



“Charting the Course” Invited to UNU Macau AI Conference 2025

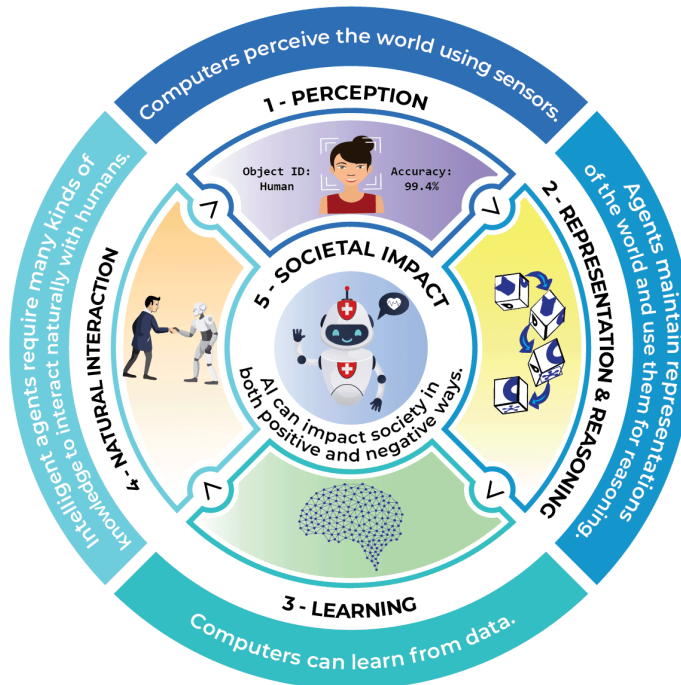
From North Carolina to Macau, Youth-Led AI Education Shines on the Global Stage

By Shuhan Li, Rishikesh Sankaran, & Roozbeh Aliabadi Ph.D.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping society, making early AI literacy and ethical understanding essential for young learners. K-12 AI education has gained tremendous momentum in the past years. Nevertheless, many resources still require coding skills or digital access, and often overlook ethics. At the same time, young people are stepping up as active creators who lead AI-driven initiatives to solve real-world problems. To support this momentum, we need inclusive, ethically grounded AI education that empowers all students to lead with purpose and innovation. “Charting the Course” does just that.

Rishikesh (Rishi) Sankaran - founder of FutureLead AI and a high school student based in Raleigh, North Carolina - has pioneered an innovative approach to advancing K-12 AI education. In March 2025, Rishi launched his weekend workshop entitled “Charting the Course” in collaboration with ReadyAI and Kramden Institute. The program assembled 18 students from Grade 5-9 to explore AI applications to solve real-world problems. Nearly half of the participating

students did not have prior experience with AI learning opportunities. Structured around the AI4K12 Five Big Ideas of AI framework, the program not only demystifies AI mechanisms through accessible instruction but also cultivates responsible AI usage for real-world problem-solving. Through quantifiable positive educational outcomes and compelling participant testimonials, “Charting the Course” stands out as a multimodal, project-oriented program led by youth and designed for youth.

