“The Teacher Salvage Business”

Saving a Special Education Teacher:
Can a Professional Learning Community
Act as a Catalyst
to Reverse Thoughts of Quitting?

Jill S. Stine
Wittenberg University
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Thesis Committee
Stefan Broidy, Ph.D., Chairperson
Jeannine Fox, Ph.D., Committee Member
Sally Brannan, Ed.D, Committee Member
Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

There are those of us in the field of special education that have been around since the “birth” of Public Law 94-142, “the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975.” How have we lasted so long in this field where every changing law, interpretation, and implementation are enough to bring about moans, groans, and the call to “pass the Pepto-Bismol?” Some colleagues may be offended by my use of the term “salvage” in my title, as if the teachers in this study lacked value. Au contraire! Let’s look at the definition of “salvage” based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary (2010). As a noun, “salvage” can mean the act of saving a ship or its cargo from the perils of the sea; the act of saving anything from fire, danger, etc.; the value or proceeds upon sale of goods recovered from a fire. You see, we are trying to recover or rescue these weary souls. Something that warrants being salvaged certainly must have value, must be worthy of being retrieved from the depths. Is it too late for resuscitation?

This research study was conducted at Xanadu High School (names changed to protect the innocent and the guilty), a suburban high school in southwest Ohio where 20 educators make up the special education department. This high school consists of grades nine through twelve and falls in the “Effective” category by meeting 11 out of 12
indicators achievement as noted in the 2008-2009 district report card. Its performance index was 96.7 out of 120 points. It did not meet average yearly progress (AYP) or the indicator for graduation rate. Average daily school enrollment is 2025 and is comprised of the following sub-categories: White, non-Hispanic – 67.4 percent; Black, non-Hispanic - 20.3 percent; Asian or Pacific Islander - 3.9 percent; Hispanic – 3 percent; Muliti-Racial - 5.3 percent; Economically Disadvantaged - 25.4 percent; Limited English Proficient – 3.6 percent; Student with Disabilities - 13.9 percent.

**Importance of the Study**

This thesis validated the plight of special education teachers by reviewing current research data pertaining to stressful issues challenging those in the field. Questions were examined pertaining to these teachers’ professional needs. It is not only the act of remaining in the field that is important; it is the quality of the climate and the impression of one’s work environment that will determine if being salvaged for the task at hand was worthwhile in the long run. The significant action of this research was the hosting of a professional learning community made available to my twenty special education colleagues as a venue for us to share ways to solve our common problems. How serious was our perceived stress within our department? As facilitator of this study, I hoped to become cognizant of these stressors and envision possible solutions.

The “salvaging” of my co-workers and me from the stress of our jobs was the culmination of a very challenging couple of years. Within our professional learning community common stressors were addressed through the following battle plan:
1) Recognizing the stressors for what they were and where they were coming from.

2) Learning to stand firm against the onslaught of stress.

3) Taking a deep breath to resist the desire to flee.

4) Remaining resolute to not allow the urgency, pressure, and anxiety from our jobs to affect us.

Becoming skilled in the aforementioned steps was extremely rewarding both personally and professionally.

**Statement of the Problem**

The hypothesis was as follows: Could Xanadu High School’s special educators’ participation in a professional learning community (PLC) act as a catalyst in allaying their stress so they could perform their jobs without thoughts of quitting? I coined the phrase, “The Teacher Salvage Business,” for the task at hand. Were these special educators salvageable? I believed they were.

**Research Questions**

Multiple questions stood out:

1. Could the needs of Xanadu High School special educators all be served by the same possible remedies, strategies, and prescriptions?

2. What would it take for these special educators to remain resolute, keeping stressors under control in the process?
3. Would further implications of this action research via participation in a professional learning community result in overturning feelings of isolation and an increase in the sense of community within this special education department?

(As a side note: If a true sense of community would manifest within our department, what an accomplishment that would be!)

**Limitations and Assumptions**

For this research, the period of time for data collection was limited due to the researcher’s university course deadline for completion. In addition, it was assumed that the amount of participation from the total pool of twenty special educators would also be limited due to their own personal time restraints within and outside of school, previous obligations, etc. Based on observation by the researcher, it was apparent that potential participants’ jobs were causing stress. That they would be willing to divulge their stress via questionnaires was an optimistic assumption.

**Definition of Terms**

The researcher used the following terms consistently throughout this study:

- **Caseload** - (No such term exists in the law, but it has become accepted terminology in the field.) The number of students one Intervention Specialist must oversee during the school year in terms of being an IEP Coordinator, which encompasses writing the Imps and being the liaison to the students’ parents and teachers.
• **Differentiated Instruction** – A method of classroom instruction where teachers vary their presentation based on students’ developmental levels (academically, emotionally, and/or behaviorally), dominant learning modality, and more.

• **Direct Instruction** – A service setting where the Intervention Specialist is teaching a small group of students with disabilities and is the only teacher in the room providing this service. A “small group” is designated with state maximum class sizes for the following categories (high school level): multiple handicapped – 8, emotionally disturbed – 10, cognitively disabled – 12, specific learning disabled – 16.

• **ED/BD** – A category title for students who manifest an emotional disorder or behavior disorder.

• **Inclusion** – A service setting where an Intervention Specialist is in a regular classroom making sure the students with disabilities receive accommodations as stated in their Imps. The delivery model for the Inclusion setting varies with some Intervention Specialists providing differentiated instruction through co-teaching.

• **IEP** – Acronym for an Individualized Education Program. Written after it is determined the criteria for being a student with a disability (age 3 – 21) have been met, this legally binding document contains various federally mandated parts: a vision statement from the parents about the child’s future, present levels of performance, individualized goals and objectives based on the child’s educational
needs, the location and duration of the service as well as who will provide the service, and more.

- **Intervention Specialist** – Typically a licensed teacher serving the needs of students with disabilities from mild-to-moderate or moderate-to-severe categories.

- **PLC** – Acronym for Professional Learning Communities; phrase coined for a group of educators with a collaborative relationship of shared focus, ideals, and culture all committed to school improvement with an orientation for action and results.

- **Service Delivery** – Methods of providing a continuum of services to students with disabilities. Types of placements for students can include the following classroom settings: self-contained, resource rooms, or the general classroom with various instructional supports.

**Summary**

The thrust of this research was the collection of data via the hosting of a professional learning community. The over-arching question being asked was - Could the activities of the professional learning community be a means to possibly rectify the constantly looming stress of working as special educators at Xanadu High School? The scope of such inquiry would reveal whether the salvaging, and thus retaining, any of these special educators was even possible. Before data was collected, research and literature in the field was examined.
Subject selection for the literature review commenced with an investigation of the particular stressors within a special educator's work environment. Next literature on teacher support programs was reviewed. Ultimately, the examination of research lead to the professional learning community with accolades for its cooperative, encouraging features.

**Quality of Special Educators’ Work Environments**

A study from the Center of Personnel Studies in Special Education at the University of Florida stated that, “one of the most important challenges in the field of special education is developing a qualified work force and creating work environments that sustain special educators’ involvement and commitment” (Billingsley, 2003, p. 3). Billingsley (2003) also established that approximately ten percent of teachers working in this field do not even hold proper certification. The above dilemma pointed to substandard education for students with disabilities, as class sizes could increase or services could be decreased altogether. Furthermore, the study revealed that the younger or less experienced special educator had a greater tendency to leave or express the desire to leave than his or her older counterparts. Unreasonable work assignments and the need for administrative support and professional development must be tackled in order for
teachers to be effective. One single solution was insufficient. Overall, more positive work environments kept special education teachers involved and committed to their work. Billingsley (2003) suggested gaps in the literature and proposes more qualitative studies be produced to encompass the teacher perspectives on job satisfaction, commitment, stress, and career decisions.

Marilyn Kaff’s (2004) play on words, “Multi-tasking is Multi-taxing” pointed to negative workplace conditions as the most important determinant in a special education teacher’s decision to flee his or her position. In her work as an Assistant Professor of Special Education, she conducted a study containing 400 questionnaires. Of the respondents, forty-five percent were considering leaving the field. The highest number considering leaving worked with the category of emotionally disadvantaged students. Kaff (2004) reported various conditions influencing special educators’ decision to leave. Lack of administrative support was the highest reported concern. Teachers lamented over a disproportionate amount of their day being used on non-teaching duties that interfere with real teaching. Paperwork and regulatory issues racked up a plethora of complaints: the increasing complexity and length of the Individualized Education Program (IEP), verification of quarterly student progress, documentation of academic interventions and behavior management plans. Teachers felt the time spent on paperwork used to be devoted to teaching the students. Caseloads were too high and the range of abilities and behaviors within one classroom created a complexity for service delivery.
The disparity among the students’ abilities, as well as the lack of resources caused students’ needs to go unmet.

Special educators in Kaff’s (2004) study had much to say about the changes necessary to boost the likelihood of their remaining in the field. Building administrators were in charge of student placement and scheduling of students with disabilities. Special educators expressed that students were being placed inappropriately and that they, the special educators, should be included in such decision-making. They also indicated that, to further augment service delivery, common planning time between general and special educators was a necessity. Moreover, almost one half of the participants asked for a reconfiguring of the service delivery model. One respondent declared that it was time for special educators to serve in settings where they were best suited. Some special educators are more adept at direct instruction, others are more skilled in inclusion; others are experts with students with behavior issues, and so on. Finally, assistance was requested from clerical paraprofessionals so special educators would not feel like their weekends and evenings were so inundated by paperwork.

Professors of Special Education Robert and Mary Kay Zable (2001) suggested, “Younger, less experienced, less highly educated special education teachers were at greater risk of experiencing burnout” (p. 129). Findings revealed a maturing of the profession. The typical special education teacher was no longer in his or her 20s, provisionally endorsed, and inexperienced. Rather he or she was typically in his or her 40s with more than 11 years experience in the field of special education. These older,
more, experienced teachers had learned to flourish at this time in their careers. They were building support systems via mentors and collegial associations. The Zables (2001) declared, “there has been a virtual disappearance of the traditional continuum of services delivery model with special educators’ roles defined not as places where they teach but the kinds of services they provide… most operate in collaborative arrangements” (p. 136). This collaborative model allowed for the sharing of responsibilities, thus reducing special education teacher burnout. Finally, the authors stated that staff should be placed in teaching positions they preferred and in which they are proficient.

A study published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals in their journal, the NASSP Bulletin, reported an “increase in the number of special education teachers accepting jobs in general education” (Ax, Conderman, & Stephens, 2001, p. 66). Attrition rates were higher among teachers of students with emotional disorders and behavior disorders (ED/BD). School administrators should recognize special educators’ thoughts of isolation, exhaustion, and burnout. Suggested positive approaches included furnishing teachers with stress-management techniques in addition to offering in-service and “developing collaborative, work-related problem-solving and support systems” (Ax et al., 2001, p. 68).

Authors Fore, Martin, & Bender (2002), all from the University of Georgia, stated, “The ongoing burnout of special education teachers has become an important liability in the provision of appropriate educational services to students with disabilities”
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The study indicated that stress combined with special educators’ inability to control their workload led to burnout. A survey of 1,576 special educators reported a negative working environment, deficient support from administrators, and large caseloads. Stress due to job design revealed, “Burdensome paperwork loads, extensive time spent in meetings, limited opportunities for individualization, and huge ranges in student performance levels” (Fore et al., p. 40). One solution they suggested was novice special educators having weekly contact with their mentors. Mentors should likewise be special educators in the same building. Moreover, building administrators should carry out needs assessments among their special educators to check whether these teachers are being provided the type of support they feel is needed.

More current literature on this topic continued to point to the immense workload on a teacher’s plate. In his article entitled “Nothing Will Leave No Child Behind,” author Erik Gleibermann (2007), responded, “Until we begin to provide resources that, at minimum, let teachers work with far fewer students, any teacher who aims for universal success prescribes for himself eventual mental exhaustion” (p. 20). He quipped that it would take more than 100 hours a week of teacher contact time to bring every one of his students up to performance level: another impossible standard looming over our already overwhelming list of expectations.

Teacher Support Programs

A teacher support program was presented in further literature from Western Carolina University. The program described five principles to guide the Teacher Support
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Program (TSP). Help to the teachers came in the form of collaborative problem-solving and mutual support along with additional expertise as desired. The program allowed for voluntary, flexible participation. Practical problems were addressed. Support was not evaluative or judgmental. The program was not to create any additional stress or add to the teachers’ workload. Sessions were scheduled weekly and were “more than gripe sessions in that teachers could work collaboratively, assisting each other in seeking solutions to their own problems and providing support to each other” (Westling, Cooper-Duffy, Prohn, Ray, & Herzog, 2005, p. 9).

Various types of participation were available through the Western Carolina University TSP. Virtual meetings via a commercial instructional web site allowed for online chats at least once a week. Electronic networking was not as popular as attendance at a real session. In addition, teachers could request printed material and videos from university program personnel. Teachers also requested instructional materials to examine and use with their students. Another service provided through the program was on-site/in-class consultation. A teacher could request that a TSP coordinator, university faculty member, or another TSP participant visit his or her classroom to help solve a problem. This form of support was one of the most popular since it could address difficult, classroom-based problems. Westling (2005) and his colleagues in Western Carolina University’s TSP attracted teachers who determined on their own that the program would help them. Their data showed the number of participants increasing as the program continued to exist. Finally, they proposed, “the
TSP offers a method to help maintain or retain them [special educators] and increase their success in their positions” (Westling, 2005, p. 13).

The University of Georgia addressed the issue of faculty stress by creating a model for personal and professional renewal. Each fall they held a two-day renewal conference. With a faculty numbering about 1900, they surveyed the entire faculty in the spring to determine the topics needing to be covered at the upcoming fall conference. Approximately 250 faculty, staff, and spouses attended the first conference in 1983. Attendees completed a health risk appraisal questionnaire. Participants thought the conference was of major benefit. Authors Jackson and Simpson (2001) believed this model was applicable to more than just the university environment. “Faculty – regardless of their institutional affiliation – face similar problems such as stress, burnout, inadequate career ladders, lack of opportunities for change, and limited financial rewards” (Jackson & Simpson, 2001, p. 441). Participation in the conference allowed the faculty to pinpoint their most urgent needs and assist each other. A dividend from the conference retreat was a deeper sense of community, thus enriching the workplace. “It can become more than a community of professionals willing to give as much as they take” (Jackson & Simpson, 2001, p. 441).

Michael Cain (2001) wrote of the ten major qualities of the renewed teacher. A few of their qualities were highlighted: they had a philosophical or spiritual center; they were committed to students, lifelong learning, and to the school; they were aware being of an integral part of the school; they had a sense of personal responsibility; they had a
strong love for all aspects of life; they had the ability to see all people as individuals; they
had the ability to communicate; they exhibited a sense of collegiality; they had a strong
sense of leadership; and they separated their egos from their work. “If school districts
work diligently to develop them [the ten qualities of the renewed teacher], teachers…
won’t feel that they have to leave” (Cain, 2001, p. 705).

Dawson Hancock (1999) of the University of North Carolina suggested remedies
for keeping teachers in the profession through his model for stress-reduction. He
suggested administrators require particularly stressed out teachers take a sabbatical. The
expectation was for the teacher to return as a more effective member of the faculty. His
research implied that a strong social support system allowed one to cope with stressful
situations better. “Teachers are almost always able to cope with stress better in schools
with high levels of interaction and mutual respect among teachers, administrators, and
parents” (Response-Related Stress Reduction Strategies, para. 3). Opportunities for
informal socializing such as dinner out at a restaurant, attending a play or concert, or
other social activities beyond ordinary teacher interaction were of benefit.

Miami Country Day School in Miami, Florida recommended a faculty wellness
program. Wellness programs promoted proactive behaviors such as stress management,
exercise, conflict management, and work/life balance. The National Wellness Institute’s
model for wellness included six diversified dimensions: intellectual, physical, emotional,
spiritual, social, and vocational. Schools held annual wellness events incorporating a
variety of offerings such as a healthy breakfast, art therapy, wall climbing, yoga, health
screenings (cholesterol, blood sugar, blood pressure), massage therapy, and acupuncture
to name a few. Faculty was surveyed and offerings tailored to meet specific needs.
Ongoing efforts included on-campus classes such as Weight Watchers, yoga, access to
the weight training room, a meeting with a personal trainer to set up individual fitness
programs, etc. “We believe that the success of our wellness efforts has already made a
positive impact on the lives and health of the staff and has improved the school’s culture”
(Davies, Davies, & Heacock, 2003, p. 70).

