



# Teaching public dispute resolution in Asia: Challenges and experiments

Boyd Fuller

Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy  
National University of Singapore

# Beginning observations

- o Students enthusiastic about learning negotiation and conflict resolution skills, BUT...
- o Many are not sure if they can apply it in their work as public officials (at all levels)
- o So, what are the challenges and constraints facing them and what can we do to help them move through them?

# Semester long courses

1. Negotiation (two- and multi-party)
2. Convening and facilitation

## o Students:

- o Masters level students in public policy
- o Mostly Asian students but very diverse in culture and experience
- o Most have some public sector experience

# Executive courses

- o Negotiation

- o 1-3 days

- o Seeding a few basic ideas – e.g. 7 elements, coalitions, etc.

- o Participants

- o Mid- to senior level public and private sector executives

# Challenges students will face

- o It's difficult to recognize conflict and move to negotiation.
  - o Hierarchy: Follow orders
  - o Harmony
    - o Difficult accepting that others have different wants and perspectives
    - o Don't want to be in conflict and disagreement
- o Norms of doing business
  - o "Old boys club": traditional networks of key patriarchs.
  - o Norms about the role of governments

# Opportunities

- o Growing demand for participation
  - o mistrust between public and government
  - o Growing belief that participation is required
- o Some countries have growing commercial and legal mediation industry
- o Younger and more open-minded youth
- o Decentralization programs throughout region
  - o Governments more open to participation, but prefer hearings & feedback sessions

# One recent experiment

- o Class on convening and facilitation
  - o Group plans, convenes, & facilitates a policy dialogue
  - o What I do:
    - o No lectures
    - o advise the group
    - o give feedback on their internal negotiations
    - o coach individual students (3 sessions during term)
    - o assess the students
- o Purpose: make your mistakes and learn before it really matters

# What can we do to promote consensus building?

- o How can we find better ways of making convening a face-giving rather than face-hurting activity?
- o How can we design and convene pilot consensus building efforts are safe enough, productive and legitimate?
- o How can we teach students to negotiate without appearing to negotiate?