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# Indigenizing Education: Historical Perspectives and Present Challenges in Sámi Education

Torjer Olsen & Pigga Keskitalo

*This chapter discusses the most important issues of educational eras in different phases conducted by the Lutheran Church and four current national states where Sámi people live: Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia. The early phases are described by the civilization process conducted by the Church between the 1600s and the 1850s and nationalism between the 1850s and the 1950s by the national states. These actions created the Sámi's experiences of oppression, inequality and Othering while at the same time, finding ways to empowerment. Since the 1960s, and in particular, in the last four decades, there has been a process of revitalising and recognising Sámi languages, culture and rights. An important part of this is the expansion of Sámi education with the ambition that everyone in states with Sámi population receives basic knowledge of Sámi history, culture, society and rights. This chapter is based on the first workshop in the Indigenous Pedagogy in Teacher Education (IPED) series funded by Academy of Finland NOS-HS theme to promote the Nordic network in educational fields. This article has two tasks: to present the historical background and development of Sámi education and to discuss the present challenges in Sámi education. An important and innovative perspective in the article is the cross-border dimension of looking at several aspects of Sámi concerns in education, with special focus on teacher education.*

## Introduction

In the current state of affairs, the Sámi people operate under various circumstances as part of multicultural and changing communities. Sámi education history is currently shaped by the education practices in various contexts and forms in regions of Norway, Finland, Sweden and Russia. In turn, the education histories of these countries form part of the Sámi education history. There is also the Sámi's own political awakening that was affected by the development of Sámi education, an interest that arose more actively in the beginning of 1900's (Lehtola, 2012).

This chapter continues the process of constructing the narrative of Sámi education by adding the value of teacher education to the discussion. Talking about four countries' education systems, different eras and different forms of current countries is a complicated task. Although the area

covered is wide and there are many nuances, attention is paid to the special needs of the Sámi education today and teacher education as a continuum of education history. We draw on our current and previous research on these matters. For the historical overview, we lean also on research from other scholars. In the past 20 years, the practice of researching state-Sámi relationships and education have been followed by more critical studies, inspired by postcolonial and Indigenous studies (e.g. Hoëm, 2007; Kuokkanen, 2010; Lehtola, 2012; Minde, 2005).

This chapter carries a theoretical perspective connected to decolonization, inspired from Indigenous studies. Our aim is to conceptually explain and analyse Sámi education historical frames as well as the most recent progress and challenges in teacher education and Sámi education by championing self-determination, empowerment, decolonization, and social justice (see Dorpenyo, 2020). We identify opportunities and openings for talking about Sámi education and teacher education with a task that emphasizes an approach to decolonization that highlights the character of complexity, accomplices, and hesitancy (Stein et al., 2020). An Indigenization perspective provides advice and recommendations for how educational practices can recognize and respect the intellectual and cultural traditions of Indigenous peoples (Sammel et al., 2020).

The article is written from the point of view of the Indigenous Pedagogy in Teacher Education (IPED) project funded by a grant for NOS-HS workshops by the joint committee for Nordic research councils in the humanities and social sciences, administered by the Academy of Finland and led by the University of Lapland (UoL). The workshops reviewed the Sámi and Indigenous pedagogy needs in all-Sámi and Nordic teacher education contexts in an attempt to support the development of new research areas. This chapter is based on the first workshop hosted by the UiT-Arctic University of Norway with the theme “Indigenizing Education: Historical Perspectives and Present Challenges in Sámi Education”, which concentrated on the added value of Sámi education history. The first workshop addressed the most important issues of colonization and assimilation, such as related experiences of inequality and Othering, so that ongoing education could continue its work on its premises and starting points with keynotes and conversations to build a foundation for subsequent workshops.

States globally have started to take steps towards determining what kinds of consequences have been experienced by Indigenous people and minorities, such as the Sámi in Nordic countries, through truth and reconciliation work. Examining different education policies towards the Sámi through the lens of education history offers an important perspective at a time when there is greater emphasis on the development of intercultural relations or, on the other hand, understands today’s practices as partly a result of former ideological and policy measures.

