



The Battleground of Sri Lankan History Education: Barriers to Teaching Inclusive Histories

Overview

As the separation between those who lived through Sri Lanka’s civil war and those who come to learn about the war grows, future generations’ understanding of the war becomes the war itself – all factual truth diminishes and makes room for one generation’s perception to be passed down to the next. What is key here is that there is no singular perception of an event, but rather competing perceptions – and these perceptions compete in the space of history production.

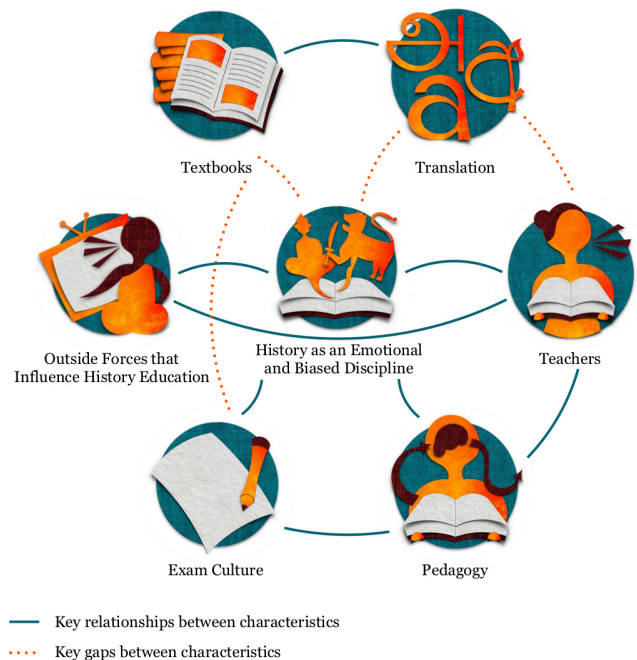
The teaching of history education is made up of a complex web of barriers that have caused history reforms to fall short. Throughout this brief, the term ‘reforms’ refers to attempted changes to history education structure and curriculum. This brief serves to map the multiple facets of Sri Lanka’s history education structure, explore why tried reforms have and have not gained momentum, and theorize as to how multiple stakeholders can strategize together based on lessons learned.

Methodology

The findings presented in this brief are part of a larger publication, intended to answer the following research question: *Why, in a society burdened with ethno-religious tensions and a lack of shared history, does history education continue to exclude marginalized histories and silo communities over ethno-religious divides? When history education has so much potential to give future generations shared understanding, why has Sri Lanka’s history education largely not changed?* Between September 2018 and January 2019, ICES interviewed professors, scholars, educators, organizers, curriculum developers, policy makers, and NGO workers who have worked on the frontlines of history education, documenting the institutional knowledge of tried reforms – their successes, their failures, and their lessons learned.

Mapping the Barriers to Effective History Education

In mapping the distinct characteristics of history education in Sri Lanka, one will find an interconnected web of systems, dynamics, and tensions prohibiting effective history education:



I. History as an Emotional and Biased Discipline

History is often trivialized as dates and names of people long gone, but the reality is that “history isn’t just facts of things happening in order, but ideologies behind why things happened [...] religious change, communalism, Sinhala nationalism, Tamil separatism” (Wickrama-singhe 2006, x). For this reason, history in its nature cannot be devoid of emotion nor bias, as the people, stories, and



concepts we choose to demarcate as 'history' will always prioritize some and exclude others. Historian Leslie Gunawardana argues that "historical narratives are integral to many Sri Lankan identities and the understanding of their positions in society" as historical moments are "often used to support incorrect political claims and justify injudicious political decisions" – hence the close tie between history's prevalence of emotion and its nature to be biased (Wettimuny 2016). However, "in relation to the question 'what nation is being built?' it's the Sinhala-Buddhist nation under the guise of the 'Sri Lankan' nation" – even history curriculum developers used the concepts 'Sri Lankan' and 'Sinhala-Buddhist' interchangeably.

Sri Lanka has spent half of its seventy-one years of independence suffering from the violence and aftershock of civil war – yet, history curricula strategically omits this incredibly significant time in the country's past. Those in favour of this omission might say "we don't want you to talk about the ethnic conflict – they could say this isn't part of the discipline of history. This is part of social studies" (Wickramasinghe 2018). While other supporters argue that "omitting the civil war is a method of reducing depictions of dyad conflict," "this omission does not facilitate more positive depictions of the Sinhala-Tamil relationship – it merely ignores this controversial aspect of it" (S. Jayawardena 2017, 64). Those who attempt to ignore the controversial parts of history fail to understand that what is demarcated as history is already biased, emotional, and controversial.

II. Textbooks

The production process of history textbooks has long been centralized by the Sri Lankan government, creating a system in which the predominantly Sinhala government writes all textbooks per grade for the entire



country (S. Jayawardena 2017). This gives these history textbooks the unique role of distilling Sri Lankan history to the entire nation's youth – thus textbooks are critical to shaping future generations' understandings of the country's past (S. Jayawardena 2017).

