



Book Review

Charlotta Svonni

Utbildning för samer: Ambitioner och praktiker i nomad- och sameskolan från 1950-tal till 2010-tal

Umeå University (PhD diss.)

2023, 150 pp. and 4 articles.

Charlotta Svonni's dissertation, with the English title *Education for Sámi: ambitions and school practices in the nomad and Sámi school from 1950s to 2010s*, provides a comprehensive examination of the evolution of nomadic and Sámi school education from the 1950s through the 2010s. The thesis contributes significantly to our understanding of educational goals, ambitions, and their implementation, alongside principles for knowledge transfer within this context.

Svonni's dissertation delves into the complex interplay between educational policies, societal ideologies, and the lived experiences of the Sámi people. Through an interdisciplinary lens, it examines the democratic movements and political decisions that have shaped Sámi education in Sweden. By focusing on the development of nomadic and Sámi school education through a period marked by significant societal changes, Svonni brings to light the educational goals set for Sámi education, the measures implemented to achieve these goals, and their ultimate realization.

This doctoral dissertation is structured as a compendium, incorporating four scholarly articles. This compendium gives a detailed exploration of various facets of Sámi education across different periods, showcasing Svonni's

extensive research and contributions to the field. Together, these articles form a comprehensive investigation into the evolution of Sámi education in Sweden, from the mid-twentieth century reforms to contemporary debates on identity, autonomy, and the role of traditional knowledge in educational settings. Svonni's work represents a significant contribution to our understanding of these complex issues, offering new insights and fostering further research in Sámi educational history and indigenous studies.

Svonni's research is integral to the academic genre that focuses on the complexities of Sámi and indigenous education. This body of work underscores the critical necessity for educational practices and policies that are both culturally and linguistically responsive, as well as the imperative for inclusive policy-making that respects and incorporates indigenous perspectives and needs. Svonni's contributions, alongside those of her peers, are pivotal in the ongoing efforts to decolonize education systems, ensuring they more effectively serve and support indigenous communities. The research is solidly positioned within the dynamic and impactful domain of school history research, a discipline that enjoys significant and well-established foundation at Umeå University.

Svonni's dissertation is deeply connected to Swedish Sámi education history through its critical examination of the policies, practices, and ideologies that have shaped Sámi education over the decades. Her work enhances our understanding of the complexities of indigenous education and outlines the essential steps

required to develop a high-quality educational system for the Sámi in Sweden.

Theoretical Framework

Svonni's dissertation, firmly anchored in the discipline of curriculum studies, offers a comprehensive and critical examination of the ways in which educational content and objectives for Sámi education have evolved under the influence of broader societal and political ideologies over several decades. This scholarly work goes beyond a mere historical recount of educational practices; it delves into the intricate layers of policy formulation, ideological underpinnings, and their practical implications for Sámi schools. Through the methodological lenses of thematic and content analysis, Svonni conducts a thorough exploration of a wide range of educational documents, policies, and curricula, thereby revealing the explicit and implicit educational goals set forth for Sámi schooling.

Svonni's approach to analyzing these documents is both methodical and insightful, allowing her to trace the trajectory of policy decisions from their inception to their implementation in classroom settings. By dissecting the content of educational materials and policy documents, she uncovers the nuanced ways in which educational ambitions for Sámi schools have been shaped by changing political climates, shifts in societal attitudes towards indigenous rights, and evolving perspectives on multicultural and bilingual education. Her analysis highlights how these educational ambitions have sought to balance the preservation of Sámi cultural and linguistic heritage with the demands of national education standards and integration policies.

The dissertation critically evaluates how these complex dynamics have influ-

enced the formulation of educational objectives, the selection of curricular content, and the pedagogical strategies employed within Sámi schools. Svonni's work illuminates the tensions and synergies between the desire to maintain Sámi cultural identity and the pressures to conform to a homogenized national education framework. Through her meticulous examination, she brings to light the challenges faced by educators and policymakers in crafting curricula that are both culturally responsive and aligned with broader educational goals.

Furthermore, Svonni's application of thematic and content analysis enables a detailed understanding of how educational policies and curricula for Sámi schools have evolved in response to changing ideological currents. This methodological approach allows her to draw connections between abstract policy objectives and the tangible experiences of Sámi students and teachers, offering insights into the real-world impacts of these policies on Sámi education. Her analysis sheds light on the processes through which educational content is selected, adapted, and delivered, revealing the complex interplay between educational theory and practice in the context of indigenous education.

Sámi Educational History

Svonni's doctoral dissertation offers a groundbreaking analysis of the shifts in educational policy and practice affecting Sámi education from the era of the 1962 school reform to the present. Her meticulous research illuminates the nuanced ways in which policy objectives aimed at the preservation of Sámi linguistic and cultural heritage have been embedded within the educational system catering

to nomadic and Sámi schools. This deep dive into the evolution of educational policies reveals a concerted effort to align Sámi education with broader national educational goals, while also striving to maintain the unique cultural and linguistic identity of the Sámi people.

One of the dissertation's key contributions is its detailed examination of the transformation of Sámi schools. Originally designed to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary for life within traditional reindeer herding communities, these institutions have gradually shifted focus towards a broader educational mandate. This transition towards emphasizing the Sámi language as a core component of the curriculum marks a significant pivot in educational strategy, from specialized, community-specific instruction to a more inclusive approach that seeks to serve the wider Sámi community. Svonni adeptly traces how this shift is reflective of a larger trend in educational policy and practice, moving away from segregation towards greater integration with the mainstream education system.

