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# How Do the Sámi Culture and School Culture Converge — or Do They?

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This article dissects instruction in the Norwegian Sámi School and its cultural sensitivity. The focus is on the classroom culture of Sámi education: how Sámi education is arranged in practice. The core of the research is intertwined with issues concerning the status, language, and culture of Indigenous people in education. The research was ethnographic and the research data consists of questionnaires ( $N = 108$ ), teachers' ( $N = 15$ ) interviews, and the researcher's field diaries. The research showed that the Sámi culture and school culture do not meet: the western school culture dominates teaching at the Sámi School and socialises the Sámi School into mainstream society. The Sámi people's conception of time, place, and information should be emphasised in the teaching arrangements.

■ **Keywords:** Sámi schooling, Indigenous people, socialisation, enculturation, teaching arrangements, cultural sensitivity

This article examines how school supports the Sámi culture. Further, it reflects the connection between the conceptions of socialisation and enculturation within the instruction at the Sámi School. In this article, school culture is the main concern. Hall (2003, p. 85) has defined culture as the system of common meanings applied by people belonging to the same community, group or nation in order to understand how the world functions. Culture as a concept is complicated; especially, what it comes to the Sámi School. Diverse ethnic groups and many languages operate there. How is the system prepared for the reality? This article concentrates on the culturally sensitive situation within the Indigenous people's schooling system.

Although the school has operated in the Sámi community for centuries, the Sámi people do not have a school culture of their own being born from their own circumstances and based on their own values. This is the case although the Sámi people do have their own learning and teaching culture. Furthermore, the Sámi people do not have an educational history that would be based on their distinct circumstances and their way of thinking. Thus, the school is a foreign concept and institution imported into Sámi society by outsiders (Sara, 1987); although the historical presence of school has lasted in the area for a long time. Because of these characteristics, it could be

stressed that school culture in Sámi schools is in liminality. Furthermore, cultures collide easily (Hannerz, 2003).

According to Sara (2003, p. 123), the reason for the estrangement of the school from Sámi culture is that there was no need for the school to be aware of and take into account how to provide culturally sensitive teaching earlier. Culturally sensitive teaching is based on the Sámi premises. These issues are new to the school, which has its own — western — tradition of teaching and competence. However, the situation has now changed as Norway has adopted a separate Sámi curriculum in 1997 (O97S, 1997). The second reform is going on, implemented in 2007 (Máhttolokten, 2007).

## The Sámi as Indigenous People

The Sámi live in four countries: in Northern Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Kola Peninsula in Russia. Altogether, there are about 100,000 Sámi people in these countries. About 40,000 of them can speak the Sámi language. A huge assimilation process has been going on for centuries.

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Today, assimilation still continues through different processes. ‘Sápmi’ means the geographical area populated traditionally by the Sámi people. The Sámi people has also been known as the Lappish people. The Sámi could be written also Saami or Sami. We choose to use the form of coming from Sámi word instead of referring to the Sámi people. The Sámi people form a nationality that does not have a nation or nation borders but a common language, culture, and history (Smith, 2006, p. 65). The definition of Sámi varies by nation. According to the one used in Norway, a person has to:

consider himself or herself to be Sámi, and who either has Sámi as his or her domestic language, or

has or has had a parent, grandparent or great-grandparent with Sámi as his or her domestic language, or

is the child of a person who is or has been registered in the Sámi electoral register.

The Sámi are recognised as Indigenous peoples. There are several definitions for Indigenous people but in this article, we use the definition compiled by the International Labour Organization (United Nations, 1989). Being the only one of the countries with Sámi population, Norway has ratified the International Labour Organization 169 convention. The definition of Indigenous people in International Labour Organization 169 convention grounds on the assumption that the nation is governed by some other population than the Indigenous one. In addition, the Indigenous population in question has to identify itself as Indigenous people. The Sámi have their own culture, language, and means of livelihood as well as a distinct connection with the traditional territories and territorial waters. The right to land, water, and natural resources forms a central element of the rights of the Indigenous peoples. (Henriksen, Scheinin, & Åhrén, 2005, pp. 276–277). The debate concerning Indigenous people has raised the Sámi to a new position (see Valkonen, 2009).

