

Siiri and the “Bag Lady”: Analysing the Material Entanglements of Special Needs

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Abstract

In this article I discuss educational practices and policies relating to special needs, and I also address the assumptions about teacher professionalism in doing so. At the same time I consider the ontological premise of materiality and relationality as something that urges and opens up new possibilities for how qualitative analysis is done. I experiment with feminist posthumanist storytelling to analyse a particularly complex and affective piece of memory data. The empirical materials consist of “memory data” involving a 10-year-old girl, Siiri, myself, then her teacher, and the writing of a teacher’s statement about the student’s behaviour needed to make a special needs decision. The “bag lady” storytelling strategy by Donna Haraway foregrounds material detail and allows various close readings of the complexities of the special needs politics in schools. I propose this approach as a way of enacting critical analysis in an affirmative manner, that is, in a way that resists divisions and binaries and enhances nonreductive movement within the material entanglements of education.

Prologue: Like an eagle

The other day, I was sitting in a café with Päivi, my friend and colleague, discussing posthumanist feminist research. We were attempting to formulate definitions and images that would capture the effect of posthumanist onto-epistemology on our analytical approaches — that is, trying to articulate what it meant for us to emphasise material and relational starting points instead of our earlier ways of analysing power by relying on the idea of discursively and socially constructed differences. One of the basic differences that we agreed on was that, as an effect of thinkers such as Barad (2007) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and their followers in educational research, we had started to feel restricted by pre-defined categories of difference, such as gender or generation, and by the idea of analysis as explaining empirical examples according to these categories. We were thinking about the implications of the collective concepts of *entanglement* by Barad and *assemblage* by Deleuze. In research, both of us were struggling with the question, how to understand and engage with analysis, when gatherings, combinations and assemblages were the first and foremost to be attended to — and how to fully recognise the part of material entities within them. We were aware of how posthumanist ontologies were troubling the analytical strategies of representing, explaining and interpreting when doing qualitative research, as discussed for example by MacLure (2013b). But if we were hesitant about representing, then what?

“Could we be like eagles?” I asked. I was looking for a metaphor, and the eagle felt like one that could encapsulate movement and the simultaneous elements of freedom and dependency. Yes, movement: blurring the landscape; zooming in and out of the research setting; and, when necessary, attacking the material detail of an event. Might this metaphor facilitate research as *nomadic*, to use the term by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), research in which the horizon consists of relations instead

of pre-set categories of difference and in which subjects and things are not fixed but are, first and foremost, “becoming”? Moreover, the target that the eagle attacks—the object of the research—would then be a spot that is defined by all the other spots on the landscape. What is focused in would always be object-in-relation, always part of something open and far-reaching.

Some time ago, Päivi contacted me and asked whether I still thought about the eagle. She was waiting to see if I had written any material with the help of this metaphor. Her question made me think of one particular part of my research that had continued to keep me thinking in a disturbing way but that I never really had started on analysing. I thought about Siiri¹, a small girl who was student in my third-grade class years ago, and about myself—then her teacher—and the events and policies around defining Siiri’s degree of special needs, which included me writing a teacher’s statement about her behaviour. I could sense a number of complexities, layers, and perspectives folding and unfolding around our shared history. I was also thinking about a certain printed email that I knew was among my data and about a tick in a box on a certain form. Perhaps this was where I could give the eagle a try. Undecidability, the restless hunt for material detail, movement, the zooming in, and the zooming out . . . these qualities were my guiding sentiments for starting an eagle-like experiment in analysing this piece of my “memory data” (St. Pierre, 2011, 621).

What follows is a gathering and an unfolding of stories that can be told between various times, physical encounters, and theoretical concepts. These stories are non-innocent in the sense that Donna Haraway (2016) speaks about the complex and troubling stories of our times, thus, they clearly are stories that need to be told. By writing some parts of the text in italics, I aim to illustrate the “zooming” movement of nomadic inquiry (see Hohti 2016). These parts come closer to personal memories or a particular material detail, while normal font is used to represent how the inquiry moves outwards, adding layers and connections to other studies and ideas.

Teacher stuff

To begin, I want to look for the paper and hold it in my hand. I know it is there in the drawer among all the papers, notebooks, and other stuff that constitute my empirical materials. I open the cupboard drawer, and I take out my teacher’s notebook—my everyday life five years ago. It is a construction of responsibilities, things to remember, timetables, notes to myself, and notes to others. Most of the days on the calendar are full of scribbles. They are things for me to do and remember, such as lesson plans, dentists’ appointments, parents’ meetings, and teachers’ assemblies. The notebook, which is swollen with papers that have been stored between the sheets, is a constellation that is barely being held together. At times, years ago, it did not, and I did not: I was exhausted.

