



Laidlaw Cohort 2025

Summer 2 Reflective Report – LiA and Personal Development

Building Agency: Leading Critical AI Literacy Workshops for Secondary School Students

Author:

Rachel Ranjith

Supervisor:

Tania Duarte, We and AI

September 2026



Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Project Overview	3
Project Summary	3
Project Objectives	3
Alignment with Laidlaw LiA Criteria	4
Impact	4
Artefacts and Materials	5
Personal and Professional Development	7
Engagement with Peers, Supervisors, and Other Experts	7
Personal Development	7
Leadership	7
Reflection	8
What Went to Plan	8
What Didn't Go to Plan	8
Conclusion	8



Project Overview

Project Summary

For this Leadership in Action project, I partnered with We and AI, a UK-based not-for-profit on public AI. The aim was to adapt and deliver a series of critical AI literacy workshops for secondary school students, building on the organisation's established methodology and best practice principles. I was involved in aligning We and AI's existing approach and developing the curriculum materials. I also trained volunteer facilitators during the workshop series across August as well as producing a handover pack so that We and AI can continue to run these workshops independently in the future.

The project was created with the intention of addressing a growing need for critical AI literacy among young people, equipping them with the tools to engage thoughtfully and confidently with an increasingly AI-driven world. From recommendation algorithms that shape the content they watch and read to chatbots positioned as companions and confidants, AI has saturated their immediate environment, and yet formal education has been slow to equip them with the frameworks needed to engage with these technologies thoughtfully. We and AI occupies an important space in addressing this gap, and this project represented an opportunity to extend their reach to a secondary school audience in a meaningful and sustainable way.

Project Objectives

The primary goal was to adapt We and AI's existing methodology into an engaging, age-appropriate Critical AI Literacy workshop series for secondary school students, structured across four thematic sessions.

To facilitate this, a co-objective was the development of curriculum resources, including slide decks, facilitator notes, structured activities, and discussion guides for each session.

A parallel objective was to recruit, train, and lead a team of volunteer facilitators, equipping them to deliver the workshops consistently and confidently in a way that reflected We and AI's approach.

Alongside facilitation training, I aimed to iterate and improve each session based on feedback gathered from the facilitators after each session.

Finally, I also aimed to produce a complete handover pack, including the full curriculum, facilitation guides, a feedback summary, and sustainability recommendations.



Alignment with Laidlaw LiA Criteria

In terms of learning in a new and personally challenging environment, leading educational workshops for secondary school students in a community setting in partnership with an external organisation required real adaptation. Facilitation is a different skill set from lecturing or tutoring, and developing it in real time was an incredibly rewarding experience.

The project also addressed the criterion of working with communities in need. Partnering with We and AI to reach young people who may lack access to quality critical AI literacy education was central to the project's purpose. AI systems are already shaping the opportunities and experiences of young people from all backgrounds, but the critical tools to interrogate those systems are not equally distributed.

In terms of making the world a sustainably better place and generating positive societal impact, the project was designed to carry forward. Creating reusable materials and trained facilitators means the impact extends well beyond the six weeks of the placement, as evidenced by the handover pack and sustainability plan.

The project also provided substantial opportunity to develop Laidlaw leadership skills. Working with a team of volunteer facilitators, managing a project end-to-end, communicating across stakeholders, and adapting in real time to feedback and unexpected challenges all contributed to genuine growth in practical leadership.

Finally, the project was delivered overseas in partnership with a UK-based organisation, satisfying the criterion of learning through service internationally, and required both travel and meaningful adaptation to a new working context.

Impact

The direct impact of the project was felt by the secondary school students who participated in the workshop series, gaining foundational critical AI literacy and developing the thinking skills to engage more thoughtfully with AI systems they encounter in everyday life.

The organisational impact for We and AI comes from the tested, ready-to-deliver workshop series, a full curriculum pack, and trained facilitators, meaningfully extending their capacity to reach younger audiences.

The sustainable legacy of the project lies in its handover materials and sustainability plan, which ensure the workshops can continue to be delivered and iterated upon after the placement ends.

For me personally, the placement provided hands-on leadership experience in project management, team training, stakeholder communication, and community engagement that I could not have gained in a purely academic setting.