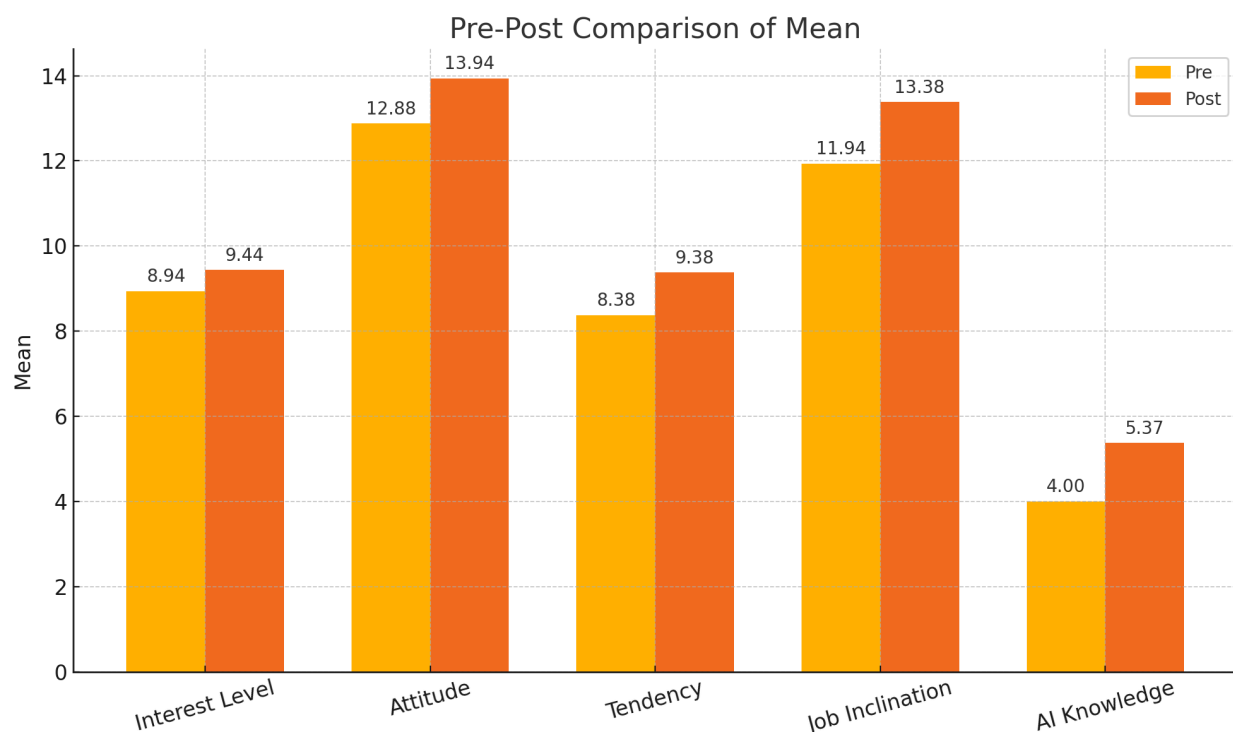


AI4K12 Five Big Ideas of AI (image courtesy of AI412)



Group photo of the second cohort, March 29

Both numbers and narratives have testified to the initial success of “Charting the Course” in empowering young learners along their AI literacy journey. The program has achieved measurable positive outcomes on students’ knowledge acquisition and curiosity retention. The program reinforces the pedagogical soundness of PBL, along with gamified learning and multimodal design. The extensive use of unplugged and group-based activities simultaneously develops computational thinking and collaborative problem-solving. Most importantly, “Charting the Course” reveals the tremendous potential of youth-led AI initiatives, paving the way for an inclusive, ethics-by-design, and equitable approach to democratizing digital fluency.



Histogram, Comparisons of Pre-Post Survey Results

ReadyAI is thrilled to announce that our research paper, “Charting the Course: Decoding K-12 AI Education at a Youth-Led Multimodal Workshop,” is accepted by the [UNU Macau AI Conference 2025](#). We firmly believe that this recognition further strengthens the promise of project-based AI workshops by youth, for youth. We are excited to share our insights with scholars, industry leaders, and students worldwide who convene in Macau this October to explore the future of human-centered AI.

“Charting the Course” exemplifies the synergy across multimodal design, ethical grounding, and youth leadership, ultimately leading to impactful AI education initiatives. We are elated to see students’ curious minds blossom into creative blueprints for community betterment, environmental stewardship, and altruistic empathy. The program differentiates itself from the conventional, adult-led workshops by positioning young people in the spotlight. The program is

a compelling model for stakeholders at all levels seeking to democratize AI literacy, cultivate future talent, and prepare young people to lead in a tech-driven world. Amplifying young people's voices and bridging the digital gap, "Charting the Course" carries on its mission to decode AI education for youth, removing barriers and sparking curiosity. The Course Charters today will evolve into the Changemakers of tomorrow.

About UNU Macau AI Conference

Building on the success of the 2023 World Data Forum Macau Satellite Event and 2024 UNU Macau AI Conference, the UNU Macau AI Conference 2025 will convene thought leaders, innovators and stakeholders under the theme **AI for Humanity: Building an Equitable Digital Future**. This global conference aims to bridge divides - whether geographic, economic, cultural or digital - and ensure that the benefits of AI reach everyone.