Professional Learning Communities

Further literature noted that professional learning communities became a way of
learning community’ emerged among researchers as early as the 1960s, when they
offered the concept as an alternative to the isolation in which most teachers worked”
(Honawar, 2008, p. 25). However, putting a PLC into practice was extremely
challenging as it necessitated a cultural change from that of isolation to that of
community for the teacher/participant. When Mr. DuFour was principal (author Richard
DuFour of the Professional Learning Communities at Work fame) of Stevenson High
School, he said, “We want you to talk to colleagues, want you to look at common
assessments that you and your teammates have developed, and that’s pretty scary
initially” (Honawar, 2008, p. 26). In response to the question: ‘Creating a learning
community – Where do we begin?’ DuFour’s answer was three-fold: “More enduring
catalysts for change are a powerful sense of purpose, a widely shared vision of what an
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organization might become, and a collective commitment to act in a way that will make the vision a reality” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 55). A PLC did not cost anything and did not involve a huge investment of time. Richard DuFour, considered a leading expert on the PLC, believed PLCs worked best when time was set aside during the school day and school year for teachers to collaborate.

The entire Capistrano Unified School District in Southern Orange County, California reinvented itself as a professional learning community. Teacher collaboration became a major district objective. PLCs were given time to operate through students’ late arrival or early dismissal one day a week. Staff development “has shifted from teaching to learning, and from anecdotal to data-based decision making” (O’Donovan, 2007, p. 94). According to data, student achievement increased and the gap between No Child Left Behind [NCLB] subgroups tapered off. “Collaboration is more than collegiality. It’s hard work” (O’Donovan, 2007, p. 95).

Authors of another journal article on the above mentioned school district stated that this school district “has taken a hard look at the realities of complacency and cynicism among its teachers and has found a way to rekindle that spark so they may rediscover their original passion for the profession” (Buffum & Hinman, 2006, p. 16). The solution pointed to a new paradigm – the professional learning community.

The San Clemente High School altered Capistrano’s plan by voting to add minutes to the school day so the bell schedule allowed for four collaboration meetings each month. “Teacher collaboration in itself was not a natural act” (Buffum & Hinman,
CAN A P.L.C. ACT AS A CATALYST TO REVERSE THOUGHTS OF QUITTING? – 2006, p. 18). Data at San Clemente High School over the past five years showed increased student achievement connected to the work teachers had put forth through their PLCs: student failure rate decreased by 21 percent for freshmen and 15 percent for upperclassmen, students taking advanced placement increased 213 percent, and the pass rate of students for the California High School Exit Exam increased by 30 percent. Morale was reported to be high among staff, students, and community. Ninety-five percent of parents responding to a survey stated that the school was a positive environment for their children. In addition, San Clemente High School was a model for PLCs and had been visited by more than 50 schools from throughout California.

In support of the teacher collaboration system known as the professional learning community, Charles Garcia (2005), fourth grade teacher from Erie, Colorado, described it as uplifting. Mr. Garcia remarked that teachers’ dialoguing and strategy-sharing were very rewarding. He noted, “The things that I hear other teachers are doing are just fascinating – and the collegiality! It’s just marvelous” (Garcia, 2005, p. 28).

Further review of educational literature pointed to the benefits of group building within the professional learning community. According to researchers from the McGraw-Hill publishing company, one outcome of a professional learning community was teachers experiencing a connectedness in place of the old, familiar feeling of isolation. In an online article, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory of Austin, Texas attributed continuous inquiry and improvement as being offshoots of the professional learning community. Through this venue, teachers “commit themselves to
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Making major changes in how they participate in the school” (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory [SEDL], 2010a, p. 1). Also noted was the teachers' “need to have opportunities to share what they know, to consult with peers about problems of teaching and learning” (SEDL, 2010a, p. 2). In addition, “a powerful form of teacher learning comes from membership in professional learning communities that extend beyond classrooms and school campuses” (SEDL, 2010a, p. 2). Surely every upstanding teacher would want to be involved in such success. Further promotion of the benefits of the professional learning community found teachers “more likely to be consistently well-informed, professionally renewed, and inspired so that they inspire students” (SEDL, 2010a, p. 2).

A second online article from Southwest Educational Developmental Laboratory answered the question, “What difference does it make if staff is communally organized?” (SEDL, 2010b, p. 1). The article cited decreased isolation of teachers, increased satisfaction, increased morale, and a decreased absentee rate as positive benefits of teacher interaction. A resource from the National Staff Development Council called “Tools for Schools for a Dynamic Community of Learners and Leaders” shared this response, “Members trust and feel comfortable working with each other…They feel safe about exposing their vulnerabilities and resolve to work together on common problems and issues” (Richardson, 2005, p. 3). Finally, Roland Barth (2006), author of Lessons Learned: Shaping Relationships and the Culture of the Workplace, remarked that
“Empowerment, recognition, satisfaction, and success come only from being an active participant within a masterful group – a group of colleagues” (p. 6).

**Summary**

To summarize the findings in the educational literature, the subject of the special educator’s work environment revealed numerous depressing scenarios. Kaff (2004) suggested negative workplace conditions as the most important determinant in a special education teacher’s decision to flee his or her position. Fore et al. (2002) from the University of Georgia also identified deficient support from administrators and large caseloads as factors in the negative working environment. Lack of administrative support was highly reported. Mary Ax et al. (2001) reported in the journal for The National Association of Secondary School Principals that school administrators should recognize special educators’ thoughts of isolation, exhaustion, and burnout.

Findings stated one step to improving work conditions was for special educators to be included in decision-making. Zabel (2001) suggested the reconfiguring of the service delivery model. Staff should be able to teach in positions they prefer and in which they are proficient. Another positive approach included furnishing teachers with stress-management techniques in addition to “developing collaborative, work-related problem-solving and support systems” (Ax et al., 2001, p. 68). Western Carolina University recommended a teacher support program. Hancock (1999) conveyed that “Teachers are almost always able to cope with stress better in schools with high levels of interaction and mutual respect among teachers, administrators, and parents” (Response-
related stress-reduction strategies, para. 3). Some schools across the country initiated wellness programs.

Professional learning community expert Richard DuFour (1998) maintained that putting a PLC into practice can be extremely challenging as it necessitates a cultural change from that of isolation to that of community for the teacher/participant. But research from Buffum and Hinman (2006) proposed that professional learning communities produced great benefits as student failure rate decreased and teacher morale increased. Added benefits of group building in the workplace could be translated into a feeling of connectedness, increased teacher satisfaction, and an increased attendance rate on the part of the teacher. Through professional learning communities, teachers worked on issues, felt empowered, and reaped success.

Questions still lingered pertaining to lack of support in administration. The literature spoke of this negative situation without apparent solutions. In a climate where administrators came and went through a revolving door in their search for upward mobility, how was a cooperative and supportive relationship between administration and members of a special education department possible? Special educators’ situations would improve if they were included in the problem-solving and decision-making process. Billingsley (2003) suggested gaps in the literature and proposed more qualitative studies be produced to encompass the teacher perspectives on job satisfaction, commitment, stress, and career decisions. In the next chapter, the perspective of a group
of special education teachers at Xanadu High School in southwestern Ohio was observed through their participation in a professional learning community.
Chapter 3
Methodology

Data collection commenced to determine if the special educators from Xanadu High School could be salvaged through participation in a professional learning community. Our working definition of a PLC was: a collaborative relationship of shared focus, ideals, and culture all committed to school improvement with an orientation for action and results. Both qualitative and quantitative research models were used in this study. The sampling procedures used in the investigation of the problem were a purposeful sampling. A letter introducing the project was sent out (Appendix A) to special educators in addition to a statement guaranteeing their confidentiality (Appendix D). The letter contained a place for a signature giving permission for responses to be published in this research.

Participants

Target participants were the 20 educators in the special education department of Xanadu High School. Their demographics were separated into three categories based on their years of teaching experience. All references to participants were labeled with an I.D. number in order to keep their identities anonymous.

Setting

The setting for the professional learning community was the regular sized classroom in one of the buildings on Xanadu’s campus. The rear of the classroom contained a six-foot work table which provided a perfect gathering spot for the participants. Eight gatherings were held after school for approximately one and a half hours each.

Measures

The first collection instrument used was the Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale. An initial teacher pre-participation survey collected demographical data such as highest degree earned, age, years’ experience, and a ranking of how often the teacher contemplated quitting (Appendix B). Another researcher-created survey provided data to calculate the top four work-related stressors facing participants. Written records included participants’ reflective responses after the eight PLC meetings. Data from the post-participation questionnaire asked teachers to state the frequency with which they considered quitting. A last questionnaire went out to all 20 department members inquiring as to whether they would consider future participation in a professional learning community.

The Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale (Appendix C) was created in 1967 by Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe, both psychiatrists, after studying the medical records of over 5,000 medical patients. Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe (1967) created this instrument “on the premise that good and bad events in one’s life can increase stress levels and make one more susceptible to illness and mental health problems” (p. 213).
The Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale was chosen for use due to its longevity of use, popularity, and availability. Stress from our personal lives cannot help but leak into our professional careers, so this measure seemed very appropriate.

Respondents determined their level of stress by tallying a list of 43 life events based on a relative score. Points added up if certain events had occurred in a person’s life within the last two years, ranging from 100 points for the death of a spouse to 11 points for minor violations of the law. A web version of the tool was easily accessible online and the link was delivered to participants via school email or regular school mail. Since respondents marked events having occurred within the last two years, results were not likely to change unless additional events brought about a higher score.

In order to measure how they were able to cope with the stress in their jobs, all members of the special education department were invited to participate in a researcher-created survey (Appendix B). This survey used a Likert-type scale:

- 0 = the item caused no stress
- 1 = the item caused low stress
- 2 = the item caused medium stress
- 3 = the item caused the highest stress

and provided quantitative baseline data pertaining to the present stress levels of the participants. Items in the survey were gleaned from teacher complaints in casual conversation as well as department meetings. Cumulative tallies per each stressor would indicate the four highest areas of stress in the department. This tool was also delivered
via school email to the 20 potential participants. Hard-copies were available via regular school mail by request.

Members answered a questionnaire (Appendix Z) supplying the post-participation data. (i.e. Did I collaborate with my department cohorts on each of the issues that needed to be solved?) Participants gave a ranking to the following: “I feel the level of progress in improving the situation in the department is…” through a Likert-type scale of ‘5 to 1’ with ‘5’ being the best and ‘1’ being the worst. Overall, comments from the participants were separated into three different subcategories in order to study the data in triangulated form. Comments were selected from: special educators with (a) 0 to 10 years’ experience, (b) 11 to 20 years’ experience, and finally, (c) 21 to 30+ years’ experience. Stressors were identified for each group in their particular “season” of their career. Also, common stressors among all three groups were determined. The type of research treatment was action-based and, of course, subjective as the information gathered was participant opinion.

Procedures

The initial packet introducing the research project to the 20 special educators of Xanadu High School contained a brief explanation of the project with space for them to record their demographics (i.e. highest degree earned, age, years’ experience). Also the packet included the statement guaranteeing their confidentiality and a place for their signature giving permission for their responses to be published in the research. Beside
providing the above information, participants also completed the Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale as described in the previous “measures” section of this chapter.

Furthermore, resources such as journal or magazine articles, guest speakers, etc. were utilized as a strategy for reducing stress levels for those areas. Participants were given the chance to join a support program through the initiation of a professional learning community for the group. This community, where special education teachers could seek refuge and support, promoted a new path where stress-reduction could be practiced. Time restraints and previous obligations restricted contribution of the entire group of 20 faculty members at “in person” gatherings of the professional learning community. However, the journal or magazine resources were still made available to absent participants in order for them to benefit from the resource. All participants were asked to provide a written reflection (Appendices – H, M, R, V) as a response to open-ended questions (i.e. Did I learn skills or discover tools to reduce stress?). These reflections provided a written record of qualitative data for further analysis. It was assumed that colleagues who did not return any information up to this point in the data collection process did not wish to participate in the research project and were they removed from the mailing list.

Overall, four strategies for stress-reduction were the topics at four PLC meetings: 1) the secrets of resiliency, 2) regaining our focus, 3) changing our perspective, and 4) deep-breathing exercises. Since personal stress contributed to stress on the job, the focus of the PLC meetings in-between consisted of applying the stress-reduction strategy to the
four highest areas of stress in our department. Thus, eight PLC meeting were conducted for the purpose of this study.

How long would a professional learning community need to meet in order to successfully meet the objective of attacking the four highest stressors and finding optimistic solutions? It was hoped that involvement and benefit from the professional learning community’s gatherings could grant a constant, continual system of support. For the purpose of this study, however, a deadline was created for measuring growth. Thus, a time frame was set up for PLC meetings (Appendix E).

Findings were reported in ethnographic style from the personal comments of the participants in the professional learning community. The data-collection instruments were the Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale, the initial teacher survey, and the written responses following the eight PLC meetings, as well as the post-participation questionnaires. The design and analysis procedure consisted of all the aforementioned compilation of data. This researcher searched for common themes as the collection of data was explored.

How was the success of the professional learning community assessed? Ultimately, this researcher looked at whether respondents expressed any renewed job satisfaction and decreased stress as a result of their involvement in the professional learning community meetings. The resulting quantitative and qualitative data would reveal whether or not fewer special educators at Xanadu High School thought of quitting.

Once all the pre-participation data had been collected it was time to meet. Again the question was pondered, “Would participating in a professional learning community
act as a catalyst to allay stress so the special educators could perform their jobs without thoughts of quitting?” This experiment was conducted from November 9 through December 10, 2009 at Xanadu High School in a suburb of southwestern Ohio. The term “The Gathering” was used as the title for the professional learning community. This PLC needed to be given a name so as not to confuse it with the first and only other PLC that existed at Xanadu High School. It was felt that the term “The Gathering” was well suited as we were gathering data and, besides, “The Gathering” sounded possibly spiritual in nature. Each of the meetings of the Gathering are described in full detail in this chapter. The proceedings of each meeting have been documented in ethnographic style via a systematic journaling of happenings. Evaluations of PLC meetings #1, 3, 5, 7 and status reports of PLC meetings #2, 4, 6, 8 follow the description of the proceedings.

**Professional Learning Community Meeting #1**

The initial meeting of “The Gathering” (November 9, 2009) focused on the first of four articles we would examine. This one was entitled, “The Secrets of Resilient People” (Howard, 2009) and was easily accessible via the internet [http://www.aarpmagazine.org/lifestyle/secrets_of_resilient_people.html]. Participants were invited (Appendix F) to read the article online prior to attending the first meeting. Those unable to attend could still glean from the article and offer their personal response via a simple evaluation form (Appendix H) provided with every article. They were asked to answer the following question: Did I learn skills or discover tools to reduce stress?
CAN A P.L.C. ACT AS A CATALYST TO REVERSE THOUGHTS OF QUITTING?

(‘0’ – not at all, ‘1’ – slightly, ‘2’ – moderately, or ‘3’ – the article provided a high level of new knowledge that I can apply to my life). Further comments were welcomed.

Significant parts of the article were noted. The author, Beth Howard (2009), of “The Secrets of Resilient People,” stated that, “Everyone goes through tough times. Some people just navigate them better” (p. 34). She interviewed Deborah Robinson whose husband was dying from Alzheimer’s. Howard wrote, “Robinson could be the poster child for resilience, the ability to respond quickly from a crisis or trauma. Highly resilient people don’t fall apart – at least not for long. They call on their inner strength and recruit outside resources to keep moving forward” (Howard, 2009, p. 34). Human reaction to disasters such as 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and even the current economic crisis allowed researchers to analyze responses. Furthermore, Howard (2009) reported that scientists believe “resilience varies from person to person and has a genetic component – recent studies showed that certain genes may protect you against the emotional back draft of trauma” (p. 34). However, resilience could also be cultivated.

The author described eight qualities of a resilient person. A discussion guide created by the researcher was on hand to facilitate dialogue and note-taking (Appendix G). Did we have any of these traits? Were there traits illustrated within that we felt we would benefit from cultivating? First, resilient people never isolated themselves. They connected with others when presented with tough times. Researchers spoke about the importance of such a connection. “In a study of 243 caregivers in British Columbia, Canada, those who reported good social support scored higher on measures of quality of
life and well-being, regardless of the burden they carried” (Howard, 2009, p. 36).

Secondly, resilient people were optimistic. People who found positive meaning in life were less likely to become depressed. Steps were depicted to get rid of negative thinking. 

Next, resilient people were spiritual. People of faith had less of a tendency to become depressed or, if they did, the depression lifted sooner than in less religious people. In addition, resilient people were playful, promoting a childlike wonder. The fifth quality of resilience was the ability to give back. Howard told a story of how a 79 year old woman, having survived stage four lymphoma 28 years ago, regularly visited cancer patients and even ran survivor support groups. Picking one's battles was the next quality on the list. Rather than wallowing in anger or fear, “Resilient people tend to focus on things over which they have some influence and not spend time on things they can’t control” (Howard, 2009, p. 37). Resilient people stayed healthy with a proper diet and regular physical exercise provided an essential defense against stress. Last on the list, resilient people found the silver lining. They “convert misfortune into good luck and gain strength from adversity… they see negative events as an opportunity to better themselves and become better people” (Howard, 2009, p. 37). The article said this experience was called post-traumatic growth syndrome. Who knew crawling out of the pit had such a fancy name?

