

**Centre for Conflict Resolution  
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**Working Paper 8**

**Developing an Online Learning Pedagogy for  
Conflict Resolution Training**

**Laina K. Reynolds & Lambrecht Wessels**

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**UNIVERSITY OF  
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## **Introduction**

Innovations in education and computing are currently converging around the use of communications technology to enhance teaching and learning. This development has significant implications for the field of conflict resolution because of the importance of education and training in the discipline. In response to these changes, the Centre for Conflict Resolution (Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford) and the European Network University (University of Amsterdam) collaborated in the creation of an online course entitled ‘Transforming Civil Conflict,’ an introduction to the concepts and tools of non-violent conflict resolution. In November 1999, the course was piloted with a select group of students to test the material and teaching approach and to assist in the further refinement of the content. In this paper, we reflect on the development, delivery and evaluation of this course with the purpose of constructing a participative pedagogical approach to teaching and learning online that is specifically appropriate for conflict resolution training.

We begin by examining the context in which the course has been developed: the need to adapt the current practice of training in the skills and theories of conflict resolution to take into account changes in education brought about by the advent of widespread use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). We also consider some of the potential problems in using new technologies to teach conflict resolution, including issues of the limited scope of access to the Internet globally and the appropriateness of teaching a human-related skill in a technological environment. Second, we review the process of developing the pilot module, evaluating the extent to which we were able to integrate appropriate pedagogical practices while balancing the needs for academic thoroughness, interactivity and ease of use. Third, we evaluate the delivery of the course using student and tutor comments, deriving guidelines for future modules from both positive and negative experiences.

## **Global Context**

### **Conflict Resolution and ICTs**

The context of conflict resolution activities is being transformed by the easier and faster exchange of information made possible by the Internet. When individuals, groups and organisations are able to access global networks of information and support, categories such as ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ conflicts and distinctions between ‘local’ and ‘external’ actors are eroded. However, current theories of conflict resolution have not yet recognised the importance of these changes. Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse, in their synthesis of the state of the field, only note the importance of ICT in passing (Miall, Ramsbotham, and Woodhouse 1999, 116). Other authors also ignore or sideline ICTs (Crocker and Hampson 1996; Zartman and Rasmussen 1997). Some organisations have begun to recognise the importance of this area—for example, since 1997 the US Institute for Peace has been running a

research programme called 'Virtual Diplomacy' to explore the impact of ICTs on the global practice of conflict management and resolution<sup>1</sup>.

Notwithstanding the general silence about this issue, the Internet has already changed the way that most peace and conflict resolution organisations operate. It is rare these days to encounter a professional, voluntary or academic organisation engaged in conflict-related activities that does not make some use of the Internet, and have a strategy for the future that includes development of its use, even among organisations in areas where Internet access is problematic or sporadic. The applications of ICTs within these organisations fall into (at least) three categories. First, and most widespread, is email and other text communications. There are approximately 435 million email accounts in the world today, doubling about every 18 months (Messaging Online 1999). Newsgroups, listservs and email mean that conflict professionals have unprecedented opportunities to exchange ideas and information quickly.

Second, the Web provides organisations with a medium for publishing and distributing large amounts of information about their activities with much lower marginal costs than print media. Online publications have a huge and global potential audience, expanding the ability of even small organisations to communicate their message.

Third, the Internet can be a powerful tool for gathering up-to-the-minute information. Most news outlets have a Web site, and increasingly other agencies are making recent events, press releases and other communications available in a timely manner over the Web. In addition to large sites such as CNN and the BBC, there are more specialised examples such as Reuter Foundation's AlertNet<sup>2</sup>, which gathers breaking news (much of it unavailable elsewhere) about humanitarian emergencies and makes it available to professionals in relief agencies.