The conference will take place on 23-24 October, 2025, **the UN Day**, a symbolic date commemorating the 80th anniversary of the United Nations and the 50th anniversary of UNU. This global gathering is expected to welcome around 500 participants from across the world, including high-level keynote speakers and representatives from academia, industry, government, and civil society. With sessions planned under the three themes, the conference promises rich discussions and impactful outcomes aimed at fostering an equitable digital future. The organization is also planning to host a series of pre-, post and side events, workshops and competitions (e.g. AI and social innovation competition).

As part of the 500 participants including keynote speakers and industry representatives, the recognition of "Charting the Course" by an international institution like UNU is nothing short of remarkable. This achievement underscores the shared vision amongst the global community that AI education thrives on youth-driven, inclusive, and interactive workshopping. Capacity-building has risen as the top priority in preparing young people for the AI age. Especially for students with unequal access to AI learning opportunities, the all-encompassing design in "Charting the Course" - along with Rishi's deep commitment to democratizing AI education for youth - marks the new direction for impactful digital education.

Author Bios

Shuhan Li is the Research & Content Development Specialist at ReadyAI. Shuhan earned their M.A. in International & Comparative Education from Teachers College, Columbia University. They also hold B.A. in Economics and Social & Cultural Analysis from New York University. Shuhan's research scope spans across innovative learning, sustainable development, and gender studies. Passionate about critical pedagogy and youth empowerment, Shuhan aspires to ignite the transformative power of education for social progress. Over the past three years, Shuhan has showcased their research in ethical AI education, youth for SDGs, and transnational activism at nationally recognized conferences, including EAAI 2023, AIED 2023, and CIES 2024.

Rishikesh Sankaran is a high school sophomore with a passion for teaching, leading and mentoring. He is the proud founder of FutureLead AI, whose goal is to educate the younger generation about AI and its profound impact on their future, through project based, interactive learning. His AI journey began in 2020 when he won the gold medal in the World Artificial Intelligence Competition for Youth (WAICY). He went on to be the only U.S participant to place three times in WAICY. Now, he is an official judge for the WAICY competition and a partner and ambassador for ReadyAI, an international AI education company. He is an MIT DOAI certified AI Literacy Educator and also an Alison certified computer programming instructor. In 2024, he partnered with Kramden Institute to hold FutureLead AI's first AI workshops and was recognized as the Youth Volunteer of the year.

Roobeh Aliabadi Ph.D. is a global thought leader in AI and advocate for AI literacy worldwide. He is the Director of Compassion in AI at Stanford University's CCARE, and CEO of ReadyAI. He has coauthored several books on socio-emotional and project-based learning for teaching AI, including titles on LLMs for educators and accessible AI concepts for children and parents. Dr. Aliabadi has delivered keynote addresses at major global conferences, including Web Summit, AI Global Summit, Global Silicon Valley Forum, and the Aspen Forum. His talks explore AI ethics, education, and the future of compassionate AI, bridging the gap between cutting-edge technology and human-centered values. As the founder of WAICY, an AI competition active in over 150 countries, Dr. Aliabadi has shaped one of the largest global movements for youth AI education. His research focuses on the intersection of AI, education, and human-centered technology, particularly emphasizing how AI can enhance social-emotional learning, foster inclusivity in education, and support global digital equity.

