



Applications of Collaborative Helping Maps: Supporting Professional Development, Supervision and Work Teams in Family-Centered Practice

WILLIAM C. MADSEN*

Collaborative, family-centered practice has become an influential approach in helping efforts across a broad spectrum of human services. This article draws from previous work that presented a principle-based, practice framework of Collaborative Helping and highlighted the use of Collaborative Helping maps as a tool both to help workers think their way through complex situations and to provide a guideline for constructive conversations between families and helpers about challenging issues. It builds on that work to examine ways to utilize Collaborative Helping maps at worker, supervisory, and organizational levels to enhance and sustain collaborative, family-centered practice and weave its core values and principles into the everyday fabric of organizational cultures in human service agencies and government agencies that serve poor and marginalized families and communities.

Keywords: Collaborative Clinical Practice; Family-Centered Services; Narrative Therapy

Fam Proc 53:3–21, 2014

Family-centered services represent a broad approach to helping families across many different contexts.¹ This approach offers access to a wide range of services, builds on family strengths, engages families on their own turf, emphasizes family choice in all aspects of planning and care, and offers flexible funding streams to simplify accessing resources (Walton, Sandau-Beckler, & Mannes, 2001). It is not just a shift in *what* kind of help is offered, but *how* that help is offered. The simplest encapsulation of this shift in the process of helping has been described by Shaheer Mustafa (at the time, director of a residential program for youth and families) as the “ABCs” of our work (Madsen & Gillespie, in press).

A – Making our work *Accountable* to the people we serve

B – *Believing* in resourcefulness

C – Working in *Collaboration* with families and other helpers

Collaborative Helping is an integrative practice framework that helps frontline workers ground their work in a commitment to these “ABCs” in the everyday messiness of

*Family-Centered Services Project, Cambridge MA.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to William C. Madsen, Family-Centered Services Project, 61 Dudley St., Cambridge, MA 02140. E-mail: madsen1@comcast.net

¹Over time, the terminology used has shifted from family-based to family-centered to family-driven services. Throughout, the commitment to strengths-based, collaborative partnerships has remained steadfast. The thing that has changed over time has been an increasing focus on accountability to people served. The current phrase “family-driven” with its attendant motto of “nothing about us without us” highlights the importance of bringing family voice and choice into the center of helping efforts (Duchnowski & Kutash, 2007). While this article utilizes the phrase “family-centered services,” it refers to an approach to this work that has consistently emphasized accountability to people served as a core principle of the work (Waldegrave, Tamasese, Tuhaka, & Campbell, 2003).

frontline practice (Madsen & Gillespie, in press). Previous *Family Process* articles have highlighted the practice framework as a whole (Madsen, 2009) and identified the use of Collaborative Helping maps both as a way to help workers think their way through complex situations and as a guideline for constructive conversations between workers and families about challenging situations (Madsen, 2011). This article builds on this previous work to examine ways to utilize Collaborative Helping maps at worker, supervisory, and organizational levels to sustain collaborative, family-centered practice. I will examine ways to use Collaborative Helping maps to support workers' overall professional development, contribute to constructive supervisory conversations about families, and enhance team and organizational functioning; all in the service of creating institutional structures and organizational cultures that support more respectful and responsive ways of interacting with families.

OVERVIEW OF COLLABORATIVE HELPING

Collaborative Helping is a practice framework that draws from Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, Sorensen, Whitney, & Yaeger, 2000; Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008), Motivational Interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2013), Narrative Therapy approaches (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Freeman, Epston, & Lobovits, 1997; Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston, 1997; Madsen, 2007; Morgan, 2000; White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990; Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1996), Solution-Focused Therapy approaches (Berg, 1994; Berg & Kelly, 2000; Durrant, 1993; de Shazer, 1985, 1988), the Signs of Safety approach to child protective services (Turnell & Edwards, 1999; Turnell & Essex, 2006), and, perhaps most importantly, the daily experiences of frontline workers and the families they serve.² Four core foundations of Collaborative Helping include (Madsen & Gillespie, in press):

- It is a *principle-based* approach designed to help workers find a solid place to stand and respond flexibly to the inherent messiness of frontline practice.
- It emphasizes the importance of the *attitude or relational stance* with which helpers approach individuals and families.
- It focuses on the *stories* through which people make sense of their lives.
- It emphasizes *inquiry*—the ability to ask meaningful and respectful questions in a spirit of genuine curiosity.

A central aspect of this practice framework is the use of Collaborative Helping maps to assist workers in thinking their way through complex situations and to provide a framework for constructive conversations between workers and families about challenging issues (Madsen, 2011; Madsen & Gillespie, in press). The Collaborative Helping map in its simplest form consists of four questions that can be arranged graphically as in Figure 1.

We can think of these four questions as areas of inquiry that can be rigorously explored in depth (though not necessarily in a linear fashion). The art and skill of this work lies in our ability to ask thought-provoking, focused questions that elicit concrete details for each area of inquiry.

²The book *Collaborative Helping* by Madsen and Gillespie (in press) grew out of interviews and focus groups with frontline workers and the people they serve, who were asked questions like, "What for you is at the heart of good helping? How do you put that into practice? What obstacles and challenges do you run into in helping relationships? How do you respond to those challenges? What might be lessons for our field from your experiences?" Their responses have contributed to a practice-based evidence that builds this framework from the ground up.

Vision <i>Where do you want to be headed in your life or work?</i>	
Obstacles / Challenges <i>What gets in the way of your Vision?</i>	Supports <i>Who and what support you in moving towards your Vision?</i>
Plan <i>How can we draw on supports to address obstacles to help you move towards your Vision?</i>	

FIGURE 1. Overview of Collaborative Helping Map.

USING COLLABORATIVE HELPING MAPS TO ENHANCE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Collaborative Helping maps can be used with workers to help them draw on existing best moments in their work to envision preferred directions for their work and develop a concrete plan to draw on supports to address obstacles to bring this vision into daily practice. The use of this process with workers can help them get the flow of the Collaborative Helping practice framework “in their bones” and break down the all too common “us and them” divisions between people in a position of offering help and people in a position of seeking help. We have used these maps in individual meetings with workers, supervisors, and managers; in small group meetings in which one person is interviewed with others offering reflections at the end of that conversation; and in larger workshops that move back and forth between a demonstration interview and dyadic or small group exercises that follow the flow of these maps.³ I will walk through this process with a focus on Vision, Obstacles and Supports, and Plan. As a reader, you might want to apply these questions to your own practice. Alternatively, you might want to reflect on ways that you could ask others these questions.

