

“Fundamentals of Mediation” Under the Microscope

Imagine the energy of a group of men and women ranging in age from 25 to 70 years with varied employment experience from 1 to 41 years including lawyers, social workers, and human resource professionals, all of whom have one thing in common: they want to learn mediation skills. In the 7th year of teaching our course Fundamentals of Mediation, it was time – maybe even the time was overdue – to do a more formal research study about the effectiveness of the course.

This interactive 40-hour mediation course is approved by the ADR Institute of Ontario and completion of the course qualifies for application as a mediator member of the ADR Institute of Ontario. The purpose of this course is to develop skills for dealing with conflict and learn a step-by-step model to develop solutions in conflict situations. Through the hands-on interactive activities during the course, participants build critical communication skills to a) encourage participation and resolve conflict, b) develop techniques to resolve potentially explosive or volatile situations, c) practise skills to give and receive criticism, and d) develop innovative solutions that work for all parties in a conflict.

In May, 2009, ten participants, three males and seven females comprised the group described above and agreed to participate in our research study. Before the course, the participants answered questions about their knowledge of conflict and the mediation process. The identified knowledge gaps were incorporated by the instructors into the course content. At the end of the course, participants completed a second survey questionnaire and a feedback form in order to examine any changes in their knowledge and to capture their reflections about the course content, learning experience and topics that they would like to learn in a future course.

The results provided evidence that the Fundamentals of Mediation course has a significant effect ($p < 0.001$) on participants' knowledge. At the end of the course, participants' scores were on average twice as high as pre-test scores. Figure 1 compares the pre- and post-test scores by individual.

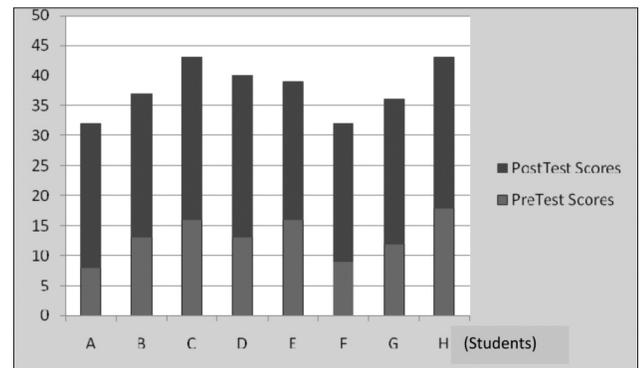


Figure 1: Comparison of the Pre- and Post- Test Scores for Each Student (A to H)

How did the participants feel about the education they received?

For some participants this was not a new experience, and at the same time it helped to reinforce and reiterate many of the elements related to mediation. One individual articulated that, “I think it just is more of a refresher” and “it basically supported my feeling about it, and it kind of refreshed me on the different terminology”. Other individuals expressed that it provided a great understanding of the mediation process when intervening in a conflict and having the role-plays allowed them to enhance their mediating techniques. Participants articulated that “it just opens your mind and [it] was very applicable to us enhancing skills as a mediator”. A participant stated that “the ability to use the five stages of mediation process when intervening with conflict was perhaps the missing piece or a place where I could see room for [my] development [at the beginning of the course].”

To what extent did the course satisfy the participants' expectations? As indicated in Figure 2, majority of the participants (92%) strongly agreed/agreed that they were very

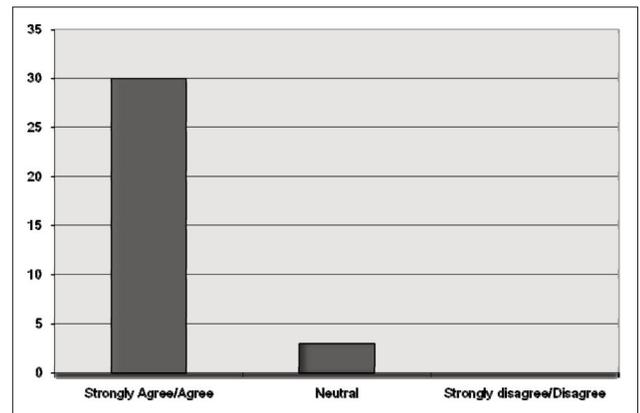


Figure 2: Students' Satisfaction with the Course Content.

satisfied and the course met their expectations. Few participants (8%) gave a Neutral response to these questions. None of the participants disagreed/strongly disagreed with satisfaction about the course content. Interestingly, the participants were not only receptive to learning about fundamentals of mediation, but they were also receptive to feedback about the current state of their abilities and discovering where they could improve their skills.

Five main themes emerged from the participants' responses: enhance knowledge of conflict and

(“Fundamentals of Mediation”... cont'd next page)

Applause !

Kathryn Munn has achieved recognition as a C. Arb. from the ADR Institute of Canada. The C. Arb. or Chartered Arbitrator designation, Canada's only official designation for practising Arbitrators, recognizes “generalist competence” upon which the public can rely as a basis to identify qualified arbitrators.

