



2024 CASE STUDY

The 2024 Well-Being by Design Fellows participated in a four-month professional development program for designers and producers of interactive kids' technology and media. They met online to workshop their current projects, network with other fellows, and gain insights from research and industry leaders as they worked to incorporate principles of well-being into their designs. We are delighted to share highlights from each fellow's experience.

Taylor Davis



Taylor Davis is the Director of Curriculum and Content at iCivics. With a keen interest in pedagogical approaches and curriculum development, she has worked to grow and develop iCivics' curricular resources. In her role as Director of Curriculum and Content, she manages the iCivics Curriculum Team and oversees the scope, voice, and depth of iCivics curricular resources.

Private i History Detectives is a classroom-based K-5 resource that guides students through exciting historical investigations to build social studies content knowledge and foster critical thinking skills. Released in 2022 by iCivics, *Private i History Detectives* is based on the "History's Mysteries" curriculum created by Laurie Risler and Kelley Brown. The primary goal is to provide elementary educators with materials and strategies to teach social studies through historical inquiry.

Private i History Detectives



PRODUCT: Private i History Detectives

TARGET AGE: Elementary (ages 5-11)

→ [ICIVICS.ORG/PRODUCTS/PRIVATEI](https://www.icivics.org/products/privatei)

Across the United States, elementary social studies instruction and systems have taken a sharp decline. In 2022, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessed 8th graders' knowledge of U.S. History. Forty percent of students scored below the basic level—a number that has been declining since 2014. According to a RAND research report released in 2023, fifty percent of elementary school principals reported having no adopted published curriculum for K-5 social studies instruction. *Private i History Detectives* provides educators with an easy-to-implement curriculum that



ensures that our youngest learners have access to high-quality resources for building historical and civic knowledge and critical thinking skills. With this foundation, students are better able to understand our complex history, make connections to their own lives, and explore their roles as citizens of their community and country.

HOW WE INCORPORATE WELL-BEING COMPONENTS NOW

Private i History Detectives already addresses competence, creativity, social connection, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Each unit and mystery hones in on a particular social studies standard and historical thinking skill. Inquiry-based strategies promote flexible thinking and encourage synthesizing information and varied perspectives on a topic. Students routinely are prompted to brainstorm together and talk through their ideas. Additionally, mysteries intentionally highlight historical figures of color, cultural practices, and multiple perspectives on an event.

WHAT MORE CAN OUR PRODUCT DO TO ADDRESS CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING?

- + Offer students choice in solving a mystery to support greater empowerment
- + Allow for greater autonomy and problem-solving through a more open, freer range of exploration of primary and secondary sources
- + Provide scaffolded support as needed to support students' success and mastery of content knowledge and historical thinking skills

When *Private i History Detectives* was first created, it was designed to be mostly teacher led as a whole-group facilitated activity. While students have a lot of creativity in how they answer a mystery question, the product's interactivity didn't allow for a lot of choice in how to solve the mystery.

Working with the Youth Design Team, I spent time thinking about the ways that we could build more choice and autonomy into our product that would lead to greater empowerment and a more open exploration of primary and secondary sources. We have thought about the use of buttons to get a hint or talk to a detective, and adding tools like an evidence collector and organizer to support students as they solve the mystery with less teacher support. Ideally, the buttons would support a choose-your-own adventure pathway through historical inquiry, whereby students are still supported and scaffolded with age-appropriate and accessible primary sources. Some of the things the Youth Design Team liked promoted independence, remained kid-friendly, and improved the interactivity.



*Having the RITEC framework and hearing from other designers who are applying it has been exceptionally helpful. It has given me an anchor point and pushed my thinking around the components of well-being and product design. One thing that I have learned is that while a product may address some components exceptionally well, more can be done to address other elements of students' well-being. It was helpful to meet with the Youth Design Team and have them validate and add features that can improve the *Private i History Detectives* experience.*





LOOKING AHEAD

I have been taking the learning from this fellowship back to my team at iCivics. We are sharing ideas about how attentiveness to children's well-being could improve the *Private i History Detectives* curriculum and other products at iCivics. As developments in digital and game-based technology advance, centering children's well-being will continue to be a focus. Evaluating our curriculum for weak areas and challenging our thinking around how we weigh and evolve our products in development will help us improve future products.



This fellowship has taught me so much about considerations for children's well-being in digital media. The learning was immediately applicable and has pushed me to influence a more thoughtful design.



TAKEAWAYS

- + Including well-being principles into the design of *Private i History Detectives* will ensure that kids have the chance to explore, make decisions, fail, and be creative in a safe space, all while acquiring necessary content knowledge.
- + By building a quality product for elementary classrooms, we hope to see a dedicated increases in the instructional time dedicated to teaching social studies, teachers' confidence in planning for and teaching the subject area, and students' knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
- + As AI becomes more prevalent in digital design, the components for well-being will be a needed guardrail for designers of children's digital media.



SESAME WORKSHOP

Joan Ganz Cooney Center

For more information about the Well-Being by Design Fellowship program, please visit joanganzcooneycenter.org/fellowship2024