The collective rights of Indigenous peoples emphasise their right to preserve and develop their societies (Henriksen et al., p. 278). Several international agreements point out that Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination (see Anaya, 1996; Henriksen, 2008, pp. 20–22; Hirvonen & Balto, 2008, pp. 108–111). Practising this right of self-determination also includes educational autonomy (United Nations General Assembly, 2009, pp. 4, 10–11, 25–26). A population that does not form a nation and lives in an existing nation or whose residential area extends to more than one nation can constitute ‘a people’. Therefore, it has to be considered as a legal entity and regarded to have the right of self-determination based on the international justice — including stateless Indigenous peoples. Thus, the Sámi constitute a people having the right of self-determination. (Henriksen et al., 2005, p. 267). According to research (see Vars, 2009), the Sámi’s right to self-determination is restricted when one considers the cultural, economic, and social perspectives.

## Theoretical Background: Socialisation and Enculturation

Although Sámi upbringing has not been in a major role in institutional education it is still at the core when addressing issues concerning Sámi education. In the 1950s, Päivänsalo studied Sámi child care and upbringing from the perspective of socialisation. According to the researcher, Sámi upbringing aimed — based on the Sámi way of life — at socialising children into the Sámi society of that time (Päivänsalo, 1953). In that context, the concepts of socialisation and enculturation are analogous. The goal of Sámi upbringing was to enculturate children into the prevalent culture and contemporary naturalistic Sámi environment.

The goals of socialisation and enculturation concerning the Sámi did not become differentiated until the mainstream cultures arrived in the Sámi area. Historically, the significance of the school is based on nationalistic ideas and this has also steered its curriculum. The use of the concept ‘enculturation’ is of current interest now as the usability of the concept for analysing and interpreting materials and phenomena from different cultural contexts is studied (Judén-Tupakka, 2000; Wulf, 2002).

According to Rasmus (2004, p. 138), enculturation is crucial for Sámi culture: through enculturation, young Sámi people acquire a strong Sámi identity preventing them from assimilating into the dominant population. Enculturation means the process during which an individual adopts the customs, beliefs, knowledge and ways of behaviour of his/her own culture. They are learnt during a lifelong process of working and living one’s daily life. (Jargon, 1994, p. 52). Sindell’s study showed certain irregularities in the enculturation of Mistissini Cree children concerning their first experiences of school. When children begin school, they have to start following other norms than the ones they are used to. Furthermore, they have to exert knowledge that is foreign to them, and communicate in a strange language in an unfamiliar environment (Sindell, 1997, p. 383). Such experiences are shared by the Sámi as well. Today, however, most Sámi children have been in contact with the mainstream language and culture before starting school and therefore their situation is not the same any longer at that broadness. Still, there are for example similarities in how unfamiliar knowledge is handled, often unconsciously. Nevertheless, the situation is different. As a result of colonisation, the Sámi have lost their cultural heritage. Hence, one of the challenges is to reclaim the norms and conceptions of knowledge that are distinctly Sámi.

In anthropology, enculturation is often used as a synonym for socialisation. However, the concepts are not completely equivalent. Socialisation emphasises becoming a member of society, while enculturation stresses becoming a member of a cultural community and adopting a culture. Thus, socialisation means that one becomes socialised into society, whereas enculturation means that one adopts and internalises a culture (Jargon, 1994, p. 52;

Kneller, 1966, pp. 12, 42; Suoranta, 1999, p. 144). The difference between socialisation and enculturation can be that if socialisation takes place without enculturation, an individual may lose his/her cultural heritage. Usually, the present education and upbringing at home aim at socialising a child into society. In the traditional culture, parents aimed at teaching a way of life and making children adapt themselves to the community through enculturation (Judén-Tupakka, 2003). Enculturation carries information about upbringing and the family values that have survived as a part of cultural heritage.

