



## 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.

### Javier Agüera



Javier Agüera is an inventor and serial entrepreneur. His past innovations include Europe's first Android phone, the award-winning Blackphone consumer privacy device, and a patent-pending dream incubation method. He is passionate about challenging how we adopt new technologies through human-centric approaches to design and business modeling. He also loves crafting interactive art experiences that help people connect to each other and themselves.

The decision to give a child a smartphone is one of the most fraught and complex ones that today's parents face. Reports come out weekly suggesting that smartphones may contribute to the current youth mental health crisis. Yet, parents lack effective tools to navigate this complex shift in autonomy and trust, and children lack the skills and habits required to inhabit a digital world built for adults.

Pandora's Way is a method and toolkit that helps parents prepare their kids (and themselves) with the skills and dispositions that they need to handle their first smart devices and enter the online world as (pre)adolescents. Families can coordinate the decision along with their community, to create a shared, memorable experience that transforms a moment into a journey of learning and growth.

Our model integrates the latest psychology, education, and behavioral science research into the archetypal framework of rites of passage – a practice that humans have used for millennia to initiate their young people into adulthood. Through Pandora's Way's, STA<sup>2</sup>RS, families create a **Safe** community where **Trust** can be built. As they progress, children complete challenges that develop their **Autonomy** and **Accountability**, with the ultimate goal of nurturing future-ready citizens through individual **Resilience** and an ethic of **Service**.



### PANDORA'S WAY

**PRODUCT:** Pandora's Way    **TARGET AGE:** 9-12

Pandora's Way helps families guide children into a healthier digital adolescence, creating a journey towards first phone ownership based on trust, agency, resiliency and service.

→ [PANDORASWAY.COM](https://pandorasway.com)



### HOW WE INCORPORATE WELL-BEING COMPONENTS NOW

Pandora's Way takes a holistic approach to fostering well-being. At the very core of the experience, we use creative challenges to develop **competence** through a gamified, personalized journey. We have designed both on- and offline challenges to foster children's overall foundational needs of **safety and trust**. As they proceed through the journey, young people develop their **autonomy** and **identity** while increasing their **emotional regulation skills, accountability**, and **resilience**. The first version of Pandora's Way focuses on intra-family social connection, but future versions will support connections among peers and their families and communities as well.

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

- + The journey should inspire children as well as their parents. A clever scaffolding of incentives that engage users' sense of agency strengthens intrinsic motivation, which in turn can multiply the effectiveness of the interventions.
- + It's important that a pathway exists for youth who complete the program to become mentors and community supporters, enriching the experience for other families.
- + The parent experience will be optimized to support and align with the child's journey, to ensure that the family core can be a consistent support of the values, skills and habits that Pandora's Way is fostering.



*Working in this space sometimes feels like exploring uncharted territory. But it's not! Thanks to the fellowship we learned validated frameworks and tools, and put them into practice. But more importantly, we did so along with a cohort of truly inspiring individuals that truly made us feel we aren't walking this walk alone.*



### REFLECTION

The context of every child is subject to a high level of variance. For example, a child in a two-household family may have different device needs than those who live in single or two-parent households. The child's temperament and motivations matter as well. We will give parents and other community members the last word in customizing the experience. Doing things in community greatly enhances potential outcomes, but forming those communities (especially aligning parents with each other) is not trivial.



### LOOKING AHEAD

Pandora's Way is incorporated as a Public Benefit Company, and we are ramping up efforts to fundraise and consolidate our core team. We follow an interactive human-centered design process. One of the key talent areas we are developing is engineering expertise and advanced gamification and user experience. After this fellowship, we are prototyping our new ideas and gathering feedback before going back to the drawing board. This will allow us to test the product and attune it to the reality of user needs. Eventually these changes will make their way to our commercially available product, at which point our focus will be to provide parents with trustworthy and reliable tools. We are incorporating the RITEC framework as a baseline to measure progress of children's growth through the program, as well as essential guidelines both in our product design and business model. One of our goals is to make the toolkit accessible to every family; validating our pricing model will be key to determining how to best make it available in low-income communities.

Furthermore, as part of our social responsibility commitments, we will create content that is freely available to anyone, including non-users, as well as conduct and sponsor research studies in partnership with leading research centers.

+ As a rite of passage, Pandora's Way aims to become one of the key formative and creative milestones that every adult remembers fondly when looking back into their adolescent years. While not a solution for every family, we believe our toolkit can move the needle and potentially help many children worldwide reap the many benefits of rites of passage: a secure sense of identity, strong relationship skills, and an orientation towards service. We plan to measure this impact qualitatively but also by using new quantitative instruments like those being developed at the [Center for Digital Thriving](#) at Harvard University.

- + One of the bridges we hope to rebuild is that of community-driven educational approaches. By helping parents find alignment and synchronizing their kid's digital journey with other families, we can remove one of the biggest challenges to family well-being: the incessant battles that ensue from lack of consistency across multiple households. Furthermore, future versions will enable these micro communities to share their own interventions and learnings with others in a moderated, free marketplace and support community.
- + From a design point of view, we hope to shine light on an alternative path to solving the "tech problem" with "more tech." Pandora's Way does leverage apps and digital devices to deliver its program and assist families and their communities, but it is not a technological solution per se. Indeed, many of the activities encourage offline engagement with family and friends. To this end, we'll offer our learnings to other product and experience designers in the hope that they'll find inspiration in them and unleash a new wave of human-centered interventions.



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### Dr. Franceli L. Cibrian



Dr. Franceli L. Cibrian is an assistant professor at the Fowler School of Engineering at Chapman University. Her research interests focus on designing, developing, and evaluating digital health intervention and assessment to support children in achieving healthcare, education, and well-being outcomes. She belongs to the National System of Researchers in Mexico, given by CONAHCYT-Mexico. She completed her postdoctoral training at UCI and received her Ph.D. and master's in computer science at the CICESE Research Center in Ensenada, Mexico.



