00				
		5	8	40.00				
Before	After learning about action research during the summer training, I was excited about undertaking AR in my own classroom.	Value	Frequency	Frequency %	5	4.7	5	2
		3	1	5.00				
		4	4	20.00				
		5	15	75.00				

Before	By the end of the summer, I knew what a successful Action Research project looked like.	Value	Frequency	Frequency %	5	4.55	5	2
		3	1	5.00				
		4	7	35.00				
		5	12	60.00				
Before	Action Research is relevant to my professional responsibilities.	Value	Frequency	Frequency %	5	4.75	5	4
		1	1	5.00				
		4	1	5.00				
		5	18	90.00				

PFF Section	Prompts	Descriptive Statistics						
		Frequency Table			Median	Mean	Mode	Range

During	The coaches modeled action research.	Value	Frequency	Frequency %	5	4.3	5	4
		1	1	5.00				
		3	2	10.00				
		4	6	30.00				
		5	11	55.00				
During	The administrative team provided helpful support to me as I undertook my AR project.	Value	Frequency	Frequency %	5	4.35	5	4
		1	1	5.00				
		3	2	10.00				
		4	5	25.00				
		5	12	60.00				

During	Colleagues in my division showed an interest in my action research project.	Value	Frequency	Frequency %	3.5	3.4	4	4
		1	1	5.00				
		2	4	20.00				
		3	5	25.00				
		4	6	30.00				
		5	4	20.00				
During	My students, at the time, benefited from my use of Action Research.	Value	Frequency	Frequency %	5	4.35	5	4
		1	1	5.00				
		2	1	5.00				
		3	1	5.00				
		4	4	20.00				
		5	13	65.00				

During	As I undertook my Action Research project, I learned more about the Action Research process.	Value	Frequency	Frequency %	5	4.6	5	4
		1	1	5.00				
		4	4	20.00				
		5	15	75.00				
During	I was able to apply what I learned about action research to my classroom.	Value	Frequency	Frequency %	5	4.5	5	4
		1	1	5.00				
		2	1	5.00				
		4	3	15.00				
		5	15	75.00				

PFF Section	Prompts	Descriptive Statistics				
		Frequency Table	Median	Mean	Mode	Range

After	Since completing my first action research project, I have used the AR process at least one other time.	Value	Frequency	Frequency %	4	3.6	5	4
		1	3	15.00				
		2	3	15.00				
		3	1	5.00				
		4	5	25.00				
		5	8	40.00				
After	Future students will benefit from my use of AR.	Value	Frequency	Frequency %	5	4.6	5	3
		2	1	5.00				
		3	1	5.00				
		4	3	15.00				
		5	15	75.00				

After	I could teach a colleague how to undertake action research in their classroom.	Value	Frequency	Frequency %	4	3.85	5	4
		1	1	5.00				
		2	1	5.00				
		3	6	30.00				
		4	4	20.00				
		5	8	40.00				
After	Action research helps me explore important ideas relevant to my professional practice as a teacher.	Value	Frequency	Frequency %	5	4.75	5	1
		4	5	25.00				
		5	15	75.00				
After	Action research is an effective means of professional development for me.	Value	Frequency	Frequency %	5	4.7	5	3
		2	1	5.00				
		4	3	15.00				
		5	16	80.00				

After	I prefer action research above other types of professional development.	Value	Frequency	Frequency %	3	3.5	3	2
		3	12	60.00				
		4	6	30.00				
		5	2	10.00				

Note. PFF = program feedback form; AR = action research.

Appendix E

Representative Quotations and Statistics for the Themes

Table E1

Representative Quotations and Statistics for the Themes of Guskey Level 1

Participant Reactions		
Stage of Participation	Theme	Representative Quotations and Statistics
Participant reactions about initial summer training prior to beginning SARP	As they began the program, participants reacted with excited and nervous energy	<p>The summer institute and the collaboration that happened at the trainings was energizing. I couldn't wait to get started.</p> <p>Yes, excited, but also trepidatious about taking on something else during soccer season.</p> <p>I was very nervous; I knew I could not start from day 1.</p>
Participant reactions about initial summer training prior to beginning SARP	AR as PD offers a collaborative community	<p>Phrases such as “with colleagues,” “one another,” and “ability to connect” were used 18 times by 16 different participants.</p> <p>I really enjoyed connecting with my peers across divisions.</p> <p>Ellie did it the same year I did, and it really opened up some trust and communication and collaboration.</p>

