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Creating Sami language spaces in a Sami classroom

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Abstract

Teaching Indigenous languages can be supported by culturally sensitive teaching that is grounded in the Indigenous culture, values, and language. In the Sami context in Sweden, culturally sensitive teaching can be connected to the local culture and place, and may enable teachers to construct knowledge together with students and to enhance cultural and language learning, but there are also potential obstacles that may interfere with the culturally sensitive approach. In this paper, we explore how spaces for authentic language learning can be created in a Sami language classroom from the perspective of a Sami language teacher. Using semi-structured interviews, we draw on Keskitalo's framework for Sami pedagogy to discuss factors that support or hinder the development of spaces for Sami language use in the classroom. Based on our analysis, we argue that the creation of an authentic Sami language space is supported by positive attitudes and valuing the Sami epistemologies. At the same time, creating authentic Sami language spaces is hindered by limited self-determination and the liminal position of the Sami language in relation to Swedish.

Keywords: Sami pedagogy, culturally-sensitive teaching, Sami language teaching and learning, culturally-sensitive teaching, authentic Sami language spaces, Swedish Sápmi

Introduction

During the global Covid-19 pandemic many teachers had to move their teaching online, or teach in a combination of online and on-site classrooms with little or no support from their schools (Bergdahl and Nouri 2020). While such hybrid forms of teaching were new to many teachers, Indigenous Sami language teachers in Sweden have long been practicing remote, onsite, and hybrid forms of language teaching with little or no support. Even though a Sami perspective and Sami teaching materials provide affordances for teachers and students in their



construction of knowledge and enhance the learning of culture and language (Hornberger and Outakoski 2015; Jannok Nutti 2010), bottlenecks, such as limited access to culturally appropriate teaching materials (Lyngsnes 2013) and limited time for Sami language lessons, restrict teachers' opportunities to create culturally based spaces for language use.

Battiste (2005) suggests that Indigenous language teaching, whether provided in the classroom or beyond should include a combination of linguistic and functional aspects of language and Indigenous knowledge, views, and values. The connection to land and place as well as to the community are important aspects to be recognized in order to meet the educational needs of children with linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds (Battiste 2005; Keskitalo 2019). Such a teaching approach can be described as culturally-sensitive teaching, underpinned by the respect for diversity and the importance of relationships, and acknowledging the knowledge, language, and experiences Indigenous children bring to school (Kuokkanen 2005). Thus, a culturally-sensitive teaching approach encourages children to influence their learning based on their language and culture (Keskitalo 2019), and can contribute to the revitalization and the reclamation of Indigenous knowledge.

Cultural-sensitive teaching can be viewed as a response to the past, in which Indigenous languages and knowledge were ignored in education due to assimilation and colonialization (Wrench and Garrett 2021; Jannok Nutti 2018). From a situation where there were no spaces for Indigenous language or culture in education, there is now a move towards teaching that acknowledges the knowledge, language, and experiences the Indigenous children bring to school (Kuokkanen 2005). Indeed, Indigenous “space in education is essential for language and identity to flourish without ethnocentric or racist interpretation” (Battiste 2005, 9). However, such movements are not without difficulties. Both outer factors, such as history and policy, and inner factors, such as community support and culturally sensitive teaching (Keskitalo et al. 2011) may influence the creation of spaces for language use.

From the perspective of one Sami language teacher, this paper explores how spaces for Sami language use can be developed in concert with culturally sensitive teaching and what factors may support or hinder such developments.


Background

Spaces for Sami language use in current education are intertwined with the historical and educational context. In the following, we briefly describe those and introduce the concept of liminal space (Keskitalo et al. 2011) together with a framework for the understanding of spaces for language use.

Sami history and liminal space

The Sami people live in parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula in Russia and their traditional land is called Sápmi - the land of the Sami people. In Sweden, the Sami people are recognized as a people, as a minority group, and as Indigenous peoples, and they enjoy the right to self-determination, cultural and language development, as well as access to education in Sami. Additionally, Sami people have the right, supported by various legislations, to use Sami with state authorities, courts, elderly care, and primary education in so-called administrative municipalities (SFS 2009:724). The current 25 Sami administrative municipalities aim to protect, promote, support, and empower opportunities for Sami people (Sveriges nationella minoriteter och minoritetsspråk 2020). These regulations are fundamental to strengthening Sami peoples' right to "decide over their education and have the mandate to influence the education system" (Svonni 2015, 900).

