

Welcome to the Follett Talks





DESIGNING OUR SYSTEMS, TOGETHER

THE PARTICIPATORY DESIGN OF SOCIAL AND SOCIETAL SYSTEMS
AS AN ADVANCED AND CRUCIAL EXPRESSION OF CREATIVE
DEMOCRACY

Matthew Shapiro

The Mary Parker Follett Foundation
Follett Talks
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About Today's Presenter

Matthew Shapiro

- Director & President, The Mary Parker Follett Foundation
- Born & raised in Brooklyn, NY; most of adult life in the western US, and past 32 years in Boise, Idaho
- 17-year-old daughter

Careers

- Renewable energy 1990-2002; 2012-Today
- K-12 education 2003-2012
- Social systems work 1995-Today

Lifelong Mission

- Foster capacities needed for conscious evolution of society & culture from the local level upwards
 - Various initiatives and projects from 1995 through today, primarily local capacity-building, culture change efforts, working to bridging theory with action



My Experience with Participatory Design

- 1996** Invited by Bela H. Banathy to join his “Societal Design Team” at a team at the Asilomar Conversation on Social Systems Design
- 1997-2003** Developed materials to support communities undertaking the participatory design of education
- 1998-1999** Facilitated the participatory design of a neighborhood newspaper / collaboration system (The North End Agora)
- 2005-2006** Led the design of the Garden City Community School, an innovative K-8 public charter school, through a participatory design process
- 2026** Facilitating “Team L” of the Follett Conversation through idealized design of a K-12 civics education experience

education

justice

governance

health care

economy

private

enterprises

built spaces

any human activity system

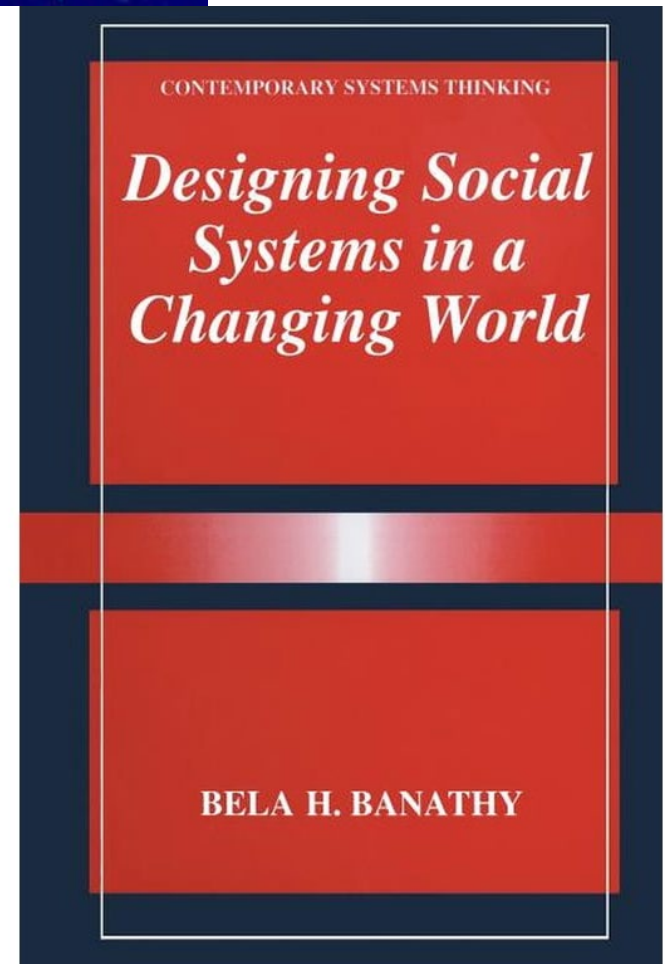
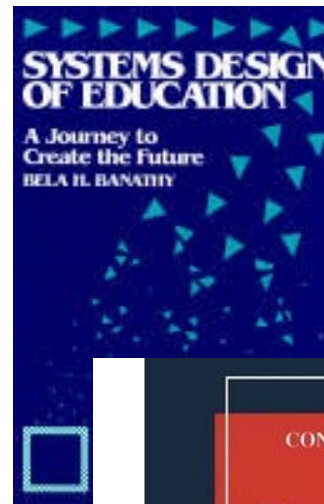
Some Questions We'll Be Exploring

- Were our social systems actually ever *designed*?
- Do the *systems we inherit* meet our needs well?
- How can we make sure our social system designs best meet our needs and aspirations?
- Who has the right to design our social systems?
- How can we design our social systems?
- What do we need to do to be able to design our social and societal systems?
- Where are there opportunities for participatory design of social systems?
- How does all of this relate to democracy?



