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## Familiar Routes New Paths



Exploring the Landscape of Conflict Management Training

# Artful ADR Training

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This article explores how arts-based ADR training can be used to help conflict resolution practitioners develop artistry in practice. It explores how engagement in arts-based experiential learning methods offer alternative modes for understanding, expression and representation of knowledge in mediation and conflict resolution practice. It will explore how the use of images, painting and exposure to performance can be used as a catalyst for inquiry, reflection and seeing things anew.

While there is a great deal of information and scholarship about how to develop mediators' basic competency, the challenge of reaching the higher stage of artistry is less easily explained. Some believe that mediators who achieve artistry in their practice are born, not made. Others would argue that continuing professional development training is important and that practice makes perfect. This article is based on the premise that a fundamental step towards achieving artistry in practice is becoming a reflective practitioner. Through reflective practice based on encounters with arts-based learning experiences, individuals can access their creative potential and achieve artistry in practice, move from the ordinary to the unique, from the mundane to the sublime, from the conventional to the innovative.

“[Reflection is] the process by which professionals think about the experiences, events and situations of practice and then attempt to make sense of them in light of the professionals' understanding of relevant theory.”



Any form of reflection becomes less effective when it becomes routine and simply reinforces existing understandings, and fails to stimulate new ideas and perspectives. Just as a characteristic of reflective practitioners is to be open to new information, strategies and techniques, they should also be open to new ways to engage in reflection.

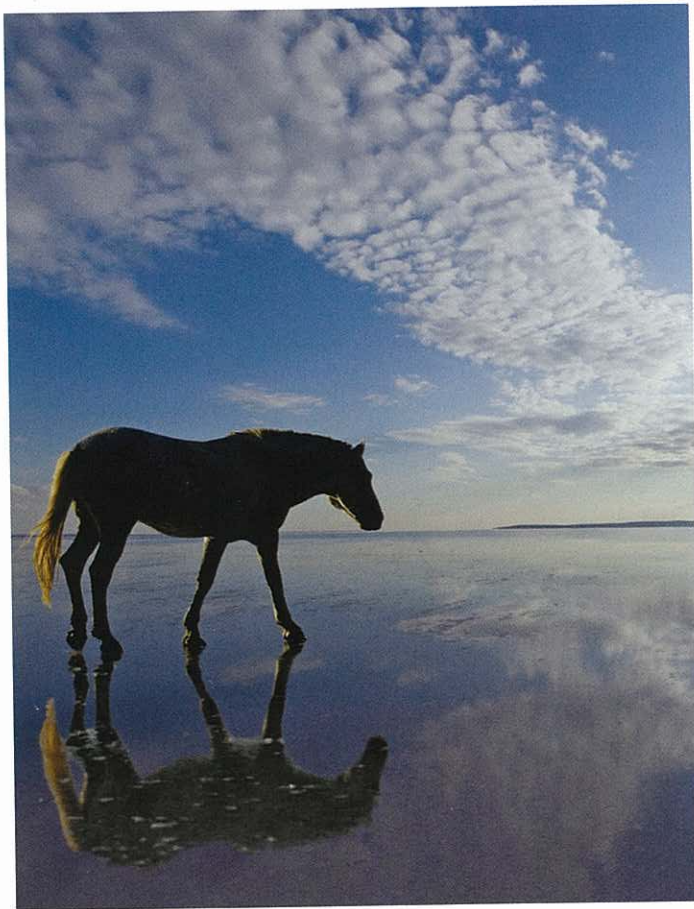
Mediators can tap into and develop their professional artistry through artful reflection, by engaging with artful and aesthetic processes as part of reflective practice that offers embodied experiences for provoking different ways of reflecting.

## What Is Reflection?

Lang and Taylor (2000) describe reflection as “the process by which professionals think about the experiences, events and situations of practice and then attempt to make sense of them in light of the professionals' understanding of relevant theory.” Reflection may simply involve thinking about one's practice, or a particular mediation, in an unstructured way. It may involve self-reflection by writing, such as a learning journal, or by reading (Lang and Taylor, 2000). Alternatively, reflection can be more guided. It may take place individually or with others; such as peers, more experienced mediators, or a supervisor. Reitman (2000) suggests that sharing one's reflections with others deepens the value of those reflections. ADR training provides an ideal forum in which group reflection including critical discourse can be facilitated, developed and conducted.