Enculturation is a process of becoming a Sámi; during which an individual adopts the beliefs, knowledge and models of behaviour that are needed for acting as a member of the culture. The members of the culture are enculturated in childhood when things are practised and learnt while performing everyday chores. Later initiation rituals and other life experiences contain elements that enhance enculturation. Enculturation steers identity formation and the development of one's self-image (Barfield, 1997, pp. 149–150). For example, enculturation into the livelihoods of a Sámi family and the socialisation at school may conflict with each other. If young people are to learn the Sámi way of life and the tasks it involves, the young need to participate in the activities of the nature-based economy although these activities are not determined by the holiday schedule of the school. This is when enculturation at home and socialisation at school can clash.

From the Sámi point of view, enculturation and socialisation still steer the Sámi and the majority of population in opposite directions. Enculturation aims at maintaining the culture, whereas the purpose of socialisation is to adapt the Sámi to the dominant society for example through the school. The culture and way of life of the dominant society still today are sometimes quite different from the Sámi ones, and this is something that people have traditionally become used to and adapted to in the Sámi area. The traditional Sámi world-view and way of living deviate from the present ones to a great extent. One needs to respect and maintain traditions and roots but also adapt oneself to society and its tempo. Enculturation and socialisation conflict when they do not have a joint sphere of activity. It is crucial to maintain and show respect towards the Sámi heritage both by the mainstream culture and the Sámi.

The most crucial question is how Sámi heritage could be maintained within the school. The issue has to be covered comprehensively in order to chart the whole Sámi field. At the present moment, the Sámi do not have recent education policy conformed to nowadays situation, as the Saami Council drew up its latest program on education policy in 1989. Neither the Sámi Parliaments nor the Sámi Parliamentary Council has an educational policy. Indeed, the Sámi people need to adapt themselves to the dominant society but how: through assimilation or integration?

From this point of view, it seems important to examine the concepts of enculturation and socialisation. For Sámi education, it is necessary to reflect on how to reconcile the issues of the past, present and future. This way of thinking is in line with Bruner's (1963) ideas on the spiral curriculum. Analysing the relationship between education and upbringing at home has mainly focused on the conceptual meaning of enculturation and the emic approach (Lauhamaa, Rasmus, & Judén-Tupakka, 2006, pp. 191–192). These two constitute a part of epistemological understanding, the sphere of living, and our view of the cultural context.

## Research Questions, Method, Data, and Analysis

The aim of this research is to analyse how the school culture and the Sámi culture meet. At the same time, the question of how the school supports the Sámi culture is at the centre. What is the connection between socialisation and enculturation in Sámi education? The research material comprises observations and research diary on education provided in the Sámi and Norwegian speaking classes in six Sámi schools in Norway between 2001 and 2007, interviews of teachers and pupils, questionnaires ( $N = 108$ ), entries in the research journal, and school documents such as annual plans and curricula. The objective is to understand and present the overall situation of Sámi education. The situation has been examined through two Reforms: Curriculum 1997 Sámi (O97S, 1997) and Curriculum 2007 Sámi (Máhttolokten, 2007). The situation in the classes that participated in the research varied according to pupils' language so that there were both kinds of pupils in the classes: Norwegians in Sámi speaking classes and Sámi speaking pupils in Norwegian speaking classes. It means that also Norwegian speaking pupils learn in many municipalities and schools Sámi language as well depending on the municipal language strategy. And on the other hand, in some municipalities, many Sámi children were situated in the Norwegian speaking classes by the parents' request. In addition to these kinds of classes, some municipalities also have special bilingual classes which consist of both Norwegian and Sámi speaking pupils. These kinds of classes were, however, excluded from this research.

