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**Title:** "I Have Karelia in My Soul" : Intra-action of Students, Seniors and Artefacts in a Community-Engaged Service-Learning Collaboration

**Year:** 2023

**Version:** Published version

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**Please cite the original version:**

Muhonen, A., & Vaarala, H. (2023). "I Have Karelia in My Soul" : Intra-action of Students, Seniors and Artefacts in a Community-Engaged Service-Learning Collaboration. In J. Ennser-Kananen, & T. Saarinen (Eds.), *New Materialist Explorations into Language Education* (pp. 57-72). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13847-8\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13847-8_4)

# Chapter 4

## “I Have Karelia in My Soul” – Intra-action of Students, Seniors and Artefacts in a Community-Engaged Service-Learning Collaboration



Anu Muhonen  and Heidi Vaarala 

**Abstract** In this chapter we examine a foreign language learning environment in a community-engaged setting in a Canadian city through a new materialist lens. As part of a service-learning project, Canadian students of Finnish language and culture visit a Finnish language seniors’ centre regularly to participate in different activities and spend time with the Finnish-speaking seniors. We examine the assemblage of the participants (seniors and students) and one artefact, a map, and offer a close analysis of the intra-action that takes place during one visit at the centre. In our analysis, our service-learning collaboration does not merely give a voice and agency to seniors. Rather, the seniors actively take the opportunity to voice their knowledge, and doing that, give a voice to an old Finnish school map, which retells stories of the seniors’ past in intra-action. Meanwhile the students also gain new knowledge.

**Keywords** Community-engagement · Higher education · Intra-action · New materialism · Service-learning · Seniors · Language learning

### Introduction

While applied linguistics has traditionally placed language and language users in the centre of attention, a posthumanist approach suggests that we rethink our relationship with our environment and the objects in it (Pennycook, 2018, p. 1). Given that we live our everyday lives surrounded by, and indeed immersed in, matter

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(Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 1), concentrating solely on what humans do or what their intentions are, would ignore a large part of our reality, including the fact that material things can take an active role in it (Toohey, 2018, p. 27).

For new materialists, as MacLure (2013, pp. 659–660) explains, “discourse and matter are mutually implicated in the unfolding emergence of the world”. New materialism considers people, discourses, and things in continuous relation, as being in constant change together, becoming different from what they were before (Toohey, 2018, p. 29; see also *sociomaterialism*, Engman & Hermes 2021; Fenwick, 2015; Guerrettaz et al., 2021; Ennser-Kananen & Saarinen, in this volume). This approach rejects the traditional philosophical dualism between human and non-human as well as the hierarchy it implies (Toohey, 2018, p. 26), for instance, the reduction of the non-human to context and/or mediations for human activity. Toohey (2018, pp. 168–169) adds that new materialism views also languaging as evanescent assembling of speakers and listeners, environments, and, for example, “memories of previous languaging” Toohey (2018, pp. 168–169) – all of which can be stored in the human body.

In this chapter we take a new materialist look at foreign language learning in a community-engaged service-learning context. Community-engaged service-learning pedagogy blends educational instruction with relevant and meaningful engagement in the society. It can be described as a course-based, “credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs” (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p. 5). Community-engaged service-learning simultaneously also emphasizes a student perspective as in such a service activity, students gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p. 5). Our service-learning collaboration includes young Finnish as foreign language students at the University of Toronto and the Finnish seniors living in a Finnish senior centre, *Suomi-Koti* (see also Muhonen & Vaarala, 2018).

In our project, the students visit the *Suomi-Koti* regularly, participate in different activities and spend time with the Finnish-speaking seniors. They learn about Finnish culture by observing and interacting with the environment of the *Suomi-Koti*. Our participation and a long-term ethnographic field work suggest that the interiors and the very special material environment of the *Suomi-Koti* play a special role in these encounters. In this chapter, we explore the intra-action within an assemblage of artefacts and participants in this setting. The notion of assemblage offers a way to consider how things exist for each other, how the relations between things, people, and space matter (Pennycook, 2018, p. 129; see also Laihonen & Szabó and Nikula et al., Chaps. 6 and 8, this volume). We examine these encounters as intra-actions, which denotes an active relationship between the participants and the artefacts (Barad, 2003, 2007).