The information gathering and dissemination capabilities of ICTs can also be used to challenge censorship or totalitarianism. One well-known incident of this type occurred during student pro-democracy protests in Serbia in 1996, when Radio B92 (an independent station) was able to continue broadcasting after their transmitters were shut down by the Milošević regime by sending programmes out of the country using the Internet, which were then rebroadcast into Serbia.

Worldwide, there is growing interest in using the Web as an educational space. Some conflict resolution organisations, including the Online Learning Project at Bradford's Centre for Conflict

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.usip.org/oc/virtual\\_dipl.html](http://www.usip.org/oc/virtual_dipl.html)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.reuters.org/alertnet>

Resolution, the Conflict Research Consortium at the University of Colorado, Boulder and the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies in Malta are pioneering online learning in the fields of conflict management, resolution, negotiation and diplomacy. This is a recent development in the field of conflict resolution, but reflects important trends in the educational sector.

### **Higher and Further Education**

The rapid expansion of ICT is having far-reaching impacts on education, both for the learners and for the teachers. One of most interesting and fastest-growing applications of ICT is as a tool to enhance teaching practice, including providing information like syllabi and lecture notes online, facilitating student-teacher and student-student communication, and connecting students to a range of information resources around the globe. Traditional classes can be augmented in this way or entire courses can be delivered without the students travelling to a central classroom.

Many forward-thinking universities, corporations and other institutions are integrating ICT-based teaching into their programmes for a variety of reasons. Foremost among these is the accelerating rate of change in knowledge, which means that skills or knowledge acquired by a person have a limited useful lifespan before they become obsolete and the person needs to be retrained. This leads to a need for what is often called ‘lifelong learning,’ or the ability to access education throughout life on a flexible basis in response to changing learning needs. This means that learners will increasingly have family and job responsibilities that preclude traditional residential long-term university study (Beller and Or 1998). Online education has the capacity to let each student choose his or her time and place of study. In addition, because universities are now operating in a more competitive environment, the potential for cost savings, the ability to enrol students from all over the world and the desire to appear innovative make the development of a capacity for virtual education very attractive (Farrell 1999).

Distance learning is not a new idea - traditional correspondence courses have been around for over 100 years. However, the interaction and communication that are a hallmark of the new media have drastically changed the distance learning environment and produced unprecedented interest in online education. The use of ICT in educational contexts and particularly in the form of networked distance learning is blossoming at an incredible rate. In the US, the number of students pursuing courses that are wholly or partly offered over the Internet is estimated to be growing at 30% a year (US Department of Education 1997). The Internet is becoming a routine part of learning environments for university students, adult learners, company trainees and many others.

There are, of course, serious issues about inequality of access to the hardware, telephone lines and basic literacy necessary to participate in online education. The rhetoric that web-based instruction will widen access to educational opportunities for the poor and disenfranchised is, up till now, belied



by the reality that the majority of people participating in these courses are exactly the opposite. These issues are particularly salient when the development of online courses is placed in an international context, as outside of North America and Europe, home computer use and easy Internet access are still a long way in the future. However, based on present trends these technologies will become more universally accessible in the future, so it makes long-term sense for institutions and organisations to invest in the capacity to deliver online courses. The Online Learning Project (OLP) receives frequent enquiries about participating in online courses from people in less-developed and conflict-affected areas, including small NGOs running Internet cafés or community centres that want to offer online education opportunities to people instead of more expensive, disruptive study abroad programmes. One of the most important aspects of future work for the OLP is to examine innovative methods of widening access to, and the benefits of, online learning technologies. For example, in Kosovo the OLP is collaborating with humanitarian agencies involved in the rehabilitation of schools to develop online peace and conflict resolution educational resources for use by teachers, youth workers and other education professionals.

## **Learning Model**

Within the field of conflict resolution, education in non-violent means of handling conflict is recognised as crucial. Elise Boulding recognises that peacemaking is a ‘craft and skill’ that must be acquired through training (Boulding 1988). There are many different methods for teaching Conflict Resolution skills from the interpersonal to the international level, but overall the discipline has developed a preference for what John Paul Lederach calls the ‘elicitive’ approach (1997). In contrast to the more traditional, teacher-directed ‘prescriptive’ method of training, an elicitive pedagogy encourages active participation by learners and a facilitative role for the teacher/trainer. This parallels the distinction between a ‘constructivist’ as opposed to ‘instructivist’ approach in instructional theory.

