

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION REPORT



Introduction:

My Leadership in Action project took place in Boston with the Timothy Smith Network (TSN), a nonprofit dedicated to bridging the digital divide. I chose this placement because it combined two passions of mine: teaching and science. This experience allowed me to step into the role of instructor, challenge myself in a new cultural context, and reflect on the impact that education can have on young people and communities.

What is TSN ?

The Timothy Smith Network (TSN) is a nonprofit organization based in Boston, Massachusetts, dedicated to bridging the digital divide in underserved communities. It was created in 2003 with the vision to empower local communities by improving access to technology and digital education.

Mission and Purpose

TSN's core mission is to provide equitable access to technology and digital skills for residents of Roxbury and surrounding neighborhoods. By creating spaces where people of all ages can access computers, the internet, and structured training, the organization helps prepare community members for higher education, workforce opportunities, and broader participation in today's digital economy. TSN also collaborates with partners such as Microsoft, the City of Boston, Boston Public Schools, and the Boston Public Library, ensuring that its programs remain impactful and up to date with evolving technology needs.

BDA

One of TSN's flagship initiatives is the Boston Design Academy (BDA), launched in 2018. This program focuses on STEAM education (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) for Boston

Public Schools high school students. Through project-based learning, mentoring, and paid internships, the program helps prepare young people to become innovators and leaders in technology-driven fields.

The program has two main tracks:

Digital Design Intensive (DDI): Focused on digital creativity and communication. Students learn branding, portfolio design, 3D modeling, animation, and social media graphics. They work with tools such as Canva, Wix, Tinkercad, Fusion 360, and Unreal Editor for Fortnite. By the end, each student builds a portfolio website and produces prototypes or digital projects that demonstrate their skills.

Tech Your Health (TYH): Focused on the intersection of technology and health. Students explore wearable devices, product design, and innovative health solutions. They collaborate with community organizations and visit local innovation hubs, linking their projects to real-world health challenges. The outcome is usually a health-focused concept or prototype developed through design thinking and teamwork.

My Lia journey:

From the beginning of my research for a LIA, I knew I wanted to work on an educational programme. When I think about who I am today and the path I have followed, I am deeply grateful for all the people who have taught me along the way. Their guidance has given me knowledge that I now carry as tools, like weapons, to pursue my goals. This is why I love to teach. I believe that knowledge is the most powerful weapon we have as humans.

At EPFL, I had the chance to be a teaching assistant for courses in calculus, thermodynamics, and relativistic mechanics. These experiences showed me how even small actions can have a big impact on students' understanding and confidence. Teaching allowed me to give back and contribute positively to someone's learning journey.

When I discovered that the Timothy Smith Network (TSN) was offered as a central LIA, I immediately knew it was the perfect fit for me. TSN's programmes combine education, science, and technology, giving me the opportunity to teach programming and electrical circuits with Arduino. At the same time, being part of a central LIA meant I would also meet and collaborate with other Laidlaw Scholars from around the world, something I was very excited about.

With TSN, I worked as the Programming and Arduino Instructor for the *Tech Your Health* programme. During the first weeks, I taught 16 students (aged 13 to 18) the basics of Python programming, before moving on to coding with Arduino. After this, I supported them in designing and building their prototypes. Teaching these concepts from scratch was challenging, and managing so many prototypes at the same time was intense. Yet, it was also extremely rewarding to see the students progress step by step, and to witness their projects come to life.



Reflection about my experience:

Through this experience, I gained a much deeper respect for teachers. Before, I thought that teaching was not particularly difficult as long as you had passion and the ability to explain concepts clearly. For me, explaining a complex notion to another student often feels intuitive. However, I realized that teaching an entire field is a completely different challenge, especially when students are starting from scratch. It required careful planning: identifying every tool they would need, deciding which concepts to introduce first, and building up their knowledge step by step, all within a very short amount of time. This was demanding, but also an invaluable learning experience for me.

I also became very attached to the students. It was not easy for them to spend their summer working and learning instead of just enjoying their vacation. Yet they showed remarkable dedication and produced incredible projects, especially considering their age. I am truly proud of them.

The highlight of my LIA came on the final day, when TSN gave out prizes to some of the students. The biggest prize was a personal computer, I was asked to help choose the recipients. This was not an easy decision. One of the students chosen was Michael. He did not have the best prototype or the most advanced idea, but what struck me was his constant positivity. Every day he came with a big smile, and he celebrated each step of progress in his project as a victory. During breaks, he loved to draw on the laptop that TSN had lent him for the program. He has eight siblings, and his family could not afford to buy him a computer in the near future which will create a brake on his creativity and curiosity.

Giving him that laptop felt incredibly meaningful. When his name was announced, he was so surprised and overjoyed that he called his brothers and mother on stage to share the moment and take a picture together. It was one of the most emotional scenes I have ever experienced. I will remember it for the rest of my life as one of the happiest and most moving moments I have ever attended. I almost cried with emotion.

Outside of work with laidlaw scholars:

Beyond my work with TSN, I spent a lot of time with the interns and other Laidlaw Scholars. Together we explored Boston and its surroundings, sharing experiences that gave me a real taste of American life. From Harvard to MIT, from the city center to the beach, from national parks to New York, and from burgers to Mexican food, I experienced many different sides of the United States.

One of the highlights was a weekend trip to New York City. It was an intense few days, and in exchange for some hours of sleep we managed to visit nearly every major hotspot in the city. Although it was my second time there, I was still impressed by the scale and energy of such famous places. That said, I also realized that New York, with all its excitement, is not a place where I would want to live.

In contrast, Boston offered a calmer atmosphere. While less overwhelming in terms of monuments, it is rich in history and has a fascinating balance between traces of the past that we must remember and the buildings of tomorrow that point to the future. I enjoyed discovering the city center and appreciating this unique blend.

TSN also gave us the unforgettable opportunity to attend a baseball game: the Boston Red Sox against the Houston Astros. It was a really intense match with a happy ending for Boston. Fortunately, we had just enough time to learn the rules before the final innings, so we could join the supporters in shouting and singing with genuine excitement.

To make the experience even more special, my parents visited me during my last week. Together, we went to a nearby national park with a beautiful beach, not far from the location where the film *Jaws* was shot. It was the perfect way to close my stay in Boston.

Conclusion:

My Leadership in Action project with the Timothy Smith Network was an experience that made an impact in my personal growth and my perspective on leadership. I developed a stronger understanding of the challenges of teaching, especially when starting from the basics. I learned the importance of patience, structure, and adaptability in guiding students through new concepts and supporting them as they built their projects.

Beyond the classroom, this experience also allowed me to connect with other Laidlaw Scholars, discover Boston's unique blend of history and modernity, and explore different facets of American culture.

This LIA reinforces my conviction that teaching and knowledge-sharing are central to my path as a leader. It reminded me that leadership is not only about guiding projects or making decisions, but also about empowering others to grow, to discover their potential, and to access opportunities they might not otherwise have. This is a lesson that I will remember for my personal life, my studies and my future career.