However, in the past, the Swedish authorities neglected these rights, which led to the segregation of the reindeer herding Sami from mainstream society to protect them from undesirable influences. The authorities recognized the reindeer herding Sami as the "true" Sami unlike the forest Sami and segregated the reindeer herding Sami into nomad schools while other Sami people (e.g. forest Sami) attended a regular Swedish school (Kortekangas et al. 2019). Thus, forest Sami attending a Swedish school were denied wearing their traditional clothing and were forbidden to use the Sami language in education (Sjögren 2010; Svonni 2015). These various legislations led to a substantial decrease in Sami language use, as well as to cultural and language loss. Researchers (Jannok Nutti 2018; Ma Rhea 2015; Outakoski, Cocq and Steggo 2018; Svonni 2015) argue that education was used to assimilate Indigenous people into mainstream society and to disconnect them from society.



Instead of planning education together with Indigenous people, education was done to and for them (Ma Rhea 2015). This created a border between western and Indigenous knowledge which reflected otherness, exclusion, denial, rejection, and fear and represented the values and beliefs of the majority society (Keskitalo et al. 2011), also referred to as a liminal space. In a liminal space:

“[...] students grasp the new knowledge, integrating it into their thinking and understanding of the discipline, consequently transforming the learners’ thinking. Students who do not grasp the concept have limited knowledge of a discipline leading to a lost learning opportunity” (Page 2013, 26).


Also, liminal refers to belonging to or being between two different places to understand how knowledge is produced in this space when different cultures encounter each other. Such a liminal space projects a power relationship between the majority and the minority group. The power relationship is negotiated in language and discourse and is established and shaped both by the future and the present (Pennycook 1995). Thus, it is necessary for teachers to provide feedback, accommodate discussion, and be good listeners, as well as guide students through scaffolding to reduce the tension between the two groups.

Sami education and spaces for language use

In Sweden, pupils can study Sami A) in Sami schools up until school year 6 (age 12) which follows their own national curriculum, B) through integrated Sami education or C) through remote mother tongue education (SFS 2010:800). Mother tongue instruction can be arranged within the syllabus of Sami (as a first or second language), Modern Language, Student’s choice, School’s choice, or beyond the school hours. However, the teaching hours for this subject are not regulated in the curriculum, and each municipality can decide upon the number of teaching hours. In school years 7-9 and in upper secondary schools, students move to a regular school or to a school that offers integrated Sami teaching (SFS 2010:800). Integrated Sami teaching can be taught remotely, however, only if a municipality is not able to recruit a qualified teacher in Sami or any other subject. These subjects are taught as part of regular school hours for compulsory education.

The limited use of Sami outside the home environment in combination with Sami being an endangered language (UNESCO 2019), made the Swedish government enact integrated Sami education. Since 2009 the Swedish government has developed and modified integrated Sami education (SFS 2010:800). Municipalities in Sweden provide Sami integrated education for Sami children, with the goal to incorporate a Sami perspective in school subjects, such as Sami language, Sami Crafts and in some cases Mathematics and Science studies. Compulsory schools located in Sami administrative municipalities have to apply to the Sami education board for permission in order to provide integrated Sami education. Once a school has its application approved, the school can implement the authorized Sami-targeted school subjects (Outakoski 2015) through remote, hybrid, or traditional teaching. These various contexts provide possibilities for revitalizing Sami languages, but also for language learning, meaning-making, and expressing beliefs about the Sami languages (Belancic 2020; Hornberger and Outakoski 2015).

