

## 5. INTRODUCTION TO SÁMI EDUCATION

### INTRODUCTION

The aim of the chapter is to analyse the main characteristics of Sámi education, such as issues experienced by teachers and students on the day to day basis, and to illustrate the understanding of Sámi educational experience on the basis of the interaction between Sámi youths and teachers. It is found that the teaching approach that is inspired by the cultural aspects is likely to improve the Sámi education. Moreover, the individual need of native peoples' education has grabbed the attention with the increased awareness about educational sovereignty. Therefore, due to its relevance nature, it has become more important to develop education for native people than ever as Sámi language is found to be seriously at risk of extinction. The teaching concerning Sámi language and Sámi-speaking education must be designed after considering pedagogical, culturally sensitive solutions while planning, realising and executing. The Sámi are native peoples living in mid and Northern Sweden and Norway, Northern Finland and on the Kola Peninsula in Russia.

Education and its content have great power because they can consciously guide the development and direction of a society (Pinar, 2004; Sarjala, 1982, pp. 72–84). In the Nordic welfare states, education is seen as a tool for national unity, social equality and social justice. As such, education has acted as a means of preventing exclusion. However, the idea of what constitutes good and/or bad education is relative. For the Sámi, the importance of education has been twofold. The education policy of the Nordic welfare states has provided the opportunity for a high level of education and thus a good livelihood; however, schools have also acted as effective assimilation tools and catalysts for consolidating and merging identities. Thus, for many Sámi people, schooling has meant participating in formal education, civilising assumptions, the assimilation of their culture and, in some cases, the loss of the Sámi language. History has shown that the introduction of schooling has led to the dilution of people's contact with the Sámi culture's deep nuances, such as their worldviews, traditional knowledge and social networks. Wars, diseases and separation from their families all complicated Sámi children's lives until the middle of the 20th century.

The aim of this chapter is to explore Sámi education in four countries' – Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden – systems, with a focus on the primary issues that pupils and teachers confront daily. The authors of this chapter are specialists in Sámi education. The first author, Rauna Rahko-Ravantti, PhD, is a Sámi scholar, and her family has

long been living in the Utsjoki commune, Gámasmohkki village and working as reindeer herders. She has studied as a primary school teacher in Guovdageaidnu, Norway at the Sámi University of Applied Sciences and completed both her master's and doctoral theses at the University of Lapland. The second author, Pigga Keskitalo, PhD, is a Docent at the University of Helsinki and a Sámi scholar from Utsjoki. She currently lives in the Enontekiö, Peltovuoma village with her husband, a reindeer herder. She is an Associate Professor at Sámi University of Applied Sciences and leads Sámi primary school teacher education master's programmes for grades 1–7 and 5–10. She was a doctoral stipendiate of Sámi University of Applied Sciences, and she earned her PhD at the University of Lapland. She has been working since 2015 as a part-time scholar at the University of Lapland, supervising Sámi PhD and master's students and giving lectures/teaching on Sámi education. Both authors also work with Sámi education related research and development projects.

Understanding the civilisation processes of the Sámi can be understood as a form of cultural colonialism (Keskitalo et al., 2016). Lakomäki (2014) calls the Sámi an example of cultural colonialism, but often has also talked about colonisation of the mind. One form of mind colonisation is epistemic violence, which is a structural and hidden form of colonisation on knowledge and information systems that is manifested, among other things, as unbalanced power relations and the legitimacy of Euro-centric knowledge (Kuokkanen, 2007, 2009). First through Christianity, and later through nationalism, globalism and western values, the spiritual and cultural traditions of the Sámi have been partly abandoned, and the Sámi language, which contains several Sámi languages, has actually diminished in favour of mainstream languages (see Lehtola, 1997, p. 32).

Sámi pedagogy, Sámi education and Sámi schools are vague terminologies. However, the terminology of a Sámi school is already present in countries such as Norway and Sweden. In Norway, it is considered as the school system located in the administration area of the Sámi language. Here, the Sámi curriculum is mainly pursued in the schools to teach to students of the district. With the evolution of the human right status of the Sámi people, there has been a further advancement in the legislation regulating Sámi language education, particularly in the last decade. In Finland, the legislation provides safety to the Sámi language by regulating the rights of every student living in a Sámi to receive education in a Sámi language. According to the Finnish primary school curriculum, teaching approach and methods used in the primary school must focus upon Sámi culture in supporting the cultural identity of Sámi students. In this regard, a new curriculum is designed along with the existing local curriculum. In Norway, the Sámi school is an inclusive school system having a Sámi curriculum with an administrative area for Sámi's language (Aikio-Puoskari, 2006; Keskitalo, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2013). In Russia, the situation is more challenging. The Sámi language teaching was forbidden 1940–1980, and it is served now couple of hours in Lovozero (Kotljarchuk, 2019).