Bela H. Banathy

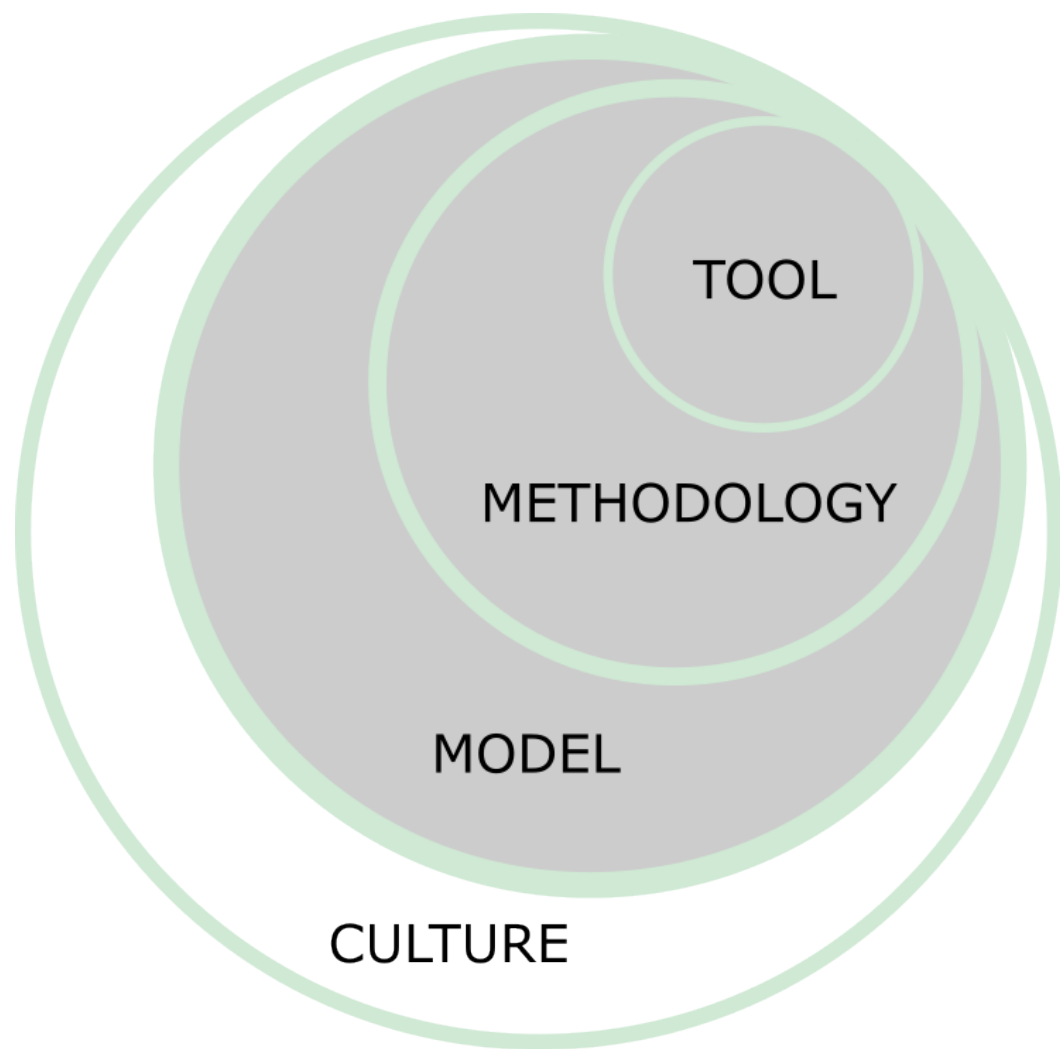
1919-2003



Design is a
disciplined
creative
decision-oriented
inquiry
by which means
the users of a system
bring about that system which exhibits goodness
of fit with their needs and aspirations.

