Workshopping approaches to building improvement infrastructure across the P-20 pipeline
UCEA- San Juan, Puerto Rico

Saturday, Nov 22, 2025 1:20 to 2:30pm,

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Kristen C. Wilcox PhD, University at Albany

Objective and Agenda

Objective: How to use continuous improvement (CI) processes and tools—specifically empathy and ecosystem maps- to support P-20 partnerships.

- Introducing P-20 equity issues
- Engaging with equity-focused problems of practice (POPs)
- Diving into continuous improvement processes and tools
- Sharing and reflecting on learning

Who we are: Matt

GRAND VALLEY
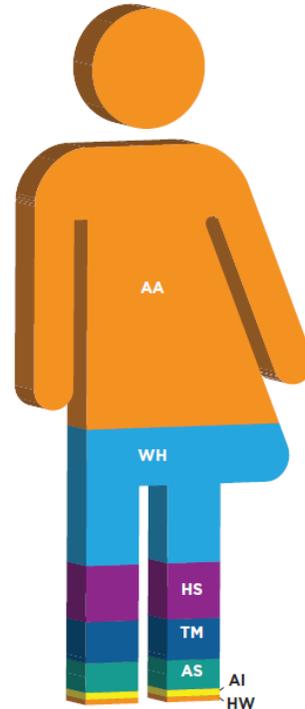STATE UNIVERSITY
CHARTER SCHOOLS
OFFICE

www.gvsu.edu/cso

79
Total Number of Schools Chartered in 2022-2023

35,111
K-12 Total Enrollment 2022-2023

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC ENROLLMENT

AA	African American	59.50%
WH	White	20.37%
HS	Hispanic	8.22%
TM	Two or More Races	6.72%
AS	Asian	4.94%
AI	American Indian	< 1.0%
HW	Hawaiian	< 1.0%

76%
GVSU-authorized Charter Schools FRL Average

52%
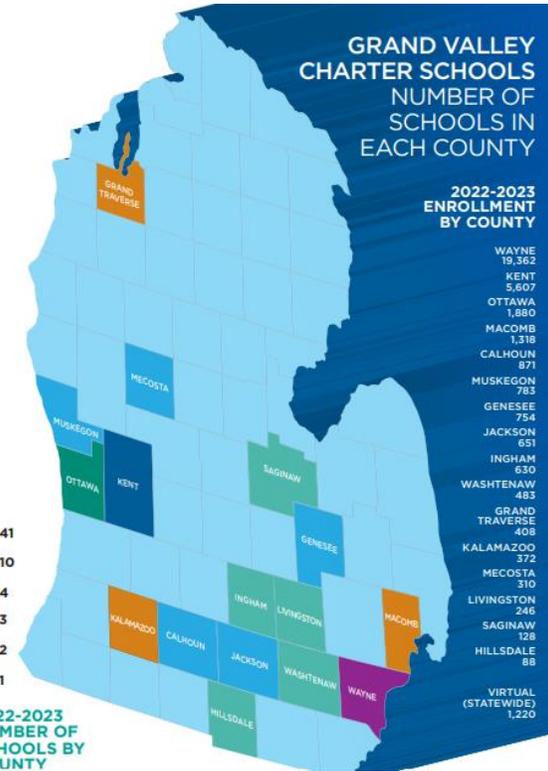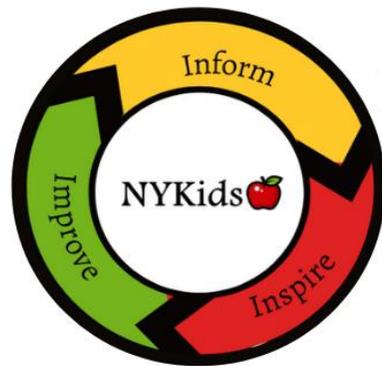Michigan FRL Average

10%
GVSU-authorized Charter Schools Special Education Average

14%
Michigan Special Education Average

GRAND VALLEY CHARTER SCHOOLS NUMBER OF SCHOOLS IN EACH COUNTY

2022-2023 ENROLLMENT BY COUNTY

WAYNE 19,362
KENT 5,607
OTTAWA 1,880
MACOMB 1,318
CALHOUN 871
MUSKEGON 783
GENESEE 754
JACKSON 651
INGHAM 630
WASHTENAW 483
GRAND TRAVERSE 408
KALAMAZOO 372
MECOSTA 310
LIVINGSTON 246
SAGINAW 128
HILLSDALE 88
VIRTUAL (STATEWIDE) 1,220