At Bradford’s Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), we have developed a pedagogical approach in our courses that emphasises group work, student-led seminar discussions and other participative methods that allow students to become more active in constructing their own knowledge. Other organisations and institutions engaged in education of this type use a similar model. This method is particularly appropriate for conflict resolution training because:

- It involves personal, transferable subject skills that need to be well integrated into the learners’ methods of coping with stressful conflict situations;
- It reflects current thinking about best practice in conflict intervention as a third party;

- It encourages students to self-question and self-explain, which results in greater understanding of the material and improved competence (Chiu 1995).

Recent research into online learning emphasises the same pedagogical principles. This is not to imply that the Web is inherently a more elicitive than prescriptive medium—there are numerous examples of text-based courses on the Internet with no opportunities for the learner to interact with the material, the instructor or other students. However, ICT does have the potential to encourage constructivist learning because of some unique capabilities:

- In a Web environment students have access to a broader range of potential information resources;
- Each learner can follow a different path through a set of hyperlinked pages, creating his or her own set of associations instead of following a linear path set out by the instructor;
- In an online seminar, each student’s voice carries equal weight. This can allow for more equal participation than is the norm in face-to-face classroom discussions;
- Students can take time to read the contributions of others and formulate a thoughtful response in their own time;
- Research shows that it encourages active and self-directed learning (Harasim, et al. 1995; French, et al. 1999).

Despite the fact that Internet-based teaching has the potential to encourage exactly the kind of active learning that is desirable in a conflict resolution course, there have not been many initiatives to use the Internet as a medium for this type of education. It is probably true that some core conflict resolution skills, such as active listening or other good communication skills, are inherently face-to-face activities and as such require in-person training. However, elements such as small group discussions are easily manageable in an online environment. The Internet can also be an efficient medium for the exchange of background and bibliographic information prior to or following a face-to-face training event. Although using web-based educational resources could enhance conflict resolution training, the vast majority of organisations and universities who engage in this sort of training continue to believe that their courses are best delivered exclusively face-to-face. For organisations or people involved in international conflict management/resolution activities, this can involve considerable expense and disruption for both trainers and trainees/students, including travel, accommodation, time off from work and family responsibilities, etc. Nevertheless, the demand for conflict resolution training is growing - at the CCR, we receive more requests for external training than we can accommodate and enrolment in our specialised MA and BA degrees in Conflict Resolution continues to grow each year.

## **Developing ‘Transforming Civil Conflict’**

The development of the teaching materials and web site for 'Transforming Civil Conflict' illustrates the process of applying the pedagogical principles discussed above to a real case. The course began as two separate initiatives; the Online Learning Project at Bradford and the European Network University (TENU) based at the University of Amsterdam.

Both institutions had noticed a distinct and growing need for improved preparation of military and civilian international staff for their intervention roles in conflict areas from Kosovo to East Timor. The current training arrangements for the myriad agencies involved in these 'complex humanitarian emergencies' are *ad hoc* and usually inadequate, and people are often deployed in a mission area without basic knowledge about their tasks and how to accomplish them. Simultaneously, Bradford was interested in using the potential of the Internet to open up the CCR's conflict resolution education resources to grassroots education and peacebuilding organisations around the world. Online learning was seen as one possible route to meet both of these agendas.

