

Teaching literature in times of COVID: views from Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

This presentation is based on the narratives of Sri Lankan teachers of literature about their experiences of teaching English literature online in times of COVID 19 in Sri Lanka. Online teaching has produced a rather polemical discourse in Sri Lanka at present, as evident most visibly in the local multimodal news media and social media. On the one hand, the affordances of online teaching are being explored, and even reified; on the other, it also records a tenacious resistance towards any form of IT-mediated education based on concerns about the “digital and social gap” of unequal access to resources. However, this discourse tends to be controlled by the powerful voices in education, largely of university academics. While they claim to speak for everyone, the voices of the teachers in primary and secondary schools who were forced to adopt online teaching methodologies almost overnight have remained conspicuously silent, perhaps even silenced, in this discourse. This presentation focuses on exploring the individual experiences of a group of teachers of English literature who transitioned to online and remote teaching since the closure of schools on March 13th 2020. Their narratives, located within their specific teaching contexts, will be analyzed. Issues of significance in teaching literature online during the pandemic, as they emerge from the teachers’ narratives, will be discussed. It is hoped that the presentation will lead to the sharing of insights into the methodologies of teaching literature within and outside the online and pandemic context, which remain a rich but unexplored area of research in our part of the world.