The article provided a rating scale for judging a person’s resilience. In a positive rephrasing of the eight qualities with a ‘5’ being “I strongly agree” and a ‘1’ being “I do not agree,” we could rate our resiliency. Scores were ranked as follows: 35-45 you are
highly resilient; 30-34 you are a self-motivated learner; 20-29 you are somewhat resilient; less than 20 you are poor at handling pressure (but it’s never too late to learn).

**Evaluation of PLC #1**

As previously stated, participants were asked to answer the following question:

Did I learn skills or discover tools to reduce stress? (‘0’ – not at all, ‘1’ – slightly, ‘2’ – moderately, or ‘3’ – the article provided a high level of new knowledge that I can apply to my life). Of the five teachers participating in the first meeting of The Gathering, four returned evaluations reporting an average of a 58 percent growth rate (see detailed explanation in Ch. 5 discussion, p. 77, Table 5) in terms of learning a new skill from the article. Even with subsequent discussion of the article with colleagues, participants stated they were only slightly able to apply new knowledge to their lives in the area of resiliency. One participant remarked that perhaps such a topic would need to be contemplated further and not until a crisis or trauma occurred would one be able to assess if new qualities of resilience had been cultivated. Teacher #12 said the article provided some helpful reminders. Members of the group spoke of instances where their mindset, faith, and humor promoted a personal strength to persevere through stressful times. Stories were shared pertaining to certain battles that were picked over others and how such lessons were learned from specially chosen mentors. Struggles were expressed concerning health, especially the lack thereof. Teacher #17 tried to incorporate stress reducing techniques into her daily life. She said, “With my current [teaching] assignment
I am so exhausted sometimes it’s hard to remember to do good things for yourself when you just want to sleep.”

**Professional Learning Community Meeting #2**

Six teachers gathered for the second meeting of our PLC on November 12, 2009. Our working definition of a PLC was: a collaborative relationship of shared focus, ideals, and culture all committed to school improvement with an orientation for action and results. At this point, we took on the task of narrowing down the eight stressful situations in our department from the pre-participation survey to a manageable number of four. How did we remain focused and not revert to a gripe session (which was so easy to do)? Other than employing bouncers to drag us back to the task at hand, a professional equivalent of horse-blinders needed to be implemented. A resource was found on the web called “Understanding Action Research” (Riel, M., 2007) which allowed for the creation of an outline that kept us on track. The outline was premised with the goal of working towards a better understanding of the situation in order to affect a positive personal and social change. Characteristics of action research were listed on the front of our worksheet (Appendix I-a) as a reminder of our shared focus:

a) We are moving towards an envisioned future aligned with values.

b) It is a systematic study of one’s actions and the effects of these actions in a workplace context.
c) We examine work and look for opportunities to improve; we work with others to propose a new course of action to help our community improve its workplace practices.

d) Our method is scientific – it changes something; we observe the effects and examine the evidence.

e) It is the process by which an organization learns.

f) We share ideas with others in our community of practice who value the knowledge gained.

g) We continually reflect on our practice so peers can contribute feedback and support.

The back of our worksheet (Appendix I-b) took us through this step-by-step process: 1) state the problem; 2) why do we see this problem as important? 3) description of the problem; 4) description of the plan (put it into practice with a time line); 5) what data collection, analysis, or some other documentation is needed? 6) final reflection (looking back on how well it worked, revise it, try again).

The participants who arrived first had the challenge of deciding which problems we were going to attack. The consensus was that multiple problems would be solved if only a few problems were addressed (i.e. cause and effect). Concern #1 was to improve communication between teachers and administrative leadership. If this situation could improve, other problems in the department would automatically improve as well. We saw this concern as important because decisions from leadership affect us. Decisions
could support us, further cloud the issue, or cause us to have even more questions. Teachers reported the follow examples of this issue. Administrators disseminate inaccurate and conflicting information. Leadership asked for problem solving input and then seemed to ignore department expertise. Responses for request for support are not provided in a timely manner.

The plan of action for improving communication with administrative leadership was created. As background information, members of the special education department of Xanadu High School have been asking for a job description for approximately 15 years. Inquiry #1 - We again requested a job description so we could clearly define our responsibilities. Administration and supervisors were ever-changing. Several administrators had promised job descriptions by a certain date. None had been provided as yet. Inquiry #2 - We requested a chain of command with answers to the following questions: What was our current chain of command? To whom did we answer for our different tasks at different times of the year (department principal, school principal, principal in charge of OGT, one of the supervisors at central office, the director of special education for the district)? Further background information was added to the plan for the benefit of our new administrators. We were not meeting as a department on a monthly basis. Communication needed to be improved. Communication from our department principal was typically not shared with all affected persons. Inquiry #3 – We requested that when an administrator answered a question for a person in the department and the result affected more than just one individual, an email announcement of the
question/answer needed to be sent out to the whole department. If the resulting decision
affected regular education teachers who also taught students with disabilities, then the
regular education teachers needed to be informed as well. The first plan of action
(Appendix J) noted that action was requested from two administrators (the principal in
charge of our special education department and the head principal of Xanadu High
School whom the department principal reported).

**Status of 1st Action Plan from PLC #2**

This first action plan was directed to the attention of these two administrators on
Tuesday, November 17, 2009. A response was requested by Monday, November 23,
2009. An acknowledgment of receipt was requested along with an indication of a time
line of possible resolution. The head principal acknowledged receipt on Tuesday,
November 17, 2009 and stated that she would respond to us with information and
possibly answers before Monday, November 23, 2009. She did not. The department
principal acknowledged receipt on Wednesday, November 18, 2009, and noted he was
glad the group was meeting and would like to meet with me to discuss matters. He
agreed he would also like to improve communication and come up with a flow chart
一起 as a department that provided ease of use for everyone when there was an issue
or concern. He even suggested a monthly special education newsletter for the
department. He was given two dates on which I could meet with him. He did not
respond. Thus, there was no resolution of this plan of action request.

**Professional Learning Community Meeting #3**
With or without resolution of our first plan of action, The Gathering was invited (Appendix K) to its third meeting (November 18, 2009) and the reading of its second article in our “de-stress” series. Only two participants were able to actually attend the meeting, but five additional teachers read the article and sent comments. The article’s title was “Regain Your Focus” from November/December, 2009 issue of the Body & Soul. Author Erin O’Donnell (2009) suggested family obligations, work demands, and constant technological stimuli bombarded our brains, and thus, over-stimulated our adrenal glands.

A discussion guide (Appendix L) created by the researcher again provided focus for the meeting. O’Donnell (2009) pointed out three main problems that stole our focus: interruptions, too much stress, and boredom. In terms of interruptions, she suggested we “unplug,” change our expectations, and set limits. The author states, “Continual interruptions chop up your day, eliminating long stretches of focus time and wrecking concentration” (O’Donnell, 2009, p. 52). She noted that workers were interrupted by others or switched tasks every three minutes in the modern office during the day and it took 23 minutes to get back to the same point where they left off. Too much stress could be a focus-robber. Whenever we encounter a stressor, our brain releases chemicals, such as adrenaline, which scatter our thoughts. O’Donnell (2009) mentioned possible solutions, such as taking a 60-second break to practice a relaxed breathing technique to reverse the affects of stress chemicals, or access our play list of favorite songs to improve our mood. Finally, boredom could steal our focus. O’Donnell (2009) suggested we
attempt our mundane tasks in a different way, such as using a pen in our favorite color or keeping a vase of flowers within view.

**Evaluation of PLC #3**

In the third meeting of our professional learning community, seven participants supplied discussion or comments on the anti-stress topic of regaining our focus. Contributions varied. One participant suggested shutting off electronic devices 30 minutes before going to bed, in order to sleep better. Stopping to breathe deeply for 60 seconds really worked. Talking to a friend to “vent” helped de-stress. One person said she was going to work on reducing her anger and anxiety because it had been narrowing her focus and jumbling her thoughts. The article mentioned coaching oneself in times of stress. A participant believed that to be the same as “self-talk” and said it worked very well (i.e. thinking positively). Another article suggestion that struck a chord was finding a tree under which to sit. But “finding a tree” as a destination for relaxation could be anything one teacher commented. It could be just making the effort to walk outside on campus rather than attempting to navigate the hallways during a busy class change. Listening to happy tunes in the car or even singing to oneself was shared as a technique for stress reduction. Other submissions were using aromatherapy candles or planting flowers at home to greet you upon your arrival during every season; putting something beautiful in close proximity to look at: a picture, a keepsake lace tablecloth, or a vase of flowers; and finding time for humor and being silly. Again a researcher-created evaluation (Appendix M) asked participants to answer the following question: Did I
learn skills or discover tools to reduce stress? (‘0’ – not at all, ‘1’ – slightly, ‘2’ –
moderately, or ‘3’ – the article provided a high level of new knowledge that I can apply
to my life). Participants reported a selection of 2 out of 3 for a “moderate” level of new
skills learned to reduce stress (detailed explanation in Ch 5 discussion, p. 78-79, Table 6).

Professional Learning Community Meeting #4

Gathering #4 allowed us to tackle the second concern within our department and
six colleagues were on hand for the job. Our teaching schedule was selected as Concern
#2. The action plan outline was utilized as before as we strategized about the scheduling
concerns of our department. We saw this concern as important because scheduling sets
the tone for our department and campus as a learning community. The federal
government determined that students’ transition goals now drive the IEP. Too few
courses were offered which allow transition goals to be met. Students with disabilities
needed to take courses in the same sequence as their regular education peers, but some
were being scheduled into classes without meeting the prerequisite. The description of
the problem was as follows: The special education schedule was rigid with “singleton”
offerings causing scheduling restraints. There were not enough elective choices for our
students. A few teachers were not being utilized effectively due to small resource room
classes of two to four students of the same subject meeting at different times during the
day. Balancing class sizes, yet keeping them a manageable size, could open up a space
for a teacher to instruct another course. Department teachers’ expertise and experience
were not taken into consideration when scheduling problems within the department needed to be solved.

So we commenced with our plan of action for our second department concern – department scheduling. As before, we looked at background and cause and effect patterns in order to resolve this concern. There was a new thrust from the federal government that students’ transition plans should drive the writing of the IEP. Inquiry #1 – What changes were necessary in order to provide resources for students' transitional needs? Our group determined further data collection was needed. A survey (Appendix N) was sent to English resource room classes so students’ course interests could be queried. Every student must take an English class so no student in the target group would be missed. Four teachers comprised this target group and were sent the surveys.

Students responded by marking their course of interest from the following list: Advanced Public Speaking, Life Skills I, Life Skills II, Personal Finance, Practical Law, Psychology I, Psychology II, Spanish I. Life Skills was already taught but not to a wide audience. The rest of the courses were in the program of studies and were offered to the regular education population, but not to the resource room students. Thirty-seven students responded with 99 selections (slightly less than three selections per student). The tally for each elective course were as follows: Spanish I received the most votes with 24, followed by Life Skills I with 18, Practical Law – 15, Personal Finance – 13, Life Skills II – 12, Psychology I – 10, Advanced Public Speaking – 4, and Psychology II – 3.
As we further examined the concern of department scheduling, attention was drawn to class sizes. Optimal class sizes for a resource room would be one that was manageable based on the level of special needs of the students on the roster. Inquiry #2 – What criteria would be utilized when determining resource room class size. Ultra-small classes of two to four students should be avoided if possible so as to utilize teachers most efficiently.

Further history concerning department scheduling was noted. One teacher in our department had made an unsuccessful attempt to schedule her students into classes out of sequence. This attempt was made in order to create a scheduling convenience for a certain population of students. Students did not have the prerequisite knowledge base in order to be successful. Regular education students would not be allowed to take courses out of order. Special education students would be at an even greater disadvantage to be forced to take courses out of order. Inquiry #3 – We requested that administrators disallow students with disabilities to take courses out of the recommended sequence.

Finally, department teachers have a wide variety of experience in working with their students and they have not been utilized in solving scheduling problems. Inquiry #4 – Can experienced teachers in the department be utilized in order to create the most effective, optimal schedule for the students they serve? The second plan of action noted resolution being requested via the same two administrators (the department principal and the head principal of Xanadu High School).
Status of 2nd Action Plan for PLC #4

The second action plan (Appendix O) was directed to the attention of these two administrators on December 4, 2009. The group asked for a meeting of the special department with principals and counselors in charge of scheduling prior to the commencement of the student scheduling process for the 2010-2011 school year (which was set for February 8, 2010). The department principal acknowledged receipt December 7, 2009 with the following response:

I have read over your plan. I believe one of the things [sic] needs to happen is for the special education department to have their caseload students make course requests in late January or early February to give us an idea about scheduling needs. I know from past experience that waiting until near the end of the third quarter when final course requests are made via the annual IEP review is too late. The schedule is based on the students’ course requests. Students request certain classes and they are only offered certain periods, and we try to accommodate those requests. We are also trying to adhere to the least restrictive environment when planning the master schedule and teachers’ schedules based on area of certification based on content area. I applaud your efforts and encourage you to continue meeting. It is nice to see that not only are you identifying issues but brainstorming possible solutions.

No response came from the head principal.
By the time The Gathering met to approach the third department concern (12/10/09), there had been no resolution on either of the first two requests (no time frame set up for resolution). It was the consensus of The Gathering participants on hand that the response to the second concern of department scheduling was technically not answered in terms of the specific request of a meeting, thus, it would be re-sent. But this time it would be sent to the director of special education, the director of curriculum, and the superintendent in addition to the same two principals from our campus. On the same day it was sent, there was no response from any of the additional staff, but as facilitator of the group, I was called to the head principal’s office and told to bring a union representative. It took a full seven days to get on the head principal’s appointment calendar.

The day before we went on winter break I met with the head principal along with my union representative. As expected, the head principal reminded me that all campus staff had previously been directed in October to not take concerns to Central Office. All concerns were to be handled via the proper chain of command on campus – our department principal first and then the head principal. We were never to take matters over her head to staff at Central Office. In her opinion, it created the appearance that we do not respect her. I had to agree that I would, in addition, no longer email department concerns to her. She requested I meet with her in person. Furthermore, I was to take all department matters up with the department principal before contacting her. My union representative and I both told her the department principal does not respond to emails
unless they are carbon-copied to her. In addition, responses were never followed up by him. I have not taken department concerns to her since that meeting.

Due to the timeliness of needing to set up a meeting pertaining to scheduling, Teacher #15 took on the task of making sure that transpired via the department principal. A meeting finally took place on the last day of first semester, two weeks after returning from winter break. It was hoped Teacher #15 and myself would be granted at least an hour of time with the department principal to discuss issues, but the meeting was interrupted by an all-call for a presentation the department principal wished to attend. The meeting lasted only 15 minutes. Nothing was resolved, but rather the department principal commented how much better it was to meet in person as the written requests were interpreted as demands.

**Professional Learning Community Meeting #5**

Though disappointment lingered for the participants, our PLC continued (Appendix P) with Gathering #5 (November 30, 2009) and our third article in our de-stress series. Four colleagues attended the meeting with a total of six teachers contributing feedback. The chosen article had a thanksgiving theme as we met just after Thanksgiving break. “The Kindness of Strangers,” by Mary Karr, was found in the November, 2009 issue of *Real Simple* magazine and also available to participants online via the magazine’s website (www.realsimple.com). The story had a familiar “unseen angels” flavor and focused on attitude adjustment as a remedy for a negative mind-set. Karr, a teacher, told of a bus-riding encounter with strangers and how their kindness was
the catalyst for her change of perspective. To avoid bad flying weather, Karr took the bus back to Syracuse University from upstate New York. Becoming acquainted with a gray-haired woman and her 5-year-old granddaughter, the teacher generously shared sandwiches, juice boxes, and fruit at a layover in Albany. Upon arrival at their destination, her laptop bag and accompanying hidden pouch of keepsake jewelry came up missing.

The happy ending to the story came after the teacher received a phone call from the grandmother that evening reporting the recovery of the missing laptop, thus, reigniting “faith in the random goodness of other souls” (Karr, 2009). On the walk home from the bus station, the grandmother spied a young man with the stolen laptop. Once discovered, the thief dropped the laptop and ran away. Karr took a cab to the grandmother’s house to retrieve her laptop. The story concluded by revealing how the teacher recorded lucky events such as the laptop’s retrieval on the back page of her journal. This became Karr’s “permanent record of inspiring moments; otherwise the seemingly miraculous can vaporize with a shift in mood” (p. 77). Karr further reported, “Regular prayer and meditation can help too. (Both practices I mocked as moronic until I got desperate enough to try them)” (p. 77). Her reflections on the missing bag became the “corrective lens I can use to click the world back into focus, to flip my inner lights back on” (Karr, 2009, p. 77).