**PRODUCT:** CoolCraig: Taking Self-Regulation in Your Own Hands

**TARGET AGE:** 8 to 15 years old



This project aims to promote self-regulation in neurodiverse children through wearables (e.g., smart watches). Self-regulation includes modulating reactions to stimuli using appropriate strategies (e.g., breathing) and is fundamental to adaptive developmental tasks, impacting academic achievement and well-being. However, children, especially those who are neurodiverse, face challenges in this area, leading to externalizing behaviors, often perceived as rule-breaking. We find that wearables have promising capabilities as interventions to support self-regulation. In tandem with a multidisciplinary and multi-institutional team, we have been developing interventions to support the self-regulation of children with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorders (ADHD) using smartwatch tracking capabilities with an interactive application that supports families in utilizing self- and co-regulation strategies.



### HOW WE INCORPORATE WELL-BEING COMPONENTS NOW

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- + CoolCraig aims to support co-regulation among children and their caregivers using a smartwatch and a phone application.
- + To support **emotion regulation**, the smartwatch triggers notifications throughout the day to ask, “How are you feeling?” and prompts the child to select a Zone of Regulation color option (green, red, yellow, and blue). This brief activity allows the child to stop, be aware, and reflect on their emotions as they glance at their watch.
- + To support parent-child **social connection**, the parent’s phone app synchronizes and provides a set of goals (similar to a to-do list) to the child’s smartwatch app so the child has access to the day’s goals and can communicate with parents about their progress through the day.
- + Finally, this application is centered on **diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)**, as it uses visible wearable technology with an invisible assistant to avoid stigma and to support children who may need it.

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

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For the next iteration of our design, the CoolCraig app aims to elevate the children’s experience by aligning with the RITEC framework. Beyond facilitating emotion regulation, DEI, and social connections, we will focus on including **creativity, competence, and empowerment** into the app’s core functionalities. We envision achieving this by introducing an interactive, gamified approach to understanding and visualizing emotions and goals accomplishment. Children will still respond to prompt questions about their moods and emotions using the smartwatch, but with a twist - their responses will translate into their very own “Emotional Garden” on a phone app. The garden will blossom, with flower petals representing the colors of the Zone of Regulation. Flowers will flourish based on daily goal achievements. By offering this creative visualization of their emotional landscape, coupled with access to historical data, we aim to enhance children’s sense of competence and improvement over time. Moreover, the gamified element of nurturing and growing these virtual flowers will serve as a digital empowerment tool, motivating users to strive towards accomplishing their goals.



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*Digital well-being is a spectrum of interrelated domains that cannot be seen as isolated. Therefore, designing and developing digital tools and interventions for children requires a deep understanding of digital well-being. Throughout the fellowship, studying the digital well-being framework helped us to think broadly about the eight domains of well-being and how applications can be designed for one main domain, but supplemented with others to improve overall outcomes.*



## REFLECTION

- + Incorporating well-being into the design will improve the product and self-regulation outcomes.
- + Young people know best! Considering their opinions, thoughts, assets, and concerns will inform better design and will help to translate the well-being components into actionable prompts that could be incorporated into the product.



## LOOKING AHEAD

In the future, we will develop the “Emotional Garden” and conduct more co-design sessions with experts, caregivers, and clinicians to refine the idea before conducting a deployment study with real families.

## HOW CAN WE EFFECTIVELY EMPOWER CHILDREN TO REFLECT ON THEIR EMOTIONS?

**Finding.** Initial studies from the CoolCraig app show more engagement among children with goal-setting features compared to the mood-tracking.<sup>1,2</sup> Currently, our research team is conducting a deployment study focusing on implementing a glanceable emotion visualization for smartwatches.

**Recommendation.** To improve reflection and engagement, it is important to develop the proper visualization and gamified interfaces to offer children a sense of achievement and long-term reflection about their emotions and behaviors.

## HOW CAN WE CREATIVELY INTEGRATE MOOD AND GOAL TRACKING INTO AN INTERACTIVE DATA VISUALIZATION?

**Finding.** Mood and goals-tracking apps have been traditionally designed for adults, and those designed for children usually do not mix mood with goals. However, to support self-regulation, both aspects should be integrated seamlessly.

**Recommendation.** Match the data visualization and interactive features, while considering the well-being domains rather than viewing them as separate entities. This approach will ensure a more comprehensive and engaging user experience.

## RESEARCH TEAM

Jesus A. Beltran, University of California Irvine  
 Yingchen ‘Yuki’ Chen, Chapman University  
 Gillian R. Hayes, University of California Irvine  
 Kimberley D. Lakes, University of California, Riverside  
 Sabrina E. B. Schuck, The Craig School  
 Lucas M. Silva, University of California Irvine

<sup>1</sup> Silva, L. M., Cibrian, F. L., Monteiro, E., Bhattacharya, A., Beltran, J. A., Bonang, C., ... & Hayes, G. R. (2023, April). Unpacking the Lived Experiences of Smartwatch Mediated Self and Co-Regulation with ADHD Children. In Proceedings of the 2023 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (pp. 1-19).

<sup>2</sup> Cibrian, F. L., Monteiro, E., Ankrah, E., Beltran, J. A., Tavakoulnia, A., Schuck, S. E., ... & Lakes, K. D. (2021). Parents’ perspectives on a smartwatch intervention for children with ADHD: Rapid deployment and feasibility evaluation of a pilot intervention to support distance learning during COVID-19. PloS one, 16(10), e0258959.


**SESAME WORKSHOP**

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### Grace Collins



Grace Collins is the Founder of Snowbright Studio, an award-winning LGBTQ+ game studio dedicated to publishing heartwarming games and experiences. Grace previously led games and education policy at the US Department of Education and later coordinated federal game policy across the executive branch. Prior to serving at the Department, they managed and developed educational game projects at the Smithsonian Institution. Grace has taught computer science and game design at multiple levels and was profiled by the Associated Press for founding the first esports team in the nation at an all-girls' high school.

### EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO ENGAGE WITH CIVICS

*Time Tails: Civics* is a digital game and set of connected experiences that help students bridge the learning gap between low civics educational attainment in the classroom and high interest in civics issues and practice. Students, particularly young women, want to be involved in civics and to take action in advocacy—but they lack the education to succeed. The National Assessment of Educational Progress has shown that only 22% of American students reach the “proficient” standard of civics knowledge at grade 8 and only 24% reach proficient at graduation in grade 12. A significant number of underserved students, particularly girls, broadly lose interest in civics and other areas of study at the age of 15. *Time Tails: Civics* aims to help empower these students by providing clear pathways to develop deeper interest, confidence, and connections to civics education and careers at the time in their lives when it matters the most.



**PRODUCT:** Time Tails: Civics!

**TARGET AGE:** 13 to 16

Explore history and save the timeline with Ari & Zoe in *Time Tails: Civics*! Players will travel from Ancient Greece to 1776 and beyond as they learn core civics concepts, the history of democracy, and put civics into practice through unique classroom activities that change the outcome of the game.

→ [SNOWBRIGHTSTUDIO.COM/TIME-TAILS](https://snowbrightstudio.com/time-tails)

## HOW WE INCORPORATE WELL-BEING COMPONENTS NOW

*Time Tails: Civics* addresses **Competence** (keeping students in the zone of proximal development), **Creativity** (leading students from digital to in-person activities and exploration), **Empowerment** (through roleplay and guided peer interactions), and **Emotional Regulation** (through guidance and practice in navigating difficult topics in peer settings).

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

**Social Connection:** We are looking for ways to further define and guide student behaviors to help them “level up” from guided conversations to more freeform conversations as they learn the skills necessary to engage with each other.

**Self-Actualization:** We aim to find more ways to insert self-reflections and self-affirmations into the work being done.

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** History has been written by the conquerors, and that often means that marginalized voices are left out of the history books. The broader *Time Tails* series has made it a goal to uplift what remains of those voices and will continue to do so.

## REFLECTION

We found that the Youth Design Team shared many values and expectations with our own team about what they would like to see in a game-like experience like *Time Tails*. What we didn't expect was the urgency and immediacy that they ask for from these experiences. This has helped shape our thinking about how we can better signal and communicate content early on in the game which then more quickly addresses their anxieties about expectations. That is particularly important in experiences where divisive and difficult topics may be broached.



*Two of the program's Youth Design Team members jumped in during a session to debate the merits of tyranny versus democracy in Ancient Greece. During that debate, one high school student explained to her peer that “Even though tyranny may be efficient, it isn't the best for society because only one person decides what is best for others to do.” Our team was excited to see this moment emerge as a student processed the concepts that they had been exploring in the game, formed an opinion, and expressed a polite, well-reasoned argument to their peer. Helping teens find moments to express themselves and explore the difficult topics of our shared democracy is the fundamental driving purpose behind *Time Tails: Civics*.*





### LOOKING AHEAD

*Time Tails: Civics* is currently in a prototype phase. We will be developing the game series over the next two years to both refine the experience and integrate content from every standard in the National Standards for Civics & Government. *Time Tails: Civics* can help fill that civics education gap in classrooms by being a guided learning experience that covers everything young teens need to know to develop core civics concepts and practices. Thanks to the fellowship, we hope to continue integrating student co-design practices into the development of the game series and setting milestones where we consider each iteration of the series through the different well-being component lenses.

- + With *Time Tails: Civics*, we hope to provide every classroom with the ability to have a fun time while engaging with content aligned to the full National Standards for Civics & Government
- + Our goal is to provide research data on the impact of our narrative-heavy, game-based intervention as compared to “business as usual” civics education. Studies show that students learn and care more when there are narratives, opportunities to practice, and opportunities to play. Our hope for all of Snowbright’s games is that we can continue to build this body of evidence.
- + The *Time Tails* series is an effort to tackle the challenges of hybrid digital and in-person learning through games. We hope that our success here with civics allows us to adapt this hybrid model to other subject areas and to showcase those methods and design processes to others in the field.



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### 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.



**PRODUCT:** Private i History Detectives

**TARGET AGE:** Elementary (ages 5-11)

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

*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



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.



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# Kimberly Dowd



Kimberly Dowd has over a decade of experience in UX Research. She has worked at global brands including Fidelity Investments, the Boston Bruins, and Sevilla FC in Spain. Most recently prior to Google, Kim was a UX Research Director at a design agency where her research ranged from helping people quit smoking to coaching NFL players on mindfulness. She's spent the last six years at Google, with a current focus on improving the digital lives of kids and families.



**PRODUCT:** Google Search

**TARGET AGE:** Products that work for the whole family, from kids to caregivers

→ **GOOGLE FAMILIES**

Google's mission is to make the world's information universally accessible and useful.

Researching and building a great search experience means looking at the needs of the whole family — from young people to parents to caregivers. Partnering with the Cooney Center throughout this fellowship was an incredible opportunity to learn from other fellows and all of the guest speakers and to take a deep dive into designing for kids and families with well-being at the core.

### UX: UNDERSTANDING HOW PEOPLE INTERACT WITH TECH AND EACH OTHER

At its core, user experience (UX) research is about championing users. We constantly push the boundaries of investigating how people interact with technology and each other. This pursuit aligns perfectly with Google's ambitious mission: to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful. Achieving true accessibility necessitates deep understanding: how does accessibility vary for a child as they're learning to navigate the world? How about for different ages, countries, family dynamics, and more? Such a bold mission means there's always room to uncover the hidden complexities of user needs to provide truly inclusive information for everyone.





### ADDRESS CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING WITH YOUTH

As with so much in UX Research & Design, it's about getting perspectives from the right balance of people. On one hand, this fellowship brought experts who taught us some of the best ways to measure success for kids and families (e.g., the RITEC framework developed by LEGO Group and UNICEF). Equally important, we spoke to another type of expert - members of the Youth Design Team, who are expert at being kids.

Here's some inspiration I plan to bring back to my team members:

#### **Quantifying well-being with the RITEC framework:**

My biggest challenge in this space has always been quantifying something that feels so challenging to define and articulate - What is well-being? How do you measure it? I plan to use the [Responsible Innovation in Technology for Children \(RITEC\)](#) initiative — focusing on concepts like creativity and autonomy to explore measurement.