The purpose of remote and hybrid teaching in Sami is to provide children with opportunities to develop their Sami languages and culture and to reach as many children as possible across Sweden. Remote and hybrid teaching come with possibilities and challenges for both students and teachers: students struggle with participation and technical skills to learn online while teachers struggle with the transition from online to offline and with preparation. Remote teaching provides possibilities, such as access to qualified teachers, a wider range of learning solutions for different needs, and the development of one's own mother tongue (Stenman and Pettersson 2020). Similar to various online intercultural exchanges for language learning purposes (e.g. Zoom or Teams), social media and virtual worlds can support Indigenous and Sami languages in educational settings (Outakoski, Cocq and Steggo 2018). Virtual worlds are spaces where communication can take place at a distance. Using a virtual environment provides online communication, opportunities for co- and reconstruction of cultural and linguistic identity, and authentic language contact between the learner within the environment (Outakoski, Cocq and Steggo 2018). Outakoski, Cocq and Steggo (2018) argue that, through remote and hybrid teaching, children can access Indigenous cultural and language teaching, a space that children would otherwise lack as they are geographically scattered and not in the proximity of other heritage language learners.



Thus, educational settings are important and today they are often the only space for children to learn about Indigenous language and culture (Disbray 2016; McCarty et al. 2009), for example, from each other through interaction and co-learning. Using authentic contexts for learning from various texts, and about ways to communicate meaning through words (Stagg Peterson et al. 2018) can increase children's cultural awareness and language proficiency. Teachers increase students' school success by supporting and recognizing their needs and abilities. In an Indigenous context talking about their language and hearing their language increases students' values and makes students' backgrounds visible in school (Linkola and Keskitalo 2015). The focus of a cultural-sensitive teaching approach is to raise awareness of cultural differences and similarities and acknowledge and respect students' cultures and backgrounds. Including a cultural-sensitive approach in teaching increases school satisfaction, facilitates the learning of new skills increases the feeling of inclusion and safety, and feel valued (Rahman 2013; Wrench and Garrett 2021). In her study of ideological and implementational spaces, Belancic (2020) concludes that the creation of new language arenas that reflect Sami values in educational contexts is supportive of Sami language use and learning. Additionally, the connection to land, cultural traditions, family, and relatives are often the core values for Indigenous meaning-making and identity (Keskitalo 2019; McCarty, Nicholas and Wyman 2012). Indigenous people who live on their land are closely connected to their culture and language and are more likely to pass their culture, tradition, and language to the next generation (Cajete 1994). Lipka et al. (2007) argue that classrooms can become spaces for Indigenous language learning and refer to this as a third space: a place where not only the dominant nor the Indigenous culture is emphasized. Rather it has the potential to "become productive uncharted zones between school and local cultural knowledge and norms" (Lipka et al. 2007, 97). A third space enables teachers to make use of places in the classroom highlighting "possible ways of effectively and authentically connecting the culture and language of the home to the culture of the school" (Lipka et al. 2007, 98).


Despite teachers' efforts to provide various opportunities for Sami language learning, children's attitudes and motivation towards Sami languages can both hinder and facilitate their language learning and use (Belancic et al. 2017). Krashen (1987) uses the term affective filter and explains that children cannot learn a language if affective variables, such as motivation and anxiety are blocking their learning process. In the Sami context, however, additional factors,

such as colonialization and liminalization, i.e., physical, geographical, and mental borders between the western way of knowing and the Sami way of knowing (cf. Keskitalo et al. 2011) can hinder Sami language learning if children feel that learning Sami is not valued in education. Thus, focusing on cultural-sensitive teaching is a possible way to enhance learning for children with different backgrounds (Elek et al. 2020). Additionally, giving children agency and making their voices heard empowers their actions and describes their “sociocultural mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001, 11).