While most ADR training encourages participants to reflect on their practice, the methods of reflection used tend to be fairly standard: typically completing a reflective journal





and answering questions during a debriefing session, such as, “What went well?” and “What could you have done differently?” Any form of reflection becomes less effective when it becomes routine and simply reinforces existing understandings and assumptions and fails to stimulate new ideas and changed perspectives. What comes to mind is the adage, “If you keep doing things the same way you’ll get the same results.” Just as a characteristic of reflective practitioners is to be open to new information, strategies and techniques about their practice (Lang and Taylor, 2000), they should also be open to new ways to engage in reflection.

### Reflective Practice Required for Artistry

Lang and Taylor (2000) describe the stages of development of mediators starting from novice mediators, who then develop skills as apprentices, eventually achieving competency as practitioners, and then potentially enhancing their abilities further to reach a level of artistry. It is widely accepted that to develop artistry in any endeavour requires critical reflection on practice (Schon, 1987; Lang and Taylor, 2000; Amulya 2008; Claxton, 1999). Lang and Taylor (2000) define reflective practice as “the ability to think divergently, to be unfettered by the limits of conventional wisdom, and to accept the challenge of the novel circumstance to develop a new approach or analysis.” In order to become a reflective practitioner, mediators need to engage in a regular process of reflection.

### Artful Reflection

Arts-based learning processes can provide experiences that are different from most mediators’ experiences in order to promote deeper reflection and learning. In this sense, artful processes provide an opportunity for mediation practitioners to find

other ways of seeing, thinking, feeling and doing in relation to the skills and capabilities required for their profession. Artful inquiry is a way for groups to explore ideas or areas of interest through a range of imaginative, innovative, inventive, resourceful, reflective, and artistic processes. Engaging with arts-based processes provides professionals with alternative experiences and a learning space for creative inquiry – a way of thinking outside their normal working constraints.

### Using Artful Processes in ADR Training

Artful ADR training includes a combination of theory and experiential learning. It should provide participants with relevant theory but also use artful activities to explore those theoretical concepts in an embodied and experiential way. Using “left of field” approaches can assist in challenging the familiar and therefore stimulating further learning and insights which may not be made in conventional training programs. In our experience the inclusion of reflective questions and discussions, combined with the use of images, movement and improvisation, theatre and painting to explore the concepts of reflective practice and artful inquiry, encourages the mediators to make links to their professional practice and challenge habitual thinking paradigms. A selection of these activities is discussed below.

### Use of Images

The use of images for reflection can be an enabling and powerful tool that can “evoke visceral and emotional responses in ways that are memorable...[and] help us empathize or see another’s point of view and to provoke new ways of looking at things...” (Weber, 2008). Weber (2008) states that visual images can:

- Capture the ineffable.
- Make us pay attention to things in a new way.
- Be memorable.
- Evoke stories and questions.
- Enhance empathic understanding.
- Encourage embodied knowledge.
- Facilitate reflexivity.

Working with images in ADR training encourages particular aspects of Lang and Taylor’s (2000) hallmarks of artistry in mediation practice, including attention to detail, curiosity, being open to new perspectives and resilient and flexible interpretation.

We have found that participants respond well to the use of images to reflect, think and talk about a range of concepts such as their current developmental level in practice, where they would like to be in the future, and what their perception and understanding of peace and conflict is.

One sample activity involves laying out about 50 different images of various subjects (we use a commercial collection of stock images, but it would be just as effective to use images cut from magazines). We first ask participants to select an image that represents a good outcome of a mediation, and then we ask them to select another image that represents a poor outcome of mediation. We then facilitate discussion about why the participants selected their images, and what it is about the image that represents the two different outcomes for them.



Participants tend to pick images intuitively, without a very clear idea about why that image represents the concept we have asked them to identify. When they then have to explain to others why they chose that image and how it represents the concept, many participants have profound insights about their own perceptions and values. They also often, on closer inspection of the image, identify new ideas and perspectives that they hadn't originally thought about. The image also gives participants a point of focus, allowing them to talk about what they see in the image rather than talking directly about their own beliefs and ideas about what makes a good or poor outcome in a mediation. This distancing of the discussion from the participant's personal opinion can allow a participant to take more risks and test out potentially controversial ideas.

Different participants also see different things in each other's images, and this fosters discussion about different perspectives and interpretations. The realization that others interpret images differently makes the discussion easier than engaging participants in a direct discussion about different ideas as to what is appropriate in practice, as Taylor and Ladkin (2009) suggest: "[d]iscussing the art object rather than discussing the issue directly provides a certain distance and detachment from emotionally charged issues." The process provides a space in which the participant is able to explore the underlying themes and come to an alternative or deeper reflection takes place. It is the possibility of seeing things from a safe and different perspective.

