

The Art and Science of Networked Learning: Performing Futures through Collective Pedagogy

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Abstract

This paper explores how the ideals of networked learning are materialised through the ethical and creative labour of a student-led decolonising initiative. Drawing on an ethnographic study of the Decolonising the Curriculum Steering Group (DtCSG), the paper examines how collective learning takes form through acts of care, repair, and imagination. It argues that while networked learning scholarship often assumes collaboration and openness as inherently functional, these ideals depend on continuous work that is ethical, material, and affective.

The study is framed within the epistemology of the Fluxus art form, where inquiry itself becomes a participatory and artful event. While ethnography serves as the overarching approach, portraiture provides the analytic and aesthetic strategy for data generation. Together, they stage research as performance, creating a space where learning and analysis occur through co-creation, interruption, and creative gesture. Data include interviews, fieldnotes, and participant-generated artefacts or performances such as digital collages, poems, and asynchronous chat fragments.

The paper contributes three main insights. First, it redefines speculation not as a design element but as a performative and accountable practice embedded in the present. Second, it establishes solidarity as the ethical and infrastructural condition that sustains networked learning, extending current theory toward questions of care, access, and responsibility. Third, it conceptualises collective pedagogy as negotiated relation rather than harmony, presenting it as an ongoing process of learning through difference.

By performing research as artful inquiry, the study reimagines networked learning as a space of experimentation, relation, and care. It proposes that the future of collective pedagogy lies not in designing better systems but in performing solidarity within the limits and possibilities of the networks we inhabit.

Keywords

Collective pedagogy, Solidarity, Ethics, Fluxus, Art-based research, Speculative Imagination

Part I – The Problem: Idealised Futures and the Myth of Collective Pedagogy

In contemporary educational research, futures are frequently imagined as spaces of innovation, participation, and liberation from the constraints of the present, as if projection alone could resolve structural inequities (Tesar, 2021). Across policy documents, pedagogical manifestos, and design led initiatives, speculation has acquired an ethical status of its own. It promises transformation while rarely accounting for what such transformation requires from those who must enact it. Within this imaginary, collaboration is treated as an unquestioned good, and collectivity appears as a self evident virtue. Futures become detached from the everyday labour of teaching and learning, from institutional contradiction, and from the material conditions that make participation unevenly possible (Hrastinski & Jandrić, 2023). Speculation, framed as design, often floats above context, frictionless and universally available. In this process, the learner is reimagined not as a situated subject negotiating structural difference, but as an idealised figure of openness and innovation. What recedes from view are the conditions through which learning actually unfolds: care work, exhaustion, bandwidth, institutional politics, and the slow, negotiated rhythms of collective life (Ross, 2022).

Networked Learning has long offered a more relational account of education. For over thirty years, it has challenged individualised and instrumental models of learning, emphasising inquiry, dialogue, and connection across sociotechnical settings. It has made an important contribution by treating collaboration as central to how knowledge is produced, rather than as a supplement to individual learning. However, this paper argues that Networked Learning has also tended to assume the conditions under which collective learning is possible. Trust, reciprocity, openness, and shared purpose are frequently treated as starting points rather than as outcomes that require ongoing ethical and relational work (NLEC, 2021).

The idea of collective pedagogy sits at the intersection of speculative futures and Networked Learning. In both traditions, collaboration is often presented as both the means and the goal of educational progress. The collective is invoked as a sign of inclusion, democracy, and shared purpose. Yet this framing can obscure the difficulties that make collective learning meaningful in practice. Difference, disagreement, uneven participation, and care are rarely foregrounded. Instead, collectivity is described as if it were stable and harmonious. Futures are framed as open, networks as connected, and learners as empowered. These descriptions are appealing, but they are limited in what they explain. They often overlook the labour required to sustain relationships, the work involved in maintaining trust, and the unequal demands placed on participants. In this sense, speculative educational work and Networked Learning share a common weakness. Both risk confusing what is possible with what is actually practised (de Laat & Ryberg, 2018). This critique is not a rejection of either field. Networked Learning has made a significant contribution to educational research by showing how learning emerges through relations, participation, and shared activity. Speculative work has similarly helped education resist narrow forms of determinism and opened space for alternative ways of thinking about the future. The difficulty arises when the critical language of these traditions becomes fixed. Concepts such as openness, community, innovation, and participation can begin to function as assumptions rather than questions, making it harder to see how collective learning is sustained in uneven and constrained conditions.

