PEER ASSISTANCE AND REVIEW: AN ANALYSIS OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA'S PAR PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

Urban school districts are beleaguered with the high attrition rate of teachers. This results in a staff that is largely inexperienced, and a large cost to the district in training and induction programs. Mentoring programs have been linked to new teacher retention, and one particular mentoring program, Peer Assistance and Review (PAR), is widely used by districts to create a structured support system for teachers. This mixed-methods study examined key players from the School District of Philadelphia's PAR program, regarding their successes and failures within the program. By examining the PAR program in depth, we can identify the key components participants perceive to be important to the program, and make recommendations for PAR to meet optimal success.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, who taught me that with hard work and perseverance, anything is possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"New Teachers have two jobs – they have to teach, and they have to learn to teach" (Feiman-Nemser, p. 1026).

Statement of Problem

Teacher attrition continues to plague public education, particularly in urban areas. The problem may be linked to the support teachers receive in their first years on the job. If you ask public school teachers what kind of professional support they received in their novice years, their answers will vary. Some were paired with a mentor; others simply attended a few evening or weekend meetings over the course of their first year.

In a 2012 Teacher Survey on Attrition and Mobility by the National Center for Education Statistics, 7 percent of teachers with 1-3 years' experience left teaching (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014). Ingersoll (1999) states that the management of schools and the view of teaching as semi-skilled work rather than a profession of high expertise is a chief concern. This perspective can lead to the assumption that teachers do not need the training or skills that more specialized occupations require, and may be the underlying problem for teacher attrition.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education's guidelines (2013), individual school districts must submit a plan for new teacher induction every six years. The induction must last at least one year, but individual districts have leeway to extend this period. First year teachers, and long-term substitutes working for more than 45 consecutive days, must be paired with a mentor teacher for one year. The new teacher is instructed on the Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching, which is the basis for

teacher evaluation in Pennsylvania. Individual districts can develop their own plans that incorporate Pennsylvania's directives.

In order to best support new teachers and improve teacher quality, the SDP, in collaboration with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT), has implemented the Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program as part of their teacher induction program. PAR pairs teachers with experienced mentors who provide them with focused help throughout the school year. The mentors, called Consulting Teachers, use the Danielson-based rubric as an observation tool when assisting teachers. The goal of PAR is to provide consistent targeted support to new teachers.

Significance of the Study

The attrition of new teachers in urban districts continues to be a problem. In many studies, induction programs can be linked to increased teacher retention; however, is effective induction the same for school districts in low-income, urban areas? Ingersoll and Strong (2011) suggests that tailoring a mentoring or induction program to the specific needs of the district could be more successful in retaining new teachers.

By conducting a mixed methods study, we can examine the inner workings of the SDP's mentoring program from the point of view of the participants. While PAR may check all the boxes of a successful program on paper, it is the observations and opinions of those closely involved that can paint a comprehensive picture of the inner workings. What attributes of a mentoring program encourage new teachers to stay? Also, what caused difficulty for teachers during their mentoring process, and what could be improved for new teachers in the future? Are administrators and teachers viewing the

program the same way, or is there a disconnect between those who mentor and those who are mentored? Are there certain groups of teachers who viewed the program more positively or negatively than others?

Ultimately, offering teachers appropriate support during their beginning years benefits not only the teachers themselves, but also their schools and students. This study's findings can be used to make changes to the current SDP PAR system in order to give significant support to new teachers.

Purpose of the Study

With the high rate of teacher attrition, particularly in urban school districts, districts must continually hire and train novice teachers. A 2017 study by the Learning Policy Institute estimated that urban districts spend about $20,000 per new teacher (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). Schools also bear the burden of a revolving door of inexperienced teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). They must orient new teachers to school and district procedures and train them in the appropriate curricula. In PAR, novice teachers can welcome a colleague into their classrooms for assistance, rather than a principal, and seek help and guidance without fear of repercussions from administration.

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of PAR from the perspective of the participants. Gaining insight from those who have first-hand experience with PAR is crucial to finding out what the perceived strengths and weaknesses are to the current system, and how the program can be improved.

Research Questions

Two research questions guide this study*:*

1.) What are PAR participants' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the PAR program in the SDP?

2.) What are PAR participants' perceptions of how the SDP PAR program can be improved?

Definitions and Terms

Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) - A mentorship and intervention program in which teachers are paired with Consulting Teachers, who observe, evaluate, and provide resources.

Consulting Teacher (CT) - A mentor teacher who has demonstrated exemplary teaching, based on yearly reviews and principal recommendations. CTs are fully released from the classroom, and may only hold the position for a period of a few years (based on the individual school district's plan), before returning to the classroom. CTs are responsible for mentoring new and veteran teachers, and must report their findings and recommendations to representatives of the PAR Panel.

Participating Teacher (PT) - Teachers who are involved in the PAR program. These teachers may be new to teaching or new to the school district. Not all PTs are new teachers. They could also be veteran teachers who have been rated unsatisfactory and are currently in their probationary year.

PAR Panel - The PAR program is governed by the PAR Panel, which makes all major decisions regarding PTs and CTs. The PAR Panel is comprised of three district

representatives and three union representatives. The CTs report to the PAR Panel several times throughout the year in order to update them on their PTs' status. At the end of the school year, CTs and school principals make recommendations on their PTs. If they agree on the recommendation, the panel upholds the decision; however, if the CT and principal disagree on the recommendation, they must present their findings at a panel hearing.

Veteran Teacher - A Veteran Teacher, in the context of PAR, is someone who has been teaching in a district for a number of years, has acquired tenure, and has been rated unsatisfactory by their administrator.

Communities of Practice - Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (Lave & Wenger, 1991) define communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly."

Limitations and Delimitations

Because participation in this study was voluntary, it was difficult to obtain a large sampling of PTs. With only one researcher, interview subjects were limited, due to time constraints and accessibility. The contact information for the past 5 years was requested, but the district only kept a record of participants for the past 2 years. This limited the number of possible participants and may have affected the reliability of the study. There was also no contact information for teachers who had left the district, so I was not able to obtain their input. This may result in a sample bias, in which perceptions of PAR may lean towards a more positive note. The scope of the study was limited to the SDP, and therefore, the results may not pertain to other districts who participate in PAR.

In qualitative studies, it can be difficult to verify results. The information gathered during surveys, focus groups, and interviews is limited to the participants' own thoughts and experiences. Interpreting the data may also be subjective, as Merriam (1998, p. 22) describes:

> *The researcher brings a construction of reality to the research situation, which interacts with other people's constructions or interpretations of the phenomenon being studied. The final product of this type of study is yet another interpretation by the researcher of others' views filtered through his or her own. (Merriam, 1998, p. 22)*

With the varied data collection methods of survey, focus group, and interviews, however, I was able to triangulate the data to authenticate my results, which supported the reliability of the themes garnered from the research. Adding quantitative elements such as demographics enables data to be generalized.

Merriam (2011) sees delimitation as the key factor of qualitative research. This is a way to narrow the scope of the research. Only one school district was chosen in order to focus on the specific issues and situations pertaining to the SDP and their PAR program. Information was requested from the past 5 years in order to further narrow the scope of the study, and the names of PAR participants from the past 2 years were provided. The study was conducted via online survey and interviews, as well as a focus group of participants in the PAR program.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review examines the issue of low teacher retention, and what factors contribute to teachers leaving. Positive qualities of new teacher support and mentoring programs are explored. The PAR program is one such mentoring program. Finally, examples of successful PAR programs are presented with defining characteristics of their support.

Teacher Retention

There are several common factors that can influence teacher retention, including, but not limited to, burnout, resilience, demographic features, and family characteristics (Schaefer et al., 2012). Teachers often feel isolated and alienated due to vague school expectations and large amounts of paperwork, leading to burnout. Pairing new teachers with mentors is one way to alleviate this stress. The ability to cope with the stressors of the job, or resilience, is directly related to teacher commitment. Those who are able to be more resourceful and committed to the teaching profession are more likely to stay in their position. Age can also play a role in retention; novice teachers who are younger are more likely to leave in their first five years of teaching (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Teachers may also leave the profession due to personal reasons having nothing to do with teaching, such as family or financial situations (Schaefer et al., 2012).

In their exploration of teacher induction programs, University of Colorado researchers Liston et al. (2006) concluded that there are three main reasons why new teachers struggle: the *problem of theory*, *emotional turbulence*, and *workplaces*

inadequately support teacher learning. With the *problem of theory*, Liston et al. postulate

that teacher preparation programs spend the bulk of studies on theory, and leave out the

more practical aspects, therefore leaving a new teacher unprepared for the rigors of the

classroom. They also suggest that colleges may be teaching the wrong theory, citing that

in a 2006 National Council on Teacher Quality study, only 15% of sampled reading

methods syllabi were teaching all five components of reading instruction. New teachers

can also suffer from *emotional turbulence*. Teachers make a multitude of small decisions

throughout the day, which can be mentally exhausting. Coupled with the stress of

learning new curricula, planning standards-based lessons, and preparing students for

high-stakes testing, new teachers can easily become overwhelmed. The third reason given

for new teacher struggle is that *workplaces inadequately support teacher learning*.

School environment plays a major role in teacher retention. In a study of a school district

with high teacher attrition, Brown and Wynn (2007) found that the schools within the

district that had the highest retention shared some of the same characteristics, including

high levels of professional support, low numbers of student disciplinary issues, and

faculty who had influence on decision making. New teachers felt like they were

welcomed into the school community, and had strong professional support. Liston et al.

(2006) call this an "integrated professional culture," where all teachers, novice and

veteran, benefit from working together.

Another problem with teacher retention may be that those who choose to leave are

often the higher-performing teachers. Jacob, Vidyarthi, and Carroll (2012) found that in

the 50 largest urban school districts, approximately 10,000 high-performing, or

"irreplaceable" teachers leave, citing unfavorable working conditions and school cultures.

In over 70% of cases studied, participants cited the actions of the principals as the reasons for leaving. Based on the findings, The New Teacher Project made recommendations such as monitoring retention rates of irreplaceables, paying them a wage commensurate with their abilities, and training principals in the ideal school culture. They also recommended dismissing ineffective non-first year teachers, or giving ineffective teachers the opportunity to leave voluntarily as an alternative to being dismissed.

Taking a different perspective to the issue, Neito (2003) interviewed Boston public school teachers in 1999-2000 to find why they chose to stay in the profession. Neito found that the characteristics that kept teachers in public schools were love, hope and possibility, anger and desperation, intellectual work, democratic practice, and the ability to shape the future. While anger and desperation can be seen as negative attributes, Neito viewed them as the other side of hope, and a measure of how invested the teachers were in their students and schools.

Mentoring

One proposed solution to low teacher retention is mentoring. Using nationally representative data from the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey, Smith and Ingersoll (2004) found that pairing a new teacher with a mentor in a field related to his or her assignment reduced the risk of teachers leaving at the end of their first year by 30% (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Teacher collaboration and group planning time also had a strong impact on retention, while participation in induction programs made little difference.

Feiman-Nemser describes learning to teach as a continuum, which is divided into three stages, or tasks: preservice, induction, and continuing professional development (Feiman-Nemser, 1027). Induction takes place in the beginning years of teaching, and includes:

1.) Learn the context: students, curriculum, school community

2.) Design responsive instructional program

3.) Create a classroom learning community

4.) Enact a beginning repertoire

5.) Develop a professional identity

Feiman-Nemser describes induction as the "transition from student of teacher to teacher of students" (Feiman-Nemser, 1027). She considers the first 2-3 years of teaching as a vulnerable time for that teacher, where they are establishing their identity as an educator. The most widely preferred induction includes mentoring, in which a new teacher is paired with a seasoned educator. Feiman-Nemser describes mentoring as having a narrow focus, and an unclear concept; mentoring time and practices can look very different from district to district. She warns that pairing assistance with assessment is incompatible, and as a result, new teachers would be reluctant to seek help when they need it. Mentors with limited time would spend their time with new teachers fixing immediate problems, rather than looking for root causes.

Feiman-Nemser does, however, see promise in three different mentoring programs. These programs "call for a multiyear, integrated approach to new teacher support, development, and assessment based around high standards for teaching and

learning, built on school/university partnerships, and featuring a strong mentoring component" (Feiman-Nemser, 1034).

