



SPECIAL ISSUE INTRODUCTION

Philosophies of Sámi Education: Indigeneity, Place and Learning

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Background

Ahead of the annual conference of the Nordic Educational Research Association (NERA) in Oslo, 2023, the Nordic Society for Philosophy of Education (NSPE) organized their annual pre-conference and chose to discuss the concepts of rootedness and flexibility. Prof. Pigga Keskitalo from the University of Lapland was invited and talked about *The importance of place and attachment in Sámi Education*. Keskitalo gave an illuminating insight in the history of Sámi education and connected educational ideas and concepts both to their devastating, but also their liberating potential (Keskitalo 2023, Keskitalo et al 2024). Keskitalo's talk was followed by associate professor Ole Andreas Kvamme from the University of Oslo. Kvamme linked his talk *Sustainability in education: What knowledge is of most worth? Ethical and political considerations* to both the movie *Ellos eatnu—La elva leve (Let the River Flow)*, about the Atla-conflict in the 1970's and early 1980's, directed by Ole Giæver. The film takes up the struggle of acknowledging one's own Sámi identity, while the Atla-conflict exemplifies the strength in political collective action and awakening. Kvammes has published his thoughts afterwards (Kvamme 2024).

At the same conference, the Nordic Society for Philosophy of Education decided to move the journal *Studier i Pædagogisk Filosofi* closer to NSPE and rename it *Speki. Nordic Philosophy and Education Review*. *Speki* aims to be a platform for “the philosophical, theoretical, normative and conceptual problems and issues in educational research, policy and practice” (*Speki* webpage) in the Nordic countries. The new editor in chief, Prof. Torill Strand, and the editorial board agreed in their constitutional meeting to dedicate the journal's first effort into a call for papers for a Special Issue about *Philosophies of Sámi Education: Indigeneity, place and learning*. From the editorial board's perspective, representing scholars from the Nordic majority's educational and philosophical schools of thought, our aim has

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been to start the new journal by learning more about Sámi perspectives on former and current educational questions.

For this Special Issue, we, the editors Ylva Jannok Nutti, Viktor Magne Johansson, Birgit Schaffar, invited contributions in which education is understood broadly, involving formal and informal educational settings, kindergartens, schools and universities. Likewise, philosophy was understood widely as involving ethics, ontologies, epistemologies, and existential questions in theoretical investigations. This involves taking back education and philosophy that emerges from local indigenous practices, and various relations to land.

Contributions were invited to explore various Sámi educational concepts and practices, but also how concepts within the global scholarship of indigenous philosophies of education relate to the Sámi context, including educational work that challenges colonial structures. We were trying to be aware of the possible contradiction between educational and philosophical wisdom and established academic forms of writing. Therefore, we encouraged both contributions in form of traditional journal articles as well as other forms of writing like interviews with scholars, authors, or tradition bearers, or poetical or narrative forms of writing that explores relevant topics. Our call went out to scholars in education, philosophy, literature, anthropology, and indigenous studies, as well as to scholars in related disciplines.

Situating the special issue in a Sámi academic landscape

The varied landscape of Sápmi – ranging from forests, coasts, mountains, tundra, and mires – and the livelihoods of those who live there have developed Sámi forms of pedagogy and education. The Sámi people have over time relied on nature for their livelihood, and connection to land is embedded in livelihood practices. This connection is stressed in Jok's et. al. (2020) discussion about mistranslations of the Sámi landscape word, *meahcci*. *Meahcci* can in English be described as wilderness. However, they argue that *meahcit* (in the plural) are practical settings, shaped by ambiguous yet meaningful social connections with both human and non-human beings, where the distinction between nature and culture does not exist. The Sámi people have shared the land collectively, guided by mutual understandings and agreements on its use, a use without leaving lasting traces (e.g. Kuokkanen, 2007; Nergård, 2006; Oskal, 2000; Porsanger & Guttorm, 2011; Sara, 2004). Rauna Kuokkanen and Asta M. Balto (2024) connect the Sámi concept of *ovttastallan*¹ and its practices, to the principle of Indigenous relationality. In Sámi relationships to the land, land is a physical and spiritual whole wherein humans are a part. Because of the close relationship to the land, one of the suggested topics was “Place, land-based and sustainable education”.

Other examples of themes were “Learning with elders and tradition bearers” and “Sámi literature and narrative traditions”. Through involvement in livelihood activities, and the participation of children and youth alongside family members and other community members, knowledge is passed down from one generation to another (e.g. Balto, 2023; Jannok Nutti, 2018; Hoëm, Sara, 2004). Livelihood work serves as a key space for the transmission of knowledge, with work communities being essential settings where skills, values, and norms are passed on to younger generations (Joks, 2007). Storytelling can in that way serve as a link between generations (Balto, 2023). A child or youth can join an Elder in

¹ North Sámi for being together.

a practical activity, and in this context, teaching can occur more unnoticed, while listening to a story (Gaski, 2019; Nergård, 2006). Asta M. Balto's book is a study of Sámi traditional and contemporary childrearing, and Sámi and Indigenous childhood and adolescence was also named as possible topic for articles to the special issue.

In 1910, the first Sámi writer Johan Turi published the book *Muitalus sámiid birra* [An Account of the Sámi] (Turi, 2012). In the book, Turi provided detailed accounts of Sámi reindeer herding life, with the intention of increasing awareness and understanding of this way of living. Sámi women literature was examined by Vuokko Hirvonen. In her book *Voices from Sápmi* (Hirvonen, 2008) she situates their writings within the context of the Sámi ethnic awakening of the 1960s and 1970s.

