



REIMAGINING SOCIAL CHANGE



Tools for Collaborative Sensemaking

NOVEMBER 17, 2015

Hallie Preskill and Srik Gopal, FSG; Cris Kutzli, Grand Rapids Community Foundation



BOSTON

GENEVA

MUMBAI

SAN FRANCISCO

SEATTLE

WASHINGTON, DC

FSG.ORG

What do you see in this picture? What does it mean?



Defining Collaborative Sensemaking

- “Collaborative sensemaking occurs when a group of people with **diverse background** engage in the process of making sense of information **rich, complex, and dynamic situations**.” ...And, it “typically occurs in a **context that is continuously shifting** and would involve multiple people engaging in sensemaking efforts.” (Umaphy, 2010)
- “Sensemaking is an **ongoing process** through which **meaning is constructed** and explanations developed in an effort to establish what is going on” (Duffy, Baber, & Stanton, 2013, referencing Weick, 1995).
- “Collaborative sensemaking, the emphasis is on the ability of a **group to form, organize and reach consensus** in the face of a novel problem.” (Duffy, Baber, & Stanton, 2013)
- “Sensemaking is the activity that enables us to **turn the ongoing complexity of the world into a situation that is comprehended** explicitly in words that serves as a **springboard into action**’.” (Ancona, 2011)

Sensemaking Involves...

- Exploring the wider system
- Pursuing opinions that differ from our own
- Testing assumptions
- Adopting multiple perspectives
- Gathering and acting on data
- Supporting consensus building and reaching agreement
- Facilitating and moderating interactions

Collaborative Sensemaking Through Appreciative Inquiry

“Our most effective knowledge sharing tool is conversation. The words we choose, the questions we ask, and the metaphors we use to explain ourselves, are what determine our success in creating new knowledge, as well as sharing that knowledge with each other.” – Nancy Dixon



The Appreciative Philosophy

- What we focus on becomes our reality; *We must be the change we want to see.*
- In every society, organization, or group, something works.
- Reality is created in the moment; there are multiple realities.
- The act of asking questions is an intervention.
- People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future when they carry forward parts of the past.
- It is important to value differences.
- The language we use creates our reality.
- People are motivated to act when they have a choice in what they will do.

Implementing Appreciative Inquiry

Phase 1: *Inquire* – Identifying the “best of what is”

- Paired interviews
- Core questions:
 - Peak experience
 - Values
 - Wishes
- Share stories in groups of 4
- Identify themes

Appreciative Inquiry Reflections

- How was activity an example of collaborative sensemaking?
What sense was this making?
- What are some ways you could use AI in your own collaborative activities?

What is a System?

sys·tem

A group of interacting, interrelated, and interdependent components that form a complex and unified whole. A system's overall purpose or goal is achieved through the actions and interactions of its components.

Characteristics of a System

- 1 It contains numerous subsystems.** Each component in a system is usually a “system within a system,” with its own set of interacting programs, policies, and strategies that meet certain beneficiary needs.
 - 2 It is also part of a larger system.** The system is an open system, meaning it interacts with other systems, has permeable boundaries, and is affected by its external environment.
 - 3 Interconnections are essential for optimal results.** A system has a goal or function that is best achieved when its components function together. More colloquially, with systems, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.
-

What is System Mapping?

system mapping

Creating a **visual depiction of a system**, identifying the **parts, interactions, and relationships** between actors / organizations / components in that system at a specific point in time

System maps can be used to:

- Better **understand roles** of current actors and their connections
- Identify **strong, weak, and missing connections**
- Identify **levers of change**
- Understand how actors are connected and where there are **opportunities**
- Help actors be better prepared to **understand system dynamics and connections**
- Identify **ideas and questions** the map raises for both strategy review (learning from the past) and strategy development (building and refining strategy in the future)

Key Considerations of Effective System Maps

The purpose of a system map is to **tell a story**

System mapping is an **iterative activity** that can and should be refined over time to reflect changing dynamics

A true system map defines the **connections and relationships between the interrelated elements**

Implementing System Mapping: Actor Maps

- Step 1: Populating the Map with Actors
- Step 2: Refining the Actors Map
- Step 3: Mapping Connections between Actors
- Step 4: Identifying Energy, Blockages, and Opportunities
- Step 5: Discussing Implications

System Mapping Reflections

- How was the activity an example of collaborative sensemaking? What sense was this making?
- What are some ways you could use System Mapping in your own collaborative activities?

