

And a Little Child Shall Lead Them - Peacemakers 2018

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I have in previous entries (July 2012 and July 2013) written about a peer mediation initiative called the Peacemakers Conference. The purpose of the Peacemakers Conference is to teach 13-16 year olds how to resolve conflicts amicably in a workshop cum competition format. This year's Peacemakers Conference was held from 20 to 22 June 2018.

As in previous years, we asked students from different schools to work together to create a visual metaphor for mediation. This started in 2015 and has become a regular feature in the Peacemakers Conference. Metaphors from previous years be found in the entries for November 2015, August 2016 and July 2017.

This year, the students came up with 8 (plus 1) visual metaphors which I would like to share with readers in this entry. For each of these, an image of the students presenting the metaphor is shared along with a description of the metaphor.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Ms. Charmaine Yap, Ms. Samantha Lek, Mr. Sean Lim and the Peacemakers Facilitation team for capturing the the description and images of each of the metaphors that appear below.

MEDIATION METAPHORS

GROUP 1: Mediation is Magic

Mediation is magic, and the Patronus deer that is summoned when Harry Potter casts the Expecto Patronum spell was chosen to represent the idea of magic. The spell is a charm that drives away life-sucking beasts, but is famously difficult to cast. This is like mediation - the difficult nature of practising mediation, mediating conflict, and solving conflicts and problems. When Harry Potter casts this spell, he has to recall a happy memory. However, he had to try this a lot of times, and only succeeded when he tried very hard. Similarly, if mediators do not mediate properly, the mediation will not work well, and might even make the situation worse.

Magic is also universal among everyone. From the old to the young, everyone appreciates magic. This is similar to peacemaking and mediation - everyone there is there to appreciate and understand it.

Mediation is also magical because by merely asking questions, people can be guided together. Just as there are endless types of spells, there are endless types of solutions in mediation. It is up to the mediator to ask parties questions to guide them along.

The Patronus is a beautiful animal. Harry Potter's Patronus is a stag. Similar to mediation, it is the unpredictable and beautiful result of parties working on a framework to resolve the problem together.

GROUP 2: Mediation is the Lighthouse that guides relationSHIPS

The lighthouse is a guide in the dark. The lighthouse symbolises the mediator, and the ships symbolise the parties. The lighthouse guides ships to land without piloting them. Similarly, the mediator guides parties to a solution without giving it to them. The darkness of the night sky symbolises how parties are unable to see each other's perspectives, but the light from the lighthouse helps them to see each other and their common destination.

GROUP 3: Mediation is like a Camera Tripod

The tripod's three stands represent the mediator and two parties. All three support one another for the foundation of the picture, and have to support one another in order for the camera to work. They also maintain level ground for the camera. If any one of these elements are missing, the picture will not be beautiful.

The camera has to be on a level plane in order to work. This represents the mediator's neutrality. The camera cannot stand without the mediator or one of the parties missing, and will fall. This shows how crucial each party is to the mediation.

The height of the tripod can be adjusted. This represents the flexibility of altering perspectives throughout the mediation session.

Just like how pictures in the camera can be deleted, conflict can be deleted at mediation. All the pictures taken are stored on the memory card, and are gone from the camera when the memory card is removed. This represents confidentiality at mediation.

Everyone can exercise their autonomy to participate by being in the picture. Similarly, anyone can participate in mediation and benefit from the process.

The camera's zoom out feature allows the mediator to move away from the narrow tunnel vision and look at the big picture, while the focus feature allows parties to focus on what others are saying and listen attentively to one another.

GROUP 4: Mediation is a Missing Puzzle Piece

Skit:
- "I have a puzzle but the two pieces won't fit."
- "Should I cut it up?"
- "But the puzzle won't look nice?"
- "I found another piece."
- "Oh wow it fits perfectly!"

Mediation is like a missing puzzle piece that connects two parties together that are imperfect. Having to cut a puzzle piece in order for them to fit is like parties sacrificing part of their interests in order to come to a compromise. Like a missing puzzle piece, mediation allows parties to reach a mutually acceptable solution that doesn't require either to give up what is important to them. A beautiful picture is formed by the pieces fitting together, the way a solution is reached when parties and the mediator come together.

GROUP 5: Mediation is a Pair of Swans

Mediation is a pair of swans, because swans are gentle and peaceful. When both swans are put together, the shape their necks make is a diamond. Just like how a diamond is hard to obtain, mediation is hard to master. Both also play important roles in society. A diamond can be used as a tool to shape or carve other things, while mediation is a tool we use to sort out problems.