## **Features of Sámi education history**

Sámi education first began with the Lutheran Church activities from the 1600s onwards and continued with national state measures from the 1800s onwards until the development of school practices utilized today (Kortekangas et al., 2019). Although there are differences, there are several ways of dividing Sámi education history in different periods. Olsen (2019) suggests that the education history about the Sámi in Norway can be seen as going through different stages. Colonization, with the connection of schools and Christian missions in the 18th century, led to the strong decline of the Indigenous Sámi religion. Assimilation, with the Norwegianization policy that ran basically from ca. 1850 to ca. 1950, led the Sámi languages to be put under immense pressure, under which some languages and dialects disappeared. Schools were key arenas in this policy.

Following the end of the official Norwegianization policy, Norwegian school policy and practice towards the Sámi was one of ignorance and absence. From the 1970s to 1987, the first proper inclusion of Sámi knowledge, language and perspective was seen. Leading up to 1997, with the coming of the first Sámi national curriculum, we see a growing recognition, which can be seen as proof of Indigenization as shown also in the current national curricula. This is partly in line with the periodization of Lund (2014), who talks of the age of missionaries (1600-1800), the era of assimilation (1850-1970), the era of acceptance (1970-1990), and the era of revival (1990-onwards).

Some of the eras are overlapping, as the era of missionaries continued with the catechesis system at the same time that national folk education and folk schools were created. This occurred because there was a place for teachers who wandered to the Sámi villages to meet the students. For example, in Finland, the catechesis teaching system was finished in the 1950's (Lehtola, 2012). As was realized, while the aspects associated with these four periods may vary in different countries with a Sámi population, to some extent, the Sámi have experienced all of these situations.

When analyzing different countries' policies with Sámi populations between 1850 to the 1950's, the period that may have had the greatest impact on language change among the Sámi because of the European wave of nationalism, we can identify differences in forms of how they were conducted. Although the results seem at least to some extent to be similar, namely partly lost identities and language-connections (Keskitalo, Lehtola & Paksuniemi, 2014; Keskitalo & Olsen, 2019; Kortekangas et al., 2019; Olsen, 2019). The civilizing attempts conducted through education have been special measures aimed at Indigenous and colonized populations worldwide, beginning with the Westernization of people between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Burrows, 1986).

In Norway, the strategy chosen was a state-written and funded process called Norwegianization (Minde, 2005). In Sweden, the chosen policy was segregation, which was conducted through the "Lapp should stay Lapp" policy with the previous outsiders' given acronym of Sámi people (Lundmark, 2008). In Finland, based on Finland's position under Russia and formerly under Sweden, Finland put energy towards building unity and independence according to general European waves. It resulted in measures towards citizens where no measures were realized towards minorities but the emphasis was on Finnish language and culture and the sense of unity among its citizens. Minorities were assimilated as they received very minimal support for their cultures and languages. While in wider Finnish society, there was a mode to use Finnish language and show a sense of Finnish citizenship, minorities or Sámi with their late Indigenous position were living in an atmosphere where it was socially accepted to use the Finnish language and forbidden to use minority ethnic group languages (Paksuniemi & Keskitalo, 2019). Anttonen (2010) reminds us that even though it seems like minorities have changed their identities and languages to national languages and identities, it has inevitably left marks on the representatives of those speakers and community members which may continue to affect generation after generation. In the Russian Federation, Stalin conducted great terror towards minorities in the 1930's and 1940's. For example, he sent 18 teachers to demolition camps and they never returned (Kotljarchuk, 2019).