Table 1: Feiman-Nemser Study of Teacher Mentoring Programs

Program	Originated	How long do new teachers receive support?	How are new teachers assessed?
Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment	California	1-2 years	Formative assessment
Beginning Teacher Support and Training	Connecticut	1-2 years	Formative and summative assessment
Peer Assistance and Review	Ohio	Up to 2 years	Union members make recommendations

Feiman-Nemser goes on to describe ideal mentors as those who can successfully integrate their experience as a classroom teacher with the expertise of teaching other teachers. They should also be in contact with other mentors, in order to reflect and talk about their work. She stresses that in order to successfully perform the duties of mentor, these individuals should be fully released from the classroom.

In a study of the literature dedicated to the advantages and disadvantages of mentoring (Hobson et al., 2009), the authors divide the literature into benefits and limitations for mentees, mentors, and schools. In the case of mentees, receiving support is regarded as overwhelmingly positive. The most common benefits observed are emotional and psychological support, which result in job satisfaction, and ultimately, retention (Hobson et al., 2009; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). There is little research detailing any negative effects of mentoring, other than individual examples of bad mentor-mentee relationships.

The effect of mentoring on mentors themselves was also studied by Hobson (2009). Mentors reported that through their coaching, they became more reflective in

their own teaching. Mentors were also able to gain new ideas through their training and experience with their mentee, gained the feeling of self-worth, and were assisted in the continuation of their own professional development.

Although the research indicates that the benefits of mentoring tend to outweigh the costs, this is not always the case (Hobson et al., 2009). One major disadvantage Hobson uncovered was that being a mentor could bring added stress to teachers, since they were balancing their own classroom duties with their mentoring commitments. Hobson also found that much of the literature written considers the views of mentors and mentees only, which can be quite limiting. A district wide program should also consider the effect a mentoring program has on school principals and district administration, as well as the teachers union.

The effects of mentoring new teachers are also seen within schools and school systems. Within the context of mentoring, new teachers are introduced to the norms and expectations of the school. With mentors on site, there is little to no cost for schools, but as described previously, this can put added strain on the mentor's workload, causing stress.

Hobson (2009) states that in order for mentoring programs to be effective for all parties involved, the following conditions must exist: 1) contextual support for mentoring; 2) mentor selection and pairing; 3) mentoring strategies; and 4) mentor preparation. Even with all of these conditions in place, the mentee must have a willingness to participate.

Communities of Practice

Taking a different perspective on new teacher mentorship "invites a rethinking of the notion of learning, treating it as an emerging property of the whole person's' legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice" (Lave, 1991). The term Communities of Practice (CoP) was introduced by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in the 1991 book *Situated Learning* (1991), and refers to the concept that learning occurs in social contexts, when people of common interests engage in collective learning. The community refers to those in the same profession. In this concept, all participants are active in their field, and they meet to gain best practices and insight on current problems they may be having.

CoPs have three common characteristics: domain, community, and practice. *Domain* refers to a shared interest or competence. In the case of teachers, they generally receive the same pre-service training. The *community* of teachers in CoPs can refer to several examples, depending on the situation. A community could refer to a group of teachers who meet regularly and who teach the same grade level or subject matter. It could also refer to a group of novice teachers who meet for induction meetings, or between a novice teacher with a mentor who has experience in the same subject matter. *Practice* refers to what these teachers discuss when they convene. Practice must occur regularly in order to be considered a CoP. No matter the subject matter, the common traits of CoP are shared experience over a period of time, and a commitment to shared understanding.

Researcher Christine Clayton shadowed a group of novice teachers whose Beginning Teacher Program (BTP) mirrored the CoP framework (Cuddapah & Clayton,

2011). The teachers were divided into cohorts of 15 teachers, and met for two hours biweekly, over the course of 15 weeks. Clayton observed one of the cohorts throughout, in order to see the effects of CoP on a group of novices. Since all of the participants of the BTP were novice teachers, they were able to share common struggles they were facing, and look to each other, as well as the facilitators, for support and guidance.

Wenger adapted his later model of CoP (1998) to include four components: community, practice, meaning, and identity. The focus of the cohort observed was community, with new teachers having a chance to discuss their questions and problems. The difference between this group and a traditional CoP was that novices were forced to be active members of the group, rather than staying on the periphery as is usually the case. The cohort was able to use their meetings to further their professional development, but suffered some setbacks that may have affected the outcome of the study. In the cohort studied, the facilitators changed mid-year; also, the Wenger framework was not incorporated into the BTP until later in the school year.

Historical Background of PAR

While the Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program has gained popularity in school districts in recent years, it is far from a new concept. The first PAR program began in 1981 in Toledo, Ohio, and is known as the "Toledo Plan" (Goldstein, 2004). This mentoring program was created by the school district, and used union members as mentors to new and ineffective teachers. The plan was first proposed by Dal Lawrence, former president of the Toledo Federation of Teachers (TFT). Lawrence proposed that teachers were the best evaluators of other teachers. His initial plan was met with

opposition from principals and district leaders, who feared losing authority to the unions.

The district finally agreed to create the mentoring program for new teachers, if the union

would work with those tenured teachers who were considered ineffective by school

administrators. Today, the Toledo Plan helps teachers in three categories: novice

teachers, unsatisfactorily rated teachers, and those teachers who volunteer for the

program in order to improve their teaching performance. With the PAR process, PTs are

paired with their CT for one to two years, giving them support and guided practice from

someone in their own profession, and gives opportunity to improve the quality of

teaching.

After the birth of the Toledo Plan, other districts began to follow suit. In 1985,

Cincinnati, Ohio began their PAR program, and two years later, Rochester, New York

started theirs. By 1996, 30 districts had adopted some sort of PAR program (AFT 2007),

and in 1999 California became the first state to institute PAR statewide with the passage

of Assembly Bill X1. By 2002, 90% of districts in California were using PAR

(Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2015). Unfortunately, in 2003, the budget for

California's PAR program was lowered substantially due to the economy (Guha et al.,

2006).

The PAR program that is in place in most districts today follows the original

Toledo Plan quite closely. Districts and unions work in collaboration to create and

implement their PAR program. A PAR panel is formed, with half the members comprised

of district officials, and the other half with union officials. This gives both parties a say

regarding the employment of teachers. The panel meets several times per year, in

accordance with the union contract, and they hear about the progress of the teachers who are participating in the program.

There are two types of participants in the PAR program: teachers who are new to the district, and tenured teachers who have been found to be unsatisfactory, and are in their "probationary" year. These Participating Teachers (PTs) are assigned a Consulting Teacher (CT) to provide targeted assistance to them throughout the school year. This assistance may include observation and feedback, modeled lessons, co-planning, providing resources, and developing growth plans. With the PAR process, PTs are paired with their CT for one to two years, giving them support and guided practice from someone in their own profession, and gives opportunity to improve the quality of teaching.

Consulting Teachers (CTs) are chosen by the PAR Panel based on their prior experience and effectiveness in the classroom (Stroot et al., 1999). They possess qualities of exemplary teachers, and can only hold their positions for a few years before returning to the classroom (Goldstein, 2004). They are trained in the mentoring process before the school year begins by school district staff. CTs are in a unique position because they work with teachers in the school, but do not report to the building administrators. PAR panel meetings are held three times per year, during which time the CT reports on the progress of the PT. At each meeting, the CTs discuss their caseloads. If a CT shows evidence that a PT is struggling in their work, they must submit an action plan, detailing their concerns and a proposal for targeted support. At the end of the school year, the CTs present their findings on the PTs, and make recommendations. Although the PAR panel and the school principal ultimately make decisions regarding retention or termination, the

data gathered by the CT over the course of the year can make a difference if the decision of the panel is not unanimous.

With the PAR process, PTs are assigned their CT for one to two years, giving them support and guided practice from someone in their own profession, and gives opportunity to improve the quality of teaching. New teachers are paired with more experienced teachers in order to provide consistent support throughout the novice stage of teaching, giving them the tools necessary to be successful on their own in the classroom. PAR is supported by both the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) (AFT, 2007).

PAR is largely seen as a beneficial teacher mentor program, but it is not without its faults. There is no set training program for CTs, and training can vary widely based on location. School districts adapt the program to fit their needs. Another concern is that CTs, who are members of the same union as the PTs, are part of the evaluation process. PTs may not see the CT as someone who is there to help improve their teaching; rather, they may view the process as just another evaluation. The program can also be an added expense to the district, since CTs are fully released from the classroom. As in the example from California, funding for programs such as PAR can be reduced based on budgetary needs, which can limit the extent of services to teachers.

Peer Assistance and Review in Action

Stroot et al. (1999) investigated the effects of a PAR program on new entry-level teachers in an urban school district in Columbus, Ohio. These teachers volunteered to participate in a PAR program where they were paired with a CT as a mentor for the

duration of the school year. CTs met with participating teachers anywhere from 20 to 50 times throughout the school year, for varying amounts of time. The number of meetings was based on need, but the authors did not indicate whether the meetings were prompted by the CT or PT. Three times throughout the year, the PTs rated their need for assistance in different categories using a Likert scale, then met with their CT for clarification of concerns and goal-setting. The results from the surveys indicated that from the beginning to the middle of the school year, teachers felt an increased need for assistance, but that need decreased by the end of the school year. With the added support, new teachers perceived that they had less need for assistance over time.

PAR can be beneficial to school administrators, as well as new teachers. With PAR, new teachers receive non-evaluative feedback on observations from CTs more frequently, rather than getting feedback once a year from their annual administrator observation. This information provided by CTs prepares the new teachers for the observation process, and allows them to grow within the teaching framework. In a study of Rosemont School District in California, the first year of district involvement of the PAR program was documented, with follow-up data gathered one year and three years later (Goldstein, 2007). In the initial years of the Rosemont program, there were some concerns that all teachers did not receive equal support. CTs may not have observed teachers or offered support in the same capacities. The district stated that they believed the support would become more streamlined over time.

Although there are many benefits of PAR for teachers and principals, it is also important to consider costs. In a study of seven established PAR school districts, an average of $3,000 to $7,000 was spent per novice teacher (Papay & Johnson, 2012). The

benefit for training a novice teacher was perceived to outweigh the cost of training a new teacher, or pay for the cost of dismissal proceedings. The New York State School Board Association found that the average cost of disciplinary proceedings for teachers were $128,941 (Honawar, 2007). Papay and Johnson (2012) found through their interviews that the consensus of all seven PAR districts studied was that they perceived PAR to have a positive impact on teaching. The end result is that the financial impact may vary from district to district, and all aspects of the program must be examined when determining the advantages of implementing PAR.

Success for PAR

The school district of Toledo, Ohio, has proven successful in teacher retention to the present day. The Toledo Plan has kept the same basic framework of PAR from its inception. Amy Potemski (2012) of the American Institute of Research examined the evolution and success of PAR since its start in 1981. Potemski attributes the success of PAR in Toledo to the following components:

- Collaboration and support from teachers union and district officials

- Highly trained CTs

- Clear evaluation program

- Sustained and consistent funding

The PAR program in the Montgomery County School District in Maryland, a model for Philadelphia's PAR, began in 2000 and has had measurable success for their new teachers. In a 2014 report, the school district reported that 87% of their teachers earned tenure within 1-2 years of PAR support, and only 5% of teachers resigned or

retired since PAR's inception (Montgomery County Public Schools, 2014). The School

District of Baltimore County began implementing the PAR program in the 2013-2014

school year, and they are already observing increased retention rates. Pre-PAR

implementation, teacher retention was 86-89%; post-PAR implementation, teacher

retention increased to a range of 93-95% (Burke et al., 2018).

Summary

The retention of new teachers is an ongoing problem, particularly in urban areas.

Neito (2001) states that the reasons that teachers stay at their job include love, hope and

possibility, anger and desperation, intellectual work, democratic practice, and the ability

to shape the future. Mentoring programs offer new teachers support as they navigate

through the beginning years in their profession (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Feiman-Nemser,

1034; Hobsen et al., 2009). Smith and Ingersoll found that induction programs

themselves made little difference to new teachers, but collaboration was seen as

extremely important. The structure of the PAR program focuses on the relationship

between mentor (CT) and mentee (PT). Toledo and Baltimore County cite the PAR

program as a factor in increased teacher retention. This study examines PAR in SDP from

the point of view of the participants. The following chapter provides information on the

methodology utilized in this research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Restatement of Problem

In many urban school districts, including Philadelphia, teacher attrition is a common issue, particularly with newer teachers. This constant turnover leaves schools with more inexperienced teachers, and districts must continually spend money training new hires. Support from a mentor often leads to teacher retention (Hobson et al., 2009; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). New teachers who receive mentors show more job satisfaction and were assisted in their ongoing professional development (Hobson et al., 2009). The PAR program is considered to be a successful induction program for new teachers, in which novice teachers are paired with experienced consulting teachers, who provide mentoring and intervention. Philadelphia adopted the PAR program, which is a widely used and accepted mentoring program, yet it continues to suffer high rates of teacher attrition.