Human bodies, discourses, environments, and technologies are constantly changing, learning, and adapting in *intra-action*. Barad (2011, p. 451) contrasts intra-action with interaction, explaining that when two things are in interaction, they are seen as two separate entities with individual characteristics. However, if they are

seen as existing only in relation to one another, they intra-act and come into being through their entanglement (Barad, 2011, p. 451; Toohey, 2018, p. 29). In other words, while interaction assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, “the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action” (Barad, 2007, p. 33).

There is a need for inter- and transdisciplinary and engaged research that recognizes the entangled and material nature of humans, discourses, machines, other objects, and, for example, the natural environment (see Frodeman et al., 2017; Michael et al., 2020; Toohey, 2018, p. 25). In the field of second language learning, analyzing artefacts as part of the learning process is not new. In earlier literacy studies, artefacts have been described as material tools and accessories that are involved in the interaction (The New London Group, 1996). Thus, artefacts have long been considered a part of literacy events and an important factor in second/foreign language learning research (Pitkänen-Huhta, 2003). In literacy studies, literacy events have been described as consisting of settings, participants, artefacts, and activities; and texts are often used as artefacts in the learning spaces, such as in the classroom (see Barton, 2001; Sailors & Manning, 2019). Expanding on this work within literacy studies and related fields, our perspective gives objects even larger role and examines them as active part of an intra-action (rather than interaction).

Important existing research on new materialist or intra-active pedagogy has been conducted with younger children (see Donnelly et al., 2020; Lenz Taguchi, 2009) or in classroom settings (see, for example, Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2013; Toohey, 2018). To this, we add the new perspective of young adults learning in a community-engaged context as part of their tertiary education. The intra-action also involves seniors in a setting that reflects the life world of seniors and their Finnish heritage. For this chapter, we focus on one material artefact, an old school map of Finland. We used data from a larger sociolinguistic and ethnographic study with the goal of offering new insights on the human-artefact intra-action.

## Research Questions, Data, and Methods

We examine the assemblage of the participants (seniors and students) and artefacts and investigate what kind of story unfolds in the intra-action that takes place. We further analyze what role artefacts play in the intra-action. This chapter hones the following research questions:

- How does an artefact, a map, facilitate intra-action of the participants?
- What kind of information is exchanged between the human participants and the artefact (the map)?
- How do seniors and students relate to the reality they (choose to) share?

Applying a posthumanist approach, as Pennycook (2018, p. 6) writes, urges us to question our set ways and invites us to reflect on imagining humans in particular

ways, with no clear boundaries between humans and artefacts. New materialist analysis attempts to explore how artefacts themselves are important members of the assemblages created in communities; it recognizes “the significance of materiality in social and cultural practices” (MacLure, 2013, p. 659). The focus in our paper is on the role of artefacts and in the information that is exchanged in the intra-action of the participants and the artefacts. We further discuss, in reference to Pennycook (2018, p. 127), how we believe knowledge unfolds in these situations and what roles we assign to bodies, things, and places.

Following an interdisciplinary approach, we combine a detailed analysis of the intra-action with linguistic ethnographic methods (Creese, 2008; Heller, 2008; see also Muhonen, 2014; Lehtonen, 2015, p. 59). Linguistic ethnography considers that language and social life are intertwined, and that close analysis of situated language use can provide fundamental insights into everyday activity, including the dynamics of spatial and cultural production (Rampton et al., 2004, p. 2; Creese, 2008, p. 229).

Linguistic ethnography was also applied in the data collection. The data was collected by participating in service-learning activities in *Suomi-Koti* during the academic year 2016–2017. It consists, in total, of audio and video recordings of informal discussions and semi-structured student-led interviews. In addition, we have gathered ethnographically informed observations and photos during the encounters. The data further includes audio-recorded semi-structured and informal interviews and discussions with the participants. In this chapter, we focus on one video-recorded event that takes place in front of a map. On the map, Finland is featured in the centre. It is surrounded by the neighbouring Nordic countries Sweden and Norway. Part of Russia is shown on the east side of the map. The large map, which was used in Finnish schools in earlier years as a teaching material for geography, has been imported to *Suomi-Koti* from Finland.

