

Charlotta Svonni, *Utbildning för samer. Ambitioner och praktiker i nomad- och sameskolan från 1950-tal till 2010-tal* (Umeå Studies in History and Education 27; Skrifter från Várdduo–Centrum för samisk forskning 30), Umeå: Umeå University & Várdduo–Centre for Sámi Research 2023, ISBN 9789180701556, 150 pp.

*Introduction. Historical Research and the Legacies of Sami Education*

In recent years, the Nordic countries have launched national truth and reconciliation processes to address the historical injustices experienced by the Sami people and other minorities. These efforts have brought to light the deep and lasting impacts of assimilation policies, cultural erasure, and systemic discrimination across institutions—including education (Norlin & Lindmark 2021). In this context, historical research takes on renewed significance. It provides the empirical and analytical foundation necessary to understand how past policies and practices have shaped the experiences and identities of the Sami and other minority peoples, and it plays a vital role in grounding contemporary efforts toward justice and institutional accountability in historical knowledge.

Charlotta Svonni's doctoral dissertation, *Utbildning för samer. Ambitioner och praktiker i nomad- och sameskolan från 1950-tal till 2010-tal* ['Education for Sami. Ambitions and school practices in the nomad and Sami school from 1950s to 2010s'], is a timely and essential contribution to ongoing discussions concerning Indigenous education, historical responsibility, and institutional change. Through an in-depth examination of Sami education policy and practice over six transformative decades, the study not only documents institutional ambitions and reforms but also interrogates the ideological frameworks behind them. It demonstrates how historical trajectories in Sami schooling have affected the possibilities for cultural continuity, transmission, and the assertion of Sami identity.

Historical research such as Svonni's enables a deeper understanding of educational systems that have functioned as both sites of colonial assimilation and potential spaces for Indigenous renewal. Her work illustrates how educational reforms—though often framed as progressive or democratic—have frequently fallen short of supporting Sami self-determination. By revisiting and critically analyzing the shifting goals and practices of Sami education, the dissertation offers crucial insights into the long-term structural challenges that continue to shape Indigenous education today.

Svonni's research is not only of scholarly value but of societal relevance. It speaks directly to questions raised by Indigenous communities, policymakers, and historical inquiries into colonial educational practices, policymakers, and historical inquiries into colonial educational practices alike: What happened? How did it happen? And how can we ensure that education becomes a space of healing, justice, and empowerment rather than erasure?

This review will highlight the structure, methodology, and significance of Svonni's dissertation and its contributions to Sami educational history, Indigenous studies, and curriculum research.

*About the thesis*

Charlotta Svonni's doctoral dissertation, *Utbildning för samer: Ambitioner och praktiker i nomad- och sameskolan från 1950-tal till 2010-tal* (2023), offers a thorough

and insightful analysis of the development of Sami and nomadic schooling in Sweden from the 1950s to the 2010s. Her research provides an in-depth understanding of the educational visions, aims, and practices that have guided Sami education across several decades, including the methods and philosophies underpinning knowledge transmission in these unique school settings.

Svonni investigates how educational policies and societal worldviews have intersected with Sami lived realities, tracing how democratic reforms and political choices have influenced the structure and content of Sami schooling. By focusing on a period of profound societal change, she reveals how national education ambitions regarding the Sami population were articulated, operationalized, and experienced.

The dissertation is presented in the format of a compilation thesis, comprising four peer-reviewed articles. These studies collectively examine key dimensions of Sami education at various historical junctures, highlighting Svonni's substantial empirical contributions and analytical depth. The articles engage with core questions around identity, autonomy, curriculum content, and the role of traditional knowledge, making the work highly relevant to ongoing discussions in Indigenous education and Sami studies.

Positioned within the broader academic discourse on Indigenous and Sami education, Svonni's work calls attention to the urgent need for educational frameworks that are both culturally meaningful and linguistically appropriate. It reinforces the importance of policy development that genuinely integrates Indigenous perspectives, and contributes to broader efforts aimed at decolonizing educational institutions. Her research aligns with the strong tradition of school history studies at Umeå University and builds on its legacy of rigorous inquiry in this field.

By critically interrogating the institutional and ideological foundations of Sami education, Svonni's dissertation deepens our understanding of how state policies have shaped, and at times conflicted with, Indigenous educational aspirations. Her work not only maps the historical trajectory of Sami schooling in Sweden, but also points toward the structural changes needed to build a more just and equitable educational system for Sami learners today.

#### *Theoretical and Methodological Approach*

Rooted in the field of curriculum theory, Svonni's dissertation offers a critical and in-depth investigation of how the content and aims of Sami education have been shaped by shifting political and societal ideologies across time. Rather than presenting a straightforward historical account, her work explores the deeper structures behind educational policies—examining how ideologies are embedded in policy formation and how these influence practices within Sami schools.