2022-2023 NUMBER OF SCHOOLS BY COUNTY

41
10
4
3
2
1

Who we are: Kristen

https://ny-kids.org/

Equity Issues across P-20

- Challenges in Collaboration
- Improvement Research in Education (IRE)
- Participatory Engagement
- Collaboration Benefits
- Power Relations and Expertise
- Equity Champions

Improvement Science and Problems of Practice

Problem of Practice:
a persistent, and specific problem experienced by practicing professional educators, the addressing of which has the potential to result in improved understanding, experience, and outcomes.
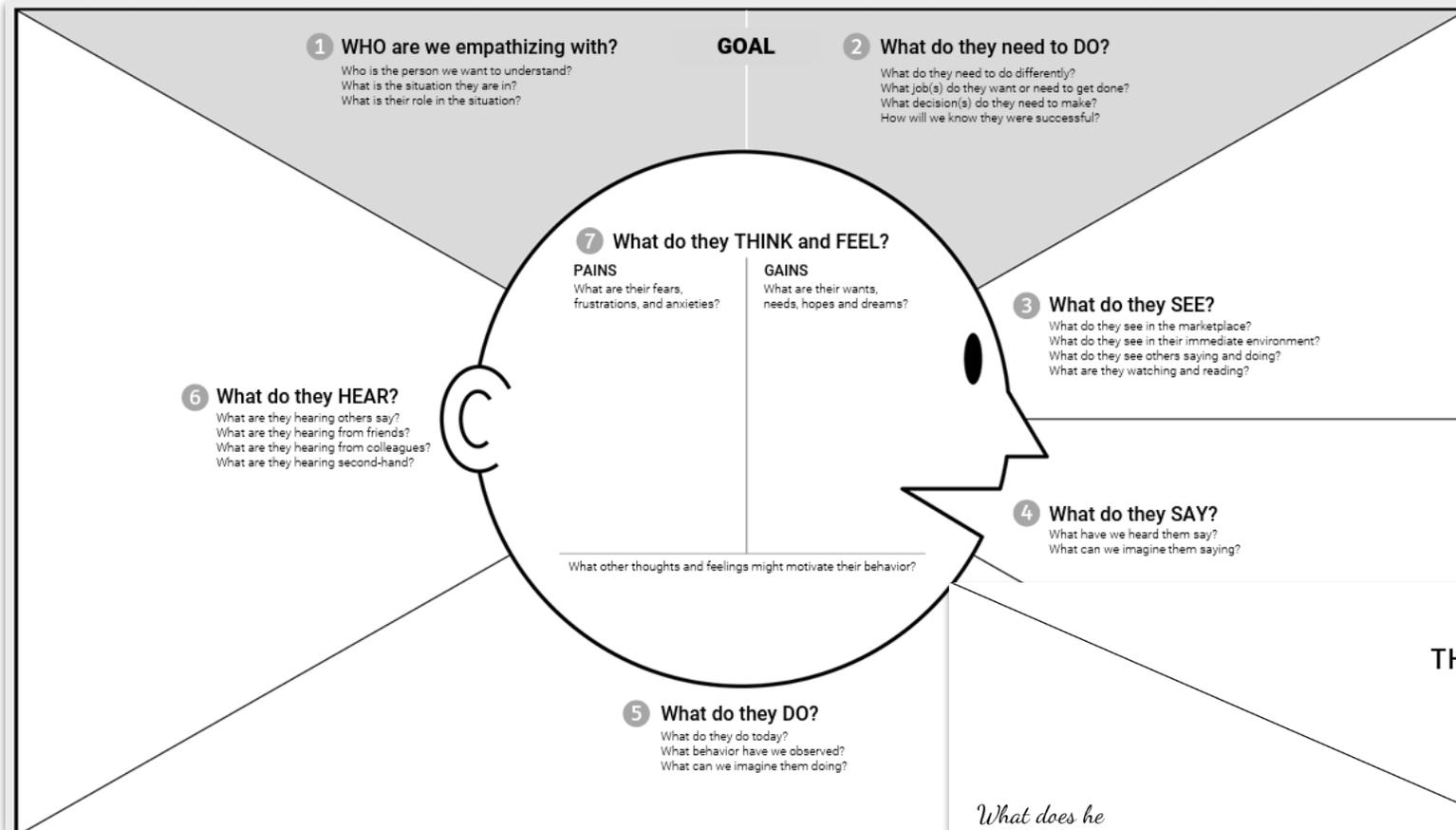