This paper starts from that concern. It asks how networked and collective pedagogies might be understood more realistically, by paying closer attention to the material and ethical conditions of learning together. Doing so requires moving away from collectivity as an assumption and towards solidarity as a practice.

Solidarity, as used here, does not refer to agreement or harmony. It refers to the work of staying connected across difference and asymmetry. It names the ethical and practical labour that makes collective learning possible. Where collaboration often assumes balance and mutual availability, solidarity begins from unevenness. It recognises that networks are shaped by histories of exclusion and by institutional arrangements, and that maintaining connection often requires unequal effort. Bringing solidarity into discussions of Networked Learning and educational futures shifts attention away from intentions and designs, and towards the ongoing work of care, negotiation, translation, and trust. This is where futures thinking becomes grounded, not in abstract visions, but in the practices that allow people to remain in relation over time.

In the sections that follow, solidarity is treated as a method rather than a metaphor. It is examined through the relational, transitive, and creative practices of a student led online initiative, the Decolonising the Curriculum Steering Group (DtCSG). This case makes visible the fragile and negotiated nature of networked learning in practice. By showing how solidarity is enacted, strained, and maintained in digital and collective settings, the paper argues that educational futures matter only when they are rooted in the ethical demands of the present. The problem, then, is not that collective pedagogy is unrealistic, but that it is too often presented as effortless. The task is to make its difficulty visible, and to understand connection as something that must be continually worked at, rather than assumed.

Part II – The Frame: Solidarity as Method, Ethic, and Pedagogy

If Part I traced how collective pedagogy became idealised through speculative and networked imaginaries, this section turns toward the framework that grounds those ideals in practice: solidarity. The intention here is not to replace the language of collectivity with another abstraction, but to recover the ethical and methodological labour that makes learning together possible. Solidarity offers a way to think about connection that begins from asymmetry rather than equivalence (Gaztambide-Fernández, Rubén A., 2012). It acknowledges that all educational relations are shaped by difference: difference in power, access, confidence, language, and time. In the context of digital and postcolonial education, these differences are not obstacles to be designed away, but the very materials through which collaboration acquires meaning (Oztok, 2019). Solidarity therefore reframes collective pedagogy as an ongoing negotiation of relation; a practice of staying-with tension rather than resolving it. It insists that connection is not sustained by access or design alone, but by the continuous renewal of care and accountability.

In this sense, solidarity extends the ethical vocabulary of networked learning by refusing harmony as the measure of success. It replaces the question “How can we connect?” with the more difficult one: “How do we remain connected when conditions are unequal?”. This shift exposes the moral infrastructure that networked learning has often left implicit. This is why digital education must confront not only issues of access but the ways in which invisibility, exhaustion, and silence are distributed across digital spaces. Solidarity begins from that recognition. It understands participation as relationally contingent, shaped by histories and structures that exceed the network

itself. Knowing together is not about reaching consensus, but about sustaining dialogue in the presence of disagreement (Hodgson & Reynolds, 2005). This stance resonates with the postcolonial critique of consensus as a form of epistemic violence. When harmony becomes the goal, certain voices must quieten for collective speech to appear. Solidarity resists this coercive symmetry. It allows the collective to remain plural, to speak in fragments, to pause without closure. The ethical task is not to dissolve difference, but to make it liveable. In pedagogical terms, this transforms the meaning of community. A learning community grounded in solidarity is not defined by sameness or agreement, but by mutual responsibility for each other's presence (Oztok, 2019). It recognises that learning involves vulnerability: to listen without defence, to stay-with misunderstanding, and to extend care across difference. In this way, solidarity becomes both pedagogy and method. It shapes how inquiry proceeds and how people inhabit that inquiry together.

Solidarity also repositions speculative imagination within educational research. Within a solidary frame, imagination becomes relational. It emerges from the willingness to imagine with rather than for others (Gaztambide-Fernández, Rubén et al., 2022). Speculation is no longer a detached design exercise, but an embodied act of attention. It asks what futures become possible when learning is sustained by care rather than by coherence. Solidarity reframes collective pedagogy in three interrelated ways. First, it provides an ethical grounding for Networked Learning, transforming its assumed ideals of trust and reciprocity into practices of maintenance and care. Second, it offers an epistemological stance in which knowledge is relational and difference is generative rather than problematic. Third, it constitutes a pedagogical method that values participation through vulnerability and relation rather than through harmony. To think with solidarity is therefore to reimagine what counts as learning, and what sustains it (Gaztambide-Fernández, Rubén A., 2012). In this line of thought, the challenge for Networked Learning is not to design stronger networks or more innovative technologies, but to make visible the ethical infrastructures that hold collectivity together. Solidarity names that infrastructure. It is not a supplement to learning, but its condition.