Finding and understanding spaces for language use

According to Keskitalo et al. (2011), the notion of Sami pedagogy refers to both outer and inner factors. The outer factors are colored by colonization referred to as historical and past events that have an impact on the shaping of Sami teaching and Sami pedagogy. Keskitalo et al. (2011) explain that Sami education A) is colored by the dominant knowledge and values, with little space for Sami knowledge; B) acts in a liminal position or interfaces by including the western school culture and excluding the Sami culture; C) acts in the field of multiculturalism – inclusion of Sami and other’s knowledge and values in different levels; and D) acts within limited self-determination – Sami people have limited command over Sami education. The inner factors refer to the implementation of teaching and include A) the Sami curriculum; B) the own Sami language; C) culturally-sensitive teaching, and D) extensive cooperation. While the outer factors are shaped by historical events, the inner factors are shaped by the practical development of Sami education and by what happens in the classroom. The inner factors of Sami pedagogy include:

1. Developing their own curriculum: Sami integrated teaching and Sami schools need their own curriculum so that teaching practices and learning environments represent Indigenous people’s knowledge. The curriculum should include cultural, economic, and geographical factors.
2. Strengthening the Sami language: Language is not just a communication tool, but also a central cultural element that needs to be strengthened in Sami language learning environments.

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3. Culturally-sensitive teaching arrangements: Sami culturally-sensitive teaching is grounded on Sami's concept of place, time, and knowledge that is connected to land and nature.
 4. Community-centered schoolwork: Cooperation with families, the community, and society are needed for teaching the Sami language.

Aims and research questions

The aim of this paper is to explore how spaces for authentic language learning can be created in a Sami language classroom. In particular, we ask the following questions:

- How does the teacher use culturally sensitive teaching to create spaces for Sami language use?
- What inner and outer factors can be identified that support or hinder the development of spaces for Sami language use in the classroom?

Methods

Our study is underpinned by Indigenous methodologies, striving to create research intersubjectivity, engaging in a dialectical process of knowledge and practice exchange (Fleer and van Oers 2018). By engaging research participants throughout the research process, we ensured that valid questions were asked, and valid interpretations of results were made. Working together with Indigenous peoples in collaborative research teams means recognizing the experience as a legitimate way of knowledge and providing an opportunity to “trouble the connections between how knowledge is created, what knowledge is produced, and who is entitled to engage in these processes” for “subjugated knowledges to emerge” (Brown and Strega 2005, 5–7). It is also a way for research practices and outcomes to be reflective of local traditional ways and traditions (Absolon King 2011).


Prior to data collection, the authors obtained ethical approval from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority. The research team provided written and oral information to the principal, the parents, and the students about the project, which highlighted that participation was voluntary and could be aborted at any point without any explanations or consequences, and that non-participation did not have a negative impact on the student's achievement. The information also

included the purpose of the research, data collection procedures, and storage and protection of personal data. Parents who agreed to their students' participation, filled in a consent form

Sára – the teacher

Sára, whose real name has been altered to keep her personal identity protected, grew up with reindeer herding and Sami is both her mother tongue and her first language. She considers herself a traditional knowledge carrier and teacher. Her teaching path started in 2015 and is tied to Sami values, philosophy, and spiritual activities which help her to create a pedagogical context to strengthen Sami students' self-determination. She believes that this practice brings back Sami knowledge and language even though it is a long-lasting process. Additionally, in her teaching she wants Sami life and culture to be understood as fundamental and co-creative for individuals to have a place in the Sami collective. Her goal is not to create "Sami people", but to contribute to the development of Sami people who contribute, develop, and live in the Sami community. She explains that one of her Sami pedagogical principles is learning by doing and "as soon as you get older practical skills create knowledge rather than lifelong learning." Her way of teaching reflects upon the fact that practical skills create knowledge rather than life-long learning and that Saminess needs to be practiced, lived, and sensed. She says that it is important to know that the Sami life is not an idea or an imagined cultural experience, but rather it is a concrete and physically lived Sami life. She believes that individuals living with these practical skills can be empowered and thereby master knowledge. She learned the Sami language combined with practicing her practical Sami skills, and she wants her students to learn the same way.

At the time of the study, Sára taught grades four to six in the classroom (ages 10-12), in hybrid forms, and remotely. She taught students from various villages located in Sápmi who came from different backgrounds and had different levels of Sami language skills. During the school year 2020/21 she worked with different themes related to Sami issues and focused on playing and on a culturally-sensitive teaching approach. One main component of her teaching was hands-on skills and the process of creating and composing something. The purpose of working with different themes, incorporating play and culturally-sensitive teaching as well as digital tools were ways to create different language contexts for the students. While it was exciting to



create these contexts, it was also stressful for her because she knew how essential these opportunities were for her students.