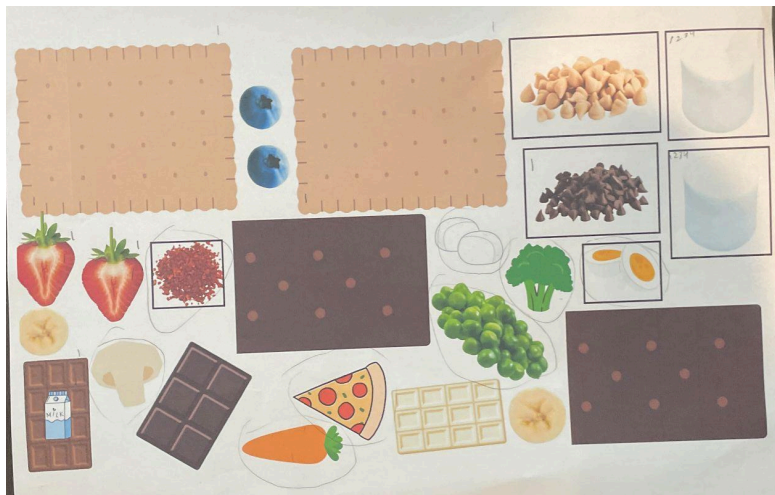
Photos



Vignette of the first workshop



Campfire S'mores Chef activity banner



Campfire S'mores Chef "Ingredients" Paper Cutouts



Campsite Cruiser banner