Contact Information

- Hallie Preskill, FSG – hallie.preskill@fsg.org
- Srik Gopal, FSG – srik.gopal@fsg.org
- Cris Kutzli, Grand Rapids Community Foundation, ckutzli@grfoundation.org

Selected References and Resources

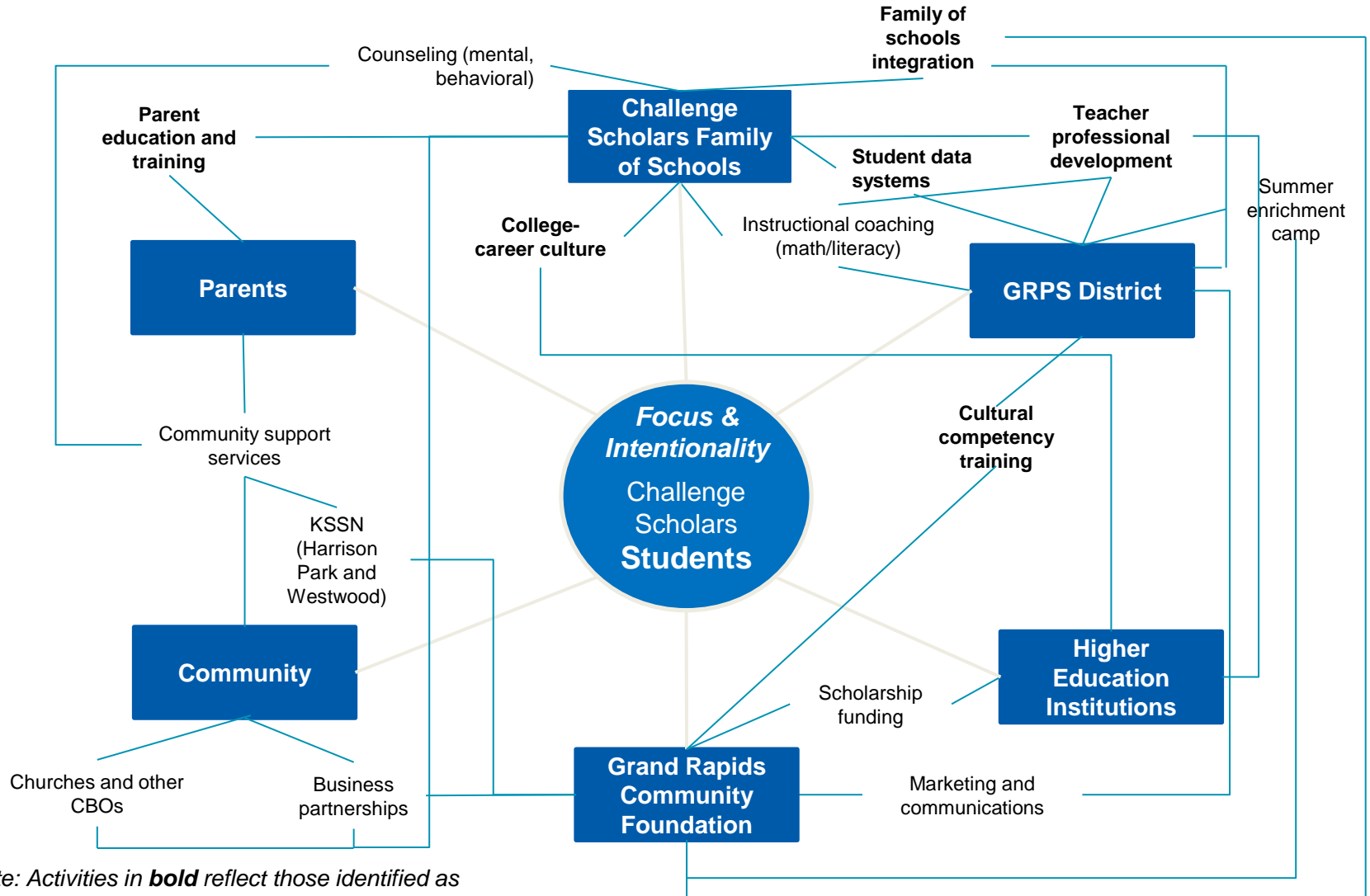
- Ancona, D. In S. Scott, N. Nohria, R. Khurana (eds.). (2011). Sensemaking: Framing and Acting in the Unknown. *Handbook of Teaching Leadership*. Sage, p. 4.
- Appreciative Inquiry Commons: <https://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu>
- Beer, T. and Coffman, J. (2015). System Mapping Made Simpler (workshop). Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) Learning Conference <http://proposalspace.com/publishdocs/754/download>
- Cook, J. (2015). Introduction to System Mapping. Blog Post. FSG, August, 2015. <http://www.fsg.org/blog/introduction-system-mapping>
- Cooperrider, D. L. & Whitney, D. (2005). *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
- Duffy, T., Baber, c. & Stanton, N. Measuring Collaborative Sensemaking. (May, 2013). Proceedings of the 10th International ISCRAM Conference – Baden-Baden, Germany
- Hammond, S. A. (2013). *The thin book of appreciative inquiry*. 3rd. Ed. Thin Book Publishing.
- Harries, E., Wharton, R. and Abercrombie, R. (2015). *Systems Change: A Guide to What It Is and How to Do It..* New Philanthropy Capital
- Preskill, H. & Catsambas, T. T. (2006). *Reframing evaluation through appreciative inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Umapathy, K. (2010). Requirements to support Collaborative Sensemaking" *Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) Workshop on Collaborative Information Seeking*. Available at: http://works.bepress.com/karthikeyan_umapathy/4
- Whitney, D. and Trosten-Bloom, A. (2010). *The power of Appreciative Inquiry*. 2nd Ed. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
- Weick, K.E. (1995) *Sensemaking in Organizations*, London: Sage.

