Developing multilingual teacher education communities for sustainable development in post-war Sri Lanka

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Set against the larger process of reconciliation, social cohesion, and peace taking place in post-war Sri Lanka, this presentation discusses the possibilities and challenges of creating multilingual teacher education communities in preservice language teacher education. In order to promote multilingual education (MLE), teachers, and more particularly language teachers, need to believe in and uphold the benefits of MLE for their learners as well as the larger community.

This is particularly so in a context like Sri Lanka, that is rebuilding its nation state at the end of a three-decade-long ethnic conflict. This presentation reports the findings of a longitudinal narrative case study conducted in three residential teacher preparation programs at the National Colleges of Education (NCOE). It looks at how NCOE created multilingual communities of prospective teachers.

This presentation explores (a) the role of preservice teacher education in creating multilingual communities that teach future teachers the value of multilingualism, (b) the curricular and extracurricular activities introduced to foster greater awareness of multilingualism and its benefits among teachers, (c) how the teacher candidates report of having changed or not as a result of these lived experiences, and (d) their fears teaching in socially and linguistically diverse setting. The findings of the study reveal many possibilities and challenges of promoting multilingualism in teachers’ education. It discusses how the structural barriers posed by the educational system and participants’ social, linguistic, and religious backgrounds play a large role in shaping their responsibilities as teachers.