

Practising Insight Mediation

by Cheryl A. Picard

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ISBN-10: 1442629371

ISBN-13: 978-1442629370

Review DOI [10.1108/IJCM-12-2016-0098](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCM-12-2016-0098)

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Many mediators who have just finished their training and started their own practices might ask: What do other mediators do when they mediate? Should I have used a different mediation style and approach at this moment? How can I mediate better? The answers to these questions, however, are not always clear until they have gained experience by observing mediation sessions of others who have different mediation styles and approaches. Thus, Cheryl Picard, an expert mediator and a conflict coach specializing in interpersonal, workplace and community-based conflict and a professor emeritus at Carleton University, has written, *Practising Insight Mediation*, to share practice skills she has gained over 35 years of mediation.

This book explains the skills of mediators who practice “insight mediation.” Insight mediation is a learning-centred relational method of mediation that is distinguished from transformative mediation, narrative mediation and the interest-based approach to mediation. Grounded in Lonergan’s theory of cognition, insight mediators focus on gaining direct and inverse insights of the disputants in conflict by finding out what each party cares about and how that threatens the other party. While facilitating the disputants to gain these insights that help them develop new interpretation and response to the interactions, the insight mediators aim to bring about lasting transformation. This is a powerful approach that can promote healing and reconciliation in conflicts that involve deep-rooted values and continuing relations. Also, it can be used in conflict-related interventions, such as negotiation, facilitation of restorative justice and group conflict.

Practising Insight Mediation is a companion to *Transforming Conflict through Insight*, which the author co-authored with Kenneth Melchin in 2008. While *Transforming Conflict through Insight* has a theoretical focus of the insight approach to mediation, *Practising Insight Mediation* has a skills-based focus of the insight approach with examples of skills-in-use and simulated dialogue. The aim of this book is to help readers learn and develop new communication, conflict resolution and mediation skills. While this book is helpful in advancing the knowledge and skills of professional mediators and teachers, researchers and students of mediation, it can also be an effective guide for anyone who is looking for “an effective method in many interpersonal or small-group conflicts” (p. 10).

This book is composed of seven chapters. The first half of this book (Chapter 1, 2 and 3) focuses on introducing insight mediation and explains the theoretical footings of this practice. The second half of this book (Chapter 4, 5 and 6) introduces the practical skills and strategies that readers can practice. The last chapter (Chapter 7) presents the recent cases in



which the insight approach was used and concludes with future implications of the approach. The appendix contains real examples of “ready-made” documents for burgeoning mediators, such as opening statements, a consent to participation document and an agreement document and has useful tips about holding a caucus.

Chapter 1 presents the aims of this book and outlines each chapter for readers. Then, it describes how insight mediation has emerged from a simple question, “What am I doing when I mediate?” (p. 6). From this question, Picard discovered some mediation strategies and interactions with disputants that the mediation literature had not discussed. Thus, based on Lonergan’s theory of insight, she and her colleague developed this insight approach to mediation. And to distinguish it from the existing approaches, they named it “insight mediation.”

After unfolding the story of how insight mediation emerged, Chapter 2 introduces the key features of the insight mediation method to readers. It starts with how insight practitioners define conflict differently from other approaches and examines the conceptual frameworks that insight mediation practice is based on. While conflict scholars have perceived conflict in terms of incompatibility, competition, struggle and defeat, insight mediators perceive conflict as “a defensive response to apprehensions of threat” (p. 15). These different perceptions of conflict lead them different approaches. While conflict scholars have focused on resolving conflict through using problem-solving models, insight mediators try to resolve conflict by engaging the disputants “in a learning process that changes defend patterns of interaction” (p. 15). Then, based on this definition and conceptual frameworks, Picard elaborates on the importance of differentiating between defend and threat stories and helps readers with how to differentiate between the two in insight mediations. Here, the author advises readers to focus more on threat stories than defend stories as defend stories reflect the levels of value that disputants perceive to be at risk. Last, she helps the readers develop “responsive intentionality”, the skills that the practitioners need – “knowingly and intentionally responds to a party based on what he or she sees and has learned about human interaction” (p. 5).

Chapter 3 offers the theoretical and practical explanations of why insight mediation practice uses the process of learning to change conflict situations. Picard applies Lonergan’s four operations of learning – experience, understanding, judgment and decisions – to help readers appreciate how this informs the insight mediation practice. Then, she examines the similarities and differences with other approaches based on the world views that each approach has. The approach that she compares insight mediation to is transformative mediation by [Bush and Folger \(2004\)](#), narrative mediation ([Winslade and Monk, 2000](#)) and the interest-based approach ([Ury and Fisher, 1981](#)).

Going through Chapters 1 to 3, readers will start wondering how to use this method in their mediation practice. Therefore, Chapters 4 to 6 offer detailed guidelines on how to practice insight mediation. In Chapter 4, Picard divides the phases of the mediation process and how insight mediators can practice the insight approach according to each phase. As she uses dialogue from simulation mediation, this chapter provokes readers to think about how the real practice would look and see in which situations they could use their skills.

While Chapter 4 focuses on the skills to use “during” mediation, Chapter 5 discusses the skills that can be applied “before” and “after” insight mediation. As this may be less common in certain court systems, Picard explains in detail the situations in which these pre- and post-mediation interventions can be used. Here, instead of showing the dialogue, Picard gives many example questions that the mediators can use with the specific situational explanations of when these questions can be asked. These sets of questions are very

practical since the skill of being able to ask appropriate questions in the right moment comes to the mediators after gaining years of experience.

Chapter 6 of this book provides readers with “generic mediation skills and the specialised communications skills and strategies the insight mediators use” (p. 113). Because the goal of this chapter is to introduce micro communication skills that can be used in any conflict situation, these skills will be helpful for anyone who is trying to improve their communication skills or wants to bring changes to their interpersonal or small-group conflict situations.

Contributed by three insight mediators, Kenneth Melchin, Andrea Bartoli and James Price, Chapter 7 concludes this book with an exploration and application of insight approaches in the broader fields. This chapter is an eye-opening chapter for scholars and practitioners in conflict resolution as the three authors of this chapter present the new ways of approaching retaliatory violence, spirituality and genocide. They elaborate on the situations in which they applied the insight approach, how they applied it and the results of the approach in detail and conclude with future implications and hopes for the insight approach. This chapter demonstrates that the insight approach does not have to only be applied in the mediation situation, but it can be applied in many different fields.

This book successfully completes its goal of equipping readers with practical skills that practitioners can use. *Practising Insight Mediation* provides a deeper level of analysis of why the skills that the practitioners use are meaningful and effective based on theories. Also, using the dialogue from the simulated mediation, this book helps the readers understand the situations in which they can apply their practices. Mediators who wish to learn and improve their skills can definitely benefit from reading *Practising Insight Mediation*. Also, anyone who wants to improve their communication and conflict resolution skills can benefit from the contents of this book. Furthermore, the insight approach to conflict has much potential to be applied and developed in the field of conflict resolution. By changing the focus of conflict resolution from problem-solving to learning, this approach can bring constructive and lasting change to the conflict. Also, by changing the focus from power and interests to feelings and values, it allows scholars and practitioners to see and approach deep-rooted conflicts differently from existing approaches. Because the author condensed her 35 years of experience into a 189-pages, this book will be a useful guide for both academics and practitioners.

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