



CASE STUDY

The 2025 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.

Jen Chiou



Jen Chiou 趙燕妮 is the co-creator of Quest Craft and founder of CodeSpeak Labs, which has taught over 25,000 students to code. Previously, her work at Crisis Text Line and Teach For All inspired her to continue working at the intersection of mental health, equity, and education innovation. As a mom of two pre-teen boys, she's passionate about co-designing playful, inclusive tools for kids.

Role-playing games are powerful. They foster collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. But in most schools, this kind of play is absent. As a mother and educator, I saw firsthand how pretend play gave way to isolated screen time for my pre-teen sons and their peers. The most common role-playing opportunities that exist were designed for older teens and adults, primarily based in Eurocentric fantasy traditions and are rarely embraced in educational settings. *Quest Craft* was born from the desire to bring the magic and research-backed mental health benefits of role-playing games and collaborative storytelling to every child—especially those whose stories are too often left out.

With the support of the Joan Ganz Cooney Center's Well-Being by Design Fellowship, we deepened our commitment to child well-being and responsible design. Our goal: to bring children on joyful, inclusive quests that enable them to practice creative problem solving and empathy while building social connections.



Quest Craft fosters kids' creativity and social skills through collaborative play using our culturally responsive tabletop role-playing game (TTRPG) designed for classrooms, community spaces, and homes.

PRODUCT: Quest Craft

TARGET AGE: 8-14+

→ [QUESTCRAFTKIDS.COM](https://questcraftkids.com)





Quest Craft builds social-emotional skills; it can be played just for fun with a group of kids forming an adventuring party around a table, or to support specific academic goals through game-based learning in a full classroom setting. Students practice empathy, communication, and decision-making as they co-create stories. It's an inherently social experience as the digital game resources facilitate live, continuous conversations among players—along with some dramatic dice rolling as kids attempt to scale sky-high walls, charm non-player characters for information, and battle monsters. Many lesson quests align with learning standards in English Language Arts, social studies, and STEM.



Participating in the Well-Being by Design Fellowship helped us move from instinct to intention, from student playtesting to student co-design. We now have a shared language to design for well-being—and to explain why that matters to funders, schools, and families.



WHAT COMPONENTS OF WELL-BEING DOES MY PROJECT ADDRESS?

Quest Craft's strengths directly support multiple RITEC dimensions including **Autonomy/Empowerment**, **Creativity**, **Relationships/Social Connection**, and **Diversity/Inclusion**. Depending on the quest, players can build their own characters or play pre-made ones that challenge them to see the world and act based on that character's backstory, motivations, and personality, which may significantly differ from their own. They are empowered to make choices that change the narrative, to work together with other players in an adventuring party to resolve disputes in novel ways, and to take risks and face in-game consequences in a structured but open-ended environment.

HOW CAN MY PRODUCT BETTER ADDRESS CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING?

We've drawn from the best practices of traditional tabletop role-playing games (TTRPGs), which have been evaluated in primarily small group settings with young adults and older. This fellowship has enabled us to draw from the tremendous, varied experience of the other WBxD Fellows: designers with extensive experience working on children's products who have broadened our view of well-being strategies to incorporate.

- + We're experimenting with different ways to further lean into RITEC dimensions: for example, for **Safety and Security**, we are testing different "Red Card" mechanics that let players pause gameplay if something makes them uncomfortable—framed as a superpower, not a shutdown.
- + As we build a classroom-ready version of *Quest Craft*, we're trialing ways to support students' increasing **Competence** of knowledge and skills that align to academic and content standards. In a recent quest, students meet California social studies standards by learning about local Indigenous people.
- + We're adding reflection loops to help kids pause after a quest and think about what happened—not just in the story, but in their own heads and hearts. Structured debriefs help players connect their choices to real-world values, and explore how **Emotional Regulation** showed up for themselves and their party along the way.

WHAT HAVE I LEARNED ABOUT INCORPORATING WELL-BEING INTO MY PRODUCT DESIGN?

Because of the fellowship, we've moved beyond youth playtesting to youth co-design—building a team of young designers who will collaborate with us over several months to create a youth-authored campaign library and help us tackle essential questions like:



How can we invite kids to reflect on identity, ethics, and consequences—while still keeping gameplay fun?

From the Youth Design Team, we've learned:

- + **Autonomy matters.** Even when students make choices that may not be “adult-recommended”, using in-game consequences (rather than restricting them) leads to more authentic engagement and learning.
- + **Different players, different needs.** Designing for players who are feeling shy, silly, or serious means offering flexibility. For instance, students who are feeling shy, prefer co-role-playing a character with a partner, having extra discussion time before sharing, or choosing from example options rather than making open-ended decisions on the spot.

From the RITEC framework and design toolbox, we gained a powerful lens for observing and deepening the well-being potential of our game design through its illustrations of the logic and real-world examples behind each feature. For example:

- + Kids love pet companions → design animal NPCs that encourage nurturing and care
- + Kids enjoy rolling dice → embrace uncertainty to build a sense of competence
- + Kids want to personalize avatars → support identity expression and exploration through creative customization

From JGCC mentors, fellows, and guest speakers, we also gained inspiration to expand immersion beyond traditional TTRPG formats. We're now prototyping integrated experiences—like mood-setting videos, tactile game props, and real-world movement (e.g., scavenger hunts)—to make sessions more emotionally and physically engaging.

In addition, we've grown in our understanding of how to design for both kids and the adults who support them. While adults want clarity, structure, and easy but comprehensive onboarding, kids often skip instructions to get straight to the action. Based on advice from other fellows, we're piloting different onboarding pathways for users to get started.

LOOKING AHEAD

We believe tabletop role-playing games should be part of every child's experience, as near-universal as playing LEGO, riding a bike, or conducting a science experiment. We're excited to help legitimize TTRPGs as powerful, research-backed tools for learning and well-being, not just niche hobbies. As we expand *Quest Craft*, we're working to make collaborative storytelling a joyful, inclusive norm in schools, homes, and community spaces across the country.

We see a future where adventurers of all backgrounds, abilities, and identities see themselves reflected in the quests they play—and where TTRPGs are embraced by educators and caregivers as a way to foster empathy, creativity, and critical thinking.

To get there, we're eager to partner with researchers, educators, and youth-serving organizations to scale this work in ways that are grounded in evidence and shaped by real-world classroom experiences. With the right allies, we can build a generation of kids who don't just consume stories or digital experiences—they co-create them, reflect on their choices, and imagine bold new worlds together.



Joan Ganz Cooney Center

For more information about the Well-Being by Design Fellowship program, please visit joanganzcooneycenter.org/fellowship2025