Doing Networked Learning Research with AI: Creation and Interpretation

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Elevator Pitch

Generative AI is rapidly becoming part of networked learning environments—but how should we research learning when AI itself participates in meaning-making, interpretation, and analysis? This workshop invites researchers to move beyond seeing AI as a simple tool and instead engage with it as a methodological and epistemic collaborator. Through hands-on activities using generative AI for visual elicitation, qualitative analysis, and interpretive experimentation, participants will explore what it means to do networked learning research with AI. The workshop is designed for researchers who want practical methods, critical perspectives, and concrete ideas they can take back to their own qualitative projects—no technical expertise required, just curiosity and a willingness to rethink agency, data, and interpretation.

1. Intended Audience

This workshop is designed for scholars, early-career researchers, and doctoral students engaged in networked learning research, using qualitative research methodologies, and interested in using generative artificial intelligence (AI) for enhancing the quality as well as criticality of their qualitative inquiry projects. It welcomes those curious about how generative AI tools may transform not only networked learning practices but also the very ways we conduct research on such practices. Participants do not need prior technical expertise in AI. Instead, an openness to posthuman and sociomaterial theoretical and onto-epistemological perspectives, and an interest in rethinking human and non-human agency in networked learning research, will ensure meaningful engagement.

2. Workshop Description

Over the past decade, networked learning research has been engaged with posthumanist and sociomaterial turns that question human-centered assumptions about learning, agency, and knowledge production. Researchers have sought to understand learning as emergent from complex assemblages of human and non-human actors, technologies, materials, and discourses. The recent emergence of generative AI—including large language models and image-generating systems—has introduced a new layer of complexity. AI now participates in learning networks both as an object of study and as a collaborator in research practice. This dual role challenges researchers to rethink epistemological foundations and to experiment with new methodological assemblages.

This workshop addresses these challenges directly. We ask:

- How can we study networked learning phenomena that are increasingly mediated by AI?
- How might we use AI to assist in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data about such phenomena?
- What are the ethical and epistemological implications of doing research with AI as a co-actor?

Participants will engage in reflective and practical activities that span three phases of research—data collection, data analysis, and interpretation—each illustrated through hands-on exercises led by the hosts. The workshop is structured as an active learning environment that blends theoretical reflection, methodological experimentation, and collective discussion.

Proceedings of the Fifteenth International Conference on Networked Learning 2026,

Edited by: Declercq, L., Loeckx, J., De Laat, M., Dohn, N. B., Ryberg, T.

3. Participant Engagement

The workshop is highly participatory and dialogic. Participants will be invited to:

- Engage in collaborative conceptual mapping of the challenges and potentials of AI in networked learning research.
- Experiment hands-on with generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT and image generators such as DALL·E or Midjourney) to explore how prompts, models, and outputs can serve as data, analytic partners, and interpretive stimuli.
- Work in small groups to discuss AI's methodological implications in their own research contexts.

Throughout the session, the hosts will guide participants through the process of thinking with and doing with AI—encouraging curiosity, critique, and creativity.

4. Participant Outcomes

By the end of the workshop, participants will:

- Develop an understanding of how posthumanist and sociomaterial perspectives inform research on AI-mediated networked learning.
- Acquire practical skills for incorporating generative AI into qualitative research workflows—from data creation to interpretive synthesis.
- Critically reflect on AI as both a research instrument and an epistemic actor that shapes meaning-making processes.
- Leave with concrete examples, prompt ideas, and analytic guidelines to apply in their own studies.

5. Workshop Alignment with Conference Themes

This workshop aligns closely with the Networked Learning Conference's commitment to rethinking connections, knowledge, and agency in learning networks. It extends the conference's long-standing dialogue on posthumanism and sociomateriality by positioning AI as a transformative actor that blurs traditional distinctions between learner, researcher, and tool. Through this exploration, we aim to advance methodological innovation in networked learning research and contribute to the collective reimagining of how learning networks—and research networks—evolve in the era of generative AI, while being mindful of AI challenges, weaknesses and disadvantages. However, as it seems that AI is here to stay, especially in educational spaces, we offer ways to engage with AI in critical and creative ways, in the spirit of networked learning.

6. Workshop Process and Activities

Opening (5 min)

- Setting the conceptual stage
- Opening lecture on posthumanist turns in networked learning; group discussion on how generative AI complicates both research objects and methods.