Six Principles

Be problem-focused and user-centered

Attend to variability

Organize as networks

6 CORE PRINCIPLES OF IMPROVEMENT

See the system
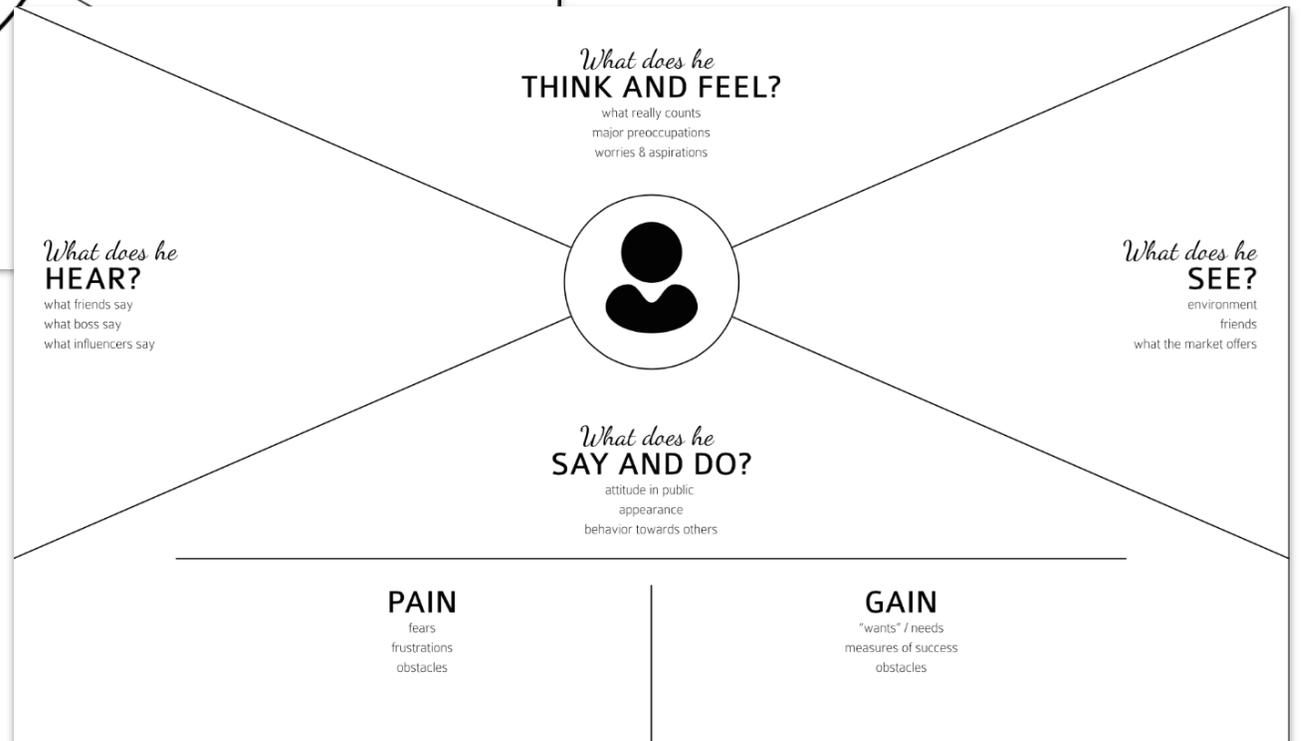
Learn through disciplined inquiry

Embrace measurement

Empathy Mapping

Step 1: Individual note-taking

1) What are some equity-focused problems of practice you have encountered or been focused on recently?
2) What have you done to address or study these problems of practice?
3) What challenges have you encountered in addressing or studying these problems of practice?

Empathy maps come in different shapes and sizes!

GOAL

1 WHO are we empathizing with?
Who is the person we want to understand?
What is the situation they are in?
What is their role in the situation?

2 What do they need to DO?
What do they need to do differently?
What job(s) do they want or need to get done?
What decision(s) do they need to make?
How will we know they were successful?

7 What do they THINK and FEEL?
PAINS
What are their fears, frustrations, and anxieties?
GAINS
What are their wants, needs, hopes and dreams?

3 What do they SEE?
What do they see in the marketplace?
What do they see in their immediate environment?
What do they see others saying and doing?
What are they watching and reading?

6 What do they HEAR?
What are they hearing others say?
What are they hearing from friends?
What are they hearing from colleagues?
What are they hearing second-hand?

What other thoughts and feelings might motivate their behavior?