Organizing Vision

We begin by eliciting a vision of helpers’ preferred direction in their work. One way to do that is by asking questions influenced by Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider et al., 2000):

- Can you think of a moment in your work where you felt good, perhaps even a bit proud, about what you did?
- What was happening in that moment? Where were you? What were you doing? How were others responding, etc.? (The more details the better.)
- As you think about that moment, what do you particularly appreciate about *what* you did and *how* you did it? What contributed to it going as well as it did?
- Imagine it is a year from now and the things that you particularly appreciated in that moment were showing up everywhere in your work. Concretely, how would you know it? What would be happening that would tell you this was the case?

³We, in this context, refers to associates at the Family-Centered Services Project, an organization that provides national and international training and organizational consultation to community and governmental agencies (www.family-centered-services.org).

Another way to begin this would be to ask a line of questioning that was originally developed for parents involved with Child Protective Services to help them project into the future and reflect on the kind of parent they would prefer to be (Root & Madsen, 2013). Here is a version of that question adapted to this context:

- Five years from now, if your (clients, workers, staff—depending on the context for the interview) were asked, what stories would you hope they might tell about you as a (worker, supervisor, manager)?

This is a broad question highlighted here for illustration purposes. Clearly, it needs to be adapted to the particular situation and brought closer to participants' everyday experience.

A final way to begin to elicit a vision that we have used in various workshop settings begins not with people's better moments or their hopes for their work, but in a way that acknowledges some of their frustrations in their work. Here are some examples of that:

- In your experience of helping others, have you ever had a bad day and found yourself pulled away from your better self as a helper?
- Do you know other helpers who have ever been pulled away from the person they'd rather be as a helper? (Hopefully you are not the only one.)
- Do you know any helper who has *never* had this experience? (If you do, please let us know because we'd *really* like to meet this unusual person.)

When these questions have been asked, people have generally chuckled and found it comforting to know that others have had this experience at one time or another. While it might be tempting at this point to ask questions about the problems in helpers' work or what they are like as helpers in those times, we prefer to start with a focus on this "better self" in order to establish a vision that organizes the rest of the conversation. So, with that in mind, please consider the next few questions.

- What is this better self that you are sometimes pulled away from? When your work is at its best, what does that look like?
- How does (the description that is offered) affect your work with folks? What do you think they might particularly appreciate about your work in those moments?
- What do *you* particularly appreciate about your work in those moments?

We generally ask people to take a moment and note their responses to these questions. Here are some sample things we have heard from workshop participants in response to these questions:

- When my work is grounded in my better judgment, I'm more centered, calm, and reflective. That does not mean I just sit around and gaze at my navel. I am moving fast, making decisions and acting on them, but it feels like I have a kind of inner stillness and am responding rather than reacting to situations.
- When my work is at its best, it is all about respect and really listening to people. Respect is important to me because I'm a big believer in my version of the golden rule—treat people the way I'd want them to treat my mother (who I love).
- When I'm on, I'm really curious and collaborative. I think two heads are better than one and believe the work goes much better when I'm building on other people's ideas rather than just trying to sell them mine.

We then ask participants to generate a word or phrase that captures their better self in their work. The three people in the examples above came up with the following statements (following a particular format):

- I'm committed to grounding my work in a spirit of "reflecting and responding."
- I'm committed to grounding my work in a spirit of "respectful listening."
- I'm committed to grounding my work in a spirit of "curiosity and collaboration."

These phrases are the beginning of a vision for their work at its best. We then ask further questions to build a foundation of motivation, resourcefulness, and community that helps to solidify this vision and give it more substance in people's lives.

- Why is this commitment important to you? (motivation)
- When have you been more able to ground your work in this commitment? (resourcefulness)
- Who in your work or life appreciates this commitment and has supported you or might support you in grounding your work here more often? (community)

Next, we examine some of the potential obstacles and supports on the road to a preferred vision of participants' work. We could start with either obstacles or supports, whichever feels more compelling. This flexibility allows us to meet participants where they are at and move in the direction for which there is the most energy and enthusiasm. Based on a coin flip, let's start with an examination of obstacles. Here are some questions to consider:

- You mentioned that there have been some times when you've been pulled away from your better self in your work. What are some of the things that can pull you away from that?
- How do you notice it when those things show up in your work?
- What effects can those things have on your work?
- What do you think about those effects? How do they suit you? Would you prefer that they are more present in your work or more absent from it?

Some of the obstacles and challenges that helpers have described include things like worry, frustration, anger, exhaustion, urgency, "denial and resistance on clients' part," paperwork requirements, work overload, bureaucratic requirements, etc. Here is a summary of what two people said in a workshop context about particular obstacles they encounter in their work. The summaries were shaped by questions asked that were intended to *separate* the obstacle from the person, examine effects of the obstacle on them and their work with people, and highlight some of the encouragements that the obstacle might receive from the broader organizational or socio-cultural contexts in which it is embedded.

Worry is something that can pull me away from curiosity and collaboration. When I get really worried about a family, I can lose my curiosity and start correcting people. I get caught up in feeling like I have the right answer and that I need to get them to see that. And, the more I start correcting people the more they start resisting me and the more they resist me, the more I fall into correcting them. That then takes on a life of its own and we're off to the races. I know that's a dead-end dance and it doesn't work, but there's a lot of pressure in my job to fix things and between my worries and that pressure, well it's a mess and I hate it because I don't like who I become and it doesn't work.

One of the things that can pull me away from being reflective and responding in the midst of crazy situations is work overload. At times it feels like there is this flood of competing demands all of which need an immediate response and I get caught up in frenzy and urgency. At those times, I sometimes quit thinking and just start acting in order to get something done. I end up running around like a chicken with its head cut off in a china shop and knocking things over and then having to pay for everything I've just broken. I mean I'm not actually breaking things, but I am making a mess in my work and I do end up paying a price for that with both families and other professionals. I don't like it because it creates more work for me and I end up even more overwhelmed and it becomes a vicious cycle.