Data collection and Analysis

Our data is based on semi-structured and follow-up interviews with the teacher to understand her experiences of, and rationale for, working with a culturally-sensitive approach. A team of university researchers analyzed the teacher's reflections on the teaching practices and activities thematically in terms of the four core factors of Sami pedagogy developed by Keskitalo et al. (2011): developing the Sami's own curriculum, strengthening the Sami language, culturally sensitive teaching, and community-centered school work. The teacher read and commented on the analysis before the team reached the final interpretation together.

In the analysis, we focus on the inner and outer factors of Sami pedagogy to understand the challenges and opportunities for the creation of space for language use in a Sami classroom. In the next section, we discuss how the teacher experienced the creation of different learning contexts that have challenged and contributed to student's language learning in Sápmi. For example, the teacher's statement "In a majority society, I never have to ask if I will receive enough language input" was interpreted as an outer factor induced by colonial history, creating different prerequisites for teaching Sami as compared with Swedish. An example of an inner factor was found in statements like "it is impossible to teach Sami if I do not include the cultural context [...] When we work with animals, we talk about them, we read about them, we draw them and most importantly we yoiked". Here the teacher highlights the connection between the Sami language and culture and provides two examples of culturally-sensitive teaching: animals and yoik [a traditional Sami way of singing].

Findings

In the following four sections, we present the findings of this study with respect to the four main factors that were identified as being in the core of Sami pedagogy, that is, the development of Sami curriculum, the ways to strengthen Sami language, cultural-sensitive teaching practices, and locally anchored and based school work.

Developing the Sami's own curriculum

The current Sami national curriculum is based on the Swedish National curriculum, and it does not include Sami epistemologies. Although the Sami national Curriculum includes a Sami perspective it is nevertheless based on the western ways of knowing. However, the Sami syllabus does not solely focus on language, it also includes themes such as Sami culture and traditions. The teacher explains:

“Since the current Sami syllabus does not meet our student’s language proficiency skills, together with other Sami teachers we had to adjust the syllabus to ensure Sami language learning among our students. Students with different Sami skills attend the integrated Sami program and we have to make sure that they can fulfill the learning requirements.” (Sára, teacher interview, our translation.)


In line with the Sami syllabus which covers various texts, such as drama, fiction, or poetry, the teacher works with these themes and organizes the teaching accordingly. The teacher clarifies that:

“It is important to include themes that students have already encountered and can relate to. I do not necessarily plan my teaching according to the student’s interests because they will not meet people who talk only about their interests. They will meet people who talk about different topics that the students have to tackle. Therefore, it is important to work broadly so students have a wide vocabulary.” (Sára, teacher interview, our translation.)

In addition to a focus on Sami culture and Sami knowledge, the teacher has to make sure to create working tasks based on student’s various linguistic levels. This helps the students to create sentences that include for example conjugations. The teacher adds:

“This is important so students can receive feedback. For example, if I tell my students: ‘I have a dog’ and the student replies with ‘I have a dog, too.’ If that is the student’s language level, then it is enough to get in touch and talk to others. What I am trying to teach them is to dare to talk with the language knowledge they have and that it is good.” (Sára, teacher interview, our translation.)

The teacher points out that the Sami syllabus supports her way of teaching as it provides themes for students to talk about their own and others’ everyday experiences.



Although the Sami syllabus to some extent supports her teaching, Sára adds, that “no matter how much I want to create a syllabus, strengthen the Sami language, involve community members, or include culturally-sensitive teaching, it is difficult to create spaces for Sami authentic learning in Sápmi. Since this is a question that matters to us and that we have to deal with, it is not interesting to others. In a majority society, I never have to ask if I will receive enough language input”.

Strengthening the Sami language

The teacher describes three situations when she created spaces for language use, how these spaces promoted language use, and what obstacles she met: a visit to a reindeer farm, visualizing Sami in the classroom, and a drama project.

