Opportunity Spaces (33)

Opportunities help determine the possible paths to the future that are available to people. Hence the opportunities that society offers are of critical importance. An Opportunity Space presents possible steps that people might take as they plan for, and move into, the future. Opportunities can include classes and seminars, volunteer positions, jobs, contests, access to the media, timely announcements, mentoring, scholarships, grants and others.

A number of questions came up in our exploration of opportunity spaces. What opportunities exist? Do they exist for all citizens or just privileged ones? How are these opportunities developed? Do people know about them? How are they publicized? It is important to devote attention and resources (including policy, services, media and technological systems) to help create new (and improve existing) “opportunity spaces” for people and communities who need them.

Written by Douglas Schuler

Strategic Capacity (34)

Occasionally, a small group with meager resources fighting a powerful foe, actually wins. One of the most famous examples is David vanquishing Goliath. A thousand other struggles, against poverty, against oppression, against environmental degradation, retell the story with equally improbable outcomes. What’s the secret to these unlikely successes? Resources don’t tell the whole story: the powerful group sometimes fails while the impoverished group succeeds. Neither does the idea of “political opportunity.” And characteristics such as dedication, drive, emotional commitment don’t always portend success or failure of activist struggles or social movements. According to Marshall Ganz, “Leaders devise strategy in interaction with their environments.” He stresses that leadership teams are more likely to have effective Strategic Capacity when they include “insiders” and “outsiders,” have strong and weak “ties” (connections) to a variety of networks, and have “knowledge of diverse collective action repertoires.” Based on Ganz’s reading of Jerome Bruner, “Strategic thinking is reflexive and imaginative, based on ways leaders learn to reflect on the past, attend to the present, and anticipate the future.”

Written by Douglas Schuler

Media Literacy (35)

Media Literacy is the process of decoding and making sense of all media. It allows us to critically view media and to evaluate the role that media play in our lives. The primary objective of media education is not simply to foster critical awareness and understanding, but to develop awareness of our roles as active agents when engaged by all media, no matter the context.

Therefore, education that fosters Media Literacy needs to address the changing media environments. We need to perform more public media criticism. We need to engage with media more closely to keep them in check and to be informed as to how we are responding and why. We need to be more serious about our media environments and foster greater awareness of the impact and influence media systems have on daily life. We must arm all people with the knowledge, skills, and values a media education program provides – granting people access to new technology and information about its workings and ideological implication. Finally, we need more alternative communication systems to counter these problems.

Written by Mark Lipton

Participatory Design (36)

Many artifacts that we use are ill designed and do not appropriately address the needs of the people for whom they are designed and produced. The problems include the inconvenient and the dangerous. And in the design of policy or any systems that facilitate group interaction, developers can create systems that embed users in a system like cogs in a machine in situations where a more human-centered approach that encouraged our humanity could also be developed. John Dewey has written that “The very fact of exclusion from participation is a subtle form of suppression.” This can be avoided if the users of any designed system (software, information and communication systems, administrative services and processes, art, city plans, architecture, education, governance, and others) are brought into its design process in an open, authentic, and uncoerced fashion. Participatory Design is the philosophical and practical approach to design in which people who will use the designed result and those who will be affected by it should be included in the process of creating it.

Written by Mark Lipton