Campsite Cruiser Gameboard Map



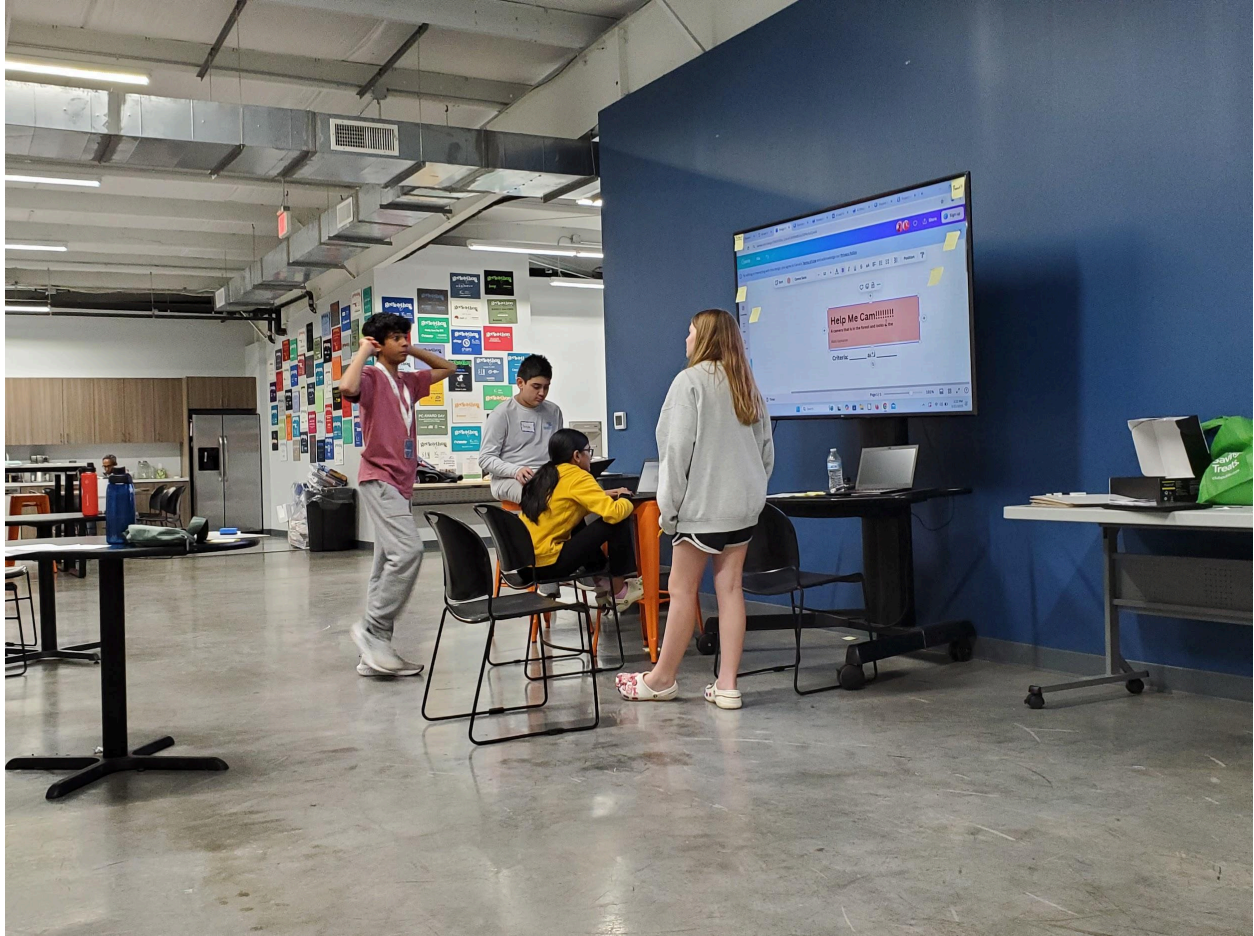
LA Wildfires banner



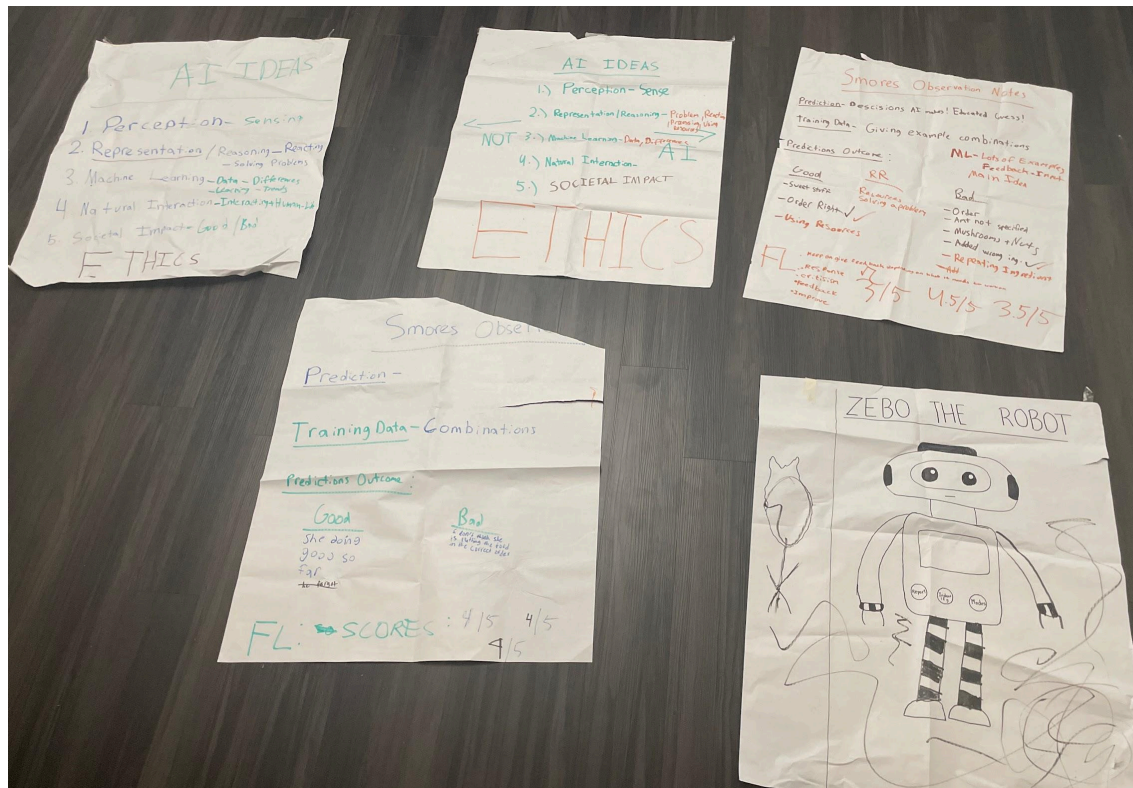
One group of students working at their "ideation station"