The field trip to the reindeer meadow farm was an event to celebrate the Sami National day, learn about reindeer herding, and strengthen the Sami student’s language. During the visit to the reindeer farm, the students audio-recorded the interview with the reindeer herder, they took pictures and asked the reindeer herder questions. The teacher reported that the reindeer herder was attentive to the students, and repeated or rephrased the student’s questions, which in turn, built the student’s language confidence and experience. The teacher recalled that the student’s reaction was “Wow, my language “reaches” the reindeer herder, and she is understanding what I am saying”.

However, instead of exposing only the Sami students to this event, it was suggested to Sára, who only taught the Sami lesson, that the whole class should join the event since learning about Sami is part of the school curriculum for all students. Sára recalled the event:

“The whole class joined the trip and when we gathered, the reindeer herder explained everything in Swedish. This is very frustrating as I am trying to create opportunities for the students to learn Sami in Sápmi, but it seems very difficult. Creating a space for Sami language learners is at the expense of those who do not understand and are not allowed to participate because everyone has to be involved. The visit to the reindeer meadow farm would have been an important space for the students to speak and hear Sami, but instead, the Sami-speaking students had to use Swedish, the language everybody understands. And usually, the Sami language is hijacked sort of cut off. I mean it is ok that everybody

participates, but my purpose was to create a language arena for the Sami-speaking students. But instead, it was an obstructive situation as we had to consider the whole class and we had to speak a language that everybody understands.” (Sára, teacher interview, our translation.)

Similarly, Sára described another situation when she felt hindered from creating a space for Sami language use. She explained that she wanted to include and make Sami more visible in the school:

“In the classroom I had posters written in both Sami in Swedish, partly for students who already can speak and partly for those who are learning. I also had simple sentences and the Sami seasons hanging on the walls. Having instructions and sentences in both languages enables students to learn Sami and is a way to support their learning. However, I had to remove everything from the walls to not distract students with disabilities. And the students asked me: ‘Why?’ I have taught the students that they can use anything in the classroom, so they know where to look for help. But now with the plain, white, and sterile walls, we lost part of our Sami context.” (Sára, teacher interview, our translation.)

For Sára, the use of drama as a learning context was a beneficial experience that stimulated students’ language use. She explained:

“The students and I were in the classroom, we used drama to teach and to learn Sami. Together we went through the drama many times so the students knew everything by heart. The students started to form knowledge together and discussed how to make things better. I could see that the students felt comfortable with the drama. I recorded the play and asked if it was ok to show the video recordings to their peers. But the students’ response was: ‘they are not going to understand; who wants to see this; and it does not matter to them’.” (Sára, teacher interview, our translation.)

The teacher told their students that they did a great job, and it did not matter if their peers did not understand and added: “you do not expose others to a language you do not understand.” But the students were aware that you do not speak a language that is not understood by everyone.

Culturally-sensitive teaching

The teacher highlighted the importance of the cultural context for those who want to bring back their language. In the Sami context, she explained that:

“We have lost many traditions such as gákti [traditional Sami clothing, in the past made from reindeer leather and sinews] or our traditional family names. Not including Sami traditions does not hinder me from creating a Sami context in the classroom. However, it is impossible to teach Sami if I do not include the cultural context. When we work with animals, we talk about them, we read about them, we draw them and most importantly we yoiked [a traditional form of song] them. Just the yoik contributes to the Sami cultural context.” (Sára, teacher interview, our translation.)

Visiting the reindeer meadow farm was based on cultural-sensitive teaching in Sami. Before the teacher and her students visited the reindeer meadow farm, the teacher asked her students to prepare at least two questions for the reindeer herder. The questions had to be written down, and each student had to ask the reindeer herder these two questions. Additionally, the teacher prepared a list of words related to the visit, such as guolga (‘fur’), krubba (‘manger’), or fuodđar (‘forage’). The purpose of the list was to support students in phrasing the questions, but also for students to recognize words when the reindeer herder talked about the different working tasks. The teacher noted, “it was a way to prepare the students for the visit, to learn about reindeer herding, and for them to know what to expect from the visit.” The visit was meant to be a cultural experience and a learning opportunity for the Sami students, which it was to some extent. However, Sára also observed that when Sami culture becomes part of an experience, like the field trip together with the non-Sami students, culture became awkward for the Sami students, and they did not feel safe. The teacher explained:

“When my (Sami) culture is part of the experience then it is perceived as exotic or different. If only we would have been at the reindeer meadow farm, it would have been different: the students would have felt safe and used more Sami. Exposing the Sami students to a cultural context is not only important for students’ cultural learning, but also for language revitalization purposes.” (Sára, teacher interview, our translation.)