**Shifting to a values lens audit:** Our friends at Scratch reminded us to do a values lens audit. It's amazing how shifting from value to values makes a difference: "How does this strategy align with our values?"

**Discuss design tensions with youth advisors:** It's a myth that we need to steer away from tough questions with youth. As Dr. Amanda Third reminded us in her talk, "Children know much better what it's like to be children today than adults." I plan to continue to directly addressing design tensions with youth, rather than tiptoeing around them.

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*The Well-Being by Design fellowship ignited my passion for designing products that truly enhance children's well-being. Building and measuring well-being can be tough. But we tackled some of the complexities of well-being through frameworks that empower us to drive real change in products. It's been such an incredible experience learning from a leader in the space of designing for children and well-being, and brainstorming some pretty complex ideas with guest speakers, and fellows throughout this experience*

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### LOOKING AHEAD

What I loved most about the Well-being by Design Fellowship was being able to learn from the best and brightest working on well-being for kids! I was inspired by industry leaders like Dr. Sonia Livingstone, whose talk on free play reminded us, “The cardboard box is the emblem of free play. You give an expensive gift & kids play with the box instead, using their agency & imagination.” Livingstone’s “cardboard box” metaphor – kids prioritizing free play over expensive toys – resonated deeply. It sparked a question: **What’s the internet’s “cardboard box”?** Where is this space where the web is useful for kids to learn, play, and grow? Inspired by this, I’m continuing to explore how digital platforms can best foster imaginative play and healthy development in children.

**Building on the well-being conversation:** This fellowship has fueled ongoing discussions focused on improving well-being for kids’ lives. I’m excited to share with folks who haven’t had the opportunity to take part in this fellowship, continuing to evolve the conversation on how to best measure well-being when designing for kids with the extended network of UX professionals at Google.

**Beyond Google:** I look forward to including these concepts in upcoming guest lectures at universities, focused on user experience, product management, and marketing programs. This will equip future designers and product leaders with the tools to prioritize children’s well-being in their work.



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# Melissa Gedney



Melissa Gedney is a learning designer, media producer, researcher, and performer living in Washington, DC, and is passionate about supporting joyful spaces where people can connect and create. She is currently the Senior Manager of the Learn Together Project at PBS KIDS, supporting co-design of content and experiences to foster intergenerational moments between kids and their grown-ups.



**PRODUCT:** Learn Together Project: Facilitating intergenerational learning moments between kids and their grown-ups with PBS KIDS

**TARGET AGE:** Kids ages 2-8 and their grown-ups

→ [PBSKIDS.ORG](https://pbskids.org)

PBS KIDS is dedicated to creating entertaining, educational content that reflects the unique and diverse experiences of children living in the United States. We strongly believe in the power and potential of quality media to inspire meaningful conversations and playful moments between kids and their grown-ups; we also believe that these moments are essential to helping kids grow and thrive.

The Learn Together Project is a strategy that aims to support *more* of those moments and conversations by (1) creating engaging intergenerational content that nurtures these interactions, and (2) supporting features and platforms that enable PBS KIDS and PBS member stations to share relevant content with families and educators.

With support from the CPB-PBS Ready To Learn Initiative, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, we have experimented with multiple ways to support intergenerational interactions grounded in our media. As children make more and more of their own media choices, a focus of my fellowship was thinking about the specific ways we may support kids in initiating these interactions with their grown-ups, rather than defaulting to a grown-up led experience.

In reference to our grown-ups and family-facing experiences, the Learn Together strategy centers on **relationships**, promoting relationship-building conversations, and moments to support a child's healthy development. Our content for children and grown-ups exist in **safe and secure** digital environments, creating a contained space to explore and learn in developmentally appropriate ways.

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

**Promote autonomy:** The offscreen intergenerational activities and interactions our resources promote are currently grown-up-led. What could messaging these activities in such a way kids could initiate (and also do alone, if a grown-up was too busy) look like? This could center iconography, voiceovers, and episode-specific bridges to related content.

**Expand the creative possibilities of our experiences:** Our suggested materials for extending the learning of a show often drive toward making things; however, how could our audiences benefit from expanding the way we think about activities to promote more imagination and original ideas? One direction could be a design commitment to being less prescriptive about the output.

**Grow our commitment to activities that center diversity, equity, and inclusion:** We will need to continue to grow and learn with our audience on how best to include and support the experiences of all families in the United States. One specific way we need to continue to grow is expanding our Spanish language offerings. Continuing to expand our creator pool and co-design community, and providing multiple means of engagement that accommodate different families' unique strengths and circumstances is ongoing and critical work.

## REFLECTIONS

Overall, I found the initial experience of auditing our work against the 8 components of the RITEC framework to be incredibly informative. Taking an honest look at the strengths and weaknesses of our strategy through the lens of well-being offered an invaluable opportunity to make a targeted plan of where we could grow - and also understand what we were already doing well, so we wouldn't lose that.

The Youth Design Team offered suggestions to provide more outside activities, and to incorporate kid-friendly navigation for activities on grownup platforms.



The Learn Together Project is a strategy that supports features and platforms that enable PBS KIDS and PBS member stations to share relevant content with families and educators.



### LOOKING AHEAD

I am looking forward to sharing my experience and recommendations with internal teams connected to the Learn Together Project, specifically thinking about ways we could grow our design to include emphasis on autonomy, creativity, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

For the organization writ large, I will co-host a department-wide presentation on well-being and invite the team to join me in a reading group, which will borrow from our assignments. I'm eager to build shared language and a community of designers internally that has access to the resources the fellowship team curated. I'm tremendously grateful for the opportunity I had to work with the Cooney Center; I am eager to share what I learned so that other designers on the team (and our audience) may benefit.