Participant reactions to undertaking the action research process	Participants expressed concern about the amount of time required of SARP	<p>The early morning meetings were tough because, and it might just be my situation, oftentimes, I'm going to be here till 5:30 pm, if not later, for Extended Day. And to start that early is a long day. Remember we were meeting at like 7:15 am.</p> <p>I think the biggest challenge is more scheduling than challenge while we're together.</p>
Participant reactions to undertaking the action research process	The assigned role of the participant matters	<p>The AR was directed towards working with groups (of students), and I am not a classroom teacher, so I found the task somewhat challenging for that reason.</p> <p>It was confusing figuring how to complete my action research without being a classroom teacher.</p> <p>I don't have (students) every day, I had them two times a week for 40 minutes, so it was a time restriction.</p>
Participant reactions after becoming an alum of SARP	The relative permanence of the SARP experience	<p>I honestly can't think of anything I didn't like about summer training.</p> <p>I don't remember any new initial ideas. If they did present an example to us, I don't remember it.</p> <p>I don't remember exactly what I put in my presentation because it's been a couple of years.</p>

Note. SARP = Saints Action Research Program; AR = Action Research; PD = Professional Development.

Table E2

Representative Quotations and Statistics for the Themes of Guskey Level 2

Participant Learning		
Stage of Participation	Theme	Representative Quotations and Statistics
Participant reflections on their learning process during initial summer training prior to Beginning SARP	Participants bring varying levels of prior knowledge of action research to SARP	<p>Five teachers had little to no previous contact with action research.</p> <p>Ten participants' AR experience was limited to the work and presentations produced by previous SARP cohorts.</p> <p>Two had completed AR projects as a graduate school requirement. I wasn't too far off of coming out of grad school where I had done action research for my thesis.</p> <p>Two were participants of other AR projects, so they could observe before conducting their own.</p> <p>One had participated in AR as PD in another school setting.</p>
Participant reflections on their learning process during initial summer training prior to beginning SARP	The instructional leadership team needs to provide direction more than knowledge and skills	<p>Phrases such as “with colleagues,” “one another,” and “ability to connect” were used 18 times by 16 different participants.</p> <p>I really enjoyed connecting with my peers across divisions.</p> <p>Ellie did it the same year I did, and it really opened up some trust and communication and collaboration.</p>

Participant reflections on their learning process during initial summer training prior to beginning SARP	Participants need to be confident that they will receive support from the instructional leadership team	<p>I loved the collaboration and the support from our leaders and librarians. With their support, I feel like we had everything at our fingertips!</p> <p>Keep me in line if the Saints Action Research project was deficient in some manner.</p> <p>(The leadership team) kept my feet to the fire because I get excited about doing and making changes. Follow-through isn't always there. So, having people in place to help support, check-in, and really help elevate what I was doing.</p> <p>I felt very well supported.</p>
Participants' reported learning while undertaking the SARP process	Participants learn AR by doing AR	<p>There is no substitute for doing!</p> <p>It was absolutely a case of immersion learning, and it reminded me of student teaching in that respect.</p> <p>It definitely was real-time research that I could see unfold in front of me based on what I chose to do or not to do with the students.</p>
Participants' reported learning after becoming an alum of SARP	Participants current conceptions of AR	<p>Action research is a process of in-depth inquiry of an area of interest.</p> <p>Action Research is a method of inquiry where educators explore a question or idea that they think might impact their way of teaching and spend time researching the question or idea. They put the idea into practice and analyze it by collecting data.</p> <p>AR is grounding your idea in the information others have found before attempting it in your classroom.</p>

Participants' reported learning after becoming an alum of SARP	Participants voluntarily applying SARP to new problems of practice	<p>My original action research question, I answered it this year.</p> <p>Only one respondent who acknowledged completing a second cycle to build upon her work in SARP.</p> <p>How others do project-based instruction within the guidelines of the national standards and ancient civilizations. So, that would probably be where I would look. With math, I'm feeling pretty good about how things are going.</p>
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Note. SARP = Saints Action Research Program; AR = Action Research; PD = Professional Development.