4 What do they SAY?
What have we heard them say?
What can we imagine them saying?

5 What do they DO?
What do they do today?
What behavior have we observed?
What can we imagine them doing?

What does he
THINK AND FEEL?
what really counts
major preoccupations
worries & aspirations

What does he
HEAR?
what friends say
what boss say
what influencers say

What does he
SEE?
environment
friends
what the market offers

What does he
SAY AND DO?
attitude in public
appearance
behavior towards others

PAIN
fears
frustrations
obstacles

GAIN
"wants" / needs
measures of success
obstacles

Source: Adapted from XPLANE

Empathy Map courtesy of
www.eventmodelgeneration.com

Using Empathy Mapping

Step 2: Identify at least one person with a different color post it note (P12 or HE).

Step 3: Now with your "other color" post-it note partner - engage in using the empathy map protocol taking turns with P12 or HE leading questions. Use the empathy map tool and allow 5 minutes each.

1. Please tell me about how you responded to the questions.
2. What thoughts or feelings come to mind in relation to your responses to the questions (ie. "pains and gains")?
3. How might collaborating with a P-12 (if HE) or HE (if P-12) partner might support you in addressing or studying this problem of practice?
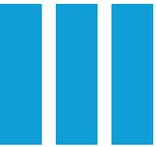
Debrief on Empathy Mapping

- What did you discover as you engaged in using this protocol about how your P-12 or HE peer is addressing or studying problems of practice?
- What do you see as the benefits of using such a protocol with those with whom you collaborate?
- What did you learn about how P-12 and HE improvers might help each other address challenges in addressing and studying problems of practice?