Staying with materiality and relationality

When starting my PhD research, after having left my job as a teacher, my thoughts often circulated around Siiri, and I initially thought loosely about writing about her and the negotiations about her “special needs” in relation to institutional power. In the course of time, however, it seemed more and more difficult. I understood that to explain what happened between Siiri and me, I would have to tell several stories, layered and conflicting: there was no single interpretation. With this complexity in mind, I now revisited the materials that I had stored for five years. Inspired by Lenz Taguchi (2010), who discussed the chair in the teachers’ meeting room; Rautio (2013), who wrote about children who carry stones in their pockets; Taylor (2013), who studied objects and bodies within the classroom; and Myers (2015), who focused on “tinythings,” such as Lego pieces and dust, I wanted to rethink the events with the help of their material participants. Could I perhaps take the *stuff* that related to the decisions and events around Siiri’s case more seriously? Could I take a

¹ All the names of the research participants and some other details have been changed for the sake of anonymity.

material object as a starting point for critical analysis of the educational policies and practices in their complexity?

As I turned the pages of my teacher’s diary from five years ago and looked at other papers, such as once-urgent emails, I was pulled into a back-and-forth travel through time. Numerous memories and experiences were evoked, a vibrant tray of memory data emerged, of which I could wish to write down only a small part. I resisted the will to read these materials as individual expressions or social interactions. I attempted to stay with them in all of their materially messy and enigmatic nature rather than arranging or sorting them. I wanted to foreground material practices and objects and to contemplate their “social and political life” (Mol, 2010).

Speaking about matter, one speaks at once about relationality and connectivity. Karen Barad’s (2007) notion of the entanglement of matter and meaning offers insight into the openness of matter and materialisation. Barad stated that matter is never merely matter and is never settled; rather, it is, in its iterative materialisation, a “dynamic play of in/determinacy” (Barad, 2012, p. 214). Barad repeatedly discusses the *radical* openness that is created through the infinity of possibilities, which is at the core of mattering. It is precisely this indeterminacy within open-ended relationality that is both a condition for all the structuring patterns in life and a predicament for researchers to rethink their research approaches, as Barad (2007, 2012) and Braidotti (2002, p. 8) have argued. Barad (2012, pp. 206–207) says: “Many voices speak here in the interstices, a cacophony of always already reiteratively intra-acting stories. These are entangled tales”. Similarly, my material, layered storytelling is aware of the need to move within radically open-ended relations and to examine the ways in which practices, beings, and differences are constituted in and through them.

But let us look at the paper that I found between the pages of the notebook – A printed email concerning Siiri.

The email

The email from Siiri’s mother arrived in May. She was writing about a document, which was the teacher’s statement about Siiri. I had made the statement by filling in a form for the children’s psychiatrist to determine whether there was a need for further examination, and in keeping with the procedure, I had sent this form to Siiri’s mother for her comments.

Yes, it was May—the most beautiful time of the year, and the time when teachers are most tired. It was stupid of me to check my email on a Sunday. Siiri’s mother had some questions about the form. “The most terrible thing was to read that my child is saying socially inappropriate things. You ticked the box ‘occurring often.’ Maybe you can explain this?”

How could I explain the straightforward statement that I just had given? How to respond to the worry and anger of Siiri’s mother?

I had the terrible feeling of having done wrong.

Had I?

Actually, I knew that my statement could be explained, as I was good with words. A teacher, of course, is a professional at explaining: putting things in context, explaining how the special support processes are best managed, and pointing out earlier occasions on which I had attempted to tell the mother that everything was not all right with Siiri. Yes, my statement could be explained, and so I did. I sent a reply to Siiri’s mother.

Bag lady storytelling

In the prologue with the eagle metaphor, I thought about blurring pre-decided categories from a height and from afar and about an “attacking” movement to a very concrete and tiny detail. Movement is also needed to traffic back and forth between ideas, ideologies, politics, material practices, and objects, and in this way, navigate middle spaces—the “fluid in-between flows of data, experience, and information” (Braidotti, 2002, p. 173).

