Debrief and Evaluation Summary of “Social Justice Mediation Training”
presented by the Social Justice Mediation Institute, University of Massachusetts at Amherst
June 8-12, 2015

Executive Summary

This five-day offering was designed to train RIT faculty and staff (n = 20) in mediation and conflict resolution from a social justice perspective. The training was co-sponsored by the Division for Diversity and Inclusion, Academic Affairs, and the AdvanceRIT program. Seven faculty (including three AdvanceRIT team members and four Faculty Associates to the Provost) and thirteen staff from across the university (one representative from the Office of the President, one representative from the Division of Student Affairs, one representative from the Division of Finance and Administration, five representatives from the Division of Diversity and Inclusion, and five representatives from the Division of Academic Affairs) attended the week-long session. Workshop participants were trained to mediate while applying a social justice lens to their own techniques. During this workshop, participants explored how mediation can routinely replicate inequalities despite our intentions to the contrary. Trainees gained strategies to address these challenges while still facilitating a process with self-determination about the outcome for the disputing parties.

Training participants explored the relationship between social justice and the development and resolution of conflicts in mediation through lecturettes, interactive activities, analyses of (actual) videotaped mediation sessions, and a series of role-plays and simulations.

Eighty percent of participants completed an evaluation of the training experience. The workshop received very positive evaluation feedback from the majority of participants. Content, pedagogical methods and facilitators all received favorable responses. Following the workshop, the majority of respondent’s expressed interest in mediating, if asked and the use of roleplaying reinforced learning.

Why a Social Justice Approach to Mediation:

This Social Justice Mediation model was developed in response to the growing body of scholarship revealing that commonly used mediation models and practices do not serve all disputing parties equally. Despite the demonstrated success of mediation (for many), research has also shown that it routinely reproduces privilege both structurally within institutions and interpersonally between disputing parties. This training undertakes a critical examination of how and why this occurs in mediation and introduces principles and new strategies that account for privilege and work to counter its discriminatory impact. The training is open to both previously trained mediators and those without any mediation training.

Goals:

- Examination of the patterns and reasons behind the privilege and exclusion that mainstream conflict intervention processes can produce
- Exposure to story gathering and agreement building theory and strategies based in a social justice perspective

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Mediation role-play practice: learning to apply a social justice lens to mediation to promote equality and empowerment for all in the mediation process and to foster the development of effective and mutually acceptable agreements

Evaluation:

A Mediation Training Evaluation tool was provided by the facilitators to gather participant feedback. The instrument consisted of six sections including selection of informative topics and important skills, session length and interest in mediation, most helpful pedagogical methods and trainer, institutional logistics and additional comments open-ended questions. Participant demographic data was not included in the instrument. Sixteen evaluations (80% participant response rate) were available for analysis.

Data

I. Topic and Skill Selection
   A. Most Informative Topics listed in order of respondent totals:
      - Patterns of privileging in mediation (11)
      - Story transmission (11)
      - Intersectionality (10)
      - Multipartiality (8)
      - Story gathering (8)
      - Overview of the Mediation Process (6)
      - Building a mutual future story (4)
      - Classism (3)
      - Racism (2)
      - Sexual Orientation Oppression (1)
      - Gender Binary and Oppression (1)
      - Action Continuum (1)
      - Other: No data provided
   
   B. Most Important Skills listed in order of respondent totals:
      - Transmitting information (9)
      - Being multi-partial (8)
      - Soliciting stories “below the line” (7)
      - Working with a co-mediator (7)
      - Listening actively for a complete story (6)
      - Managing the steps in the mediation process (6)
      - Being an ally and mediator simultaneously (5)
      - Summarizing (5)
      - Questioning (4)
      - Building agreements (3)
      - Writing agreements (2)
      - Giving the opening statement (1)
      - Other: Listening (1)
II. Responses to session length and mediation interest included:

A. Training days were spaced apart too close..(1)..(15)……too far
B. Training days were too short..(1)…(9)..(4)..(2) too long
C. Training space was too crowded…..(16)…..too spacious
D. Asked to mediate now, I would say: definitely(4)(2)(5)(5)…….. No way?

III. Most Helpful Pedagogical Methods listed in order of respondent totals:

A. Roleplaying as the mediator (15)
B. DvDs of actual mediation sessions (10)
C. Lecurettes (9)
D. Activities (8)
E. Roleplaying as the disputant (8)
F. Large Group discussions (8)
G. Dialogue in small groups (7)
H. Educational dvds (4)
I. Dialogue in pairs (1)

IV. Trainer Feedback (Open – ended):

Overall: Great job/experience/session (6), Excellent training (5), Thank you! (6), Very helpful (4), Learned a lot (2), Very valuable, Written agenda of the week would have been helpful, Start on time (2), Very long days (4) but worth it; a bit exhausting

Pedagogy: Less break-out groups (2), a bit overboard on small group discussion, more discussion, too many role-plays. Needed more time on multipartality, more comfortable with mgst as large group discussion, put in a practice mediation earlier in the process and use it to make the lectures more impactful. Video of actual mediation using the techniques we learned would have been helpful. Although seeing difficult disputants during the playing was helpful given 2 days of role playing, would have liked role players to “play” nicely earlier so we could see the whole process through. Below the line was confusing for a while, mistook that for digging for hidden truths –when I got that clearer it helped tremendously. Provide additional activity perhaps during downtime (disputants). Wasn’t sure about putting different models in the middle of training – was helpful framing info I could have used at the beginning.

