

# Kluwer Mediation Blog

## Nanny McPhee's for Grownups

Andrea Maia (Mediar360 – Dispute Resolution ) · Monday, February 25th, 2013

My son loves Nanny McPhee. For those who don't have children, it is a lovely British movie with Emma Thompson , adapted from Christianna Brand's "Nurse Matilda" books.

It goes more or less like this: In 19th century England, a widowed man has seven children who have had a series of seventeen nannies, whom they systematically drive out. He attempts to hire another nanny from the agency that sent the past seventeen nannies, but the agency refuses him, as the children have sent the past nannies away, terrorized. Desperate to find another nanny, after a series of mysterious events, an unusual and hideous woman named Nanny McPhee arrives at his home and the movie goes on.

There is a special dialogue which can summarize the rest of the story very well:

**"Nanny McPhee:** *There is something you should understand about the way I work. When you need me but do not want me, then I must stay. When you want me but no longer need me, then I have to go. It's rather sad, really, but there it is.*

**Simon (one of the children):** *We will never want you!*

**Nanny McPhee:** *Then I will never go."*

For my son, it is guaranteed entertainment. He sees it over and over again, laughing a lot at each time as if it were the first time. To me, as a mediator, this apparently childish movie all of sudden started to look like a lesson.

It all began after a fellow mediator shared an interesting thought with me: "the more the parties need the mediator, the less they want him." Maybe, it relates to the fact that the parties are so immersed in the conflict itself that they do not see the possibility of to solving the dispute in any pacific way. All they care about is imposing their positions to everyone else.

Yes, my fellow mediator is right. We, mediators, sometimes feel like Nanny McPhee. It is necessary to break the barrier between the parties against the use of mediation. Often the parties think they do not need mediation and that it will never solve their dispute through dialogue with the other parties. Overall, mediators must not only mediate the specific problem at hand, but also try to coach the parties to acquire the competence and tools to manage their own conflicts with a more open mind, so that in the future other mediation sessions are not needed, or at least it can be used in a more effective way.

It is the mediator's role to help parties to experience a shift in thinking, to understand what it is like to think through the different angles of a conflict, to carefully consider options to improve the situation and, last but not least, to handle emotions and expectations in an effective way. In this sense, mediators must attempt to teach them to ask open questions, provide feedback, offer insights, and above all learn to actively listen to each other.

Perhaps, in fact, mediators are Nanny McPhee's for grownups. Perhaps our job is to be there when we are needed and leave when our presence is no longer required, but often desired.

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The graphic features a black background with white text and a circular icon. The icon depicts a group of stylized human figures, with one figure in the center being magnified by a white magnifying glass. The entire graphic is framed by a thin blue and green horizontal line at the top.

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