In our study, the ethnographic investigations also include observations of the artefacts. Ethnographic participation can illuminate the “social processes and generate explanations for why people do and think the things they do” (Heller, 2008, p. 250). In our understanding, ethnography is not about objects but processes (Heller, 2008, p. 252), or, in our case, about intra-action. It is, as Van Maanen, (2011, p. xiii) writes, “the peculiar practice of representing the social reality of others through the analysis of one’s own experience in the world of these others”. As Bakhtin (1981) put it, “Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole – there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have potential of conditioning others” (p. 426).

As we will demonstrate, one can consider the setting of an investigation as an essential part of meaning negotiation in the process of language learning. In our case, artefacts take on a twofold role: first, they offer a context and authentic framework for discourse between the participants and second, they themselves have a voice in the process.

## The Lost Country – An Old School Map Intrigues a Multi-layered Intra-action

The new material approach observes the objects and artefacts in their or as part of their surroundings. Materialities and mobilities also offer a new way of thinking about the places and spaces of education (Brooks & Waters, 2018, p. 2; Guerretaz et al., 2021; see also Jakonen & Jauni, and Laihonen & Szabó, Chaps. 2 and 6, in this volume). In the public space of the *Suomi-Koti*, one can observe a significant number of different artefacts and objects which have been collected by Finns who immigrated to Canada. On the walls, former prominent Finnish historical figures are represented by, for example, a framed picture of former president and a wartime Commander in Chief Carl Gustaf Mannerheim; a decorative glass plate depicting longtime president Urho Kekkonen adorns the wall. Art posters are framed expressing the paintings from many famous Finnish artists including even some from the late nineteenth century. Issues of *Sotaveteraanilehti*, a Finnish war veteran publication, sit in piles in different rooms. Finnish design is represented by Iittala glassware. Finnish national symbols, such as flags, as well as different traditional and culturally significant handiworks can be observed everywhere. When students spend time in *Suomi-Koti*, they are bound to come across a variety of such iconic cultural artefacts.

In the following, we will discuss and analyze our data in four parts. Firstly, we focus on what emerges in discussions between the seniors and students in front of the map on the country borders of the Republic of Finland. Secondly, we analyze how the participants elaborate memories of a lived history. Thirdly, we analyze a discourse on so-called “lost land” and after this follows a fourth and final part, where we will analyze a reflection written by one of the students that we call “feeling hopeful in the soul”.

As mentioned earlier, this study focuses on the intra-action of students and seniors in front of a map of Finland. The map is in a very central location in the *Suomi-Koti*; it hangs in the hallway to the main hall which functions as a dining room, but also as the space where all the main festivities, events and gatherings are held. Everyone who enters the hall by-passes the map. The following took place in front of the map (Fig. 4.1).

We start our analysis of the intra-action with Reino (all names are pseudonyms), one of the seniors, who is discussing with Mark, one of the students, the country borders. The students have just had lunch in the hall and are about to take a tour of the building. As Kell (2015, p. 442) describes, “things make people happen” and “objects, in and of themselves, have consequences”. The group notices the map, stops to view it, and a spontaneous conversation begins. Here, we consider the map as a valid participant, present in the intra-action as any other participant with a will and purpose (see also Guerretaz & Johnston, 2013, p. 785, Michael et al., 2020). Mark and Reino are standing closest to the map, facing it.



