

# Myndiggjøring og aktørskap i grunnopplæring i lesing og skriving: Sarahs og Noras historier

[Empowerment and agency in Basic literacy training: The stories of Sarah & Nora]

Marte Monsen

# 5 minute discussion

- What does the terms empowerment and agency mean to you?

# Empowerment and agency

- Language and literacy serve as instruments of both oppression and empowerment
- Tension between neoliberal pressures in education systems and the **transformative** aims of critical language pedagogy
- Empowerment: collaborative creation of power (Cummins, 2001 +++)
- critical consciousness: encouraging students to question dominant linguistic and cultural norms, recognize power imbalances, and develop the skills to articulate and address social injustices (Abednia & Izadinia, 2013)
- contextually sensitive implementations of critical pedagogy
- **centralize real-life problems that agents of learning and teaching experience, positioning them as active subjects inside and outside the classroom (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1998)**
- What can this look like in basic literacy training for adult immigrants?

# Nora and Sarah

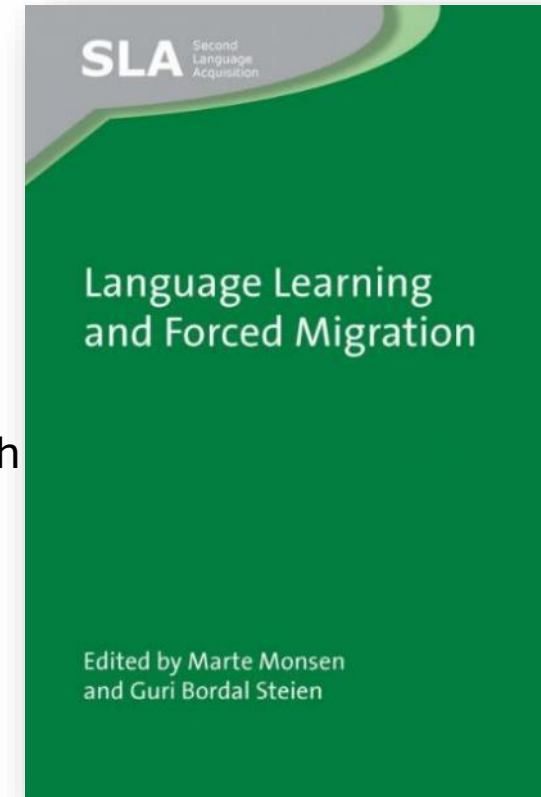
- UN refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)
  - Participants in the Norwegian Introduction programme
  - Basic literacy training
  - Very different outcomes
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- Why?
  - (background, trauma, cognitive factors, learning difficulties...)
  - Empowerment

# The KongNor-project

Language across time and space: Following UN-refugees from the DRC via Uganda to Norway (KongNor)