The textbooks incorporate a number of stories from the Mahavamsa, the 'great chronicles' of Sri Lankan history. One of its most prominent stories is that of Vijaya – the grandson of a lion and an Indian princess and the child of Sinhabahu and Sinhaseevali, who are said to be the first Sinhalese people (S. Jayawardena 2017). Up until four years ago when the folklore story was removed, "the textbooks explicitly construct[ed] the arrival of Vijaya and his fellow Sinhalese as the starting point of history in Sri Lanka" (Gaul 2014, 94). While the Vijaya story has been removed from textbooks, there was nothing to take its place to grant Tamils and other minorities belonging, so its legacy lives on.

Frustrated by the history textbooks elevating a Sinhala narrative, the LTTE produced their own history textbooks during the civil war, centring the Tamil narrative. However, while the Tamil-centric text was labelled as indoctrination, the government-issued text that prioritizes the Sinhalese and their mythical foundation is never thought of as invasion of young minds.

III. Translation

The role that translation plays in history production has been given little attention and has seen few changes since the conception of national history textbooks. After Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948, the newly formed national government went about making school more accessible by reintroducing education in Sinhala and Tamil, to replace the English medium (Hoeks 2012). Because Sinhala and Tamil curriculum was being developed



separately, “fears arose among some Sinhalese that the authors of Tamil-language history textbooks were emphasizing links with South India instead of Sri Lanka,” thereby betraying Sri Lankan nationalism and prioritizing their shared ethno-linguist identity as Tamils (S. Jayawardena 2017, 38). Therefore, in 1980 the predominantly Sinhala government mandated that all curricula be produced by them, with textbooks only being translated to Tamil and English after the fact (Gaul 2014, 89).

The National Institute of Education (NIE) and the Educational Publications Department (EPD)’s use of Sinhala as their working language “prevents Tamils – or at least, most Tamils, who do not write fluent Sinhalese – from directly authoring the history curricula” (S. Jayawardena 2017, 42). By greatly excluding Tamils and Muslims from the production process, something as looked-over as the translation process plays a role in creating history textbooks biased towards the Sinhala. While the wording of the Sinhala textbooks is often openly discussed and chosen after much debate, the wording of the Tamil textbooks is often left to the individual discretion of the translators (Danapala 2018). Chandima Danapala (2018) of the NIE History Department states that the department of publishing chooses people who can translate well, but often do not have a history background, leading to Tamil textbooks that are translated word for word rather than by meaning. Moreover, those translating from Sinhala to Tamil are often Muslims, who use a different dialect of Tamil for particular words, leaving the Tamil textbooks indecipherable at times to a sub-sect of Tamil students (Danapala 2018).

While Danapala (2018) calls for the NIE to employ more translators with a background in history, her team of two is equally devoid of a Tamil voice, and they too operate in Sinhala and employ an outside translator to translate all their work after the fact. Many point to not only the lack of Tamil voice in textbook production, but the lack of Tamil translations for teachers’ guides and outside resources for them to educate

themselves on any given topic of Sri Lankan history (Dewasiri 2018). The inability of Tamil and Muslim teachers to access educational resources for themselves contributes to the inaccessibility of comprehensive history education for their students.

IV. Teachers

There is an unspoken, yet prevalent assumption that anyone can teach history. As many as half of Sri Lanka’s history teachers at the grade school level do not have a formal background in history (Danapala 2018). With a



lack of historical knowledge among many history teachers, there is much more of a reliance on textbooks, with some rural areas having only textbooks without a history teacher at all (Dewasiri 2018; Danapala 2018). While many assume that teaching history is as simple as teaching the textbook, there is a key difference between history and other disciplines, as historical truth is completely different from other truths – “your fantasy plays a role” (Dewasiri 2018). Teaching history incorrectly is never taken as seriously as teaching the hard sciences incorrectly for example. However, this sharing of incorrect history with future generations proves to be very dangerous for Sri Lanka’s future – particularly in a post-war context with ethno-religious tensions running high (Dewasiri 2018).

While many scholars who value the importance of history education in post-war reconciliation point to textbooks as the site for necessary reform, history professor and academic Nirmal Dewasiri (2018) argues that by focusing on textbooks, policy makers are able to pacify peace educationists while still avoiding actual reform. Teachers, like anyone else, are not devoid of bias, as historical biases are ingrained into the discourse of our entire lives, from our own education to the religious services we attend and the teledramas we watch. Despite reforms to

textbooks, teachers inevitably teach widely known stories as history throughout their lives, thereby passing on this same history to future generations, regardless of reforms.

In an ethno-religiously tense Sri Lanka, perhaps what is most concerning is the lack of training necessary for teachers to facilitate the teaching of a subject as sensitive as history. Scholars, educators, and policy makers alike identified the need for history teachers to be trained to handle sensitive subjects, particularly as it relates to ethno-religious relations (Dewasiri 2018, Figurado 2018, Danapala 2018). Teachers admit to skipping sections of the curriculum in fear of catalyzing a sensitive or political conversation (Warnasuriya 2018). In one case, an English-medium teacher in a classroom of mixed ethnicities skipped a passage in the textbook as its tone blamed Muslims for a certain historical event and she did not want to offend her Muslim students (Warnasuriya 2018). Very rarely are teachers given the skills to facilitate discussion of such topics or to present their students with multiple perspectives of a single event.