Table E3

Representative Quotations and Statistics for the Themes of Guskey Level 3

Participant Perceptions of Organizational Support and Change	
Theme	Representative Quotations and Statistics
The summer training provides time to design the AR project before implementation during the school year	We use that time to do a lot of rich discussions that help them work together to fine-tune that measurable research focus.
	We had unencumbered time to commit to learning about the action research process.
	Six participants valued the summer for training due to the uninterrupted time it provided.
The instructional leadership team supports participants by providing asynchronous structure	I do think as we evolved, we realized that some parts like data analysis could be more asynchronous.
	I would have enjoyed meeting more often, but it's hard to find a time everyone has in common.
	No, we do not go in every action session; it's just not feasible for us to do that.
	Participants submit their plans so that we can help them. We can support them; help guide them and offer feedback.
Leadership roles are unclear to the participants	One of the main team leaders worked nearby. She was always available to answer a question or help me when I was stuck.
	My memory is poor here, and I don't recall the moniker of 'coaches' being used.
	The most effective thing that administrators can do it to provide time to participants, which as we all know is so difficult... that would make your collaborative group meetings so much more meaningful.

I felt my principal was enthusiastic about my representation on SARP. I don't recall much else 'support'.

Participant conversation partners during the AR process

The entire Lower School faculty and staff, students at the University of Richmond, as well as teachers across the divisions.

Six participants stated a version of, I discussed my project with the action research team.

My grade team was very supportive and helpful as I shared ideas.

I also utilized our Learning Commons team to help me find great books for the classroom and implement technology tools for sharing book recommendations with students.

I worked on the IBSC research program, as opposed to the Saints action program, so I would imagine that my collaboration was on a global scale while others were within our own community.

Note. SARP = Saints Action Research Program; AR = Action Research; IBSC = International Boys' School Coalition.

Table E4

Representative Quotations and Statistics for the Themes of Guskey Level 4

Participant Knowledge of Action Research	
Theme	Representative Quotations and Statistics
AR is best practice	<p>It was an effective way to affect change in my teaching.</p> <p>It allowed me to analyze the best practices for teaching a world language.</p> <p>I think action research actually was a better professional development for me because I could make it music-focused, or even better make it band-focused, which was really valuable.</p> <p>We should all be action researchers in our classrooms all the time. As we read books and articles, or attend professional developments, I think we naturally think about what tangible ideas or lessons we can bring into the classroom. Action research helps you to be intentional and reflective in those best practices.</p>
For participants, the AR process is more important than the AR model	<p>The word “process” was used 64 times on the program feedback form by eighteen of the participants.</p> <p>The training was very helpful, but I also think I learned as I went through the process.</p> <p>I think without that formalized process, you're going to skip a step. You're going to miss something that is an integral part of action research, and I think the moment you leave one piece out, the data collection becomes completely unusable.</p>
Participant Commitment to using Action Research	
Theme	Representative Quotations and Statistics

<p>To what degree are program alumni continuing to use AR</p>	<p>My action research continues to inform my teaching still.</p> <p>AR is relevant and integral to one’s current instruction.</p> <p>Beyond writing, I began to reflect and consider other places in the curriculum where I could thoughtfully integrate building activities.</p> <p>I wouldn’t say that I used the AR process in its entirety, but I can think of two specific times where I have definitely used those skills learned to be reflective and intentional in my classroom. Those were after attending a Guided Math professional development and the People of Color Conference.</p>
<p>SARP transition their instructional practices in the classroom from intuitive to intentional</p>	<p>I understood that AR would formalize many elements of what my ‘gut’ instinct had told me to do with my students.</p> <p>I was shocked how little transfer there was to what the guys actually knew and understood by my ‘old’ methods. When I began asking them directly to explain what they understood about the process.</p> <p>I loved the idea of intentionality and focused on one action item. Sometimes as teachers we can get caught up in the whole picture (as we should in many cases). Action Research allowed me to really hone in on a skill I was interested in learning more about.</p>
<p>AR as PD is one among many effective PD options</p>	<p>I appreciate that I was permitted the flexibility and autonomy to choose my action research project.</p> <p>Action research helps me explore important ideas relevant to my professional practice as a teacher.” All 20 respondents agreed with this statement, and fifteen strongly agreed.</p> <p>It’s not something I can see myself doing on a consistent basis, but rather when I have a problem to solve or a question to chase.</p> <p>I enjoy variety in my PD experiences, particularly opportunities to talk to people in roles similar to mine outside our school.</p>

AR in conjunction with other types of PD is best. I would never want to limit PD to AR only—too exhausting!

Note. SARP = Saints Action Research Program; AR = Action Research; PD = Professional Development.

