

Abstract for WIREC-2018

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TITLE: Writing our story - students doing writing research

In the autumn 2017, five Sámi students conducted a writing research project as part of their Sámi educational program at Umeå University. These students were all multilingual women dedicated to gaining a better control of literacy in their mother tongue, and they were curious to find out how their personal stories resonated with the technical aspects of their writing processes in their two languages, that is, the majority language that was either Norwegian or Swedish, and their mother tongue North Sámi. The project was designed as a literacy research project, and the students used a real time keystroke logging program, Inputlog, to track their writing in the native language and also in the majority language that had dominated their educational trajectories. They wrote two types of texts in their two languages, a descriptive/narrative text and an argumentative text, and analyzed the technical aspects of the writing sessions, such as the pace and fluency of writing. In addition to the actual writing sessions, the students filled a questionnaire answering to personal background questions and to questions that were designed to describe the writing discourses and situations in their everyday lives. The answers from the survey were then used to narrate a collective writing story for the group that was read and accepted by all the members of the group. The story brought the students together in spite of the differences in the writing processes and literacy levels, and lifted their spirits when they all suddenly understood the destructive impacts of colonizing education on their mother tongue and especially on writing. Especially the technical aspects of writing having to do with fluency and automatization were severely affected in their mother tongue. There was also a correlation between age and the view on writing in mother tongue. Two of the youngest writers in this project, belonging to the generation of nieiddat (girls), struggled more with the technical and linguistic aspects of writing than did the two women from the generation of eatnit (mothers). One younger writer felt more at ease when writing in North Sámi, as she also had extensive experience of writing texts in Sámi in her professional life. At a meta-level, the whole project was designed to be a pedagogical project where the students would be guided in doing experimental literacy research at the same time as they revealed facts about their own writing. The project was an emotional and methodological challenge for the students and for the teacher, but the result of the project was an important step towards a new take on Sámi pedagogy that sees personal stories and the connection to language and other members of the learner community as base for Sámi research. This talk presents the writing story of these students, and reflects on the impact of more or less voluntary language choices on developing Indigenous literacy.