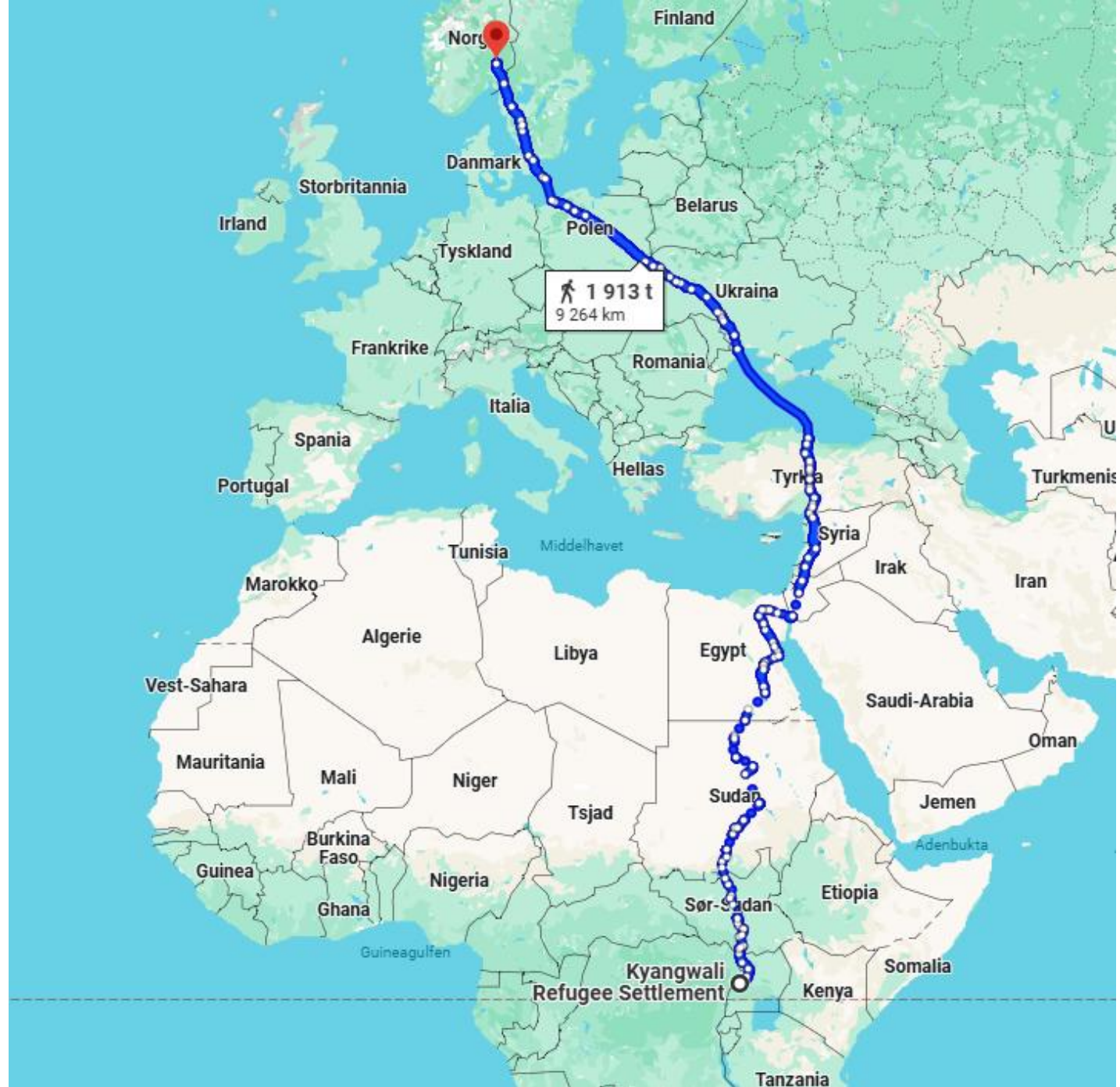
➤ **Goal: Gain insight into the processes related to learning the Norwegian language as a refugee in Norway**

- Ethnographic approach
- 14 UN-refugees from the DRC, resettled in Norway after a period in Uganda
- Phases
  - Cultural orientation in Uganda
  - Participation in the Norwegian Introduction programme
  - Life after the introduction programme
- Data so far (**2019-2025**)
  - Observations (cultural orientation, introduction programme, everyday life)
  - Interviews (participants, teachers, social workers, other actors working with refugees in Uganda and Norway)
  - Recorded ethnographic interviews/conversations with the participants

















# «Nora»

- Mid thirties
- Moved to «Vikøy» in 2019 with her five children
- No prior schooling (some hours here and there)
- Speaks a combination of kinyabwisha and swahili
- Has not lived in a graphocentric space before she came to Norway (did not read or write)
- Was not used to electricity, watches and time schedules, money, running water
- Was used to taking care of children under extremely precarious conditions
- **Today: Cannot read or write, still lives in quite precarious conditions**

# «Sarah»

- Mid thirties
- Moved to «Rørøy» in 2019 with her husband and five children
- No prior schooling (some hours here and there)
- Speaks a combination of kinyabwisha and swahili
- Has not lived in a graphocentric space before she came to Norway (did not read or write)
- Was not used to electricity, watches and time schedules, money, running water
- Was used to taking care of children under extremely precarious conditions
- **Today: reads and writes, works for a living, on her way to become a «helsefagarbeider» (health care worker)**

# 5 minute discussion

- Discuss the word *graphocentrism*



# Noras experiences in Vikøy

- Caseworker “Idunn”: «Every night I look down on the house of Nora and her family, and I feel a knot in my stomach. We have not equipped them to live in a house like that. I am afraid that some day the house will burn down. Nora is a strong woman with a strong spirit, but I am afraid that it will all be too much for her».
- Swahili-speaking “Laura” has some hours a week to assist the family in the beginning, focusing on hygiene, economy and care for the youngest child (baby).
- Nora gets parental advice (mandatory in the introduction programme). She is advised to change her parenting style towards the youngest child. This is difficult (and is it necessary?)
- The house is remote, cold and quite humid. Difficulties with keeping warm.
- One night the fire in the fire place is so hot, the glass door breaks. They manage to stop it, but the fire place is broken.