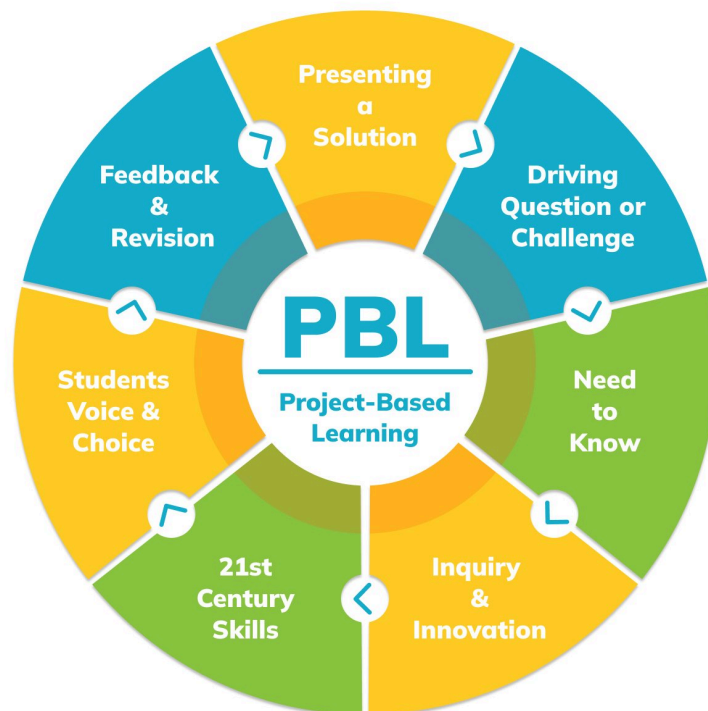
Students of the second cohort presenting their AI project



Students working on their final Wildfires presentation slides



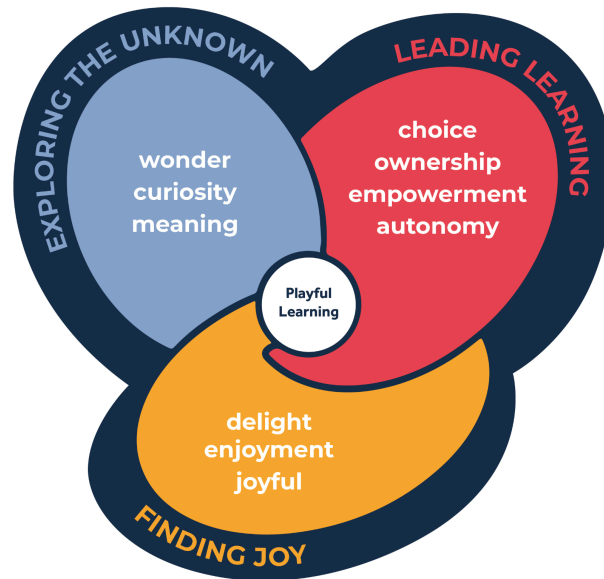
Students' worksheets and sketches for activities