I find inspiration in how Kathleen Stewart wrote about the possibility of attending simply to “things that happen” (2007, p. 4). As she narrated her way through “ordinary affects,” she did not begin with a totalised system, such as capitalism, gender inequality, or social justice, into which the characteristics of an event could be fitted and ticked off; rather, she foregrounded the shifting assemblages of fleeting moments and little experiences (see Coleman & Ringrose, 2013). Instead of using the idea of institutional power to interpret what happened and how I acted as a professional in the case of Siiri, instead of bringing out ways in which actions reflect discourses, I want to make space for something more obscure. The different stories that I can tell about Siiri can work in other ways: making shifts of perspective, using different lighting, or at once contrasting sharply (and painfully)(see also Guttorm, this special issue). To examine this assemblage, I want to collect, combine, and enrich (see Mol, 2010), as well as move around the events involving Siiri, me, special needs politics, and my tiredness, among other factors.

Donna Haraway (2004) presented her feminist narrative approach “bag lady storytelling,” which was developed following Ursula LeGuin’s carrier bag theory of fiction, as follows:

I want to engage in a carrier-bag practice of storytelling, in which the stories do not reveal secrets acquired by heroes pursuing luminous objects across and through the plot matrix of the world. Bag lady story telling would instead proceed by pitting unexpected partners and irreducible details into a frayed, porous carrier bag. Engaging halting conversations, the encounter transmutes and reconstitutes all the partners and all the details. The stories do not have beginnings or ends; they have continuations, interruptions, and reformulations—just the kind of survivable stories we could use these days. (Haraway, 2004, pp. 127–128)

"Bag lady" storytelling practice, or more broadly, speculative fiction as discussed by Haraway (2016), disturbs the assumptions of linearity and coherence. Bag lady stories do not narrate the world according to existing divisions: there is neither a winning interpretation nor an explanation, rather, these stories are told in order to suggest possible kinds of events and beings. Osgood, Giugni, and Scarlet (2015, p. 353) use this posthumanist feminist approach to challenge static and reductive analytical practices, to forefront “ebbs, flows, collisions and chaotic happenings” (see also Taylor et al., 2013), and to examine the relational constitution of worlds. Similarly, I need a mobile and careless storytelling practice to examine in an experimental manner the relational constitution of the events around the estimation of Siiri’s special needs. Movement is needed in order to take into account the various conflicting and partly hidden ways in which the teachers’ notebook and the printed email letter—the starting point of these stories—become other than mere representatives of forms of institutional power.

Researching Siiri and special needs politics in a “bag lady” manner does not empty nor exhaust the object of study. Rather, these small and irreducible stories serve as the possible starting point of a continuum of stories, including the academic story that is being typed at this very moment. Through a radical acknowledgement of relationality, they deal with *intra-activity* (Barad, 2007), the production of subjects and ideas as entangled. Bag lady stories are not for those wishing for beautiful endings in general statements. The interruptions, openings and layerings at hand might primarily provoke movement between generic and specific (and here I think again about the eagle) thus helping to disturb detached categories or binaries.

Siiri and me

I used to think about Siiri as a mystery child. I did not know how to reach out to her. She refused to speak when I asked a question. In addition, physically, she escaped my reach, locking herself in the school’s toilet cubicle when she was small.

I did not know what was going on with her.

She certainly did not want to please her teacher.

Certainly, very little was going smoothly, which made me wonder, make guesses, and feel uncomfortable.

Involved

To talk about Siiri, I have to talk about myself. The emerging paradigm of post-qualitative research (e.g. St. Pierre, 2011) recognises the impossibility of the researcher stepping outside the inquiry and judging from a distance, because he or she is always already a part of the event that is being researched (Barad, 2007). I involve myself, I respond. I cannot but see Siiri through my memories and affective engagements. My painful feeling of having done wrong makes it evident that the examination would be seriously narrower without the aspect of affect. Pain and shame are not easily worn down by time. These affects remain, and they are reminders of something intense, not in a manner that believes that there is truth to be revealed behind what happened, but perhaps by pointing at gatherings and connections that are especially intense—that is, assemblages with tensions that become sensed. Because affect is impersonal, pre-personal (differing from emotions), pre-verbal, and not restricted by time and place, the examination of affect facilitates movement beyond category thinking towards something more complex (MacLure, 2013a), blurring the lines that we usually draw between human and nonhuman, professional and private, adult and child, and different times and spaces. Taking affect into account can help in avoiding reductive traits and moving research in directions that are not guided solely by human rational intentionality (see MacLure, 2015), thus extending the inquiry into areas that have not yet been articulated.

