



WELL-BEING BY DESIGN FELLOWSHIP

20
26

CASE STUDIES

- 2 Allie Dewey
- 9 Amber Ivey
- 9 Asante Asiedu
- 12 Christopher Gomez
- 15 Kati Baker
- 19 Dr. Mariya Nikolayev
- 22 Sarah Kelley-Luker
- 25 Tatyerra Spurlock-McPherson
- 28 Téo Xisto



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.

Allie Dewey



Allie Dewey is an exhibition designer who creates hands-on, learner-centered experiences for museums and cultural spaces. Gravitated toward projects that draw from multiple fields, Allie believes successful exhibitions should spark curiosity while inviting visitors of all ages to explore, discover, and create through active participation. She currently works at The DoSeum designing interactive galleries for both the DoSeum and clients worldwide.



PRODUCT: Big Little Town

TARGET AGE: 0-5

Digital media interactives for Little Town Exhibit

→ [THEDOSEUM.ORG](https://thedoseum.org)

Our most popular exhibition is undergoing a reimagination. The enhanced *Big Little Town* experience is designed as an imaginative, immersive, and communal environment where children explore social interactions and real-world scenarios through hands-on activities. Guided by the philosophy “Try it, play it, be it,” the exhibition encourages holistic development with caregiver support. Learning goals include strengthening gross and fine motor skills, practicing foundational concepts like counting, and developing social-emotional skills. As this exhibition is reimagined, I worked to develop “phygital” (the blending of physical and digital worlds to create immersive, interactive, and personalized visitor experiences) elements to enhance the role play. Through the fellowship, I evaluated how the interactive digital experiences we are planning for the *Big Little Town* might contribute to children's well-being using the RITEC framework, focusing specifically on autonomy, relationships, and creativity, as these areas are most directly aligned with the developmental needs of young children.



Current little town gallery space

WHAT COMPONENTS OF WELL-BEING DOES MY PROJECT ADDRESS?

For the fellowship, I chose four main digital interactives that we plan to develop for the reimagined *Little Town*:

1. River/Fishing Projection

Visitors enter an immersive, movement-responsive river experience with animated aquatic life that leads to an interactive fishing activity and periodically transforms into a “floor is lava” activity, fostering open-ended play, collaboration, and accessibility through movement-based and imaginative experiences.

2. Dance Movement Interactive

A dance-themed interactive activity, similar to *Just Dance*, where kids can follow along to existing dance videos, learn new dance moves, and create their own. This activity promotes well-being through physical activity, creativity, and social connection through music and self-expression.

3. Construction

Built into a wood structure, back-lit screens invite children to explore creativity through hands-on art and construction. The construction zone fosters well-being through hands-on creativity, fine motor skills, and collaboration through open-ended painting.

4. Design your own car

Children design vehicles on a tablet and see them projected onto suspended car models in real time, with physical elements they can customize for a blended phygital experience. Blending digital and physical play, the interactive supports autonomy, creativity, and social interaction.

When evaluating our proposed designs, I focused on the well-being dimensions of **autonomy**, **relationships**, and **creativity** using the RITEC framework, while embedding **safety**, **inclusion**, and **identity** exploration throughout. At this stage, competence is not an isolated skill set but is closely tied to opportunities for independent choice, creative expression, social interaction, identity exploration, and emotional development; accordingly, many of the intended learning outcomes emphasize social-emotional growth. Safety and security, along with diversity, equity, and inclusion, were treated as foundational principles embedded throughout the experience rather than as discrete focus areas. Identity, in particular, functions as an overarching theme, as the core premise of the space is to support children in exploring and expressing different roles through active play. There remains an opportunity to further deepen the integration of emotional development beyond turn-taking alone.



[By including both physical and digital interactives] I get two sides of the story that help me get a fuller picture of what I’m learning about.