Appendix

Definition of Appreciative Inquiry

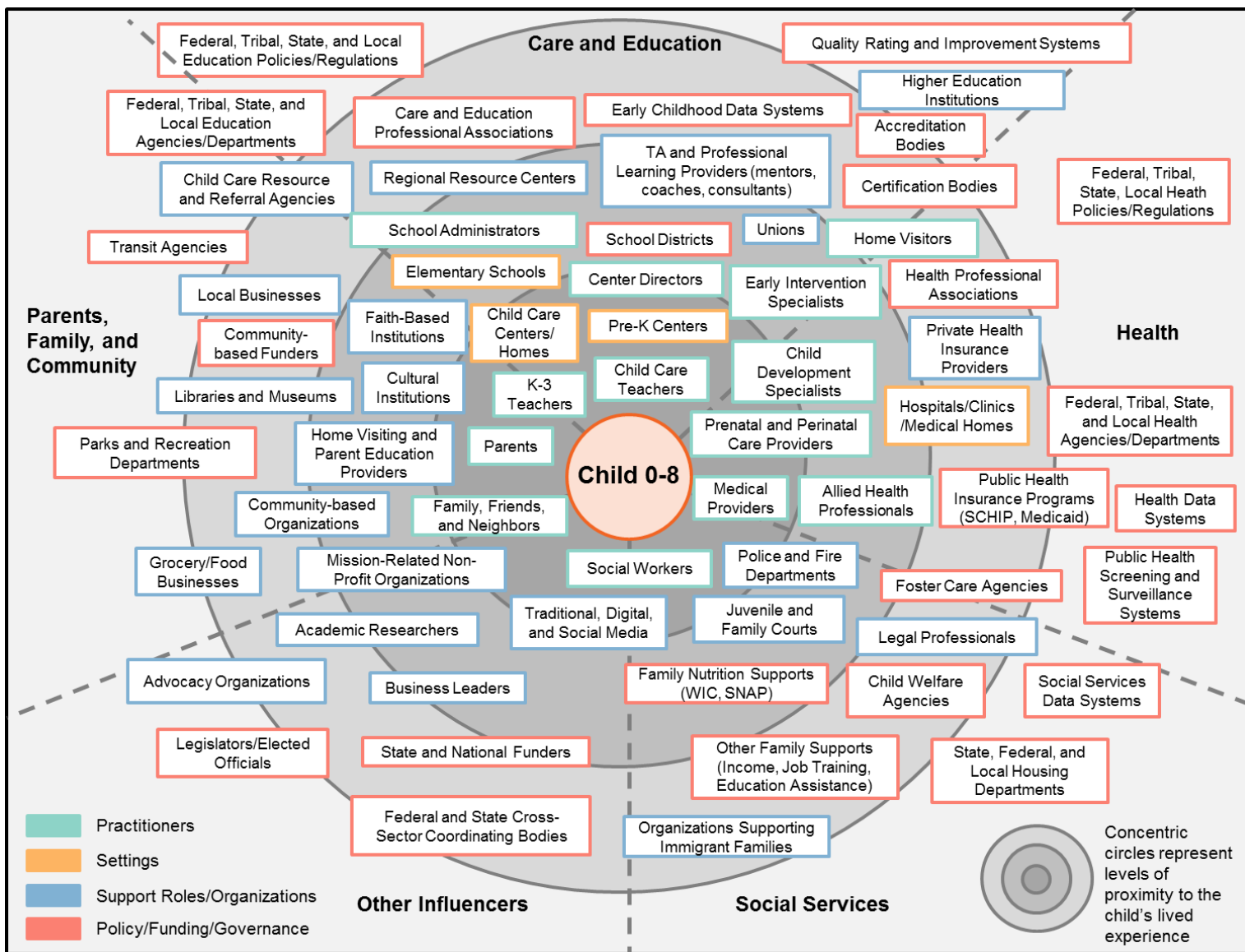
“is the study and exploration of what gives life to human systems when they function at their best. This approach to personal change and organization change is based on the assumption that questions and dialogue about strengths, successes, values, hopes, and dreams are themselves transformational. Appreciative Inquiry suggests that human organizing and change, at its best, is a relational process of inquiry, grounded in affirmation and appreciation.”

Example #1: Challenge Scholars Program in Grand Rapids



Note: Activities in **bold** reflect those identified as focus areas for SY 2014-2015

Example #2: Early Childhood, Generic (Institute of Medicine)



Example #3: Early Childhood, Specific (National Foundation)