Restatement of Purpose

PAR has been shown to be an effective mentoring program in many districts, but there is no one absolute way to implement it (Goldstein, 2007). SDP has adopted PAR, but may need to make adjustments on their plan or practice, based on the needs of the district. By focusing on the SDP's PAR program, in particular on the perceptions and experiences of the participants, we can identify any perceived strengths and weaknesses in the plan or implementation, and make recommendations for success. Two research questions guided the study: 1.) What are PAR participants' perceptions of the strengths

and weaknesses of the PAR program in the SDP? 2.) What are PAR participants'

perceptions of how the SDP PAR program can be improved?

Research Design

This mixed methods study used a qualitative and quantitative data to focus on the

SDP's model of mentoring, and examine the program from the viewpoint of the

participants. It examines the PAR programs in the School District of Philadelphia and

research on established PAR programs and considers the elements of the program that

make it successful. Districts may be identified as successful based on new teacher

retention, perceived teacher effectiveness, or data showing an increase in the ratings of

new teachers. Based on the effective elements of the SDP PAR program as perceived by

its participants, recommendations will be made in order to help the SDP's PAR program

perform at its optimal level.

Since the majority of the data obtained was through personal interviews and focus

groups, there are some possible threats to validity. The participants' interpretation of

personal events may be biased, or as the researcher, I could misinterpret the information

presented. Every effort was made to avoid compromising validity. Interviews were

conducted using a digital recorder so that accurate dialogue was procured. Transcripts

were made from the recordings, and were checked against the original recording for

accuracy. Questions were crafted in an open-ended fashion, to prevent leading the

interviewee. There was a possibility of bias in the interviews, as administrators may have

been reluctant to admit that the PAR program has any shortcomings. By using

participants from different roles in PAR, there were differing opinions on the positive and negative aspects of PAR in the SDP, which lessens the chances for bias.

Site and Participants

For this mixed-methods study, a variety of sampling methods were used to identify the participants for my research. Merriam (2009) divides sampling into two basic types: probability and nonprobability sampling. Probabilistic sampling is where the subjects of a population have an equal chance of being selected, and is not generally used in qualitative research. Non-probabilistic sampling is used more commonly in qualitative studies, and seeks to find participants who can lend insight to a particular topic. Patton (2002) further describes nonprobability sampling as purposeful sampling, and states that:

> *"the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling."*

Merriam (2009) further describes how to establish the criteria for purposeful sampling. She states that the purposeful sampling "directly directs the purpose of the study and guide in the identification of information-rich cases. You not only spell out the criteria you will use, but you also say why the criteria are important." (Merriam, 78) For my study, all participants currently worked in the SDP at the time of data collection, and participated in PAR at some level in the past five years.

Merriam (2009) breaks down purposeful sampling into subgroups: *typical, unique, maximum variation, convenience,* and *snowball* or *chain* sampling. This study uses a variety of these methods. The SDP was chosen as a unique sample for its large size, high teacher attrition, and participation in the PAR program. For the surveys and

interviews, typical sampling was used to include as many PAR participants and different viewpoints as possible. For the focus group, convenience sampling was used, as only a handful of participants stated that they would be willing to participate.

After deciding to study PAR in the SDP, I made a list of subjects whose experiences, I felt, were critical to my research. They included:

1. Participating Teachers – received PAR services. Their responses would be crucial in determining how PAR affected their lives in their beginning stage of teaching.

2. Consulting Teachers – provided mentoring to teachers, and had contact with teachers, administrators, and PAR Panel members.

3. PAR Panel member – Panel members are the final say whether a teacher stays or is dismissed.

4. PAR design team member – design team members had the opportunity to see PAR programs in action in other districts, and set the groundwork for the PAR program

5. SDP and PFT administrators – oversaw CTs and received updates on PTs. They are the first point of contact for CTs.

The participants in this study included members of Philadelphia's original and current PAR program from the SDP and PFT. In order to paint a complete picture, it was ideal to include developers and administrators of school district PAR programs, as well as recent participants in the program. Participants were initially contacted via their school district or union emails. I requested the contact information of PAR CTs and PTs for the past five years, but the school district had only kept records for the previous two years.

A key demographic to include were PTs, to see if the PAR program was a factor staying in the district. Initially, 1,175 PTs were contacted to complete the PAR survey via email. In the email, I introduced myself, my research, and discussed the survey. I stressed that answers would remain confidential. Over the course of two months, three survey invitations were sent to CTs and PTs. The second and third emails were gentle reminders to fill out the survey, and thanks were given to those who had already completed the survey. Four hundred forty-three emails bounced back, which most likely meant that those PTs no longer worked at the district. There were 123 responses from PTs, giving a response rate of 16.8%. Twenty-nine CTs were also included in the survey invitations, and 12 responded, for a response rate of 41.3%. While I allowed time for CTs and PTs to respond to the survey, I began my interviews of PAR leaders.

One of the questions in the initial survey asked participants if they would be willing to participate in follow-up interviews. Of the 12 CT responses, nine indicated that they would be willing to take part. Because of the small number of responses, all nine were invited to take part in a focus group. Five CTs participated in a focus group that was held in a meeting room at the SDP's administration building, which lasted approximately one hour. There was a snowstorm on the morning of our meeting, and one of the CTs was late due to the weather conditions. As we only had the meeting room for 90 minutes, we started on time with the four CTs who were present, and the final CT joined us halfway through our focus group meeting.

In choosing PT participants for a follow-up focus group, I first isolated the responses that chose "yes" as an answer to survey question 8: *Would you be willing to be*

contacted for follow-up questions regarding PAR? I paid careful attention to survey question 3, which was presented on a Likert scale: *Support from PAR prepares new teachers to become more effective educator.* The demographics of the PTs who indicated that they would be willing to participate in follow-up research were very similar to those of the entire group that responded. For my first attempt at gathering a PT focus group, I selected 16 PTs with a variety of gender, race, age, teaching experience, and choice on survey question 3. Only 2 participants responded that they would be willing to participate. Some other responses stated that they could not get to the meeting after school.

For my second round of obtaining focus group participants, I invited 25 PTs to participate, once again taking care to have a variety of participant types. This invitation had zero response. I decided to change the focus group to an online format, and received approval to do so from my committee.

For my third round of obtaining focus group participants, I reached out to all previously contacted PTs who did not refuse to participate in a focus group outright, and offered 3 meeting times over two evenings. Once again, I had a low response, giving me a very small convenience sample of PTs. Five participants responded that they would participate, and 2 Google Hangout meetings were held over two nights. The interviews may have suffered from self-selection bias, as participants had the option to refuse follow-up interviews, and the resulting group may not have been truly representative of the 123 PT participants. The 5 PTs who took part in the online meetings had varied opinions regarding PAR, but all were in the 25-34-year age group, and all had 4-5 years teaching experience at that time. One participant was a special education teacher, which

allowed me to hear a first-hand account of a special education teacher having a CT without a special education background, which had been noted among other participants in the survey.

Data Collection

Researcher Sharan Merriam (2009) encourages using multiple measures of research to create a richly descriptive product in research. Using a variety of methods of collecting data from multiple sources is a preferred way to triangulate the research (Yin, 2009). Some methods of data collection include observation, surveys, focus groups, interviews, and archival records. For the purpose of this study, surveys, focus groups, interviews, and archival records were used.

Survey

After receiving research approval from SDP's Office of Research and Evaluation, a request was made to the Office of Teaching and Learning (OTL) for the emails of CTs and PTs for the past five years. The OTL was only able to provide emails for the past two years, as they did not have information for the years prior.

Initial research was conducted through survey research. Surveys are usually completed in the descriptive stage of research in order to find preliminary data (Yin, 2009). Questions were posed through a Google online survey in order to find participants, and to determine the participants' roles in, and perceptions of, PAR. The survey (Appendix) posed questions with respect to past and present roles in PAR and the participant's current role in their school district, as well as open-ended responses regarding their experiences in the program. Names were requested for the purpose of

follow-up interviews, but for the purpose of this study, all names were coded for the purpose of confidentiality. Responses were divided according to CT and PT response, and numbered in order of response; for example, the first CT to respond was coded C01. The results of the surveys were analyzed for demographic data and patterns in open-ended responses. The demographic data provided information to select participants in heterogeneous groupings for follow-up research. The open-ended responses allowed participants to share their opinions in an anonymous manner that could be analyzed and coded for themes. The promise of anonymity may have encouraged participants to share honestly without fear of repercussion.

Focus Group

A focus group was an ideal way to collect a large quantity of information from CTs in one setting. Hallas (2014) states that the main strength of the focus group is the dynamic that the group creates. In the case of individual interviews, participants may feel alone in their feelings, but within a group they create synergies and give a more complete picture of the study. The information gathered is a co-creation of the participants. The focus group began with an introduction of the moderator and participants, norms for the meeting, and the leading question: How has your involvement in PAR shaped or affected your teaching? There should be only a few open-ended questions planned, with time allowed for elaboration by participants (Merriam, 2009).

Focus group participants are able to build upon others' views when speaking about their experiences. A typical focus group consists of 6-10 participants, and lasts between 1.5 and 2 hours (Merriam, 2009). Kreuger and Casey (2014) encourage selecting homogeneous groups so that the participants have shared knowledge about the topic, but

they encourage some heterogeneity for contrasting opinions and more active discussion. For example, CTs who participated in the focus group in this study all held the same position in PAR, but they had varied years of teaching experience prior to becoming a CT, and within their experience in PAR, they worked with teachers in different grade levels and subject matter.

Julia Hallas, a researcher at Auckland University of Technology, suggests three activities a researcher could engage in with their focus groups if they are new to this method, in order to generate enough information for an empirical study (2014). The first activity is a review of the literature in order to see how data can be generated. Richard Kreuger and May Anne Casey, qualitative researchers from Minnesota, give an overview of how to prepare for the focus groups (2014). In this initial stage, researchers should be planning on how to generate quality data. Researchers develop questions and identify participants. The second activity is to develop an interview schedule to keep the researcher on track. Kreuger and Casey (2014) developed a system of questioning for focus groups that begins generally, and the questions get more specific as they go on. The *opening question* gives a sense of belonging to the group, and aids in transcription purposes to identify voices. The *introductory question* gives time for the participants to reflect. It is relatively easy to answer, and focuses participants on the subject matter. The *key questions* follow, and they are developed from the study's research questions. The *end question* gives participants a chance to reflect upon what they have said during the focus group, and they have the opportunity to make any final statements. The third activity is to conduct a pilot focus group to test out questions to determine if they are useful. Hallas did not support the idea of a pilot group with additional research, and

analyzing survey responses may prove just as valuable in judging the usefulness of questions as a pilot focus group (Hallas 2014).

Kreuger and Casey (2014) recommend focus groups begin with an introduction that includes 1.) Introduction; 2.) Overview of Topic; 3.) Group Norms; and 4.) Initial Question.

The focus group questions were adapted from examples of Kreuger and Casey (2014). They are designed to avoid simple yes or no responses, and they encourage reflection and opinions.

Questions for CT Focus Group:

1. How long were you involved in the PAR program?

2. Think back to your fondest memory when working with a PT.

3. What are some of the most positive aspects of PAR?

4. What needs improvement in PAR?

5. Suppose you were the head of the PAR program. What would you do differently?

6. What is one thing that could be changed right now in PAR?

I gave each participant the opportunity to lead the conversation by starting questions at a different person each time, and then asking other group members to add to the discussion. When posing question 3 for the focus group, "What are the most positive aspects of PAR?" I asked each member of the group to think of one word that immediately came to mind, and I recorded each answer on a large sheet of paper. After coming up with the words *strengthen, impactful, accountability,* and *collegial*, we took time to focus on each answer and elaborate on how it described their experience with PAR.