While all teachers hold their own biases, repercussions that teachers face for teaching outside the mandated curriculum unequally falls on teachers who teach inclusive histories. Tamil teachers reported getting in trouble for covering things not on the syllabus, not only because they're viewed as jeopardizing students' exam scores for not teaching the curriculum they'll be tested on, but also because Tamil teachers are viewed as having ties with the LTTE and spreading terrorism (Figurado 2018). However, if a Sinhala teacher was to teach the story of Vijaya even after it was removed from the textbook, they would be viewed as appropriately supplementing the curriculum rather than indoctrinating their students with non-mandated lessons. These unfair repercussions create a system in which teachers' biases are given room to flourish, if and only if those biases are in favour of the Sinhala majority and do not expose the atrocities of the war.

V. Pedagogy

Sometimes the most important factor in learning is neither the content nor the teacher, but how the content is taught – its pedagogy. Not only in Sri Lanka but globally, there is a pedagogical emphasis on memorization and what critical pedagogist Paulo Freire (2000) calls the 'banking method' – the idea that students are empty vessels to be filled rather than individuals who bring their own knowledge and experiences to the classroom.



Wickrema and Colenso (2003) argue that “in spite of current educational reforms which emphasize a student-centred and activity-based approach to teaching and learning, teaching is still for the most part heavily teacher-centred, relying on traditional chalk and talk techniques” (3). For example, when a teacher only has forty-five minutes to teach forty-five students, lecturing from the textbook will be much easier than facilitating a more interactive method of teaching (Daniels 2018). For this reason, the pedagogy of lecturing within the banking model is prioritized over methods of critical pedagogy, such as discussion, critical thinking, and questioning. Teachers are placed in an environment where pedagogies of memorization are more efficient and measurable given their lack of time and resources (Warnasuriya 2018).

Of all disciplines, history is perhaps the most dangerous to humanity to teach in pedagogical methods that do not teach from multiple perspectives, as history in its nature is perspectives. In the current pedagogical structure, students learn that the written word is truth and should never be questioned, but rather should be memorized and regurgitated. Very rarely are students faced with the reality that their textbooks are written by humans just as flawed as they are, who made choices to include

and exclude certain parts of history. Moreover, students are sheltered from the fact that history can be perceived in many ways and all those ways are made up of varying biases (Daniels 2018). The failure to recognize history as biased and questionable allows for the history mandated by the predominantly Sinhala government to be accepted as fact and for all varying perceptions of history to be invalidated. In order to combat these normative biases in history education, one must get to the crux of history's pedagogy and offer varying, yet coexisting perspectives, presenting history as knowledge meant to be questioned.

VI. Over-Emphasis of Exams

With the British having colonised Sri Lanka for some 150 years, one of the many legacies that remains is A-Levels and O-Levels – a structure in which exam scores serve as a gateway ticket to university admissions and career opportunities afterwards. A large number of primary students and a majority of secondary students take part in tuition – private tutoring outside of school (Wickrema and Colenso 2003). The education system is so dependent on tuition that sending one's child to tuition is seen as an obligation (Bloemer 2018). The most prominent tuition masters lecture as many as a thousand students at a time (Bloemer 2018). Pedagogically, “tuition classes teach answers – not to ask questions,” as their one intention is to have students succeed in their exams, not to teach critical thinking skills or question the biases being taught (J. Jayawardena 2018).



While history textbooks have been under scrutiny to remove more Sinhala-centric lessons, exams have not been under this same scrutiny, creating a system in which Sinhala-centric lessons are excluded from textbooks but are still taught so that students are prepared for exams (Wickramasinghe 2018). The prevalence of

private tuition in Sri Lanka's education structure encourages a system in which the supplementary teaching of Sinhala bias is monetized. In comparison, non-Sinhalese teachers are pressured by the use of exam scores to measure success so much so that they must teach their students Sinhala-centric lessons regardless of their own values, “openly telling students that this is not a real history but this is what you need to pass the exam, but if you want to learn the real history we'll teach it on the side” (Warnasuriya 2018). In this structure, teaching supplementary Sinhala-centric lessons is highly profitable, while teaching minority-centric lessons are provided as a free service by already overworked teachers.

VII. Outside Forces that Influence History Education

We are constantly given messaging regarding history, from politics to cinema, that what is learned in school is merely a part of what is actually absorbed. Nira Wickramasinge (2018) notes that even after history textbooks saw reform, her university students continued to hold the same misconceptions that glorified the nation. For this reason, she qualifies that while textbook reform is worthwhile, there is still a whole different battle to be fought in the public realm about history (Wickramasinghe 2018). While there are many outside forces influencing how Sri Lanka's youth learn the country's history, there are two forces that play a particularly underestimated role – televised media and religious schooling.



