



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.

Phoebe Jiang



Phoebe Jiang is a learning designer, media producer, and mom. She has a background in child development and international education from Teachers College, Columbia University. An avid storyteller in all mediums (from interactive games to long-form video content), Phoebe specializes in crafting meaningful, culturally responsive media experiences for kids and their grown-ups. Her work with Sesame Workshop, Little Airplane Productions, and Age of Learning highlights her passions for intergenerational play, digital thriving, and maximizing the joy in learning.

Math is everywhere! and families engage in math in more ways than they realize (Ginsburg et al., 2008). Moreover, children develop important social and emotional skills through meaningful math talk and activities with their grown-ups (Clements & Sarama, 2014). To better support families in identifying, creating, and sharing positive math experiences with their children, the *Family Math* app will meet them where they are. With young kids (2- 4 years old) spending over two hours on screens (Common Sense Media, 2025), **what if a digital math learning platform could not only be joyful, but also nurture their well-being?**

This project extends PBS SoCal's catalog of analog experiences into a child-facing, interactive app featuring games and videos, emphasizing math positivity, confidence, and competence in foundational math skills. The app captures the messiness and creativity of familiar arts and crafts activities by blending digital and real-world experiences.



PRODUCT: Family Math
TARGET AGE: 3 to 5

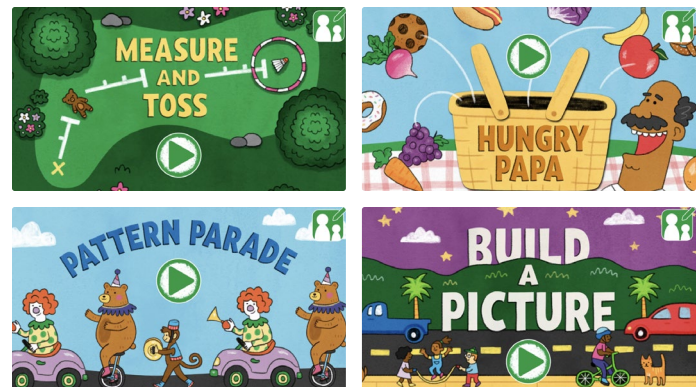
The *Family Math* app is a kid-centered app showcasing how early math can be joyful, open-ended, and interactive. "Family" is core to Family Math, so the app will encourage co-play and co-viewing across ages. Primarily designed for young kids (3- to 5 years old), the app integrates "math talk" and co-play prompts for grown-ups (parents/caregivers, educators, and early childhood professionals).

➔ [PBSSOCAL.ORG/EDUCATION/PBS-SOCAL-FAMILY-MATH](https://pbsocal.org/education/pbs-social-family-math)

This includes a novel feature—screen time breaks—where users take the fun offline to screenless mindfulness moments, math missions (think math-inspired scavenger hunts), and more! This feature serves an additional purpose of empowering kids and families to be more critical curators and consumers of media, so they are better equipped to advocate for digital features that center well-being.

WHAT COMPONENTS OF WELL-BEING DOES MY PROJECT ADDRESS?

All Family Math programming (ranging from in-person, multigenerational workshops, printed materials, to digital play) aims to represent and uplift the range of diverse lived and linguistic experiences of the young children and families in Southern California, and RITEC provides a meaningful framework and foundation to advance these efforts. The *Family Math* app addresses **Autonomy** (through the open-ended experience, where children can freely choose how to engage in their digital play), **Creativity** (by offering digital play experiences that encourage children to use their imagination to build, invent, and experiment), as well as **Competence** (by contributing positively towards their perceptions of their math ability).



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

- + **Promote Emotional Development and Regulation:** Managing big emotions and nurturing emotional well-being is integral to healthy early childhood development. Moreover, math and social emotional learning are inextricably linked. We are considering additional features and programming to encourage children to not only recognize, but also reflect on, a range of emotions and provide opportunities to learn important self-regulation skills.
- + **Intergenerational Play:** We're exploring how to more seamlessly bring together young children and the people in their lives, from siblings to grandparents and babysitters, to playfully engage with math. How can prompts geared towards grown-ups in our app support kids initiating this type of play or vice versa?
- + **Fostering Positive Math Identities:** We aim to create a joyful, digital playground where young children can not only feel confident, capable, and engaged with math, but also understand that making mistakes is part of the learning journey! My hope is that we can build this into the new games that will populate the app.



REFLECTION

The Youth Design Team members kickstarted a mindset shift for our development team, inspiring deeper reflection on when and how to co-design with youth. Previously, Family Math resources were designed primarily to support adults with the delivery of meaningful math learning in a home environment. With the app, we've flipped that model—putting kids at the center and designing with a child-first mindset. The RITEC framework provided important shared language for both our internal team and Youth Design partners, which helped guide our team conversations, including thinking critically about how best to bake well-being into the structure of the app. The Youth Design team validated initial hypotheses and offered wonderful insights on how to lean into the math positivity and joy embedded in the overall program!



This fellowship has opened my eyes to a world of possibilities not only in the realm of well-being, but also for kids media as a whole. I feel fortunate to have met and learned from all my fellow fellows, especially those leading start-ups and/or pushing the boundaries when it comes to imagining how well-being can be woven into our lives. I look forward to continuing to learn, grow, and innovate in this space.



LOOKING AHEAD

The *Family Math* app is currently in the early stages of development (we were able to share initial wireframes with the Youth Design Team). In collaboration with Makefully Studios, we will be developing the app and associated content over the next two years. We're particularly excited about two features: the "screen time breaks" and co-play prompts directed at parents and caregivers. We look forward to optimizing in-app and offline experiences for both kids and grown-ups. Thanks to the fellowship, I've been inspired to pursue a Family Advisory council (composed of parent-child dyads), which will help systematize our co-design processes to ensure that we are best serving our target demographic. Additionally, we're weaving social emotional learning into our in-person workshop offerings, and we're pleased to begin piloting of FM+ Feelings.

- + With the *Family Math* app, we hope to provide all families with high-quality, engaging math experiences that foster young children's well-being and their relationships with caregivers.
- + We aim to blend digital and physical play by providing time and space to take learning beyond the screen. We hope our success here will allow us to extend our Family Math offerings to other subject areas, such as literacy.
- + By building on our special value proposition as a public media organization, we are uniquely positioned to offer an alternative to "business as usual" metrics and KPIs. Encouraging kids to take "screen time breaks" runs counter to strategies and features that aim to keep kids in apps. Our hope is that these efforts inspire other media organizations to continue innovating in this space.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- + **Finding community and camaraderie:** Well-being encompasses many dimensions of the lived experience. As such, it's near-impossible for products to fully address all aspects of the RITEC framework. After being encouraged to not think of the framework as a checklist, and in conversation with other fellows on their projects, I realized the power of our collective efforts. I'm not only a designer of educational, interactive media, but also the mom to young children. So it's heartening to see how so many grown-ups are centering well-being in their efforts, which will have positive effects on the ecosystem as a whole.
- + **Inspired to innovate:** This fellowship has opened my eyes to a world of possibilities not only in the realm of well-being, but also for kids media as a whole. I feel fortunate to have met and learned from all my fellow fellows, especially those leading start-ups and/or pushing the boundaries when it comes to imagining how well-being can be woven into our lives. I look forward to continuing to learn, grow, and innovate in this space.

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