*It is design
and not
intention
that creates
the future.*

Kenneth
Boulding



Design as presented here is **not** a **tool** or a **methodology**.

It is a **model** for how to create and evolve systems; it can use a variety of methodologies and tools.

Design can also be thought of as a **culture** (Banathy called it the “**third culture**” next to that of science and the humanities).

The Core Ethic

Only the users of a system have the right to design that system.

Users = User-Designers = Stakeholders. Banathy defined *stakeholders* broadly as everyone who serves, is served by, and is affected by a system.

**FROM THE BOTTOM-UP, FROM THE IDEAL TO THE
ACTUAL, AND FROM THE OUTSIDE-IN**

Design From the Bottom Up

- The core ethic in participatory design is that **only the users of a system have the right to design that system.**
- This is because our systems are vehicles for the expression and fulfillment of our needs and aspirations (or otherwise for their denial and repression).
- “You don’t have to be an expert to know what you want”
- **Experts are still essential**, but their role changes from that of designer to that of advisor & assistant.

*I must Create a
System, or be
enslav'd by
another Man's.*

*I will not Reason
and Compare;
my business is to
Create.*

William Blake,
Jerusalem

Design From the Ideal to the Actual

- Starting design from a present “problem” or crisis leads to “fixes” that fail to address roots, systems, contexts, or possibilities.
- Envisioning what we *really* want puts the present situation into a new light.
- Influenced by Russell Ackoff and others, Banathy advocated that we **start with the articulation of ideals, or a desired state, and work backwards to the present.**

Idealism and realism meet in the actual.

Mary Parker Follett

The ideal will always be on the horizon and will guide our purposeful move toward it. The ideal might be truly revolutionary, but its realization can be evolutionary.

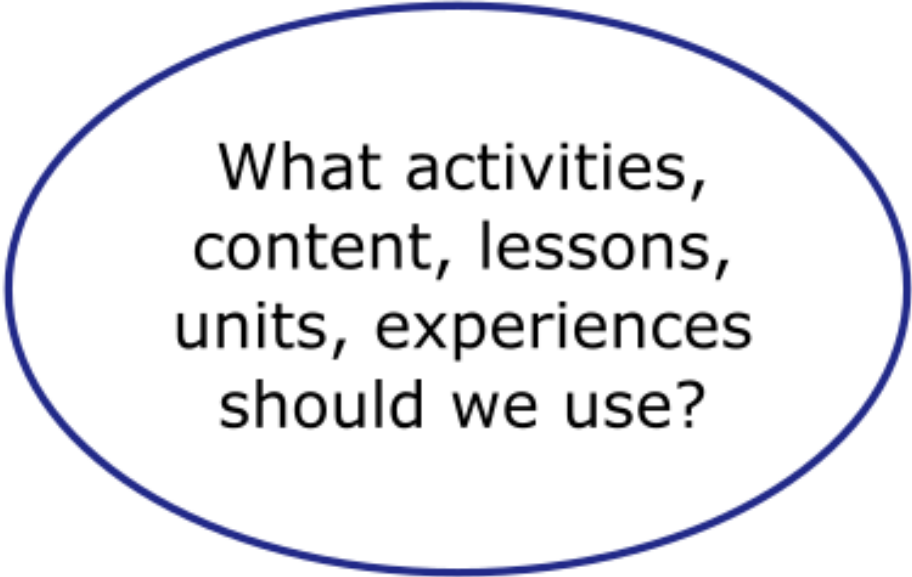
Bela H. Banathy

Design From the Outside-In

- This has to do with the SCOPE we start with.
- The core idea here is that the design of all of our systems sits within a larger context.
- That larger context is the IMAGE we hold about what life is for, what constitutes a good life and a good society.
- Starting by defining this image, together, is what Banathy called **“painting the largest possible picture on the largest possible canvas”**.