Popular culture has always drawn from accounts of history – particularly from those “that have drawn from the chronicles, myths, and Jataka tales, and portrayed heroes and gods as the motors of history rather than in terms of social forces or class conflict” (Wickramasinghe 2012, 14). Professor Dewasiri (2018) recalls the first cartoon film produced in Sinhala, from 1979 –

Dutugemunu, a pseudo-historical film depicting the story of the famous Sinhala king who, according to this account, defeated the Tamil king, Elara. The film aired for one day and was then banned for being too sensitive and spurring ethnic tensions (Dewasiri 2018).

However, in more recent years much more ethnically-charged media has been allowed to air, including the 2008 film *Aba* depicting the life of King Pandukabhaya – the first king of Anuradhapura some 2,400 years ago (Wickramasinghe 2012, 14). *Aba* was seen by roughly 10% of the island and its success paved the way for other historical media. Among the most popular pseudo-historical media was the prime time show *Maha Sinhale Vansa Kathava* (The Great Sinhala Chronicle), on which a panel of ‘experts’ discussed an event of Sri Lanka’s past, often drowning out an academic’s historical perspective with “the dominant narrative of praise for the great feats of the kings and people of the past” (Wickramasinghe 2012, 15). The underestimated, yet extremely damaging consequence of such pseudo-historical media is that it allows immense Sinhala and Buddhist-centric bias to be interwoven into history education, as teachers may watch such media and ad-lib such biases when interpreting and teaching a textbook.

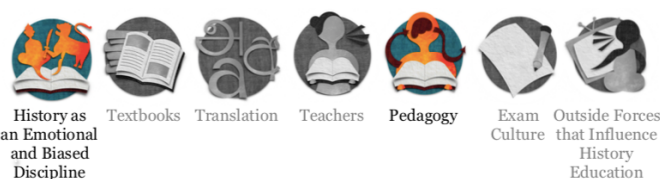
The other prominent force that influences how youth and even their teachers learn Sri Lankan history is the teachings of religious schooling. At Daham Pasala (Buddhist Sunday school), children learn about Sinhala-Buddhist heritage in a way that can be counterintuitive to recent history education reforms. The textbooks used in Daham Pasala tell history as “peppered with glorious deeds and exceptional individuals. It is a history full of omissions and chosen emphases, one which resembles the heritage/mythic mode of recounting the past rather than modern historiography” (Wickramasinghe, 2012, 10). At a time where Buddhist extremist groups like Bodu Bala Sena are at a height in Sri Lanka, the influence that religious schooling has on our next generation’s understanding of the past, and

thereby the present, can no longer be underestimated or ignored.

The History of History Education Reform in Sri Lanka

With a mapping of the distinct factors that shape Sri Lanka’s history education – the emotion and bias of the discipline, the textbooks, the translation, the teachers, the pedagogy, the exam culture, and the external influences – one begins to see an interconnected web of challenges to history education reform. A decade after the war’s end, Sri Lanka is in dire need of reforms that do not repeat what’s already been done, but rather multiply and combine various efforts. To measure the success of tried reforms in addressing multiple barriers, each of the following sections will induce a grid of history education’s areas of influence – coloured to indicate whether the area has been addressed. For example, if one is to revise textbooks without also revising exams within Sri Lanka’s highly exam-oriented environment, there lacks an actual shift in curriculum as teachers and tuition masters will first and foremost teach to the test. In order for us to approach history education reform using informed and strategic methods, we must understand what types of reforms and interventions have been tried, what worked, what failed, and what we can learn from one another’s efforts.

I. How History as a Subject has Changed



After the 1971 Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) youth insurrections, history decreased in priority and became part of the subject of ‘social studies’ taking a large blow at both the grade school and university level (Dewasiri 2018). Many history lecturers went on to teach other subjects, leaving university history departments

deserted, less students specializing in history, and thereby less teachers today having formal training in history education (Dewasiri 2018). It is out of this context that the Sri Lankan History Association was born and began campaigning for history to be a core subject – a concession that was eventually won in the early 2000s (Dewasiri 2018). As history took on a renewed prominence in education, those of very different ideologies found themselves advocating for the same thing – both Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists and those fighting for minority causes saw history education as a potential tool to impact the next generation (Dewasiri 2018).

Decades later, professor and historian Nira Wickramasinghe was placed on President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga’s team to revise history curriculum and went about reframing the lens through which we view history – rather than centring the narrative around kings, she wanted history to be taught through multiple interpretations (Wickramasinghe 2018). Her ground-breaking work "Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities" reframes history “with the knowledge and regret that if history is indeed the record of men/women in time, most men and women have never appeared in the written histories of Sri Lanka. Rectifying this bias would mean writing a history from the grassroots” (Wickramasinghe 2006, xi). While Sri Lanka’s mainstream history curricula has not been reformed to mirror Wickramasinghe’s innovative framing of history, her time on the curriculum revisory team planted seeds that have yet to grow.