The focus group lasted approximately 45 minutes. The conversations in the focus groups were recorded and transcribed. Notes were taken during the groups to note the seating arrangement of the participants, body language, and to highlight any well-said statements.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with SDP and PFT administrators. Effort was made to have face-to-face interviews, where body language can be observed, and participants can keep focus, but when this was not possible, phone interviews were utilized. Merriam (2009) describes three types of interviews, categorized by structure: standardized, semi-structured, and unstructured/informal. The interviews for this study were semi-structured, where there is room for flexibility, participants were expected to answer the questions posed (See Interview Protocol, Appendix). The majority of the questions in the interviews were open-ended questions to give participants room for elaboration, and to make way for related topics. Interviews were conducted with administrators and individuals who have served on the PAR Panel. It is preferable to interview these participants individually where they can share their views unencumbered by others' opinions. Administrators may be more inclined to discuss their thoughts on any shortcomings or disadvantages of PAR if other members of PAR are not present.

The leaders of the PAR panel were the preferred subjects for individual interviews, and four administrators were chosen; two from SDP and two from PFT. The SDP administrators were chosen for their current roles in PAR. Both SDP administrators requested to speak via phone due to scheduling. Their interviews were 15 and 30 minutes. The PFT participants were chosen for their roles on the PAR panel and the design

committee. They requested that they be interviewed together due to scheduling. We scheduled a meeting at union headquarters, in their conference room. The interview lasted 45 minutes. For all interviews, an iPhone was used to record each session. While participants responded to my questions, I made notes on my script of points I wanted to focus on in the transcripts. Following each interview, I sent my recordings to Rev.com, an online transcription service.

Procedures

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe seven stages of interview inquiry, which allow research to be completed in a logical, linear process.

1. Thematizing – Formulating the purpose of a study; the why and the what of the investigation, which is then followed by the how.

2. Designing – Before interviewing can begin, an outline of the investigation should be designed.

3. Interviewing – Conduct interviews.

4. Transcribing – Interviews are transcribed from oral speech to written text, to prepare for analyzing.

5. Analyzing – Based on analysis of interviews, determine the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the findings. Did the interviews actually investigate what they were supposed to investigate? Are the results consistent?

6. Reporting - Create a report that communicates the subjects' view of the topic.

Data Analysis

For this mixed-methods study, strong emphasis was placed on gathering personal narratives and opinions from those who have had first-hand experience with PAR. Conventional content analysis was used to analyze responses (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Hsieh and Shannon view conventional content analysis as a way to avoid preconceived categories when obtaining information. Conventional content analysis explains a phenomenon, which in this study is the participant perception of PAR. Data is obtained from open-ended responses, rather than from existing theory. Analysis begins with the reading of all transcripts, which Hsieh and Shannon liken to reading a novel. The researcher goes through all transcripts again, this time highlighting key thoughts or concepts. Through highlighting, codes begin to emerge that represent more than one concept. These codes are grouped into categories based on their relation to each other.

Ethical considerations

As an educator who participated in the fledgling years of the SDP's PAR, I understand that I may carry some bias for the topic of PAR. I was careful to request information from years I did not take part in the program, and therefore, I had no previous contact with the CTs and PTs in the study. The questions posed in the study come from my personal interest in teacher retention and urban education.

Before beginning my research, I obtained approval through the Temple University IRB and the SDP's Office of Research and Evaluation. Communication, interview protocol and the survey were reviewed by my advisor. I obtained signed consent forms

from all focus group and interview participants. Careful consideration was made to respect anonymity; all names in the study are pseudonyms. Survey participants were coded according to number as they were received. Transcripts were made from focus group and interview recordings, and after data were analyzed, the digital recordings were deleted.

Summary

To conclude, a mixed-methods study design is the most logical choice in analyzing the inner workings of the Philadelphia PAR program. The mixed-methods study design gives a rich, holistic view of the PAR program in the SDP, and allows for an in-depth look at the situations that are specific to Philadelphia. A variety of qualitative and quantitative data was examined and analyzed through the collected data of surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups, using conventional content analysis. A variety of purposeful sampling was used to identify the site and participants, including unique case, typical, and convenient samples.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the categories that emerged from the analysis of my collected data, which includes interviews, focus groups, and surveys. This chapter examines the themes that emerged from my research in order to answer the following research questions:

1.) What are PAR participants' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the PAR program in the SDP?

2.) What are PAR participants' perceptions of how the SDP PAR program can be improved?

Categories include:

1.) *Support:* This category gives insight to the services that new teachers received within the PAR program. Administrators discussed the reasoning and benefits of new teacher support, while CTs and PTs gave specific examples of what day-to-day support looked like.

2.) *Collaboration:* This category gives insight to the working relationship among participants of PAR. Administrators discussed the working relationship between the district and the union, as well as how CTs interacted with PTs, and among other CTs. CTs also discussed the collegiality of the CT group, and PTs gave examples of collaboration with their CT, with other CTs, and with their own staff.

3.) *Increasing Support for PTs:* This category gives insight to the struggles that administrators, CTs, and PTs felt with the amount of support currently provided. More CTs, smaller caseloads, and more time spent support PTs were common suggestions.

4.) *Providing Good Matches between CTs and PTs:* This category gives insight in the type of teaching experience the CT has, versus the type of job placement the PT has. PTs stressed the importance of CTs having knowledge and experience in their certification, particularly in special education.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected over a five-month period. After receiving approval from Temple University's IRB and the school district, I sent the survey out to CTs and PTs who had participated in PAR over the past two years. I sent two follow-up emails in order to obtain as many survey participants as possible. In order to garner honest feedback, I stressed to participants that their answers would remain confidential. In the email that was sent to potential survey participants, it was expressed that names were only requested for contact purposes, and that they would not be included in the dissertation. The survey remained open for two months. Once the survey was closed, demographic data was determined, and open-ended questions were analyzed using inductive coding. Before analyzing data, survey participants were coded to protect confidentiality, with CTs coded C01 to C12, and PTs coded P001 to P123, in survey response order.

The survey asked participants if they were willing to participate in follow-up research. CTs and PTs were chosen to participate in focus groups. Five CTs were able to

meet and participate in a focus group. The focus group took place in a semi-structured format that followed the focus group protocol, but allowed for elaboration and follow-up questions. Several attempts were made to assemble a PT focus group, but due to lack of response, I held two small group interviews via Google Hangouts. These interviews still followed the PT focus group protocol in a semi-structured interview format that allowed for elaboration. After the focus group and interviews were completed, they were transcribed using Rev.com, reviewed for accuracy, and analyzed using thematic coding.

Four administrators were chosen to be interviewed: two from the union, and two from the district. The union administrators chose to be interviewed together, and we met in the conference room at union headquarters. The district administrators chose to be interviewed via phone, and I interviewed them individually. After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed using Rev.com, reviewed for accuracy, and analyzed using thematic coding.

Description of the Sample

Setting: School District of Philadelphia

The setting for this study was the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), which is the eighth largest school district in the country. According to a report by the Philadelphia City Council, 81% of students in the SDP live in poverty (King, 2017). The district is comprised of 217 schools, and serves over 120,000 students.

The SDP is an example of a school district with a high teacher attrition rate. The district serves over 120,000 students in district-operated schools and employs over 7,000 teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), who are represented by the

Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT). In a Pennsylvania Department of Education

report (2019), there was a turnover of 699 teachers in the 2017/2018 school year; at a

little over 9%, one of the highest percentages of turnover in the state.

SDP began using the PAR program in the 2010-2011 school year, in which it

gave PAR support to teachers in one-third of SDP schools, and increased by a third until

all schools were included. SDP teachers were without a contract for four years of

negotiations, until 2017 (Loewus, 2017). During that time, PAR support continued for

new and veteran teachers.

Surveys:

Online surveys were sent out to CTs and PTs. They contained both closed-ended

and open-ended questions.

Demographics

This section analyzes the demographic characteristics of survey participants. Data

were gathered from closed-ended questions. The SDP provides demographic data on their

website for race and gender (School District of Philadelphia, 2019). Tables are provided

for survey responses, and then compared to available current SDP demographics.

Age Distribution

I included a question about age in the survey, in order to find similarities in the

views expressed in the open-ended questions. The age distribution for survey participants

is shown in Table 4.1. The 25-34 years old age group was the largest subgroup in PTs, at

51.2%. This was expected, as PAR is part of new teacher induction. It was surprising,

however, to see that 20.3% of survey participants were 45 or older. It is most likely that

some of these PTs participating were participating in PAR because of their unsatisfactory standing in the district, since 10 of the 25 participants stated that they had ten or more years of teaching experience. It could also be inferred that some of these PTs previously taught in another district or began teaching later in their career.

Table 2: Survey Participant Age

Age	Consulting Teachers	Participating Teachers
24 years or younger	0	3
25-34 years old	3	63
35-44 years old	6	32
45-54 years old	1	17
55-64 years old	2	8
65 years or older	0	0
Total	**12**	**123**

Gender Composition

The gender composition of the survey respondents was 83.3% female and 16.7% male for the 12 CTs, and 78% female and 22% male for 123 PTs. For the 2019-2020 school year, the SDP reported a gender composition of 74.43% female and 25.57% male teachers, with a total of 9085 teachers reported. The PT participants in this study have a similar gender composition to the SDP, but there is a larger female representation for the CTs. No male CT survey participants indicated that they would be interested in participating in a focus group, so the focus group consisted of females only.

Table 3: Survey Participant Gender (by %)

Gender	Consulting Teachers	Participating Teachers	SDP Teachers 2019-2020
Female	83.3	78	74.4
Male	16.7	22	25.6
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

Ethnic Origin (or Race)

Table 4.3 indicates that 50% of CT survey participants were White, and 50% were Black or African American. In terms of PT participants, 73.2% were White, 17.9% were Black or African American, 4.9% chose Other, 3.2% were Hispanic or Latino, and less than 1% were Asian or Pacific Islander. The SDP demographic information from the 2019-2020 school year indicated that 66.5% of teachers were White, 24.5% were Black or African American, 3.6% were Hispanic or Latino, 2.6% were Asian or Pacific Islander, and 2.8% were other or unknown.

Table 4: Survey Participant Ethic Origin, or Race (by %)

Ethnic Origin (or Race)	Consulting Teachers	Participating Teachers	SDP Teachers 2019-2020
White	50	73.2	66.5
Hispanic or Latino	0	3.2	3.6
Black or African American	50	17.9	24.5
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	<1	2.6
Other	0	4.9	2.8
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**

Teaching Experience

When looking at years working in education, I expected CTs to have more teaching experience than PTs. 75% of CTs had more than 10 years' experience, 8.3% had 6-10 years' experience, and 16.7% had 4-5 years' experience.

As stated previously, PAR is part of new teacher induction, and one might infer that all PTs would have little to no teaching experience. Since the survey participants have all completed the PAR program which lasts 1-2 years depending on the participant, I did not expect any teachers to have 1 year or less of experience, but I expected most teachers to be in the 2-3 year or 4-5-year subgroups. The responses of the majority of PT participants were as expected, with 20.3% having 2-3 years' experience, and 47.1% having 4-5 years' experience. It was unexpected that 17% of PT participants had 6-10 years' experience, and 15.4% had more than 10 years' experience. There may be three possible reasons for this. In a later question, 9 PTs indicated that they had volunteered to participate in PAR. Volunteers would have teaching experience. Another reason could be that some teachers with a larger amount of experience could have been in the PAR program as teachers who were rated unsatisfactory, rather than new teachers in induction. Finally, teachers may have come from another state, and even though they had teaching experience, they still needed to fulfill Pennsylvania's requirement for induction.

Table 5: Years Working in Education

Years of Experience	Consulting Teachers	Participating Teachers
1	0	0
2-3	0	25
4-5	2	58
6-10	1	21
More than 10	9	19
Total	**12**	**123**

PT Role in PAR

PAR is widely seen as a program for new teachers in induction, and veteran teachers who are rated unsatisfactory, but veteran teachers who are in good standing may also request PAR services if they feel they would benefit from CT assistance. 92.7% of PT survey participants stated that they were in the mandatory PAR program, but 7.3% participants indicated that they had volunteered to take part in PAR. This may account for the large number of PTs with a higher number of years in the teaching profession.