The spectacles on the swans show that viewing things through different lenses can help make things clearer, and help you see things from different perspectives. The bridge in the background is to commemorate the previous year's winning metaphor.

GROUP 6: Mediation is a Compass

A maze has multiple entry points, each leading to the centre via a unique route. Similarly, parties enter mediation with a unique perspective. What they see, experience, and the obstacles they face can be very different from one another. When they reach the end point, there is conflict. Parties think they know each other's stories since they are in the same space. They assume that they had experienced the same thing since they are in the same maze, but what they had gone through may be different. This is a form of tunnel vision - assuming what they experienced is the same. When that is not the case, it leads to conflict.

A compass needs a needle, cardinal directions, and its casing to work. Likewise, mediation cannot proceed if either party or the mediator is absent.

Confidentiality: The fact that the compass is enclosed in an opaque maze represents confidentiality since no one outside the maze can get an idea of what is happening in the maze.

Neutrality: Only when the compass is on a flat surface will it work well. Similarly, neutrality must be maintained by the mediator for the most effective outcome.

Autonomy: Parties choose whether they want to hold the compass or to be guided by it. The compass helps parties see different sides and perspectives to the issues by allowing them to learn about the stories of different parties. This avoids tunnel vision.

This is where mediation comes in. Mediation helps parties see different perspectives to the complicated issue by learning about the other parties' stories. Because parties have different orientations, turning in the same direction might not necessarily set the other party on the same route. However, a compass will set parties on the same route (by guiding them North, South, East, or West), towards a solution that they can all agree on together.

Mediation is a compass because it can help parties see the complete picture, set common ground, and guide them through conflict.

GROUP 7: Mediation is a Tightrope

A tightrope is very thin, and you have to be very focused to not lose balance. Maintaining balance is like maintaining neutrality. If you don't maintain neutrality, you will fall. Similarly, the mediation process will not proceed well if the mediator is not neutral.

Although the tightrope is very thin, it still connects two points together. Similarly, mediation brings two parties (represented by the mountains) together. We (the students) have written everyone's names on the tightrope in order to convey that everyone has undertaken the challenge of mediating between two parties.

GROUP 8: Mediation is a Needle

There are different kinds of needles.

Threading Needle

A threading needle patches up holes in fabric, and binds different pieces of fabric together to make something beautiful. Likewise, the mediator enables parties to reach resolution. Just like how the needle guides the thread, the mediator guides parties. However, the needle can also cause hurt - it can pierce you and cause you to harm yourself. Similarly, mediation can also cause harm if it is used wrongly.

Syringe Needle

Mediation can help people recover from emotional wounds. A syringe draws out blood, like how mediation draws out conflict. A syringe needle must also be precise - specific mediation techniques need to be applied depending on the context.

Acupuncture Needle

Acupuncture needles are pin needles - they need to be inserted precisely and accurately, otherwise the patient will be in a lot of discomfort. Similarly, if the mediator says something that makes parties uncomfortable, then parties will be in a situation of discomfort. However, if the acupuncture is done well, blood will flow well into the areas that are stressed, relieving the patient of pain. This is similar to the relief mediation provides if it is done well.

SPECIAL MENTION: Mediation is a Toilet

The three principles of mediation are: (i) autonomy, (ii) neutrality, and (iii) confidentiality.

- Autonomy: Just like mediation, you can choose when, where, or how you use the toilet. You can use it in the day or night, and decide how long you want to use it for. You can even use what type of toilet you want to use
- the squatting type, sitting type, or even a potty.
- Neutrality: Long or short, big or small, the toilet will not judge.
- Confidentiality: Whatever is made in the toilet, stays in the toilet. After the work is done and you use the flush, all evidence is destroyed.

The cubicle is like a mediation centre. You can go whenever you like, and leave only when you are satisfied.

The 4 stages of the mediation process is similar to going to the toilet.

- Opening: You are apprehensive because you don't know what you will find in a toilet. But when you are really urgent, you go in anyway.
- Information Gathering: This is when you release the poop. Sometimes there is so much that you don't know where to begin. But once you get comfortable, everything starts pouring out. Some get constipation, while others get diarrhoea. Everyone goes through pain, and it takes time and effort, but things will come through sooner or later. After that, you can step out and take a breath of fresh air.
- Problem Solving: The flushing comes after you have been satisfied. It is only when you get everything out, that you are ready to start afresh.
- Closing: Now you can step out of the smelly cubicle and start afresh, since you have gotten everything out of the way.

"Pissmakers - Helping you get your shit together"

That brings us to the end of another installment of visual metaphors for mediation! I hope readers found some of these as inspiring as we did!

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