Fig. 4.1 Intra-action in front of the map

#### Excerpt 4.1 Discussion of Finland's Country Borders

Reino (tämä) <this>

Mark what is (.) this here (*points towards the right corner of the map*)

Reino Russia

Mark ou yeah (.) and all this (.) this here (*moves his hand randomly across the Nordic countries*)

Reino Finland ei ei siin on (.) siin on (.) <no there is, there is> border is here (*points to the border between Finland and Sweden with his finger*)

Mark oukey

Reino Sweden (*finger touches Sweden on the map*)

Mark o:u right

Reino up here is Norway (*points to Norway*)

At the beginning of the conversation, Mark does not seem to be able to locate Finland's borders on the map as he rather arbitrarily points to the right corner of the map asking Reino to tell him "what this here". The map has a special color-coded design; Mark's gesturing across the map gives the impression that he is not certain about how to locate Finland on the map or make sense of the borders, which raises questions about whether the traditional map signifies different things to the seniors and to the young participants. In the era of interactive online maps, the map may not signal the same value and function to the young Canadian participants as it does to the seniors. The map may carry trajectories of its original historical time and space, it has been a common object in its original context in a school setting in the past, and it makes sense even here, where the seniors are familiar with it and able to read it. In the current time, for the contemporary young viewer, it may seem impractical and

belong to a past that is somewhat unreachable. We authors, however, learned to read this map in Finnish school.

Reino uses the map to demonstrate the location of the neighboring countries. Mark and the rest of the group learn about the borders by following Reino’s gestures and explanations. According to Barad (2007, p. 33; 2011, p. 451), there is a mutual constitution of entangled agencies in intra-action; agency is co-constituted in the intra-activity of bodies, artefacts, social relations, and environments (Ehret et al., 2016, p. 352). Here, the seniors’ and students’ discourse, gestures, the map, and the *Suomi-Koti* as an environment are co-constituting the entangled agencies. The map and all the participants have agency in the intra-action and story making.

In this event, the artefact, the map, does not just provide input to a passive group of recipients. The environment provides a context, within which the active learners engage in languaging activities together with seniors, who are more knowledgeable about Finnish language, culture, and history. In our example, Reino takes the role of a teacher and mediates culturally important knowledge for the students. Mark takes an active role in facilitating the discourse by asking questions in an active intra-action with the map and Reino. The context provides an opportunity for the participants to engage in a meaningful intra-action in the situation. As students almost accidentally walk by this artefact, stop to chat in front of it, this intra-action unfolds and further develops.

The discussion above creates the frame for the follow-up intra-action, where the map now functions as a renewed artefact, which makes it possible to give new information for the student, as, for example, geography is being learned. Reino also mediates historically important knowledge. The artefact, which is familiar to Reino, becomes new to the students. As we will see in the second part of our analysis of the memory of lived history, the history of Finland and the Second World War develop another new angle for the discourse.

To analyze the following intra-action, it is useful to understand some details of Finland’s history. Based on the geographical shape of Finland’s map, Finland is commonly described as a maiden, who has a head, two arms and a long dress. In the Second World War, Finland lost geographical territories to the Soviet Union, including “one arm and a hem of the dress”. In the ongoing intra-action, Mark has now learned the borders of Finland and utters “yeah (.) and here’s the” while he shows the central part of Finland with his hand, confirming his understanding of the topic:

#### **Excerpt 4.2 Memory of a Lived History Embodied**

- Mark yeah (.) and here's the (*shows the central part of Finland with his hand*)  
 Reino kaikki Suomea (.) ja <all is Finland and> (*glances down briefly*) Josef Stalin  
 (.) that (.) stupid (.) dictator (..) He took about that much (...) that Finnish  
 country (*points to an area on the map with his finger*)  
 Mark oh okey  
 Reino ja same here (.) here was other arm (.) (*points the area with his finger*)  
 Mark yeah  
 Reino now it's gone  
 Mark yeah yeah



Reino (*turns slowly to look at Mark*) and you know it was (.) we were too small to say no [...]

The map hanging on the wall is a permanent, stable artefact that allows Reino to reflect a discourse significant to his whole habitus. The intra-action continues when Reino suddenly comments in Finnish “*kaikki Suomea (.) ja*” <all is Finland and> and briefly pauses and glances down, apparently moved by the thought. The sudden switch to Finnish, together with the short pause and the downward glance, reflects an emotional connectedness to Finland as does the use of “we” (= Finnish people) in the last line “we were too small to say no”. Autonomic responses which occur below the threshold of consciousness and cognition and are rooted in the body (Leys, 2011, p. 443). Reino’s bodily reaction to the somewhat emotional topic is clearly visible in this intra-action. Talk, gestures, wistful gaze, embodiments and even silence perform in the intra-action collaboratively (Engman & Hermes, 2021, p. 91).