Participation in PAR and Retention

PTs were asked how, if it all, did their participation in PAR lead to staying in the district. These open-ended responses were examined and categorized by positive impact, no impact, negative impact, and no answer. Thirty responses were left blank. Of the 93 remaining responses, 46.2% said PAR had a positive impact, 50.5% said PAR had no impact, and 3.2% said PAR had a negative impact.

Table 6: Survey Question 6: Participating Teachers: How, if at all, did your participation in PAR lead to you staying in the district?

Response	Number
Positive impact	43
No impact	47
Negative impact	3
No response	30
Total	**123**

Answers were categorized as positive if the PT stated that participation in PAR led to their retention in the SDP. Some key words that repeated within the positive responses were *helpful, encouragement, support,* and *feedback*. Many teachers spoke about making it through their first year with support from their CT. An elementary music teacher praised her mentor, stating, "My consulting teacher gave me hope that I would be able to survive my first year" (P061). Another music teacher described that she was "so encouraged by [her] consulting teacher that [she] decided to continue on in the district even after a very hard first year" (P013). An elementary teacher described her first year as difficult, but shared, "I truly believe that if I didn't have a PAR coach my first year in the district, I would have left halfway through the year" (P024).

Answers were categorized as no impact if the PT stated that participation in PAR did not lead to their retention. Some PTs wrote simply, "it didn't." A few participants elaborated, saying that they "never had intention to leave" (P026), or "it did not play a factor" (P034) in staying at the SDP. A middle school teacher stated that PAR was

"insignificant in [her] first year in the district," which was not her first-year teaching (P005).

Answers were categorized as negative if the PT response included a negative experience or feeling. One elementary art teacher said her CT "almost made her quit" (P027). An elementary autistic support teacher stated, "My PAR coach did nothing to help me stay, the kids are why I'm here" (P045). She further explained that her CT only told her how good she was, when she knew she was far from perfect, and could use improvement. She attributed the dearth of assistance to her CT's lack of knowledge in special education.

The three PTs who stated that PAR had a negative impact gave the following suggestions for improvement:

- Make it optional; let them switch coaches for better match (P027)
- Make sure the coaches are nice and really care to improve the teacher, not put the teacher down and make them nervous and scared when they come to observe (P076).
- New teachers need support and suggestions, not intimidation (P045).

The answers of P045 and P076 were similar in their views toward their CTs. The demographics of the participants were examined to determine if they shared any commonalities. Besides gender, there were no similarities between the PTs.
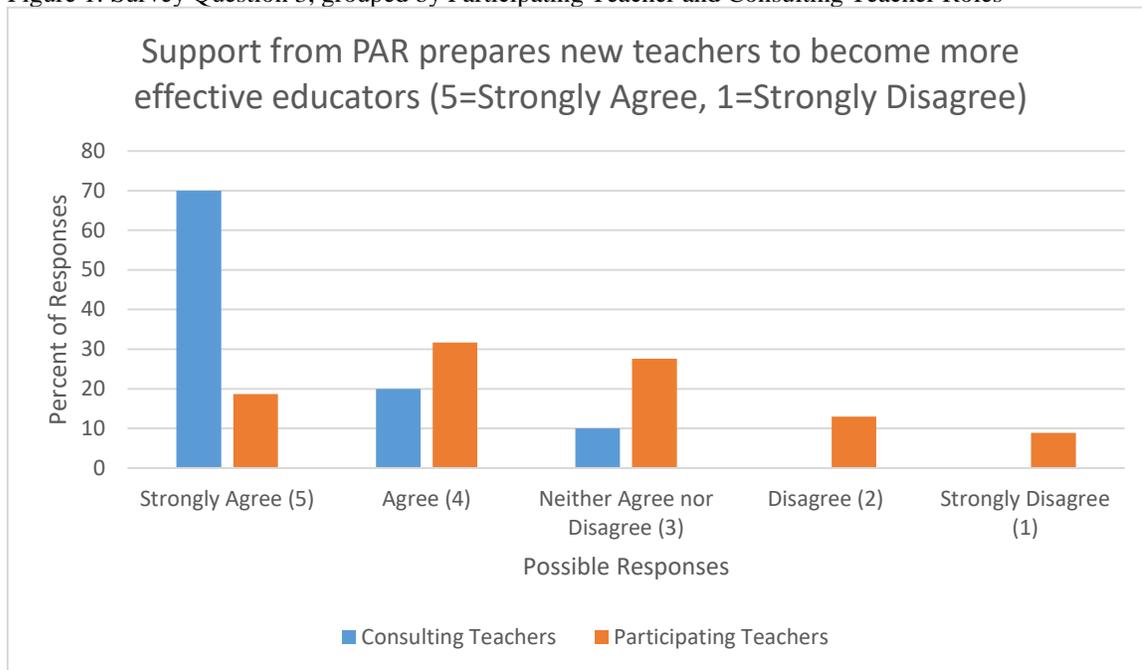
Table 7: Demographic Information of P045 and P076

	P045	*P076*
Age	25-34 years old	35-44 years old
Gender	Female	Female
Ethnic Origin, or Race	White	Hispanic or Latino
Current teaching assignment	Autistic Support, grade 6-8	3rd grade teacher
Years of teaching experience	4-5 years	2-3 years

Survey Question: Does support from PAR prepare new teachers to become more effective educators?

Likert-scale questions are used to measure attitudes concerning a particular topic. Yin (2013) uses Likert-scale questions to find how answers relate to each other. This question was used as a probe to find the participants' impression of PAR. After examining the overall distribution of answers, I broke down the answers into categories in order to see if one subgroup had an overwhelming positive or negative attitude toward PAR. I then examined the responses of the open-ended survey questions to determine if there were any patterns of responses.

CT responses were overwhelmingly positive, which was to be expected since they were responsible for providing mentoring services. With nearly 22% of PT responses being negative (1 or 2 on Likert scale), I broke PT responses into subgroups to examine further.

Figure 1: Survey Question 3, grouped by Participating Teacher and Consulting Teacher Roles

Support from PAR prepares new teachers to become more effective educators (5=Strongly Agree, 1=Strongly Disagree)

The first subgroups created were female versus male. The responses of male participants were overwhelming positive; 74% of men chose 4 or 5 on the Likert scale, while 43% of women chose 4 or 5. 26% female participants chose 1 or 2, indicating that they disagreed with the statement. In examining the responses of the 25 female participants who indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, their answers their answers fell into four themes:

- Teachers should be able to opt out of the program if they came from another district (P005, P041, P102)

- Support should be increased (P015, P033, P038, P055, P082, P107)

- Teachers should be matched with CTs who hold similar certifications (P016, P021, P027, P045, P075, P083, P110)

- CTs should give supportive feedback instead of critique (P025, P046, P076, P084, P092, P104, P115)

Only 2 men chose "disagree" or "strongly disagree" on the Likert scale. They were both high school teachers, with one being a new teacher (2-3 years), while the other had 4-5 years experience. Both male teachers declined being available for follow-up interviews. Below are the answers each gave when asked for suggestions for improvement in PAR:

- It is punitive-administrators use it to blame teachers for the immoral, violent, and dysfunctional behavior of students without parents (P036)

- Better matching of mentors; mentor seemed to override a lot of my thoughts and opinions with theirs and I felt as though as if I was not governing my classroom their way that I was doing it wrong. I felt like my authority in the classroom was often undermined and my students would even notice it on my facial expressions (P070)

Figure 2: Survey question 3, grouped by male and female

Support from PAR prepares new teachers to become more effective educators (5= Strongly Agree, 1=Strongly Disagree)
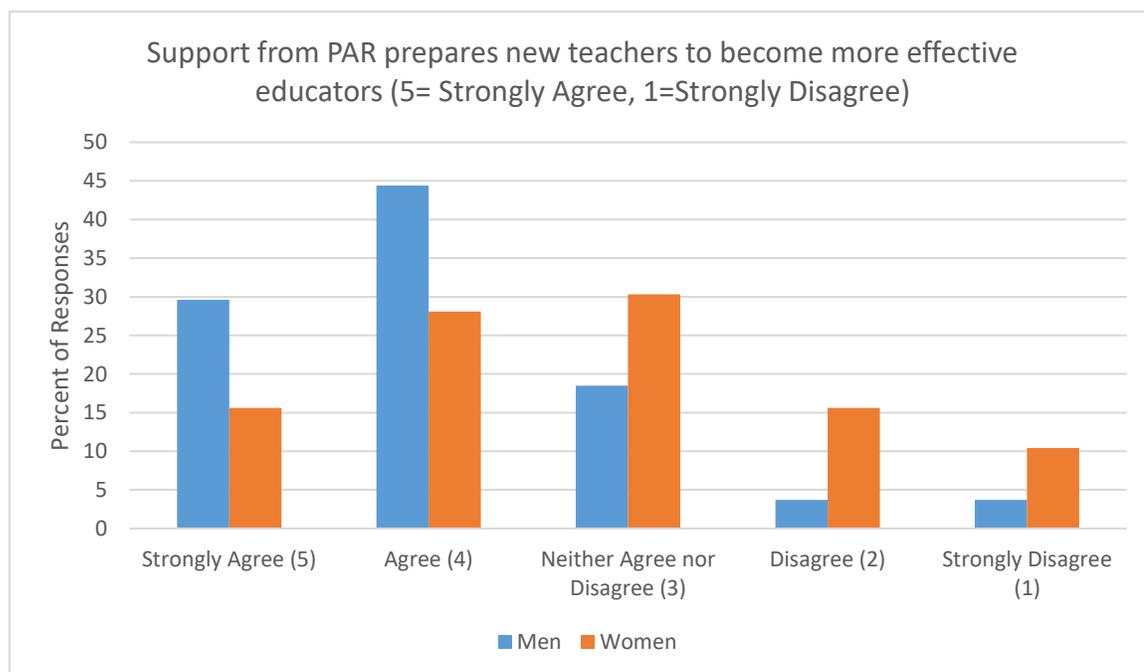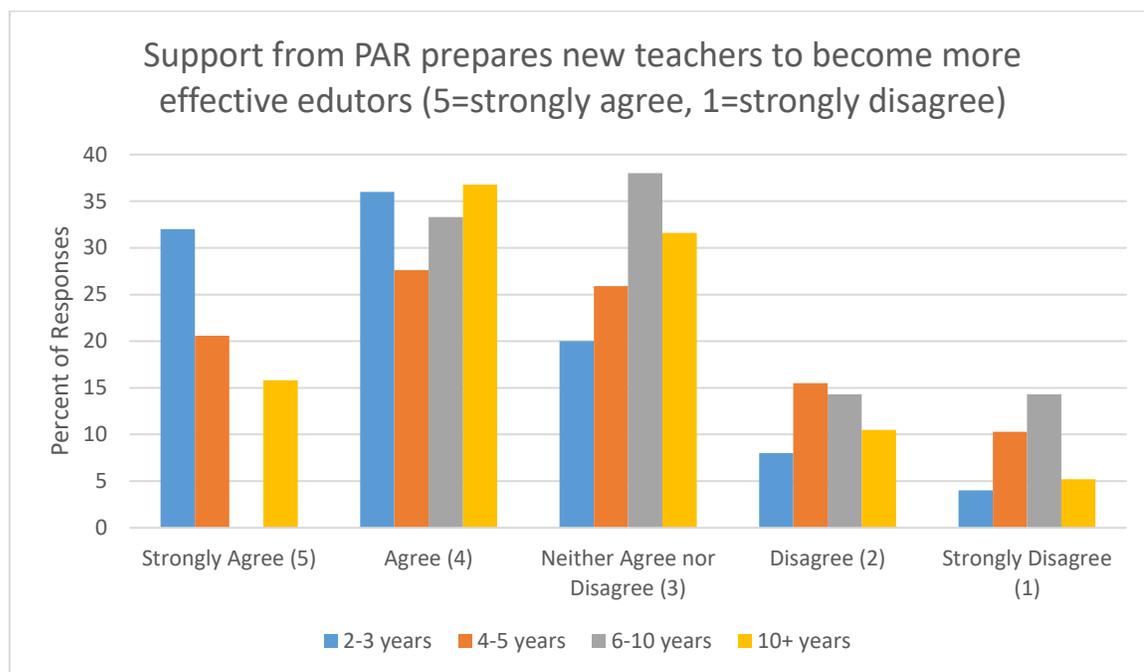
For Figure 4.3, PTs were grouped according to teaching experience. Those with 6-10 years teaching experience had the largest percentage of unfavorable responses, with 28.8% of participants answering 1 or 2 on the Likert scale. In examining the open-ended question asking for suggestions for improvement, the six PTs gave three similar responses:

- Begin PAR program as soon as the teacher begins with the district (P015, P038)

- Program is too critical, and should give more support (P036, P046)

- Induction programs should be accepted from other districts/states (P041, P102)

PTs with 2-3 years experience had the most favorable view of PAR, with 68% of the group answering 4 or 5 on the Likert scale. Of the 12% of teachers with 2-3 years experience who answered 1 or 2 on the Likert scale, all three participants (P021, P027, P070) suggested that CTs should be better matched to their PTs, P021 specifically recommending that more CTs have special education experience.