EXAMPLE OF DESIGN FROM THE OUTSIDE-IN: CIVICS EDUCATION

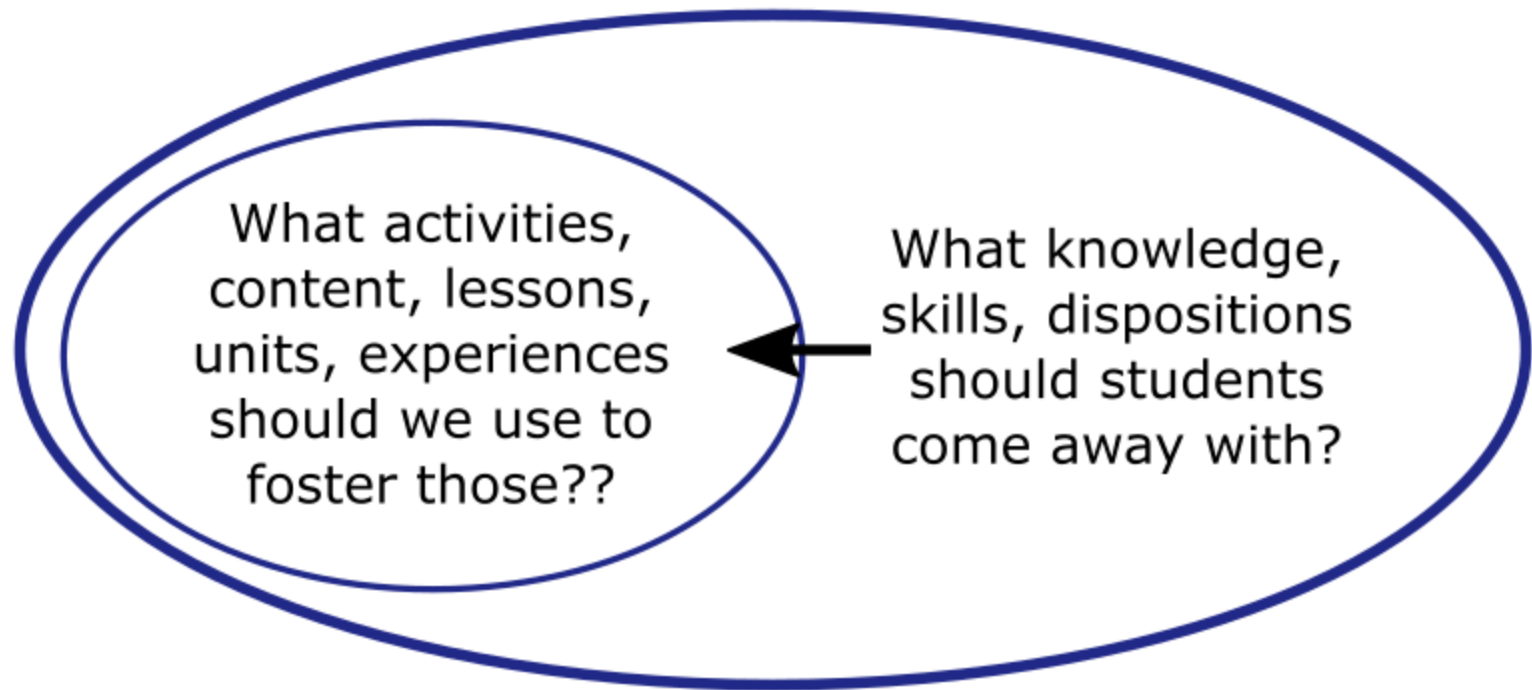
Typical Scope of Design



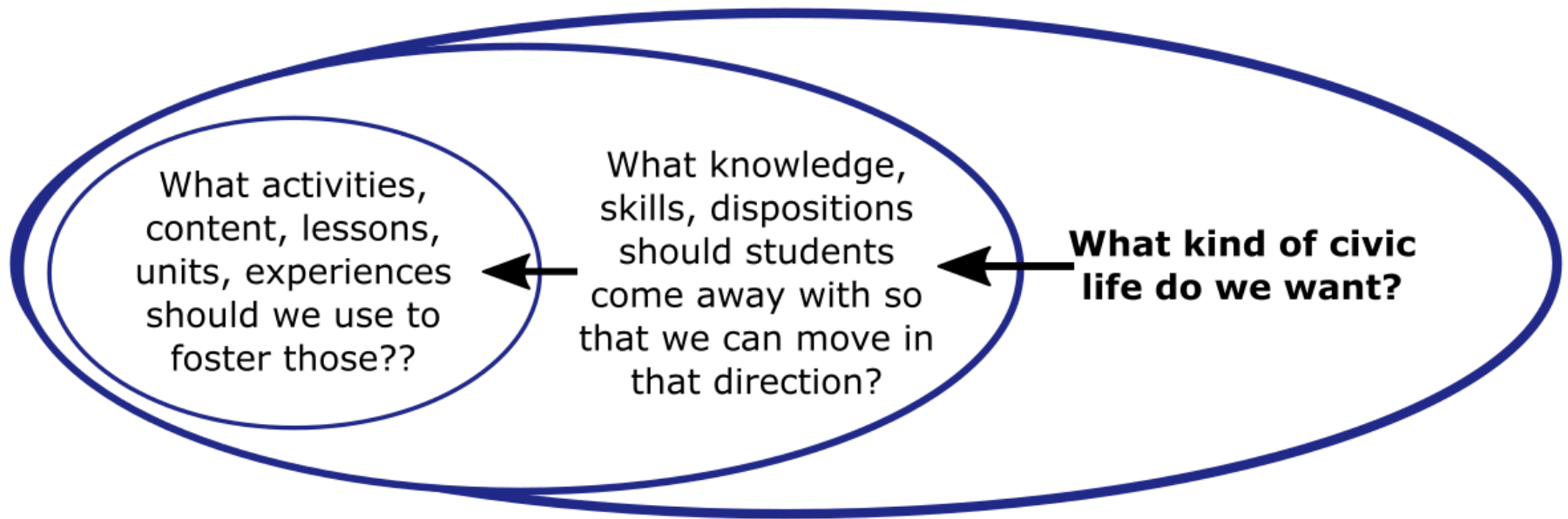
What activities,
content, lessons,