II. Beyond the Sinhala-Tamil Binary



History as
an Emotional
and Biased
Discipline

Textbooks

Translation

Teachers

Pedagogy

Exam Outside Forces
Culture that Influence
History
Education

Often when we recount history, we wish to package our understanding of the past neatly, with simplified answers as to why a war began or

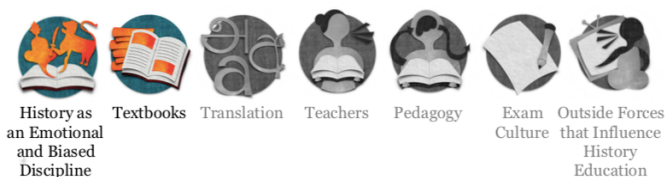
why tensions between groups of people continue. However, this oversimplification bars us from understanding the past as dynamic, organic, and nuanced human interactions which never have one answer to such questions. Since the war’s end in 2009, political and academic discussion of the leading factors of the war have pointed to a Sinhala-Tamil binary, ignoring other ethnic groups on the island (Bass and Skanthakumar 2019). While Sri Lankan history education marginalizes and vilifies Tamil history, it largely ignores the histories and political presence of Muslims, Up Country Tamils, and Christians. The erasure of these other minorities in Sri Lanka not only diminishes societies’ understanding of the violence and oppression these groups have faced, but it also prioritizes the framing of historical violence in Sri Lanka as occurring only across ethnic lines. An inclusion of the history of Muslims, Up-Country Tamils, and Christians would expose historical tensions across religious, class, and caste divides.

Since their ancestors arrived in Sri Lanka over a hundred years ago, Up-Country Tamils have been integral to the country’s import-export economy, and yet they have been forgotten in history education, legally barred from citizenship, and often framed as outsiders. The Sri Lankan government continues to label Up-Country Tamils as “Indian Tamils” a term that “explicitly refers to their historical origin [and] implies that the community is non-indigenous, and, therefore, not truly Sri Lankan” (Bass and Skanthakumar 2019, xv). By attempting to understand history only across ethnic divides, we fail to recognize the fight Up-Country Tamils face for repatriation and the class struggle they have long faced as plantation workers. By limiting Sri Lankan history to the Sinhala-Tamil binary, the history and plight of Up-Country Tamils is erased.

This erasure is also true for Sri Lanka’s Muslims, the country’s third largest ethno-religious group and the one that has most recently been under attack. The anti-Muslim riots of 1915 are often referred to as the beginning of the episodic

violence Muslims have face. However, the popular memory of Muslims themselves recount “a much more frequent and widespread set of instances during which ethnic tensions have led to targeted violence” (Nagaraj and Haniffa 2017, 2). Much of these conflicts were “between working class poor Sinhalese and the Muslim bourgeoisie [...] horizontal conflict on ethnic lines within the working class poor and vertical alignment between classes on the lines of ethno-religious identity (Nagaraj and Haniffa 2017, 42). Looking beyond the binary not only exposes the hidden histories of Sri Lanka’s other minorities, but it also uncovers the nuanced dynamics that beget violence, beyond ethnicity alone.

III. Reforms to Textbooks



Since 1972 when Sri Lanka’s MoE produced the first history textbook taught nation-wide, the text has been criticized for its distortion of history and fact, the inclusion of material offensive to Hindus, and the dominance of Sinhalese Buddhist culture (Wickrema and Colenso 2003). There is also concern regarding the textbook’s production process, highlighting the lack of Tamil involvement in the drafting process (Wickrema and Colenso 2003). A 1999 study by Yoga Rasanayagam and V. Palaniappan found that Tamil and Hindu culture and history are largely absent from textbooks and another study showed that the history represented is that of the Sinhala Buddhist nation state, and that “myth and scientific evidence are amalgamated” (Wickrema and Colenso 2003, 10). Even the MoE has criticized the NIE and EPD who produce all textbooks for their use of out-dated content in history textbooks (Wickrema and Colenso 2003). While “compared to the social studies texts in the 1970s and early 1980s, biases and negative portrayals are considerably less [...] the difficult issues of ethnicity and history are more or less avoided”

and continue to be today (Wickrema and Colenso 2003, 10).

Over the last three decades, government issued history textbooks have seen three revision cycles (S. Jayawardena 2017). Even though these revisions have not included the history of the civil war itself, there has been a great deal of progress in decreased bias (Wickramasinghe 2018). For example, history has now been framed as a science focused on evidence (S. Jayawardena 2018). There has also been reform to the production process of textbooks, with the MoE at one point implementing a Multiple-Book Option, to bring private authors and publishing companies back to textbook publishing (Wickrema and Colenso, 2003). The government even assembled a multicultural team of historians and sociologists to implement EPD Sensitivity guidelines and assess the sensitivity of textbook content in terms of ethno-cultural bias, gender, geography, etc. and make recommendations for improvement (Wickrema and Colenso 2003, 15). Most notably, the story of Vijaya – the foundational story of Sinhala supremacy – was redacted from textbooks, along with the language of ‘invaders’ to describe Tamils (S. Jayawardena 2018).