Co-designing with DoSeum’s Youth Advisory Board

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

1. Design for open-ended, communal play that supports autonomy and relationship-building

Feedback from youth advisors and observations of preschoolers show a clear preference for open-ended experiences over structured interactives, as they foster creativity and allow children of all abilities to engage at their own level. In response, I shifted the dance experience away from predetermined choreography and toward a more flexible environment that encourages children to explore movement, creativity, and self-expression. This approach aligns with the RITEC framework by prioritizing autonomy and creativity, allowing children to engage on their own terms while also creating opportunities for collaborative play, social interaction, and relationship-building.

2. Add more opportunities for meaningful social connection

Participants in the co-design sessions expressed interest in incorporating educational elements into the interactive river experience to transform it from an individual activity into a shared learning opportunity. This feedback highlighted the potential for the river to foster meaningful interactions between children and caregivers. In response, we plan to integrate opportunities for caregivers to actively participate by offering guidance, responding to children's discoveries, and helping identify different fish species. These interactions can create shared moments of exploration and learning, strengthening social connections while enriching the overall experience.



Co-designing with DoSeum's Youth Advisory Board

REFLECTION

Feedback from young people has been a critical part of the design process for the reimagined Little Town. Both the DoSeum's Youth Advisory Board (YAB) and the fellowship's Youth Design Team identified the river projection as a standout concept, with strong alignment in preferences despite differences in age and prior experience with children's museum environments. Across both groups, there was notable enthusiasm for enhancing the construction experience through alternative tools—such as spray paint or shape sponges—either alongside or in place of traditional brushes.

Participants also expressed a desire to engage more deeply with content, including opportunities to learn about fish species and car facts, and emphasized the value of integrating audio and physical elements to create a more immersive experience. Overall, there was a clear preference for physical and “phygital” interactions over strictly digital alternatives, reinforcing the importance of tactile, hands-on engagement in an increasingly digital landscape.



LOOKING AHEAD

I have gained valuable tools to further develop and strengthen my co-design practice. In particular, I found the Cooney Center's [Co-Design with Kids Toolkit](#) to be very helpful and plan to continue using it as we expand community conversations with children and stakeholders, and as we grow and evolve our Youth Advisory Board. We are continuing to conduct co-design sessions and have actively incorporated key learnings and participant feedback into our ongoing development and ideation processes.

I also plan to continue to reference the RITEC framework for this project and others I will design and develop throughout my career.

1. Rebalancing play through physical–digital integration

As children grow up in increasingly screen-saturated environments, thoughtfully designed “phygital” experiences can restore balance by blending tactile, embodied play with meaningful digital augmentation. These experiences encourage movement, collaboration, and sensory engagement while still leveraging the interactivity and adaptability of digital tools. For kids, this can lead to deeper learning, improved social interaction, and stronger memory retention. For designers, the key lesson is not to compete with digital media, but to integrate it in ways that enhance—not replace—physical exploration.

2. Designing for shared family engagement

Both children and caregivers are signaling a desire for experiences they can participate in together, rather than parallel or isolated forms of engagement. Phygital environments create opportunities for intergenerational interaction by offering layered experiences that appeal across ages and abilities, inviting collaborative problem-solving or storytelling. This highlights for designers the importance of creating flexible systems that support multiple entry points, fostering connection rather than fragmentation within family groups.

3. Shifting expectations for meaningful interactivity

As digital natives, today's kids expect interactivity to be intuitive, responsive, and personalized—but they also crave authenticity and real-world connection. Physical components ground experiences in reality, while digital layers can provide narrative depth, feedback, and adaptability. This shift challenges designers to move beyond novelty-driven tech and toward intentional, purpose-driven interactivity. The broader lesson for the field is that successful experiences will be those that feel cohesive and human-centered, using technology to deepen engagement rather than distract from it.



Joan Ganz Cooney Center

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



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.

Amber Ivey



Amber Ivey, also known as AI, is the founder of AiDigiTales and creator of AiDigiCards. A data and AI governance practitioner, children's edutainment creator, and proud aunt, she helps kids and the adults who love them understand AI in simple, safe, playful ways, building critical thinking, creativity, confidence, and curiosity rather than taking them away.

Kids are growing up in an AI world, but the adults raising and teaching them rarely have a simple, safe way to introduce AI, without adding screens or handing a child to a chatbot. Families want kids to understand AI, yet worry about technology eroding creativity, privacy, and childhood. Schools are still catching up, and children are already meeting AI through toys, YouTube algorithms, game apps, classroom tools, and voice assistants.