units, experiences
should we use?

...to meet civics standards x, y, z

Starting with Learning Outcome **Better**



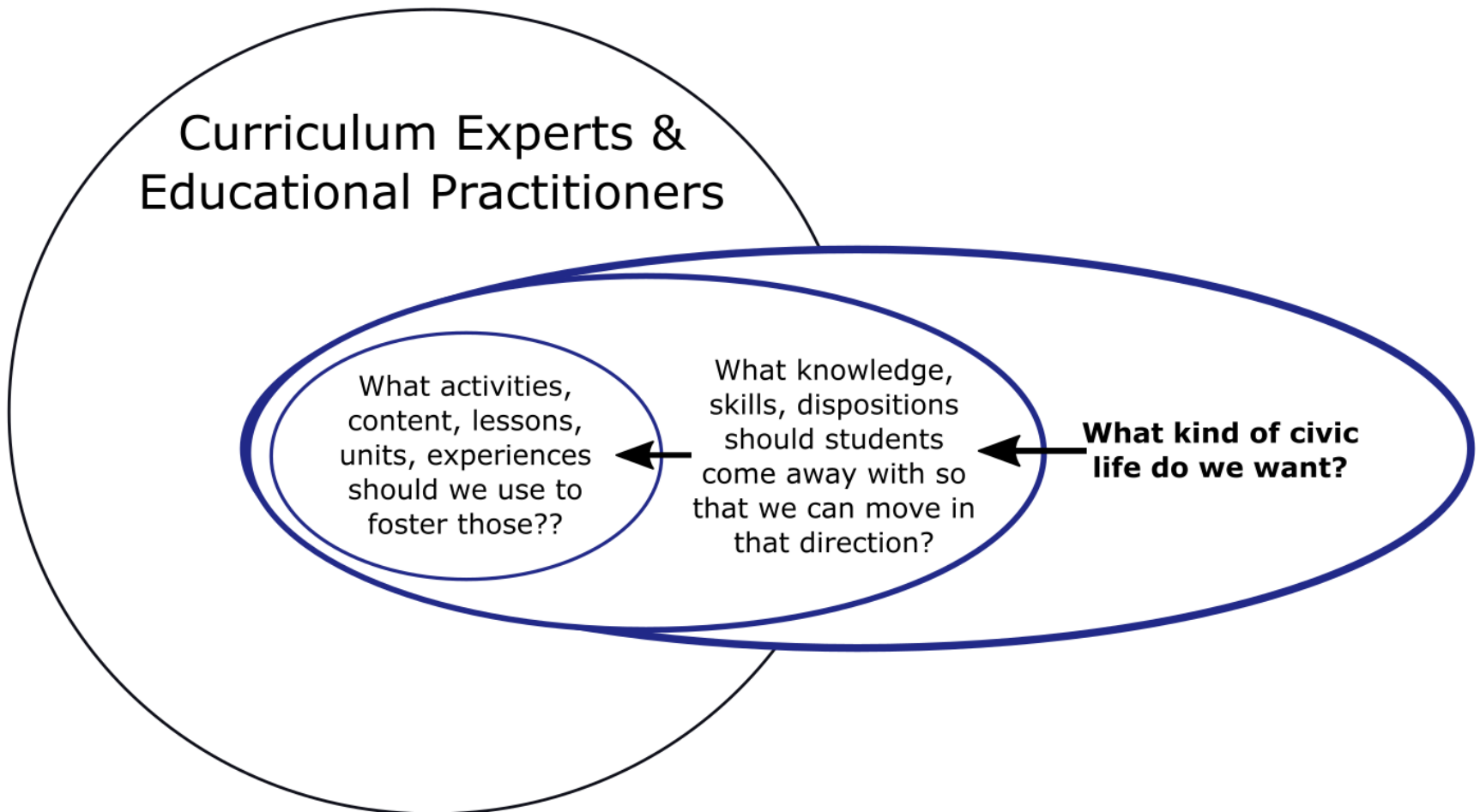
Starting with the ultimate reason/purpose **Best**