*I was motivated by hearing industry peers' reflections on centering well-being in their design processes and measures of success. How would childhood be different if the landscape of kids' digital lives was designed by people obsessed with (and held accountable to designing for) well-being? I got a peek into what that would look like in this fellowship community — and spoiler, it's hopeful!*



### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- + **Start from where you are:** Transparently, I found it difficult to imagine a product that adequately addressed all of the principles that comprise RITEC's framework at once; sometimes overperforming in one category leads to underperforming in another. However, I believe that using the framework to find out where you are and help shape where you want to go is powerful. The more designers that are centering well-being in their process, the better products will be, and the more balanced the landscape will be overall.
- + **Measure what matters:** With so many competing measures of success, it is important to set goals you can celebrate and motivate a team on that align to well-being; how do we change the rules of the game so that well-being wins? Something I really valued hearing from other industry peers was the ways they incorporated well-being into their design standards.



**SESAME WORKSHOP**

Joan Ganz Cooney Center

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### Carissa Kang



Carissa Kang is a developmental psychologist who has been working with kids, tweens, and teens for over 15 years across both academia and industry. She is currently a Principal User Researcher at Roblox. Over the past two years, she has led research on helping teens connect and communicate with friends and finding like-minded communities on Roblox. Prior to Roblox, she led research at YouTube Kids.

Roblox is a global immersive platform for connection and communication. Every day, millions of people come to Roblox to create, play, work, learn, and connect with each other in virtual experiences built by a global community of creators. Our vision is to reimagine the way people come together – in a world that's safe, civil, and optimistic.

My research at Roblox encompasses all things social. This includes how and why users (kids/tweens/teens) connect and communicate with friends: to play together seamlessly or to connect with friends and family, through a combination of avatar, voice or text chat. All of this helps youths build critical social-emotional skills, and the friendships formed and/or maintained can be sources of positive emotions and support.

We want to promote healthy socialization and to provide users with more control and options over their experience, with a focus on how we can provide kids and teens with more nuanced ways to better represent themselves on Roblox.

# ROBLOX

**PRODUCT:** Roblox

**TARGET AGE:** Everyone

→ [ROBLOX.COM](https://www.roblox.com)



## HOW WE INCORPORATE WELL-BEING COMPONENTS NOW

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**Social connection:** Roblox's mission is to build a co-experience platform that allows users to come together to play, learn, communicate and explore. Everyday, over 77 million people connect and communicate on Roblox. We've seen billions of friendships made on the platform (ex. ~5.9 billion accepted friend requests) and billions of in-game chat messages sent daily.

**Creativity:** Roblox has an intuitive creation system where anyone can create experiences and games with Roblox Studio, a tool that allows users to design, build and script their experiences.

**Safety:** Roblox also has "Content Labels" that provide parents with guidance as to what experiences and games are appropriate for their child depending on their maturity level. Based on these recommendations, parents can use parental controls to manage content their child has access to. In addition, users can easily mute or block players they come across in games, and report inappropriate content and/or behavior. Roblox also filters all text chat to block inappropriate content. For users under 13, filters are even stricter.

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

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**Diversity, inclusion:** Roblox is currently working on how we can increase the diversity of avatars available on the platform. For example, we're thinking about how we can allow users to create an avatar doppelganger directly from a photo that they could then further customize (e.g., body shape, height, etc).

**Competence:** Roblox Studio provides accessible ways for users to learn the fundamentals of coding and game design. In addition, many users also create and sell virtual items. However, there's much more we can do to lower the barriers to entry for creation and user generated content (UGC), so more users are able to effectively use these.

**Emotional regulation:** We've made a lot of progress in improving public voice communication on Roblox, for example, making it easy for users to report and block others or inappropriate content. We're also exploring how we can better help users feel safer and to maximize positive emotions through private communication channels. This will allow users to better express themselves with close friends only (vs publicly visible communications) so they have more opportunities to self-organize and share content and ideas in a safer space.

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*I learned a lot from the guest speakers from different backgrounds. In particular, Amanda Third talked about how children's experiences online are fundamentally oriented towards "sociality". However, this also inadvertently exposes them to harms and risks. What stood out to me from her research on what safety means to kids was the importance of feeling safe about being who they are, being able to express their identity and be who they are without experiencing discrimination. This made me think about how we need to brainstorm ways to ensure kids feel emotionally safe on the platform, so they feel like they can experiment with and express their different identities.*

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### REFLECTION

Throughout the fellowship, I have learned about different approaches and strategies in which wellbeing can be incorporated into the product. For example, the RITEC framework has been tremendously valuable in helping me to think about different ways in which we can incorporate children's well-being into our product. Given the multidimensionality of each component, there are many ways to think about how different features can be designed to support children's well-being.

The youths reinforced the importance of **online safety**. Teens are keenly aware of online risks and dangers, including scams and the risks related to sharing personal information. Fostering a sense of security so they can express themselves authentically without compromising their safety will encourage healthy risk-taking and exploration, all of which will be key to their well-being and development.

### LOOKING AHEAD

I'm planning to share what I've learned about the RITEC framework and designing for well-being at a Lunch & Learn workshop with cross-functional stakeholders. This is both to raise awareness about thinking about well-being in design (which many may not be familiar with yet), and also to kick-start brainstorming ways we can incorporate different components of well-being into our product design across different features.

In addition, we'll continue iterating on early concepts and ideas and will check in regularly with youth through user research studies to ensure that we're taking their needs into consideration.

### BUILDING MORE SOCIAL CONNECTION

Being on Roblox isn't just about playing games; it has evolved into a social hub. In the [most recent report from the Digital Wellness lab](#) (April 2024) with 1400 adolescents (13-17), 54% report having real-time or extended conversations frequently with friends/family and 32% do this with strangers while playing video games. All of this can help with fostering connections and building a sense of community.

Roblox's vision is to enable everyone to connect with others, and express themselves with immersive communication. In 2023, we launched [Roblox Connect](#), which allows friends to call each other with their avatars. Friends can hang out in an immersive space while being on a voice call together. Soon, we'll allow users to initiate video calls on Roblox across experiences. All of this will eventually help users better connect and communicate with their friends while having fun on Roblox.



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# Olivia Korchagin



Olivia Levenson Korchagin co-founded Global Tinker, a multi award-winning children's media company harnessing the power of stories, constructionist pedagogy, and ubiquitous technology to inspire kids to create more and consume less. Global Tinker's work, ranging from animated series to graphic novels and educational programming, has received awards from the National Science Foundation, Harvard's Early Education Innovation Challenge, Kidscreen, and MIPTV. Olivia is a graduate of USC's School of Cinematic Arts.