We could think of things like "Worry" or "Work Overload" as obstacles that constrain helpers from working in ways they'd prefer. In doing so, we can begin to identify the obstacle as the problem rather than the people involved as the problem. We can appreciate the negative effects of these obstacles at both an individual level (on workers themselves) and a relational level (between workers and families or among collaborating workers). We can also see that these obstacles may receive significant support from the broader work context as well as from taken-for-granted assumptions in professional culture (e.g., urgency and pressure to "fix" things in our work). When inquiring about obstacles with families, it is useful to consider obstacles at individual, relational, and broader socio-cultural levels. When inquiring about obstacles with workers, we can focus on individual, relational, organizational, and broader socio-cultural levels.

While we moved from vision to obstacles in this illustration, we could just as well have begun with supports. Some sample questions to identify supports for preferred directions in work could include the following:

- What are some of the things that support you in grounding your work in the commitments you described before?
- When you are "at your best" in your work, what does that look like? If we had a YouTube video of you at your best, what would we see?
- What strengths, capacities, and resources do you bring to your work? How do you put those into practice in your work? What helps you to do that?

Here are summaries of responses from the two workers above. Again, both summaries came out of longer conversations.

One of the ways I stay connected to curiosity and collaboration is through asking lots of questions. When I'm tempted to point a finger and give advice, I try to turn that finger around at myself and think about what more I could learn in this situation. Doing that often changes my relationships with people. As I get more curious, they are more open and seem more interesting which in turn gets me more curious. I like that because given the choice of working with frustrating people or interesting people, I'd prefer the latter and I think how I approach them strongly affects that. Curiosity is really important to me at a very deep level. For me, it's really about respect and a hope that I will keep growing in my work.

The thing that helps me stay more in a place of reflecting and responding in the midst of crazy demanding situations is remembering that sometimes moving a bit slower initially actually saves time. I try to remember that and tell myself to count to five before speaking and usually pausing like that at the beginning saves me time in the long run. I think about what I'd like to see happen and whether what I'm about to say is likely to have the effects I want. That's important to me because I used to go on long walks with my grandmother and she was very quiet, but when she spoke, she had great wisdom and I want to be more like her. She has been very important to me.

In these two situations, we can identify a number of different kinds of supports including abilities, skills, and know-how (e.g., I've always been a good listener and I know that people talk more when they think someone is really listening); particular habits and practices

(e.g., asking questions when tempted to give advice or pausing before speaking to consider the potential effects of one's actions); positive interpersonal interactions (e.g., When I'm more curious, people are more open and become more interesting and then I'm even more curious); intentions, values, hopes, and commitments (e.g., the value of respect and a hope for continued growth in work); supportive community members (e.g., the memory of my grandmother who sustains me in this work). We can inquire about the ways in which people "do" this practice (What do you do to help you stop and count to five? How do you remind yourself of that?), and the history of these practices (How did you develop this practice of asking questions when tempted to give advice? What went into the development of this practice?). We can learn about important others who have contributed to this practice (Can you tell me more about your grandmother and your relationship with her?), the meaning this practice holds for them, and the intentions, values and beliefs, hopes and dreams, and commitments in life that stand behind this strength. This emphasis on supports as practices that people are actively doing highlights their personal agency in these situations and allows us to examine the importance of that agency and actions in a way that helps to reinforce these supports.

Once we have a sense of people's vision along with the obstacles to and supports for that vision, we can put this all together in a plan to help them draw on supports to address obstacles in order to live out the preferences they've described. Here are some final questions to complete this illustrative process:

- Can you take a moment and remember the vision of your work at its best that you described? What in particular makes that particular vision important to you?
- As you look at the various obstacles and supports you've described, which ones seem like the best ones to start with? Would you prefer to begin by addressing particular obstacles, drawing on particular supports, or some combination of both?
- If beginning with obstacles... As you think about this particular obstacle, are there times when you have been more successful in responding to it, coping with it, resisting it?
- How did you do that and what helped you to do that?
- What thoughts do you have about the next concrete steps that you might take?
- Who might be available to help and support you in that process?
- If beginning with supports.... As you think about this particular support, how has it sustained you? How have you drawn on it? What steps did you take to do that?
- What does that suggest to you about possible next steps?
- Who might be available to help and support you in that process?

These questions represent a broad outline for a process of inquiry. They are a distillation of broad steps and need to be filled in with many small steps in order to help people answer them. Again, the art and skill of this process is finding ways to conduct this questioning process as a joint exploration and to ask questions that prioritize people's responses while doing so in a way that they feel like they have an appreciative ally in the process. There are several steps in developing a plan. The first might be to identify potential steps for each of the Obstacles and Supports. Subsequently, we could prioritize with people based on their best ideas about where to begin. Figures 2 and 3 contain two maps, with vision, obstacles, and supports and the final plan that were developed with two straight white social workers followed by a brief discussion of their maps.⁴

⁴I appreciate Emily and Anna's (not their real names) willingness to share these maps that summarized an interview with each of them in different workshop contexts.

Emily's Vision	
I want to ground my work in a spirit of curiosity and collaboration	
Obstacles	Supports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The intrusion of Worry into my work • An interpersonal sequence “the more I correct, the more they resist and vice versa.” • Organizational pressures to fix things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The practice of asking questions when tempted to offer advice • An interpersonal sequence of “the more curious I am, the more open and interesting they are and vice versa” • A value for respect and a hope for continued growth in the work
Plan	
In order to better ground my work in curiosity and collaboration:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I want to turn down the volume of the voice of Worry in my work. I don't want to lose it, but I want to find a way to not let it drown out my better judgment. • I want to develop my ability to ask better questions in order to bring more curiosity into my work, ground my work more in my value of respect and continue my own growth in this work. • I want to identify when I begin to fall into a correct / resist sequence and develop ways to disrupt that early. • I want to better identify this pressure fix things, appreciate its power in my workplace and notice when it starts offering me unwanted supervision, and find two others who think “fixing” is not all it's cracked up to be. 	

FIGURE 2. Emily's Professional Development Map.

These two plans took different approaches. Emily began with a focus on obstacles. She was very concerned about the presence of Worry in her work. She experienced Worry as a loud voice in her mind and really wanted to turn down its volume (without shutting it off completely). Anna began with a focus on supports. She appreciated the presence of Reflection in her work and wanted to build on that. The ability to begin with either obstacles or supports allows us to “meet people where they are at” and progress in the most effective manner. In both of these situations, there was an emphasis on helping the two women articulate directions in which they would like to move in their work and then exploring where and from whom they might find support for that. In this way, these maps can be useful to help workers reconnect to their best moments in this work and develop concrete plans to bring those best moments more directly into their daily work.