As Blackledge (2012, p. 6) writes, by looking at the fine grains of linguistic practice, one can sometimes find small nuances of phonological, lexical, semantic difference, which can intrigue a shift in positioning in participants’ orientation to their social world. The strong emotion connected to the war memories and perhaps even being a (former) Finn made Reino emphasize his belonging with the use of “we”. Davies (2014, p. 18) saw emotional speaking as a quality of a collective rather than an individual; it can be felt in the body (Toohey, 2018, p. 33). Here, the strong memory and the emotional heaviness of the topic makes Reino switch into his heritage language. The casual reading of the map has suddenly turned into a rather emotional intra-action about history, recalling Reino’s personal memoirs and the collective memory of his generation of wartime and post-wartime history and immigration.

The analysis reflects the emotions that are embodied in the realities that are shared between the seniors and the students, triggered by the intra-action with the map. Not only can participants retell what happened in the past, but they can also convey how it felt, igniting the historical imagination in the present. As Creese (2008) writes, linguistic ethnographic methods allow one to shed light to the discussion in both micro and macro levels. Large structures of culture, heritage, and history can be identifiable even in the small instances of the language practices (Blackledge, 2012, p. 7). This excerpt demonstrates that the map triggers feelings and carries emotional meanings, these become embodied by the intra-actions. The conversation continues as the seniors then change the topic from discussing the borders of today and geography to the lost areas of the former republic of Finland. Our third part of the analysis focuses on the lost territory, Karelia. As we will see, Karelia, the lost land, becomes a very meaningful and emotional topic for the seniors. For students, this brings along new information and the intra-action continues as depicted in Excerpt 4.3.

After the long discourse Reino has been leading, Maija, one of the seniors, physically moves towards the map from the back and takes her place in front of it. By that gesture, she shows that she also has something to contribute to the intra-action.

### Excerpt 4.3 Discourse on Lost Karelia

- Maija excuse me (*moves closer to the map*) missä on ne kaikki ne maat mitkä oli Suomee ennen <where is all the land which was Finland before> (*points to the eastern border of Finland*)
- Reino tässä (.) tässä näin <this here > Laatokka (.) järvi <lake Ladoga> (*points with finger*)
- Maija Karelia (*points with finger*)
- Reino tähän näin (.) sitten (.) tässä oli käsivarren (.) ylös <here, then, here was the arm (.) up>
- Mark that was
- Maija the land that was (.) was given away (*Maija and Reino are turning to Mark and looking at him*)

While standing in front of the map, Maija asks “missä on ne kaikki ne maat mitkä oli oli Suomee ennen (where is all the land which was Finland before)”. By this she is referring to the fact that a significant part of Finnish land, known as Karelia, was surrendered to the Soviet Union in the Second World War as part of the peace treaty. When participants take different positions, as Maija here, “they act, together with other types of things and forces, to exclude, invite and regulate particular forms of participation” (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 7). We treat the human participants as part of the assemblage, participants are seen as co-evolving with other forms of life and enmeshed with the environment (Nayar, 2014, p. 13). When Maija steps into a new and more central physical position, the orientation of all the participants around the map changes and the intra-action triggered by the map takes new forms. Maija’s actions assists the students to get a more comprehensive understanding on the subject because Reino then explains it the second time.

At the end of the sequence, both seniors turn to Mark and look at him; this seals the intra-action and offers a thematic cycle referring to Mark’s original question about the borders of the republic of Finland. However, as we have seen from above, a great deal of more than just Finland’s geographical boundaries have been passed on by the seniors in this short intra-action. Barad (2007, p. 136) writes that posthumanists consider subjects both from humanist and structuralist viewpoint, the human element alone is neither pure cause nor pure result; the participants positions can be seen both as “the natural and fixed” elements, belonging both to the interior and the exterior (Barad, 2007, p. 136), both humans and artefacts are in other words essential part of the assemblage and as we have seen here, also the meaning making in the final story.