Approximately 60% of children who have suffered from trauma are below the age of six. The root causes of childhood trauma, including violence, poverty, neglect, natural disasters, and a shortage of counseling services, are widespread and varied. The repercussions of such early life trauma are profound and long-lasting, extending well into adulthood. Individuals may suffer from a range of severe mental health conditions, such as depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder, as well as physical health issues, including cancer. The global spread of this crisis is accelerated by factors such as displacement, economic instability, and catastrophic events, underscoring the urgent need for effective solutions.

This problem is compounded by one significant challenge: the lack of necessary tools and training for caregivers to provide immediate, effective interventions that pave the way for a child's long-term well-being.



**PRODUCT:** *Breathe, Make, & Flourish*

**TARGET AGE:** 3-5 year-olds, caretakers, educators, and mental health professionals

*Breathe, Make, & Flourish* is a 10-step multidisciplinary platform that merges age-old mindfulness and origami art therapies with cutting-edge augmented reality technology to address early childhood trauma.

→ [GLOBALTINKER.COM](https://globaltinker.com)

Despite the good intentions behind many programs aimed at addressing childhood trauma, the reality is that most of these initiatives are often too complex, expensive, or not sufficiently engaging for children.



### HOW WE INCORPORATE WELL-BEING COMPONENTS NOW

**Emotional Regulation:** Our product embodies 10 mental health themes, ranging from anxiety to resilience, all of which encourage children to verbalize and communicate their emotions.

**Social Connection:** Our product is designed to be an intergenerational experience. Children develop communication and social skills with their caretakers in a “low tech” setting.

**Creativity:** Our blend of meditative stories and associated origami projects allows children’s imagination to blossom and encourages project personalization.

**Empowerment:** Studies show that when a child makes something, it boosts their self esteem. In our case, a child folding and personalizing a paper project – and then seeing it “come to life” using augmented reality – amplifies their confidence.

**Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion:** Our product addresses digital equity by being “low tech”, easily translatable, and designed for multiple entry points to participation – from listening and reading to making and communicating.

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

**Competence:** While our product’s origami component enhances underlying developmental skills (i.e. fine motor and spatial awareness), it would be fascinating to explore scaffolding other learning objectives, such as math and literacy.

**Safety & Security:** As we build on our product’s technology platform and website, and possibly integrate 3rd party partners, we’ll want to ensure we engage policies that ensure safety and protection amongst our users.

**Self-Actualization:** Our product experience is designed to be guided by adults. It would be interesting to explore complementary experiences whereby children are self and/or peer-directed and encouraged to explore and focus on areas and themes that interest them.



*Designing for well-being requires stepping outside of the box and flipping the script on its head – repeatedly! It’s a journey that goes far beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and calls for empathy, collaborative and evidence-based design, and lateral thinking.*







### REFLECTION

I learned that incorporating well-being into product design isn't a linear process – it's ongoing, requires consistent iteration and innovation, and feedback loops. Another key takeaway is that designing for well-being should be a creative and collaborative process amongst the product team and stakeholders – including the users themselves! Our Youth Design Team session was instrumental in discovering new angles and formats for our product. As a result of our session, we're considering integrating a teen mentorship program within our product.

### LOOKING AHEAD

We aim to incorporate the RITEC framework into our product's core, drawing upon the innovative strategies introduced by the Well-being by Design Fellowship. This includes the adoption of the Playful by Design Tool, developed by the Digital Futures Commission, to enhance our approach. We will actively integrate insights and feedback from our stakeholders and focus group sessions to refine and enrich our application of these frameworks and strategies. Alongside this, we are excited to announce plans to expand our digital offerings, with a particular focus on enhancing our website and developing an augmented reality feature for browser-based applications in the upcoming months. This multi-faceted approach underscores our commitment to delivering a product that is both impactful and user-centric.

Our hope is that *Breathe, Make, & Flourish* will positively impact kids by:

- + Enhancing emotional understanding, regulation, and mindfulness;
- + Building confidence through creative arts and development of fine motor skills; and
- + Empowering collaboration, communication, and problem solving.

We humbly hope we can set an example for other designers by emphasizing:

- + The blend between digital and physical experiences;
- + Amplifying creation over consumption through engaging stories and characters; and
- + Experiences that complement intergenerational collaboration and bonding.



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# Aatash Parikh



Aatash Parikh is a software engineer turned educator. He worked at Khan Academy and on a variety of edtech projects before deciding to work in schools. While at High Tech High, Aatash learned about project-based learning as a pedagogy that promotes well-being and academic engagement, and he felt a need for tech tools to support and assess this form of learning. Aatash built the first version of Inkwire while teaching middle school computer science in Oakland Unified School District. It is now in more than 30 schools across the country.

## HOW WE INCORPORATE WELL-BEING COMPONENTS NOW

The Well-Being by Design fellowship introduced us to the Responsible Innovation in Technology for Children (RITEC) framework and its eight components of well-being. We found several elements of well-being that Inkwire was already addressing:

**Empowerment:** Students have choice in how they demonstrate their learning — whether through written responses, video recordings, etc.

**Identity/Self-Actualization:** Projects allow students to explore their interests, and students can then share their stories through their own customizable portfolios.

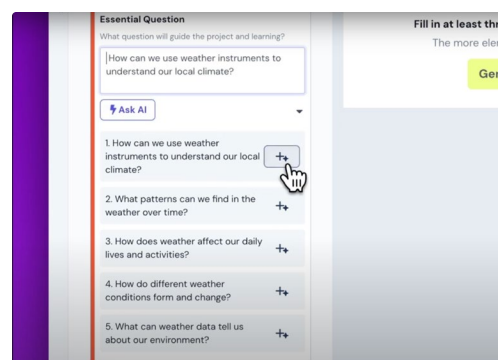
**Social Connection:** Commenting and sharing features inherent to Inkwire promote interaction among the entire community of learners, not just as a one-way dialogue between student and teacher.