A two-page discussion starter was created by the researcher (Appendix Q) to go along with the article. With stress-reduction as the goal, the question was asked, “How
we look at other people – Can it change our perspective?” Further discussion revolved around possible remedies that might help us change our perspective: journaling, prayer, meditation. What could help us gain corrective lenses? What does it mean to “have your inner lights flipped back on?”

**Evaluation of PLC #5**

Teacher #15 reported loving to read articles like this. It gave her a boost of confidence in people. She identified with the teacher in the story calling herself an idiot when she lost the laptop. Once Teacher #15 stopped calling herself stupid and calmed down a little, she was able to think better and could sometimes even find a lost or misplaced item. She believed being optimistic was a learned behavior. As with meetings one and three, a researcher-created evaluation (Appendix R) asked participants to answer the following question: Did I learn skills or discover tools to reduce stress? (‘0’ – not at all, ‘1’ – slightly, ‘2’ – moderately, or ‘3’ – the article provided a high level of new knowledge that I can apply to my life). In their evaluations, participants reported a 2 out of 3 for a “moderate” level of new skills learned to reduce stress (see detailed explanation in Ch. 5 discussion, p. 79-80, Table 7).

**Professional Learning Community Meeting #6**

For Gathering #6 (December 3, 2009), we embarked upon the third concern within our department – the status of our available technology. The two teachers able to attend this session requested a survey (Appendix S) go out to the members of our department. Five statements were made pertaining to technology:
1) I have access to a computer (with internet access) every period in the classrooms where I teach.

2) I have adequate technology training in order for me to do my job.

3) I have never experienced a work stoppage during IEP writing season due to technology problems.

4) I am always able to meet the needs of my students in terms of technology.

5) It has been my practice that technology has improved my ability for me to do my job.

The rating scale for the survey was as follows: ‘1’ – strongly disagree, ‘2’ – disagree, ‘3’ – agree, ‘4’ – strongly agree. 11 out of 20 members of the department returned the survey for a 55 percent participation rate. The items with the worst ranking in terms of technology were as follows: teachers were experiencing work stoppage during IEP writing season due to technology problems, and teachers were unable to meet the needs of their students due to lack of technology (Appendix S-b).

Why did we see our technology concerns as important? Our school's archaic level of technology prevented us from getting our job done. We had a legal responsibility to complete federally required documents. Annually, since it was the category of students with disabilities that kept our school district from meeting the state’s criteria for annual yearly progress (AYP), why were we not the most supported department so we could reverse this trend? We wasted so much time trying to use technology. Our time was
better spent in the classroom. We were forced to use inadequate software programs and were forced to recreate documents lost by district-provided programs.

Our concerns with the status of available technology escalated when we were left out of training. For several days in early 2010, the faculty at Xanadu High School was granted professional leave for technology training within their departments. Our entire special education department was omitted from this training. Upon inquiry, we were informed we would receive this new training. However, we would have to do it on our own time over the summer. Fourteen out of 20 members of the department, or 70 percent, were traveling teachers with reduced or non-existent access to technology during class periods. A software program used last year for IEP storage was erased due to a program change. If we wanted to utilize that data within a software program, we had to spend hours re-entering previous IEP goals and objectives.

Our plan of action (Appendix T) requested that members of our department be provided laptop computers with wireless internet access or alternate drop-down lines for internet access in the rooms we were assigned to use. A target date of the beginning of the second semester was suggested. This request was submitted in writing to the head principal and the department principal on January 4, 2010. There was no response. A face-to-face meeting occurred on January 15, 2010 with the department principal with the goal of discussing this request. The principal ended the meeting before this item could be addressed. No progress was made.
The next item in our plan of action was a request for additional training on the new IEP form adopted in 2009. This new IEP form was introduced at training in August, 2009 prior to the start of the school year. A hard copy of the form was presented, but computer access was unavailable. We requested training in January, 2010. This issue was acted upon by the department principal on January 15, 2010. Training was scheduled for the first week in February, but canceled due to a snow day. An attempt to reschedule it for the second week in February saw the same outcome. Finally the training was successfully rescheduled for March 10, 2010, with merely a month between training and the deadline to complete all IEPs for the year.

Further training was requested on the subject of transition for the IEP student. The newest version of the IEP placed increased emphasis on transition goal writing and new resources were necessary for evaluating students’ transition needs. Training was requested for early January. Training appeared on the schedule for late January, but was canceled due to lack of sufficient registrations. Previously training for department members was held after school and advertised via email. No registration was necessary. Now all of our trainings were being coordinated by the district staff development department with registration required ahead of time in order to attend. Sufficient registrations must be gathered or the event is canceled. Transition training was rescheduled for late February, but only four teachers from the high school special education department attended. Other teachers sought training within resource agencies outside the school district.
Additional training was sought. An “EMIS” (Education Management Information System) form is required following the completion of each new IEP. This form is mandated as a part of an educational management system which records important data such as what special education service will be delivered as well as the number of minutes each student will be receiving that service per day or week. Any errors made in recording proper codes within this filing system affects the accounting of monies coming from the state to the local district. Training for EMIS was combined with the training for the new IEP form. Participants felt instruction on how to complete EMIS remained unclear.

A member of our department created a staff development class teaching us how to perform as much essential documentation for our job online as possible, thus saving time and paper. This training took place March 10, 2010 after school, with an early and late start time in order to accommodate staff from within the whole district. This training was widely attended as well as extremely helpful on a concrete level.

Finally, the last request for training encompassed our need for an update on current available software and current assistive technology for use in our content area. We also needed equipment which would improve our students’ ability to grasp knowledge within the classroom experience. Therefore, we requested experts from our local regional center to provide in-service. A target date of February, 2010 was requested in order to meet the district's deadline for ordering new materials. The ordering deadline was March 3 for our department. As the school year was ending (June 4, 2010),
communication came from the technology department describing equipment that would be available to the special education teachers. Not all teachers were chosen to receive the same equipment. Upon inquiry, no clear answer was provided as to how the equipment was to be dispersed, and according to emails, a disparity would exist with more equipment going to the elementary level than the high school. Training, as previously promised, was being provided over the summer, however, space was limited.

**Status of 3rd Action Plan for PLC #6**

The group’s plan to improve the status of technology was multi-faceted. In summary, it appears the district has plans for traveling Intervention Specialists to obtain laptops with access to the internet with final details still to come. Professional leave for training on the new IEP forms was held March 10, 2010 during the school day. Requested training for Transition manifested in late February, 2010 via district staff, with only four teachers from the high school Intervention Specialists in attendance. Other Intervention Specialists chose to attend training provided through resource agencies outside the school district. Help in understanding how to complete EMIS forms was supposed to be included with new IEP form training. However, neither sufficient knowledge nor additional confidence in completing these forms was gained due to minimal instructional time allowed for this topic. Requested instruction in using online formats for essential documentation occurred after school March 10, 2010. Updates on current software and assistive technology did not manifest by the March 3, 2010 ordering deadline.
Professional Learning Community Meeting #7

Gathering #7 (December 8, 2009) introduced the last article selected for our professional learning community and specifically addressed the realm of physical stress on the body. Four participants benefited from the expertise of our guest facilitator, our high school’s clinic assistant. The article’s title was “Just Breathe” from the November, 2009 issue of Real Simple magazine. Author, Lisa Whitmore, says, “Studies show that mindful breathing can do wonders to increase your well-being. (Extra incentives: It’s free, you own the necessary equipment, and you can practice it anywhere)” (Whitmore, 2009, p. 123). Within the article described the affects of breathing exercises on the body. Michael McKee, a psychologist at the Cleveland Clinic, stated, “When we slow down our breathing, we can interrupt and decrease our stress response and engage our minds and bodies in the relaxation response” (Whitmore, 2009, p. 124). Furthermore, he claimed, “concentration on our breathing can help anchor us in the present moment, which can be a useful tool to quell worry and increase productivity” (Whitmore, 2009, p. 125).

Additional tips included practicing deep breathing before answering the phone and when pulling into the driveway after work. Three different methods of breathing were offered in the article: belly breathing, focused breathing, and alternate-nostril breathing.

An article discussion guide (Appendix U) was created. Did we need to subdue stress, stave off sickness, or stay calm? Would we like to gain energy, release toxins, and help our organs work efficiently? Anxiousness caused the heart rate to elevate and blood pressure to increase. The immune system weakened. There was an increased risk of
developing disorders like cardiovascular disease. While remaining calm, blood pressure and heart rate dropped. Worry was suppressed and productivity rose. Participants spent meeting time practicing different deep breathing exercises. Our facilitator shared personal situations where application of these techniques would be beneficial.

**Evaluation of PLC #7**

As with meetings one, three, and five, a researcher-created evaluation (Appendix V) asked participants to answer the following question: Did I learn skills or discover tools to reduce stress? (‘0’ – not at all, ‘1’ – slightly, ‘2’ – moderately, or ‘3’ – the article provided a high level of new knowledge that I can apply to my life). In their evaluations, participants recorded this article bringing the highest level (a score of 2.4 out of 3) of new knowledge that they can apply to their lives. Teacher #6 said she intended to practice and utilize these techniques. Teacher #12 liked learning practical ways to de-stress. Teacher #15 did not realize how important deep breathing was to good health. She felt we all needed to learn this technique, including students (see detailed explanation in Ch. 5 discussion, p. 80, Table 8).

**Professional Learning Community Meeting #8**

As the date of the last Gathering arrived (December 10, 2009), five members of the special education department at Xanadu High School were in attendance. Our fourth and final concern arose from the Inclusion setting and working with regular education teachers. Using our action plan outline to describe why this problem was important, we stated that the goal of Inclusion could not be met when there were not enough regular
education students on the roster. Students with disabilities were selected for placement in the Inclusion setting so they could observe the modeling available from regular education students. While in Inclusion, if special education students performed or near the level of their peers, then it truly was the special education students’ least restrictive environment. When special education students overload an Inclusion classroom, having a disability became the common denominator. The room, then, turned into a special education classroom which limited the progress for special education and regular education students alike.

In further depiction of the problem, we agreed students’ needs could not be met within the following situations: 1) classes where caps were too high; 2) Inclusion classrooms where students with disabilities comprised too large a portion of the roster. An Intervention Specialist in Inclusion received a class roster of students for whom she was responsible (teacher of record). The regular classroom teacher in the Inclusion setting also received a roster of students. Often, students with disabilities showed up on the roster for the regular education teacher, increasing the total number of special education students. Moreover, students’ individual accommodations could not be met within the Inclusion setting when the class size was out of balance. Our group resolved that Inclusion rosters should contain no more than one-third students with disabilities.

Data collection for special education class sizes was monitored and reported (Appendix W) by members of the department every October in order to decide if a violation of the teacher contact had occurred. Current contract language had placed a cap
on class-size at 25 students. The results of this year’s annual search for contract violations of class-size allowed for data (Appendix W-a through W-i) to be borrowed for reference and utilization in this action plan. Clearly, this year’s analysis reported occurrences where the ratio of students with disabilities to regular education students being 1:1 or higher. The 2008 Operating Standards for Ohio Educational Agencies Serving Children with Disabilities #3301-51-09 item (I) (1) (b) stated that districts “shall determine ratios for an individual service provider by considering… the severity of each eligible child’s need, and the level and frequency of services for children to attain IEP goals and objectives” (Ohio Department of Education, 2008, p. 168). The following cases detailed where the size of the class did not allow for each student with a disability to receive the level and frequency of described accommodation services in order to meet his or her goals and objectives:

**Percentage of Special Education Students in the Inclusion Classroom**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. History</td>
<td>70.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Finance</td>
<td>63.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>57.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Government</td>
<td>53.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Science</td>
<td>52.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Studies</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algebra I</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math 10</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Studies</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cases were reported where Intervention Specialists were able to deliver accommodations and successful outcomes were apparent. In these cases, the total numbers of students with disabilities in the class were tracked at the following levels: 31%, 35%, 36%, 37%, 37.5%, 40%, & 42%. Thus, negative outcomes occurred in Inclusion classrooms where the percentage of special education students was between 40 to 70.5 percent. Positive outcomes occurred, however, in classes where the average number of students with disabilities was approximately 37 percent.

Another circumstance causing negative results in the Inclusion setting was Intervention Specialists being placed in situations where their expertise and teacher preferences were not taken into consideration. When an Intervention Specialist was in his or her optimal Inclusion situation, everyone won – the students, the classroom teacher, and more. Unfortunately, in some instances, Intervention Specialists were placed in situations where his/her expert skills and content knowledge were not able to be utilized. An outcome of our action plan from Gathering #8 was the following list of considerations for each Intervention Specialist's schedule when working in the Inclusion setting: 1) a limit to the number of regular education teachers to whom he/she was assigned; 2) a limit to the number of entry-level teachers to whom he/she was assigned; 3) a limit to the number of different courses to which he/she was assigned; 4) co-teachers be assigned common planning periods; 5) teachers assigned to teach classes as opposed to doing office supervision.
In the past, especially when the departments at Xanadu High School had chairpersons, Inclusion team pairings were chosen after much consideration. A great deal of deliberation was needed when teaming an Intervention Specialist and a regular education teacher in order to create an optimal environment for students with disabilities. Dialogue and collaboration should occur between teachers within the content departments and the special education department. First and foremost, the regular education teacher should be asked if he or she is willing to work with students with disabilities. If need be, criteria could be created to identify who would make the best teams.

**Status of 4th Action Plan for PLC #8**

The head principal and special education department principal of Xanadu High School received this fourth and final request (Appendix X) from The Gathering on January 4, 2010 requesting collaboration within the departments prior to the finalizing of the teaching schedules for the next year. This writer only heard of one department (English) which actually had this discussion in their monthly department meeting. On the other hand, the faculty at Xanadu High School had a deadline of April 1, 2010 to complete a wish list containing the following questions: 1) Are you interested in Team Teaching in an Inclusion setting? [yes or no]; 2) If you are in a Team Teaching situation, do you wish to remain? [yes or no]; 3) If no, please give a short explanation of why? The information on this sheet was to be held in confidence and seen by administration only.

This writer was unsure if the requests of The Gathering had any influence on the questioning contained in this faculty wish list. Nevertheless, participants in The
Gathering remained hopeful that dialogue would be generated within departments as the scheduling process was finalized for the coming school year. On a more promising note, expert teachers who had acted in the capacity of department chairpersons in the past were consulted by administrators in charge of scheduling. Teachers were given as much as one full day of professional leave to apply their experience to the scheduling process so that optimal situations might be created. At this writing, it was apparent that Inclusion teams who had been split up last year were restored. In addition, Intervention Specialists were only assigned to work with up to two different teachers. A third piece of favorable news was that no Intervention Specialists were assigned to work with entry-level teachers.

However, the number of different courses assigned to Intervention Specialists was not limited. Contractually, teachers are given a stipend if they are assigned to teach more than three different courses. Unfortunately, if an Intervention Specialist teaches a resource room course and also teaches that same course in the Inclusion setting, it is not considered an extra course preparation. Finally, there are still Intervention Specialists who have been relegated to supervisory duties rather than being assigned a class to teach. All previously stated concerns regarding resource room class sizes being too large or the Inclusion class rosters being out of balance and overloaded with students with disabilities will not be able to be evaluated until rosters are available prior to the start of next school year.
Summary

Volunteers from the special education department at Xanadu High School embarked on a bank of pre-participation surveys and tools which provided all the baseline data for the research. Four PLC meetings (the odd-numbered meetings) spotlighted stress-reduction topics: 1) the secrets of resiliency, 2) regaining our focus, 3) changing our perspective, and 4) deep-breathing exercises. Four other PLC meetings (the even-numbered meetings) birthed action plans through which members hoped to gain support from administration to resolve the four highest areas of stress in our department. It is surely evident that some matters brought forth by the actions plans of The Gathering have been resolved for the coming school year. It is hopeful that further progress will result in favorable balance of resource room and Inclusion class rosters as well. Post-participation surveys rounded out the data collected for the research. Results and findings are presented in Chapter 4.
Chapter 4

Findings

Background

Twenty colleagues from the special education department at Xanadu High School were invited to join a professional learning community (PLC) to see if it would act as a catalyst in allaying their stress, to allow them to perform their jobs without thoughts of quitting. Baseline data was collected. Of the 20 teachers solicited, 16 participated in some form or another, from actually attending meetings to merely returning feedback. Considering what some of my colleagues were going through in their personal lives, an 80 percent participation rate was fantastic. Teacher #16’s mother passed away during the time the PLC was meeting. Teacher #4 was the new father of twin boys. Teacher #7 just received a kidney transplant. Two teachers were occupied with matters involving the court. Between five and twelve teachers contributed to each meeting for an average of eight per meeting. When the pre-surveys and questionnaires were added into the calculation, there was favorable involvement at the following levels: two teachers - 60 percent, one teacher – 70 percent, one teacher – 80 percent, and three teachers with 100 percent involvement.