Under Prime Minister Kumaratunga, a number of progressive historians were brought together to reform history textbooks, but under Prime Minister Rajapaksa’s government many of these revisions never came to fruition (S. Jayawardena 2017). The Multiple-Book Option policy soon came to an end with this turn in power (S. Jayawardena 2017). Even history textbooks’ new bend towards scientific evidence was used to give prominence to archaeological digs done by one of the textbook’s main writers, Raj Somadeva, rather than to frame history as a human-constructed study worth being questioned (S. Jayawardena 2018). Sarani Jayawardena (2018) points out that despite so-called progressive reforms, the textbooks only mention the infamous act passed to give prominence to Sinhala over Tamil as the national language, the ‘Sinhala Only Act,’ once – thereby highlighting

the continued shying away from ethno-religious history. In regards to reforms falling short, it should also be noted that none of these reforms to history textbooks were accompanied by changes to exam content, pedagogy, the methodology of teacher trainings, nor a change in the use of the Sinhala language in textbooks' production process. Despite the prevalent perception that reform to history textbooks is the panacea to the problems we see in Sri Lanka's history education, textbook reforms must be held in unison with reforms to these other areas of influence in order to see changes that are both impactful and sustained.

IV. Interventions in Teacher Trainings



As many as half of grade school history teachers in Sri Lanka have not received formal training in history education, with many teachers trained in other disciplines spread thin to teach history in free periods (Dewasiri 2018). For the other half of teachers who are trained in the discipline of history, much of this training occurs in universities at the undergraduate level and at specialized institutions like the National Colleges of Education. Today only nine of the seventeen universities in Sri Lanka teach history, with each university having a distinct belief system for which they are known (Rogers and Wahab-Salman 2018). For example, the University of Colombo has moved away from teaching history chronologically, towards teaching it thematically, highlighting the history of capitalism, for example, while Jaffna University is categorized for promoting regional history – advancing Tamil historical narratives that are often otherwise excluded (J. Jayawardena 2018).

Knowing how isolated universities are in their pedagogical and ideological methods of teaching history, professors and activists worked together

to establish “History and Community” – a program to unite history students from different regions. They brought Tamil and Sinhala students together to understand how their varying understandings of history fit together (J. Jayawardena 2018). They asked the students what they already knew about the subject and unpacked the differences and similarities in their respective interpretations (J. Jayawardena 2018). While the students and professors who took part in the program commend it for its innovation and success, GIZ staff point to the challenge future teachers face in not being able to implement teaching multiple interpretations of history within a highly mandated and exam-oriented curriculum (de Mel and Feyen 2018).

Recognizing that students in particular regions of post-war Sri Lanka often have trauma that goes unacknowledged, GIZ implemented an intervention in which teachers and guidance counsellors are trained in psychosocial counselling – through the lens of both their psychological tendencies and their social environment (Daniels 2018). The model was structured so that teachers receive training by GIZ and then return to their schools and carry out trainings for more teachers, equipping teachers with tools to question their own bias. However, because teachers are so often transferred to other departments or schools, very few schools have retained their original trained professionals (Daniels 2018). Beginning with just five school zones in 2009, the MoE intends to take over this intervention from GIZ and replicate it across the country (Daniels 2018).

V. The Impact of Government Agencies and Laws



In 1987, the 13th Amendment mandated primary and secondary education to the provincial level. Since then, Sri Lanka's nine provinces have been

tasked with hiring, training, and deploying teachers while the national-level MoE is primarily responsible for policy development, planning and monitoring, national examinations, and the management of about 200 national schools (Wickrema and Colenso 2003). In partnership with the MoE, the NIE develops the national curriculum, consisting of syllabi and teachers' guides (Wickrema and Colenso 2003). Part of the role of the NIE is to put checks and balances in place to develop a culturally sensitive and well-informed history curriculum. In 2020, the NIE history department will consider revisions that have been suggested in the past years and work to introduce a new textbook in 2023 (Danapala 2018).

In its first attempts at reform, the NEC set nine national goals for education – the first of which continues to be a key pillar: "The achievement of a functioning sense of National Cohesion, National Integrity, National Unity" (Wickrema and Colenso 2003, 6). Since then, many of the government policy documents governing the structure and content of the education system have strongly positioned the role of education in promoting diversity and peace building. In 2008, the MoE's creation of the Social Cohesion and Peace Education umbrella program established seven strategic areas of focus: curriculum; teacher education; second national language; whole school culture; integrated schools; co-curricular activities; and research. Many additional initiatives were born out of this program, including the Ministry for National Languages and Social Integration which is now lauded as the first of its kind in the world (Duncan and Lopes Cardozo 2017).

While Sri Lankan education policy has succeeded in establishing social cohesion as a named priority, impactful reform to materialize social cohesion has been barred time and again, as reforms are overly dependent on the political party in power and political regimes are continuously in flux. From 1994 to 2005, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga was in the presidential seat and catalyzed many

initiatives lauded for their disruption of the status quo (A. Jayawardena 2018). The World Bank was brought in to give more direction in developing history curricula in a post-war country and they called for the removal of concepts of biological race such as of the 'Aryan race,' and instead called for the reframing of history as structures of social and economic forces, not just political history (Wickramasinghe 2018). By working together with the NIE, it was actually accepted by the ministry and adopted, but as soon as Kumaratunga's term was over, the proposal was put away and never implemented.