Drawing on thematic and content analysis, Svonni systematically examines a wide array of curricula, policy documents, and educational frameworks. Through this rigorous approach, she identifies both the overt and subtle goals embedded within these materials, tracing how visions for Sami education have evolved in tandem with developments in politics, Indigenous rights discourses, and educational reform movements in Sweden.

Her analysis reveals how efforts to preserve and promote Sami language and culture have often had to coexist with the national education system's expectations for

standardization, integration, and uniformity. By unpacking these tensions, Svonni highlights the difficulty—and importance—of designing curricula that respect cultural distinctiveness while also meeting national requirements.

Svonni's methodical reading of policy texts enables her to chart the journey from educational ideals to classroom implementation. She pays particular attention to how different historical moments have influenced perceptions of Sami identity, bilingualism, and Indigenous knowledge in the school setting. Her findings emphasize the significant role of curriculum design as both a policy instrument and a site of negotiation for cultural continuity.

By connecting abstract policy goals to the concrete experiences of Sami students and teachers, Svonni offers a nuanced portrait of how educational systems function in practice. Her research exposes the complex and at times contradictory forces that shape Indigenous education—illustrating the ongoing need for educational models that are responsive to the specific linguistic, cultural, and historical realities of Sami communities.

#### *Contributions to the History of Sami Education*

Svonni's doctoral work presents an important and original analysis of the changing landscape of Sami education policy and practice from the early 1950s onward. Her detailed study reveals how efforts to safeguard Sami language and culture have been integrated—though not without tension—into the Swedish educational structures designed for nomadic and Sami communities. Through a careful tracing of policy development, Svonni shows how Sami education has been shaped by broader national education reforms, all while attempting to protect Indigenous cultural distinctiveness.

A central strength of the dissertation lies in its close examination of how Sami schools have evolved over time. These schools, which initially aimed to prepare children for life within reindeer herding communities, have since undergone a significant shift. Over the decades, they have moved from narrowly defined cultural instruction toward a broader, more inclusive model that serves the wider Sami population. The increasing prioritization of Sami language instruction marks a notable change in both policy and pedagogy—reflecting wider educational trends toward integration and inclusivity within national schooling systems.

Svonni's research also offers valuable insights into the ideological currents that have influenced Sami education since the mid-twentieth century. As Sweden set out to pursue a more standardized and centralized education system at the beginning of the 1950s, policymakers attempted to accommodate linguistic and cultural minorities within this larger framework. Svonni critically assesses how these attempts have materialized, shedding light on both the achievements and limitations of implementing an education system that acknowledges cultural difference while striving for national cohesion.

By placing these developments in their historical and political contexts, Svonni contributes to a deeper understanding of how Indigenous education is negotiated within state systems. Her findings emphasize the challenges involved in creating school environments that simultaneously support Sami cultural revitalization and meet the requirements of a national curriculum. The gradual transformation of Sami schools—from culturally specific, localized institutions to more integrated education-

al spaces—reflects shifting perspectives on Indigenous rights, diversity, and inclusion in Sweden.

Ultimately, Svonni's dissertation makes a major contribution to scholarship on Sami educational history. It offers a critical and nuanced account of how Sami schooling has adapted to changing political priorities, helping us better understand the role of education in shaping Indigenous futures within modern nation-states.

#### *Assessment of Methodology*

Svonni's study, situated within the field of curriculum studies, offers a careful and in-depth analysis of the aims and knowledge foundations that shaped Sami education over the decades under review. Her investigation is informed by Gert Biesta's (2020) conceptual model of education, which distinguishes between three key functions: qualification, socialization, and subjectification. This framework serves as a lens through which Svonni interprets the educational goals embedded in Sami curricula.

In addition to exploring curricular aims, the dissertation also examines how collective Sami identity is constructed and represented within educational texts. To accomplish this, Svonni draws on identification theory and the concept of imagined communities, particularly as theorized by Benedict Anderson (2006) and Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2007). These theoretical tools enable her to analyze how Sami identity has been envisioned and articulated within schooling materials across time.

Methodologically, Svonni applies both thematic and content analysis to a wide selection of curriculum documents and policy texts. This dual approach allows her to uncover underlying values, ideological shifts, and the practical strategies used to shape Sami schooling. Through this analytical lens, she provides a detailed and insightful account of how Sami education has evolved in both form and content, revealing how educational strategies were influenced by broader sociopolitical forces.

#### *Scholarly Importance*

Svonni's doctoral dissertation represents a crucial academic contribution with significant implications for the fields of educational history, Indigenous studies, and curriculum theory. Her thorough investigation of Sami education from the 1950s to the 2010s goes beyond a simple historical account, providing deep insights into the shifts in educational practices and policies within the context of Sami communities in Sweden. Beyond merely adding to historical understanding, the dissertation critically examines the interaction between educational systems and Indigenous communities, offering valuable perspectives on the broader issues of cultural preservation, language rights, and the role of education in fostering community identity and resilience.