Part III – The Materialisation: Fluxus Ethnography and Portraiture

This section shows how the study gives shape to its epistemology through three interrelated components. Fluxus provides the design frame that defines how knowledge is produced. Ethnography offers the approach that situates inquiry in practice. Portraiture operates as the strategy that gives form to experience and relation. Together, they enact research as an open and collective process, where knowledge is created through participation, interpretation, and care.

Fluxus as Design Frame

Fluxus shapes the research by treating inquiry as something that happens through doing, not by following a fixed plan (Friedman, 2012). It provides a design for research that values process, participation, and uncertainty. This design helps to turn ideas about learning and collaboration into actions that can be seen, discussed, and understood. In this study, Fluxus creates the conditions where learning and research meet. Online meetings, messages, and creative tasks become the setting where people think and act together. Everyday events such as a pause, a delay, or a digital glitch are treated as part of the research because they show how learning actually happens in networked environments. Instead of seeing these interruptions as problems, I read them as evidence of how connection, care, and labour are distributed in digital learning. This way of working reveals that learning is not only about exchanging knowledge but also about how people manage difference, negotiate meaning, and stay connected when conditions are uneven. The open and improvisational design resists hierarchy and fixed interpretation, allowing knowledge to appear through relation and context. Attention moves from control to responsiveness, from structure to encounter. Fluxus supports my central aim of turning speculative ideas about collaboration and future learning into visible practice. It shows how imagination becomes tangible through shared actions, gestures, and artefacts (Miles & Springgay, 2020). The approach makes collective work accountable to its conditions by grounding creativity in the material, digital, and institutional realities where people learn and act together. Fluxus, therefore, is not an art reference but a way to materialise ethical and collective inquiry. It creates the framework where ethnography and portraiture can operate together to study how people learn, act, and imagine collectively in digital spaces.

Ethnography as Participatory Approach

Ethnography provides the approach that makes the research relational. It is used to study practice from within, not from a distance. The ethnographer joins the flow of events, paying attention to how people interact, how meaning

is negotiated, and how the conditions of online life shape participation (Hammersley, 2006). Observation and participation happen together; description becomes an act of involvement. The ethnographic approach treats context as inseparable from knowledge. What people say, do, or create only has meaning in relation to the technological, institutional, and emotional settings where these acts occur. Meetings, chat messages, and shared documents are all part of the field. Presence is found not only in words but also in gestures, silences, and digital traces that show how relation is maintained over time. Fieldnotes are written as vignettes that capture the detail of interaction. They document how participants respond to one another, how fatigue and care circulate, and how creative work becomes a way of thinking. Analysis is not a separate stage but part of this ongoing engagement. Insights develop through reflection, conversation, and writing. This approach allows the research to stay close to practice while still offering interpretation. Ethnography, in this study, is not used to generalise but to understand how people work together across difference. It follows the belief that knowledge is produced through relation and that every account is partial. The approach accepts that the researcher is part of the story being told. This understanding keeps the study reflexive and open, allowing it to recognise the limits of what can be known (Walford, 2009).

Portraiture as Strategy for Composing Inquiry

Portraiture gives the research its form. It turns experience into written representation without reducing it to data. The portraits combine narrative, observation, and interpretation to show how learning and relation take shape in practice (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2002). Each one is written to capture tone, rhythm, and the feel of participation. A portrait brings together fragments from interviews, fieldnotes, chat threads, and creative artefacts. It focuses on moments where people negotiate meaning, care for one another, or respond to the demands of digital work. The writing holds these moments in tension: it shows both connection and difficulty. In this sense, portraiture reveals the ethical and emotional weight of collaboration. Portraiture also registers the infrastructures that shape learning. A frozen screen, a missed response, or an uneven translation are not background details but part of how the network operates. Including these in the portraits makes visible the material and political conditions that influence who can speak and how they are heard. Writing becomes a way to recognise these asymmetries while still valuing the collective effort. The portraits in this study are not biographical sketches. They are analytic compositions that show how learning is lived. Each one records a process rather than a result. They turn the abstract idea of collective pedagogy into scenes that can be seen and felt. In doing so, portraiture allows the research to move between the personal and the structural, linking individual experience to wider questions about digital work, belonging, and care.