Pre-Participation Surveys

Nine teachers completed the Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale. The two teachers in the “0 to 10 years’ experience” group achieved an average score of 216 (see Table 1 below).
The average score was the mean between Teacher # 9 with a result of 158 on the Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale and Teacher #20 with 274.

**Table 1**

ANALYSIS OF HOLMES-RAHE STRESS SCALE CATEGORY 0 TO 10 YEARS’ EXPERIENCE

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Column1</th>
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<tr>
<td>158</td>
<td>216</td>
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<tr>
<td>274</td>
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The three teachers with 11 to 20 years’ experience had an average score of 259 (see Table 2 below). Teacher #2 had a score of 124. Teacher #6’s score was 322. Teacher #12’s score was 330.
Table 2

ANALYSIS OF HOLMES-RAHE STRESS SCALE CATEGORY - 11 TO 20 YEARS’ EXPERIENCE

<table>
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<th>124</th>
<th>322</th>
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<tr>
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And finally, the four teachers with 21 to 30+ years teaching experience scored a 250 average (Table 3) on the Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale. Teacher # 10 scored 262. Teacher # 15’s score was 157. Teacher # 17 had a 476, while Teacher # 22 had a 105.
Table 3

ANALYSIS OF HOLMES-RAHE STRESS SCALE CATEGORY - 21 TO 30+ YEARS' EXPERIENCE

<table>
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<th>Column 1</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>476</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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<td>105</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average score between the groups was 241 (Table 4) with a range of only 43 points (that is the mean score between the 216, 259, and 250 scores from the three groups, respectively – 0 to 10, 11 to 20, and 21-30 years' experience).
Table 4

HOLMES-RAHE STRESS SCALE AVERAGES OF THE THREE EXPERIENCE CATEGORIES

<table>
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<th>Column1</th>
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<tr>
<td>259</td>
<td></td>
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<td>250</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standard Error</td>
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<td>Sample Variance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Range</td>
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<td>Minimum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This online tool provided by The University of Texas Medical Branch [http://www.utmb.edu/psychology/ClinPsych/Assessments/Holme-Rahe%20LifeStress%20Scale.htm] provided a calculation of results with a delineation of scores in the following “life crisis” categories:  under 150 = a prediction of no significant problems, 150 to 199 = suggests mild life crisis with a 33 percent risk of illness, 200 to 299 = moderate life crisis with a 50 percent risk of illness, over 300 = major life crisis and predicts an 80 percent chance of serious physical illness in the next two years. The physical illnesses indicated were: headaches, diabetes, fatigue, hypertension, chest and back pain, ulcers, infectious disease. Overall, only two of the respondents fell in the lowest category of health risk. Three teachers fell in the highest category of health risk. For this study, the number of years of
teaching experience did not correlate with a higher level of life stress or vice versa.

Could it be that stress is no respecter of persons no matter your life experience?

Next, respondents completed a pre-participation survey about level of education, number of years' teaching experience, and how often they had thought of quitting their job (never, daily, weekly, monthly, or annually). Ten out of 20 teachers responded for a 50% participation rate. Again, results were triangulated based on the number of years of teaching experience. There were two people who never thought of quitting. Teacher #9 had a masters' degree and was the only respondent of the pre-participation survey in the 0 to 10 years' experience category (see Figure 1 below). But, interestingly enough, Teacher #9 came into teaching as a second career. Conversations with Teacher #9 indicated that a previous occupation was one that caused thoughts of quitting and that teaching was the favored career.
The category of 11 to 20 years’ teaching contained three respondents (Teachers #2, 6, and 12). The majority (67 percent) thought of quitting annually. Thirty-four percent considered quitting on a weekly basis. The majority of teachers in this category had masters’ degrees (67 percent), but this did not correlate with their desire to terminate their jobs (see Figure 2 below).
Of the six respondents with 21 to 30 years of teaching and beyond (Teacher #7, 10, 13, 15, 17, and 22): 17 percent never thought of quitting, 17 percent contemplated quitting daily, 34 percent considered quitting monthly, and 34 percent thought of quitting annually (see Figure 3 below). The majority (67 percent) of this group has bachelors’ degrees. Their level of education does not correlate with their desire to quit.
Also included in the pre-participation survey, eight situations within our special education department were ranked according to the following scale: ‘0’ – the item causes no stress, ‘1’ – the item causes low stress, ‘2’ – the item causes a moderate amount of stress, or ‘3’ – the item causes the highest level of stress. Items were chosen from situations which have caused teachers to express complaints in casual conversation as well as department meetings. The situations were as follows: a) class size; b) teaching schedule; c) department leadership; d) administrative support; e) status of available technology; f) confidence towards the new IEP form; g) cooperation from others within
the department; and h) cooperation from regular education teachers. The results of the tally were based on the values given to the situations by the nine respondents. The situation which indicated the highest stress value was the “status of technology.” The next highest area was “administrative support” followed by “teaching schedule.” A tie for fourth place yielded “department leadership” and “confidence towards the new IEP form.” In sixth place was “cooperation from regular education teachers.” Stressors ranked in last place were “size of classes” and “cooperation from others within my department.” The four situations with the highest scores were addressed in PLC meetings #2, 4, 6, and 8 (Appendix S-b).

Post-Participation Surveys

The Gathering, an experiment examining the premise that joining a professional learning community would act as a catalyst in allaying teachers’ stress so they could perform their jobs without thoughts of quitting, was conducted from November 9 through December 10, 2009 at Xanadu High School in a suburb of southwestern Ohio. The eight Intervention Specialists in attendance at even one of the Gatherings #2, 4, 6, 8 where department issues were dealt with were sent a post-participation survey (Appendix Y). Participants were asked to rate their opinion of the status of the four issues sent to administration for resolution or action by responding to the following question: “I feel the level of progress in improving the situation is…” including rankings of 1 through 5 with ‘1’ being “worst” and ‘5’ being “best.” Four surveys were returned for a 50 percent participation rate. The survey summarized each of the four issues. Responses were as
follows: Issue #1 - Communication from Administrative Leadership – 35 percent improvement; Issue #2 - Special Education Scheduling Concerns – 30 percent improvement; Issue #3 - Technology Available to the Special Ed Dept – 40 percent improvement; Issue #4 – Improving the Inclusion Setting – 30 percent improvement.

Respondents were from the following categories in terms of number of years taught: two from the 11 to 20 years’ experience category (Teachers #4 and 6) and two from the 21 to 30+ years’ experience category (Teachers #15 and 22). As a part of the final research, could it be surmised if participating in a professional learning community such as “The Gathering” could make any difference in thoughts of leaving one’s job? None of the respondents to the post-participation survey for this professional learning community changed their minds about how often they had thoughts of quitting or changing their job. Teacher #6 thought of quitting weekly. Teacher #15 still contemplates quitting on a monthly basis. Teacher #22 repeats her pre-survey response of never considering quitting or changing jobs. Teacher #4 did not complete a pre-survey, but noted in his post-survey that he thought of quitting or changing jobs annually (see Figures 4 & 5, respectively).
Figure 4

FREQUENCY OF "THINKING OF QUITTING"

POST-PARTICIPATION DATA

11-20 YEARS’ EXPERIENCE
Figure 5

FREQUENCY OF "THINKING OF QUITTING"

POST-PARTICIPATION DATA

Future Participation Survey

All 20 colleagues from the special education department at Xanadu High School who were initially invited to join The Gathering were sent a query as to their preferences via a “future participation survey” (Appendix Z). This survey began by reiterating the characteristics of action research:

a) We are moving towards an envisioned future aligned with values.
b) It is a systematic study of one’s actions and the effects of these actions in a workplace context.

c) We examine work and look for opportunities to improve.

d) We work with others to propose a new course of action to help our community improve its workplace practices.

e) Our method is scientific – it changes something; we observe the effects and examine the evidence. It is the process by which an organization learns.

f) We share ideas with others in our community of practice who value the knowledge gained.

g) We continually reflect on our practice so peers can contribute feedback and support.

The survey addressed two questions. Query #1 – In the future, I would meet after school to share stress-reducing strategies or articles. Query #2 – In the future, I would meet to work on action plans in order to seek improvements in practices within our special education department. Respondents were asked for a simple “yes” or “no” answer.

Twelve out of 20 department members returned the survey. Sixty-seven percent replied they would meet to share stress-reducing strategies and articles. Ninety-two percent replied they would meet to work on action plans in order to seek improvements in practices within our special education department. Response from 11 out of 12 teachers confirmed that meeting within a professional learning community could have a positive
influence on teachers. These teachers wanted to keep meeting. Four of the teachers were new respondents. Even though they could not meet with The Gathering from November 9 to December 10, 2009, they did believe it would be worth their time to participate in the future. In looking at the categories of years of experience, three of the respondents were from the 0 to 10 years’ experience category, three were from the 11 to 20 years’ experience category, and six were from the 21 to 30+ years’ experience category.

Written comments were provided via the post-survey process. Teacher #13 (with 21 to 30+ years experience and thought of quitting annually) wrote, “I wanted to attend one or all of your gatherings, but I just get so snowed under.” Teacher #6 (with 11 to 20 years’ experience and wanted to quit weekly) expressed her feelings by stating she would not attend future meetings “unless I was convinced that the time and effort would lead to positive results and I can’t see that happening with the current leadership in place.” On a very positive note, Teacher #15 (with 21 to 30+ years’ experience and considered quitting monthly) stated that being a member of this professional learning community made her feel better about her job. She continued, “This was very helpful. As a department we only meet every other month. We never have an agenda and don’t have time to discuss concerns. These seminars really produced good ideas and plans.”

Summary

As a part of the collection of data for this research, pre-participation surveys revealed baseline information of how often teachers in the three experience categories thought of quitting. The Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale calculated the stress levels of the
teachers involved. In addition, participants answered a survey ranking the four situations within the special education department that scored the highest points in terms of stress. The professional learning community meetings addressed these four areas of stress within the department and action plans were created and sent the principal in charge of the special education department and the head principal of the high school with the hope of improvement as a result. Post-participation surveys interpreted the outcome of the action plans in terms of percentage of improvement. Further information was gathered reflecting participant’s post-participation thoughts towards quitting or wanting to change jobs. As participants revisited their initial response, would the act of being in a professional learning community improve one’s perspective after completion of the eight gatherings? The outcome of that question will be revealed in next chapter’s discussion. Future participation questionnaires answered by the participants indicated a very positive response for further department activity within the framework of the professional learning community.
Chapter 5
Discussion

Several of questions were contemplated at the onset of this investigation. Could Xanadu High School’s special educators’ participation in a professional learning community act as a catalyst in allaying their stress to allow them to perform their jobs without thoughts of quitting? Comparison of the responses to the pre-participation surveys and responses to the post-participation surveys indicated there was no change or improvement in participants’ accounts of their thoughts of staying or leaving. Whether they testified that they never considered quitting or thought of quitting daily, weekly, monthly, or annually, there was absolutely no change from the beginning to the end of the data collection.

How serious was the perceived stress for the members of the special education department of Xanadu High School? Participants completed the Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale to determine their level of stress by tallying a list of 43 life events based on a relative score. Teachers with the fewest years’ experience (0 to 10 years) achieved an average score of 216. Teachers in the middle category of 11 to 20 years’ experience had the highest average score of 259. And finally, the teachers with the greatest number of years’ teaching experience (21 to 30+ years) scored a 250 average on the Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale. The average score between the groups was 241 with a range of only 43
points. At Xanadu High School, younger teachers indicated they have the lowest levels of stress and were not expressing a desire to quit or change jobs. This was disproportionate to a study from the Center of Personnel Studies in Special Education at the University of Florida (Billingsley, 2003) which revealed that the younger or less experienced special educator had a greater tendency to leave or expressed the desire to leave more so than his or her older counterparts.

As stated above, Xanadu High School’s group of special educators with the highest stress numbers according to the Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale were from the 11 to 20 years’ experience category. This group had the highest percent of members considering quitting – 67 percent annually and 34 percent on a weekly basis. Of the next category (21-30+ years), 34 percent thought of quitting annually and 34 percent wanted to quit monthly.

The professional learning community embarked on four de-stress articles and activities. Through the first article (“The Secrets of Resilient People”), resiliency in times of stress was measured. Teacher #2 measured her growth at a ‘1.’ Teachers #12, 17, and 22 measured their growth as “moderate” with a ‘2’ (see Table 5 below). According to Table 5, the mean or average score would be 1.75 (rounded up to 2 for the purposes of this calculation). With the highest possible total score being a 12 (3 times 4 participants); then 7 points out of 12 is 58 percent. Thus, evaluations reported participants experiencing a 58 percent growth rate in terms of learning a new skill from the article.
Group members shared instances where mindset, faith, and humor promoted a personal strength to persevere through stressful times. Strategies of learning to pick one’s battles and learning from a chosen mentor were also advantageous.

The second article the professional learning community tackled was called “Regain Your Focus.” In their evaluations, members of the group (Teachers #2, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, and 22) measured their growth from the meeting at a “moderate” level (2 out of a scale of 3) of new skills learned to reduce stress. With the highest possible total score being a 21 (3 times 7 participants); then 14 points out of 21 is 67 percent. Thus, evaluations reported participants experiencing a 67 percent growth rate in terms of learning a new skill from the article (see Table 6 below).
CAN A P.L.C. ACT AS A CATALYST TO REVERSE THOUGHTS OF QUITTING?

Table 6

EVALUATION FOR MEETING #3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Column1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Error</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Variance</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>#DIV/0!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>#DIV/0!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contributions for regaining focus and stress reduction were as follows: discovering methods of better sleep (i.e. shutting off electronic devices 30 minutes before going to bed), talking with a friend, determining to get outside more, listening to happy tunes or singing, burning aromatherapy candles, placing beauty in close proximity (i.e. pictures, flowers), and finally, finding time for humor and silliness.

The next article in the series was “The Kindness of Strangers.” Discussion included the question, “How we look at other people – Can it change our perspective?” In their evaluations, members of the group (Teachers #11, 12, 15, 17, and 22) measured their growth from the meeting at a “moderate” level (2 out of a scale of 3) of new skills learned to reduce stress. According to Table 7, the mean or average score would be 1.5 (rounded up to 2 for the purposes of selecting the average category of growth). With the
highest possible total score being a 15 (3 times 5 participants); 7.5 points out of 15 is 50 percent. Thus, evaluations reported participants experiencing a 50 percent growth rate in terms of learning a new skill from the article (see Table 7 below).

**Table 7**

**EVALUATION FOR MEETING #5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Column1</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>2 Mean</td>
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<td>1 Median</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Mode</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2 Standard Deviation</td>
<td>0.707106781</td>
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<td>0.5 Sample Variance</td>
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<tr>
<td>-1.75 Kurtosis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.883883476 Skewness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Range</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.5 Minimum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Maximum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5 Sum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Count</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further discussion revolved around possible remedies that might help us change our perspective: journaling, prayer, meditation.

“Just Breathe,” the fourth and final article selected for the professional learning community specifically addressed the realm of physical stress on the body. The article discussion guide inquired, “Do we need to subdue stress, stave off sickness, or stay calm?” Participants spent meeting time practicing different deep breathing exercises as described in the article. Our guest facilitator, the high school clinic assistant, shared personal situations where application of these techniques would be beneficial. Teachers
remarked on the importance and the practicality of training in deep breathing. They intended to implement this exercise. This last article, which incorporated the actual hands-on practice of deep breathing, tabulated the highest score in terms of life application. In their evaluations, members of the group (Teachers #6, 10, 12, 15, and 22) measured their growth from the meeting at a “moderate” level (2 out of a scale of 3) of new skills learned to reduce stress. According to Table 8, the mean or average score would be 2.4 (rounded down to 2 for the purposes of selecting the average category of growth). With the highest possible total score being a 15 (3 times 5 participants); then 12 points out of 15 is 80 percent. Thus, evaluations recorded this article conveying the largest growth rate of all the meetings at 80 percent for the participants in terms of learning a new skill from the article (see Table 8 below).

Table 8
EVALUATION OF MEETING #7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Error</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sample Variance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>0.3125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>-1.257788237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question #1

One of the original questions asked was, “Could the Xanadu High School special educators’ needs for stress relief all be served by the same possible remedies, strategies, and prescriptions?”