In many cases, the Sámi regions were the first places in their respective countries where educational measures were conducted by the Church or public school (Kortekangas et al., 2019). In 1612, the measures that were implemented through different measures to change the belief system of the Sámi were first aimed at and through Sámi boys, as seven of them were sent to Uppsala for three years to educate them on how to function as Sámi language speaking teachers or priests in order

to make the Sámi become Christian. The boys also started to wear Western-style clothing and shoes. Five years later, the Piteå Lapp school was created in 1617, and six Sámi boys were sent to study there so that they would eventually become priests (Lindmark, 2019). To a certain extent in Norway-Denmark as well, there was a special education for Sámi teachers in the 18th and later in Norway 19th centuries, first in Trondheim in these schools: *Seminarium scolasticum*, *Seminarium domesticum* and *Seminarium lapponicum*. Later, Sámi was a subject at the Trondenes and Tromsø seminaries (Nilsen, 2009).

## Current teacher education

As schools are important arenas for the implementation of state policy, the same is the case for teacher education programs. Our historical overview has shown that there is variation across borders in Sápmi. At the same time, there are some shared tendencies. When it comes to teacher education, the development goes from Christian priests being teachers to the emergence of professional education of teachers with the responsibility to shape and make citizens.

When it comes to Sámi education, it is important to remember and acknowledge the work of the Sámi political movement. Parallel to the assimilation and segregation policies of the 20th century, motions within the Sámi communities were engaged to maintain the rights of the Sámi people. The first phase of Sámi politics took place in the early 20th century, and crossed the state borders. The second phase followed with the foundation of the Nordic Sámi Council in 1956. At this stage Sámi activists began to participate in the international movement of Indigenous peoples (Indigenism) from the 1970s onwards. Norway, for instance, changed its policy towards the Sámi beginning around 1980. A policy of recognition was introduced, to a great extent as a result of the work of Sámi activists and politicians. Within the educational system, a preliminary achievement was reached with the launch of the first Sámi national curricula in 1997. Since then, the national curricula have shown official recognition of the Sámi (cf. Olsen & Andreassen, 2018). The development of the curricula has led to an extensive increase in Sámi rights to education.

The teacher education, as well as the national guidelines and regulations for this, follows along the same lines. This means that in Norway, following the then new guidelines of 2013, all teacher education programs need to provide its students with knowledge about Sámi history, society, language and rights. This is directed towards the mainstream schools. In addition, there is a parallel Sámi teacher education: 2010 saw the establishment of a separate Sámi teacher education parallel to Norwegian national teacher education, first on Sámi allaskuvla and since 2017 also at UiT The Arctic University of Norway and Nord University. There are of course challenges related both to the Sámi content of the national or mainstream side of this, as well as to the Sámi programs. The mainstream programs are in need of general capacity-building related to Sámi matters, whereas the Sámi programs struggle to find teachers with the combined competence of language and pedagogy. Still, the emergence of these national demands, based on a proper recognition of Sámi rights and state responsibility, create a necessary starting point for a further building of structures and systems.

In Finland, there is a project-based Sámi teacher education conducted by the University of Oulu, Giellagas Institute, called *Ketterä-korkeakoulu*. In Oulu, there has been Sámi language subject teacher education since the 1960s (Lehtola, 2014). University of Lapland and University of Oulu Faculties of Education share responsibility to serve education for Sámi speaking primary school teacher education (Arola, 2020). University of Lapland gives study points for every student teacher

in primary school teacher education of Sámi culture. Students may choose to study contents of Sámi culture with a study course of Sámi pedagogy.

Sweden conducts teacher education in Umeå, the so-called lecturer studies in Sámi language. No specified primary school teacher education is provided in northern universities with a Sámi profile. At the moment, there is an on-going project where Swedish Sámi school teachers or Sámi language teachers can build their competency in Norway, at Sámi allaskuvla (Sámi allaskuvla, 2018).

According to Zmyvalova (*forthcoming* 2022), the Herzen Pedagogical University offers Sámi language and cultural studies where there is a specification aiming at qualifying Sámi language and culture teachers. Only a few people are educated every year.