Material Practices and Artefacts

Artefacts that are both creative and analytic. Participants' everyday actions, such as making collages, writing short reflections, or annotating shared documents, become part of the research. These artefacts record thinking as it happens (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 2002). They show how people respond to digital constraint and how imagination becomes visible through practice. For example, one participant created a layered digital image that exposed how online platforms hide cultural difference behind uniform design. Another composed a short poem during repeated connection failures, using the interruptions as part of the work. These artefacts are not outputs in the traditional sense; they are moments of inquiry that make visible the textures of learning and relation in digital space (Friedman, 2012). The artefacts, portraits, and fieldnotes together form the material archive of the study. They do not aim for completeness but for resonance. Each piece captures a different angle on how collective work happens through care, disruption, and persistence.

Part IV – The Enactment: The DtCSG as Solidary, Speculative Pedagogy

First, I want to justify that the Decolonising the Curriculum Steering Group (DtCSG) is a form of Networked Learning because its practice centres on connection, inquiry, and shared responsibility across digital and institutional boundaries. The group does not exist within a single programme or department but as a self-organised network of students and staff who work together to address questions of curriculum, representation, and justice. Its activity is collaborative, sustained through digital communication, and oriented toward collective action rather than individual achievement. Learning emerges through relationships, through conversation, negotiation, and creative work, rather than through prescribed content. The DtCSG therefore enacts the core principles of Networked Learning, including collaboration, dialogue, and knowledge-making through shared inquiry

(Networked Learning, 2020). As I will articulate below, the DtCSG indeed extends these principles by showing how such ideals depend on ongoing labour, ethical relation, and attention to difference.

The following analysis explores how this networked learning takes material and ethical form through the group's creative and collaborative practice. It focuses on two intertwined dimensions of that practice. The first concerns how speculative imagination becomes a collective pedagogical process through artistic and reflexive experimentation. The second concerns how solidarity operates as the ethical and infrastructural condition that sustains collaboration under uneven digital and institutional circumstances.

Speculative Futures as Collective Pedagogy

In the Steering Group, speculation is not a plan for tomorrow; it is a shared practice that helps people stay with the work today. Members imagine otherwise through small acts, creative artefacts, and conversation that moves between the practical and the poetic. These gestures are not add-ons; they are how inquiry unfolds. The futures that appear in the group are provisional and situated. They emerge from within constraint and carry the marks of it, keeping imagination close to the realities of digital learning, institutional fatigue, and uneven access (Houlden & Veletsianos, 2023). Participants often described the group not as a committee but as a space; a space of possibility to be precise. During one early meeting, when the question of writing an agenda arose, Dilan laughed and said, "Maybe we should let the agenda find us". This remark became a shared motto. Rather than setting outcomes in advance, the group allowed structure to emerge through practice. This echoes what Bayne (2024) call learning futures as practice rather than projection. The group enacted this principle by letting speculation guide process rather than product.

Suhana, reflecting later, said, "Sometimes it's the waiting that teaches us. We wait for people to come online, for the document to load, for the words to make sense. That is when we learn how to be with each other". Her statement reveals how the rhythms of digital connection shape the pedagogy itself. Waiting becomes part of the learning design, resonating with arguments that digital social justice depends on recognising hidden temporal and affective labour (Oztok, 2019).

The group's imagination of the future did not take the form of institutional reform or formal strategy. It appeared instead through metaphors that emphasised intimacy and transience. Thandiwe said:

I would like to see it grow, but not like a programme or something formal. More like small fires, sometimes connecting, sometimes not". Lila added, "It should be leaking, contagious. If someone takes something and reuses it somewhere else, that is the future, not something we scale.

These images of "small fires" and "leaks" resist the managerial language of innovation that dominates speculative education. They align with Ross' (2022) call for partial, affective, and non-scalar futures that remain accountable to local conditions. The participants' metaphors imagine growth as dispersal, not expansion; movement as translation, not replication.