Stress Relief through Article Discussions

Gatherings #1, 3, 5, and 7 shared articles which challenged the group to learn new strategies for stress relief. Gathering #1 taught resiliency with a growth rate of 58 percent being reported by the participants. Gathering #3 practiced the skill of focusing with a 67 percent growth rate acquired. Gathering #5 reminded us to change our perspective with only a 50 percent rate of acquiring a new skill. Gathering #7 was hands-on training in deep breathing. This last session of de-stress practice was the most successful with an 80 percent growth rate reported in learning a new skill. Just as students have a higher rate of learning with hands-on activities, teachers as learners acquired the highest level of new skill through the deep breathing exercises and gained the highest growth via the kinesthetic mode.

Selected articles spotlighted techniques for remaining resilient in times of stress, regaining focus, and changing our perspective. Participants reported a moderate level of ability to apply newly acquired knowledge to stressful situations. Did we take a deep breath to resist the desire to flee? Absolutely! The deep breathing exercises allowed the group members to gain practical guidance. New perspective, focus, and practice allowed the group members to resist stressful situations. We became skilled in remedies,
techniques, and strategies to abate feelings of urgency and angst so prevalent in the field of special education.

**Stress Relief through Action Plans**

This investigation intended to expose common stressors within the members of the professional learning community. Input was gathered via a pre-participation survey sent to the 20 members of the special education department at Xanadu High School. Through consensus, the professional learning community concluded that these four issues caused the highest stress for department members: 1) communication from administrative leadership, 2) department scheduling, 3) the status of available technology, and 4) the Inclusion setting. Several discoveries materialized while exposing the stressors. Were the stressors recognized for what they were and where they were coming from? Yes, the pre-participation survey identified the stressors and, in many instances, members of the professional learning community strategized that further data collection was required. Questionnaires from students garnered courses of interest for this year’s department scheduling. The department survey on the status of technology revealed six necessary solutions. Implementation of five out of the six new requested inservices has occurred for a 83 percent resolution rate although needs were not always met in a timely manner. Did we learn to stand firm against the onslaught of stress? Yes. Could the needs of all age groups be served by the same possible remedies, strategies, and prescriptions – be it articles or action plans? Yes, the only common denominator was participation in the professional learning community.
Research Question #2

Were these special educators to remain resolute, keeping stressors under control in the process? These educators were salvageable! Sixty-seven percent of the respondents stated they would meet after school to share stress-reducing strategies or articles. With a 92 percent affirmative rating, respondents stated they would meet to work on action plans in order to seek improvements in practices within their special education department. The literature review pointed to high levels of interaction and mutual respect being a catalyst for coping with stress. Hancock (1999) conveyed that “Teachers are almost always able to cope with stress better in schools with high levels of interaction and mutual respect among teachers, administrators, and parents” (Response-related stress-reduction strategies, para. 3).

Research Question #3

This researcher had asked, “Would further implications of this action research via participation in a professional learning community result in overturning feelings of isolation and an increase in the sense of community within this special education department?” In this researcher’s opinion, participants’ stating that 92 percent of them would meet to work on action plans was an affirmative answer to the above question. Thus, implications in the research confirm that participation in action research within a professional learning community could result in the overturning of feelings of isolation and increase a sense of purpose while these teachers worked on improvements within their special education department. A highly reported concern in the educational
literature was lack of administrative support. Mary Ax et al. (2001) reported in the journal for The National Association of Secondary School Principals that school administrators should recognize special educators’ thoughts of isolation, exhaustion, and burnout. The scenario with the initiation of the professional learning community at Xanadu High School demonstrated that special education teachers would rather work together in a PLC than work in isolation. It should be noted that these teachers were doing all this in spite of a lack of administrative support.

Reflections

Overall, the members of the 21 to 30+ years’ experience category claimed the highest attendance in the professional learning community. Veteran teachers in the department displayed the most determination to put their noses to the grindstone, so to speak, and invest time in a professional learning community. As the researcher, the process of facilitating the professional learning community for colleagues was very fulfilling. One definite reward was becoming closer to members of the department. Having someone new with whom to join forces was refreshing and comforting at the same time. The most challenging component was facilitating the meetings where department issues and concerns were discussed. Coming to group consensus was extremely demanding and exasperating without the assistance of veteran members of the department who were experts in refocusing the group. The action plan outline was indispensable in training the group to focus on the issue at hand. Without an action plan, collaboration within the group dynamic would have been unattainable.
Ultimately, the most unfortunate and frustrating element was continued impairment in the communication process with administration. Lack of resolution of issues eroded the confidence of members of the department seeking improvement. Needing the approval of administration in order to implement progress, and the difficulty of even gaining an audience, were maddening. Administrative leadership played a crucial contribution to the quality of a special educator’s work environment. When administrative leadership created roadblocks for department improvement, special educators had to determine if being salvaged for the task at hand was worthwhile in the long run. If only all administrators were open to communication with special educators eager for reform within their department. The subject of the special educator’s work environment was breached in the educational literature revealing numerous depressing scenarios. Kaff (2004) suggested negative workplace conditions as the most important determinant in a special education teacher’s decision to flee his or her position. Fore et al. (2002) from the University of Georgia also identified that deficient support from administrators, and large caseloads as factors to the negative working environment.

On a very positive note, the head principal at Xanadu High School appointed a different principal to lead the special education department for the upcoming school year. This writer remains cautiously optimistic that this infusion of new blood could bring about even more cooperation and support on the part of administration. Only time and patience will tell.
CAN A P.L.C. ACT AS A CATALYST TO REVERSE THOUGHTS OF QUITTING? – 86

Summary

Could Xanadu High School’s special educators’ participation in a professional learning community act as a catalyst in allaying their stress to allow them to perform their jobs without thoughts of quitting? Comparison of the responses to the pre-participation surveys and responses to the post-participation surveys indicated there was no change or improvement in participants’ accounts of their thoughts of staying or leaving. Whether they testified they never considered quitting or thought of quitting daily, weekly, monthly, or annually, there was absolutely no change from the beginning to the end of the data collection.

However, The Gathering, a group of special educators at Xanadu High School, bears witness to the benefits of working in a professional learning community. Amicable communication with administrative leadership was nearly non-existent, yet imperative, in spearheading future improvement in the special education department. Moderate improvement has already occurred in department members’ access to new technology. Resolutions to issues with department scheduling and teaching in the Inclusion setting appear on the horizon. Furthermore, the experience of working in a professional learning community definitely supplied valuable and positive contributions to eradicate stressors within this special education department.

Questions for future Gatherings: Why do younger special education teachers seem to have less time for participation in a professional learning community? Will there come a time when requests for collaboration will be more welcomed by administrators?
Are presumed irresolvable communication problems with administrators isolated to current administration or can communication improve with administrative turn-over? Disappointment or lack of success does not have to be the focus of attempts to resolve issues deterring a special education department. This researcher found solace in an old poem which surfaced in the 2009 movie “Invictus” which chronicles Nelson Mandela’s post-apartheid South Africa and the fight of their Springbok Rugby team to reach the 1995 World Cup Championships (poem on next page):
INVICTUS

(by William Ernest Henley)

Out of the night that covers me,

Black as the Pit from pole to pole,

I thank whatever gods may be

For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance

I have not winced nor cried aloud.

Under the bludgeonings of chance

My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears

Looms but the Horror of the shade,

And yet the menace of the years

Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,

How charged with punishments the scroll,

I am the master of my fate:

I am the captain of my soul.
Over the course of the eight professional community meetings, the troubles and stressors within the special education department of Xanadu High School at times appeared dark. However, the choice could be made to adopt the attitude of being in charge of one’s fate. Take a deep breath. Grab the steering wheel. Steady on. The future’s horizon does not have to look so bleak. Entering “The Teacher Salvage Business” together can reap qualitative and quantitative benefits. Special education departments have a seasoned tool at their disposal – the professional learning community. Teachers can find a non-threatening haven to practice stress-reducing remedies as well as tackle action plans to improve stressful situations in their department. Participation may not prevent a special education teacher from having thoughts of quitting. But it will provide perhaps a new, yet understanding, hand to hold.
References

doi:10.1177/019263650108562108


Bloomington, IN: National Education Service.


CAN A P.L.C. ACT AS A CATALYST TO REVERSE THOUGHTS OF QUITTING?


Appendix A

Dear Friends,

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for those of you who said they’d participate in helping me finish my masters thesis.

Here are some of the first things you can do in the process:

1. Open up the attachment “anonymity promise;” print and sign page 2
2. Go to the website below; take the survey; write your score on the bottom of the above form
   http://www.utmb.edu/psychology/ClinPsych/Assessments/Holme-Rahe%20LifeStress%20Scale.htm

I printed out my Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale and wrote down the comments that appeared of all the diseases that were going to happen to me.

3. Open up the attached “pre-participation survey;” print and complete
4. Send 1, 2, & 3 to me (or bring them along when you attend your first gathering; see dates below)

If you find all this complicated, just come to my room at one of the following 4 possible times and we will take care of downloading and printing right then. Gatherings will take @ an hour and will always be in Room 226.

- Monday, Nov. 9 at 3:00 PM
- Monday, Nov 9 at 5:00 PM
- Tuesday, Nov 10 at 3:00 PM
- Tuesday, Nov 10 at 5:00 PM

See the attached calendar for a list of all the professional learning community gatherings for our department that I will be facilitating in order to finish my masters.

Participation is voluntary, of course.

Thank you so much!

Jill
Appendix B

PRE-PARTICIPATION SURVEY

Directions: Fill in the blank with the appropriate answer or circle the correct multiple-choice response as displayed.

1. Male / Female

2. Your age: ______

3. Number of years of education you have completed: ______

4. Degree level you’ve completed: (Bachelors) (Masters) (Doctorate)

5. Number of years of teaching experience: (0-10 years) (11-20 years) (21-30+ years)

Mark your response by selecting a level on the following scale:
(0 = the item causes no stress, 1 = the item causes low stress, 2 = the item causes a moderate amount of stress, or 3 = the item causes the highest level of stress)

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<th>3</th>
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<td>6. the sizes of my classes</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. teaching schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. department leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. support from administration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. status of available technology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. confidence towards new IEP form</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. cooperation from others in my dept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. cooperation from regular ed teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. Have you ever thought of quitting your job? YES______   NO______

15. How often have you thought of quitting or changing your job?
    (daily) (weekly) (monthly) (annually)

Name__________________________________________________________

(remember – your identity will be kept anonymous; you will be assigned a participant ID#)
Appendix C

The Holmes-Rahe Scale

Read each of the events listed below, and check the box next to any event which has occurred in your life in the last two years. There are no right or wrong answers. The aim is just to identify which of these events you have experienced lately.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Events</th>
<th>Life Crisis Units</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Death of spouse</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martial separation</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jail term</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of close family member</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal injury or illness</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fired at work</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital reconciliation</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in health of a family member</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Difficulties</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain of new family member</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business readjustment</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in financial state</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of close friend</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change to different line of work</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in number of arguments with spouse</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortgage over $100,000</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreclosure of mortgage or loan</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in responsibilities at work</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Events</th>
<th>Life Crisis Units</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Son or daughter leaving home</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble with in-laws</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding personal achievement</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife begins or stops work</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin or end school</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in living conditions</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision in personal habits</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble with boss</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in work hours or conditions</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in residence</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in schools</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in recreation</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change in church activities</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in social activities</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortgage or loan less than $30,000</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in sleeping habits</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in number of family gettogethers</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in eating habits</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas alone</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor violations of the law</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your score is:


Appendix D

TO: Special Ed Colleagues
FROM: Jill Stine – Masters Candidate, Wittenberg University
RE: Your anonymity
DATE: 11/05/09

I had emailed you 10/08/09 asking if you’d participate in helping me complete my masters thesis by joining me in some answering some surveys, questionnaires, professional learning community gatherings, etc.

The purpose of this note is to assure you that any info you provide me will be kept completely anonymous. You will be assigned a number and, therefore, your identity will not be revealed.

This is standard procedure for anything like this. The statement of concordance with instructional review board guide is re-printed below.

F. Statement of Concordance with Instructional Review Board Guide

This proposed master’s thesis is exempt from the Institutional Review Board for the following reason as outlined by Wittenberg University and the Institutional Review Board. The exemption applies to: Survey or similar research that poses no risk or that protects the anonymity of subjects. “Federal policy requires IRB review of ‘research involving the use of educational tests, …survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior’ only if subjects can be directly or indirectly identified and if disclosure of their responses ‘outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects’ financial standing, employability, or reputation.’ Unless both conditions are met (anonymity is not assured and there is a risk of harm if responses were to be disclosed), such research is exempt.” Notification will be submitted to the Wittenberg Institutional Review Board through the process of my master’s thesis outline approval.
Please print and sign this form and send it to me via school mail. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate your participation.

I, ___________________________________________, hereby give Jill (your name goes here) Stine permission to use my responses to surveys, questionnaires, and written records as a part of the collection of data for her masters thesis for Wittenberg University. I understand that my identity will be kept anonymous.

______________________________
(your signature)

______________________________
(date)

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

Write your score from the Holmes-Rahe Stress Scale below

______________________________

(this part will be detached and labeled with your participant ID#)
Appendix E

CALANDAR OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY GATHERINGS

(location will always be Room 226 unless otherwise noted or agreed upon by the participants)

Gathering #1
Objective: to learn about one strategy or technique for reducing stress (come to one)
- Monday, Nov 9 at 3:00 PM
- Monday, Nov 9 at 5:00 PM
- Tuesday, Nov 10 at 3:00 PM
- Tuesday, Nov 10 at 5:00 PM

Gathering #2
Objective: to discuss and decide on an action for one of the top 4 issues in our dept (come to one)
- Thursday, Nov 12 at 3:00 PM
- Thursday, Nov 12 at 5:00 PM

Gathering #3
Objective: to learn another strategy or technique for reducing stress (come to one)
- Wednesday, Nov 18 at 3:00 PM
- Wednesday, Nov 18 at 5:00 PM

Gathering #4
Objective: to discuss and decide on an action for one of the top 4 issues in our dept (come to one)
- Monday, Nov 23 at 3:00 PM
- Monday, Nov 23 at 5:00 PM

Gathering #5
Objective: to learn another strategy or technique for reducing stress (come to one)
- Monday, Nov 30 at 3:00 PM
- Monday, Nov 30 at 5:00 PM
Appendix E (cont.)

Gathering #6
Objective: to discuss and decide on an action for one of the top 4 issues in our dept (come to one)
- Thursday, Dec 3 at 3:00 PM
- Thursday, Dec 3 at 5:00 PM

Gathering #7
Objective: to learn a final strategy or technique for reducing stress (come to one)
- Tuesday, Dec 8 at 3:00 PM
- Tuesday, Dec 8 at 5:00 PM

Gathering #8
Objective: to discuss and decide on an action for one of the top 4 issues in our dept (come to one)
- Thursday, Dec 10 at 3:00 PM
- Thursday, Dec 10 at 5:00 PM

(possible location for Gathering #8 could be at a local restaurant so we can celebrate!)

Please don’t look at all these dates and be scared away because the task appears too daunting. Whatever participation you can give me will be fine. If you cannot attend an odd numbered gathering (where we discuss techniques for reducing stress), ask me to send you the materials and you can still learn them and write a brief written response for me.

Bless all of you who can give me any time at all.

Jill
Appendix F

(To: special ed colleagues participating in the gathering of data for my masters thesis)

Read this short article (link provided below) prior to coming to the first gathering.

"The Secrets of Resilient People"


Take quiz at the bottom of the page. Keep the score for reflection.

Come to one of the gatherings to discuss how resilient we are (Room 226).

- Monday, Nov 9 at 3:00 PM
- Monday, Nov 9 at 5:00 PM
- Tuesday, Nov 10 at 3:00 PM
- Tuesday, Nov 10 at 5:00 PM

If you can't come, read the article and answer the reflection question below (please send me your answer):

"The Secrets of Resilient People"

Did I learn skills or discover tools to reduce stress?

0 - not at all
1 - slightly
2 - moderately
3 - the article provided a high level of new knowledge that I can apply to my life

Further comments?

Thanks,
Jill

Gathering #1
“The Secrets of Resilient People”
Article Discussion

Look at the characteristics of being a resilient person. Do you already manifest this characteristic in your life? Describe the things you already do. If not, give examples of things you’d like to do in your life in order to practice being more resilient.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics:</th>
<th>Examples of what you already do:</th>
<th>Examples of what you’d like to do:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. They stay connected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. They’re spiritual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. They’re playful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. They give back</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. They pick their battles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. They stay healthy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. They find the silver lining</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix H

EVALUATION – GATHERING #1

"The Secrets of Resilient People"

Did I learn skills or discover tools to reduce stress?