USING COLLABORATIVE HELPING MAPS TO ENHANCE SUPERVISION

Collaborative Helping maps can also be used in supervisory conversations about individuals and families. They provide a vehicle for supervisors and workers to collectively think their way through complex situations. While these maps were originally designed for use with families and have had powerful effects on helping relationships, we have found that their use in supervision also enhance supervisory relationships and can have transformative effects on workers. Their repeated use over time helps workers develop “habits of thought” that can bring more rigor and discipline into their work. They can introduce workers to new ways of thinking about vision, obstacles, supports, and plans. And finally, they can assist supervisors in helping workers draw on supports and shift

Anna’s Vision	
I want to ground my work in reflection and responsiveness	
Obstacles	Supports
Work Overload – there’s more than I can do	Practice of pausing to the consider effects of my actions
Frenzy and Urgency – I get captured by urgency and spin into frenzy	Interpersonal sequence of reflecting before speaking leads to better results and encourages me to do that more
Pattern of quickly reacting, making a mess and then backtracking to clean it up.	Memory of my grandmother as a support for reflection
Plan	
<p>In order to ground my work in R & R (reflection and responsiveness, not rest and relaxation, though they might have the same effects), I want to grow my ability to pause and anticipate the consequences of my actions by developing more reflection in my life and work. To do that, I am going to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a point of stopping to breathe before responding to crazy situations, knowing that 30 seconds of breathing will not slow me down too much. • Find old photos of my grandmother and keep them with me as a reminder of the importance of this to me. • Find two work colleagues with whom I can discuss the ways in which frenzy and urgency try to mess with our work and develop ways to support each other in pausing that old and all too common tape 	

FIGURE 3. Anna’s Professional Development Map.

their own relationship with obstacles to work more effectively with families. This section introduces an adaptation of Collaborative Helping maps for supervision and briefly examines one way they have been used in supervisory consultations. While supervision in community agencies often serves many functions, we will focus here on the use of these maps to organize conversations about more effective work with families. A Collaborative Helping map adapted for a supervisory context is shown in Figure 4 with sample questions to highlight each section. We’ll walk through the map, highlighting the purpose of each section, and then illustrate how it was used in a supervisory consult.

The *Purpose and Context* section of this supervisory map is an opportunity to clarify and align worker and supervisor hopes and purposes for the supervisory meeting.⁵ Taking the time to gain agreement about purpose is actually an investment that saves time in the long run. For example, how many times have you found yourself in a meeting wondering “What are we doing here?” How might the meeting have gone differently if you had a clear sense of its purpose? Clarifying hopes and purposes generally leads to a better meeting. Supervision in home and community-oriented service organizations often takes place in a pressure cooker of conflicting demands that creates a multi-tasking frenzy. Context questions such as “What might be getting in the way of you being fully present here today?” and “In the midst of everything else going on, how can we make this time as useful as

⁵The inclusion of questions about purpose, context, and stakeholders in this map draws from a dialogue structure for supervision and consultation developed by John Vogel and Sophia Chin of the Massachusetts Child Welfare Institute, the child protective services training arm in that state. I am indebted to them for extensive conversations and inspiration in our shared work.

Purpose and Context of the Supervisory Conversation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose - What do you hope to get out of us talking today about this? • Context - Is there anything that might get in the way of you being able to focus in on this conversation? • Stakeholders - Is there anyone else who is not here who should be part of this conversation? 	
Introduction of the Person or Family	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the members of this family and their network? • How do you think they might like you to introduce them to us? • What is it like for you working with them? (What do you like about working with them? What is hard about working with them?) 	
Agreed upon Focus	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 25 words or less, what might different members of this family say their work with you is heading towards? • What might other helpers involved with the family say? What would you say? • What similarities and differences do you notice in these different descriptions? • On a scale of 0-10, how would family members, you, and other helpers rate progress towards these goals? • What similarities and differences do you notice in these different descriptions? 	
Obstacles	Supports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What might different family members and other helpers say gets in way of things going better towards agreed upon focus? • What would you say gets in the way of things going better towards agreed upon focus? • What similarities and differences do you notice? • How have these obstacles gotten in the way of your agreed upon focus and what problematic effects have they had on your work together? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What might family members and others helpers say have contributed to things going as well as they have towards agreed upon focus? • What would you say has contributed to things going as well as they have towards agreed upon focus? • What similarities and differences do you notice? • How have these supports contributed to to your agreed upon focus and what beneficial effects have they had on your work together? •
Plan	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on what you've heard yourself saying about vision, obstacles, and supports , what do you think is the next step to help this family draw on supports to address obstacles to "live into" vision? • Who will do what, when and with whom? • Who else needs to involved? 	
Reflection on the Supervisory Conversation	
Plus	Delta
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What went well in our meeting today that you'd like to see us continue in future meetings? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What could we do differently to make this better in the future?

FIGURE 4. A Collaborative Helping Map for Use in Supervision.

possible for you?" acknowledge that context and provide a way for workers and supervisors to carve out a small space for reflection. The final question about stakeholders seeks to ensure that we have the right people in the room for the conversation we wish to have. Many times this is not possible, but inquiring about the possibility acknowledges some of the contextual realities we face together.

The Introduction to the Person or Family section is an opportunity to learn about people in a way that highlights elements of competence, connection, and hope. Case presentations often begin in a fashion similar to "Patient is a 30-year-old borderline female with significant difficulties regulating affect." As a reader, how would you prefer to be introduced to a group of strangers who had significant influence over your life? How might an

introduction like the one above impact your own “affect regulation”? In a spirit of “contact before content,” we prefer to get to know people in a helping relationship as three-dimensional human beings before entering into an investigation of their difficulties. We believe this holds true whether we are actually meeting them or simply having a conversation about them. Asking helpers how people served might like to be introduced humanizes them. And the final question in this section helps get a sense of the helping relationship and gives workers an opportunity to talk about both what they appreciate and what they find difficult in that relationship. This is important both to make supervisory conversations responsive to helping workers and to get a sense of the emotionally laden responses that often end up implicitly hijacking supervisory conversations.