The form

I remember sitting at the long table in the teachers’ room, staring at the form that needed to be filled in, and talking to my colleagues about filling in these kinds of forms. I was a new teacher, and I had real difficulty deciding which alternative to tick. Each statement was followed by five alternatives in the form of boxes from which to choose:

- not at all*
- not often*
- sometimes*
- occurring often*
- most of the time*

The statement that I was now looking at was “The child says socially inappropriate things.”

Again, I was thinking about small, thin Siiri and her almost inaudible voice — and the way in which she turned her head away and pressed her mouth shut whenever I asked her a question. Then, there was the surprise when she sometimes laughed in a rough voice, almost as if it was not her own voice,

and became carried away by inappropriate words as she shouted suddenly, “Your boobs are showing! Your boobs are showing!”

I was thinking about Siiri and her “behaviour.”

Undecided

I find a sister to Siiri in MacLure’s (2013b) Hannah, who refuses to say her name when it is her turn to do so during the morning assembly in class. There was an incredibly strong urge to explain Siiri’s silences and shouts—her behaviour—just the way Hannah’s silence woke a “rage for explanation and meaning” (MacLure, 2013b, p. 662). What did Siiri’s and Hannah’s silence mean? Were these children not acting their age? Did the problem lie in their verbal abilities? Social interaction? Emotional problems? Had their silence something to do with their families?

In fulfilling the task of defining Siiri’s actions—her episodes of silence, her shouting, and her escapes to the bathroom—the concept of “behaviour” was used as the key tool. A concept can be used to collect all the material and bodily aspects of an event under one umbrella. A concept can also be used to turn difficult relations into individual traits and to create unidirectional causal relations instead of controversial or “messy” multiplicity. Fitting occurrences within a chosen abstraction has been seen as central to educational professionalism both among practitioners and in research. However, MacLure (2013b) described how “(t)he undecidable nature of Hannah’s silence, hanging in some threshold between language and something else, brought interpretation to a standstill in a blizzard of unanswered questions” (p. 663). In a later study, she spoke about the productive “middle,” which can be a depthless and directionless (non)place in which subjects and objects no longer behave themselves or take up the places allotted to them. Through “bag lady storytelling,” I am granted at least the momentary possibility to occupy a place in which the teacher is not only the teacher and the pupil is not only the pupil, rather, they both move beyond their institutional positions. As Haraway (2004, p. 127) stated, bag lady stories have “no beginnings nor endings”; they are told purposefully unconcerned about where they lead us. This is a space in which to examine the indeterminacy of the teacher and the pupil in their relational existence with multiple others.

When talking about mattering, one of the core principles to engage with is indeterminacy, which was taken from quantum physics and discussed in the context of social sciences by Barad (2007). Through feminist “bag lady storytelling”, I experiment to see if this idea can be used to contemplate the untamed dimension in life. Indeterminacy at the core of mattering also concerns education, despite its efforts to emphasise rational processes and predictable trajectories. In my ethnographic study with children in a primary school classroom (Hohti, 2016), I asked 10-year-old children to freely write their observations, thoughts, and stories using laptops within an unstructured practice called classroom diaries/children as ethnographers. Their writings brought me to a surprising landscape—besides the more structured ones, a great deal of the writings did not contain much that was taken for granted or predictable, nor could they be arranged according to a single storyline. The children’s writings also opened my eyes to the role of the material objects in classroom life. I started to see how materialities such as classroom architectures, football cards, papers, and clothes intervened in educational processes affirming their open-endedness. They could no more be bracketed or reduced into rational uses of a tool or environment to achieve learning goals. My study concluded that viewing educational settings as ambiguous, open, and unpredictable can be seen as an ethical choice to centre complexity that has largely been stolen from children (see also Lenz Taguchi, 2010).

Early intervention

A colleague came to the teachers’ room, where I was sitting with the form, and said, “Yes, concerning Siiri, I recognise what you are talking about: Definitely, in my lessons, she has these kinds of

difficulties, too. You know, she’ll never get any help unless you tick a strong statement. There simply are no resources; the healthcare professionals will not react to anything mild.”

I asked, “Shall I tick ‘occurs often’ then?” “Yes. I think you should do it,” she answered. “You know, later, if she gets worse, people may come to look for the earlier decisions, and they will raise questions about why you did not do anything in the name of early intervention when you still could.”

I knew that every document concerning Siiri, just as those concerning other pupils with special needs, were kept in a file in the locked safe; it was a file titled “Confidential.” I had gone into that same file to find documents from her preschool years. While reading those documents, I had discovered that as a toddler, Siiri was not willing to answer the questions posed by the nurse at the child welfare clinic nor do the things that she asked her to do.