0 - not at all

1 - slightly

2 - moderately

3 - the article provided a high level of new knowledge that I can apply to my life

Further comments?

Appendix I-a

Resource for Gathering #2, 4, 6, 8
Action Research

Gathering# ______

Issue: ____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

Goal of Action Research: To work towards a better understanding of a situation in order to affect a positive personal and social change

Characteristics of Action Research:

- Moving towards an envisioned future aligned with values
- Systematic, reflective study of one’s actions and the effects of these actions in a workplace context
- Examine work and look for opportunities to improve
- Work with others to propose a new course of action to help their community improve its work practices
- Method is scientific; it changes something; observe the effects; examine the evidence
- Process by which an organization learns
- Share ideas with others in your community of practice who would value the knowledge you gained
- Continually reflect on practice so that peers can contribute feedback and support

Appendix I-b

WORKSHEET

1. state problem

2. why do we see this problem as important?

3. description of the problem

4. plan (put it into practice; with timeline)

5. data collection / analysis (documentation)

6. final reflection (looking back on how well it worked; revise it; try again)

Appendix J

CONCERN: Communication from Administrative Leadership

Why do we see this as an important concern?

Decisions from leadership affect us. Decisions can support us, cause confusion, or cause us to have even more questions.

Description of the concern

- Misinformation can be disseminated unknowingly.
- Leadership asks us to solve a problem. We have a good solution. Expertise within the dept is not utilized at all or it’s not utilized within a timely fashion.
- Decisions or instructions lack consistency and sometimes correctness.

PLAN OF ACTION:

1. Background: Dept has been asking for a job description for @ 15 years.

REQUEST: We need a job description so we can do our job better.

SEEK RESOLUTION FROM: Mr. “A” & Dr. “B”

2. Background: Administration and supervisors are ever-changing. There is confusion among the ranks.

REQUEST ANSWER TO QUESTION: What is our current chain of command? Who do we answer to for our different tasks at different times of the year? (Dept principal? School principal? Principal in charge of OGT? One of the supervisors at Central Office? Director of Special Education?)

SEEK RESOLUTION FROM: Mr. “A” & Dr. “B”

3. Background: We are not meeting as a dept on a monthly basis. Communication needs to be improved. Our dept principal will answer a question, provide direction, or make a decision which affects more than just one individual. However, others who are affected by his decision are not being informed.

REQUEST: When Mr. “A,” Mrs. “E,” Mrs. “F,” and Ms. “G” answer a question for a person in the dept and the result affects more than one individual, an email announcement of the question/answer needs to be sent out to the whole dept. If the result affects regular ed teachers who also teach students with disabilities, then the regular ed teachers need to be informed as well.

SEEK RESOLUTION FROM: Mr. “A” & Dr. “B”
Appendix J (cont.)

TIMELINE:

Response requested by Monday, Nov 23 as that is the next time our group will meet to evaluate this plan and begin work on Issue #2. Please acknowledge receipt and give us an indication of a timeline for possible resolution. Thank you.
Appendix K

(To: special ed colleagues participating in the gathering of data for my masters thesis)

I’m sending everyone a copy of the 2nd article in our “de-stress” series J

There is no online version of the article this week so it is on its way to you via snail-mail (~ Monday AM school mail ~)

It is titled “Regain Your Focus”

Please read it prior to coming to Gathering #3

Some folks can’t attend but tell me that they read and reflect on the article

If you can attend, we will be getting together to learn how focused we are (Room 226)

(choose one)

- Wednesday, Nov 18 after the spec ed dept mtg
- Wednesday, Nov 18 at 5:00 PM after Twilight
- Thursday, Nov 19 at 3:00 PM (added due to the dept mtg interfering in the previously announced schedule)

If you can’t come and still wish to participate, read the article and answer the reflection/evaluation that’s in the mailing. Return your thoughts to me as a part of data collection for my thesis.

One more thing – if you would like to be removed from this email list, please drop me a line and I will take care of that.

Thanks so much,

Jill
Appendix L

Gathering #3
“Regain Your Focus”
Article Discussion

Learning to keep our focus where we want it…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOCUS FOGGER</th>
<th>Ex. what you already do:</th>
<th>Ex. what you’d like to do:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERUPTIONS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What can you do?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unplug</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Change expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Set limits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOO MUCH STRESS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What can you do?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take a breather</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coach yourself</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pull up your playlist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOREDOM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What can you do?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Multi-task strategically</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consider “flow”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Try a different way</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix M

EVALUATION – GATHERING #3

"Regain Your Focus"

Did I learn skills or discover tools to reduce stress?

0 - not at all
1 - slightly
2 - moderately
3 - the article provided a high level of new knowledge that I can apply to my life

Further comments?

Appendix N

Student Interest Survey - English Resource Room Classes

Directions: Put a mark in the “YES” box if you would be interested in taking one of the courses on the list next school year. Mark the column for the grade you are currently in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current 9th Graders</th>
<th>9th ~ YES</th>
<th>Current 10th Graders</th>
<th>10th ~ YES</th>
<th>Current 11th Graders</th>
<th>11th ~ YES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Public Speaking</td>
<td>Advanced Public Speaking</td>
<td>Advanced Public Speaking</td>
<td>Advanced Public Speaking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Skills 1</td>
<td>Life Skills 1</td>
<td>Life Skills 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Skills 2</td>
<td>Life Skills 2</td>
<td>Life Skills 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Finance</td>
<td>Personal Finance</td>
<td>Personal Finance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Law</td>
<td>Practical Law</td>
<td>Practical Law</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology 1</td>
<td>Psychology 1</td>
<td>Psychology 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology 2</td>
<td>Psychology 2</td>
<td>Psychology 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish I</td>
<td>Spanish I</td>
<td>Spanish I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers: Please return completed surveys to Ms. Stine no later than Wed, Dec 2

Thank you!
Appendix O

PROBLEM: Special Education Scheduling Concerns

Why do we see this problem as important?

- Scheduling sets the tone for dept/bldg as a learning community
- The federal govt has determined that transition goals now drive the IEP, therefore not enough courses are offered which will allow transition goals to be met
- Students with disabilities need to take courses in the same sequence as their regular ed peers (as regular ed students do not take their courses out of sequence)

Description of the problem

- Special ed schedule is rigid; “singleton” offerings cause scheduling constraints; there are not enough elective choices for our students
- Teachers could be utilized more effectively if there weren’t small resource room classes of 2 - 4 students of the same subject; balancing class sizes (yet keeping them a manageable size) could open up a space for a teacher to teach another course
- Dept teachers’ expertise and experience not taken into consideration when scheduling problems within the dept need to be solved

PLAN OF ACTION:

1. Background: There is a new thrust from the federal govt that the students’ transition plan should drive the IEP.

   REQUEST: More resource room courses are needed which provide specific curricular content for students so they may meet their transition goals.

   DATA COLLECTION: English Resource Room classes were surveyed @ their course interests. See attached addendum.

   SEEK RESOLUTION FROM: Mr. “A” & Dr. “B”

2. Background: Optimal class sizes for a resource room would be one that is manageable based on the level of special needs of the students on the roster

   REQUEST: Criteria needs to be determined as to the size of resource room classes; a cap level needs to be established that takes into consideration the specific needs of the students with disabilities on the roster; ultra-small classes (2 – 4 students) should be avoided if possible so as to utilize teachers most effectively

   SEEK RESOLUTION FROM: Mr. “A” & Dr. “B”

3. Background: An attempt to allow spec ed students to take courses out of the recommended sequence was not successful. This attempt was made in order to create a scheduling convenience for a certain population of students.
Appendix O (cont.)

There is a prerequisite of understanding within content knowledge between course offerings. Regular ed students would not be allowed to take courses out of order. Special ed students would be at an even greater disadvantage to be forced to take courses out of order.

REQUEST: A practice of allowing special ed students to take courses out of order from that which is expected by regular ed students shall not be instituted.

SEEK RESOLUTION FROM: Mr. “A” & Dr. “B”

Background: Dept teachers have a wide variety of experience in working with their students and they have not been utilized to solve scheduling problems

REQUEST: Experienced teachers in the dept need to be utilized to create the most effective, optimal schedule for the students they will serve

SEEK RESOLUTION FROM: Mr. “A” & Dr. “B”

TIMELINE:

A meeting is requested prior to the student scheduling for the 2010-2011 school year. Please acknowledge receipt. Thank you.

ADDENEDUM

Results from Student Interest Survey from English Resource Room Classes of “Mrs. W,” “Mrs. X,” “Mr. Y,” and “Mrs. Z” (9\textsuperscript{th}, 10\textsuperscript{th}, 11\textsuperscript{th} graders)

- 37 students responded with 99 selections (@ < 3 selections per student)

Total tally for each elective course

- Advanced Public Speaking = 4
- Life Skills 1 = 18
- Life Skills 2 = 12
- Personal Finance = 13
- Practical Law = 15
- Psychology = 10
- Psychology = 3
- Spanish I = 24
Appendix P

(To: special ed colleagues participating in the gathering of data for my masters thesis)

Read this short article (link provided below) prior to coming to Gathering #5

This the third article in our de-stress series (there’s only ONE more article)

“The Kindness of Strangers”

This is a neat post-Thanksgiving story

Some folks can’t attend but they read and reflect on the article anyway

If you can attend, we will be getting together in Room 226 - (back door will be unlocked) on the date below

(come to one)
• Mon, Nov 30 at 3:00 PM
• Mon, Nov 30 at 5:00 PM

If you can't come, read the article and answer the reflection question below (please send me your answer):

“The Kindness of Strangers”

Did I learn skills or discover tools to reduce stress?

0 - not at all
1 - slightly
2 - moderately
3 - the article provided a high level of new knowledge that I can apply to my life

Further comments?

One more thing – if you would like to be removed from this email list, please drop me a line and I will take care of that.

Thanks so much,

Jill

Appendix Q

Gathering #5
“The Kindness of Strangers”
Article Discussion

How we look at other people?
Can it change our perspective?

Would you be so kind to share…?

• Tell about a situation where you’ve felt like an outsider?

• Can you share a time when you did an act of kindness? Or when someone performed an act of kindness for you?

• Have you ever lost anything of extreme sentimental value? What was your reaction?

• Has your faith every been “reignited in the random goodness of others souls?”

**Possible remedies for changing our perspective:**

(Journaling)
The author’s default mood was “muddy gloom,” so she “keeps a permanent inventory of inspiring moments” on the back page of her journal; “otherwise the seemingly miraculous can evaporate with a shift in mood.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas for changing our perspectives</th>
<th>Examples of what you already do:</th>
<th>Examples of what you’d like to do:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you journal?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you want to journal?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular prayer?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditation?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you need corrective lenses?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you click the world back into focus?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you need your inner lights flipped back on?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How can changing your perspective help in reducing stress?

Appendix R

EVALUATION – GATHERING #5

"The Kindness of Strangers"

Did I learn skills or discover tools to reduce stress?

0 - not at all
1 - slightly
2 - moderately
3 - the article provided a high level of new knowledge that I can apply to my life

Further comments?

TO: Special Ed Dept  
FROM: the Gathering within our dept  
RE: Issue #3 – Technology  
DATE: 12/04/09

Those in attendance at the Gathering 12/03/09 asked for a survey to go out to the members of our dept. Please complete this survey and return it to Jill Stine by Wed, Dec 9. Thank you.

Please use the following rating scale for your answers:
1 – strongly disagree  
2 – disagree  
3 – agree  
4 – strongly agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have access to a computer (with internet access) every period in the classrooms where I teach.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I have adequate technology training to do my job.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have never experienced work-stoppage during IEP writing season due to technology problems.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am always able to meet the needs of my students due to the lack of technology.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. It has been my practice that technology has improved the ability for me to do my job better.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further comments?
Appendix S-b

FROM: Participants of the Gathering within Spec Ed Dept
TO: Administrators who can help us
RE: Issue #3 – Technology
DATE: 12/22/09

Rating Scale:
1 – strongly disagree
2 – disagree
3 – agree
4 – strongly agree

Point value = number of respondents x the numerical value for that column

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have access to a computer (with internet access) every period in the classrooms where I teach.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL = 30; RECEIVES A RANKING OF “4”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I have adequate technology training to do my job.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL = 19; RECEIVED A RANKING OF “3”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have never experienced work-stoppage during IEP writing season due to technology problems.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL = 11; RECEIVES A RANKING OF “1”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am always able to meet the needs of my students due to the lack of technology.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL OF 16; RECEIVES A RANKING OF “2”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. It has been my practice that technology has improved the ability for me to do my job better.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL = 30; RECEIVES A RANKING OF “4”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further comments?
Lowest numerical rankings indicate items needing attention
Appendix T

PROBLEM: Concerns about technology available to Special Ed Dept

(Notification only to: Mr. “A” & Dr. “B”)

Why do we see this problem as important?

- Archaic practices prevent us from getting our job done
- We have a legal responsibility to complete federally required documents
- We are a population that is under-served and under-supported
- If it’s the students with disabilities category that keeps our district from meeting AYP, then why are we not the most supported dept so that we can reverse this trend?
- We waste so much time trying to use technology. Our time is better spent in the classroom. We are forced to use inadequate programs and/or are forced to recreate data lost by programs the district provides

Description of the problem

- We are left out of training unless we initiate inquiry
- Reduced or non-existent access to technology for those of us who are traveling teachers
- Technology is not compatible with our needs (i.e. we are told to use the new IEP form but the Adobe 9 software that runs it is not available unless we request it)
- Previous SSEM program contained our quarterly report data but was erased due to program change and we had to spend hours re-typing the data

PLAN OF ACTION:

1. Background: Our dept is under-served and under-supported in terms of available technology.

REQUEST: For traveling teachers, the following needs to be available: laptops with wireless internet connection or multiple drop-down lines in every room we are assigned to use. Timeline - beginning of 2nd semester.

DATA COLLECTION: Surveys were sent out to members of our dept in order to solicit status of available technology. Results of survey attached.

SEEK RESOLUTION FROM: Mr. “A” & Dr. “B”

Appendix T (cont.)

2.

Background: Pertinent training is needed in order for us to properly complete our required paperwork. Also in the future, we would need to be included in technology training sessions when the rest of staff is invited (and not have to wait until summer).

REQUEST: Multiple trainings are needed and a timeline needs to be set for each one.

1) Previous training on the new IEP program was inadequate and we were not given the opportunity to evaluate that training. Competent and experienced facilitator requested to provide the training. Timeline – early January, 2010.


3) Training for EMIS writing. Cheat sheets were sent but questions still remain. Training via cheat sheets is inadequate. Face-to-face training is requested. Timeline – February, 2010.

4) Mr. “Y” is creating a staff development to teach us how to do as much of our documentation online and thus save time and paper. We are requesting this training. Timeline – March, 2010

SEEK RESOLUTION FROM: Mr. “A” & Dr. “B”


Background: We need an update on current software available to assist us in teaching in our content area. We need an update on current assistive technology available to assist us in teaching in our content area. We need equipment which would improve our students’ ability to grasp knowledge within the classroom experience.

REQUEST: Competent experts from the SERRC Center are requested to provide inservice in the above areas. Timeline – February, 2010 (prior to “ordering” deadline)

SEEK RESOLUTION FROM: Mr. “A” & Dr. “B”

Appendix T (cont.)

3. Background: Old and new IEP programs are a source of frustration. Quarterly report data was lost when the district needed to switch to a new program. Not only was data lost, but time was lost by teachers having to recreate data.

REQUEST: In the future it should be understood that if/when needed documents are erased due to events beyond our control; administration will assign us professional leave to recreate lost documents.

SEEK RESOLUTION FROM: Mr. “A” & Dr. “B”


4. Technology can be wonderful. But in some cases a good old fashioned xerox machine is necessary in order to complete a task. In the past, paraprofessionals were available for clerical assistance when they were not engaged with their student(s). Intervention Specialists need to xerox quarterly reports and other documents of a confidential nature. This takes time away from teaching and planning.

REQUEST: Paraprofessionals have time when they are not engaged with their student(s). Could the dept principal determine which paraprofessionals are available and let Intervention Specialists know so they may make contact for assistance with xeroxing?

SEEK RESOLUTION FROM: Mr. “A” & Dr. “B”

TIMELINE:

Please acknowledge receipt and help us seek a resolution to our request for an approved schedule of trainings with sufficient notification so we have time to prepare. And substitutes provided for our professional leave.

