

AB241**Strategies of Reconciliation through Education and Research**

Sarath Vitharana¹, Kumudu Sumedha^{1,2}, Sudheera Jayaweera³, Prabha Manuratne⁴

Postwar Sri Lanka has explored several modes and models of reconciliation as part of its effort to address the deep ethnic divide that still affects the country. Ultra-nationalist groups continue to create discourses and forums that destroy the potential for any sustainable peace among the various ethno-religious groups that were affected by the conflict. Attempts at creating discourses on reconciliation do not always occur at the grassroots level, often employing top-down models that prove unsustainable in the long run. In this research, we theorize a pedagogical exercise in which we participated as lecturers at the University of Kelaniya. A group of Third Year Sociology students were required to conduct a field research as part of their study program. The study involved a field trip to Tirukkovil and Karaitivu in two consecutive years, two Divisional Secretariats in the Eastern Province. The students had to be part of home-stays that involved close cultural contact with the host community. In this paper, we explore how the experience of being part of this research project can be theorized in terms of pedagogical strategies for reconciliation. Drawing on this experience, and the insights of the Freirean model of education, we explore the limits and challenges of traditional modes of delivering information such as lectures and presentations. We argue that informal modes of cultural exchange, operating at the grassroots level, facilitate ethnic reconciliation more effectively than traditional modes of delivery.

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¹ Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Kelaniya, lvitharana@yahoo.com

² kumudusumedha@gmail.com

³ sudheera_jayaweera@yahoo.com

⁴ Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, University of Kelaniya, pmanuratne@kln.ac.lk