Furthermore, Svonni's analysis sheds light on the broader societal and political ideals that have influenced the direction of Sámi education since the mid-twentieth century. The move towards a more uniform education system, starting from the 1950s, underscores a national effort to integrate diverse educational experiences while attempting to respect and preserve minority cultures and languages. Svonni's work critically explores how these policy efforts have played out in practice, offering insights into the successes and challenges of implementing a culturally sensitive education model within a national framework.

By situating these developments within a historical context, Svonni's dissertation enhances our understanding of the complex interplay between national education policies, cultural preservation, and the rights of indigenous communities. Her findings underscore the delicate balance required to design and implement educational programs that both respect indigenous cultures and align with national educational standards. This transformation of Sámi schools from community-specific institutions to inclusive educational entities represents a pivotal moment in the history of Sámi education, reflecting broader shifts in societal attitudes towards diversity, inclusion, and the recognition of indigenous rights. In essence, Svonni's dissertation offers a comprehensive and critical exploration of the evolution of Sámi education policy and practice, contributing significantly to our understanding of how educational systems can adapt to serve both national goals and the specific needs of indigenous communities.

Methodological Approach and Academic Significance

Grounded in curriculum theory, Svonni's research meticulously investigates the knowledge content and specific goals of Sámi education during the examined period. Drawing upon Gert Biesta's (2020) theoretical framework on educational domains—qualification, socialization, and subjectification—the dissertation explores the educational ambitions as expressed in the curricula. Additionally, the portrayal of collective Sámi identities in these educational documents is analyzed through the lens of identification theories and the concept

of imagined communities by Benedict Anderson (2006) and Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2007). Employing thematic and content analysis, Svonni's methodological approach allows for a nuanced examination of the curricular content and educational strategies deployed in nomadic and Sámi schools.

Svonni's doctoral dissertation stands as a pivotal scholarly work that profoundly impacts the academic landscape, particularly in the realms of educational history, indigenous studies, and curriculum theory. Her meticulous examination of Sámi education from the 1950s through to the 2010s transcends a mere historical recount, offering deep insights into the evolution of educational practices and policies within the context of Sámi communities in Sweden. This work does not simply add to our historical knowledge; it provides a critical analysis of how educational systems interact with and impact indigenous communities, shedding light on broader issues of cultural preservation, linguistic rights, and the role of education in shaping community identity and resilience.

By integrating the disciplines of curriculum studies and Sámi and indigenous studies, Svonni's dissertation advances our understanding of the multifaceted relationship between education and indigenous cultural survival. Her approach highlights the significance of educational content and goals in the process of cultural transmission and adaptation, offering a nuanced perspective on the challenges and opportunities inherent in delivering culturally responsive education to minority communities. This interdisciplinary lens allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in formulating

and implementing educational policies that respect and uphold the rights and traditions of indigenous peoples.

Moreover, Svonni's work critically engages with the broader societal and political contexts that have shaped Sámi education over time. By situating the development of Sámi schooling within these larger frameworks, her research illuminates the intersections of educational policy, national identity politics, and indigenous rights movements. This contextualization is crucial for understanding the specific historical and contemporary challenges faced by the Sámi community, as well as for drawing broader comparisons with the experiences of other indigenous groups globally.

The academic significance of Svonni's dissertation also lies in its potential to inform future research and policy-making in the field of indigenous education. Her findings underscore the importance of including indigenous perspectives and voices in the development and implementation of educational curricula and policies.

Closing Remarks

In concluding the evaluation of Svonni's doctoral dissertation, it is imperative to underscore the exceptional academic contribution and originality her work brings to the understanding of Sámi education within the broader context of educational history and indigenous studies. Over a period spanning six decades, Svonni meticulously charts the evolution of educational policies and practices, providing an unprecedented depth of analysis on the shifting educational goals and content directed towards the Sámi community in Sweden.

This comprehensive investigation not only bridges a crucial gap in histori-

cal and educational scholarship but also paves the way for future inquiries into the dynamics of indigenous education systems globally. By placing the focus on Sámi education, Svonni's research illuminates broader themes of cultural preservation, linguistic rights, and the impacts of national educational policies on minority communities. Her work thus contributes to a critical reevaluation of how education can serve as both a tool for cultural assimilation and a means of cultural preservation and empowerment.

Moreover, the dissertation stands out for its rigorous methodological approach, combining thematic and content analysis with a theoretical framework that spans curriculum studies, educational domains, and theories of identification and imagined communities. This methodological rigor, coupled with Svonni's deep engagement with the material, ensures that her findings are not only robust but also richly contextualized within the specific socio-political landscape of Sámi education.

Svonni's commitment to exploring the nuanced experiences of the Sámi community, as reflected through their educational history, exemplifies a scholarly dedication that transcends mere academic inquiry. It speaks to a deeper engagement with the questions of how education shapes, and is shaped by, cultural identities and community values. Her work, therefore, does not merely contribute to the academic discourse but also engages with pressing contemporary issues of educational equity, cultural rights, and the preservation of indigenous languages and traditions.

In sum, Svonni's dissertation is a landmark study that significantly enhances our understanding of Sámi educational

history. It sets a high standard for future research in the field, offering both a model of scholarly excellence and a compelling call to action for researchers, policymakers, and educators alike to consider more deeply the complex interplay between education, culture, and identity in indigenous contexts. Her work is a testament to the power of education as a field of study to illuminate the broader contours of social and cultural life, making a profound contribution to our collective understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing indigenous education today. Svonni's work stands as a critical resource for scholars, educators, and policymakers interested in indigenous education and curriculum studies.

References

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