

## **Nancy Roberts**

Although my participation was limited, the time I spent at the workshop was invaluable. Four points stand out for me.

First, I was delighted that you included practitioners who have been out in the field working on deliberative democracy and dispute resolution, especially those who write about their experiences. Practitioners are discovering very creative and innovative ways to deal with the challenges of deliberative democracy and their work needs to be validated and reinforced. Your choice of participants signaled your interests in bringing the two groups together, a task that has not been easy up to this point given the wide ranging disciplines from which we come.

Second, although my perspective may be limited due to my early departure, I think I can see some next steps that need to be taken with the two groups (practitioner-researchers). I think we need to identify the basic theoretical ground on which we all can stand. I believe there could be a common, theoretical foundation, but it has yet to be clearly articulated. Each of us has worked in our sub fields of interest; we now need to pull the years of research together to begin to build this framework. At this juncture, I think theory-building is our greatest challenge (Roberts, 2005). By bringing us all together, and giving us the ability to contact one another, you most likely have jump-started this process.

Third, and related to the second, I think there are important distinctions between dispute resolution and problem-solving. Most of the deliberative democracy field settings in which I have worked/observed can be characterized as "messes." There is confusion, ambiguity, uncertainty, but not as yet fully formed disputes as the dispute-resolution literature characterizes them. Instead, the challenge in dealing with messes seems to be articulating what the issues are and how to cope with them. For theoretical and practical reasons, I think we need to be careful to make distinctions--whether disputes or disorders best describe the situation.

Fourth, and this is a personal note, I found myself less depressed and more hopeful about our deliberative democracy and dispute resolution after interacting with the workshop participants. It was wonderful to find a group of like-minded people who have made it part of their life's work. Thank you for bringing us all together. It was nice to put a face to the names of researchers whose work I have read over the years.