Artefacts created by the group materialise this collective speculation. Mariana's Patchwork Interface began as a late-night experiment. The collage combined screenshots, emojis, and chat fragments in multiple languages, creating a chaotic digital tapestry. When shared, it prompted laughter, then a pause, followed by a discussion about how seamless interface design hides linguistic difference. Mariana explained, "We use English, but not the same English. The platform looks clean, but it's not neutral. The mess is real, so I kept it messy". Her statement echoes Bayne's (2024) argument that digital education aesthetics often erase the complexity of human and cultural difference. Amira's Fragment Diary developed this reflection on invisibility and delay. She compiled unread chat lines, emojis, and timestamps into a single vertical image that scrolled like a feed. When she presented it, Dilan typed in the chat, "This is exactly how the group feels". The diary became a shared point of recognition. Amira explained later that she made it because "the unread messages kept haunting me; it's not about missing something, it's about realising that silence is also work". Her piece performs what Oztok (2019) calls the hidden curriculum of participation; that is, the unseen labour of waiting, attending, and being available.

Thandiwe's Policy Poem emerged during a session when her internet connection repeatedly dropped. She typed continuously despite the interruptions, and the final text included repeated fragments: "... reconnecting ... policy ... waiting ... justice ... unstable ...". She kept the lag visible in the text, later explaining, "I thought the delay was part of the poem. The gap is the real world we live in". Her decision to treat breakdown as content aligns with Fawns' (2019) notion of the postdigital entanglement between human and technical conditions, where disruption becomes part of learning rather than its failure.

Thandiwe later expanded on this reflection in an interview, linking the experience of technological instability to the ethics of collaboration:

When everything is unstable, you start to listen differently. You pay attention to the tone of a pause or to the sound of someone rejoining the call. That's where the real collaboration is. It's not about finishing the task but noticing how we hold each other in the breaks. Maybe that's the future we keep talking about ... the one that already exists in the gaps we survive together.

Thandiwe's insight moves the discussion from creative artefact to ethical method. As a student based in Johannesburg coordinating meetings across five time zones, she lived the infrastructural fragility that others only glimpsed. Her comment reframes instability from obstacle to pedagogy. The "listening differently" she describes is not metaphorical but material as an attunement to rhythm, silence, and digital noise as indicators of relation. It turns the politics of attention into collective method: a way of staying accountable to each other's presence and absence (Oztoğ, 2019). In Thandiwe's account, the group's speculative future is not imagined ahead but sensed in real time, within the interstices of delay. Fieldnotes from that meeting describe how the group received the Policy Poem: "There is laughter, a pause, and then someone says quietly, 'It is us, but written differently'". The response demonstrates how artefacts operate as collective mirrors, prompting both recognition and reflection. Through humour and vulnerability, participants reframe failure as knowledge.

Another session produced a piece titled *Still Here*, an audio recording of ambient meeting sounds like keyboards, background chatter, a long sigh. It played at the start of the next meeting. The group listened without speaking for nearly a minute before Dilan said, "It sounds like the network breathing". The comment captures networked learning as embodied and fragile.

Together, these artefacts enact what speculative education scholars describe as performative imagination (Ross, 2022). They transform creative acts into analytical tools that make the politics of digital work perceptible. They refuse the expectation of clarity or closure, insisting that learning remains uncertain and collaborative. "I don't think it should be polished", Suhana said near the end of the project. "If it's messy, it's honest. That's how we know it's ours". Her reflection summarises the ethos of the group. Speculation here is not about design or prediction but about presence. It teaches by showing how imagination and accountability can coexist inside the uneven infrastructures of digital life. In this mode, the DtCSG performs what Networked Learning has long theorised but rarely made visible: knowledge-making as relational, embodied, and collective (Networked Learning, 2020).

Solidarity as Situated, Ethical, and Infrastructural

Solidarity in the Steering Group was not declared; it was made and remade through ordinary acts that held the group together. It was never about agreement or unity but about the ongoing work of maintenance, translation, and repair. Participants built solidarity through care and attention to difference. It was through actions that turned the ideals of collaboration into lived coordination. What emerged was not harmony but a system of small adjustments that allowed the network to survive its own fragility. Fieldnotes from one session capture this texture of maintenance: "The meeting begins slowly. Someone types 'Hi' and waits. Another replies with an emoji. Cameras are off. A third voice says, 'Can you hear me now?' before dropping out again. Ten minutes later, everyone is here. The call feels quieter than usual. Dilan suggests we just talk without an agenda. There is laughter. Someone sighs, someone says, 'I needed this.'". These moments might look insignificant, but they reveal the group's ethic of presence. The participants recognised that showing up, even in partial or glitching form, was itself an act of solidarity. This is the embodiment of care as the practice of maintaining connection in the face of breakdown (Tronto, 2013).