I ticked the “occurs often” box.

Response-ability

The understanding of social situations as entangled and radically open contradicts the idea that ethics could be situated along a good/bad or right/wrong binary. In her agential realist theory, Barad maintained that ethics has to be considered an integral component of the materiality of our being and knowing, which is implied in her discussion of “ethico-onto-epistemology” (2007, p. 409). In her study “On Touching,” Barad (2012) talked about the importance of recognising the part of the inhuman in our existence. According to her, through turning to the inhuman, it is possible to approach indeterminacy through listening to “murmurings” about the possibilities of something being otherwise. Throughout Barad’s work, the idea of responsibility is elaborated as “response-ability,” (see also Haraway, 2016) by means of which attention is turned to the interdependencies within the relationality that constitutes us, whereby a constant call to respond is also created. For Barad, ethics is something other than superimposing values from the outside; rather, it is primarily about entering into relationships and about responding.

Representations, such as the stories and narratives that can be told about an event, are always non-innocent, as reminded repeatedly by Haraway (2004; 2016). It is an illusion that they can be analysed alone, working only within the realms of ideas and thoughts, because they are materially entangled and are always already meshed in the fabric of reality. Through engaging as a “bag lady” in one of the most influential practices that teachers face—that is, writing statements about their pupils’ behaviour reflecting their possible special needs—I am able to examine the materially entangled nature of drawing a line between normal and problematic behaviour, as well as the assumptions about the teacher’s professionalism in doing so. Discussing matter and mattering vis-à-vis the policies of special needs in the classroom, I suggest attending to the fact that ideas and ideologies come to us in materially entangled ways. Moreover, my “bag lady” examination suggests that their materially entangled nature is precisely what makes these practices so resistant to change. Thus, a material-discursive starting point is necessary for affirmative critical work that wishes to intervene in practices in response-able ways.

The tick

Finally, I would like to target the tick that I drew in the box: “Occurs often.” The tick created a confident voice for me, the teacher, to speak about Siiri. I did not want that voice, but in the end, I took it. The tick was powerful and agentic enough to bring something to exist and to ignore other things. What was made to disappear was everything that was ambiguous and unspeakable between Siiri and me—everything that was not clearly dividable into categories but rather was “both and.” The tick facilitated something and made other things difficult, if not non-existing. It made me tell one

story instead of a thousand other stories. It helped me to draw a line between normal and abnormal behaviour—a line between good and steady development on one side and disruptions and disturbances on the other. This line was needed to make a child in need of special support to exist. The ticks in the boxes, however, did not facilitate acknowledging unpredictability, surprises, nonlinear trajectories, accidents. Having drawn the ticks in the boxes, it became almost impossible for a professional to acknowledge particular and unique happenings as parts of education, and to raise questions of ambiguity.

I had tried.

“Riikka, you know, you are going to end up burnt out if you continue thinking like that,”

a colleague had said to me during a conversation about a certain child behaving rudely, when I had asked how the other teachers could be so sure that the causes for his behaviour had lain with his parents. And I did. The prophecy had been very accurate.

Right or wrong?

What about my feeling of having “done wrong,” which is the affective essence of why I could not forget Siiri? The posthumanist understanding of material entanglement challenges the distant critic’s ability to explain, unmask, and separate what is right from what is wrong (see Edwards & Fenwick, 2014). In research, the affirmative stance means a shift in the focus of analysis from knowing and complete understandings as the basis for critical research to “relating to.” An affirmative stance also implies that the future is fundamentally open, and it would be too simple to think that the alternatives are to be found in the present moment through negation. Rosi Braidotti (2010) clarified that affirmative politics does not choose to focus on positive over negative things but abandons dialectical and oppositional thinking altogether. It affirms life as difference-at-work and seeks to increase the participant’s ability to enter into modes of relation with multiple others (Braidotti, 2010, 2011).

Telling these “bag lady stories” about Siiri and throwing myself in the complexity of the situation, I cannot wish to achieve a level of knowledge based upon which to judge my words and decisions as right or wrong. Instead, I might go on with responding to the affective pull that continues to inhabit our shared history still after years have gone. Moreover, this careful (and careless) moving, gathering, and collecting of conflicting stories allows me to generate a renewed understanding of how it is that the fault can neither be situated in me, nor Siiri, nor her mother, nor in special needs policies alone. Examining an issue such as this from a relational ontology perspective entails a move towards ethics that emphasises the materiality of the situation and not an overarching system of a priori rules or judgments, as Hickey-Moody and Malins (2007, p. 31) have stated. It can be a laborious move because a great deal of the tradition of ethics understood as ideas is questioned along with realising that everything, including the “bad” and the “good” practices, is constituted *in between*, where, in Deleuzian language, the between is a “set of relations which are not separate from each other” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002, p. viii).