# Noras experiences in Vikøy

- “Here in Norway, you just read and read and read”
- Noras basic literacy training takes place in large groups (first 15, then 25)
- Nora likes being there with other adults
- “Reading is very important”
- Nora cannot manage the computer she gets from school, and it is stashed at home, together with Ipads, a smart-tv, smart-phones – all with virus
- One day a week: cooking together in the school kitchen
  - Noras favourite: «I need to learn how to make nutritious food that my children want to eat from the produce I can find in the stores. They love the food I learn to cook there»
- Long school days with computer tasks and textbook

# Noras experiences in Vikøy

- Noras reading after 2,5 years in the introduction programme:
- Reading aloud from *Hei!* (Cappelen Damm, 2023)
  - *Farid Afram* and *Syria* – reads correctly
  - *litt* > [me:d] *med*
  - *hyggelig* > [jobər] *jobber*
  - <k> to /k/
    - *klassen* > [kən'ti:nə] *kantine*
  - <v> to /v/
    - *velkommen* > [ve'si:dnəu] *ved siden av*
- “reading about Farid Afram”
- “I will read what I am told to read if I am able to read it”
- Reading is associated with one social space: school

# Noras experiences in Vikøy

- Today:
- Reading is not part of her everyday activities
- Very low literacy skills
- The municipality is looking for a place to get work practice for Nora
- Good communication with her children
- Some of them struggle at school
- Quite a lot of challenges
- But Nora has humour
- And friends among other DRC-diaspora



# 5 minute discussion

- Is Noras experiences familiar in any way?

# Sarahs experiences in Rørøy

- Caseworker «Marius»: «We didn't know how to communicate with the family. Very difficult at first. I have never resettled a family with no literacy skills, no common language. We had an interpreter on telephone, but they didn't quite speak the same language as the interpreter»
- Found «Odile» who became an assistant, interpreter and friend of the family
- Odile and Marius helped with
  - Communication with school and kindergarten
  - Introduction to the local community
  - Making it possible for Sarah to express her needs
- Sarahs concerns were treated as valid

# Sarahs experiences in Rørøy

- The first teacher «Kathrine»: No teacher education, no language education, but she «was the only one who dared»
- Strange literacy training, but...
- Created a friendly, safe space
- Included Sarah in decisions
- Helped solving «real life problems» as described by Sarah
- Changed things with her pedagogical plans when they didn't work (called it “cheating”)
- Lots of teachers after this, “both good and bad”
- Attends groups with many students (about 20), active in class, happy (but misses Kathrine and Marius)

# Sarahs experiences in Rørøy

- Today:
- Can read adapted texts and learn from them
- reads and writes messages at work and privately
- Has employment
- Training to become «helsefagarbeider» (health care worker)
- Active in the local community (church, mountain hiking group)
- Goes swimming in a pool with the family every Saturday
- The family has quite a lot of challenges
- Sarah can't solve them all
- But she can communicate about them



# 5 minute discussion

- Why do you think Sarah and Nora have such different outcomes of basic literacy training?

# Nora and Sarah

- Both Rørøy and Vikøy are small municipalities with moderately good economy, that resettles about the same number of refugees
- Both municipalities found it difficult to resettle families with low literacy and «no common language»
- Kathrine and Marius were «driving forces» in the Rørøy community
- In Rørøy, Sarah was included in finding the solution
- Sarah was trusted to know the needs of her children – even when there were disputes between Sarah and the schoolteachers
- In Vikøy they were also invested in finding solutions for Nora, but she was not included in the same way
  - And they had no Odile
- Graphocentrism both in Vikøy and Rørøy, but in Rørøy they «cheat»

# But in the end...

- Both Nora and Sarah are happy in Norway – their children are safe and well fed
- Both have friends
- Both have a lot of humour when life gets difficult
- But Sarah have more possibilities for choosing how to live and work
- Sarah has a larger network in the local municipality
- Sarah can communicate the needs of herself and her family
- Sarah had possibilities for raising her voice long before she could read and wright
- Neither Sarah or Nora can help their children with difficult school homework (but Sarah can explain to the teacher why she cannot)

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