Translation was one of the clearest sites where this ethic became visible. Every meeting carried layers of linguistic and disciplinary difference. The fieldnotes describe one discussion about revising a sentence in the curriculum statement: "Mariana reads the line aloud. Amira repeats it more slowly. Thandiwe paraphrases it: 'If we say decolonising, we must mean who decides what counts as knowledge.' There is a pause. Mariana nods and says, 'Yes, that's what I wanted to say, but better.'". This act of slow translation was more than language work; it was pedagogy. It transformed mutual incomprehension into a collective way of thinking. It demonstrated that understanding in a network is built through restatement and patience rather than through immediate agreement. The ethical performance of solidarity means that collaboration requires continuous negotiation of difference sustained through acts of trust and reciprocity (Oztoğ, 2019). The pace of these exchanges was deliberate. The group resisted the tendency to rush toward clarity. Lila described it later as "working in a rhythm that keeps everyone visible". In her interview she explained, "Sometimes it feels like the meeting moves in waves. When one of us speaks, the rest pull back a little. Then someone else joins in. It's like a tide that keeps balance". Her metaphor captures care time: a temporality that values attention over efficiency (de La Bellacasa, 2017).

Solidarity also appeared in how the group managed infrastructure. The network was fragile: connections dropped, audio lagged, documents failed to sync. The group adapted not by complaining but by reconfiguring its practice. Meetings shifted between video, chat, and shared documents depending on who had a chance to commit time and effort on that day. When a link broke, another member quietly pasted it back into the chat. When someone's screen froze, others waited, summarised, or messaged them privately to check in. One fieldnote describes Amira typing, "No worries, we can hear you, take your time". Another captures a collective sigh when a long-delayed voice finally returns: "Ah, there you are!" These small gestures formed the emotional infrastructure of the group. They turned breakdown into routine rather than crisis.

Thandiwe reflected on this dynamic in an interview:

We do not have the same time, the same bandwidth, or the same confidence. So we decide to move at the speed that makes us a group. That means waiting for someone to reconnect, repeating a point without making them feel behind, writing the summary so they do not have to ask. For me, that is solidarity. It is not a feeling; it is a set of actions that make the work possible for all of us.

Her words crystallise the politics of care within the network. She reframes solidarity as practice rather than sentiment. When conceptualised in this way, solidarity is a distributed form of maintenance that turns technological constraint into ethical relation. This perspective echoes the idea that infrastructure is not a static system but a relationship formed through use (Fawns, 2019). The group's shared pace, repetition, and summarising were infrastructural acts: they kept the network alive by adjusting to its weakest links. Repair work was one of the most recognisable forms of this solidarity. When a discussion was interrupted by a glitch, someone always took responsibility for documenting what had been said. In one meeting, after an unexpected disconnection, Dilan retyped three lost sentences in the chat, ending with "This is roughly what we agreed, right?". Others responded with corrections and thumbs-up emojis. The repair itself became a shared moment of laughter and relief. Repair is never neutral in collective action; it is the moral core of collective life (Oztok, 2019). By treating repair as a collective responsibility, the group redistributed power and accountability.