The research method was a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods which complemented each other and thus increased the reliability of the study. Primarily, the study was a school ethnography including observations and interviews at the schools in cooperation with the institutions mentioned above. The research material has been constructed through social communication and therefore the knowledge has been created in collaboration with the research partners and assessed by the researchers. Because of this way of producing information in social interaction and in cooperation, it is important to use the term 'research partner' like Sarivaara (2010) did. In

this research the knowledge is understood as unique and context-bound.

The question is about research on Indigenous people and certain basic requirements concern its methodology such as research ethics. It occurs in the relationship between researchers who belong to Indigenous people (such as the first author of this article) and Indigenous people who are the research target. The researcher's localisation was explained to the research participants. The research process was cyclic, including the analysis which overlapped with the course of action (also Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, pp. 3, 5–6). Research material was segmented and divided into meaningful components but by preserving the connection to entirety. The research material was organised inductively; thus, the analysis is inductive, data driven (see also Tesch, 1990).

## Results

The data showed that the ways of the western school dominate instruction in the Sámi School and is spirally connected with the assimilation, power relations, and socialisation process that the Sámi had experienced. The timetables were divided into 45-minute periods and the school day was organised by the time allocation. Time allocation defining the minimum number of lessons for core subjects' (Research diary, 2001, 2006, 2007). 'The lessons consisted mainly of filling in the text books' (Research diary, 2001).

The way the school organises teaching is connected with the historical task of the school, namely, the nature of the school as an organisation and the conditions in which Sámi schools provide their instruction. 'It would be important that children were helped to perform their best. Children would develop if they got tasks that would stimulate them in many ways. The tasks are often too monotonous' (An interview at the children's school level, Teacher no. 3, fall 2007).

The problem in many Sámi schools is that their pedagogical arrangements and curricula are similar to other schools. Students are not socialised into their own cultures. 'In the morning, when arriving at school, the pupils come in the school after the school bell has gone. They hang their outdoor clothes on the racks situated outside the classroom. After this, the teacher opens the classroom room with the key. At the classroom, the pupils stand at their desks and say good morning in unison before they sit down. They listen to the teacher's teaching and start working with their text books. After the 45-minute lesson, the pupils go for a 15-minute break. The subjects changes into some other one after this. This pattern is repeated day after day and week after week, month after month, and I suppose also in other years too' (Diary notes at the children's school level, fall 2001). 'There is not just one well-designed series of text books for Sámi primary education but I have to look for the best parts that support the

goals of a subject from a variety of books' (An interview at the children's school level, Teacher no. 10, spring 2007).

The Sámi School is organised based on the prevailing values. Rather than skills and attitudes, it is affected by the values of one kind of information society. 'For example, the curriculum does not pay attention to the heterogeneous locations of the schools in the municipal centres and small villages where the availability of services varies' (Diary notes, fall 2001). The visual environment at the schools was scarce. Neither the pupils' Sámi language nor themes that emerged from the local culture functioned as stimuli. Even the non-English group works hung across the walls of the classroom got more visibility than the ones in Sámi. 'After observing the notice boards, I noticed that the language used in announcements was Norwegian language. It clearly breaches the Language Act and the principle of equality' (Diary notes at the children's school level, middle school level, and youngster's school level, fall 2001).

The research material showed that the school culture and Sámi culture never met each other. However, the question is not that simple: Kuokkanen (2007) writes about cultural conflicts by criticising them. According to Kuokkanen, we simply cannot talk about the collision of cultures because the issue is always linked with power relations as well. In this context, it means that Sámi education lacks self-determination. In ideal circumstances, teaching provided by the school would be based on the values of the surrounding community (see Hollins, 2008). The Sámi people's self-determination in, for example, drawing up the curricula and in connection with school statutes should also be strengthened.

According to this research, Sámi culture and school culture do not meet nor is the Sámi School very sensitive culturally. The school does not notice the special characteristics of Sámi culture sufficiently. Of the countries that have a Sámi population, the Sámi people's rights come true the best in Norway. Yet, Sámi schools still are as if in the middle ground between Norwegian and Sámi schooling: they are Sámi schools governed by western school culture and pedagogies.