Pennycook (2018, p. 6) points out that a posthumanist account “questions the boundaries between what is seen as inside and outside, where thought occurs and what role a supposedly exterior world may play in thought and language”. “Posthumanism doesn’t presume the separateness of any-‘thing’” (Barad, 2007, p. 136). In this posthumanist stance, in addition to the assemblage of the human and the artefact, we are also discussing feelings and emotions as something *more real*. The seniors are telling about the lost land with a longing in their voice, almost as if the area of Karelia does not exist anymore – The loss of Karelia has obviously been a

life-changing experience for them and their ancestors. Although the land of Karelia still exists, a significant part of it now is on the Russian side of the Finland-Russia border. The Karelia of their youth, however, has been “lost”, left to the other side of the border. Therefore, when the seniors talk about the history and their Karelia, different feelings emerge.

While we do not claim that the map can talk or have an active role alone, we suggest that the map should be considered as more than just an artefact hanging on the wall, similarly to Engman and Hermes (2021, p. 90), who see the land as an interlocutor, a participant, and a “living teacher”. As mentioned earlier, the map is in a welcoming and central space and it almost seems like it is there to invite attention, waiting to be approached. With the close analysis of the situated intra-action, a spontaneous stop in front of the map triggered a multi-layered meaningful conversation. The map we are analyzing here has agency in what people say, think and feel about it; the artefact is a part of a “semiotic ecosystem” where historical trajectories of people, places, discourses, and objects come together (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 89, 159) in this particular setting, in the seniors home in the diaspora. Most of the artefacts are more than just artefacts for the seniors and as this map, generate trajectories, memories, and stories.

## **Multi-layered Understanding of Space and Time, Past and Future**

The object, the map, is available and it is present, the participants can touch it and rely on it to re-experience the past and describe the present reality. It is almost as if the map tells a story which is transferred through the voice of the seniors and their personal, somewhat historical, trajectories. Although the map cannot talk, it plays a part, takes meaning, and has a semiotic role (see also Pennycook, 2018, p. 46). It allows for meaningful and multi-layered intra-action and knowledge construction based on the artefacts at hand. This includes linguistic, cognitive, cultural, physical, and digital artefacts and may also create new artefacts “to formulate, embody, preserve and communicate new knowledge” (Stahl, 2002, p. 62). In addition, many different understandings of space and time are present in the above-described intra-action.

The intra-action with the map signifies different understandings and views of Karelia. Firstly, the space denotes certain geographical areas (e.g., Finland and Karelia). Secondly, there is a mutual understanding of the lost country, lost territories, which designate the parts of Finland lost during the Second World War (e.g., Karelia and the “left hand” of Finland). Next, the map presents current Finland, but also an old home country and the space the seniors have left and immigrated from after the Second World War. In this space, a special role is given to the birthplaces of the seniors as they point out in the same discussion earlier. Fourthly, Karelia is present in the current residence *Suomi-Koti*, the space where this interaction takes

place and where the map signifies all these spaces and invites the seniors to talk about them. Following this, Canada as the current home country and space where the distance to all these spaces perhaps even allows a critical view of the other spaces. In the present space the young generation of students is learning about Finland. Throughout all these spaces, the concept of home and transnational belonging prevails. It becomes clear that knowledge can be found in this assemblage, in a direct and ongoing material engagement, in a practice of intra-acting with the surrounding in a dynamic articulation (Barad, 2007, p. 379).

Just as the concept of space is multi-layered, also the concept of time can be understood in multiple ways. The intra-action with the map signifies different understandings of a time. Firstly, there are references to the time before the Second World War, as the intra-action recalls the geography of the former territory of the republic of Finland. This time exists in the memories of the Karelia addressed by the seniors. Secondly, the discussion refers to the time when the seniors still lived in Finland before their immigration to Canada. After that, it becomes the time in Canada, and for the seniors, at one point moving to the Finnish seniors home where intra-action with the artefacts and young learners occurs. Fourthly, and most importantly, the intra-action takes place in the present time as the students and the seniors meet in front of the map, which allows the seniors to make references to all the past times in the current moment. However, there is also time after the present time as the students also create their own relationship to the “lost Karelia”, “lost Paradise” which finally also has implications for the future of the students, as we will demonstrate in the last part of this analysis.