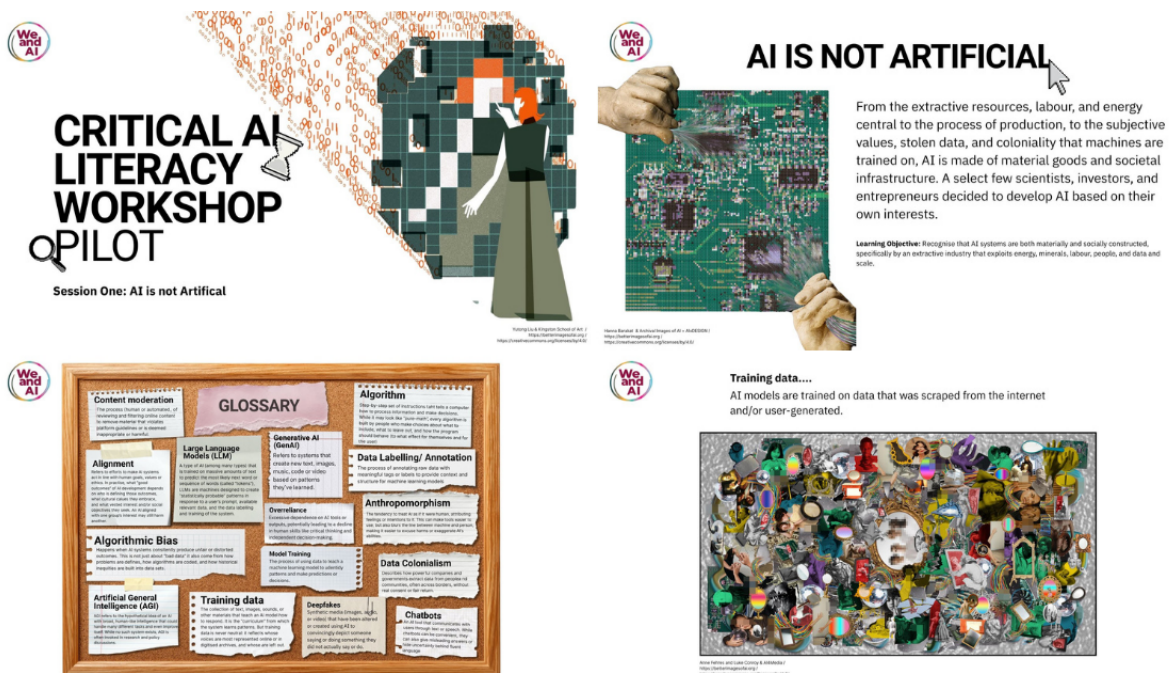
Artefacts and Materials

The curriculum materials I developed included slide decks, facilitator notes, structured in-session activities, and discussion guides.

- The first session “**AI is Not Artificial**” challenged students' assumptions about what AI actually is and where it comes from, grounding abstract technology in the very human labour, data, and decisions behind it.
- The second session “**AI is Not Intelligent**” unpacked the gap between how AI systems are popularly imagined and how they actually function, building a more accurate and less mystified understanding.
- The third session “**AI is Not Neutral**” introduced students to questions of bias, power, and whose values get encoded into the systems that increasingly shape their lives.
- The fourth session brought everything together in a hands-on workshoping format, giving students space to apply the frameworks they'd developed across the series to real scenarios, consolidate their thinking, and leave with tools they could carry forward.

The aim throughout was to produce materials that were genuinely age-appropriate while being engaging and accessible, all without being patronising and giving facilitators enough structure to feel confident while leaving room to respond to the energy and questions in each room.

Set 1: Slides from workshop packages



CRITICAL AI LITERACY WORKSHOP PILOT

Session Two: AI is not Intelligent

AI IS NOT INTELLIGENT

Learning Objective: Understand that "intelligence" in AI is very distinct from human intelligence, which, within that, is not well understood or defined. Highlight how AI is simply a computational process of analysing and interpreting large aggregates of data.

Training data

the red bus late the red bus big red bus red buses
the bus was red buses are red

Prompt

The number 15 bus is bright...

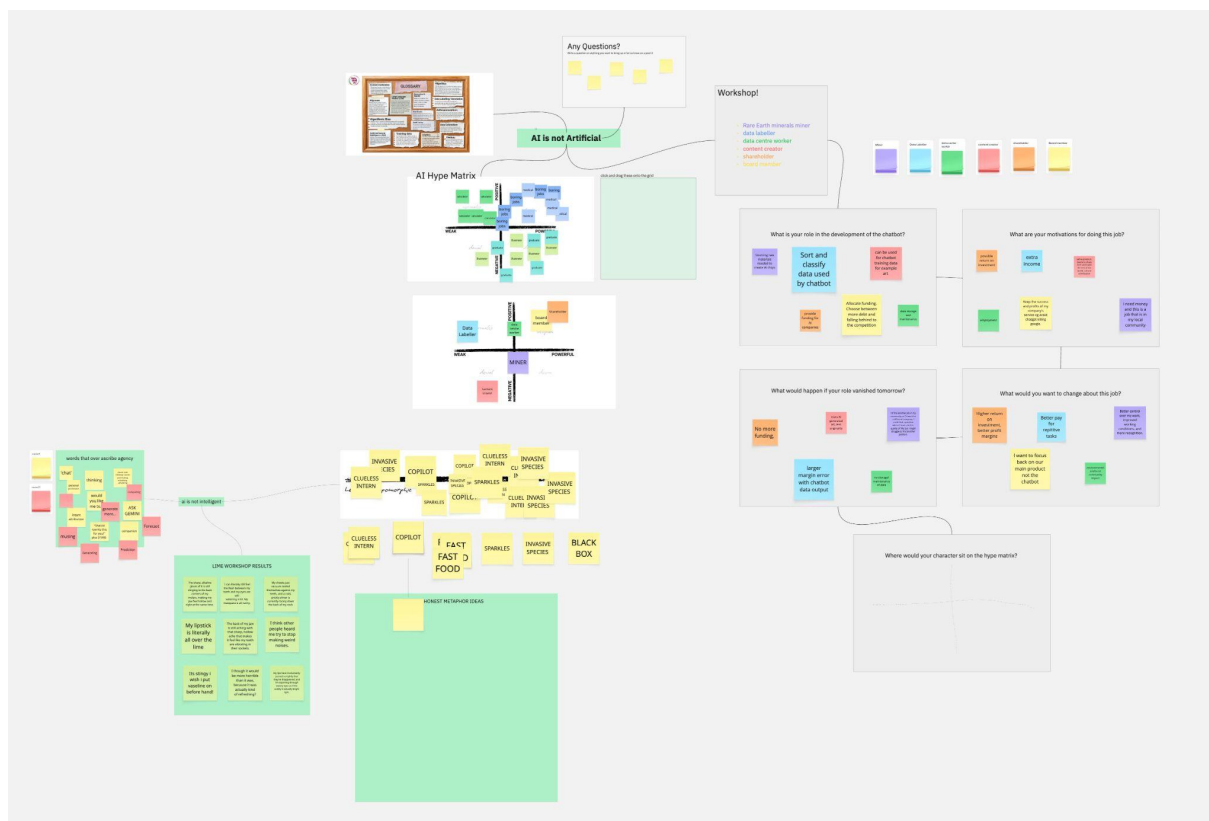
Statistically improbable words: late, house, warrent, joke