Table E5*Representative Quotations and Statistics for the Themes of Guskey Level 5*

Participant Perceptions of Student Learning Outcomes	
Theme	Representative Quotations and Statistics
AR as PD changes teachers	<p>I continue to carry many of those ideas and skills learned through my action research in my classroom today.</p> <p>I continue to consider the PROCESS of action research and apply it to our lesson planning. I am constantly reflecting, “What worked?” “What didn’t?” “Who did this lesson work (or not) for?” “Why?” “What one variable can I change that will make a positive difference?”</p>
AR as PD is student-centered	<p>Eight out of 20 participants selected their area of study for SARP based on what they believed would benefit their students.</p> <p>I selected my study by watching and listening to my boys.</p> <p>I learned to listen more to the voices of my students. I thought I was doing so beforehand, but my AR really helped me evolve more from the “Sage on the Stage” position to a learning coach approach.</p> <p>We always encouraged boys' voices.</p>
Student academic enjoyment is the primary outcome sought by SARP participants	<p>My students were enthusiastic about my AR goals and became far more eager to write and share what they wrote.</p> <p>The boys really enjoyed the AR and the stories, and they also really enjoyed when I shared the results with them of what I observed in class.</p>

Three families sent emails to me at the end of the year sharing some of the changes they saw in their son's attitude about math.

The joy that they had with working together was amazing, and the problem-solving that they were doing was incredible.

Note. SARP = Saints Action Research Program; AR = Action Research; PD = Professional Development.

Table E6

Representative Quotations and Statistics for the Themes of the Advantages of SARP

Theme	Representative Quotations and Statistics
SARP provides an opportunity for mentorship	<p>Lilith was a fearless leader.</p> <p>So Lilith already knew that I was doing all this. So, she was the one like you're already doing it, let's get it.</p> <p>The research brief template is where we have dates where certain things are due at certain times, and that's an opportunity for us to get a sketch of what it is that they intend to do. And if it is not detailed enough, then we have an opportunity to have a conversation.</p> <p>The mentors were my colleagues, and they really support me in every step.</p>
SARP provides an opportunity for collaboration	<p>Working with a team of your peers and learning with and from them are great advantages – growing and learning.</p> <p>A version of the word “collaborate” appears in the PFF open-ended section 11 times by nine of the twenty respondents.</p> <p>Many other respondents employed synonyms like “community,” “team,” and “group.”</p> <p>The benefits of AR are getting to know colleagues and gaining knowledge that helped me become a better teacher.</p>

Prerequisite knowledge is not required to participate in SARP, but it helps

Five respondents claimed to know “very little.”

One of them indicated on the PFF that a close colleague had completed the IBSC Action Research Program.

I felt like I had a decent idea about what action research was just because it was such a big part of graduate school for me not long ago.

The first (action research project) I ever did was my master's thesis at the University of Florida.

50% of respondents expressed some exposure to action research during their time as an educator for St. John’s School.

Eight respondents specifically cited the projects and presentations of other SARP cohorts as sources of their exposure to and understanding of action research.

SARP participants make a deliberate choice to become a better teacher

I feel it [SARP] has made me a better teacher & coach, has deepened my interest in the field of motivation and stoked my fire for more teaching & coaching

One advantage of participating in the AR program is to learn about yourself working in a group and learning from peer teachers.

This is my opportunity to actually be serious about collecting data and to see if this actually work as I think it works.

I just really wanted it to be more successful for them because it was very hit or miss. It was very much like it was the best thing the kid ever did, or there were two kids that, at some point, I met at school and bribed them with pizza so that they would sit there and do their work... So it definitely was a need for me.

Note. SARP = Saints Action Research Program; AR = Action Research; PD = Professional Development.

Table E7

Representative Quotations and Statistics for the Themes of the Limitations of SARP

Theme	Representative Quotations and Statistics
SARP participants do not have enough available time	<p data-bbox="562 459 1881 529">Time was mentioned by 13 out of 20 respondents when asked to name the limitations. Eight of those 13 listed time as their only limitation.</p> <p data-bbox="562 570 1482 602">I wish I could have extended my research across a longer period of time.</p> <p data-bbox="562 643 1871 748">The action research project did indeed demand a lot of time—though I enjoyed the work I was doing. I did have to rely on my assistants more as I was recording audio or video from the boys about the process during the fall season.</p> <p data-bbox="562 789 1646 821">Actually, it really was not nearly as overwhelming as I anticipated it was going to be.</p> <p data-bbox="562 862 1854 932">I felt like it was all one big action research with the IBSC being the grounded focus, I guess, and then you just took pieces out and applied that to the Saints Action Research Program.</p>
SARP participants do have extra work	<p data-bbox="562 967 1625 1000">Seven out of 20 respondents expressed that SARP was extra work in various forms.</p> <p data-bbox="562 1040 1646 1073">Several terms were employed in the data, such as “pacing,” “busy,” “so much to do.”</p> <p data-bbox="562 1114 1881 1182">Trying to find articles and fit them in during the school year while I was simultaneously conducting my research made the process feel more burdensome than it needed to be.</p>

