



Basic Education in The Arts, Equality, And Sámi Communities in Finland

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Students at the Sámi Music Academy, Utsjoki

Source: Sámi Music Academy
(Sámi Education Institute)

Introduction

Based on research conducted in 2016 as part of the Academy of Finland funded ArtsEqual Research Initiative, this paper presents some considerations for institutions and educators to further equality in extracurricular music education from the perspectives of Sámi communities.

A recent (2017) report compiled by the *Sámi Norwegian National Advisory Unit on Mental Health and Substance Abuse* and the *Saami Council* outlines significant concerns for the mental health and wellbeing of Sámi people in Finland.¹ Moreover, the *European Commission against Racism and Intolerance* (2016) identified a widespread lack of awareness of the Sámi people among the majority population in Finland, alongside a worrying trend of escalating hate-speech directed at national minorities and Indigenous peoples.² Recent changes in non-discrimination legislation have extended obligations to promote equality to education providers and institutes³, requiring Basic Education in the Arts (BEA) leadership and music institutions to 'evaluate the realisation of equality in their activities and take necessary measures to promote the realisation of equality'.⁴ Whilst equality has long been a central principle of the BEA system, it is important to note that minority groups may experience the enactments of this principle differently from the majority population.⁵ Thus, it is necessary to learn from different perspectives, and engage in effective and localised action for positive change.

Research has shown that extracurricular activities have enormous potential to address social inequality,⁶ and music education in particular has the power to 'bring people together, enhance communal well-being, and contribute substantially to

human thriving'.⁷ The BEA system is thus in a unique position to effect positive social change together with, and for, Sámi communities in Finland. This discussion paper does not offer a blueprint of what is already being done in BEA, or what *should* be done, but rather serves as a point of departure for discussions and a resource for decision-making as BEA continues its efforts to enhance equality for *all*.

Who are the Sámi?

The Sámi are recognized as the only Indigenous people in the European Union, with the Sámi Homeland Region (*Sápmi*) spanning across Northern Finland, Sweden, Norway and the Russian Kola peninsula.

Altogether there are approximately 100,000 Sámi people in these four countries, of which around 10,000 live in Finland. The Sámi Homeland Region (*Sápmi*) is in the far North of Finland, including the municipalities of *Eanodat* (Enontekiö), *Aanaar* (Inari), *Ohcejohka* (Utsjoki) and *Vuohčču* (Vuotso, part of the Sodankylä municipality). However, an increasing number of Sámi live outside of *Sápmi*, and it has been estimated that the largest group of Sámi people in Finland live in the capital city, Helsinki. This poses new challenges to public services and the future of Sámi culture.

Although recognized as one indigenous people, there is great diversity in *Sápmi* in terms of



Borderless map of Sápmi. Source: Nordic Sami Institute

1 www.sanks.no

2 www.coe.int

3 revised Non-Discrimination Act 1325/2014

4 <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/101088/121628/F9480663/FI-N101088English.pdf>

5 Keskitalo, Uusiautti & Määttä 2012

6 Putnam 2015

7 Elliott, Silverman, & Bowman 2016, 7

language, religious affiliation, employment, livelihoods, and culture. For example, whilst Sáminess is often associated with reindeer herding, it has been estimated that only 10% of Sámi in Finland engage in such work. This diversity is also reflected in both traditional and contemporary arts. This can be seen in the different vocal traditions of each Sámi culture in Finland: *luohti* in Northern Sámi, *livde* in Inari Sámi, and the more narrative *leu'dd* in Skolt Sámi.

Contemporary Sámi music spans the genres of pop, rock, folk, classical, hip hop, heavy metal and others, often crossing genre and cultural boundaries and drawing upon both traditional and modern Sámi cultures.

Challenges

Cultural Wellbeing

There is a recognized need to cultivate an awareness of Sámi music and cultures and support the individual, social, and cultural wellbeing of young Sámi throughout Finland.

Remote Area Music Education

Children and young people residing in the more remote areas require improved access to music education at every level, from music playgroups to advanced instrumental tuition.

Language Revitalization

All Sámi languages are recognized by UNESCO as requiring a great deal of support to survive. Arts education has great potential to contribute to language revitalization efforts and support the language needs of Sámi students.

Inclusion

There is a need to create opportunities for Sámi people to become students, teachers, leaders, and decision-makers in BEA, and establish ongoing collaborations between BEA institutions and Sámi organizations.

Opportunities for equality

International human and Indigenous rights and recent research acknowledges that Indigenous peoples are not the same as multicultural minorities and established multicultural policies may not apply to these communities.⁸ Addressing the specific barriers to equality experienced by Indigenous peoples, contemporary research often employs terms such as *post-colonial*, *anti-colonial*, *de/colonizing*, and *Indigenized* education.

Coloniality in this discussion paper is used not only with reference to acts of international conquest, but also to (often subtle) processes of inclusion and exclusion that separate Indigenous peoples from the majority population, designating the latter as *normal* and *desirable*. This perspective does not aim to blame certain individuals as colonizers and depict others as victims, but rather consider how people come into relation with one another *through* the mindset and structures of coloniality.⁹ Reflecting upon coloniality in this way, educators and administrators (and researchers) can consider whether their choices of repertoire or pedagogical approach reinforce or interrupt logics that create a 'hierarchy of civilizations' and assumptions that 'west is (already and always) best'.