While the ideologies of "national cohesion, national integrity, and national unity" and fostering a "multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society" seem to be synonymous, they are often at odds with each other. In Sri Lanka's one-for-all curriculum structure, such policies call for the representation of multiple perspectives while arguing for one textbook, which often – contradictory to itself – prioritizes the predominantly Sinhala governments' point of view. Now, nearly three decades after reforms for multiculturalism were put into place, Sri Lankan history curricula continues to teach a monocultural story by excluding the civil war, an event that has fundamentally changed the country and its multicultural communities. Since the founding of the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR), reforms have still not been implemented to address the past forty years in Sri Lanka's history. When commenting on why this might be the case, scholar Sarani Jayawardena (2018) questioned "why would we choose the most upsetting and difficult thing to tackle first?" To Jayawardena's point, one could argue that giving the predominantly Sinhala government the task of including the civil war in history education could do more harm than good, as reforming existing curriculum is more bureaucratically challenging than writing new curriculum. Therefore, reform cannot only come from within the government, but must be in partnership with non-governmental organizations.

VI. The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations

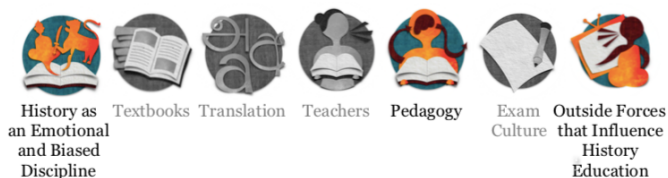


With the bureaucracy of governmental agencies and the instability of ever-changing regimes, Sri Lanka has often turned to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to take on bold reforms. GIZ has been at the front lines of many reforms to history education in the past few decades, often partnering with governmental agencies, NGOs, scholars, activists, and community organizers. After the war's end, GIZ was asked to develop a new policy for social cohesion, creating a program with four components: promoting peace and value education, establishing student parliaments, coordinating student exchange programs, and helping the NIE with curriculum and teacher trainings (Bloemer 2018). In addition to this program, GIZ began two other initiatives: to further the teaching of a second national language to both Sinhala and Tamil speakers and to provide psychosocial care in schools (Daniels 2018). GIZ's success in history education reform has come from their ability to take on a variety of systematic and direct service interventions simultaneously, creating a multi-pronged and multi-level approach with its network of governmental agencies, NGOs, scholars, activists, and community organizers working in partnership.

Another organization that has seen success in history education reform is the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) – using arts and culture as a vector for teaching youth about Sri Lanka's past. CARE launched 'Youth Create,' a program that fostered deep discussions about peace and reconciliation among Sinhala and Tamil youth through multi-linguistically teaching dying art forms (Rislan 2018). In one initiative of the program, participants created stage dramas that addressed everything from displacement to the

trauma of families of missing persons, going so far as to address majority Buddhist communities in the South after riots were carried out against minorities (Rislan 2018). For youth heavily affected by the war, CARE offered a program in which they could process their trauma through art, while for those from less heavily-affected areas, the program was a way to learn more about what those who were affected experienced, with all youth involved learning more about their shared culture. The program not only greatly benefited the youth who were able to work together across ethno-religious lines and despite linguistic barriers, but the multi-lingual productions centred around peace reconciliation also engaged as many as 80,000 audience members in its two years of running (Rislan 2018). Hosting 240 forums in Ampara, Kilinochchi, and Mannar, CARE was able to develop modules framing culture as a site for reconciliation, engaging youth in conversations about the meaning of reconciliation, peace building, gender, and diversity (Rislan 2018).

VII. The Influence of Peace Camps



With one danger of Sri Lanka's segregated structure being that Tamil and Sinhala youth grow up in isolation of one another, reformists have turned to peace camps as a way to foster relationship building and reconciliation among Sri Lanka's youth. In 1998, NIPU started a four-day peace camp program where "Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim students, who were seen as leaders in their own communities, participated in camp activities that included mini-lectures, peace workshops, creative activities, a cultural show, and tours of multi-ethnic villages" (Malhotra and Liyanage 2005, 915). It is very bold to expect behavioural and attitude changes from this short-lived experience, particularly because many youth "returned to a community

in which they had no interactions with the other ethnicity for a year” (Malhotra and Liyanage 2005, 918). However, a comparative study done with Israeli and Palestinian youth showed that Palestinian participants did not have increased negative attitudes towards Israelis as compared to their nonparticipant peers and Israelis who had fostered intergroup friendships from the camp were more likely to see legitimacy in Palestinian perspectives (Malhotra and Liyanage 2005). While long term effects weren’t as dramatic as one could have hoped, slight attitudinal shifts were seen, and in Sri Lanka’s case, participants showed a stronger feeling of empathy towards their peers of another ethnicity (Malhotra and Liyanage 2005).

