



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.

Sarah Kelley-Luker



Sarah Kelley-Luker (she/her) is a creative producer and playful learning designer specializing in media, toys, and curricula for kids ages zero to ten. Her work focuses on elevating everyday childhood experiences as meaningful sites of learning, wonder, and growth. To this end, Sarah has designed unique and engaging learning experiences for Disney, Noggin, Britannica Kids, Tiny Souls Media, Nurture, and Committee for Children, among others. She currently works as a production and learning consultant for the kids' media industry.

NURTURE

PRODUCT: Nurture

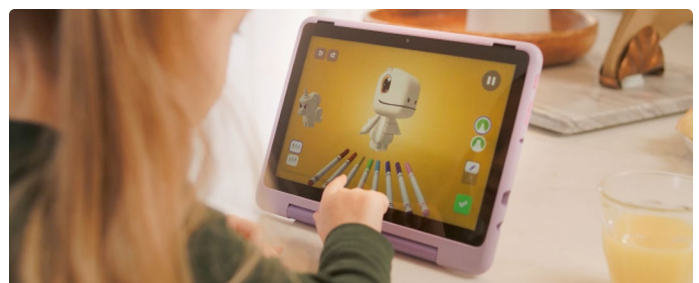
TARGET AGE: 5–6

Nurture is an interactive learning app that uses the power of storytelling to teach kids future-proof life skills.

→ [SARAH'S WEBSITE](#)

Nurture is a story-based learning app designed to teach kids future-proof life skills, such as growth mindset, habit-building, and digital well-being. Players embark on “adventures” with beloved characters, moving seamlessly between linear and interactive moments to practice their new skills and help characters solve problems like fixing a broken skateboard or flying an airship through an asteroid field.

This immersive format is full of possibilities, both for kids and for the industry. It gives kids the opportunity to practice their new skills in authentic contexts. Helping a character can give kids a sense of competence and importance (Reymond, 2022). The presence of these characters adds excitement and motivation to play (Wohlwend, 2013). And we know that young children both care deeply about storytelling and are moving towards interactive experiences (Wohlend, 2013; Mann et al, 2025). But this exciting format is only as good as what we make it. There's so much opportunity here to engage kids meaningfully: How are we harnessing all of that potential? And how can we become even more thoughtful, more responsive, more “nurturing” to kids in the future?





WHAT COMPONENTS OF WELL-BEING DOES MY PROJECT ADDRESS?

Nurture games support kids' autonomy, competence, and creativity. We encourage a sense of autonomy by honoring kids' interactive choices in the linear content. For example, kids decorate an airship in "Doki's Delivery" and then see the characters fly their uniquely decorated ship for the rest of the adventure. All interactives begin with a character calling the player for help, positioning them as skilled and competent. And Nurture players are encouraged to exercise their creativity through both self-expression and problem-solving activities, all of which accept multiple processes and answers.

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

Following my RITEC audit and co-design session with the Youth Design Team, I am recommending that Nurture:

- + **Builds a culture of co-design.** The phrase "nothing about us without us" has been used to argue for people's participation in the design of policies and programs that affect them, and it is a useful phrase here as well. If we recognize children as people, we must also recognize their right to be involved in the design of their learning environments through co-design.
- + **Build out the Emotions Toolkit.** This idea involves gradually introducing emotion-regulation strategies that kids can use with a character experiencing strong, uncomfortable emotions. Each time a strategy is introduced, it is added to a child's "toolkit," which they can pull from as needed. This idea models both emotion regulation strategies as well as situations where those strategies might be helpful.

- + **Aligns key metrics to RITEC.** Like most apps, Nurture expresses its goals and priorities through analytics, which in turn drive decision-making. If we truly care about kids' well-being and want to hold ourselves accountable to designing for kids' well-being, our key metrics must reflect that commitment.

REFLECTION

My experience with the Youth Design Team led to three main takeaways. First, that kids want to make a mark on their media, and they want that mark to matter. Customization is important, and especially customization that meaningfully affects the trajectory of the game or story. The session also highlighted the need for kids' design participation. Kids deserve a seat at the table where their media is being created, and it only benefits organizations to bring in their unique expertise. Lastly, I was struck by the importance of making a commitment to the care and struggle inherent in thoughtful design. Designing for kids' well-being is not a task we can ever fully check off. This work requires a long-term commitment to re-evaluation, conversation, flexibility, and care.

LOOKING AHEAD

Nurture's Learning and Research team has already begun enacting the recommendations that have come out of this fellowship. They are currently drafting new research protocols to ensure that a commitment to co-design becomes a core part of the organization's culture. They have committed to a yearly well-being review, and are investigating how they can more closely align their key business metrics to kids' well-being. Conversations around the design and logistics of the Emotions Toolkit have re-started and, possibly most importantly, the wider Nurture team has new language and structure with which to discuss the topic of well-being.

There is so much that I hope to carry back to the kids' media industry from this fellowship. Among the most important points are these ideas:

+ **Well-being and delight are co-dependent.** Kids' media is a silly, serious business. My task list regularly includes items like reviewing designs for a tomato-squishing foot monster and hosting a rigorous debate over the cultural agency of a chicken civilization. Even as I work on these absurd (and absurdly fun!) tasks, I'm aware that I'm producing formative content for a vulnerable population. Our industry creates the stories, ideas, and art entering the human brain at the exact time that that brain is forming critical connections (Brown & Jernigan, 2012). Our work defines playground culture, which heavily influences the initial worldviews and identities of millions of children (Wohlwend, 2009). At first glance, the silliness and seriousness of kids' media can seem somewhat at odds, but research shows that silliness is seriously good for kids. It can strengthen their relationships and give them access to some of the emotions that make life most worth living (Koch, 2023). I would love to see the industry explore what it would mean to treat delight as critical to well-being, and a sense of well-being as equally critical to kids' delight.

+ **Caring about well-being is for everyone.** Anyone interested in designing for kids' well-being can access many studies, resources, and conversations around this topic that are publicly available. ([The Cooney Center](#) website, the [Co-design with Kids Toolkit](#), and the [RITEC toolbox](#) are great places to start!) This fellowship has been a particularly incredible way to get started; another way is asking a work friend, "What do you think makes a game really good for kids?"

REFERENCES

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SESAME WORKSHOP

Joan Ganz Cooney Center

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