Who does the designing?

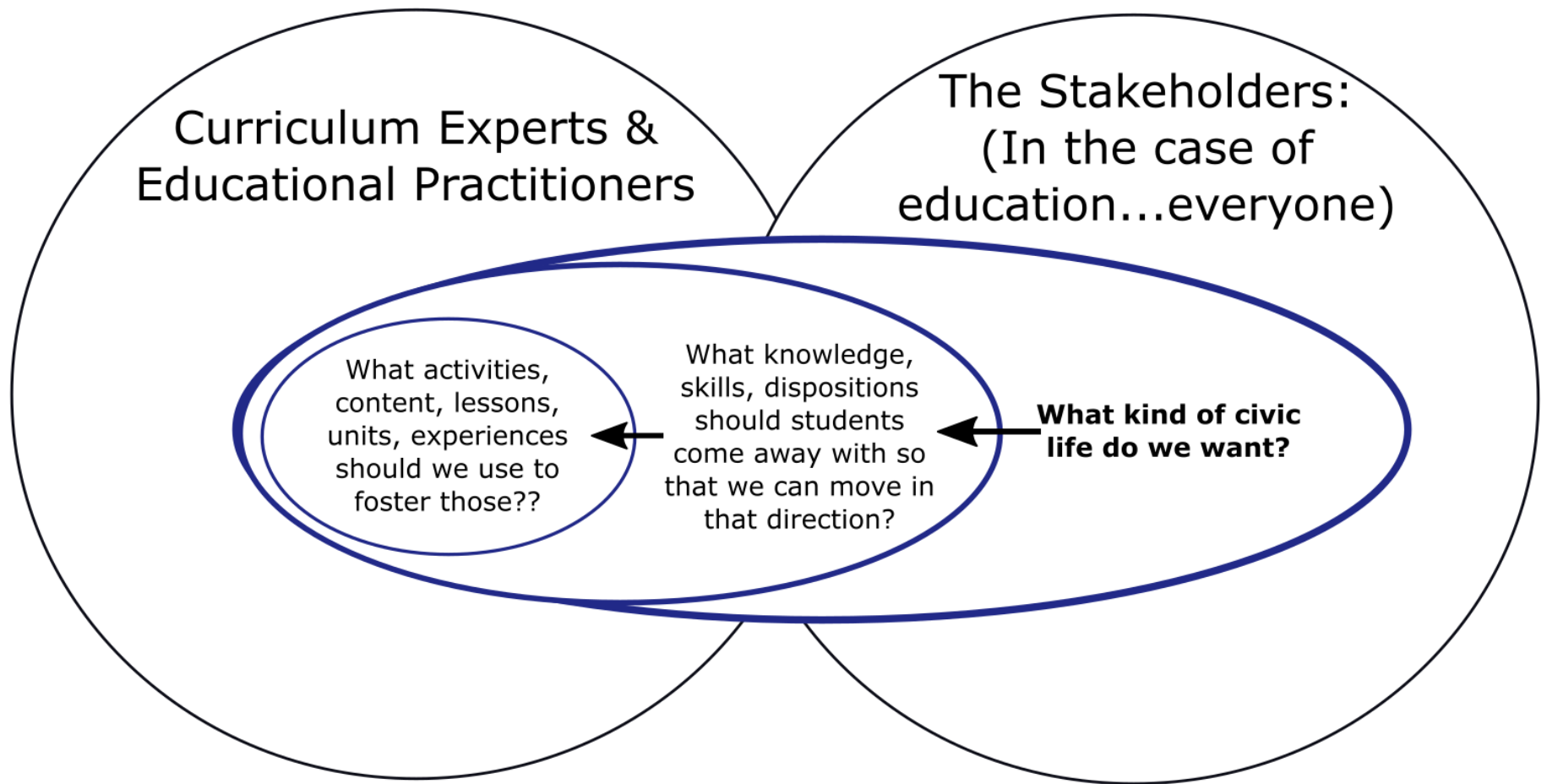
(Who has the right to answer these questions?