The *Agreed Upon Focus* section elicits a proactive focus for the work of helping from different perspectives and encourages a comparison that facilitates shared vision. The scaling question encourages a mutual assessment of where things are currently and sets up an examination of obstacles and supports to both build on emerging progress and address challenges.

The *Obstacles and Supports* section of Collaborative Helping maps encourages workers to identify obstacles and supports at individual, relational, and socio-cultural levels. When applied to supervision, we can shift these levels to include obstacles and supports at a family level (which would include individual, relational, and socio-cultural levels), obstacles and supports at a family-worker level (interactions that have developed between workers and the people they serve as well as the broader professional and socio-cultural contexts in which those interactions occur), and obstacles and supports at a helping level (a worker’s negative or positive emotional reactions to a family, beliefs or stories about a family and their possibilities, and the broader taken-for-granted professional and cultural assumptions and practices that may support those reactions and stories). We can conceptualize these three levels of obstacles as concentric circles as highlighted in Figure 5.

The *Plan* section asks helping workers to put the pieces together and in a way that positions the supervisor as an ally to support rather than supplant worker thinking. There is obviously room here for supervisors to add to workers’ ideas, but it is critical to first elicit worker thinking and then proceed with further ideas in an additive fashion.

The final *Reflection* section encourages continuing feedback and shared learning. The Plus (+) section seeks to build on what went well. The Delta section (Δ —the Greek sign for change) seeks to elicit what could go better. This extends an investigation of “What was good and not so good?” to a more constructive “What was good and what could be better?”

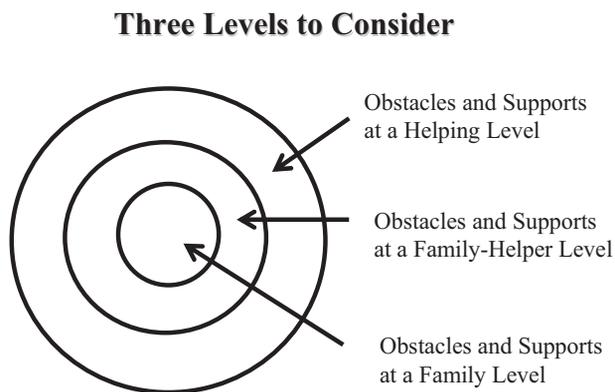


FIGURE 5. Three Levels to Consider in Supervision.

It elicits useful feedback for supervisors, encourages shared learning, and models a process for workers in their own interactions with people and families.

In order to illustrate this, consider the following supervisory consult.

The Johnson family is a working class, African-American family that has a long involvement with child protective services because of concerns about neglect primarily due to the mother's substance use. The parents are currently divorced and the three young children (2, 3, and 4) are living with their father and have been doing well until the most recent incident when the father was arrested for a DUI (his first) with the three children in the car. He took responsibility for what he called "a mistake in judgment" and he and the CPS worker have developed a plan they are both comfortable with to insure that the children will not be put into a similar situation again in the future. They are served by an office in which the worker, supervisor, and manager are all African-American and straight. There are significant protective concerns in the broader office about this family due to the long history with substances. This concern has been exacerbated by a recent phone call from a neighbor to a local African-American politician who is putting significant pressure on the department to "come down hard" on the family and take a strong "no tolerance" stance. The manager in the office has increasing concerns about the situation and there is an increasing polarization developing between the worker and the manager in which the supervisor feels caught.

Susan is a child protective supervisor who sought a consultation on this situation. When asked what she hoped to get out of the consultation, Susan responded, "This is a case where there are differences of opinion about how to move forward among the worker, me as the supervisor, and our manager and I'd like to find a way to better address that. We have a lot of outside pressure on this case and I'd like to sort out how we can do good work in that context." Susan gave a brief description of the family and we moved into an examination of obstacles and supports for good work in the face of outside pressures. Because the purpose of the consultation was to clarify how the team might best work with this family, we focused on obstacles to and supports for good work at an office level, rather than focusing on the family or the worker. When asked how the differences of opinion were playing out, Susan described the manager as much more worried about the situation than the worker and expressed a concern that conversations about the family were becoming increasingly stuck. We traced out an overly protective/overly harsh pattern in which the manager saw the worker as being too "soft" with the family and the worker saw the manager as being too "hard" with the family. We can think of this interaction as a series of mutual invitations in which one person's actions invite a particular response from the other and that response in turn invites a counter response. The interaction occurred in a broader context of outside pressure that fueled the manager's concerns and in turn exacerbated the worker's sense of others "meddling with his work." When asked about the effects of this pattern on their work and relationships in the office, Susan worried about the potential for escalating polarization and described herself as caught in the middle.

It was not an unusual situation for them to have differences of opinion amidst significant outside pressures, so I inquired about other "different, but similar" situations that might hold relevant lessons. That led into a discussion of how they had managed political pressures in the past. The worker, supervisor, and manager were all good at advocating for their own position, while listening to others' perspective. When asked how they had successfully resolved differences in the past, Susan described the use of the same mapping process occurring with her in this consultation. As the consultation moved into the plan section, obstacles and supports were identified and Susan was asked what she thought needed to happen next. She thought a moment and replied that she wanted to have a meeting with the father, worker, herself, and manager. She would facilitate a Collaborative Helping Map process with all of them. She thought that would help them examine different perspectives in a transparent process and move forward thoughtfully. It was agreed

and logistics were discussed. From here, let's expand our focus from a supervisory to an organizational level.

USING COLLABORATIVE HELPING MAPS TO ENHANCE ORGANIZATIONAL FUNCTIONING

Effective collaborative, family-centered practice can also be constrained by problems that develop at a work team or organizational level. This section highlights ways in which Collaborative Helping maps have been useful in addressing work team problems that interfere with effective helping practice. It highlights a team building consultation with a human service team fractured by internal conflicts and strife. The team consisted of six workers and a supervisor in a divisional office of a large bureaucratic state agency. The workers were younger and included two white women, two Latina women, and two Latino men (all heterosexual). The supervisor was an older white man. I (another older, straight white man) was originally called in by the supervisor for a consultation to help them address challenges that were initially viewed as personality conflicts set against a larger cultural context in which Wanda (a white woman) felt marginalized when she was repeatedly left out of lunch plans and when the four Latino/a workers spoke Spanish in her presence (which left her wondering what they were saying and fearing they were gossiping about her). She felt disrespected by the team and angry. A Latina team member, Luisa, in turn felt disrespected by her and a third team member who was close to both felt caught in the middle. When asked about his hopes for the consultation, the supervisor hoped team members would come to respect each others' backgrounds, understand and appreciate them better, and not personalize the conflicts over language spoken. We agreed to move from an immediate investigation of the problems on the team and begin with a focus on their hopes and possibilities for the team as a foundation for a different way of approaching the difficulties on the team. The supervisor conveyed this proposal to the team and there was agreement with it.