Statistically probable word: red

Pattern recognition...

GenAI models that most people think of as "intelligent" are actually just computers that recognise patterns in millions or billions of data points to produce images, videos, audio, or text. They deliver outputs by analysing and summarising massive amounts of data.

Set 2: Example participant interaction Miro board





Personal and Professional Development

Engagement with Peers, Supervisors, and Other Experts

My primary point of contact was Tania Duarte, founder of We and AI, who served as both local supervisor and mentor throughout the placement. It was a great learning experience, as I was working in an organisation she had built, within a methodology she had developed, while also bringing my own initiative and ideas to the table.

Beyond Tania, I worked closely with other members of the We and AI team in the co-development of the curriculum. These were genuinely collaborative relationships, and we each brought our own expertise, instincts, and investment in the outcome. Learning to work through differences constructively was a valuable interpersonal lesson of the placement.

Additionally, interacting with the facilitators themselves was a learning moment as they bring their own lived experience. Training and leading a group of volunteers required being motivating and clear and building genuine confidence rather than just procedural knowledge. People brought varying levels of prior knowledge and comfort with the subject matter, and it was important that the training would address everyone's knowledge bases and fill the gaps accordingly.

Personal Development

On a personal level, this placement pushed me into territory that was uncomfortable in productive ways. I came in feeling relatively grounded in the subject matter but I quickly discovered that knowing a topic and being able to facilitate a room of secondary school students through it are quite different skills. Being able to convey knowledge in an engaging way, managing unexpected developments, and allowing for healthy discussion were great learning moments. It's something I wasn't prepared for, and working within that uncertainty, and then reflecting on it honestly afterwards, was a meaningful part of my development.

Leadership

In terms of leadership, I came away having learnt different flavors of leadership in different contexts. Leading the facilitation team meant taking responsibility for their experience as much as the students', ensuring they felt equipped, supported, and genuinely part of something worth doing. Leading the project as a whole meant remaining involved across six weeks of stakeholder relationships, content development, live delivery, feedback loops, and handover planning, without losing sight of the original intent. On reflection, I think I managed to remain adaptable when required, and the growth that came from navigating those moments is incredibly gratifying.



Reflection

What Went to Plan

One of the things I felt most successful in was my ability to manage multiple competing priorities without losing momentum or enthusiasm. I balanced content development, facilitator relationships, stakeholder communication, and delivery. While that was demanding, I found I was able to fulfill them as required without being overwhelmed.

Equally important to me was maintaining the spirit of the project throughout. Critical AI literacy can easily become dry and pedantic, and I was determined that the workshops would feel energising rather than like a lecture. On a more personal level, I came into this project hoping to genuinely learn from the range of perspectives around me, and that goal was more than met. The diversity of experience and context that people brought to a genuinely universal issue made the work richer than I could have made it alone.

What Didn't Go to Plan

The original plan was to run an intensive bootcamp that would equip the volunteer facilitators to independently co-deliver the workshop sessions alongside the We and AI team. In practice, scheduling conflicts and availability made that model unworkable, and the format had to shift. What emerged instead were more open, collaborative jam sessions, with iterative conversations where facilitators' perspectives and ideas were folded directly into the materials rather than simply training them to deliver content that already existed.

There was also a recurring challenge around group dynamics. Getting participants to move past the initial awkwardness of contributing to a larger group took more active facilitation than anticipated. Drawing people out and managing the energy of a room where not everyone wanted to be the first to speak were skills I had to develop.

Conclusion

This project gave me the experience of leading something real, for people who had a genuine stake in the outcome, in a context that required constant adaptation. I came away with materials I'm proud of, relationships I value, and a clearer, more honest sense of my own leadership.