These choices are not only those that teachers make when working with Indigenous students, but also the everyday decisions made within the majority population. This discussion paper outlines four challenge-areas in which BEA has the potential to affect positive change, also highlighting innovative practices that are already making great strides towards equality. These challenge areas are:

- Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy;
- Accessibility;
- Language revitalization; and
- Teaching resources.

⁸ Barten 2015

⁹ Patel 2016



Ijahis Idja násttážat youth concert.

Source: Sámi Music Centre



Children's CD release concert 2016, Sajos Inari.

Source: Sámi Music Centre

Culturally sustaining pedagogy

In 2016, the *Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Council of Europe)* raised concerns for national minorities such as the Sámi, amidst a climate of 'increasing interethnic intolerance, and increase in instances of racial discrimination and a more pronounced polarisation' of Finnish society.¹⁰ For these reasons, it is equally as important to develop an awareness and understanding of Indigenous cultures and arts among non-Sámi communities (including the Finnish majority, Swedish-speaking Finnish communities, national minorities, immigrants etc.) as it is to offer support for the individual, social, and cultural well-being of Indigenous students.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) has been identified as one means to develop teaching that supports students' own cultures and languages (such as Sámi musics and languages), facilitates access to dominant cultural competencies (such as western art music knowledge and skills), and accounts for the dynamic and ever-changing nature of cultural practices. Through engaging in mutual learning, opening up new spaces of 'boundless creativity, a world of imagination and possibility', the goal of CSP is to foster diversity as a strength.¹¹ Understanding oneself and one's own artistic traditions as being-in-relation with living, changing, learning others, Sámi culture is not only something only to learn about, but also to learn *with* and learn *from*.

If BEA is to avoid cultural disrespect, or superficial approaches to cultural inclusion, a culturally sustaining approach to teaching and learning must be developed from the *ground-up*. For example, if a teacher is to include one of the Sámi vocal traditions as part of music teaching and learning, these traditions should:

- Be integrated into the everyday curriculum rather than added as a 'bonus' activity,
- Be contextualized within a specific Sámi culture rather than generalizing,
- Explore the differences and similarities between Sámi vocal traditions and performing music, both aesthetically and functionally
- Discuss Sámi vocal traditions not as archaic artforms, but living traditions,
- Incorporate a reflection and critique of the power relations that arise when non-Indigenous musicians engage in Indigenous cultural activities,
- Involve experts from the local Sámi community if, and whenever, possible,
- Understand that Sámi vocal traditions are not (necessarily) a cultural possession of all Sámi students. Rather, teachers should open up spaces to strengthen or challenge assumptions about cultural ownership.

Critical and reflective engagements with Sámi culture aim to avoid stereotypes and superficial approaches to teaching and learning, that reinforce western art music or Finnish culture as the dominant *norm*. In this way, students and teachers can learn about - and from Sámi traditions and culture as part of the main curriculum.

Questions for further discussion include:

- How might BEA foster connections and collaborations with local Sámi organizations and artists?
- How can BEA prioritize self-determination in music education, ensuring that all students and teachers have the right to define and redefine their own identities?



Ms. Hildá Länsman and children from City-Sámit leading the workshop. Source: Kalle Kallio Photography

Innovative practice

A workshop in April 2017 at the International Music School of Finland involved over 70 teenagers learning a contemporary 'Snowmobile' *luohti* (joik) in the Northern Sámi language. The workshop invited young children from Helsinki City-Sámit to assist in teaching the joik and about Sámi culture, positioning them as the experts in their own living cultural heritage and traditions.

¹⁰ <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806ae11a>

¹¹ Alim & Paris 2017, 3



The crowd enjoys a performance at *Ijahis Idja* music festival 2016. Source: Sámi Music Centre

Accessibility

Research conducted in 2012 found that the accessibility of BEA institutions varies significantly between provinces and students living in more remote areas of the Sámi Homeland Region are often required to travel long distances to attend lessons.¹² Much of the music education that these young people do receive is organized as part of festivals or annual events, and students often do not have access to regular, goal-oriented tuition. Students who wish to pursue further study often leave their families and cultural support networks at a very young age to study in larger regional centres. This can be a significant risk-factor for many young Sámi.

BEA has an opportunity to include remote area students as part of its student population, drawing on recent technological advances and Finnish government and Sámi investments in infrastructure to support online learning. While specific support systems may be required to meet the needs of these students, this could provide one opportunity to increase Indigenous student numbers in BEA and allow Sámi students to remain in their communities while studying.

Questions for further discussion include:

- How might BEA employ distance teaching and learning resources to reach young people living in more remote areas?
- What support structures are needed to ensure the success of distance music education for both teachers and students?

12 Etelä-Suomen aluehallintovirasto 2014

Innovative practice

One recently implemented innovation has been Metropolia's project: Virtuaalimuskari – Varhaisän musiikkikasvatus digitaalisessa oppimisympäristössä. Although primarily focused on providing early childhood education to families living in remote regions of Finland, this pilot project also incorporates teaching in Sámi languages.