Bradford's initial step had been to adapt and condense the wealth of existing teaching materials, including a book (Miall, Ramsbotham, and Woodhouse 1999) and various course outlines and lecture notes into a straightforward online format. Units were edited to be short and clear and the language was adapted to make it more accessible and jargon-free.<sup>3</sup> The course content was designed to fulfil the need of professionals in conflict-related fields such as diplomacy, journalism, development, humanitarian agencies and international peacekeeping to gain a thorough grounding in the conceptual basics, historical background and current best practice in conflict resolution. The results can be viewed online at the Centre's web page<sup>4</sup>. At this stage of development the course was basically 'flat' in structure - the text had a clear linear sequence, relatively few outside links and a small number of layers of related information linked to important concepts. It was not a particularly constructivist resource. A student could complete the readings and answer the assessment questions with a minimum of interaction, much like a traditional correspondence course.

The European Network University's concept was altogether grander. Based on their experience offering an intensive online course in 'International Political Economy,' they had developed a proposal to bring together a number of European academics and universities with expertise in specific aspects of conflict intervention to offer a Master's degree in 'Transforming Civil Conflict.' The teaching of the programme was to be based on an intensively collaborative pedagogy making full use of the Internet's potential for communication and interactivity (van Druten 1999). Bradford was contacted as a possible partner in this endeavour. We decided to jointly offer a pilot module, making use of

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<sup>3</sup> These methods are similar to guidelines for good distance learning material developed separately at the University of Bradford's Graduate School. See (Tallontire 1988).

Bradford's source material and TENU's technical and teaching resources, in order to test the idea and to fine-tune the course content. The result was a three-week course, including one week of introductory concepts and tools, one week on conflict analysis and one week on conflict prevention<sup>5</sup>.

The Transforming Civil Conflict pilot module was designed to differ from the few currently available online courses in related fields by incorporating intensive feedback between students and supervisors; readily accessible, knowledgeable supervisors and experts; an emphasis on interactivity and cooperation between students; and a high degree of adaptability of course materials to current events through the use of updateable readings, and student-submitted materials like conflict guides and useful links.

The process of writing the course collaboratively was a positive experience for both writers, as we could bounce ideas off of each other, check our work for mistakes and so on. Nonetheless, it was difficult and time-consuming, even when working from existing materials. This has important implications for estimating the time and cost involved in online course development. Much effort went in to adapting textual material into a richer resource that made good use of the Web as a medium. This involved breaking the material into smaller, more manageable chunks and mapping out clear learning objectives for each section. We also incorporated supplementary links and resources for students to expand topics in which they were personally interested.

We tried to design assignments that met constructivist criteria, including prioritising active student involvement, encouraging students to relate the theoretical concepts to their own experiences, and emphasising student-student questioning and communication. This last objective was met by using a service called eGroups to host the class discussion group (<http://www.egroups.com/>). This tool allowed people to send email to the whole group via one address, kept an archive of all past messages, and offered a variety of other features such as a group calendar and database.

## **Delivering the Course**

Overall, the evaluations from students were quite positive. It was apparent from the extraordinary depth of analysis in many of the assignments and discussions that we were dealing with an intellectually gifted and engaged group. The pedagogical goal of inspiring students to actively explore the topic was certainly met. This result should not simply be accepted at face value, however, because in all likelihood the students who had negative experiences either dropped out at an early

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.brad.ac.uk/acad/confres/dislearn/dislearn.html>

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix A for the course outline, or preview the course at <http://www.netuni.nl/demos/tcc/>.

stage or did not return the evaluation form. Therefore, any evaluative statements about the course should be taken as indicative rather than conclusive.

The initial enrolment consisted of about 20 people from a variety of professional backgrounds, including lawyers, staff from *Médecins sans Frontières*, UN staff, military personnel and others. We tried to include people who had some professional experience working with conflict situations. Our initial goal was that an average student would need to spend about twelve hours per week in order to read the material, complete the assignments and participate in the discussions. This proved to be both an underestimate of the time needed and an excessive time burden for many of the participants. Only about one-quarter of the initial enrollees completed all of the coursework. We attribute this result to several factors, including the heavy assignment load, a lack of commitment to the course because it was free and experimental, language difficulties, unforeseen emergencies that arose for several students, and bad time management on the part of others.