("Fundamentals of Mediation"... cont'd)

develop conflict management skills; enhance knowledge about mediation and acquire skills and techniques to mediate; develop communication skills in conflict situations; experience course content appropriate for building confidence to manage conflict and to mediate; and establish a network with each other in a supportive learning environment

1. Enhance knowledge of conflict and develop conflict management skills

There was a positive attitude towards the course content about conflict modes and conflict management. All participants (100%) strongly agreed that they felt more confident and able to resolve a conflict as the result of their participation in this course. One of the participants was surprised that s/he found, *"the use in my personal life of the insight gains (dealing with staff, family)."* Another said, *"the most significant thing that I learned working through conflict modes is that everyone had one mode while going [through] conflict but it doesn't always stay the same."*

2. Enhance knowledge about mediation, and acquire skills and techniques to mediate

As might be expected, there were two common areas that participants indicated in their reasons for taking this course: enhancing knowledge and improving their skills in conducting a mediation process effectively.

About their knowledge of mediation, participants reported that through the course activities, they gained awareness about the importance of mediation process and also a better understanding about its *"protocol and process"*.

Furthermore, all participants felt that the five-stage mediation process was helpful when intervening in a conflict. Participants commented: *"How much I enjoyed the learning process. I was fascinated about the whole process from [stage] 1 to 5"; "How much I have to learn"; "I strongly agree that this course demonstrated to me the importance of using stages of mediation process when intervening with a conflict... because I have previously [conducted] mediations in the past and now I know the proper process"*.

3. Develop communication skills in conflict situations

Not surprisingly, all participants expressed how important it is to develop communication skills to resolve conflicts. Participants described how the course content assisted them to learn and use language to influence the effectiveness of the mediation process. Also another important component of communication that participants reported was the improvement of their active listening skills. Participants described how they enjoyed the development of their communication skills: *"Listening prevented me from forming my own opinions too quickly and I was able to retain more information"; "I am able to listen and pick up on key ideas and interests"; and "...[Y]our listening skill can always be improved"*.

4. Experience course content appropriate for building confidence to manage conflict and to mediate

There was for the most part a positive attitude towards the organization and structure of the fundamentals of mediation course. Participants described how the course *"was well organized"* and *"straight forward"*. Participants also expressed their satisfaction with the written materials that were provided as well as demonstrations and role-plays. One participant described how s/he enjoyed the different formats; *"there was audio, visual, there were scenarios, role plays, it was really interesting"* and *"[it was] nice to break it up with that type of activity that you can sit back and watch something."*

5. Establish a network with each other in a supportive learning environment

This course also offered an opportunity for participants to establish a network with each other. They had opportunities to discuss situations from their own experience and this contributed to their learning.

Overall, regardless of their previous knowledge of mediation, or of their age or experience level, the research concluded that the Fundamentals of Mediation course is very beneficial for participants, equipping them with the right tools to manage conflict and mediate. Thank you to our May, 2009 students for their participation in this research. We are using the results to continue to improve our program.

From my own experience as an instructor in the course, I know that in addition to the growth of knowledge and skills documented by the researcher, the energy and supportive network continues long after the 40 hours of the course are finished. The last word goes to a participant:

"I learned for the first time the stages of the mediation process and how to use them. It is fair to say that [this] is a Fundamental Course on Mediation."

Munn-thly Memo will return in the next issue of Common Ground

Mark Your Calendar

Upcoming Training Events Presented by Kathryn Munn

Fundamentals of Mediation

Intensive 40 hour program
May 10, 11, 12, 17, and 18, 2010
8:30 AM to 5:30 PM each day
Course location: London, Ontario
This course is approved by the
ADR Institute of Ontario.
Registration form available at
www.munnrcs.com
Please call 519-660-1242
(toll-free 1-888-216-3202) or email
kmunn@munnrcs.com for more information.

Mediator Refresher Program

Advanced 14 hour program
For graduates of Fundamentals of Mediation
and Mediation Beyond the Basics
June 14 and 15, 2010
9:00 AM to 5:00 PM each day
Course location: London, Ontario
Registration form available at
www.munnrcs.com
Please call 519-660-1242
(toll-free 1-888-216-3202) or email
kmunn@munnrcs.com for more information.

Mediation Beyond the Basics

Advanced 21 hour program
For graduates of Fundamentals of Mediation or
equivalent 40-hour mediation program
Nov 24, 25, 26, 2010
9:00 AM to 5:00 PM each day
Course location: London, Ontario
Registration form available at
www.munnrcs.com
Please call 519-660-1242
(toll-free 1-888-216-3202) or email
kmunn@munnrcs.com for more information.

Kathryn Munn, LL.B., Cert.ConRes., C. Med., is a mediator, arbitrator, facilitator and lawyer. Through her firm Munn Conflict Resolution Services she works exclusively in alternate dispute resolution from a base in London, Ontario. She is a Roster Mediator, Ontario Mandatory Mediation Program - Toronto / Ottawa / Windsor, a mediator under contract to the Farm Debt Mediation Service of Canada, insurance industry ombudservices and for Canadian government departments.

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