Trainers: Constructive feedback (2), Patient. A comfortable environment. Answered questions (2). Taught important lessons/ info quickly and kindly. Great teachers and role models (2). Extremely knowledgeable (2), Experienced (2). Skill made it look deceivingly easier than it is and is a real treat to observe. Grateful for all the work put into developing this training. Teaching style blended content and application along with the research and theory was very rich. Nice rapport with each other (2).
V. Logistics and Training Space Feedback (Open – ended):

Space fine (5): quiet but sterile; turn down AC
Provide healthier snacks (2); Thanks for the timely and healthy food & drinks
Provide lunch (2) so we can use that time to debrief; shorter lunch
It would have helped if we ended @ 3pm to go back to my office and get some work done
Welcome additional learning opportunities; many could benefit if RIT decides to do this again

VI. Additional Comment (Open – ended):

Prefer abstract vs. hands on practice.
Will apply the strategies where appropriate in any work and relationship
Know I will use in the future
Relevant and interesting training
I am now a second generation mediator in my family

Data Analysis

Respondents identified Patterns of privileging in mediation, Story transmission, Intersectionality, Multipartiality, Story gathering, and Overview of the Mediation Process as the most informative training session topics. The skills identified as most important to respondents were Transmitting information, Being multi-partial, Soliciting stories “below the line” and Working with a co-mediator, and Listening actively for a complete story and Managing the steps in the mediation process. Neither section included item ranking, therefore, it is difficult to determine which of the items are more important to respondents. Most scaled responses to the spacing of the training days indicated a mid-range (15) or neutral finding. Six respondents (38%) found the training days were too lengthy, while nine (56%) respondents rated length in the mid-range of the scale. All training space responses nested in the neutral or mid-range of the scale (16). Respondent’s expressed interest in mediating, if asked, with most selecting definitely with slight variations toward to the mid-range portion of the scale. Roleplaying (as mediator and disputant) supported by instructional aids (DvDs, lectures, and activities) reinforced respondent learning. Small group and pair dialogue were the least selected pedagogical method.

Themed qualitative data provided positive feedback with respect to the overall training experience. Slight adjustments including participant agendas to guide the training week as well as the length of individual and overall training sessions may enhance the value of the learning experience. There were also various pedagogical suggestions including less small group and break-out group discussion. The use of additional tools and techniques were suggested to support learning and the reinforcement of training session material. Trainer expertise was highly regarded by respondents based on a review of qualitative comments. Logistical recommendations confirmed adequate space with snack and lunch suggestions.

Evaluation Data Summary:

The Social Justice Mediation Training session facilitated by the Social Justice Mediation Institute (University of Massachusetts at Amherst) on June 8-12, 2015 received very positive evaluation feedback from the majority of participants (80%). Content, pedagogical methods and
facilitators all received favorable responses. Slight programmatic adjustments as noted above would enhance the overall training experience.

Key findings include:

- The majority of respondent’s expressed interest in mediating, if asked.
- Feedback reinforced the learning and training value as well as application.
- The use of roleplaying (as mediator and disputant) supported by instructional aids (DvDs, lectures, and activities) reinforced respondent learning.

Recommendations include a follow-up focus group to discuss the application of training techniques and how social justice mediation best practices and strategies may be offered or integrated into the existing RIT programmatic infrastructure. Interest in the development of a “train the trainer” model to support future mediation efforts could also be determined through these discussions.

Social Justice Mediation Training Facilitators

Leah Wing, Ed.D., lwing@legal.umass.edu

Leah is a member of the Legal Studies Program faculty at the U. of MA/Amherst where her research and teaching applies critical race legal theory to mediation and reconciliation in colonized and postcolonial societies. Leah is also the Co-Director of the National Center for Technology and Dispute Resolution. Since 1985, she has been a mediator and trainer for over 100 educational institutions, government agencies, and non-profits. She served on the Association of Conflict Resolution board of directors (2002-6) and is on the editorial boards of Conflict Resolution Quarterly and The International Journal of Online Dispute Resolution. As founding director of the Social Justice Mediation Institute, she has offered over 150 trainings in social justice mediation over the past 21 years, training over 3000 people in this approach to conflict intervention. Leah is a member of Healing Through Remembering (Belfast).

Deepika-Marya, Ph.D.

Deepika, Associate Professor of Postcolonial Theory and Literature, has been teaching in higher education in the United States for the past decade and a half. A dispute resolution trainer since 1997, Deepika introduced critical theory to the field of mediation and integrates conflict resolution theory with multicultural approaches to conflict. As a lead trainer with the Social Justice Mediation Institute she has trained at dozens of public and private educational institutions and organizations across the U.S. and provided consultation services for the development and implementation of mediation programs. To date, Deepika and the Social Justice Mediation Institute have assisted more than 20 colleges, universities, high schools, and non-profits to create and implement mediation programs based on the social justice mediation model.