Ecosystem Mapping
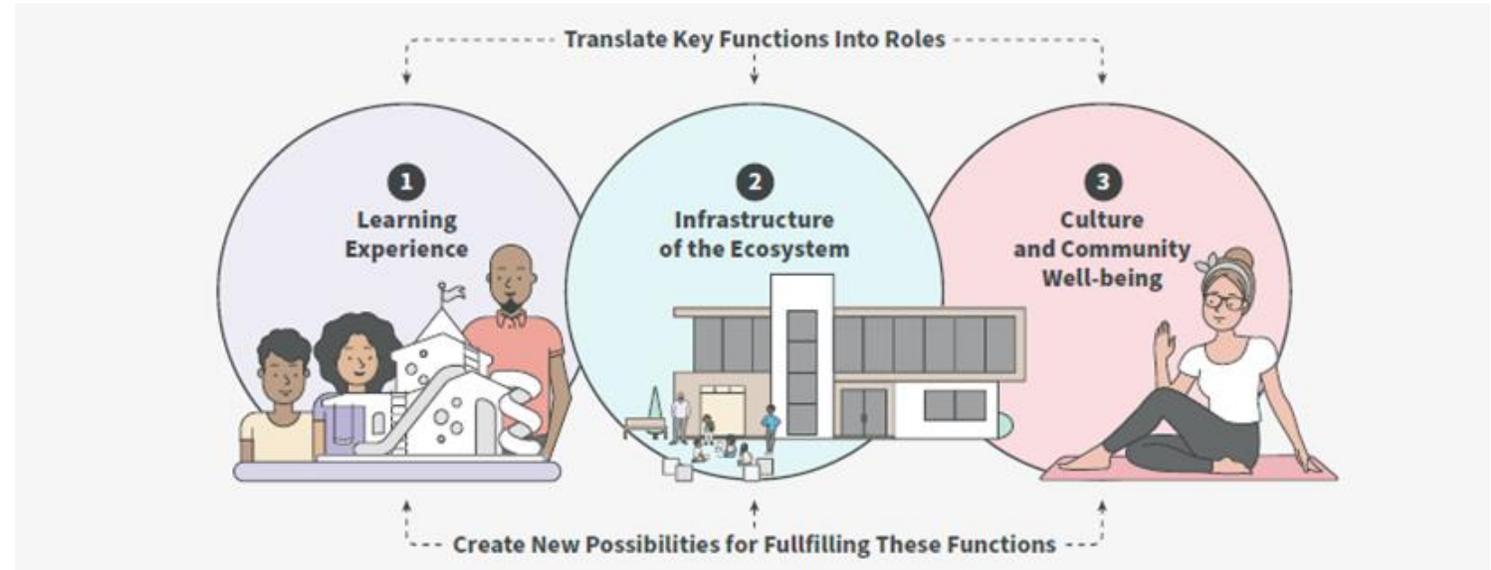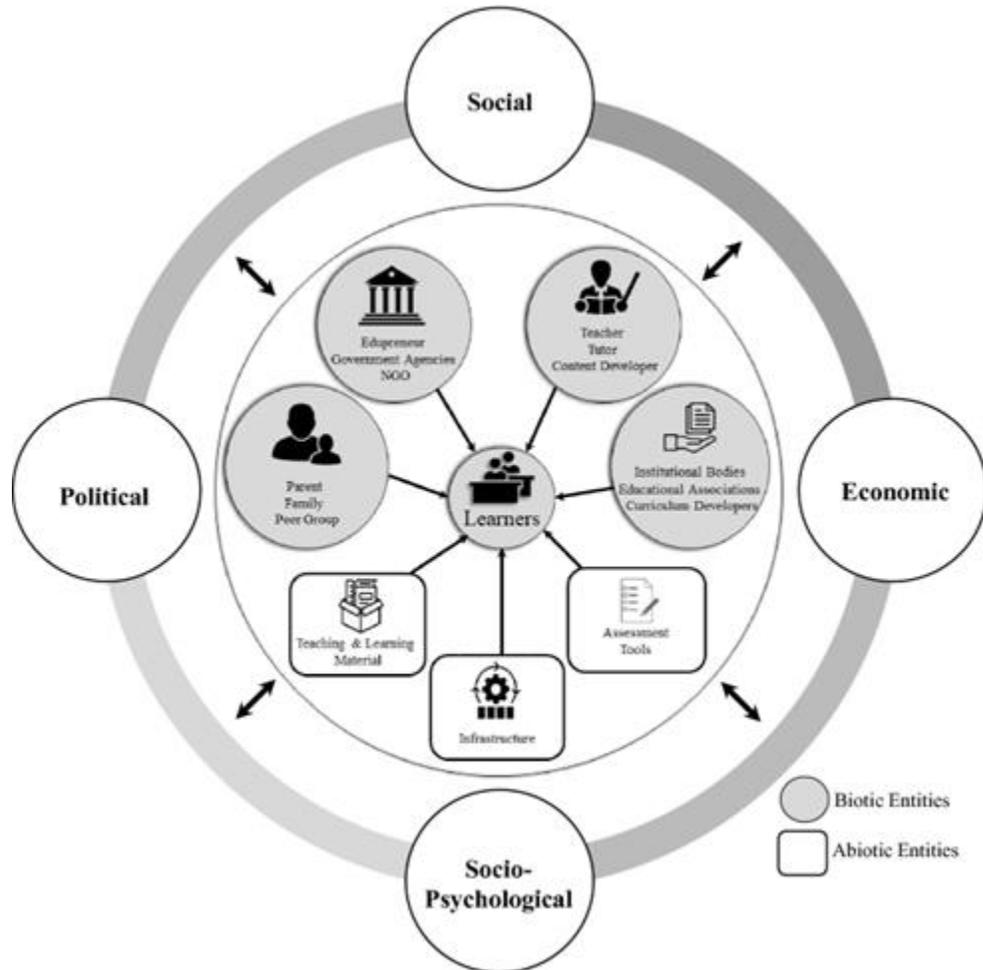
- Modern Educational Ecosystem (Bandyopadhyay, S. et al (2021))
- Domains and Key Functions of Thriving Ecosystems (Martinez Calvit, Education Reimagined (2023))

Diving into CI protocols and tools: Ecosystem Mapping

- Ecosystem mapping involves creating a map of the interconnections between all the people, organizations, ideas, and other factors that impact your problem.
- It can help you understand the interactions between different issues and sectors to find new opportunities for action and impact.

Sample Ecosystem Map: Charter School

Ecosystem Mapping

Using the sample Ecosystem Map at your table:

- Who the people, organizations, and roles that are relevant to your community context.
  - Hint: work small to big!
- What the ideas, issues, and contexts that influence your work.
- Where are the connections, interconnections, and other associations across groups and issues.

Lessons Learned

Matt's Key Lessons Learned

- COVET (Communication, Openness, Vulnerability, Experience, and Trust)

- See both the forest and the trees (human experience within systems that we live and work in)

Kristen's Key Lessons Learned

- Anchor partnership work in IS principles (like being user-centered and problem-focused)

- Anchor research into strategic planning and measurement systems with P-12 partners

- Invite diverse array of professionals in the school/university/other organizations into continuous improvement teams

Concluding Remarks

- We argue that for transformation in schools (as described in the ICSEI call this year) to occur, problems of equity of access to HE learning need to be addressed as a system problem.
- It is our intent to show how we, as P-20 boundary crossers and collaborators, do this in our practice and promote discussion with colleagues on how to continue to improve in this work.

Key References

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