The consultation consisted of an initial phone conversation with the supervisor, an e-mail to the team re-introducing me (I had done previous training and consultation in their office) and framing the context and purpose of the proposed outline, a 2-hour meeting with the team, a follow-up call to the supervisor and a letter documenting the consultation (which was shared with the team), and a 6-month follow-up interview with the supervisor. The consultation utilized the Collaborative Helping map as an organizational structure. We began with an initial go-round that focused on what they each had heard about the goal of the consultation and one hope they each had for it in order to align joint purposes. Then, drawing on Gervaise Bushe's (2000) use of Appreciative Inquiry with work teams, a second go-round asked them each to describe one of their best experiences of being part of a team (e.g., work team, sports team, neighborhood team, academic team, etc.). Each person was asked some brief questions to get a sense of what that experience was like, what made it meaningful to them, and how they contributed to it. They talked about experiences that included their involvement in this job, other jobs, participating in or coaching youth sports, volunteer opportunities, and church groups. At the end of each person's speaking, others on the team were asked about contributions that this particular person brought to this team. This established a generous spirit in the group and from this collection of individual "best team" experiences I pulled out what they as a team were most proud of how they functioned as a group. Here is their summarized list:

- We approach our work with humor
- We continually talk with each other

- We often lend a hand or ear to each other
- We maintain a strong sense of camaraderie

Using this as an organizing vision for their team at its best, I asked why this was important to them as a way to enhance motivation for pursuing this vision and then inquired about obstacles and supports. Beginning with obstacles, we identified things that could get in the way of their functioning as their better selves on the team. In the process, I recast their various descriptions as nouns, checked out how that fit for them, and jotted them down. Here is the list that was generated:

Misunderstandings, personality clashes, work stress, unexpected emergencies, crises, court appearances, abuse by families, anxiety about the work, and dealing with parking tickets and snow.

When asked what might be a title for this collection of problems, a conversation ensued and they settled on the phrase, “Work Stress.” I externalized Work Stress as a separate entity that came into their work lives and wreaked havoc (rather than thinking about team members as stressed workers who engaged in dysfunctional behavior) and collectively examined some of the effects Work Stress had on them individually and as a team. The effects they described included the following:

Getting some people snappy, getting some people to feel on the outside of things, separating each other, getting some people to become more demanding, quieting and shutting down others, sometimes leading people to avoid each other, feeling disheveled, misreading and stereotyping each other, making us uncomfortable with each other, silencing people, getting us to walk on eggshells with each other, forming negative opinions of each other.

In response to further inquiry, they were very clear they didn’t like these effects and were quite dismayed by them. We jokingly reflected on what coming to work might be like if Work Stress were to take over as their unit supervisor and they all agreed “that would not be a pretty picture.” This inquiry into their preferences about the effects of Work Stress on their lives and relationships at work helped to align emotional energy and foster a commitment to reclaiming their work life from Work Stress. In that context, they were asked about some of the ways in which they had been keeping Work Stress more in its place and the group brainstormed further actions they might take. These ideas were extensive and are captured in a letter that followed the conversation. We concluded with a final go-round in which they were asked, “What’s one thing you want to take away from this meeting?” and I then offered some reflections from my experience of spending the time with them. Based on the Collaborative Helping map, I wrote up a letter to document the meeting and sent it to the supervisor, who shared it with team members.

Dear Team Members (their names were actually listed out),

It was good to meet with you last week. I wanted to capture and share back with you some of the notes that I jotted down in our meeting. After getting to know you a bit, I asked you questions about your vision for what this team could be, obstacles to and supports for that, and the beginning of a plan for how to move forward. I’ll use that format to organize my comments here.

Vision

We began by eliciting your individual “best team” experiences, getting a sense of what that was like for you, what made it meaningful for you, how you contributed to it, and what of those contributions you’ve brought to this team (as noticed by others). From this collection, we pulled out what you as a team are most proud of in how you function:

- We approach our work with humor
- We continually talk with each other

- We often lend a hand or ear to each other
- We maintain a strong sense of camaraderie

Obstacles

When asked about the obstacles and challenges that can get in the way of your functioning as your best selves as a team, you mentioned the following:

Misunderstandings, personality clashes, work stress, unexpected emergencies, crises, court appearances, abuse by families, anxiety about the work, and dealing with parking tickets and snow.

We summarized these problems as “*Work Stress*” and then examined some of the effects that Work Stress has on each of you and on you as a team. This included:

Getting some people snappy, getting some people to feel on the outside of things, separating each other, getting some people to become more demanding, quieting and shutting down others, sometimes leading people to avoid each other, feeling disheveled, misreading and stereotyping each other, making us uncomfortable with each other, silencing people, getting us to walk on eggshells with each other, forming negative opinions of each other.

We jokingly reflected on what your work and the experience of coming into work might be like if Work Stress were to take over as your unit supervisor. You all agreed “that would not be a pretty picture.”

Supports

You were all clear you didn’t like these effects and would prefer to have John rather than Work Stress as your supervisor. You described ways in which you have been keeping Work Stress in its place and we brainstormed about further actions you might take. Ideas included:

- Taking time off and finding outlets for dealing with Work Stress
- Talking with each other about the presence of Work Stress and its effects
- Acknowledging the many different ways in which you each cope with Work Stress
- Focusing on and appreciating each other’s strengths in responding to Work Stress
- Getting together after work
- Going out with each other on home visits
- Thanking each other for stepping up and stepping in
- Giving warnings (“weather reports”) to others when Work Stress is messing with you
- Acknowledging the challenges of foster care reviews and court in particular and encouraging each other when those come up
- Remembering that you are all more than effects of work stress and trying to see “problematic behaviors” as perhaps an effect of work stress than a personal problem
- John serving as a buffer from organizational stressors and workers trying to support each other in the same fashion
- John letting people settle in each morning for 15 minutes before calling them into his office

Next Steps

At the end, you each responded to “What’s one thing you want to take away from this meeting?”