In the fourth part of our analysis, we discuss the theme “cherishing hope in one’s soul”. Nate, one of the students present in this intra-action but not actively participating in the discussion excerpted for this analysis and the encounter with the map, wrote the following reflection after the *Suomi-Koti* visit. He reflects his experience on the service-learning in the following manner:

Perhaps one of the most interesting parallels between my own immigration background and the immigration backgrounds of the residents is the idea of the “Holy Land”, or the “Paradise Lost”. In Finnish culture, Karelia holds a place of extreme importance, as the land in which the Kalevala, and by extension, Finnishness, was kept alive. (Reflections, Nate, April 2017).

Dahlberg and Moss (2009, p. xxiii) write that when the logic of affect is activated it gives rise to collective experimenting and unpredictability. The present intra-action seems to have triggered an multilayered emotional reaction even in the students, intriguing them to reflect what they have learned. This can be seen in the way the students show empathy to the seniors, and when they begin to recall immigration memories of their own family trajectories and stories. Thinking, liking and, for example, learning, according to Marks (1998), all happen within our bodies. In his reflection, Nate further mirrors his longing to Karelia in a similar manner the seniors have expressed in these mutual intra-actions.

“ – minä toivon että kesä tulee nopeasti, koska minä haluan käydä Suomessa, ja Karjalassa myös. Me puhuimme Karjalasta, Virosta ja Valamosta, ja nyt sielussa minulla on toivo

nähdä Karjalaa. Kaikki puhuvat Karjalasta, ja nyt minun täytyy käydä.” (Nate, reflection, February 2017). <I wish that it’s summer soon because I want to visit Finland, and Karelia too. We talked about Karelia, Estonia and Valamo Monastery, and now there is in my soul the hope to see Karelia. Everybody was talking about Karelia and now I have to visit> (Nate, reflection, February 2017)

Identities develop “in the moment through discursive practices, but also through memory” (Toohey, 2018, p. 97). The conversation of the map presents even this additional place, the student is also taken into a space of his own place of longing to the holy land, discussion familiar to him from his parents’ and grandparents’ past and immigration trajectories. This student reflection adds yet another layer of space and time into our analysis: Karelia is now even positioned “in their souls”. The discursive and the material interact in the bodies (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, p. 7); it functions as a contagion that people get “hooked on” (Toohey, 2018, p. 34). The discourse on Karelia therefore involves the embodiment of sensations among all the participants. Nate’s wish to see Karelia in the future adds a new perspective.

The map guided the participants to a deep discourse leading the seniors back to their past lived experiences and memory lane and made the young students reflect on their own heritage and future. For the seniors, it is meaningful to transmit the experiences of past generations to the young students. Any individual’s participation can become part of the community’s shared historical knowledge, which is linguistically signalled and framed (Toohey, 2018, p. 97). The oral story of the collective history of the displaced Karelians touches everyone in the intra-action. The way in which the seniors communicate these experiences impresses on the students the importance of real-life learning and impacts on students’ future. Nate reflects these learnings as an experience, which has an impact on his future endeavours. He wants to see Karelia because he can feel it in his soul; Karelia then becomes relevant even in the unfolding future.

The transferred information between the participants and the artefacts tells us about multi-layered mobility; the seniors – or even their parents – have lost Karelia, the seniors themselves have left their “home country”, Finland, behind them. These experiences of lost country resonate with the experiences of some of the students, as their parents and they themselves have started a new life in Canada, as seen in Nate’s reflection earlier. Pennycook (2018, p. 131) suggests that we should “consider the social, spatial, and embodied dimensions of language learning”; language learning happens in a much wider semiotic framework, which includes “touch, smell, taste, things and places” (see also Atkinson, 2019; Laihonon & Szabó, Chap. 6, this volume). In this chapter, we have demonstrated that learning can take place in many places but there are many more layers to learning — feelings, emotions, different participants have different kinds of agencies, and the role of teacher – here seniors and an artefact, an old map, become teachers.