Authorship and consent offered another dimension of ethical solidarity. Whenever creative artefacts or written pieces were shared beyond the group, participants discussed how to attribute them. Some wanted recognition; others preferred anonymity or collective naming. These discussions were long and sometimes awkward but never avoided. They showed that representation was not a procedural afterthought but a pedagogical concern. Mariana captured this in her reflection: "It matters who is seen speaking for the group. Sometimes I want to be visible, but sometimes it's safer if it's 'we'". Her remark recalls that solidarity depends on negotiated authorship, where voice and visibility are shared responsibilities. Fieldnotes from the later months of the project record the emergence of what participants called "slow facilitation". Instead of assigning a chair, the group began each meeting by asking, "Who feels ready to hold the time today?". This question reframed leadership as care. Whoever volunteered guided the conversation but also watched the chat for signs of confusion or absence. When someone left unexpectedly, the facilitator would summarise their last comment for continuity. This distributed approach is a sign of "caring democracy", where responsibility circulates among those who participate rather than resting with a single figure (Tronto, 2013). The labour of maintaining collective action through care was most visible when technology often exposed the unevenness of access, especially for members joining from different continents and time zones. Fieldnotes describe one session where Thandiwe's voice broke repeatedly until she switched to the chat. Others slowed down, reading her lines aloud so her words could enter the conversation. The transcript shows a rhythm of alternation in the forms of typed and spoken voices interlacing to build meaning. Afterwards, Lila noted, "I realised we made a different kind of discussion today, one that could not happen if we all had perfect connections". Her observation testifies that postdigital learning is inherently entangled with its infrastructures and that awareness of those entanglements is itself pedagogical (Fawns, 2019).

The infrastructure can bring absences and silences to any networked setting. Indeed, the group's solidarity was tested most visibly during moments of silence. In one reflective session, the fieldnotes record a six-minute pause after Dilan asked, "What does accountability feel like?" Cameras were off; the chat remained empty. Silence was stubborn and palpable until a notification popped up: Thandiwe typed, "It feels like this". The comment was met with laughter and relief. The silence turned from discomfort into shared meaning. It became an example of what Ahmed calls living with the weight of relation, where connection is maintained not through constant activity but through mutual endurance (Gaztambide-Fernández, Rubén et al., 2022).

Across these encounters, solidarity functioned as the ethical and infrastructural glue of the network. It depended on care, translation, and repair rather than harmony or consensus. It was situated because it grew out of specific digital and institutional constraints. It was ethical because it kept members accountable to each other's limits. And

it was infrastructural because it involved the continual reorganisation of time, labour, and attention. The DtCSG demonstrates that the ideals of networked learning, like those big concepts of collaboration, reciprocity, dialogue are only realised when solidarity is treated as ongoing material work. By centring these small acts of maintenance, the group transforms solidarity from rhetoric into pedagogy, showing that learning together requires holding, waiting, and mending as much as thinking or speaking.

Part V – The Reflection: Rethinking Networked and Collective Pedagogy

This study began by asking what networked learning looks like when its central ideals are examined in practice rather than assumed in theory. Specifically, it set out to investigate how values often taken as foundational to networked learning, such as trust, reciprocity, and collaboration, are actually produced, sustained, negotiated, and at times strained or broken within collective activity. In doing so, the study also addressed a wider concern in educational theory, namely that collective pedagogies are frequently discussed at a distance from the social, political, and material conditions through which learning takes place. By grounding the analysis in the work of the Decolonising the Curriculum Steering Group (DtCSG), the study treats networked learning not as a stable arrangement but as an ongoing accomplishment. Learning is approached as material, ethical, and processual, shaped by the everyday actions that hold relationships together over time. From this perspective, pedagogy is not simply a matter of design or intention, but of continuous ethical work. The use of Fluxus as an organising logic allowed this work to be studied as it unfolded, making speculation and solidarity visible as practices enacted within the network rather than as abstract principles applied to it.

1. Reframing the ideals of networked learning

Networked learning has consistently emphasised collaboration and dialogue as central to knowledge making (NLEC, 2020). These values have been foundational to the field and remain important. However, they are often treated as conditions that exist once networks are in place, rather than as outcomes that require ongoing work. What is less visible in much networked learning scholarship is how collaboration is sustained in practice, and what kinds of labour are required to keep networks functioning over time. The work of the Decolonising the Curriculum Steering Group brings this labour into view. It shows that connection depends on ethical and infrastructural practices such as waiting, translation, repair, and silence. These practices are not incidental. They structure how participation is made possible and how relationships are held together: the focus of networked learning from what networks are expected to provide to how they actually operate in situated conditions. In doing so, the study also speaks to arguments about the hidden curriculum of digital learning spaces, where norms of participation, availability, and voice are reproduced without being explicitly named (Oztok, 2019).

By examining how collaboration is maintained through uneven but collectively negotiated labour, the study challenges the idea that digital networks function as self-sustaining communities of dialogue (NLEC, 2020). Instead, it shows that networks persist through ongoing work that is affective, material, and infrastructural. This reframing moves networked learning beyond an idealised emphasis on reciprocity and towards a more grounded ethics of maintenance. It aligns networked learning with feminist theories of care, which emphasise responsibility and dependency (de La Bellacasa, 2017; Tronto, 2013), and with sociomaterial perspectives that understand learning as inseparable from the conditions through which it is enacted (Bayne, 2024).