Language revitalization

All of the three Sámi languages spoken in Finland (*Davvisámegiella*, Northern Sámi; *Anarâškielâ*, Inari Sámi; and *Nuõrttsää'mkiöll*, Skolt Sámi) are listed by UNESCO (2010) as endangered, the latter two of which are 'seriously endangered' and require a great deal of support to survive.¹³ Significant progress has been made with regards to the government provisions for young people to learn Sámi languages. Students in Sápmi now have significantly improved resources for language instruction than in previous decades, and even Sámi children living in the Capital area are entitled to learn Sámi languages up to 2 hours per week. However, concerns have been raised as to the number of children reached through comprehensive schooling, suggesting that only 30% of Sámi children are receiving Sámi language tuition, and that teacher shortages pose serious threats to existing language programmes.¹⁴¹⁵

The arts offer powerful opportunities to revitalize endangered languages. Both traditional and modern songs and dances have been effective tools in Indigenous language revitalization¹⁶, and often ensures that Indigenous people retain *control* over their songs as part of the revitalization process.¹⁷ In Finland, the Inari Sámi rapper *Amoc*, Skolt Sámi heavy rock singer *Tiina Sanila*, and Northern Sámi rock band *Somby* can all be seen to be involved in language revitalization efforts, as one report exclaims: 'Amoc is rapping Sámi language onto the map!'¹⁸

Whilst considerable efforts have been made to improve access to BEA services for Swedish-speaking or English-speaking learners, there are currently no provisions for students to learn in Sámi languages, despite these languages holding official language status in the Sámi Homeland Region, and official minority language status throughout the country.

Questions for further discussion include:

- How can BEA co-operate with local Sámi communities and institutions to support the language needs of Sámi pupils?
- How can BEA help to revitalize Sámi languages through teaching and learning with non-Indigenous students?

13 www.samediggi.fi

14 <http://yle.fi/uutiset/3-9559185>

15 <http://magma.fi/post/2017/4/26/saamelaiset-uhattu-kansa>

16 Zaraysky 2015; Bell & Williams 2015

17 Bracknell 2015; Walsh & Troy 2015

18 Korpela 2006

Innovative practice

The annual *Dáidaga vugiin leaira* (Art camp day) offers artist-led multidisciplinary workshops for children to experience and learn Sámi culture. In 2016 children worked together with a professional sound engineer and rap-artist Áilu Valle to write and produce a rap. Through rhyme and rhythmic speech, children broadened their own language-repertoires, analysed the linguistic characteristics of Northern Sámi, navigated challenges in communication and translation, and celebrated contemporary Sámi culture together.

Teaching resources

There is a recognized shortage of Sámi music teachers who can teach Sámi musics, in Sámi languages, and through Sámi pedagogies. This challenge has many sides. For instance, one challenge is to attract and recruit music teachers in the BEA system who can work and teach in Sámi languages. Yet, at the same time, if the BEA system is to be culturally sustaining in including Sámi teachers and students, it is also necessary to consider what and how BEA might learn from Indigenous pedagogies and education approaches. In this way, Sámi teachers and cultures would not be assimilated into mainstream music education, nor isolated as independent sections or departments of institutional work. Rather, through active engagements and ongoing negotiations between mainstream and Indigenous artistic and pedagogical traditions, both Sámi and non-Sámi teachers will learn, develop, and grow together.

Non-Sámi teachers often express a desire to engage with Sámi music, but don't know where to begin. There are few textbooks or similar resources available, as Indigenous knowledge is typically embedded in the experiences and teachings of Indigenous peoples rather than in a library'.¹⁹ This illustrates the limitations of western knowledge systems, having systematically excluded Indigenous wisdom for so many years. If we think of knowledge and culture not as commodities that can be possessed or controlled, but living processes, it is clearly important to create opportunities for BEA teachers to communicate, collaborate, and learn from and with Sámi musicians and pedagogues. One avenue to provide such opportunities could be through teacher in-service training.

Questions for further discussion include:

- How might BEA attract and recruit music teachers who can work in Sámi languages?
- What and how can BEA teachers learn from Sámi musicians and pedagogues?

¹⁹ Battiste 2002, 2



*Student performance at the Sámi Music Academy 2017.
Source: Sámi Music Academy*

Innovative practice

Est. 2015, The Sámi Music Academy in Utsjoki is the very first institution in any country to offer adult education in traditional and contemporary Sámi musics. This project aims to preserve and develop the living traditional musical cultures that are disappearing through addressing the recognized Sámi music teacher shortage. However, as funding ended in mid-2017 this education programme has been suspended until further financial support can be secured.

The way forward

The development of both national and local strategies is fundamental to the achievement of equality for Sámi communities. It is the recommendation of this discussion paper that this Indigenous Equality Strategy is based on three key areas: Respect,

Collaboration, and Learning. This process should involve in-depth collaboration with both (inter)national and local Sámi experts and organizations at every stage of strategy development, including: planning, implementation, and evaluation.



Author

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Photo: Kalle Kallio

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