SARP lacks visibility
within the school
community

Participating in AR can feel isolating, especially if others on your grade level/department are not facilitating similar activities.

More time, more group interactions, more input or even interest from the divisional administration team. I think it feels like something separate from what our divisions are doing.

I'm not sure (my administrator) even knew what my question was or that I was even doing it, so I think that's a big sort of disconnect.

As the school year gets going, my colleagues were very supportive. However, at times I felt this was something else for them to hear about or to support.

Note. SARP = Saints Action Research Program; AR = Action Research; IBSC = International Boys' School Coalition.

Table E8

Representative Quotations and Statistics for the Themes of Recommendations for SARP

Theme	Representative Quotations and Statistics
SARP should be differentiated	<p data-bbox="560 459 1724 492">Excuse the participant from extra duties, so they have extra free time during the school day.</p> <p data-bbox="560 532 1776 597">For trimester (elective) teachers, maybe give them one extra free period during the time of their research project in the classroom.</p> <p data-bbox="560 643 1850 708">Action research just added to what you still have to do, and there were no breaks in what I still had to do.</p> <p data-bbox="560 753 1866 818">Perhaps a half-day or two of sub coverage as participants are wrapping up their research and preparing their presentations?</p>
The SARP instructional leadership team should use concrete examples and samples	<p data-bbox="560 857 1808 922">In reflection, I wish I had created surveys, interview questions, and additional assessment tools. It would have been beneficial going into the school year with the initial survey complete.</p> <p data-bbox="560 967 1845 1000">I think the teachers over the years have done a really beautiful job, which is providing work samples.</p>
SARP might alter its duration	<p data-bbox="560 1036 1131 1068">I would recommend additional training time.</p> <p data-bbox="560 1109 1131 1141">I wish it would have been longer in duration.</p> <p data-bbox="560 1182 1083 1214">Maybe present the findings May or June.</p>

Involve non-participating members in AR as PD	<p>I would suggest that AR is integrated into the 3-year observation cycle implemented by the C&I team. This would ensure that every teacher is a part of AR every three years, and it's not just for those who choose to do it.</p> <p>Provide the opportunity for faculty to get in each other's classrooms to observe. I think it's especially powerful to do this cross divisionally to help us better understand the students and action research as it pertains to each division's unique challenges.</p> <p>Share more results of findings with the faculty in order to help them really see what the program does.</p>
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SARP should not change anything	<p>I honestly feel that the program is excellent. I can't think of anything that I would change.</p> <p>Twenty-five percent did not have a recommendation to offer.</p> <p>Four out of 20 who liked the program just the way it is.</p>
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Note. SARP = Saints Action Research Program; AR = Action Research; PD = Professional Development.

Appendix F

Summary of Major Findings

Participant Reactions	
Theme	Summary of Finding
As they began the program, participants reacted with excited and nervous energy	Participants reacted to the summer training with a mixture of eagerness and concern about conducting action research in their classrooms.
AR as PD offers a collaborative community	From the summer training, participants favored the cross-divisional cohort model, which included teachers from various grades and subjects in each year of the program.
Participants expressed concern about the amount of time required of SARP	During the program, participants felt burdened by the amount of time the program requires.
The assigned role of the participant matters	The program was not designed to conform to the unique responsibilities of participants who were employed as elective teachers, tutors, or coaches.
The relative permanence of the SARP experience	Since completing the program, participants expressed a general sense of enjoying the experience. However, they found it difficult to recall specific events and components of the program.

Participant Learning	
Theme	Summary of Finding
Participants bring varying levels of prior knowledge of action research to SARP	Participants come to SARP with four main levels of prior knowledge: (a) AR contact was little to none, (b) AR contact limited to the projects and presentations of previous cohorts, (c) AR contact through participation in an AR project, and (d) AR contact includes a previous project in university or professional setting.