**PRODUCT:** Inkwire      **TARGET AGE:** 9 and up

Inkwire is a K-12 edtech platform where teachers and students design and collaborate on authentic, project-based learning experiences and curate portfolios of their best work.

→ [INKWIRE.CO](https://inkwire.co)



Inkwire's  
AI-powered  
project  
design tool

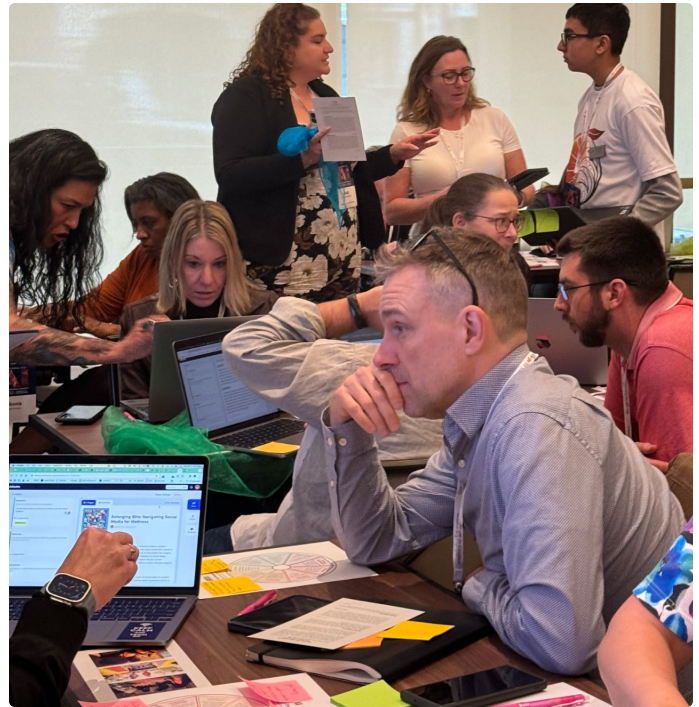
## WHAT MORE CAN OUR PRODUCT DO TO ADDRESS CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING?

We also found clear opportunities for growth in a few other elements of the framework

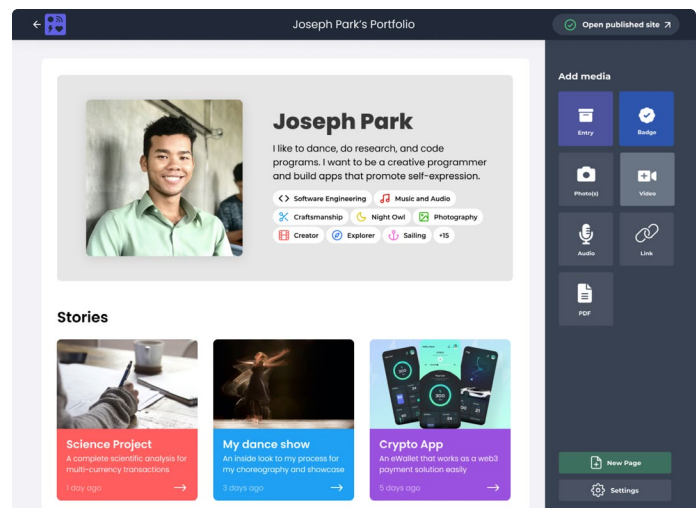
**Safety (in Social Connections):** Even with the presence of many social interaction features in our product, we often noticed students engaged with each other less than they could – for example, only commenting on each others' work when required by the teacher. The "Safety" element of the framework made us realize that students may feel vulnerable when sharing their work and feedback in a semi-public context, and that we could take specific steps to allow students to feel more comfortable and encouraged to do so.

**Emotional Regulation:** Inkwire was specifically designed not to feel like traditional learning management systems (LMS), which are heavily task- and deadline-oriented. However, we have learned that Inkwire requires students to operate at a higher level of executive functioning to keep track of the various to-do's in their projects. Our goal is to incorporate some of the task management and calendaring features of a traditional LMS while maintaining the empowering design of Inkwire.

**Boosting Creativity:** Inkwire presents a great platform for students to display their creativity, but we felt that we could do more to help students actually more directly create on the platform. For us, that may mean building in more authoring and creation tools into the platform directly, rather than requiring students to do that outside of the platform.



Students and educators sharing the projects they created on Inkwire at a recent live workshop



Inkwire helps students build portfolios of their best work

## REFLECTIONS

One of the main reasons we were so excited to participate in this fellowship is that it gave us a framework for operationalizing our values. We've made a lot of design decisions that we believe promote well-being, but have not had a research-backed way to communicate our choices or to measure how well they were working. Using the RITEC framework was incredibly valuable for us for this reason.

We had an opportunity to learn from an accomplished group of guest speakers throughout the fellowship who were influential in our thinking about how to incorporate well-being into our design process. Tiffany Gagnon, a designer at the Scratch Foundation, shared about how they are improving the onboarding flow for new users on the Scratch platform. Learning how they are aiming to maintain users' **empowerment** while increasing their **safety** helped us see how an established product team is wrestling with the same tradeoffs in their process. Pia Breum Corlin at the LEGO Foundation, shared with us how they have concretely operationalized the well-being framework by creating their own decision-making matrix that they use when implementing new features. This encouraged us to create our own internal process that keeps us accountable for incorporating well-being into our product development.

