

Introduction

IT IS NOT AT ALL uncommon for students in social work and other social sciences such as sociology, political science, and public administration to be interested in a wide variety of different forms of deliberation and dialogue. This section demonstrates something of the range of interest in deliberation and dialogue, with contributions from journalism, family therapists and public administration.

David Ryfe at the University of Nevada, Reno, is a well known author on public deliberation. In his chapter, Ryfe looks closely at what he terms “the deliberative posture,” a kind of applied micro-sociology or a social psychological analysis of the act of deliberation. “In this essay,” Ryfe writes, “my goal is to reduce the fuzziness that envelops the concept of deliberation.”

In “Public Deliberation and Dialogue in Public Management,” David G. Williams, emeritus professor of political science and public administration at West Virginia University, lays a theoretical groundwork for public deliberation as a managerial tool or strategy in the public sector. His perspective is as applicable to public social services as to any other form of government service. “Public deliberation and dialogue” Williams says, “can contribute significantly to effective public management. While some public managers have been pulled unwillingly into various types of public deliberation, it is critical to recognize that there are some important and legitimate management functions and needs met by such deliberation.”

In chapter 14, one of the editors (Lohmann) explores “the social dynamics of citizens in public spaces” through certain convergences between deliberative democracy theorizing and commons theory. The chapter concludes with two “messages”: For adherents to the rational choice paradigms, he notes, “There is more to life than the unfettered display of naked self-

interest.” And, he says, the message to “true believers in deliberation and dialogue” is that “deliberation and dialogue do not automatically lead to reconciliation in all circumstances, and even when they will, getting there can be sweaty, exhausting hard work.”

In “Question Mapping: A Tool for Organizing and Sustaining Dialogue,” Richard Ludeman, of Carta Nova Consulting in Portland, Oregon, and Erna Gelles, of the Department of Public Administration in the Hatfield School of Government at Portland State University, pursue a particular management application with their exploration of a group process technique. “Question mapping” is a “process for defining the central issue while identifying related issues and their relationships to the central issue.”

The final chapter in this section is by a pair of family therapists, Neal and Susan Newfield. Neal is an associate professor in the Division of Social Work and Susan is an associate professor in the School of Nursing at West Virginia University. As they note in their chapter, several key assumptions of family therapy closely parallel those of deliberation and dialogue.