Hirvonen's work can be seen as part of a global Indigenous counter colonial movement of challenging power structures and epistemic control. As the Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith puts it in her groundbreaking book *Decolonizing Methodologies*:

Knowledge and power to define what counts as real knowledge lie at the epistemic core of colonialism. The challenge for researchers of decolonizing methodologies as a set of knowledge-related critical practices is to simultaneously work with colonial and Indigenous concepts of knowledge, centring one while centring the other (Smith 2021, p. xii).

Working with an Indigenous methodological framework in Sápmi may include engaging with themes and topics such as, "Sámi pedagogies in educational institutions and policy"; "Sámi philosophies of education in conversation with other indigenous philosophies of education"; "Decolonial, counter-colonial, and/or post-colonial philosophies, practices, and processes in education"; and "Indigenous methodologies in educational research". The articles in this special issue all work in the critical and creative spirit that Smith suggests by working with many of these themes and topics.

Overview of the special issue

The special issue spans over a range of these above mentioned philosophical and pedagogical ideas and contexts. The following articles explore the widths of contexts in which Sámi education takes place and demonstrate through their own particularities how various ideas are formed and performed in related ways.

In the first article "Living and Practising Values of Gratitude and Respect in a Sámi Educational Context" Ylva Jannok Nutti and Viktor M. Johansson explore experiences and stories told at visits to cold springs with a group of children and educators from a Sámi early childhood centre. The article exemplifies how several themes in Sámi education are entwined in relation to being at particular sites on the land. Jannok Nutti and Johansson explore how the educators, through telling stories, create a sense of being in an adventure at the cold springs both for themselves, the children and the researcher. It shows a form of decolonising philosophy of education where sustainable traditions and knowledge connect past and previous generations.

In the following article "Å flette og veve med samiske kunnskapsforståelser i barnehagen," by Anne Myrstad, the attention on sustainable knowledge continues by

exploring children's participation and interaction with the artistic design of a Sami-inspired outdoor area in an urban kindergarten, located in Sápmi. Using a braiding metaphor, Myrstad shows how the children in playing with the artistic designs encounter Sámi understanding and knowledge in and through the way in which traditional materials are used. The installations can be regarded as entrances to Sami understanding of knowledge, where material culture is regarded as relational ties between people and the environment. Thinking with a braiding metaphor, rooted in indigenous epistemology, the article will discuss how Sami knowledge can be understood and emphasized in the education system, in which kindergarten is a part of. The article is a contribution to the reconciliation process. Thus, in both Jannok Nutti and Johansson's as well as Myrstad's contributions, we see how Sámi knowledge is present in early childhood education settings where place and materiality matters and are part of a lived educational relation.

In "Contesting hegemonic narratives: The educative power of Indigenous Sámi youth's literary reviews" Saia Stuong takes the questions of lived relations in a different direction. She actualises the voices of Sámi youth regarding different narratives about truth and reconciliation. Together with the rich meanings of the Sámi concept of *gulahallan* (communication) as well as indigenous readings of pragmatist ideas about truth, she engages Sámi youths' voices in reviews of recent literary work. She shows how the youth reviewers work with fictional and historical stories to form their own decolonising narratives of truth. As in the articles in early childhood settings, she shows how Sámi knowledges in artistic and practical contexts create educational moments in contemporary Sámi lives, that allow a reflection about their own history and identity.

The digital spaces for teaching Sámi languages are yet another educational setting that Katarina Parfa Koskinen analyses in her article "Since you live in two worlds, it is not always easy to tell them apart". Here, she discusses the simultaneously practical and philosophical, challenges in current Sámi language education in online and digital settings. "Living in two worlds" has several meanings in her discussion. The teachers, she says, work in a colonial matrix while at the same time trying to counteract colonial consequences and create connections with land, animals and people even in the digital educational setting. Thus, just as land, materiality and place is part of the educational accounts in both Jannok Nutti and Johansson's as well as Myrstad's contributions, Parfa Koskinen shows that it is equally central in Sámi online language education. Moreover, Parfa Koskinen's article presents teachers speaking of the everyday complexities of online language education. Together with Stuong's attention to Sámi youths' voices, her article provides a further example of Sámi experience in everyday educational life.

In the last full article of this special issue Rauni Äärelä-Vihriälä, Ylva Jannok Nutti and Rauna Rahko-Ravanti present their own experiences and work in Sámi teacher education. Honouring the spoken and dialogical tradition they engage in a conversation with each other and share their experiences as Sámi teacher educators. Their reflections illuminate how Sámi traditional education, values, and concepts of learning always are, can, and need to be a part of a Sámi teacher education. Their conversation not only sheds light on Sámi teacher education but reflects about what a Sámi university education can be. Referring to space and place as a common theme in this Special Issue, the authors title their article "Making space for students' learning". They conclude their reflections with a choir of voices speaking about Sámi education and the various philosophical ideas that live in it.

Although we may seem to present the articles in a somewhat linear manner, going from the youngest children, to youth, to teachers, and finally to university students, teacher educators and teacher education, we would like the readers to engage in a kind of circular engagement through which the various themes are formed. Yoik – a Sámi melodic and vocal tradition – is sometimes, at least in modern times, said to be both harmonically and philosophically circular in its form and performative practice (Graff 2018; Jernsletten 2004; Aubinet 2023). In his book *Why Sámi Sing: Knowing through Melodies in Northern Norway* (Routledge 2023), Stéphane Aubinet combines the voice of a scholar in ethnomusicology with the voices of many yoikers who themselves express profound philosophical and pedagogical insights. Viktor M. Johansson provides a pedagogical reading of Aubinet's book, in which we get a further sense of the rich sources for thinking about education that abound in Sápmi.

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