Who is *qualified* to answer these questions?)



Who needs to do the designing?

Start from the outside and work inward



DESIGN LITERACY, DESIGN READINESS, AND DESIGN COMPETENCE

Design Literacy, Design Readiness, & Design Competence

We're not quite ready for participatory design.

- Participatory design requires a widespread capacity for stakeholders to engage in dialogue with others. **We don't have that yet.**
- Participatory design requires a widespread capacity to integrate our perspective and to create together. **This is creative democracy, and we don't do it yet.**
- Participatory design requires a willingness to to dream, to express aspirations, core values and ideas, and to transcend –if only for a moment – existing constraints. **This is discouraged in our culture.**
- Participatory design requires transformational leadership and/or a readiness to challenge authority. **This is rare but we can find it.**

Design Literacy, Design Readiness, & Design Competence

Design readiness can only be grown through new kinds of education, for people of all ages, along with shifts in organizational and political cultures.

Design competence will come with experience and reflection.

We need to seek and pursue opportunities for experience in the participatory design of social systems. (Some ideas are explored later in the presentation)

PROCESS:
**GENERAL STAGES OF THE PARTICIPATORY
DESIGN OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS**

General Stages of The Participatory Design of Social Systems

Details, sequence, and stages may vary depending on the approach that is found to be best for the particular community, culture, system, etc.

1. **Preparation**
2. Creating an **Idealized Image of the Desired Society, Community, Life Together**, etc. (the broader context affected and effected by the system in focus)
3. Creating an **Idealized Image of the Desired System** in Focus
4. Defining the **Specifications** of the System
5. Creating **Design Solutions**
6. **Evaluating and Selecting** Design Solutions
7. **Designing the Transition** from Existing to New
8. Designing a **Living Design** Process
9. **Implementation, Reflection, & Ongoing Design**

While this list of might suggest a straight, or *linear* path, in practice it won't be so linear.

Modeling a Design: Banathy's Three Lenses

Banathy suggested considering a system's design through three complimentary lenses:

- The **Structure-Function** Lens: A Snapshot at a Moment in Time
- The **Process** Lens: A "Motion-Picture" View
- The **System-Environment** Lens: How the system exists and works within its wider systemic context

PITFALLS

Pitfalls

There are many pitfalls to watch out for in the design journey.

- Lack of Commitment to the Undertaking and to the Spirit of Participatory Design
- Compromised Integrity of Process
- Insufficient Representation of Perspectives
- Poor Process / Poorly Conducted Process
- Failure to Idealize / Transcend Current Thinking
- Systemic Environment Ignored
- Transition & Implementation Failures
- Approaching Systems Design as a One-Time Intervention

A DESIGN CULTURE & COMMUNITIES THAT DESIGN

Continuous Design: A Design Culture & Communities that Design

The end, or ideal, is ever-evolving. **Participatory design is meant to be continuous, not episodic. It is not a one-and-done but a way of life of evolutionary learning.**

Progress is an infinite advance toward the infinitely receding goal of infinite perfection. – Mary Parker Follett

OPPORTUNITIES AND CATALYSTS FOR DESIGNING OUR SYSTEMS, TOGETHER

Opportunities

- Every kind of system that touches our lives is an immediate opportunity for participatory design or redesign (even if we're perfectly happy with it). However...
- Smaller, more local systems present easier opportunities for participatory design than larger ones. Examples?
 - A neighborhood association
 - A police department
 - A faith community
 - A program within a school district
 - A private enterprise
 - A public space like a park.
- It may be easier to design new systems than redesign existing ones.