The instructional leadership team needs to provide direction more than knowledge and skills	Before the program starts, participants want to receive clear expectations of the program. It is more important than the AR framework or developing and practicing research skills.
Participants need to be confident that they will receive support from the instructional leadership team	Before the program starts, participants need to understand the support system offered by the instructional leadership team.
Participants learn AR by doing AR	During the program, participants recalled learning the action research process by implementing their project.
Participants current conceptions of AR	Since completing the program, participants expressed their current understandings of what action research is.
Participants voluntarily applying SARP to new problems of practice	Since completing the program, participants have applied their learning from the program to new areas of interest.

Organizational Support and Change

Theme	Summary of Finding
The summer training provides time to design the AR project before implementation during the school year	Before the program starts, the instructional leadership team aims to layout the AR process and provide uninterrupted time for participants to design their AR project.
The instructional leadership team supports participants by providing asynchronous structure	Participants were each responsible for individual AR projects. Therefore, the instructional leadership team supported participants asynchronously through the research brief template.
Leadership roles are unclear to the participants	Participants demonstrated confusion distinguishing the role and function of the instructional leadership team as compared to other administrative staff.

Participant conversation partners during the AR process	During the program, participants indicated four conversations partners. No participant used all four, and one participant used none: (a) Other members of their SARP cohort, (b) Other teachers outside their SARP cohort, (c) librarians, and (d) The IBSC.
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Participant Knowledge of Action Research

Theme	Summary of Finding
AR is best practice	Participants saw action research as a PD framework that is generally accepted as superior to alternatives because it produces results with students.
For participants, the AR process is more important than the AR model	Participants saw employing the action research process in practice as more significant than following each step of the action research model.

Participant Commitment to using Action Research

Theme	Summary of Finding
To what degree are program alumni continuing to use AR	Since completing the program, participants shared more recent experiences with action research.
SARP transition their instructional practices in the classroom from intuitive to intentional	The program provided a structure for selecting and implementing instructional practices. It also equipped participants to make minor adjusts to a single variable.
AR as PD is one among many effective PD options	Participants know AR as PD was relevant to their teaching. However, they also believe it is not feasible for teachers to constantly be engaged in it. They shared other PD options that are also necessary to produce well-rounded and effective teachers.

Participant Perceptions of Student Outcomes

Theme	Summary of Finding
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AR as PD changes teachers	AR as PD facilitates change for willing teachers.
AR as PD is student-centered	AR as PD is built around improving student experiences.
Student academic enjoyment is the primary outcome sought by SARP participants	Participants sought joy in their students as the primary measure of success.

Advantages of SARP

Theme	Summary of Finding
SARP provides an opportunity for mentorship	Participants placed a high value on the coaching relationships forged with the instructional leadership team.
SARP provides an opportunity for collaboration	Participants placed a high value on the collegial relationships developed with one another through the cohort model.
Prerequisite knowledge is not required to participate in SARP, but it helps	A subset of participants noted their ability to be successful in SARP without any prior knowledge
SARP participants make a deliberate choice to become a better teacher	Participants volunteer for SARP primarily due to an interest in the annual theme. As trust builds, and research enlightens, they invest more deeply into become more effective with their students.

Limitations of SARP

Theme	Summary of Finding
SARP participants do not have enough available time	Participants cited three ways in which time constrains the program: (a) Underestimated the time for data collection and analysis with students, (b) colleagues substituting for

	them, so that they could complete their AR project, (c) partnering with the instructional leadership team for additional support requires time.
SARP participants do have extra work	Participants acknowledged the stress that accompanied the extra work required by the program.
SARP lacks visibility within the school community	Participants were concerned by the invisibility of the program within the larger school community.

Recommendations for SARP

Theme	Summary of Finding
SARP should be differentiated	Participants recommended allowing participants to adapt requirements rather than standardizing expectations for an eclectic cohort.
The SARP instructional leadership team should use concrete examples and samples	Participants wanted the instructional leadership team to share exemplars from previous years: (a) to make their expectations interactive and (b) to decrease the burden of building from scratch.
SARP might alter its duration	Participants recommend the program address the time limitations by adjusting the duration. They brainstorm several ways this might be done well.
Involve non-participating members in AR as PD	Participants suggested ways to involve more stakeholders in the action research process.
SARP should not change anything	A subset of participants believe the program is sufficient without revisions and should continue being marketed to new participants.

Note. SARP = Saints Action Research Program; AR = Action Research; PD = Professional Development; IBSC = International Boys' School Coalition.

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