In one case, a participant who was working with a medical NGO in Somalia suffered an armed raid on his compound in the second week of the course. This clearly necessitated that he withdraw from the remainder of the course, but he did keep in touch with the group and sent us some of the details about this dramatic event. This acted as an important reminder for all of the other students about the seriousness of the subject. Also, the participant wrote later that the course stimulated him into researching the possible causes for this raid and the impact of his organisation on the local social-economic structure. This illustrates the immediacy of online education - the way teachers and students can react to current events, be it developments in peace negotiations or emergencies arising from participants' experience.

There were two course supervisors to give substantive feedback on assignments, act as discussion facilitators and manage the administrative aspects of the course. Various support staff at TENU assisted with the website design and dealt with technical issues as they cropped up. This division of labour worked better than having one person responsible for all aspects of the course, as participants could have their questions on content, administration or technicalities answered quickly by the relevant person rather than wait for their query to come to the top of one list.

Many of the technical problems were the result of that fact that both the course site and the eGroups collaborative tool were designed for fourth-generation browsers only (i.e. Netscape Navigator 4.0 or Internet Explorer 4.0), and did not function well with older versions. This problem manifested particularly in the use of online interactive scripts, one of which malfunctioned, causing several people's assignments to be lost. Problems such as this can be a source of great frustration for the participants as well as causing major delay in the process of handing in assignments and giving

feedback. We now recommend that students write assignments in a word processor first and save copies of everything they submit, so as to minimise the potential of this problem arising. We have also simplified some of the assignments so that they do not rely on online scripts, but are purely exchanged through email and other relatively 'low-tech' means.

Participants found the first week, which introduced the foundational concepts and tools of conflict resolution, useful and stimulating. Although one participant commented that the readings were "too summarized," another said that they "were good for stimulating discussion." The mix of assignments during this week seemed to work quite well.

The first assignment was submitted directly to the instructors, who provided individual feedback. This seemed to be a good way for the students and instructors to begin getting comfortable with each other and with electronic interactions. It also allowed the instructors to become acquainted with the style and analytical abilities of each student, although the volume of incoming assignments meant a heavy workload for several days, as the supervisors had promised feedback within a two-day time-frame. The need for a good system for tracking incoming assignments and outgoing feedback was clearly evident at this stage.

In the second assignment from the first week, the participants read a brief explanation of the concepts of positions, interests and needs in conflict and the differences between them. They then read a series of political statements and categorised them as positions, interests or needs. Finally there was a whole-group discussion via the email list, in which students were asked to debate the deliberately provocative statement, "Positions and needs are often one and the same." They participated in this discussion with gratifying enthusiasm, asking good questions of each other and exploring the parameters of these concepts in very sophisticated and subtle ways. The third assignment in this week proved to be too much work, and had to be significantly shortened and even put aside for some people.

In the second week participants were to collaborate with one or more other people in the gathering of information into a 'conflict map,' analysing a particular conflict in order to understand its dynamics more fully. It proved difficult for the students to form groups on their own. Differences between peoples' schedules and unclear commitments to participation from some students resulted in delay and confusion that lasted until halfway through the week. The participants appreciated the importance of the assignments - one said that she "liked the idea of trying to adapt what you have learned from the theoretical parts of the course to a conflict," and another said it was "the heart of the course." However, the amount of work we expected in our assignment scheme during this week was obviously over-ambitious for the time-frame, as all of the respondents reported that they had difficulty completing them. There was also concern from two participants that some of the conflicts chosen by their classmates were too complex or inappropriate for the exercise in other ways. In the future,

tutors could provide a limited list of target conflicts, derived from students' professional backgrounds and interests, and make suggestions as to which groups might be most appropriate.

The discussion component of the second week, a debate about co-ordination of humanitarian assistance activities, was also fascinating and lively. A few extracts from the debate will give a feel for the interaction between students during the course. The participants, one with a military peacekeeping background and one working for a humanitarian international non-governmental organisation (INGO), are responding to the following controversial statement.