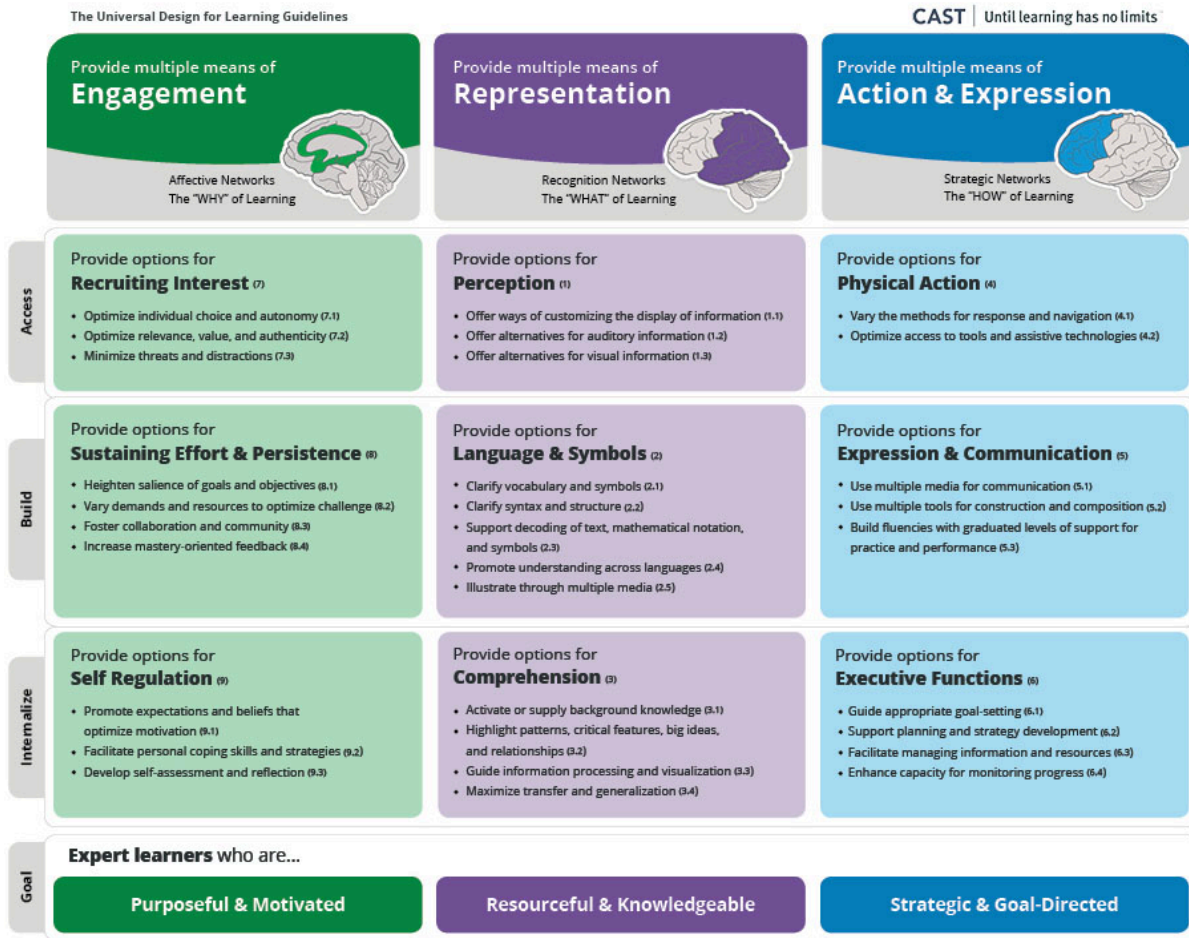
PBL Framework (image courtesy of Green Ninja)

Cross-cultural Indicators of Playful Learning

Patterns from schools in Denmark, South Africa, the U.S, and Colombia



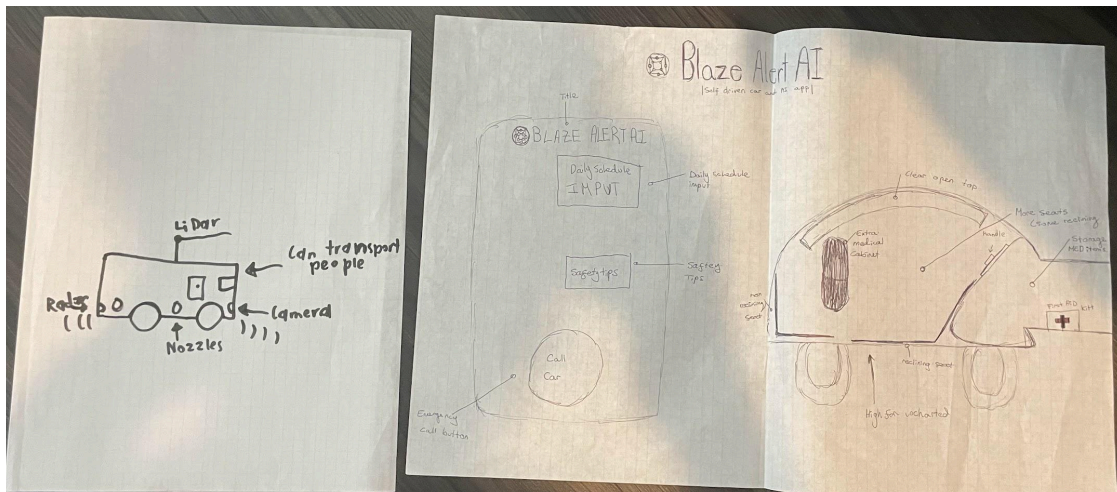
Pedagogy of Play Diagram (image courtesy of Project Zero, Harvard University)