The problem of the school is that it cannot solve the ways how teaching is arranged in the western school world referring, for example, to teacher-centred teaching which is tied to text books. Subject and time allocation epitomises this kind of the teaching arrangement as well. Organising teaching with the focus on a holistic approach would suit Sámi education better. Then the school schedules, conception of space and idea of learning would become more similar to the typical manner of surrounding environment. The working methods at school should be developed into more pupil-centred than before and learning environments should be seen as wider than just a classroom. For example, local people and nature could be exploited in teaching remarkably more than they are today. To enhance pupils' proficiency in Sámi language, it would also be important that the language would be more visible in schools and classrooms.

## The Sámi Conceptions of Time, Place, and Knowledge

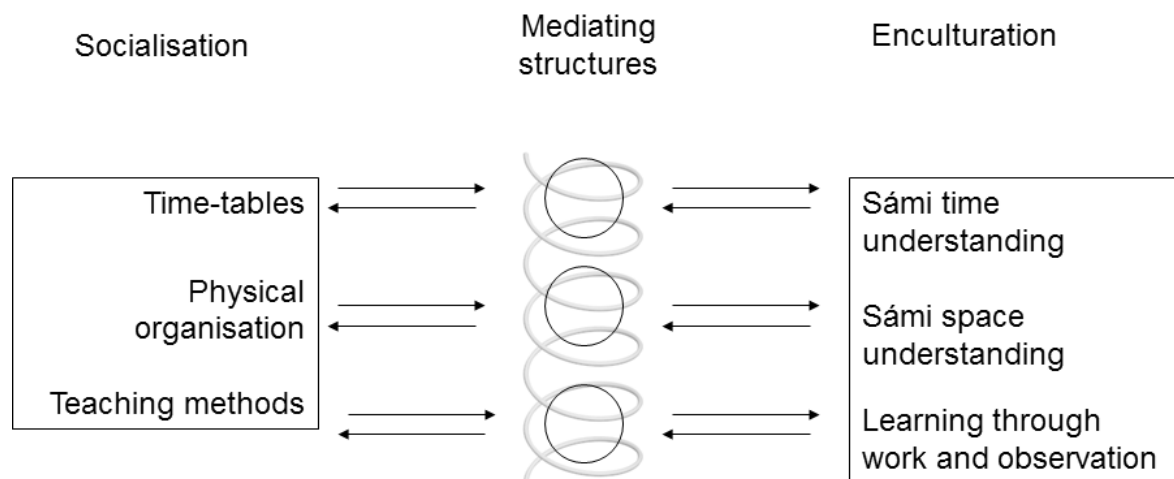
Figure 1 illustrates enculturation and socialisation through mediating structures. The western style of organising teaching in school system can be seen to bringing Sámi pupils apart from being Sámi people. Therefore, it is important to break the organising ways of teaching familiar to the western school system. Time allocation, classrooms, and working methods have to be re-organised. For this re-organisation, Sámi conception of time, place, and knowledge are important. The purpose of the hermeneutic circle is to form entities where history, present situation, and future are combined in education. It is a philosophical conclusion that could solve the main problem of school in practice: how to become a true Sámi School at the present time and place, in this moment and now.

## How to Organise Sámi Education

It is remarkable how time, place, and knowledge are understood and organised at school. Smith (1999) writes that the place of Indigenous peoples is colonised. At the mainstream culture, place is usually understood for example architecturally but in Indigenous peoples' conception place includes people and quite intangible levels as well. It can be stated that Indigenous peoples are obliged to have, for example, the spatial conception of place typical of the western countries. Similarly, school participates in moulding for pupils the conception of time that represents initially foreign culture with no connection to the tradition with yearly sense of time. The same can be said of knowledge: at school, the authority holds the information and thus it is not formed together, which would be suitable and typical of the traditional Sámi culture.