Since PAR is a program that supports new teachers and veteran teachers who have been rated unsatisfactory, it can be determined that PTs with more teaching experience have either transferred from another district or state, or were veteran teachers who had been previously rated unsatisfactory. According to the New Teacher Center, as of 2016, more than half of the states in the United States required participation in an induction program (Goldrick, 2016), so these teachers have most likely already participated in a teacher mentoring program.

Figure 3: Survey Question 3, grouped by PT Teaching Experience

Support from PAR prepares new teachers to become more effective edutors (5=strongly agree, 1=strongly disagree)

Interviews:

The leaders of the PAR panel were the preferred subjects for individual interviews, and four administrators were chosen; two from SDP and two from PFT. The administrators were chosen based on their active roles in the program, and their regular contact with the participants. While not all had been a part of PAR since its inception, their current jobs keep them in contact with not only CTs and PTs, but also school principals and administrators from both the SDP and PFT.

Table 8: Interview Participants

Name (all names are pseudonyms)	Current Job Title	Position(s) Held in PAR	Method of Data Collection
Anna	Administrative role in the Office of Teaching and Learning	Administration	Interview
Beth	Administrative role in the Office of Teaching and Learning	Administration PAR Panel	Interview
Cathy	Leadership role in PFT	PAR Design Team PAR Panel	Interview
Dierdre	Leadership role in PFT	PAR Implementation Team PAR Design Team PAR Panel	Interview

Focus Group:

In the Google survey, five CTs indicated that they would be interested in participating in follow-up research. We met in a conference room in the SDP headquarters for approximately 45 minutes.

I was unable to conduct a focus group with PTs, due to low response. I met with four teachers via Google Hangouts, and conducted a small group interview and two individual interviews, using the focus group questions.

Table 9: Focus Group Participants

Name (all names are pseudonyms)	Current Job Title	Position(s) Held in PAR	Method of Data Collection
Eliza	SDP Administration	CT: middle school team	Focus group/survey
Francine	CT	CT: elementary team	Focus group/survey
Georgia	CT	CT: high school team	Focus group/survey
Isabelle	CT	CT: elementary team	Focus group/survey
Jeannette	Split role as CT and central office administration	CT: high school team	Focus group/survey

Table 10: PT Interviews

Name (all names are pseudonyms)	Current Job Title	Position(s) Held in PAR	Method of Data Collection
Kimberly	Elementary Special Education teacher	PT	Group interview/ survey
Leigh	Elementary teacher	PT	Group interview/ survey
Madeline	High School English/Special Education teacher	PT	Interview/survey
Nick	High School Math teacher	PT	Interview/survey

Conventional Content Analysis of Data

The interview transcripts, focus group transcript, and open-ended survey questions were analyzed using conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In this method of analysis, open-ended responses are studied until initial themes, or codes, emerge. Categories are derived from this data.

Table 11: Categories derived from Conventional Content Analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005)

Category	Definition	Examples
Support	Hierarchical assistance from administration and CTs given to PTs. This includes both instructional and emotional support.	Teaching in this large urban district has very explicit and apparent and distinct challenges, and not everyone can just be great right off the bat. People need to be given time and support to become the best they can be. (Cathy, Administrator) Provide that consistent support throughout the first year, to be a lending ear, a helping hand, to problem solve, be solution-oriented (Anna, Administrator). They're being coached by individuals in a non-evaluative way where they built these relationships built off of trust and rapport. (Beth, Administrator) Having supports from the beginning made me feel a part and important not just within my school but the district (P116). I had those additional resources I could rely on when I was faced with challenging situations (P122). My consulting teacher gave me hope that I would be able to survive my first year (P061).
Collaboration	Collaboration is a lateral concept, in which entities work together toward a common goal. Examples of this include the SDP and PFT, and the work among CTs.	It's one piece of collaboration between the federation and the district that has been sustained, in spite of times when, perhaps, things were tense in other areas, i.e. not having an updated contract" (Beth, Administrator). They're bringing in their colleagues to do co-visits to say, like, hey, am I missing something? Did I miss the mark? Could I be looking at this

Table 11, cont.

| | | teacher from another lens? What do you think I should do? This team is so collaborative. If they're not strong in an area, then they are.. They will admit like, hey, this is not my strong suit (Anna, Administrator).

I'm pleasantly surprised by what my colleagues bring to the table every day. If I don't have an answer, I have five people I can call for an answer. That makes us stronger as coaches (Eliza, CT).

I think we're a pretty unique team and office, that we have no problem building off of each other and asking for help, like, This is not my area of strength. What can you do to support me" (Isabella). |
| **Increasing Support for PTs** | Addressing PTs' individual needs and providing an appropriate amount of PAR support | Teachers go through that novice time that is more than just the one year (Cathy).

The program ends after two years. I felt that I still had more to learn and improve. I was brand new to teaching and an optional third year would have been great to have at my disposal (P028).

With the ratio we just said, 25 to 30 teachers on a consulting teacher caseload, the consulting teacher isn't able to be there the amount of time or in a crisis situation, and so, we tend to think, again, we don't have the evidence, that those are some of the reasons that teachers exit (Dierdre, Administrator).

We have such large caseloads, that, I know I feel that I can't spend the amount of time that I really want to spend with my teacher (Eliza). |

Table 11, cont.

| **Providing good matches between CTs and PTs** | Creating an environment in which PTs are appropriately supported in PAR | My consulting teacher had no background in special education. I felt that the quality of support I received was less than what other participating teachers were receiving (P037).

I had a wonderful experience specifically because my consulting teacher was a music teacher as well and knew the struggles of general music, choir, and classroom management as a specialist (P013)

The cooperating teacher who was working with me did not know special ed. So, it made it very hard to discuss things with her and figure everything out because she did not understand my students (P045).

I had a great mentor, yet my mentor didn't have an understanding of Special Education (P083). |
| --- | --- | --- |

After determining the main categories derived from the data, I examined the data once again, and organized them according to *support, collaboration, increasing support for PTs,* and *providing good matches between CTs and PTs*. The following description delves deeper into the participant responses according to category.

Category 1: Support

Deirdre, a PFT administrator and a member of the design team, was introduced to PAR by union affiliates in the American Federation of Teachers. The PFT researched the PAR program for eight years before it was included in the district's Collective Bargaining Agreement with the union. When asked about the inception of PAR in the

SDP, Deirdre explained that a large part of the appeal was PAR's mission in attempting

to retain effective teachers.

In her interview, Cathy, a PFT administrator, spoke of the importance of new

teacher support in PAR.

> *"I think the greatest thing about PAR is that support and coaching that a first-year teacher gets. And it sort of removes them from that vulnerable position where they can be in to literally be fired their very first semester…you know, after the very first semester of teaching. They, with the benefit of coming in and getting a very strong support and coaching in the form of the CT, and then having their rating period extended for a full year, I think allows them the time and the opportunity to become better teachers over the course of the first year, and hopefully be retained and also want to stay. Teaching in this large urban district has very explicit and apparent and distinct challenges, and not everyone can just be great right off the bat. People need to be given time and support to become the best they can be."*

Beth, an SDP administrator, stated that even teachers who left the district spoke

positively about PAR. "Folks will talk about their consulting teacher as being the most

helpful thing that they had during their time here, even though they are leaving."

In her focus group, Georgia, a CT on the high school team, emphasized how

important the support offered through PAR can be. She shared, "I didn't have this as a

first-year teacher. I didn't get any help until I was already in my 11th year of teaching. I

had never been a part of anything that was set in place to help build me. If I had had it, I

probably would have been 20 times better."

An open-ended question in the PAR survey asked PTs, "How, if at all, did your

participation in PAR lead to you staying in the district?" Of the 123 PT participants, 23

PTs directly attributed staying to the support of their CT and the PAR program.

When asked to list any positive consequences that were observed in the PT's

schools and the district as a result of PAR, survey participants responded that teachers

were more supported, and better equipped for teaching. Examples of specific support
included:

- Teaching strategies

- Teaching resources

- Feedback on instruction

- Strategies for effective classroom management

- Modeling lessons

- Listening

- Sharing personal experiences

Category 2: Collaboration

Beth, a district administrator, spoke about the single view the union and district
had when discussing how new teachers need to be supported. "It's one piece of
collaboration between the federation and the district that has been sustained, in spite of
times when, perhaps, things were tense in other areas, i.e. not having an updated
contract."

Anna, a district administrator, lauded the collaborative nature of the CTs,
explaining how working together makes them stronger. "They're bringing in their
colleagues to do co-visits to say, like, hey, am I missing something? Did I miss the mark?
Could I be looking at this teacher from another lens? What do you think I should do?
This team is so collaborative. If they're not strong in an area, then they will admit like,
hey, this is not my strong suit."

Anna further discussed how the collaboration was not limited to CTs and PTs.
She and her co-director have weekly check-ins with the CTs to reflect on their goals and

support. "Every week, the coaches come with goals that are mind-blowing. When I think about teachers who initially have significant challenges, significant struggles with executing lessons, with implementing engaging lessons, with being able to really have students think about the content in a deeper manner. When we kind of reflect on where the teachers were in August and September to where they are now, it's really mind-blowing."

In the focus group, Eliza, a former CT from the middle school team, spoke about the benefits of collaborating with her fellow CTS. She said, "I'm pleasantly surprised by what my colleagues bring to the table every day. If I don't have an answer, I have five people I can call for an answer. That makes us stronger as coaches."

In their focus group, the CTs discussed how much they valued the input of their colleagues. Isabelle, a CT on the elementary team, explained, "I know I've called on Francine at least once to come in, 'Are you seeing what I'm seeing? Am I on the right track? Am I holding myself accountable?' There's that little insurance policy by having our colleagues here to have that extra set of eyes."

Francine, a CT on the elementary team, spoke about how she has even collaborated with her former PTs when she is looking for an answer. One of her former PTs is an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher at a high school. The ESL teacher showed strength in her implementation of ESL and station teaching as a PT. When Francine comes upon a new teacher who is struggling with either of these areas, she reaches out to her former PT. That teacher will text and email pictures and examples to the new teacher.

Category 3: Increasing Support for PTs

The sentiment echoed by many PAR participants was that they would like CTs to spend more time helping PTs. Deirdre explained why she felt high caseloads were a concern. "With the ratio we just said, 25 to 30 teachers on a consulting teacher caseload, the consulting teacher isn't able to be there the amount of time or in a crisis situation, and so, we tend to think, again, we don't have the evidence, that those are some of the reasons that teachers exit."

As for specific recommendations for change, Beth stressed the need for increasing the number of consulting teachers and limiting the number of schools to which they report. At the time of the interview, she stated that some CTs had as many as 30 PTs, which lowered the frequency of visits. By lowering the number of schools each CT supported, they could make the most of each visit.

In their focus group, CTs echoed the importance of lowering caseloads. Eliza explained her rationale with spending more time with PTs. She stated, "I wish I could be in one building for a concentrated time so that I understood the culture a bit better." She further explained that understanding the culture would assist her in getting to know the individual needs of teachers and their students. Georgia explained that all teachers would benefit from more support from their CT, and that cutting the caseloads in half would be more impactful. At the time of the focus group, the amount of PTs on the interviewed CTs' caseloads ranged from 20 to 28. Georgia added, "It's just spreading yourself thin sometimes and wanting to do the best for everyone."

Of the 123 PT respondents, 27 stated that they would have preferred more support, or extended services. Three of those participants expressed that an increase of

the number of consulting teachers or the amount of support would result in improving the quality of the experience.