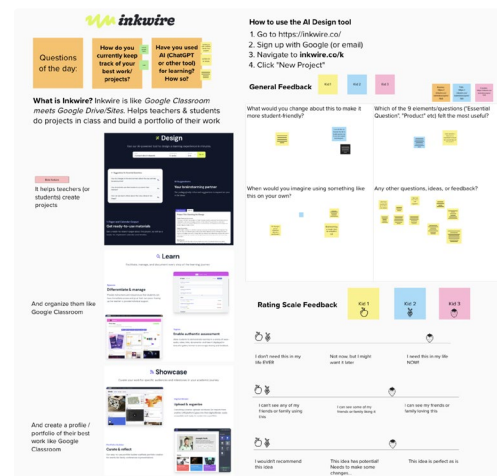
Working with the Youth Design Team was a highlight of our experience. We have been working on a new project design tool for teachers, but have been exploring the idea of making it student-facing. Our feedback session with the Youth Design Team gave us a chance to get direct input on how the tool would need to be changed to better interface directly with students. Here are some of the changes we are making as a result of their feedback:

- + Allow students to try the tool without having to sign up or be invited by their teacher
- + Provide more customization options for the project design
- + Add calendaring functionality that help students plan projects around school constraints

## LOOKING AHEAD

Our ultimate goal is to incorporate the elements of well-being into our product design process. We were inspired by some of our guest speakers to think about how we might build our own internal toolkit that is lightweight and flexible enough to be a regular part of our design cycle. As a small team, our design process has yet to be systematized, but we are growing quickly and at the perfect time in our journey to create a process that incorporates well-being right from the start. We also are planning to build regular youth feedback and co-design into this process.

We are also excited to launch our student-facing project design tool. In addition to the tangible feedback we received from the Youth Design Team, they inspired us to more quickly build out tools that directly interface with young people who are working both in and out of the classroom context. We aim to launch in the next month or two, and the Youth Design team members we worked with will be the first to know when we do!



Mural from Youth Design feedback session

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### Keeana S. Saxon Esq.



Keeana S. Saxon, Esq., Founder and CEO of Kidogo Productions, lives in Boston with her family. She holds a B.A. from Spelman College and a J.D. from Western New England University School of Law. She practiced law for over 10 years and now serves as a Commissioner on the Boston Licensing Board. Keeana also teaches classical piano. Her TEDx Talk is entitled "A Mother's Mission Against Anti-Black Bias in Children's Media."



**PRODUCT:** Kidogoville      **TARGET AGE:** 3-6

*Kidogoville* is an interactive edutainment app for preschoolers built by Kidogo Productions.

→ [KIDOGOPRODUCTIONS.COM](https://KIDOGOPRODUCTIONS.COM)

Kidogo Productions aims to disrupt the children's media with Black Excellence and Black Joy. We understand how color bias in mainstream media leads to low self-esteem in Black children and a false sense of superiority in non-Black children. I saw the negative impact on my own daughter as she yearned to look like mainstream characters.

We believe that children's media would be stronger, higher quality, and have more integrity without bias. Studies show that children who learn from culturally responsive content show more empathy towards others.

In addition to representation, the 80+ parents we surveyed are looking for premier digital educational content, which encourages interactive reinforcement of the curriculum. Moreover, parents want an educational tool, which integrates both on- and off-screen learning. They also understand that their children want to have fun even if they're learning in the process.

We are taking this insight and building a colorful and interactive urban landscape named "Kidogoville," which hosts content, gamifies learning, and connects a Kidogo Kid to real world experiences.



### WHAT COMPONENTS OF WELL-BEING DOES MY PRODUCT ADDRESS?

As we build our app, we are building our content pipeline and community. Our strengths are:

**Social Connection:** we engineer social connection through live events. Whether they are in-person or online, our events help to foster a sense of togetherness.

**Competency:** Our curated and created videos and games, which span a wide number of subjects (STEM, Social Studies, Movement/Wellness, Arts, Literary Arts, Life Skills), improve academic and social/emotional competence.

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** Our content is filtered through the lens of Black Joy and Black Excellence. We highlight and celebrate the many faces, voices, cultures, talents, and skills of the vast and heterogeneous African Diaspora.

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

During this fellowship, we chose to focus on the following:

**Empowerment:** The app we are building will allow our Kidogo Kids to explore Kidogoville on their own. We would like to give our Kidogo Kids the chance to roam without a lot of prompts, directions, algorithms, or social pressures. We believe that empowering our Kidogo Kids to be led by their own curiosity will begin their journey of self discovery.

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** The app will not be just for a Black audience because our avatars will be fully customizable.

**Creativity:** Our activities will allow Kidogo Kids to imagine and produce something we didn't anticipate.



*This fellowship provided Kidogo Productions a researched-backed framework from which to organize our product roadmap. It affirmed our overall purpose and helped to clarify where to focus our attention.*



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

This fellowship gave us creative permission to lean into other design details, which will make the *Kidogoville* app a powerful tool for preschoolers. We asked the Youth Design Team how we could ensure that non-Black children feel comfortable in Kidogoville. Black Kidogo Kids deserve to see themselves reflected positively and non-Black Kidogo Kids *should* see Black people reflected authentically, but we wanted to go beyond mere “windows” and “mirrors”. We wanted all Kidogo Kids to feel immersed and safely inoculated from the poisons of prejudice. The YDT immediately recognized that incorporating fully customizable avatars would help. Through the power of avatars, Kidogo Kids of any race, ethnicity, gender, sex, color, or physical characteristic will be able to see themselves in Kidogoville.



Sample of Kidogoville avatars

## LOOKING AHEAD

One of the best pieces of advice we received from the fellowship was to invite kids to offer their feedback early on in the design process. We knew that children are brilliant and insightful, but during a focus group we hosted with seven 7-10 year olds, they blew us away! Their worldview, fresh imagination, and relevant experience playing with kid apps helped us shape the UX/UI of the app. Accordingly, we are planning more focus groups. We would like them to use their wildest imaginations to help us build Kidogoville. The product roadmap involves a series of sprints, which center around designing certain areas of the landscape. Each area/building involves culturally resonant graphic designs, backend development, interdisciplinary curriculum design, and high quality passive and interactive content. With each major design decision, we now create a survey question to get feedback. We are designing a blissful experience during which learning is a byproduct of the fun, rather than the other way around.

We are beyond thrilled to see the impact Kidogo Productions has already had on Kidogo Kids. We see the twinkle in their eyes when we speak life, love, excellence and joy into them. We can't wait to share Kidogoville with the world. Here are the key lessons we will take with us from the fellowship:

- + Centering certain cultures in children's content does not sacrifice such content's ability to be relatable to and appreciated by other cultures.
- + Do not build without children providing feedback even in (especially in!) the early stages.



Some of the locations kids can explore in Kidogoville

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