Catalysts

What might catalyze communities and societies undertaking the journey of participatory design?

- Massive failure of existing system
- Surfacing and confronting the assumptions underlying an existing system or institution
- Other?

**CONCLUSION: PARTICIPATORY DESIGN AS A
NATURAL EXTENSION OF, OR DIMENSION OF,
PARTICIPATORY & CREATIVE DEMOCRACY**

Design & Democracy

- Democracy is about all people being able to effect and affect their shared situations through the integration of their perspectives, needs, aspirations, and ideas – their whole lives.
- Systems are ongoing patterns of information that heavily influence and mediate our lives. As such, their design is a “situation” and is as important a subject and object of democracy as is crafting a law or policy.
- Learning & doing participatory design may well be a key cross-catalyst for learning & doing democracy.

Soz A 1351

DESIGN FOR AMERICA

AN EDUCATIONAL EXPLORATION
OF THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY
For Senior High Schools and Junior Colleges

By
THEODORE BRAMELD
*Associate Professor of Educational Philosophy
University of Minnesota*
with the collaboration of
KENNETH HOVEY, Superintendent
DOROTHY O'SHAUGHNESSY and DONNA TRAPHAGAN
Floodwood High School, Floodwood, Minnesota



1945

HINDS, HAYDEN & ELDREDGE, INC.
NEW YORK • PHILADELPHIA



High School Students Work on "A Design for America"

THEODORE BRAMELD
R. B. RAUP
B. O. SMITH

THE FLOODWOOD PROJECT

The students vote to try it. One morning about a year ago fifty boys and girls, members of the junior and senior classes in a small, fairly typical rural community school at Floodwood, Minnesota, met for discussion with the superintendent of schools, the English teacher, the social studies teacher, and a visiting member of the University of Minnesota faculty. The students were asked whether they would enjoy embarking upon an educational adventure. Instead of studying the literature of the past, the institutions and practices of yesterday and today, why not turn to the future for a change? Why not try to answer the question, "What kind of society do we as young citizens want to build for tomorrow?"

The discussion did not go into detail regarding the "design for America" that they would construct. Indeed, this would have been premature, for the construction would take place by cooperative effort from step to step. The teachers did not suggest that the

probably some of the traditional subject matter in such courses as American literature would be retained, and that certainly practice in speaking and writing would be provided, but that both content and skill would be gained primarily as pertinent to the over-all purpose of the experiment rather than for their own sake or otherwise in isolation. But every student was urged to be critical and not to be influenced merely by the instructors' convictions. Accordingly, when they were ready to make a decision, they did so by secret ballot: three voted against trying the experiment, the rest were in favor. But since all had previously agreed to abide by the decision of the majority, the dissenters remained in the project and their identity was never learned.

They seek to agree on the kind of society they want. Four and one-half months, two hours a day, five days a week, were devoted to the project. An orientation-motivation period of four weeks focused upon two problems: Is it important to build a plan for the future of America? and Is it possible to get the goals of such a plan so clear that the

For a Deeper Dive...

For a deeper exploration, download the new booklet *The Best We Can Do: Designing our Systems, Together*:

tinyurl.com/designingoursystemstogether

I'd welcome your feedback on that booklet.

For a comprehensive dive, I highly recommend Banathy's *Designing Social Systems in a Changing World* (Plenum, 1996) and other books and articles by Banathy (see Google Scholar or ask me for recommendations & materials)

Presenter Contact

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*Some men see
things as they
are and ask why.
Others dream
things that
never were and
say, why not.*

George Bernard
Shaw

Next Follett Talk

**Wednesday, September 16, 11-12:30 Eastern /
3-4:30 GMT**

Bernadette Wesley will present on **Sociocracy**.
Contact us for the Zoom link.