- Letting go of stereotypes I may be holding about others
- Realizing the importance of communication and talking—lend an ear to others
- Focusing on each other’s strengths
- My job as a supervisor is to lessen stress on workers so they can better do their jobs
- Realizing how we affect each other and what effects I’d rather have on others

- Commenting when others seem to be having a hard day
- Remembering that people are more than the bad day they might be having

My Own Reflections on the Meeting

I was very moved in spending this time with you. It reminds me yet again about your good work with both families and each other in the midst of many challenging stresses. One phrase that I mentioned at the end was a quote from Eileen Munro that you've probably heard a lot from recent trainings in your department—"The best way to minimize error in child welfare is... to admit that we might be wrong."

I have often thought about confirmation bias—the danger of coming to a quick conclusion about a family and then fitting subsequent data to that initial conclusion. However, it wasn't until our meeting that I fully appreciated the parallel process of also working to see beyond our initial assumptions about each other, working to see work colleagues as more than the effects of Work Stress, and working to appreciate and acknowledge each other's better moments in doing this work. I encourage you to keep looking for this with each other, knowing that *what you look for* profoundly shapes *what you see*.

I hope this is helpful and remain committed to learning more about how you move forward in this work.

Respectfully,
Bill

In the initial follow-up conversation, the supervisor reported that the staff appreciated the consultation and found it very interesting, and stated that he believed it would be an important milestone for the team. Informal feedback from team members suggested that participants had experienced each other in some very different ways and that the meeting had helped them to move from seeing each other as the problem to seeing Work Stress as the problem and their workmates as allies in dealing with this problem. The following comments from the supervisor come from a more formalized follow-up interview at 6 months.

As you look back on the consultation now 6 months later, what about it particularly stands out for you?

I think the big thing is it reduced a lot of stress. It began a process of the team talking more to each other and gave them reason to think why people might not be talking to them on a certain day and to begin attributing that to Work Stress rather than just the person. The way the consultation began was also important. I think they thought it was going to be, "Okay, we have a problem. Here it is. What are we going to do about it?" And instead, we went around the room and started talking about each individual person and people were talking about what they liked and admired about that person. And, that really helped people buy into what was happening. It helped people feel good about themselves, get to know each other better, and feel respected by others.

And what effects do you think it had to start with their best experiences of being part of a team and how they bring their contributions to that into this team as opposed to starting with what are the problems here that we have to address?

I think starting with what's working well took us down a new path. I think they came in prepared to give the standard answers to the questions they expected and going this way didn't allow rehearsed answers to what they perceived the questions to be.

And what was it about the consultation that made it harder for people to go to rehearsed answers?

Well, the questions were different and it was more informal. It wasn't a presentation, it was a conversation. And, I've used that in supervision asking people, "Geez, isn't that the way it should be

with our families? It shouldn't be so much of going through a service plan with a focus on this is what you need to do, but instead more of a conversation with the family."

These comments begin to highlight the power of inquiry as an intervention. In this process, it's important to ask questions that stretch people beyond their usual range of responses. The questions we ask generate experiences of self, others, and relationships. In this consultation, the structure and sequencing of these questions invited a different set of interactions among team members and opened up possibilities for them to experience each other (and themselves) differently.

I also asked John about moving from an internal focus on personal problems or personality conflicts to externalizing the problem as Work Stress.

I think that made a big difference. We have talked a lot since then about Work Stress. There's always going to be stress here. It's just part of the job, but commenting on it helps to make it more noticeable. One of the things they've all talked about is that Stress stops communication and lack of communication builds Stress. And there's a lot more respect now and respect and communication seem to buffer Stress. It's also been helpful for me because if I think about it as a personality problem, there's not much I can do, but if I think about it as an external problem, there are some ways that I can help alleviate some of that. One example that came up in the consultation was that some people wanted 15–20 minutes when they come into work to settle in without me going after them (because I get in much earlier and often greet them with questions about their work) and in a couple of cases, backing off to let them settle in has made all the difference.

Let me ask you about another thing. When we originally talked about this before the consultation, it seemed like some of the conflicts on the team were embedded in broader cultural and linguistic dynamics. While the consultation never directly addressed those concerns, were there ways in which the broader cultural issues were affected by the consultation?

Yes, it started them talking and provided a structure where everyone had an opportunity to talk. As Luisa (the person who objected to complaints about her speaking Spanish) put it, "I thought I wouldn't have a chance to talk and Wanda (the person complaining about Luisa and others speaking Spanish) would take control. And, I was very happy to be allowed to speak my piece and I felt really heard." About a month later, I heard from each of them that they were doing much better with each other. Luisa said, "Wanda and I are cool these days. I talked to her after the consultation and told her the only reason I speak in Spanish is that's my first language." And Wanda told me (John, the supervisor), "You know, Luisa didn't start speaking English until she was 8 years old and that's the language she's most comfortable with." So, now there doesn't seem to be any apparent conflict about speaking Spanish and whatnot. And I think the consultation helped them to begin to move beyond their initial impressions and really listen to each other. And, now the whole team is sharing cultural experiences with each other. As an example, we recently talked about a case of a Latino kid who wasn't going to school and got various perspectives from team members about how their own communities (El Salvadoran, Puerto Rican, Peruvian, and white working class) viewed school, education, and achievement. I just think the consultation helped people move from being paranoid and defensive to talking more openly. And perhaps the best example of that came with the holidays this year. This was maybe only the second time in 6 years that we've had no conflicts about who wanted what day off during the holidays. They talked as a group about what days were important to each of them and they worked it out amongst themselves. So, while the cultural issues may not have been directly addressed in the consultation, what happened in the consultation helped them to respect and be interested in each other for who each other was and in that way it was addressed.

It sounds like this consultation had some pretty powerful effects on people, but that couldn't have really happened without your follow-up. What do you think it is that you've done as a supervisor that has helped this team move forward in such a dramatic fashion?