Community-centered schoolwork

Working with Indigenous people's community members, such as elders and family members, is important for language learning. In addition to community members, technology together with traditional ideas was explored by Sára in her Indigenous teaching. Using social media, she created a space for language learning with the students and with the community allowing the students to decide on and take charge of their language use. The teacher used Instagram as a cultural space exposing the students to the Sami language and to the cultural context. The students decided on the content they wanted to share on their account since they had friends with and without Sami knowledge who were following their account. The teacher described that "posting on Instagram was a fun activity for the students" and that "the students' voices were visible". The students were able to decide what kind of adjustments to make when publishing on Instagram. Sára explained that "the students had to write in Sami but had the possibility to publish a Swedish translation. Consequently, the premise was that the students started writing in Sami and that they had the power to make decisions [our translation]."

Another way of including community-centered schoolwork and creating an authentic language context for the students was to use Second Life, an online virtual world. Since Sára is a newcomer to Second Life, one researcher, and expert in Second Life helped her to incorporate Second Life into her hybrid teaching. The researcher created a mission with different tasks and two purposes: the students had to guide the Avatar, who only spoke Sami, to find a certain item followed by guiding the Avatar to a certain place. The mission was written in Sami and included pictures, explanations, and clarifications. Anna Sara explained, "Second Life was a great place and space to expose students to the Sami language", but also that "even if the students felt that they learned new words when visiting Second Life, they did not dare to use more words since they were afraid of saying it wrong and felt unsafe."

Anna Sara also expressed a wish to include more community-centered schoolwork in her teaching. "If we had the possibility to visit for example someone who is tanning leather, students would be exposed to the language and the cultural context. I am trying to create a cultural context in Sápmi, but it is difficult, as we always have to include the majority language [our translation]", and she concluded: "teaching the Sami language without the Sami cultural context is impossible [our translation]."

Discussion

When creating spaces for authentic language learning in Sami, results showed that the Sami cultural context played an important role. Sára's reflections on the creation of different spaces for authentic Sami language learning contributed to students' Sami language and cultural learning. Integrated learning opportunities within and beyond the classroom provided students with additional language input in Sami. The teacher created various opportunities, e.g., Instagram, Second life, or the visit to the reindeer herder for her students to use Sami while connecting the learning experiences to the Sami culture and language (cf. Lipka et al. 2007).

The visit to the reindeer herder was an authentic space for language learning and as Hornberger and Outakoski (2015, 44) highlight, "one of few remaining authentic community places that can contribute to Sámi language revitalization into future generations". Including community members is part of the Sami pedagogy and a way for students to learn about traditional practices and methods as well as a potentially safe space to express identity and meaning-making. Despite all efforts to create a possibility for Sami language learning, the visit to the reindeer meadow came with obstacles that hindered Sára's teaching. Instead of using Sami during the visit, the reindeer herder ended up using mainly Swedish in order to include the non-Sami-speaking students. This scenario can be understood as an outer factor resulting in unequal power relations between Sami and Swedish, neglecting the Sami languages. The teacher's experiences can be understood as patterns of colonialism which "is based on the idea of otherness which justified the subordination of indigenous peoples" (Keskitalo et al. 2011). Power relationships have always been renegotiated in language and discourses and are:


"constitutive of as well as constituted by [...] the history of their connections ... Neither can be separated from the present cultural and political context or from their historical formation. Thus, both can facilitate and restrict the production of meanings" (Pennycook 1995, 52).