### **Sámi school and Sámi curriculum in Norway as an example of diversity in Sámi education**

We aim to present more detail about Norwegian Sámi education and what it entails. As Norway conducts Sámi rights best, we will introduce the recent education practices in Norway in detail to showcase some of the solutions in Sámi education.

The consequences of diversity for Sámi education should be obvious. Nonetheless, diversity seems to be a challenge in the field of Sámi education. The previously mentioned dominant discourses have in Norway aimed at developing the Sámi curriculum and addressing the representations of Sámi people and communities within educational contexts. Perhaps the most striking aspect of Sámi diversity, and one that poses a serious challenge to the curricular and rights-based representation of “the Sámi student” and “the Sámi school”, is the situation of the Lule Sámi and the South Sámi languages and communities. While the use of North Sámi language is being challenged, North Sámi language teachers and educational resources can still be found, although they are scarce. Both Lule Sámi and South Sámi are languages that are threatened to become extinct. The situation for teachers and educational resources in these two languages is strikingly different from the situation of the North Sámi (Gjerpe, 2017). It is Nord University, located in the area of both the Lule Sámi and the South Sámi, that has the national responsibility to provide language education in these languages. In addition, Nord University also has teacher education programs directed towards the Lule Sámi and the South Sámi. Because of the imminent challenges related to the small number of speakers of these two languages, the teacher education programs cannot be given fully in Sámi languages. Nonetheless, there exists both teacher education and early childhood education teacher programs with an emphasis on Lule Sámi and South Sámi language and culture.

### **Recent challenges**

Educational systems — from kindergartens to higher education institutions — are exemplary arenas for enfolded state policies, particularly when considering minorities and Indigenous peoples. In addition, schools are the state’s tools to supply its citizens with competency that is determined as the most significant. Thus, schools and education are ways for the procreation of ideology and for turning policies into reality. The reality of Indigenous peoples comprises of claims on the local and global levels. Educational systems tend to be based on the needs of majorities, that is on the needs of mainstream society. The experiences of Indigenous peoples worldwide evidently tell the story of school and education as main arenas for colonisation, assimilation and

the communication of the states' monocultural ideologies. There is a paradox of education, related to it being part of decolonisation or colonisation.

A historical perspective is required when discussing educational systems and colonisation. As colonial states have changed, educational systems have changed, too. Even though there is still a need for decolonial criticism of contemporary educational systems, colonial states are generally in a process of making attempts to (re)build educational systems that are more culturally responsive and less oppressive than those of the past.

This creates the need for greater nuance when understanding and analysing Indigenous issues in education. The educational system of Norway is an example of a system that has moved from colonisation, assimilation and marginalisation to inclusion and various expressions of Indigenization (Olsen, 2017; Olsen & Andreassen, 2018). Moreover, both in Norway/Sápmi and other states with a more or less strong Indigenous presence, the situation for the Indigenous communities is complex and diverse. A "Sámi student" is not the same, regardless of where s/he lives. The legal distinction between peoples, without deemphasising the rights dimension, does not necessarily work as a pedagogical and didactic principle for use in classrooms. Teachers in the current situation need to be aware of and be able to handle these complexities.

The term "cultural interface" was coined and used by Nakata (2007) to describe the complex situation of both Indigenous individuals and Indigenous communities. Cultural interface proposes an alternative to dichotomies; it describes a space of relations that an individual person (and community) lives by and with. Within this space, numerous subject positions are available; it is multi-layered and multi-dimensional and it shapes how a person speaks of himself/herself and others. Thus, when speaking of Indigenous education, cultural interface, and the idea of numerous subject positions, it seems to be a constructive alternative to simplistic dichotomies or dichotomism.