2. Reclaiming speculation as critical and embodied imagination

This study also contributes to debates on speculative education by situating speculation within networked learning practice rather than treating it as a detached design exercise. While speculative education often frames futures as imagined scenarios or technological possibilities (Ross, 2022), the work of the DtCSG shows speculation operating as a form of participatory rehearsal in the present. Through its Fluxus informed approach, speculation is grounded in everyday networked experience, such as digital glitches, unfinished shared work, and moments of delay or fatigue. These conditions make visible how imagination is shaped by access, language, time, and institutional position, rather than being equally available to all participants. In this sense, speculation becomes accountable and situated, aligning with postcolonial critiques of universal futures (Ashcroft et al., 2024). By embedding speculation within the material and relational conditions of networked learning, the study shows how futures thinking can function as a critical resource for reflecting on how learning is organised, sustained, and constrained in practice, rather than as a projection removed from the network itself.

3. Solidarity as method and as ethics

Solidarity emerges in this research not as a theme but as a methodological stance. It functions simultaneously as method, ethic, and pedagogical condition. Through Fluxus's design logic, solidarity becomes visible in the rhythms and decisions of the group, like the patience of waiting for a connection, the redistribution of facilitation, the negotiation of authorship. These gestures transform solidarity from principle into method (Gaztambide-Fernández, Rubén et al., 2022). Theoretically, this responds to the underdeveloped treatment of ethics in networked learning scholarship. While the field has often invoked values like trust or care, it has rarely examined how they are produced and sustained under material constraint (Networked Learning, 2020). The DtCSG shows that solidarity is the ethical infrastructure that materialises these ideals. It bridges the gap between relational aspiration and digital practice by turning collective responsibility into a form of inquiry. This echoes that critical ethnography is a space where ethics and method are inseparable (Hammersley, 2006).

4. Rethinking collective pedagogy

Collective pedagogy is often described in terms of consensus and harmony, creating the impression that learning together emerges naturally through shared goals and equal participation (Oztok, 2019). This study argues instead that collective pedagogy is a negotiated and ongoing relation. Learning together involves remaining within friction rather than resolving it. The practices of the DtCSG, including slow facilitation, distributed authorship, and collaborative repair, show pedagogy operating as a process of ethical coordination rather than as a stable arrangement (Gaztambide-Fernández, Rubén et al., 2022). From this perspective, the absence of conflict is not a measure of collective success. What matters is the capacity to stay connected across difference. This reframing responds directly to the tendency to romanticise collective pedagogy as effortless togetherness. It shows instead that collectivity is sustained through difference, and that difference requires ongoing care. In this way, the study extends critiques of consensus and aligns with decolonial approaches that treat relation as something continuously negotiated rather than resolved (Ashcroft et al., 2024).

5. Rethinking networked and collective pedagogy

Taken together, these arguments call for a rethinking of both networked and collective pedagogy. Learning through networks needs to be understood not only as connection or dialogue, but as ongoing work of care and maintenance. In this study, solidarity functions as the ethical infrastructure that makes such work possible, while speculation provides a means of reflecting on it without detaching from practice. The work of the Decolonising the Curriculum Steering Group shows that these two cannot be separated. Imagination requires ethical grounding, and ethics requires space for imaginative reworking. By foregrounding uneven participation, fatigue, fragility, and moments of breakdown, the study challenges Networked Learning to move beyond idealised accounts of collaboration and to attend more carefully to the conditions under which collective learning is sustained. It argues that pedagogical theory must value the often invisible and affective labour that keeps networks functioning, and that future oriented educational research must begin with close attention to present practice, including the glitches, silences, and everyday negotiations through which learning actually takes place.

6. Closing thought

The work of the Decolonising the Curriculum Steering Group makes visible the ethics involved in staying connected. It shows that the future of collective pedagogy is not secured through design alone, but through repeated and often uneven acts of relation that sustain learning in practice. To rethink networked learning, then, is not to refine a structure or optimise a model, but to recognise it as a form of solidarity that must be enacted continuously, within shared constraints and limits.

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