I think one thing that happened was admitting that I don't have all the answers. I had tried a number of other things before we got to the consultation and it wasn't working. And my willingness to be more open with them and invite them into trying to solve this was really important. I

really care about this group. It has been heartbreaking because they are a good group of folks who got stuck in their perceptions of each other and that prevented them from working cohesively. The consultation helped me see that these folks were stressed in ways that I didn't realize before and it's helped me keep in mind what brings them stress.

And What Effects Has that Had on You as a Supervisor?

It's given me more patience and a new understanding about them. They are really committed to trying to make a difference and they feel like they can do that and more importantly that's what they want to do.

This situation highlights the value and usefulness of moving from corrective instruction to facilitative inquiry. Despite all the pressures on this supervisor to "have the answers and fix the problems," the shift into a more collaborative stance with his team gave him more maneuverability.

SUMMARY

This article has explored some of the different ways in which Collaborative Helping maps can be used at broader levels to support family-centered practice. At a frontline practice level, these maps can be very useful both to help workers think their way through complex situation shifts and as a guideline for constructive conversations between workers and families about challenging situations (Madsen, 2011; Madsen & Gillespie, in press). In addition, the use of these maps over time (especially as a guideline for conversations with families) shifts helping relationships. To suggest that workers should ground their work in family-centered values and principles is a vague charge that is unlikely to result in any meaningful change in practice. However, these maps provide a concrete guide for thinking and action. Their use over time promotes a shift in how helpers position themselves with people served. They provide a concrete way to help frontline workers put the "ABCs" of family-centered practice (making our work *accountable* to people served, *believing* in resourcefulness, and working in *collaboration* with families and other helpers) into daily practice.

Similarly, the integration of Collaborative Helping maps into professional development, supervision, and team and organizational functioning embeds frontline workers in a way of thinking and acting that weaves the values and principles of family-centered practice into the tapestry of organizational cultures. Such applications reinforce a sense that "this is how we do things here." The use of these maps at a broader organizational level institutionalizes a shift from corrective instruction to facilitative inquiry. These maps center vision as a guiding inspiration for our work. Beginning with a focus on possibilities rather than problems is a powerful shift that enhances engagement, aligns purpose and direction, and builds momentum to make helping efforts more efficient and effective. Recasting problems as obstacles to preferred directions in life (or work) helps us focus on the most relevant challenges. Viewing obstacles as externalized problems (e.g., thinking about problems as separate from people and people as being in an ongoing and modifiable relationship with those problems rather than being a problem or having a problem) minimizes shame and blame and gives people more maneuverability in addressing those problems. Recasting supports as contributors to preferred directions in life (or work) helps identify supports in a way that is immediately relevant and meaningful to the people involved. Viewing supports as practices in life backed up by intentions, values and beliefs, hopes and dreams, and commitments in life rather than simply individual characteristics leads to richer conversations and helps people build on and further cultivate the supports available to them. The development of a plan that draws on supports to address obstacles leads to a very concrete consideration of "Who will do what, when, and with whom?" that can

hold all involved parties accountable. Overall, the incorporation of these ideas and practices at multiple levels (frontline practice, supervision, and organizational functioning) builds and sustains a context that supports the core values and principles of collaborative, family-centered practice.

REFERENCES

- Berg, I. K. (1994). *Family based services: A solution-focused approach*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Berg, I. K., & Kelly, S. (2000). *Building solutions in child protective services*. New York: Norton.
- Cooperrider, D. L., Sorensen, P. F., Whitney, D., & Yaeger, T. F. (Eds.) (2000). *Appreciative inquiry: Rethinking human organization toward a positive theory of change*. Champaign, IL: Stipes Publishing.
- Cooperrider, D. L., Whitney, D., & Stavros, J. M. (2008). *Appreciative inquiry handbook* (2nd ed.). Brunswick, OH: Crown Custom Publishing.
- Duchnowski, A. J., & Kutash, K. (2007). *Family-driven care*. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, The Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, Department of Child & Family Studies.
- Durrant, M. (1993). *Residential treatment: A cooperative, competency-based approach to therapy and program design*. New York: Norton.
- Freedman, J., & Combs, G. (1996). *Narrative therapy: The social construction of preferred realities*. New York: Norton.
- Freeman, J. C., Epston, D., & Lobovits, D. H. (1997). *Playful approaches to serious problems: Narrative therapy with children and their families*. New York: Norton.
- Madsen, W. C. (2007). *Collaborative therapy with multi-stressed families* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.
- Madsen, W. C. (2009). Collaborative helping: A practice framework for family-centered services. *Family Process*, 48, 103–116.
- Madsen, W. C. (2011). Collaborative helping maps: A tool to guide thinking and action in family-centered services. *Family Process*, 50, 529–543.
- Madsen, W. C., & Gillespie, K. (in press). *Collaborative helping: A strengths framework for home-based services*. New York: Wiley.
- Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2013). *Motivational interviewing: Helping people change*, 3rd ed.. New York: Guilford.
- Monk, G., Winslade, J., Crocket, K., & Epston, D. (Eds.) (1997). *Narrative therapy in practice: The archaeology of hope*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Morgan, A. (2000). *What is narrative therapy? An easy-to-read introduction*. Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Press.
- Root, E. A., & Madsen, W. C. (2013). Imagine: Bringing vision into child protective services. *Journal of Systemic Therapies*, 32(3), 76–91.
- de Shazer, S. (1985). *Keys to solution in brief therapy*. New York: Norton.
- de Shazer, S. (1988). *Clues: Investigating solutions in brief therapy*. New York: Norton.
- Turnell, A., & Edwards, S. (1999). *Signs of safety: A solution and safety oriented approach to child protection casework*. New York: Norton.
- Turnell, A., & Essex, S. (2006). *Working with 'denied' child abuse: The resolutions approach*. New York: Open University Press.
- Waldegrave, C., Tamasese, K., Tuhaka, F., & Campbell, W. (2003). *Just therapy – A journey*. Adelaide, South Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- Walton, E., Sandau-Beckler, P., & Mannes, M. (2001). *Balancing family-centered services and child well-being: Exploring issues in policy, practice, theory, and research*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- White, M. (2007). *Maps of narrative practice*. New York: Norton.
- White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: Norton.
- Zimmerman, J. L., & Dickerson, V. C. (1996). *If problems talked: Narrative therapy in action*. New York: Guilford Press.