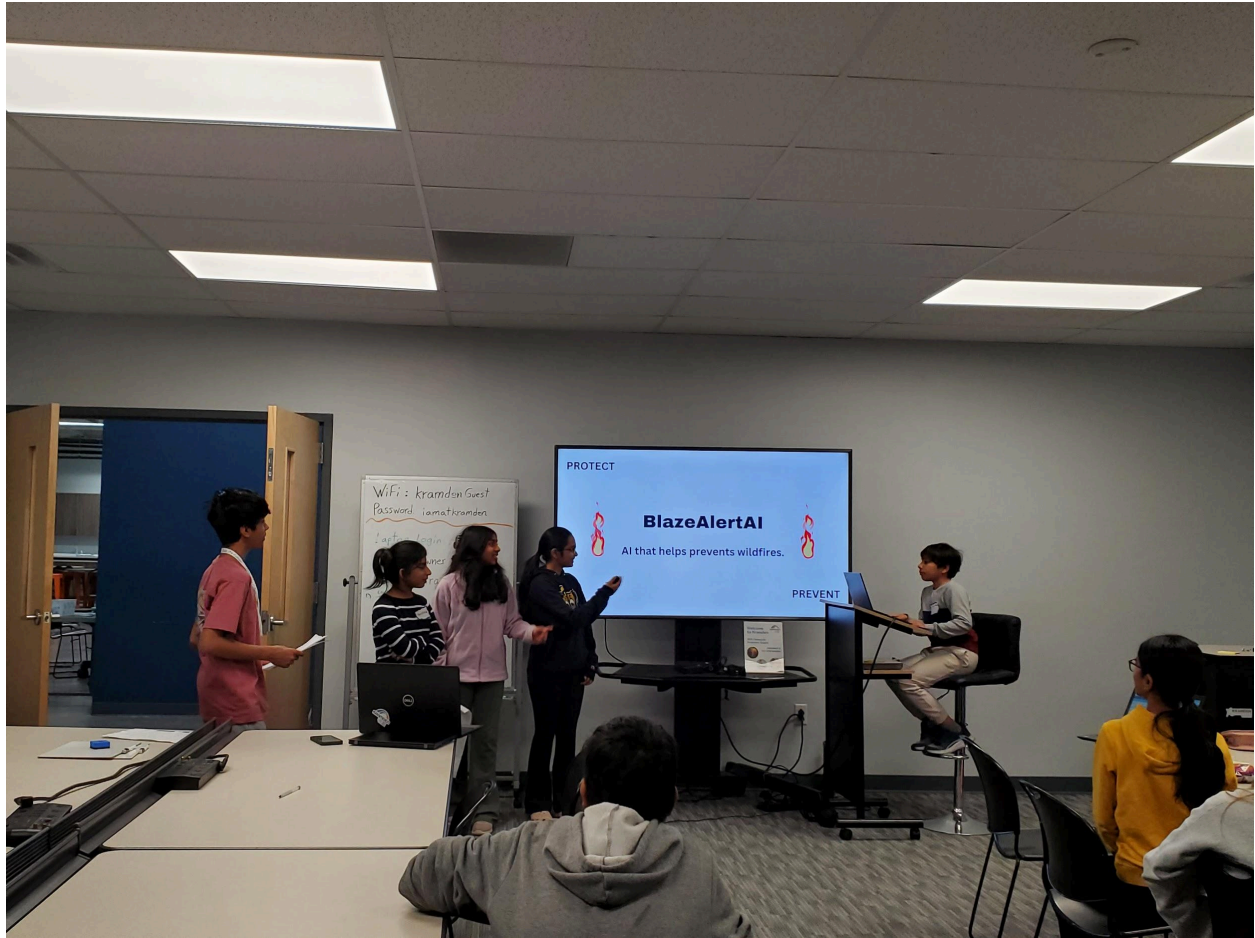
Universal Design for Learning Poster (image courtesy of CAST)



Group project from the first cohort



Wildfires robot design example



Student team presented their "BlazeAlertAI"



Students getting ready for group projects



Rishi, leader and instructor of "Charting the Course," at Kramden Institute



Rishi giving a presentation on wildfires



Group photo of the first cohort, March 21