Therefore, it is necessary that the time allocation at school, the form of classrooms, and working methods are reconsidered. It would be natural to cut loose from the time allocation and think more wide rangingly than just classrooms. In addition, the working methods should be more and more pupil-centred. The present form of school should be conceived all over again. Then, it could fit the Sámi situation better than the prevailing form does.

According to Freire (1970), education always handles power relations and the achievement of objectives. Training includes a fundamentally arbitrary cultural system, which is based on an invisible power relationship. Recreating culture through education seems to play a key role in the reproduction of a complete social system (Althusser, 1970; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In this process, the school is a socially conservative force (Bourdieu, 1977). It means that education becomes the central terrain where power and politics operate in the lived culture, in the asymmetrical political and social positions of individuals and groups. Education should be seen as a type of counterforce for the colonisation of the mind and the heart. To arrive at decolonised pedagogy, we need to take seriously, on the one hand, the interplay between knowledge and learning and, on the other hand, the experiences of the students and the teacher. It is essential to theorise about and politicise the experiences, if pedagogic measures focus only on systemising leadership and on the assumptions of disciplinary knowledge. We need to take into account pluralism: uncolonised pedagogical measures require that we pay serious attention to various types of cultural logics, as they are fitted into asymmetrical power relations (Mohanty, 1994, pp. 147, 152, 154–155.)



**FIGURE 1**  
The mediating structures of Sámi education.

## Discussion

From the point of view of Sámi culture, enculturation is a challenge especially because the Sámi curriculum and its implementations in instruction do not enculturate pupils into Sámi culture. Through strengthening mediating structures, it might be possible to succeed better with micro-level instruction and learning than nowadays. The Sámi world-view and Sámi values should occupy a central position in teaching but also in curriculum. Teaching should be organised according to the principles of open learning environments at the Sámi School.

Culture is transferred through upbringing and education. Learning can be formal taking place in the traditional way at school or informal happening outside the school (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 21; Judén-Tupakka, 2000, 2003). The study focuses precisely on the encounter between formal and informal learning. Therefore, we need to have a look at the Sámi conceptions of space and place (Hoëm, 1995, pp. 51–53) and of time and knowledge (Helander & Kailo, 1999, pp. 233, 235). In this context, mediating structures have a central role and their purpose is to alleviate the cultural conflict (Nurmi & Kontiainen, 1995, p. 68). Cultures do not provide their members with a finished operational model: they are more like processes (Huttunen, Löytty, & Rastas, 2005). It means that culture is not an innate characteristic but created in a range of ways through experiences and interaction (Kvernmo & Stordal, 1991, p. 76). The Sámi School should pay attention to this perception and, therefore, school cannot be handled like static, ready organisation in diverse situations, but as an organ in a burgeoning position.

Sámi life contains a great deal of informal knowledge. This knowledge is holistic and place-bound; it is also an important element in socialisation. Taking this approach into account gives children and young people better skills to encounter the modern world (Bergland, 2001, p. 9). There are also differences in world-views; for example, the imagery in the world of the Sámi drums depict life as being divided into three levels (see Westman & Utsi, 1998, p. 20). Knowledge that is based on science holds a dominant position in the school — which is right. The problematic thing is that this knowledge is abstract knowledge and not connected to the daily life. After all, everyday life is concrete and based on daily experiences.

In the Sámi context, schooling has been criticised from the collision perspective (Hoëm, 1978; Høgmo, 1989). In addition to power issues, the short tradition of Sámi teaching results in deficiencies at all levels. These shortages introduce the continuous lack of competent teachers and Sámi language as well as culture-sensitive teaching material. However, the situation has gradually improved as a result of Sámi teacher training and the production of teaching material in Sámi. As the self-determination of the Sámi has not been realised comprehensively, the community cannot develop the school on its own terms. In addition, we talk

about a school culture, which cannot, as such, fulfil the needs of the Sámi.

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