

Ethical and Epistemological Dilemmas in Doing Networked Learning Research with AI

Kyungmee Lee, Department of Education, Learning Sciences Institute, Seoul National University, k.lee23@smu.ac.kr

Nina Bonderup Dohn, Department of Design, Media and Educational Science, University of Southern Denmark, nina@sdu.dk

Natasa Lackovic, Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University, n.lackovic@lancaster.ac.uk

1. Elevator Pitch

This round table continues the conversation initiated in the workshop *Doing Networked Learning Research with AI* at this conference, expanding it toward the ethical, relational, and epistemological dilemmas that arise when AI becomes a research collaborator rather than a mere tool. While the workshop focused on how to use generative AI in qualitative research processes—data collection, analysis, and interpretation—this round table invites participants to engage with deeper questions about what it means to do such research responsibly and reflexively. We will discuss how AI’s participation in research assemblages reconfigures human–non-human relations, challenges conventional notions of ethical accountability, and complicates the epistemic boundaries of interpretation. Using Barad’s concept of the agential cut, we will explore how researchers make decisions about what—and who—counts in knowledge production, and what ethical consequences follow from those decisions. Importantly, this session is a standalone discussion: while it directly follows the workshop and extends its themes, participants who did not attend the workshop will be fully able to engage and contribute. The framing and discussion prompts will ensure an inclusive, open entry point for all.

2. Goal

The round table aims to co-create a shared understanding of the ethical and epistemological challenges of researching with AI in the context of networked learning. Our collective goals are to:

- Identify and unpack emerging ethical tensions—including transparency, authorship, bias, and relational responsibility—when AI acts as a research collaborator.
- Examine epistemological dilemmas about interpretive authority and meaning-making in human–AI research partnerships.
- Explore relational ethics that recognize entanglements among humans, technologies, data, and discourses.
- Reflect on “agential cuts”—the methodological boundaries that include or exclude particular actors and practices—and their ethical implications.
- Co-develop shared propositions or guiding questions for responsible, reflexive, and creative research practice with AI in networked learning contexts.

The aim is not to reach consensus, but to cultivate ongoing dialogue and mutual understanding across different research traditions and positionalities.

3. Context and Rationale

Generative AI technologies such as ChatGPT, DALL·E, and Claude have become both objects and agents within educational and research networks. They shape what we can know, how we analyze, and what we consider valid evidence. As researchers increasingly employ these systems to assist in data generation and interpretation, new ethical and epistemological questions arise:

- When an AI co-authors or co-interprets, who holds responsibility for meaning and bias?
- How should relational ethics evolve when the “other” in research is not only a human participant but also a computational entity?
- How transparent and reflexive must researchers be about their interactions with AI?

- What kinds of agential cuts do we make—knowingly or unknowingly—when we treat AI outputs as data, interpretation, or insight?

Following the workshop’s practical exploration of AI-assisted research, this round table turns toward philosophical, ethical, and relational inquiry. By integrating concepts from posthumanism, new materialism, and networked learning theory, participants will collectively interrogate how AI unsettles assumptions about agency, responsibility, and knowledge production.

4. Structure and Participant Engagement (1.5 hours)

i) Setting the Stage & Going around the table to introduce oneself (15 min)

Framing ethical and epistemological dilemmas in AI-mediated networked learning research: Short conceptual introduction by round table hosts linking this session to the earlier workshop; framing of relational ethics and agential cut; invitation for participants to share one ethical question or discomfort they have encountered.

ii) Provocations (15 min, by round table hosts)

Opening reflections on relational ethics and interpretive responsibility: Relational ethics in AI-generated and multimodal data; Epistemic accountability in AI-assisted interpretation.

iii) Collective Dialogue (40 min)

Exploring ethical and epistemological tensions together: Facilitated open dialogue structured around guiding questions and including the ethical questions raised by participants in the first Setting-the-Stage-phase; Collaborative documentation using a Google doc.

iv) Synthesis & Closing (20 min)

Co-developing ethical propositions: Participants collectively draft short propositions or questions that encapsulate key ethical concerns; reflection on next steps or collaborations.

5. Guiding Questions

- How does AI participation challenge our traditional research ethics grounded in human agency and intentionality?
- What forms of accountability and care emerge in human–AI research collaborations?
- How do we decide where to “cut”—what to include or exclude—when representing AI-mediated research processes?
- How might relational ethics guide our methodological decisions in future networked learning studies?

6. How Participants Will Be Engaged

The round table will be interactive, inclusive, and dialogic—not an expert-led panel. Engagement will be encouraged through:

- Accessible framing: brief conceptual orientation so those who did not attend the workshop can fully join the conversation.
- Small-group reflection: participants share examples or dilemmas from their own research contexts.
- Collective knowledge-building: live note-taking, mind-mapping, and synthesis to ensure shared ownership of insights.
- Co-authoring ethical propositions: groups formulate and share reflective principles, emphasizing plurality rather than consensus.

This participatory structure embodies the spirit of relational ethics, where understanding is co-produced through dialogue rather than instruction.

7. Expected Outcomes

- A collaboratively developed set of “ethical touchstones”—brief statements capturing shared concerns and values for AI-mediated research.
- A networked learning ethics working document (open Google Doc or shared repository) for ongoing post-conference collaboration.
- Potential for a co-authored position paper or symposium proposal on “Ethics and Epistemology in AI-integrated Networked Learning Research.”

Through this follow-up discussion, participants will leave with a deeper appreciation of how ethics, epistemology, and methodology intertwine in the age of AI, and with a sense of community committed to exploring these complexities further.

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