### **Movement and Collaborative Improvisation**

The idea of embodied learning, inviting the whole person, their feelings, bodies, and mind to the learning experience is critical if deep reflection and change is to occur. In our workshops participants are encouraged to move and engage in improvisational activities. Through movement-based games, participants explore how their physical interaction and movements impact on those around them, and develop new understandings about how meaning can be made through bodily awareness.

Through improvisational activities participants experiment with the act of co-creating with others as an alternative to the standard approach of questioning and reflecting in traditional ADR skills training. This develops participants' flexibility, imagination and ability to be in the moment and think on their feet, particularly when things seem ambiguous or do not go as expected.

In one movement based game, commonly known as "Moon and Sun," participants move about the space in relation to two other people in the room. The process requires each person to select someone who will be their "sun" and their "moon." In the experience each participant then needs to keep their moon between them and the sun as they move around the space for a period of time. Afterward there is opportunity for reflection and each time this physical interaction is played, participants have insights useful for a mediator.

For example, one participant commented that this activity reminded her "how we can be so focused that we lose sight of the things around us – maybe the bigger picture." It acts as a metaphor for what may be going on in our professional practice. We have also used a process of walking around in silence and observing each other. People often find this process confronting and uncomfortable and yet it provides another wonderful metaphor for how we deal with silence. What is going on in those moments of silence and how present as a practitioner are we to what is not being said.

Movement and improvisation activities also promote a number of Lang and Taylor's hallmarks of artistry in mediation practice whereby the participants demonstrate attention to detail by responding in the moment, and observing subtle behavioral clues. Participants have the opportunity to explore and discover and in improvisation cannot afford to be bound by limiting assumptions. Participants can practice developing and testing formulations (holding on tightly, letting go lightly), can experiment, implement action and observe the response of others. They must also be resilient and flexible in their interpretation, as the activities are not bound by any script and tend to develop in unexpected ways.

### **Abstract Theatre**

We have used a piece of abstract theatre to challenge participants' notions about communication and how meaning is constructed. In one instance we showed an abstract theatrical piece that questioned and played with conventional notions about communication. Participants were invited to reflect on the underlying themes and ideas and what links could be made back to mediation. In this case we had two opposing views: one person found it "invaluable to remind me to keep an open mind and listen, and that everybody offers some value"; while another participant was horrified and felt like "it was the emperor's new clothes - people pretending it was profound when really it was rubbish."

This highlights how differently people see and make sense of the world around them. This is particularly relevant to a mediator who will likely be witness to two very different views of the same situation. Therefore this experience highlights how mediators need to remain open to the varying interpretations rather than quickly judging that one view is the "right" view and the other the "wrong" view. It provokes the question how can the mediator sit in the 'swampy lowlands' (Argyris & Schön) of uncertainty and ambiguity? These are the potential challenges a mediator may experience in their practice and offers a great metaphor around challenging assumptions, making judgements and being open to the situation at hand.




## Painting and Creating

Engaging participants in creative endeavours such as painting or bricolage can also be useful for developing reflection. Often the actual act of trying a new and unexpected activity is useful in itself and even feeling the discomfort and resistance to participating in such an activity can provide a rich and valuable learning experience.

For example, participants will sometimes express reluctance to engage in an activity because they are worried that they can't draw, that they are not particularly creative or they won't be able to produce something of quality. This in itself can lead to a useful discussion about how participants in mediation might be reluctant to experiment or participate in a process when they are uncertain about the outcome or where they may be focused on the end product rather than the process in which case they may miss valuable clues and signals as to what is actually going on in the mediation. The process can be used in a variety of ways to engage people in a creative and reflective response to the situation at hand.

In a session we lead using painting, one of the participants made an insightful comment into her experience, explaining that at first she was quite enjoying painting on the canvas, and figured that she knew how to use a brush and paints, so it seemed quite easy. However, she got to a certain point and realized that, in her opinion, in order to significantly improve the quality of the work, she needed further skills that she currently didn't have. She commented, "This is what it was like when I started to mediate. At first intuition and gut feeling get you through, but you get to a point when you realize that to be a really good mediator, you need more than that, and you need to develop your skills in a more formal sense."

If participants are producing works of art during the workshop, these can also then be used as images for discussion afterwards. Asking others to interpret what they think a piece of work means can sometimes lead to very important insights for the artist, particularly in relation to the difference between intended and actual communication of messages.

The creative and artful processes we have outlined promote many of Lang and Taylor's hallmarks of artistry in mediation practice. They also offer the opportunity for mediation and conflict resolution practitioners to develop the capacity for patience and vision, and find a balance between process and outcome. We suggest that creative processes that encourage artful reflection can lead to a level of artistry in mediation and conflict resolution. 

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