In examining the demographics of the PTs who stated that they would prefer to increase the amount of support, or the length of the support program:

- 52% were between the ages of 25-34 years old

- 85% were female

- 79% were white

- 48% had between 4-5 years of teaching experience

These demographics were similar to the makeup of the total PT survey participants.

Category 4: Providing good matches between CTs and PTs.

While Anna praised the collaborative nature of the CT cohort, she admitted that there is sometimes a content gap in the experience CTs have in some subject matter. CTs are divided into elementary, middle and high school teams, but sometimes support teachers where they have limited expertise. One content area in particular where Anna sees need for additional support is special education. "When I think about emotional support classrooms, when I think about autistic support classrooms, unfortunately, we have a very limited amount of folks on our team with coaching experience in special education." She went on to say how she would like to see CTs grouped by content areas, such as humanities, math, or special education, rather than just elementary, middle, and high school teams.

In the CT focus group, Isabelle stated, "As a consulting teacher, I relied heavily on my teammates to come make sure I was in check and seeing certain things, but I also used my colleagues for things I wasn't familiar with. I taught for 11 years. You only see

so much in 11 years of teaching, right? If I had, like a music teacher, we have someone on our team who is a very talented music teacher. I would use her for information. I would go to an elementary team if I had a kindergarten or first grade teacher. I know the work, but I want a different perspective. I know that they'd be able to give me their open, honest feedback. I think that in our office, we have a lot of trust with each other, and a lot of respect. We're also not afraid to push back on each other if we feel we need to dig a little bit deeper."

While Isabelle was able to explain her process for supporting PTs as best she could, matching PTs with CTs who held the same certifications would give more direct support, rather than going through several different channels to give assistance to a new teacher.

In the survey sent to past PAR participants, the question was posed, "What suggestions would you give to improve the PAR program in the SDP?" Of the 123 PT participants, 18 PTs suggested that CTs should hold the certification of possess the content knowledge that matches the PT's teaching assignment, particularly in special education. In a follow-up interview, one special education teacher explained why she had a negative experience with her CT. "The cooperating teacher who was working with me did not know special ed. So, it made it very hard to discuss things with her and figure everything out because she did not understand my students." She went on to say that she had to depend on the other teachers in her school for support. She added, "If it weren't for the school environment at the time, I probably would have run out of education completely."

The need for CTs who are certified in special education was emphasized by a large proportion of special education teachers. For the 23 teachers who categorized themselves as special education, autistic support, or learning support teachers, 11 mentioned that more care should be made in matching PTs and CTs with special education experience.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented descriptive findings from a mixed-methods study at a large urban school with a concentration on teacher preparation and support. An attempt was made to conduct a study including PAR participants for the past five years, but due to a lack of available records, only the past two years were available. Study participants included administrators from the SDP and PFT, CTs, and PTs, all who had participated in the PAR program in the previous two years.

After conducting a survey, focus group, and interviews, I analyzed the open-ended responses and searched for common themes. Conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) revealed four main categories. These categories included support, collaboration, increasing PT support, and providing good matches between CTs and PTs.

Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the findings presented in Chapter 4 and explores the implications of this study, as well as recommendations for future practice.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This study utilized a mixed-methods study design to investigate the mentoring program of the SDP, and compare it to other existing PAR programs. In Chapters 1 through 3, I outlined the methodology of my research. In Chapter 4, the data and findings of the study were discussed. In this final chapter, I describe the results associated with the research questions. The findings are analyzed, related to the methodology, and recommendations for further study are made.

Restatement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine the PAR program in the SDP and find ways to improve it, in order to make it more successful. Mentoring programs that are effective are shown to lead to job satisfaction and teacher retention (Hobson et al., 2009; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Ingersoll (2011) explained that in order to be successful in teacher retention, a mentoring program needed to be tailored to the needs of the individual school district. Much of the literature addresses the relationship between mentor and mentee (Brown et al., 2007), but does not delve into the inner workings of specific programs from the views of all participants (Hobson et al., 2009). The majority of the literature focused on the positive aspects of mentoring programs, without addressing many negative aspects, or room for improvement.

I was guided by the following research questions:

1.) What are PAR participants' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the PAR program in the SDP?

2.) What are PAR participants' perceptions of how the SDP PAR program can be improved?

Review of Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods design in which to examine the SDP's PAR program using qualitative and quantitative data. Participants from the last two years of the program were contacted to participate in the research. Nine CTs and 126 PTs responded to the initial survey. Five CTs participated in a follow-up focus group. Due to a lack of response for a PT focus group, I held online interviews using Google Hangouts with the five PTs who agreed to participate in follow-up research. Two union administrators participated in an interview in person, and two district administrators participated in individual interviews via phone. The focus group and interviews were recorded and transcribed using an online transcription service. The transcripts and open-ended survey responses were examined using inductive analysis and coded for themes and categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Summary of the Results

The first question explored PAR participants' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses in the PAR program in the SDP. Through conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), four categories emerged: support, collaboration, increasing support for PTs, and providing good matches between CTs and PTs. The qualities of

support and collaboration were seen as strengths in PAR, while the amount of support provided and the matches between CTs and PTs were seen as weaknesses.

The second question examined how to improve SDP's current model of mentoring. Overwhelmingly, participants stressed the need for additional, targeted support. About half of special education teachers in this study expressed that their mentors had limited experience in special education. One music teacher discussed how beneficial it was to have a CT with music experience as a mentor.

Another request that was made both by administration and participants was the addition of time. PTs voiced that they would have benefited from additional support, CTs spoke about their limited time with each PT, and administrators discussed reducing caseloads so that CTs could provide a stronger support system.

Discussion of the Findings

It was my hope, in this study, to find the best possible way to support new teachers within their current mentoring program, by examining how participants perceived their experiences in PAR. In analyzing the data, I determined that many participants held similar views, in both positive and negative aspects of PAR.

From the responses of the participants, PAR is seen as a mostly favorable experience, with a few exceptions. I found that teachers who came into the PAR program with previous experience did not have as favorable a view as those who were in their beginning years. Some of these teachers expressed their displeasure in taking part in a new teacher program when they had already participated in a mentoring program elsewhere.

PAR Provides Support to New Teachers

While it might seem obvious that a mentoring program would be viewed as supportive, due to the high turnover rate of teachers, it was a surprise to find that many participants of PAR emphasized the positive support demonstrated in the program. PTs expressed that they felt supported both personally and professionally. Administrators, CTs, and PTs stressed the importance of non-evaluative support. Teachers discussed how they were supported with strategies, tools, and resources to be successful in the classroom. Not only was instructional support a common theme, but examples of emotional support were also widely expressed. Emotional support is seen as a vital aspect of mentoring, which commonly leads to job satisfaction (Hobson et al., 2009; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). PTs expressed that their CTs provided moral support, encouragement, and hope.

PAR is a Highly Collaborative Program

When reflecting on their experiences in PAR, many of those providing support focused on the collaborative nature of the program. CTs pooled their resources to support their new teachers, when they felt they needed a fresh set of eyes, or expertise in a situation where they were not totally comfortable.

Administrators from both the SDP and PFT stressed that working in partnership was instrumental in helping new teachers. PAR was the first teacher mentoring program that the district and union had developed together. It is also the longest-running mentoring program that has been used in the SDP. Cathy, one of the PFT administrators, discussed the importance of the district-union collaboration and future of PAR, "I feel like PAR has… it sticks. And it's something that I think both the PFT and the district

have faith in and really want to see it keep going and improve, but I think just the fact that it's been around for this many years and it's going strong, I think we're going to keep at it and keep making it better."

PTs Would Like More Support

As seen in the first category, many participants felt supported during their participation in PAR; however, within the category of support, it was determined that not all participants received the same level of support. Whether it was adding more CTs to the staff, seeing their CT more often, or allowing more time in the program, many participants in the study stressed the need for more support to new teachers. With a district as large as the SDP, providing an adequate amount of professional support to so many teachers in so many schools can appear to be a monumental task.

CTs Should Possess the Expertise that PTs Need

The overwhelming number of negative responses regarding PAR concerned poor matches between CTs and PTs, specifically in certification areas. Largely, this focused on the lack of CTs who were certified in special education. Many PTs who were special education teachers felt that their CTs did not understand the nature of their job. Besides instruction, special education teachers have additional duties including specific testing, creating and updating Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), using specialized funds, and meeting with parents and support teams. Their work comes with legal responsibilities and guidelines. Having a CT with specific experience in special education would be an asset. Both administration and participants voiced their concerns for providing good matches of CTs and PTs. Administrators hypothesized that content-specific matches might be more beneficial, rather than the current elementary, middle, and high school teams of CTs.

The policies regarding PAR are outlined in the SDP Collective Bargaining Agreement. The policies explain the PAR process and PAR roles, but PAR support can vary from teacher to teacher. As previously stated, mentoring programs need to fit the needs of the teachers. It is important to give appropriate support to PTs, and to tailor their support based on their certification and level of experience. Including a mandatory end of year survey for PTs would assist the PAR Implementation Committee in tailoring the program to best fit the needs for the participants. Points to address could include thoughts on the type of support provided, amount of support provided, what was helpful in their PAR experience, what was missing from their PAR experience, and what was unnecessary.

Implications for Theory and Research

Continuum of Teaching

Feiman-Nemser theorizes that teaching occurs on a continuum: preservice, which occurs at the college or university level, induction, which is the beginning years of teaching, and continuing professional development (Feiman-Nemser, 1027). She considers the first 2-3 years of teaching as a critical time for teachers to establish their identity, and stresses that induction is crucial for new teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; 2012). Induction includes: 1.) learn the context of students, curriculum, and school community 2.) design responsive instructional program 3.) create a classroom learning community 4.) enact a beginning repertoire 5.) develop a professional identity.

Feiman-Nemser also emphasizes the importance of well-appointed mentors in order for induction programs to be successful. The mentors should be able to integrate their experience as classroom teachers with their expertise in teaching new teachers. She

also stresses that good mentors stay in contact with other mentors in order to talk about their work and self-reflect.

Many of the negative responses concerning PAR came from teachers with more experience. These teachers either transferred from another district or were rated unsatisfactory in the previous school year. Since these teachers are past the induction phase of teaching, and in their continuing professional development phase, they would benefit from a different kind of mentoring program. If initial observations with more experienced teachers are completed without concern, CTs may want to tailor their mentoring to the PT's own questions and concerns (Feiman-Nemser, 1042). Another option for PT professional development would be peer observation. This was not mentioned in any interviews or survey responses. CTs often modeled lessons with a PT's class, but watching a teacher with their own class could be more advantageous. PTs could have the opportunity to observe a teacher who is recognized for their expertise in instruction or classroom management.

In this study, PTs discussed how having a knowledgeable CT made their teaching experience a more positive experience. Those PTs who were not assigned a CT with a similar background, particularly in special education, spoke about how having a mentor with limited experience in their assignment was not helpful, and in some cases, made the PAR experience negative. Both CTs and administrators highlighted the constant communication that the CTs have within the group. The CTs did not limit their interaction to meetings; they used each other as sounding boards, and looked to each other for support when they felt they did not have enough information to help a PT.

Communities of Practice

Lave and Wenger define CoP as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Participating in a CoP can be seen as a solution to the issue of isolation that many new teachers feel (Schaefer et al., 2012). This speaks back to the notion of an "integrated professional culture," where all parties can benefit from interaction (Liston et al., 2006). The components of a CoP are *domain*, *community*, and *practice*.

- Domain: The domain of the CoP in this study, or the shared interest, was the goal of administration at CTs to support and improve the performance of PTs. This was a clear vision across both groups. Many PTs echoed these thoughts, that their mentors were there to help them improve.

- Community: CoP rely on collaboration and communication. CTs and administrators emphasized how collaborative the CT cohort was. For all groups, it was seen as a detriment when CTs did not have relevant experience to assist the PT in their classroom. CTs discussed how they would call in other CTs when they needed a fresh set of eyes, or could not solve a problem.

- Practice: The notion of practice in CoP is that it is ongoing. Since this study only included participants from the past 5 years, it is difficult to prove that the things that PTs learned would be ongoing practice years later. In the focus group, however, it was mentioned that some CTs still kept in touch with their PTs after they had completed the PAR program.