If these “bag lady stories” about Siiri were to work as affirmative critique, they could be seen as resulting in a livelier, more visible, and more tangible relationality (see Osgood et al., 2015). The posthumanist stance forces one to abandon “perspective talk” and those forms of empowering criticality that are dependent on identities and voices. What is offered, nevertheless, could be the possibility of creating a collective demand for spaces in educational practices for multiple stories—stories of difference. I do not refer to universal claims of institutional power but to specific workings of power relations as part of an open-ended relationality that embraces accidentality, chaos, and mess, which have to be acknowledged as parts of children’s lives. Stories that vary and play with events attach layers of understanding. Bag lady stories within education could create courage to

resist those practices that grossly simplify the relational complexity of the lives of children and their educators, one example of such practices being the making of statements about a child through ticks in boxes. In addition, the “bag lady” kind of an affirmative stance could help us to realise how the temporal and spatial constraints construct tension, pressure and exhaustion which enhance the employment of such practices. These stories could be told in order to prevent hurrying to conclusions or generalisations and to halt and stay with material and embodied events without reducing or purifying them. “Bag lady stories” as affirmative critique could eventually increase the writers’ and the readers’ capacity to enter similar kinds of events with an increased relational sensibility as they emerge anew sometime and someplace.

As a result of a “bag lady” examination of writing special needs statements, I would like to write another kind of statement:

The bag lady statement

The discourses of normal development and teacher professionalism are not there as abstract power plays of dominance and submission; they are material entanglements.

These discourses do not gain their heaviness from nowhere; they get it from histories and futures:

Institutional histories that materialize as lack of time, crowded classrooms, and tiredness. Personal histories that materialize as the confidential papers in the safe, joined by yet one new document written by me about Siiri. And futures, materializing in the present moment as the awareness about decisions and discussions being documented and subject to future judgements.

The non-innocent retellings of this article want to affirm children’s rights to live their lives in unusual and complex ways and to make space for strange narratives along with the normal ones. What if teachers told strange, fragmented and unexpected stories as a sign of their expertise—not as a sign of failing in being professional?

Ending, opening

This experimental article was written to discuss the shared and disturbing history of me and Siiri, who was my pupil, involving the events around writing a statement of special needs for her. I started with the image of an eagle that emerged during a conversation between me and my friend in an attempt to verbalise how a new space of analysis became available for us through posthumanist and new materialist theoretical concepts. “The eagle” came up as an image that was able to illustrate the targeting of a material detail while remaining dependent of all the relations within a specific field. I then combined this with “Bag lady storytelling” presented by Donna Haraway (2004), a practice depicted by her as “pitting unexpected partners and irreducible details into a frayed, porous carrier bag” (p. 217). The metaphors of the eagle and the bag lady have their deficiencies in that they picture the storyteller/researcher as someone who acts, and they do not emphasise the mutual transformation concerning both the things and doings that are discussed in the research and the one who engages in the storytelling. However, these metaphors provide an affective encouragement towards movement that differs from the linear and hierarchical procedures of the conventional qualitative researcher. My tick in the box on the special needs form, Siiri’s silences, my tiredness, and Siiri’s shouting “Your boobs are showing!” could be included as “unexpected partners and irreducible details” (Haraway, 2004, p. 127) even if they earlier could not be taken into account as ingredients for something significant.

The attacking movement of the eagle and the stumbling, undecided wandering of the bag lady might serve the simultaneously careful and reckless strategy of materialist critique (MacLure 2015) which

adheres to specific material details without worrying about how to explain things later or how to conclude with generalisations.

Posthumanist feminist storytelling shifts the focus of analysis from knowing to “relating to.” “Bag lady stories” affirm that there is always an excess in life. The narratives presented in this article encourage others to attend to the open-ended element of practices and to join children like Hannah and Siiri with an experimental repertoire of listening, telling, and retelling (and the ones who are listened to are not solely humans). In addition, they urge us to realise the glowing and sizzling of a thousand stories of differentiation along with the normative stories that keep teachers and pupils in place in classrooms.

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