

Navigating Cultural Expectations in Global Mediation Clinics

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Presentation for International Mediation Clinic
Network Conference

20 October 2025

Why Culture Matters in Mediation

Culture doesn't just influence disputes — it defines how people experience conflict and what resolution feels legitimate.

Cultural expectations shape emotional expression, authority, and fairness.

Mediators unaware of these dynamics risk reinforcing power imbalances.

Mediation Clinics as Cultural Laboratories

Provide access to justice in diverse communities

Train students to engage with real conflicts

Offer space for reflection on bias and values

Clinics are ideal environments to explore cultural literacy in practice.

Comparative Perspective

Jurisdictions: Philippines PH | South Africa ZA |
United Kingdom GB | United States US

Each context offers distinct assumptions about communication, hierarchy, and justice.

Southeast Asia: The Philippines

Deference to family and community

Indirect communication and saving face

Emotional harmony valued over factual clarity

Mediators must interpret silence and subtext as integral to resolution.

Africa: South Africa

Ubuntu: 'I am because we are'

Respect for hierarchy and communal identity

Conflict embedded in social belonging

Mediators must balance procedural fairness
with cultural resonance.

Western Contexts: UK & US

Emphasis on individual rights and self-determination

Direct communication and procedural clarity

Goal-oriented mediation styles

Cultural humility is essential—recognize that directness or silence mean different things across cultures.

Lessons for Global Clinics

Embed cultural literacy in training

Use comparative simulations

Encourage reflective supervision

Facilitate international clinic exchanges

Students learn most when contrasting their instincts with other cultural approaches.

Practical Takeaways

Train mediators to see through another lens

Recognise one's own cultural defaults

Honour difference without stereotyping

Treat cultural awareness as ethical competence.

Closing Reflection

“When mediators learn to see through another culture’s lens, they don’t just resolve disputes — they expand justice itself.”

Global mediation is not only about skill, but about presence, empathy, and humility.

Thank you.