Indications for Practice

Through an examination of the literature, we can see that mentoring new teachers is beneficial to the teachers, the schools, and ultimately, the students (Brown & Wynn, 2007; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Liston et al., 2006). The advantage of PAR is that it is both developed and supported by the union and district. Strong union-district partnerships are linked to effective mentoring programs (Feiman-Nemser, 1027; Hobson et all., 2009; Potemski, 2012). Union and district administrators gave overwhelming positive responses to their work and partnership in PAR in this study. Based on the literature and the results of my research, I would recommend that the SDP continues to utilize the partnership they have in their continual development of PAR.

The majority of the participants in this study spoke positively about the mentoring and support they received in PAR. Those who did not have a positive view discussed how their individual needs were not being met. The SDP is a large urban district, and faces challenges that may not be experienced in other successful PAR school districts (Papay & Johnson, 2012; Potemski, 2012); therefore, in order to successfully assist new teachers, careful considerations should be made in the development of the PAR program.

In structuring a mentoring program like PAR in the SDP, several factors must be considered. First, there must be a delineation between the services provided for new and unsatisfactory teachers, and those provided for teachers who transfer to the SDP from another district. Many teachers who came to the SDP with previous teaching experience expressed dissatisfaction with PAR support, stating that the support given was geared towards newer, inexperienced teachers. Teachers with previous experience would benefit from support that takes into account their prior knowledge and skills. Feiman-Nemser

(1042) considers this experience in her Continuum of Teaching, and states that once they have completed their induction years, assistance should become more individualized. Those experienced teachers should have a preliminary observation, and if the outcome of the observation is positive, they can work with a CT over the course of the year on a personal professional development plan. This allows more time for CTs to focus on the more inexperienced teachers, and gives experienced PTs the opportunity to improve within their discipline. Many PTs expressed that they would have benefitted from additional support. In order to have an appropriate amount of support for PTs, more CTs should be hired in PAR. All groups in this study agreed that the caseloads of CTs were too large. Less time can be allotted for those who come to the district with teaching experience, and are deemed proficient by initial observations, and more focused assistance can be given to those teachers who are struggling or new to the profession. Second, PTs must be matched with a CT who has relevant experience to the PT's teaching placement. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) found that matching teachers with mentors who had related experience reduced attrition by 30%. A high priority should be given to recruiting and hiring strong CT candidates with experience and certification in special education. It was clear throughout the study that the needs of special education teachers should be met. Special education teachers need guidance in individualized education programs (IEPs) and other legalities that teachers without the experience most likely do not have. Lastly, the program needs to evolve as teachers' needs evolve (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). An end of year survey would be an opportunity to address the positives and negatives experienced through PAR. Simple Likert scales could be used to gauge the PTs' perceptions of their PAR support, including amount of time CT was

classroom, responsiveness of CT, and whether the CT was a good match based on experience. Optional space could be provided for elaboration. These surveys could be used to keep PAR relevant for its participants.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study

While I still believe a mixed-methods study was the best choice for this study, they are elements of the study that could be researched further. There is limited research on the association between PAR participation and increased retention in urban school districts. Although SDP implemented PAR in 2010, they only had access to data from 2016 to 2018. A recommendation would be to create a longitudinal study examining those who participated in PAR and tracking their movements to other schools and districts over a longer period of time.

This study was limited to those who had specific roles in PAR, and did not include school principals. School administrators could offer views on PAR from a second-hand perspective, especially in regard to veteran teachers receiving support in their probationary year.

Another limitation to the study was that I only had access to PAR participants who were current employees of SDP. There was a concern that those who responded to the survey would be biased, since they had completed the PAR process and remained in the district. Survey responses are the result of self-selection bias, in which participants had the ability to choose whether they completed the survey or made themselves available for interviews. Participants may have only responded if they had an extreme response to the program, such as performing well throughout the program, or having a

negative experience. By stressing throughout my communication that responses would remain confidential, I may have lessened the amount of self-selection bias. By the varied survey responses regarding PT experiences, I believe that the answers I did receive were honest and insightful.

These findings are helpful in making recommendations for improvement, but it is important to note that I was not able to include all PAR participants from 2016 to the time of my data collection. Those who left the district did not have forwarding contact information, and therefore were not part of this study. Their perceptions may have not aligned with my findings. This meant that I did not have any responses from PTs who were terminated, which would have been an interesting group to survey. It could be assumed that these teachers would have a negative perception of PAR, but their ideas for program improvement may have addressed an aspect of PAR that was missed in this study.

A recommendation would be to include questions regarding PAR for the exit interviews in which employees participate when leaving the district. Did PAR effectively prepare teachers for teaching in SDP? What role, if any, did PAR play in the employee's leaving?

Finally, this study was limited to the employees of the SDP. In order to examine the overall positive and negative perceptions of PAR, it would be useful to study other urban school districts that utilize this particular mentoring program, to see if these perceptions were limited to the SDP.

Conclusion

Support needs to change and evolve based on the needs of the teachers. When teachers are successful, this benefits the schools, the district, and most importantly, the students. What worked at the onset of the PAR program may not work now.

Anna, district administrator, ended our interview with a thought about future and change. She shared,

> *"I think that the more we are reflecting on what the current structures are and what the needs are of our teachers, what the realities are of our systems, it is our professional responsibility to make adjustments as time goes on, and sometimes that means letting go of traditions and ways of doing things in order to be more responsive to our stakeholders."*

In such a large district, new teachers are looking for support and guidance. For PAR to be the success story described in the literature, support should be targeted and consistent. PTs and CTs would both benefit from the addition of more CTs. Additionally, the program would benefit from the addition of CTs certified in specialized areas, particularly in special education. Teachers would also benefit from targeted professional development. The results of this study show that new teachers are looking for guidance, but they feel the most beneficial support comes from those educators who have the certifications and teaching backgrounds that are similar and relevant.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SURVEY

An In-depth Look at Peer Assistance and Review: Survey

Name (Names will be kept confidential): _____

Age:
- o   24 years or younger
- o   25-34 years old
- o   35-44 years old
- o   45-54 years old
- o   55-64 years old
- o   65 years of older

Gender:
- o   Female
- o   Male

Ethnic Origin (or Race):
- o   White
- o   Hispanic or Latino
- o   Black or African American
- o   Asian/Pacific Islander
- o   Other: _____

Current Position in District: _____

Years Working in Education:
- o   1
- o   2-3
- o   4-5
- o   6-10
- o   More than 10

Please check any positions you have held in education:
- o   Elementary
- o   Middle School
- o   High School
- o   Administration
- o   Other: _____

Question 1: What role(s), past or present have you held in the SDP's PAR program? (Check all that apply.)
- o   PAR Panel
- o   Consulting Teacher
- o   Participating Teacher
- o   Other (please elaborate) _____

Question 2: If you checked Participating Teacher, was your involvement voluntary or mandatory?
- o   Voluntary
- o   Mandatory

Question 3: Support from PAR prepares new teachers to become a more effective educator.
- o Strongly Agree
- o Agree
- o Neutral
- o Disagree
- o Strongly Disagree

Question 4: What positive consequences have you observed in your school as a result of the PAR program?

_____
_____

Question 5: What positive consequences have your observed in the SDP as a result of the PAR program?

_____
_____

Question 6: How, if at all, did your participation in PAR lead you to staying in the district?

_____
_____

Question 7: What suggestions would you give to improve the PAR program in Philadelphia?

_____
_____

Question 8: Would you be willing to be contacted for follow-up questions regarding PAR?
- o Yes
- o No

Contact email: _____

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Part I: Focus Group for Consulting Teachers

Introduction: *Good morning/afternoon. My name is Susan Niescier and I will be conducting this focus group today. You were all selected to participate because you have experience with the School District of Philadelphia's Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program as consulting teachers (CT). I will be asking you a few questions regarding your involvement with PAR. There are no right or wrong answers; I am just looking to get a fuller picture of your feelings and experiences as a CT.*

Recording Instructions: *I will be recording our focus group session today. Is that alright? The purpose of this is so that I can be attentive in our conversation, while keeping track of all details. I will be referencing your comments in my research, but your identities will remain confidential (TURN ON RECORDER).*

Consent Form Instructions: *Please fill out this consent form before we get started* (HAND OUT FORM TO PARTICIPANTS, READ FORM ALOUD, PARTICIPANTS READ AND SIGN).

Questions:

Opening Question:

7. How long were you involved in the PAR program?

Introductory Question:

8. Think back to your fondest memory when working with a PT. Could you share your experience with the group?

Key Questions:

9. How do you think the PAR program has affected teaching in the SDP?

10. What are some of the most positive aspects of PAR?

11. What needs improvement in PAR?

12. Suppose you were the head of the PAR program. What would you do differently?

End Question:

13. What is one thing that could be changed right now in PAR?

Debriefing: *Thank you for your participation. Before we end this session, is there anything you would like to share, or is there something you feel we missed in our conversation?* (WAIT FOR RESPONSES, THEN TURN RECORDER OFF)

Part II: Focus Group for Participating Teachers

Introduction: *Good morning/afternoon. My name is Susan Niescier and I will be conducting this focus group today. You were all selected to participate because you have experience with the School District of Philadelphia's Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program as participating teachers (PT). I will be asking you a few questions regarding your involvement with PAR. There are no right or wrong answers; I am just looking to get a fuller picture of your feelings and experiences as a PT.*

Recording Instructions: *I will be recording our focus group session. Is that alright? The purpose of this is so that I can be attentive in our conversation, while keeping track of all details. I will be referencing your comments in my research, but your identities will remain confidential (TURN ON RECORDER).*

Consent Form Instructions: *Please fill out this consent form before we get started* (HAND OUT FORM TO PARTICIPANTS, READ FORM ALOUD, PARTICIPANTS READ AND SIGN).

Questions:

Opening Question:

1. What was your involvement in PAR?

Introductory Question:

2. Think back to your fondest memory when working with a CT. Could you share your experience with the group?

Key Questions:

3. Looking back, if you could go through the experience again, what would you do differently as a PT?

4. How do you think the PAR program affected your teaching?

5. How do you think the PAR program has affected teaching in the SDP?

6. What are some of the most positive aspects of PAR?

7. What needs improvement?

End Question:

8. If you could change anything about the PAR program, what would it be?

Debriefing: *Thank you for your participation. Before we end this session, is there anything you would like to share, or is there something you feel we missed in our conversation?* (WAIT FOR RESPONSES, THEN TURN RECORDER OFF)

Part III: Individual Interviews

Introduction: *Thank you for speaking with me today. My name is Susan Niescier and I will be speaking with you regarding the School District of Philadelphia's Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program. I will be asking you a few questions regarding your involvement with PAR. There are no right or wrong answers; I am just looking to get a fuller picture of your feelings and experiences as a CT.*

Recording Instructions: *I will be recording our interview session. Is that alright? The purpose of this is so that I can be attentive in our conversation, while keeping track of all details* (TURN ON RECORDER).

Consent Form Instructions: *Please fill out this consent form before we get started* (HAND OUT FORM TO PARTICIPANT, READ FORM ALOUD, PARTICIPANT READS AND SIGNS).

Questions:

Opening Question:

1. What is/was your involvement in PAR?

Introductory Question:

2. How did you first get introduced to PAR?

Key Questions:

3. Have you had any experiences with other school districts that used the PAR program? If yes, what are some of the similarities? What are some differences you observed?

4. How do you think the PAR program has affected teaching in the SDP?

5. What are some of the most positive aspects of PAR?

6. What needs improvement?

7. Where do you see the future of PAR headed?

End Question:

8. If you could change anything about the PAR program, what would it be?

Debriefing: *Thank you for your participation. Before we end this session, is there anything you would like to share, or is there something you feel we missed in our conversation?* (WAIT FOR RESPONSE, THEN TURN RECORDER OFF)

Part IV: Follow-up Interviews

Introduction: *Thank you for speaking with me again. I wanted to take this opportunity to revisit some of the topics we discussed earlier in our conversation about the PAR program.*

Recording Instructions: *I will be recording our interview session. Is that alright? The purpose of this is so that I can be attentive in our conversation, while keeping track of all details* (TURN ON RECORDER).

Questions: Questions from focus groups or interviews will be posed again in order to gain more detail or clarification.

Debriefing: *Thank you for your participation. Before we end this session, is there anything you would like to share, or is there something you feel we missed in our conversation?* (WAIT FOR RESPONSES, THEN TURN RECORDER OFF)