“All NGO field activities & offices in conflict areas should be coordinated by one international non-governmental organisation (INGO) in a structure fashioned on the coordinating activities which take place within NATO and UN Peacekeeping forces.

1 From: Participant 1 (P1)  
2 To: transformingconflict  
3 Subject: Coordination  
4 Date: 13 November 1999 15:49

5 During the difficult period when Track 1 and Track 2 conflict management is  
6 occurring simultaneously, implied is the task of Track 1 organizations coordinating  
7 with Track 2 organizations: communication between NATO, UN, OSCE, and  
8 NGOs operating locally. As you would expect, we often found ourselves  
9 duplicating NGO efforts, observing organizations duplicating the efforts of others,  
10 and significant needs going unfulfilled. Given that all of these organizations are working with  
11 limited resources in terms of personnel and funds, overall  
12 coordination could be of significant value.

13  
14 From: Participant 2 (P2)  
15 To: transformingconflict  
16 Subject: Re: Coordination  
17 Date: 17 November 1999 01:00

18 Fuelled by the contributions by P1 and P3 (thanks for the kick-off!) I would like to  
19 differentiate in this topic in an alternative matter. The way we (INGO) look at co-  
20 ordination in general is summarised in the statement that we do not oppose (and do  
21 co-operate) to coordinate "with" but refuse to be co-ordinated "by". This, in  
22 particular when co-ordination is concentrated in political bodies consisting of  
23 (donor) governmental agencies, UN representatives and worse, warring parties as is  
24 the case in the suggested development under UN coordination.

25  
26 From: P1  
27 To: transformingconflict  
28 Subject: Track 1 to 2: Coordination  
29 Date: 18 November 1999 12:07

30 Yesterday's email by P2 made clear to me the value of this course. It provided  
31 insight into the processes and challenges of an NGO – thoughts and views to which  
32 I am not normally exposed. I agree with almost all of P2's points. Realistically, it is  
33 difficult to address this issue without generalizing and I'll remind you that my  
34 perspectives are based primarily on current efforts in East Timor, Bosnia, and  
35 Kosovo. I simply see a need for coordinated effort among IOs and NGOs as well  
36 as intra-coordination among NGOs .

We can see that the students are establishing an informal, friendly tone through their inter-textual references to previous contributions (lines 18, 30-33) and casual sentence structure. Clearly, each participant is operating within the culture and constraints of his own agency. P1 initially responded to the statement in terms of efficiency; he wants to avoid ‘duplicating efforts’ (line 9). P2 challenged that with another discourse about independence (lines 21-24). This is reflective of a cultural difference between military organisations and INGOs, in which the former tends to value clarity of command structure and efficiency while the latter tends to value independent decision-making and informal networking. This difference has important effects when these two types of organisation need to work together in a complex humanitarian emergency situation (Duffey 1998). For P1 (military culture), the involvement of political actors such as the host government and overall coordination through political bodies is the source of the legitimacy of a peacekeeping mission, a belief that is strongly rooted in the historical development of peacekeeping. For P2 (NGO culture), political actors are a source of favouritism and compromise, two factors that fundamentally conflict with his organisation’s principle of delivering humanitarian aid to those in the greatest need (lines 22-24). In the final email, P1 clearly indicates the learning process that has occurred, both explicitly in the first lines, and then later in his more complex formulation of the need for coordination from “overall” (line 12) to “intra-coordination” (lines 35-36).

In the week on conflict prevention, we invited three staff members from The Forum on Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER), a European conflict prevention thinktank, to sit on a virtual ‘expert panel’ and answer questions from students. Each of them contributed a brief introduction to his or her work and a couple of interesting discussion questions. Easy access to knowledgeable guest teachers is one of the advantages of virtual instruction, as there is no need for them to travel to the classroom location. Reactions from participants were mixed, but there was a general sense of frustration that more use was not made of the FEWER specialists, largely because people were still caught up in work from the previous week. One student commented that this week was a “balanced module, since it gave a lot of room for self study,” and that it was “challenging and imaginative.” Others thought the background readings for the topic should have been “more elaborated.”