Part 1: Data Collection and Representation: GenAI images in Interviews (40 min)

- Exploring AI-generated images as research data
- Demonstration of image generation for interview-based research as "AI photovoice" or "Visual AI Thinkaloud"; group task to design AI-generated visual stimuli for a network learning related educational inquiry; reflection on data (representation affordances) for research inquiry.

Participants will engage in exploring how they could engage their participants (who could be also students) in using images generated with AI for research purposes in the context of interviewing. The method explored adapts photovoice into an "AI photovoice" as well as thinkaloud interviews into "Visual AI thinkaloud" ones.
In the first part of the workshop (10 min), we will jointly explore how GenAI images have been used (or not) by participants and in networked learning research context, considering why this has been/would be useful, when, to support what kind of research questions or consideration, and what challenges can be noted.

Then, in the next stage of the workshop (20 min) colleagues will be invited to use a free GenAI image platform such as Promeai (https://www.promeai.pro/ai-image-generation). In particular, they will create images in response to a broader/general network learning and workshop related research question, and few prompt (analytical) questions.
In the final part of the workshop (10 min), colleagues will provide feedback in terms of key takeaways from the workshop, what the method offers, specifically focusing on generated AI image representational affordances, which would include its affordance to mediate a networked kind of thinking in interviewing as a pre-requisite for a networked kind of analysis when these methods are used, which Nataša will share following the workshop.
This workshop session is imagined to result in a collaborative co-written article on using GenAI images in networked learning research, especially as part of a new relational, sociomaterial and posthuman turn in the field, as a follow up to the workshop. All participants will be invited to opt in or out of this collective article that will build on the workshop. The participating colleagues who will be part of the collective article will provide their contact e-mails, and Nataša will get in touch, following the workshop.

Part 2: Data Analysis & Interpretation (40 min)

- Interpreting with AI as an analytical partner
- Collaborative text-based analysis using ChatGPT/CoPilot/Gemini; comparing human and AI interpretive patterns; discussion of epistemic responsibility and interpretive authority.

Participants will be asked to work on a set of data from a Networked Learning project in which Nina was involved some years ago. After a brief introduction to the technical and communicative aspects of the networked learning setting which the project focused on, participants will be presented with anonymized transcripts from the project and asked to analyze and interpret these data in groups.
The first round (20 minutes in all) of data analysis will be done bottom-up, without theoretical guidance, in line with recommendations from data-driven approaches to analysis. This first round of analysis will then be discussed, including the extent to which analyses actually draw upon (unacknowledged) theoretical claims, rather than be data-driven. This will be done by asking AI to identify presuppositions in the analysis when comparing with the transcripts. Participants will discuss how well the presuppositions identified by AI align with claims they consciously subscribe to and whether some of the presuppositions might correspond to unacknowledged (biased?) understandings that they hold.
In the second round, AI will be asked to analyse the transcripts from different theoretical positions and to compare the interpretations. Participants will then compare these interpretations with their own initial analyses and discuss similarities and differences (10 minutes).

The third round (10 minutes) starts with Nina briefly indicating the theoretical focus of her own analysis of the transcripts and the interpretations this focus led to. This serves to open a final reflective discussion on

- The process and viability of data-driven analysis with AI
  - The role of theory (acknowledged or not) in data-driven analysis
  - The use of AI to identify blind spots and unacknowledged presuppositions in our analyses
- The use of AI to perform theory-led analysis of interpretation
  - Keeping the human in the loop in analysis
- Epistemic responsibility and interpretive authority in collaborative text-based analysis with AI

Closing (5 min): All Participants

- Whole-group reflection on the methodological implications of AI
- Questions and Answers

Throughout the workshop, participants will engage with shared prompts, sample datasets, and collaborative note-taking (via shared digital document).

7. Concluding Remarks

Doing Networked Learning Research with AI invites the networked learning community to collectively explore an emergent methodological terrain. Rather than positioning AI merely as an external instrument, the workshop treats it as a participant in the research assemblage—a co-creator of data, meaning, and reflexivity. By connecting conceptual debates about posthumanism with hands-on methodological experimentation, this session aims to

equip participants with both theoretical sensitivity and practical strategies to navigate the evolving intersection of networked learning and artificial intelligence.

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