



CASE STUDY

The 2026 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.

Christopher Gomez



Christopher Gomez is an illustrator, painter, and educator raised in Queens, NY. Sharing a love of the arts and the skills needed to excel in them has been his mission throughout his decade in Arts Education. His current work as Associate Curator of the Bronx Children's Museum allows him to explore that mission by developing curricula and activities on a daily basis.

PRODUCT: The Bronx Story Machine

TARGET AGE: 2–9

The Bronx Story Machine is an application that guides children through the act of creating, using a variety of media. Children can enter information about themselves and have a story created about their lives. At the same time, it will present the child tools to pursue their interests.

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Technology moves forward at a rapid pace, and the amount of information and content a person takes in today is unprecedented. This current generation of learners has the opportunity to be the most informed and creatively empowered ever, thanks to developing technology like AI. Historically, certain groups have been excluded or left behind during times of rapid change or advancement, so *The Bronx Story Machine* is a tool designed to introduce all children to emerging technologies (like assistive AI, prompt-based programming and design, and at-home 3D printing) in a safe and fun environment, in a way that will help close that gap. Assistive AI can empower different kinds of learners to customize their own experiences with education and creative pursuits. The Story Machine aims to be the first stepping stone for children to become comfortable with these emerging tools.

WHAT COMPONENTS OF WELL-BEING DOES MY PROJECT ADDRESS?

Within the RITEC framework, The Story Machine empowers youth to explore their **creativity** and forge their **identities** by telling their stories in the ways they want. In many schools and parts of the world, the arts are severely underfunded. This creates a situation where many young people cannot see themselves entering creative fields, or even exploring media such as the visual arts or music. The Story Machine would present users with a tangible set of tools to explore their interests and, in turn, measurable goals to promote learning and growth.



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

- + Originally, The Story Machine was intended to act as a touchpoint for children to tell their own stories. However, after receiving feedback from the Youth Design Team, we now plan to create a system or aggregator to collect tools and resources for the children. For example, if a child shows interest in music production, we can introduce them to a simple beat-making game, focusing on beginner concepts like timing. As they show more interest, more complicated concepts are introduced, and the child is guided into career paths that they show interest in e.g., singing, rapping, music production.
- + The Story Machine will become more responsive to the needs of the user. It is important that this system evolves and adapts as the child interacts with it, providing more and more complex and intricate tools. Young people absorb information at an amazing rate, and if we want our tools to stay relevant to them, we must do our best to do the same.
- + We plan to implement some social aspects to facilitate connection amongst our users. In order to maintain the safety of the young users, it would not include any direct communication, but perhaps it would allow the users to view how many others created similar things to them, or chose to participate in a similar way.

REFLECTION

The Youth Design Team was very enlightening. Many times you can find yourself developing in an echo chamber, with only your design sensibilities and mission to guide you through. However, by speaking with these young people, we gained insight as to how these products present themselves and how they would really be used. At the onset of this journey, my intention was to enable all who interact with The Story Machine to feel creative, but, through this fellowship and speaking with the Youth Design Team, I've come to realize that empowerment has to come with autonomy, competence, and the room to find out more about yourself.

LOOKING AHEAD

The next step in this development is to revamp how users will interact with The Story Machine. After learning about new frameworks and speaking with the Youth Design Team about The Story Machine, it became abundantly apparent that in order to develop the creative experience that I had set out to make, I would have to consider a few key concepts. Firstly, creating a safe environment for parents and children to make use of the app, which, to me, presents itself in two distinct forms. Families need to know that whatever information they are sharing with the museum is safeguarded and only handled internally, so that they are comfortable volunteering information about themselves to create their stories. The second part of feeling safe in this context is seeing themselves in the application: knowing that they were considered and taken into account throughout development. This directly leads into another aspect of the player experience that needs to be addressed: **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**. By including depictions of families from rich and diverse backgrounds, families will hopefully feel as if they can take advantage of the tools within The Story Machine. This will lead directly into the young users wanting to learn how to use these tools better and gaining competence. And with mastery, comes the freedom to create things in a satisfying way.



- + The Story Machine is a great opportunity for children to involve themselves in the process of creating and sharing those creations with each other. These “stories” that will be written can come in a variety of forms: A song about your day, a drawing depicting how you feel, a short story about family. What The Story Machine will aim to do is create a fun and educational environment for children to explore all these options and understand that these artforms are all healthy and fulfilling outlets that can help you learn more about yourself, even if you don’t want to grow up to be a full-time artist.
- + Design can fall into the trap of focusing on solving singular problems: a goal is given, and a solution is developed to address it. But this often leads to tunnel vision. Effective design requires seeing from the user’s perspective—from a human perspective. If someone is unable or unprepared to engage with your work for any reason, they cannot fully benefit from it. Design is not just about solving problems; it is about creating the conditions that allow people to use and engage with your application, product, or experience. And tools like the RITEC-8 framework can aid with that, by guiding designers to consider things that aren’t necessarily quantifiable. For example, a classroom application can be amazing at teaching children math in a group setting, but if there aren’t safeguards put in place to ensure that the children interact with each other in an enriching way (e.g. positive language filters, tools for a facilitator to confirm that a student is growing with the program) the returns and results of the application will continually diminish. The RITEC framework provides the perspective needed to create a fulfilling experience through design.



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For more information about the Well-Being by Design Fellowship program, please visit joanganzcooneycenter.org/fellowship2026