## **Conclusions**

In summary, the course produced the following main lessons, which are both suggestions for improvements in this specific course and general guidelines for a constructivist or elicitive approach to online teaching:

- Include a discussion assignment as a prominent part of each week.



- Simplify and standardise the assignments, keeping the target study hours per week in mind (the revised course will have a maximum of three assignments per week, one of which is the discussion).
- Tutors should make suggestions for group formation and ensure that they are formed well in advance.
- Incorporate a wider range of examples in theoretical discussions and encourage students to relate their own examples.
- Encourage short, informal email contributions so as not to intimidate any participants.
- Expand and deepen the background readings.
- Make the introductory information package very explicit about how to access the various aspects of the course, expectations for deadlines and participation level, etc.
- Because it is easier for most people to read printed pages, each week's readings should be available in one file to download and print.

Overall, the pilot course fulfilled its objectives very well. The components that went well produced a valuable learning experience for participants and a stimulating teaching experience for tutors, while those that went badly helped to generate many concrete ideas about how to improve the course. The online environment proved to be conducive for conflict resolution teaching and facilitated, for most participants, a dynamic and interesting learning process. There may be some interpersonal conflict resolution skills that need to be learned face-to-face, but this course demonstrated that many of the core concepts and ideas can be explored well in an online seminar. One of the participants thought that the course had provided him with useful analytical tools,

I have discovered that [using some of these tools] has been very helpful for me and field practitioners to increase our understanding, identify the gaps in understanding in order to get a clear contextual understanding. [sic]

The TCC course fills a gap in provision of information and training for people engaged in international conflict intervention activities. The format of intensive interaction between the learners and tutors provides more opportunities for connections with other learners, questions to tutors and deep reflection than a purely correspondence-based course like the UN Institute for Training and Research's "Programme of Correspondence Instruction in Peacekeeping Operations" (UNITAR POCI<sup>6</sup>). This course is more focused on the specific practice needs of the target audience than the more conceptual "International Online Training Program on Intractable Conflict" run by the Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado at Boulder<sup>7</sup>, or other online courses available in various forms of

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.wm.edu/unpeacek/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/index.html>

mediation or facilitation. Face-to-face training programmes of this nature, including in-house training provided by organisations, residential programmes of varying lengths (e.g. Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution<sup>8</sup>, Eastern Mennonite University<sup>9</sup>, Bradford's Centre for Conflict Resolution) generally require the participant to take time off work, and sometimes travel to the training centre. This course, by providing a concentrated introduction to important concepts and tools in the fields of conflict management while allowing participants to continue working, can make a valuable contribution to the successful performance of their professional roles and responsibilities.

With the success of the pilot course and the large potential audience for online education in this field, the Network University has decided to offer the course again at regular intervals on a fee-paying basis. The intention is to progressively design and offer additional specialised courses in related topics, eventually building up a programme that can be accredited as a Master's degree.

In the wider context of developing the capacity of the conflict resolution training community to use ICTs to their full potential, the TCC course is only a small contribution to a larger agenda of research and application. Much still remains to be learned about the most effective training methodologies for these topics in an online environment. Equally, the effects of training in conflict resolution concepts and skills, in-person or online, are still poorly understood, both in terms of its impact on the learners personal development and its hoped-for positive impact in reducing violent conflict. Part of the OLP's ongoing research agenda is to investigate appropriate methodologies for evaluating online training. Finally, we continue to explore ways that online technologies can support grassroots peacebuilding efforts in conflict-affected communities, thus lessening the 'digital divide.'

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.aspr.ac.at/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.emu.edu/spi/index.html>

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