Thank you.
Gathering #7
“Just Breathe”
Article Discussion

**TAKING A DEEP BREATH (check if you desire the stated quality)**
- quickest way to subdue stress
- stave off sickness
- stay calm

**REASONS TO IMPROVE BREATHING**
- gain energy
- release toxins
- help organs work efficiently

**BREATHING CHANGES DEPENDING ON THE SITUATION**

**Anxious**
- elevates heart rate
- increases blood pressure
- weakens immune system
- increase risk of developing disorders like cardiovascular disease

**Calm**
- blood pressure drops
- heart rate drops
- anchor us in the present moment
- quell worry
- increase productivity

**FOLLOW EASY BREATHING EXERCISES 1-2-3...**
- other suggestions or ideas?

Appendix V

EVALUATION – GATHERING #7

"Just Breathe"

Did I learn skills or discover tools to reduce stress?

0 - not at all
1 - slightly
2 - moderately
3 - the article provided a high level of new knowledge that I can apply to my life

Further comments?

Appendix W

Class Size Tracking Sheet for Inclusion

Subject________________________________________ Period________

Intervention Specialist_______________________________________________

Regular Ed Teacher ________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>number of regular ed. students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster =</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on Intervention Specialist’s roster =</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster who are documented special ed. students =</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage of special ed. students =</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Operating Standards for Students with Disabilities states that districts “shall determine ratios for an individual service provider by considering… the severity of each eligible child’s need, and the level and frequency of services for children to attain IEP goals and objectives.” #3301-51-09 item (I)(1)(b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please answer the following questions:</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does of the size of this class allow for each student with a disability to receive the level and frequency of described accommodation services in order to meet his/her goals and objectives?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the size of this class allow for the students you serve to have successful outcomes?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix W-a

### Class Size Tracking Sheet for Inclusion

Subject: U.S. History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>number of regular ed. students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster =</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on Intervention Specialist’s roster =</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster who are documented special ed. students =</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage of special ed. students =</td>
<td>70.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Operating Standards for Students with Disabilities states that districts “shall determine ratios for an individual service provider by considering… the severity of each eligible child’s need, and the level and frequency of services for children to attain IEP goals and objectives.” #3301-51-09 item (l)(1)(b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please answer the following questions:</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the size of this class allow for each student with a disability to receive the level and frequency of described accommodation services in order to meet his/her goals and objectives?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the size of this class allow for the students you serve to have successful outcomes?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COMMENT:** Special Ed population is more than ½ of the total class

Data Collected – 10/09
"Xanadu" High School
**Appendix W-b**

**Class Size Tracking Sheet for Inclusion**

Subject: Algebra I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>number of regular ed. students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster =</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on Intervention Specialist’s roster =</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster who are documented special ed. students =</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage of special ed. students =</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Operating Standards for Students with Disabilities states that districts “shall determine ratios for an individual service provider by considering… the severity of each eligible child’s need, and the level and frequency of services for children to attain IEP goals and objectives.” #3301-51-09 item (l)(1)(b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please answer the following questions:</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does of the size of this class allow for each student with a disability to receive the level and frequency of described accommodation services in order to meet his/her goals and objectives?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the size of this class allow for the students you serve to have successful outcomes?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collected – 10/09
“Xanadu” High School
Appendix W-c

Class Size Tracking Sheet for Inclusion

Subject: Integrated Science I

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>number of regular ed. students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster =</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on Intervention Specialist’s roster =</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster who are documented special ed. students =</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage of special ed. students =</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Operating Standards for Students with Disabilities states that districts “shall determine ratios for an individual service provider by considering… the severity of each eligible child’s need, and the level and frequency of services for children to attain IEP goals and objectives.” #3301-51-09 item (I)(1)(b)

Please answer the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does of the size of this class allow for each student with a disability to receive the level and frequency of described accommodation services in order to meet his/her goals and objectives?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the size of this class allow for the students you serve to have successful outcomes?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COMMENT: Special Ed population is more than ½ of the total class
Appendix W-d

Class Size Tracking Sheet for Inclusion

Subject: Math 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>number of regular ed. students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster =</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on Intervention Specialist’s roster =</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster who are documented special ed. students =</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage of special ed. students =</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Operating Standards for Students with Disabilities states that districts “shall determine ratios for an individual service provider by considering… the severity of each eligible child’s need, and the level and frequency of services for children to attain IEP goals and objectives.” #3301-51-09 item (I)(1)(b)

Please answer the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does of the size of this class allow for each student with a disability to receive the level and frequency of described accommodation services in order to meet his/her goals and objectives?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the size of this class allow for the students you serve to have successful outcomes?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collected – 10/09
“Xanadu” High School
Appendix W-e

Class Size Tracking Sheet for Inclusion

Subject: Personal Financial Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>number of regular ed. students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster =</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on Intervention Specialist’s roster =</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster who are</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>documented special ed. students =</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage of special ed. students =</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Operating Standards for Students with Disabilities states that districts “shall determine ratios for an individual service provider by considering… the severity of each eligible child’s need, and the level and frequency of services for children to attain IEP goals and objectives.” #3301-51-09 item (l)(1)(b)

Please answer the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does of the size of this class allow for each student with a disability to receive the level and frequency of described accommodation services in order to meet his/her goals and objectives?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the size of this class allow for the students you serve to have successful outcomes?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COMMENT: Special Ed population is more than ½ of the total class

Data Collected – 10/09
“Xanadu” High School
Appendix W-f

Class Size Tracking Sheet for Inclusion

Subject: World Studies

| Number of Regular Ed. Students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s Roster | 12 |
| Number of Students on Intervention Specialist’s Roster | 8 |
| Number of Students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s Roster who are Documented Special Ed. Students | 0 |
| Percentage of Special Ed. Students | 40% |

The Operating Standards for Students with Disabilities states that districts “shall determine ratios for an individual service provider by considering… the severity of each eligible child’s need, and the level and frequency of services for children to attain IEP goals and objectives.” #3301-51-09 item (l)(1)(b)

| Please answer the following questions | YES | NO |
| Does the size of this class allow for each student with a disability to receive the level and frequency of described accommodation services in order to meet his/her goals and objectives? | X |
| Does the size of this class allow for the students you serve to have successful outcomes? | X |

Data Collected – 10/09
“Xanadu” High School
Appendix W-g

Class Size Tracking Sheet for Inclusion

Subject: World Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>number of regular ed. students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster =</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on Intervention Specialist’s roster =</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster who are documented special ed. students =</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage of special ed. students =</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Operating Standards for Students with Disabilities states that districts “shall determine ratios for an individual service provider by considering…the severity of each eligible child’s need, and the level and frequency of services for children to attain IEP goals and objectives.” #3301-51-09 item (l)(1)(b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please answer the following questions:</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does of the size of this class allow for each student with a disability to receive the level and frequency of described accommodation services in order to meet his/her goals and objectives?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the size of this class allow for the students you serve to have successful outcomes?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COMMENT: Special Ed population is ½ of the total class

Data Collected – 10/09
"Xanadu" High School
Appendix W-h

**Class Size Tracking Sheet for Inclusion**

Subject: American Gov’t

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>number of regular ed. students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster =</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on Intervention Specialist’s roster =</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster who are documented special ed. students =</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage of special ed. students =</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Operating Standards for Students with Disabilities states that districts “shall determine ratios for an individual service provider by considering… the severity of each eligible child’s need, and the level and frequency of services for children to attain IEP goals and objectives.” #3301-51-09 item (l)(1)(b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does of the size of this class allow for each student with a disability to receive the level and frequency of described accommodation services in order to meet his/her goals and objectives?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the size of this class allow for the students you serve to have successful outcomes?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COMMENT:** Special Ed population is more than ½ of the total class

Data Collected – 10/09
“Xanadu” High School
Appendix W-i

Class Size Tracking Sheet for Inclusion

Subject: English II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>number of regular ed. students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster =</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on Intervention Specialist’s roster =</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of students on the Regular Ed. Teacher’s roster who are documented special ed. students =</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage of special ed. students =</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Operating Standards for Students with Disabilities states that districts “shall determine ratios for an individual service provider by considering… the severity of each eligible child’s need, and the level and frequency of services for children to attain IEP goals and objectives.” #3301-51-09 item (I)(1)(b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please answer the following questions:</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does of the size of this class allow for each student with a disability to receive the level and frequency of described accommodation services in order to meet his/her goals and objectives?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the size of this class allow for the students you serve to have successful outcomes?</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COMMENT: Special Ed population is more than ½ of the total class

Data Collected – 10/09
“Xanadu” High School
Appendix X

PROBLEM: Inclusion/working with regular ed teachers

Why do we see this problem as important?

- The goal of Inclusion cannot be met when there are not enough regular ed students on the roster. Students with disabilities are selected for placement in Inclusion so they may observe the modeling available from regular ed students. If in this situation the special ed student can perform at the level or near the level of their peers, then it is truly the special ed student’s least restrictive environment. When an Inclusion classroom is overloaded with special ed students, then having disabilities becomes the least common denominator. The room then becomes a special ed classroom which can become a deterrent to the progress of the regular ed student.

Description of the problem

- Students needs cannot be met within all the situations described here: 1) classes where caps are too high; 2) students with disabilities comprise too large a portion of the roster in an Inclusion class (students with disabilities show up on the roster of the regular ed teacher making the total number of special ed students even larger)
- Dept teachers’ expertise and experience not taken into consideration in the following situations: creating effective Inclusion teaching teams;

PLAN OF ACTION:

1. **Background**: Students’ individual accommodations cannot be met within the Inclusion setting when the class size is out of balance.

   **REQUEST**: Inclusion rosters should contain no more than 1/3 students with disabilities (currently the ratio is ½ or larger)

   **DATA COLLECTION**: See attached “Inclusion Class Size” tracking sheets for documented negative cases. Percentage of special ed population where Intervention Specialists stated accommodations where able to be delivered and successful outcomes were apparent: 31%, 35%, 36%, 37%, 37.5%, 40%, 42%

   **SEEK RESOLUTION FROM**: Mr. “A” & Dr. “B”
Appendix X (cont.)

2. **Background**: Intervention Specialists are being placed in Inclusion situations where their expertise, teaching preferences, etc. are not taken into consideration. When an Intervention Specialist is placed in his/her optimal Inclusion situation, everyone wins – the students, the regular classroom teacher, and more. Unfortunately, in some instances, Intervention Specialists are placed in situations where his/her expert skills and content knowledge is not able to be utilized.

**REQUEST**: 1) There should be a limit to the number of regular ed teachers an Intervention Specialist has to work with in Inclusion. 2) There should be a limit to the number of entry-level teachers he/she has to work with in Inclusion. 3) There should be a limit to the number courses an Intervention Specialist is assigned to for Inclusion. 4) Co-teachers should have common planning periods. 5) An Intervention Specialist should not be relegated to office supervision. Class periods should not be wasted when courses could be taught.

**SEEK RESOLUTION FROM**: Mr. “A” & Dr. “B”

3. **Background**: In the past, especially when we had a dept chairperson, Inclusion team pairings were chosen after much consideration. Some Inclusion teams which were paired for this year or definitely not in the best interest of the students with disabilities. Either it is not strength of the regular ed teacher to work with special needs students or there are other considerations that do not make the situation optimal for the Intervention Specialist.

**REQUEST**: Much consideration needs to occur when pairing Inclusion teams. Dialogue and collaboration should occur between teachers within the content depts and the special ed dept. First and foremost, ask if the regular ed teacher even wants to work with special ed students. If need be, criteria could be created to formulate who would make the best teams.

**SEEK RESOLUTION FROM**: Mr. “A” & Dr. “B”

**TIMELINE:**

Collaboration requested within depts prior to the finalizing of the teaching schedules for next year.

Please acknowledge receipt and give us an indication of a timeline for possible resolution.

Thank you.
Appendix Y

POST-PARTICIPATION SURVEY

Directions: Fill in the blank with the appropriate answer or circle the correct multiple-choice response as displayed.

1. Number of years of teaching experience: (0-10 years) (11-20 years) (21-30+ years)

2. I collaborated with my department cohorts on issues that needed to be solved. 
   ______ YES ______ NO

3. Rate your opinion of the following issues that were sent to administration for resolution/action:

   “I feel the level of progress in improving the situation is…” (answer once for each bold title)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISSUES</th>
<th>BEST (5)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>WORST (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| A. Communication from Administrative Leadership: we asked for…  
  1) a job description  
  2) a chain of command  
  3) improved communication within the dept |
| B. Wayne Special Education Scheduling Concerns: we asked for…  
  1) more resource room courses (*data provided from 42 student surveys*)  
  2) criteria for size of resource room rosters must consider the special needs of the students  
  3) resource room students must take courses in prerequisite order  
  4) use experienced teachers from the dept to create optimal schedule for students we will serve |
C. Technology Available to Wayne Special Education Department: we asked for…
(data provided via our responses to technology surveys from 11 of us)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BEST (5)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>WORST (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>laptops for traveling teachers with wireless internet connection or drop-down lines in rooms we are assigned to use (by beg of 2nd sem)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>adequate training on new IEP program with competent and experienced facilitator (by Jan, 2010)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>training from Teacher #13 re: new requirements for transition (by Jan, 2010)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>proper training for EMIS writing not via cheat sheets (by Feb, 2010)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>staff development training by Mr. “Y” re: doing as much documentation online as possible (by Mar, 2010)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>training from SERRC center re: current software, assistive technology, etc. (by Feb, 2010 prior to ordering deadline)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>when data (i.e. for quarterly reports) is lost via district change in programs, dept members will be given professional leave to restore data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>paraprofessionals with time to provide copying assistance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D. Improving the Inclusion Setting: we asked for…
(data provided from 10 class size surveys)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Inclusion rosters should contain no more than 1/3 students with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Limit # of teachers Intervention Specialist has to work with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Limit # of entry-level teachers Intervention Specialist has to work with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Limit # of courses Intervention Specialist is assigned to for Inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Co-teachers should have common planning periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Intervention Specialists should not be assigned to office supervision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(cont. on next page)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISSUES</th>
<th>BEST (5)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>WORST (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

E. Improving Intervention: we asked for…
1) criteria needs to be established to keep
   the roster down in order to meet the
   needs of the students most needing
   and/or willing to utilize opportunity
   (i.e. suggested criteria – students with all
   As and Bs and never need assistance,
   students who have no intention of
   utilizing opportunity, students with
   primarily all resource room classes
   have all needs met in their resource
   room periods and should go to regular
   study hall)

4. You’ve answered the question below before in the pre-participation survey. Final research it
   attempting to determine if your participation in a professional learning community such as “The
   Gathering” can make any difference in your thoughts of leaving your job.

   How often have you thought of quitting or changing your job?
   (never)        (daily)      (weekly)       (monthly)       (annually)

   Name___________________________________________
   (remember – your identity will be kept anonymous;
   you will be assigned a participant ID#)
Appendix Z

Dear Friends,

I cannot tell you how much I appreciate all your contributions of data for my master’s thesis through “The Gathering.” Enclosed you will find up to three items:

For only those who were in attendance at one of the Gatherings -
  1) a post-participation survey
  2) an evaluation for Staff Development vouchers

For all in the department -
  1) a survey for possible future participation of some sort

Again, thanks so much for all your help! Happy, happy New Year and tremendous blessings on your household! Who knows what this year will bring.

Blessings,

Jill

“I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul.”
Appendix Z (cont.)

TO: Members of Special Ed Dept
FROM: Jill Stine – previous facilitator of “The Gathering”
RE: INQUIRY @ FUTURE PARTICIPATION
DATE: 1/04/10

An “experiment” was conducted as a part of the collection of data for my masters’ thesis for Wittenberg University from Nov 9 to Dec 10.

Would you care to perpetuate any of the following within our Special Ed Dept?

**Goal of Action Research:** To work towards a better understanding of a situation in order to affect a positive personal and social change

**Characteristics of Action Research:**

- Moving towards an envisioned future aligned with values
- Systematic, reflective study of one’s actions and the effects of these actions in a workplace context
- Examine work and look for opportunities to improve
- Work with others to propose a new course of action to help their community improve its work practices
- Method is scientific; it changes something; observe the effects; examine the evidence
- Process by which an organization learns
- Share ideas with others in your community of practice who would value the knowledge you gained
- Continually reflect on practice so that peers can contribute feedback and support

Please complete survey and return to Jill Stine

SURVEY @ FUTURE PARTICIPATION

1. Directions: Circle the correct multiple-choice response as displayed.

Indicate your category of years of teaching experience:

(0 -10 years)
(11 - 20 years)
(21 - 30+ years)

2. Directions: Select your answer by marking the “yes” or “no” boxes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SURVEY QUESTION</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the future, I would meet after school to share stress-reducing strategies or articles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the future, I would meet to work on action plans in order to seek improvements in practices within our special ed dept</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name__________________________________________

(remember – your identity will be kept anonymous; you will be assigned a participant ID#)