It is important to include a disclaimer: the theory of cultural interface does not imply a deemphasis of the collective rights of Indigenous peoples. Rather, when understanding Indigenous communities, the theory and premise of the cultural interface makes it possible to include the many people living in or close to the periphery of their respective communities. In many Indigenous contexts, the boundaries between who is and is not Indigenous can be blurry. We see this clearly in the different countries that the Sámi inhabit. In all countries and situations, there are discussions regarding the definitions and boundaries of Sámi identity and citizenship. So far, this has not been taken into account or dealt with within the respective educational contexts. We argue that this may be an interesting, albeit complicated, topic to include in the teaching about Sámi history and society.

Furthermore, as many Indigenous children, regardless of geography, attend mainstream schools, a pure distinction between education for Indigenous peoples and education about Indigenous peoples and issues seems to be over-simplified. This is both a general statement and one that addresses the situation in the Sámi's' different states. Thus, it makes sense to look at and talk about Indigenous education as something that dwells and works in and through a cultural interface. It becomes a way of stating that Indigenous education, in practice, can have many variations and articulations, and that different educational systems can be located on different parts of a continuum with assimilated and marginalised Indigenous students in mainstream schools on one end of the spectrum and Indigenous students going to Indigenous/indigenized schools within their

Indigenous communities on the other end. Perhaps most students, Indigenous or not, are found in between these two ends (Sollid & Olsen, 2019).

The encounter and potential synergy of the two national curricula in the Norwegian and Sámi context can be seen in two different ways depending on one's perspective. Having dichotomy and difference as premises is different from having the cultural interface as a premise. We argue that the latter is both more useful and more reflective of the reality of Indigenous education in schools and teaching.

Students (and their families) can see themselves (be seen) as belonging to different positions between what is Norwegian/Swedish/Finnish and what is Sámi. For instance, the Sámi and the Norwegians must be seen as related to—rather than separate from—each other through colonisation. This is even more important and striking due to the process of assimilation (Norwegianization), which led many Sámi to change their ethnic identity. In many highly Norwegianized villages, the last three decades have shown a powerful revitalisation of Sámi identity and language. At the same time, the question of who is Sámi and who is not is complex and not easy to answer in these villages. In educational contexts, a more open perspective may have the potential to connect the complex personal and family stories of Norwegianization and revitalisation to larger narratives of nations and politics. To paraphrase Donald (2009) in his works on Indigenous *métissage*: the goal is to have an educational practice that works to interpret and integrate mixed understandings of history and communities as relational, in order to acknowledge and recognise the Sámi presence and place in history and in the community.

## Conclusion

Sámi education can be said to be a result of a long history and policy-making and societal development processes, which should be dealt with today. This concerns the education that is aimed at the Sámi people and reviving and taking care of their linguistic and cultural issues, but it also means that mainstream education needs to deliver knowledge about the Sámi so that teachers can do their job in a modern world based on inclusive education needs. Processes are already in place in different countries with a Sámi population to address this need. For example, in Norway it has been written into Norwegian and Sámi teacher education reforms that every preservice teacher needs to know about Indigenous Sámi people so they will have the competency to teach students based on the curriculum demands about Sámi issues.

At times, hope may seem hard to find and recognise in a field where assimilation, colonisation and oppression have been dominant. Within the field of Indigenous education, suspicion and critical thinking about educational systems can be expected from the point of view of Indigenous people. At the same time, it is striking—and an expression of hope—that Smith (2017: 82) noted that education and schooling have the potential to be transformative. This is similar to how Donald (2009) talked about Indigenous *métissage* and the ethical space of Indigenous education. In this line of thinking and practice, discomfort may be necessary in order to ensure that critical thinking and the diversity of the cultural interface remain and/or become an integral part of Sámi education.

Teacher education, in the current situation, faces a variety of challenges and possibilities. The two branches of mainstream teacher education and Sámi teacher education answer to different demands from states and the respective Sámi authorities. Both are important in the effort to provide education about, for and in Sámi communities. Still, as the boundaries between the Sámi



and the majority may be blurry in some places, so may the boundaries between the two teacher education spheres. Thus, the development of a Sámi teacher education should be seen as and made connected to the Indigenization of the majority teacher education.

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