## Conclusions

In our study several artefacts representing Finland and Finnish cultural heritage were observed in the *Suomi-Koti*. These are objects that the seniors have brought from Finland, collected, and cherished. In this chapter, we have focused on an intra-action relating to one of them and demonstrated that intra-action between the participants also makes multi-layered learning possible. The service-learning context provides the students and seniors spontaneous intra-actions encounters which lead to meaningful conversations about language, history, geography, and belonging.

In the intertwining discourse between the artefacts and participants, the discourse moves between present and past, as well as historical, current, and future time. The participants move around in the space in front of the map as the intra-action unfolds and features different actors. In addition, different spaces the participants recall, enter, are positioned in or talk about become relevant. Finland is mediated through artefacts and stories constructed by the participants. What Finland or Karelia is, where it is, and in what time it is featured shifts during this intra-action. We consider artefacts as forms of mobility as they and the stories they can intrigue, facilitate movement between different times, spaces and all the participants in the assemblage. When a journey takes place via stories and memories, artefacts come into life collaboratively in these stories. As we have demonstrated, artefacts, here the map, are especially significant in the life of the seniors living in the diaspora. Material world makes one recognize that humans participate in a shared and vital materiality (Bennett, 2010a, p. 14).

‘New materialism’ does not only impact our understanding of the world and the relationships between humans and non-humans, but also the methods that we use to research that world (see Brooks & Waters, 2018, p. 26). In our study, we have looked at the relationship between environments and objects in a new manner: human participants are considered a part of the material world, and vice versa. According to Pennycook (2018, p. 129), in a posthumanist approach, humans are no longer depicted as “distinct, inalienable creatures” who have the sole agency to control the environment but emerged together with their interior. As we have demonstrated in this chapter, in new materialism, as MacLure (2013, pp. 659–660) states, discourse and matter can emerge and unfold in the mutual space one participates in and is surrounded by. Here, both the seniors, students and the map as an artefact created an interesting multi-layered intra-action prompted by a shared materiality (see Bennett, 2010a, p. 14) which depicts current and past space and time. We have shown that artefacts can play a role in our lives, they can have agency to our stories, in assemblages “where different things and people and places and discourses come together” (Pennycook, 2018, p. 129). Here all these participants were closely interwoven into the material world, and by intra-acting together, a memorable and meaningful discourse was created.

Taking a posthumanist standpoint makes new connections and lines of thinking possible. The current climate of thought seeks an increased emphasis on space, place, things, and their interrelationships; there is a desire to expand the semiotic

terrain to go beyond language in relation to material surrounds and space (Pennycook, 2018, p. 8). As Brigstocke and Noorani (2016, p. 2) ask:

What happens, though, when we attempt to attune ourselves to forms of agency that do not possess a conventionally recognized voice to be amplified? What new intersections among research, invention, and political agency might emerge when voices have to be assembled rather than merely amplified, and when new methods of listening need to be invented? (Brigstocke & Noorani, 2016, p. 2).

Critical work is often conceived in terms of “giving voice to marginalized subjects” (Brigstocke & Noorani, 2016, p. 2). Here our service-learning collaboration has not just *given* a voice and agency to seniors, the seniors are actively *taking* the opportunity to voice their knowledge; also, artefacts that are not traditionally considered to have anything to say, are an integral part of the story. Here we are further showing that one can also *give a voice to artefacts*; the old Finnish school map captured in the seniors’ centre does retell stories of their past when in intra-action with the seniors and students.

Based on our study, we agree with Toohey (2018, p. 28) that fixed and essential qualities cannot be attributed to the animate or inanimate, or to human persons of non-human things but rather that material, people, animals, objects, nature, discourses proceed in relation to and with another (Toohey, 2018, p. 28). New materialism investigates what happens if materialities were actors alongside and within us, and further what is the significance when trajectories and powers irreducible to the meanings, intentions, or symbolic values humans can invest in them (Bennett, 2010b, p. 47). By participating and observing our data in the light of new materialism, we have described how intra-action of seniors, students and one meaningful artefact, the map, connects the lives, spaces, past and future and even emotions and feelings of the participants.

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