By combining curriculum studies with Sami and Indigenous studies, Svonni's research enhances our comprehension of the complex relationship between education and the survival of Indigenous cultures. Her work emphasizes the importance of educational content and goals in transmitting and adapting cultural knowledge, offering a nuanced view of the challenges and opportunities of delivering education that is culturally relevant to minority communities. This interdisciplinary approach provides a more comprehensive perspective on the difficulties involved in developing and implementing educational policies that honor the rights and traditions of Indigenous peoples.

Additionally, Svonni's dissertation thoughtfully engages with the societal and political forces that have influenced Sami education over the years. By examining Sami schooling within these larger contexts, her research explores the intersections between educational policy, national identity politics, and Indigenous rights movements. This contextual approach is essential for understanding the specific challenges faced by Sami communities and for making comparisons with the experiences of other Indigenous groups worldwide.

The academic significance of Svonni's work is also evident in its potential to guide future research and influence policy in the realm of Indigenous education. Her findings highlight the need for incorporating Indigenous perspectives and voices in the creation and execution of educational curricula and policies.

### *Concluding Reflections*

Charlotta Svonni's dissertation offers an important and timely contribution to our understanding of Sami education, especially in the context of ongoing Nordic discussions concerning Indigenous rights, historical injustices, and educational reform. At a moment when governments and institutions are being called to acknowledge and address the historical injustices experienced by Indigenous peoples, this research provides a crucial foundation for reckoning with the past and envisioning more just educational futures.

Spanning over sixty years of policy development, curricular shifts, and ideological transformations, Svonni's work provides a detailed and critical account of how Sami schooling in Sweden has been shaped by both national objectives and Indigenous aspirations. Her study does not simply document change—it interrogates the forces behind it, revealing how education has functioned as a tool for assimilation and as a space for cultural resilience and self-determination.

By placing Sami educational history in dialogue with theories of curriculum, identity, and power, Svonni enables a deeper understanding of the structures and discourses that continue to affect Indigenous education today. Her methodologically rigorous approach—drawing on thematic and content analysis alongside theoretical insights from curriculum studies and the study of imagined communities—makes this dissertation a model for research that is both empirically grounded and conceptually rich.

Importantly, the study's relevance extends beyond the academy. In the context of ongoing efforts to address colonial educational legacies, Svonni's research underscores the value of historically informed inquiry in addressing the legacies of colonial education systems. It demonstrates how careful, critical research can support processes of recognition, redress, and reform. Her findings call attention to the lasting impact of educational policy on Sami identity, language, and cultural continuity, and serve as a reminder of the responsibilities that states and institutions bear in healing historical wounds.

Svonni's dedication to uncovering the lived realities of Sami education—and the ways in which these have evolved across time—reflects a research ethic that honors both scholarly rigor and community relevance. Her work speaks not only to historical realities, but also to future possibilities: a future in which Sami education is defined not by external imposition, but by self-determination, cultural continuity, and linguistic revitalization.

In summary, this dissertation stands as a milestone in Sami educational research. It sets a strong precedent for future scholarship, while also offering policymakers and educators a valuable resource for designing more equitable and culturally sustaining educational systems. More broadly, it affirms the critical role of research in confronting uncomfortable truths, amplifying Indigenous perspectives, and shaping more inclusive futures.

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Torun Zachrisson & Magnus Källström (eds.), *Tyde den som kan. En upptäcktsfärd bland Upplands runstenar* (Upplandsmuseets skriftserie 13), Uppsala: Upplandsmuseet 2022, ISSN 1404-2908; ISBN 9789186145415, 288 pp.

In connection with the exhibition “Tyde den som kan” [‘Interpret it, whoever can’] at the Uppland Museum, it was suggested that a publication should be issued on the many rune stones in the province, and the use of runes over time. A volume comprising thirteen contributions by many leading experts is now available.

Not surprisingly, the first contribution is by Henrik Williams, Professor of Runology at Uppsala University, who presents an overview of the use of the older runes in Uppland during the pre-Viking period. Carvings dating back to that period are remarkably few in the central Swedish provinces. No such carvings have been found in Västmanland, only two, or possibly three, in Södermanland, and four in Uppland, namely “Möjbrostenen,” “Bolstomstasten,” “Krogstasten” and “Rickebytarningen.” Two doubtful items clearly do not belong here, namely “Dragbyskärvan” and “Danmarksbyfragmentet.” In addition, Williams briefly and pedagogically deals with questions concerning the origin of the runes.

Magnus Källström provides an overview of the runestone tradition in Uppland. Approximately 1,300 runestones are known to exist in this province, most of which were erected during a hundred-year period in the transition between the Viking Age and the Middle Ages. He also treats of some famous runestone carvers in his content-rich contribution, such as Åsmund Kåresson—the innovator from the north—Fot, Visäte, Torgöt, Fotsarve and Öpir, the latter of whom was the subject of Marit Åhlén’s doctoral thesis in 1997, and highlights the runestone tradition in western Uppland, which differs from that of the eastern and central parts of the province. A section in