Today, activist Ruki Fernando leads many peace camps around the country, often with multiple schools from different ethno-religious backgrounds coming together to share in their learning. At one of Fernando’s peace camps, students had the opportunity to visit the tea estates and learn the history of Up-Country Tamils and discuss the vulnerability of internally displaced people. Fernando hopes to build on what students already know of the war, rejecting the idea that students are merely empty vessels to be filled with knowledge. Moreover, this out-of-school experience is often students’ first time engaging with Sri Lanka’s more recent history outside of their community and across ethno-religious divides.

Peace camp organizers are often given just half a day to talk to students about the entire history of Sri Lanka’s civil war, with the school having an expectation that a one-off workshop will provide attitudinal shifts to their students (R. Fernando 2018). Because students naturally replicate the pedagogies they are used to, peace camp educators need to explicitly reframe the pedagogy of history education for their students. For this to be accomplished, schools need to dedicate more time to these crucial workshops and educators need foundational teacher trainings in order to discuss pedagogy and topics

such as ethno-religious history and identity with their students.

Lessons Learned

I. Building a Network of Multi-Pronged Approaches

After mapping the distinct characteristics prohibiting effective history education reforms and evaluating the tried methods of reform, there are many lessons learned for how we can avoid repeating what has already been done and instead combine various efforts into a multi-pronged approach. You will notice from the diagrams that accompany each tried method of reform that not a single method touched on all seven characteristics of Sri Lanka’s history education. For instance, Reforms to Textbooks have only taken into consideration the barriers that we face due to history being an emotional and biased discipline and due to Sri Lanka’s textbook production process, without considering the challenges of the translation process, teacher trainings, predominant pedagogies, the prevalence of exam culture, or the outside forces that influence history education. A true multi-pronged approach should attempt to address all of these characteristics that intertwine to shape Sri Lanka’s history education, as addressing one without the others is very much like trying to topple a seven-legged stool by removing just one leg – the challenges facing history education will remain standing.

II. Reframing Historiography and Pedagogy

While the current state of history education presents history as a singular, factual truth, the concept of critical historiography contends that history is not fact, but subjective; not truth, but perception; and not singular, but capable of holding multiple perceptions. For example, Janaki Jayawardena (2018) encourages taking students outside of the classroom “to showcase

that history belongs to community” and to teach them to “read a historical site as a construction,” as even a cultural site like a temple has a subjective story that is constructed from someone’s understanding of the past. Ruki Fernando (2018) hopes to use peace camps to teach in more participatory ways of learning history rather than through lectures and to draw on what the students already know, urging them to learn from each other and reflect critically on what they’ve been told. Others hope to promote community-based museums as avenues of memorializing marginalized histories (de Mel 2018). Interwoven in all these examples is the pursuit to teach students the stories of the past that are rarely documented – from the history of influential women, to communities like the Burghers and the Veddas; from the changing landscape of the environment, to the impact class and caste systems have had throughout history (S. Jayawardena 2018; R. Fernando 2018). History education must be expanded to be comprehensive of the wide scope of Sri Lankan identities and the richness of the past.

III. Learning from Success Stories: Grassrooted Trust

Having similar challenges to that of history education reform, health education reform in Sri Lanka has passed great milestones, earning itself the approval of many school administrations, teachers, parents, and students, without needing to appease the state. By starting with topics the public already cared about, like cyber exploitation, Grassrooted Trust succeeded at building relationships with decision makers – in this case parents and school administrators – to move forward a curriculum that required a great deal of trust to implement. Today, Grassrooted Trust works with sixty schools in Batticaloa and fifty schools in Colombo, providing schools with a wrap-around approach of teacher trainings, pedagogy and exam reforms, and knowledge-sharing sessions among various schools (Billimoria 2018). Their goal is to build a foundation so that they can one day be taken out of the equation, but they would have already

provided schools with all the tools they need for sustainable reform (Billimoria 2018).

IV. Being Practical While Dreaming Big

As we explore the interconnected web of systems limiting history education and what reforms have and have not gained momentum, it is imperative to strike a balance between implementing calculated and feasible strategies of reform while also dreaming big and believing that we can change the status quo. Scholar Nira Wickramasinghe (2018) explains that “ideally you’d want a completely different way of teaching history, but if you want to implement something quickly, [...] then you can’t completely challenge what exists; you have to implement things within a given structure.” For example, we may not be able to change the fact that many history teachers do not have a formal background in history, but we can at least provide them with simplified, technology-driven resources in both Sinhala and Tamil that can teach them and their students coexisting narratives of history (R. Fernando 2018). Because history is an emotional and biased discipline, history education reform “runs a high risk of discontent, with so many vested interests and moving pieces running in contradiction of each other,” and yet every time we put it off or convince ourselves that it’s not worth the effort, future generations of Sri Lankans are learning a singular narrative of history that further divides our society (Bloemer 2018). Another reform process will begin again this year, in 2020, with an estimated curriculum integration date of 2023, so there is a dire need to understand the value of wholistic reform in order to enact sustained change in time (Danapala 2018). As we take on this ever-going task of doing better for the future of society, generation after generation, we must continuously remind ourselves of Paulo Freire’s (2000) wise words: “There’s no such thing as neutral education. Education either functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom” (34). It is up to us to choose.