The work on Instagram created opportunities for students to communicate using print and writing. The theme-based project enabled students to work autonomously as they decided what and when to upload something on Instagram. Thus, communication was meaningful for the students as they were in control of the content and the choice of languages, and they had to consider an authentic audience. This decision-making process was a way to empower students

and give them their own voice and distribute the power relationship between them and their non-speaking Sami peers. Instagram became a space for the students to expand their vocabulary, and develop their reading and writing skills, where Sami culture always played an important role. Even though Battiste (2005) argues that teaching Indigenous knowledge is undertaken through oral traditions, the students in this study had the possibility to achieve an intended social purpose through their writing practices (c.f. Stagg Peterson et al. 2018), which contributed to other forms of literacy such as expressing their own ideas and views or to inform their audience (Elbow 2004). Through Instagram, the students gained self-determination and were able to satisfy their own needs, aspirations, and interests. The Instagram project was not only for the students to learn, but also to take place as Sami students, who proclaimed themselves as Sami and to be visible (as Sami students) when they wanted to. They gained agency by acting independently, making their own choices, and empowering their actions (Ahearn 2001).

By exposing students to Sami while using Second life together with community members, whose knowledge and experience were respected, the teacher provided another space for authentic language learning. This approach tapped into the social aspects of Sami pedagogy where “interaction and co-learning, meaning that learning occurs with and from each other” (Laiti and Frangou 2019, 14). For example, during the Second life activity, together the students had to guide an Avatar to complete a mission. The students united their Sami knowledge and solved the mission successfully. Also, during the drama play, the students interacted with each other which supported their language learning through social interaction and collaboration as well as through meaning-making that drew on their background knowledge and experiences (Vygotskij 1978).

Another approach the teacher used to employ culturally sensitive teaching was storytelling. She used storytelling for learning purposes which required listening to the storyteller followed by knowing when to act their role. This approach strengthened students’ various languages on different levels. However, once the drama was filmed, the teacher encouraged the students to break their boundaries and show the drama play to their non-Sami speaking peers, but the students refused as the peers would not understand the language and then the students were afraid it would not matter to their peers.



Although the teacher used the drama and Second life to include students' linguistics repertoire, she recognized that the space was liminal (c.f. Keskitalo et al. 2011), i.e. there was a gap between the western school culture and the Sami culture. Liminalization includes the concept of otherness through unconscious social and cultural denial. Not only liminalization but also traces of colonization and power relationships were visible when creating authentic learning environments: while connecting the culture and language of the students to the school culture, the majority of the society always had to be considered. For example, the teacher felt that we, the Sami, always have to include and take into consideration the dominant language and culture, as she added "you do not expose others to a language they do not understand." The teacher questions otherness or othering and opposes the relationship between us and them, which in turn can be understood as based on a relationship of power, inclusion, and exclusion. Even though the teacher questioned the educational culture, challenged the educational model, and the language of the curriculum, the power of inclusion and exclusion as well as "otherness" remained.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have explored how a Sami teacher created spaces for language learning and what seemed to support or hinder the development of spaces for Sami language use. We acknowledge that the voice of one teacher is limited and encourage future studies to extend this approach to larger groups of teachers to broaden the understanding from this study further. Nevertheless, based on this teacher's experiences, we found that Sami education based on a culturally-sensitive teaching approach including Sami people's own premises, values, culture, tradition, and language was central for the teacher to create spaces for authentic language learning. Additionally, providing spaces that empower students and make them feel safe, if approached in the right way, can lead to student's self-worth, self-confidence, and a better understanding of their identity. While inner factors, such as teaching language and culture, working with the community on social media, and creating safe cultural spaces supported students's language learning, traces of outer factors, such as colonialization, liminalization, and limited self-determination obstructed the goal to fully engage in Sami language learning. Finally, for Sami pedagogy to be included in education, the power relationship between the dominant and minority groups and the decision-making process requires rethinking, so that

Sami people, principals, teachers, and students become agents in and driving forces behind the policymaking process that affect them. With this approach, education, relevant to Sami people, has the potential to become decolonized, free from otherness, free from assimilation, and free from colonization.

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