AiDigiCards meets kids at the kitchen table, not on a tablet. The ABCs of AI Activity Deck teaches foundational AI concepts offline first, using tactile cards, stories, games, and activities adults can guide. Each card introduces a concept through multiple modes: kids can hear it, say it, act it out, draw it, question it, or connect it to everyday life, and closes with a conversational prompt that hands

AiDigiCards

WHERE AI LITERACY BEGINS.

PRODUCT: AiDigiCards

TARGET AGE: 5-9 with parents, teachers, librarians, and caregivers serving as trusted adult guides

AiDigiCards is a screen-free-first AI literacy edutainment product line that helps kids build a foundational understanding of artificial intelligence through hands-on, age-appropriate learning tools. Its first product, the ABCs of AI Activity Deck, introduces kids to AI concepts through definitions, stories, activities, games, and optional audio.

→ [AIDIGICARDS.COM](https://aidigicards.com)

the trusted adult an easy, ready-made question to keep the discussion going. That supports vocabulary, critical thinking, communication, creativity, turn-taking, and adult-child connection, building AI literacy in step with how young children actually learn: through play, repetition, and conversation with someone they trust.

WHAT COMPONENTS OF WELL-BEING DOES MY PROJECT ADDRESS?

AiDigiCards addresses **autonomy**, **creativity**, **competence**, and **social connection**. It supports autonomy by letting children explore AI in a low-pressure way, with no screen or AI tool required. It builds creativity through drawing, storytelling, movement, and imaginative play. It develops competence by giving kids simple language for complex ideas. And it strengthens social connection by creating shared learning moments between children and trusted adults, turning AI from something kids face alone into something they explore together.

“

AI literacy should start at the kitchen table, not on a tablet. The fellowship clarified that this wasn't just a tagline, it's a well-being principle.

”

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

- + **Protect the way kids first meet AI.** The fellowship helped make the why clearer. AiDigiCards starts offline because kids do not need their first AI lesson to come from another screen. They need room to ask questions, play with the ideas, and build confidence with an adult beside them. As the product grows, the deck will stay the starting point because that first conversation matters.
- + **Add digital only where it makes sense.** Digital is still part of the roadmap, but not every part of the deck needs to become digital. The Youth Design Team helped sharpen that. They were more interested in digital activities than digital definitions or stories, which makes sense. Activities give kids something to do, try, and create. That feedback will guide how future expansion packs are built.
- + **Keep making AI feel understandable, not scary.** Kids can handle big ideas when the language meets them where they are. The Youth Design Team reminded us that clear explanations, physical activities, and playful examples matter. AiDigiCards will keep translating AI into language kids can actually use, with examples connected to their real lives instead of jargon that makes AI feel distant or overwhelming.





REFLECTION

The biggest shift was realizing well-being can't be bolted on after a product is built; it shapes the core design choice itself. For AiDigiCards, that meant committing to conversation, play, and trusted-adult guidance before independent digital use. The Youth Design Team affirmed it: kids still want physical activities, simple language, and playful ways to learn. Their feedback reinforced that children need room to build confidence, ask questions, and stay curious in a space that feels safe, human, and age-appropriate.

LOOKING AHEAD

AiDigiCards will keep growing as a screen-free-first tool, adding digital experiences only when they genuinely support children's learning and well-being. The next phase is testing the full ABCs of AI Activity Deck with kids, parents, teachers, and librarians, learning which cards engage most, which concepts need clearer language, and how adults actually use the deck to guide conversations.

Those findings will shape the roadmap, guided by a simple principle: cards for now, digital next. The physical deck stays the core experience because it gives kids a tactile, playful way to build AI literacy alongside trusted adults. Digital expansion packs will follow gradually and intentionally, beginning with audio, informed by the Youth Design Team's insight that activities, more than definitions or stories, are where kids most want to go digital. Letting children's feedback drive the roadmap keeps the goal in focus: every new feature should help kids build confidence, curiosity, and agency in how they understand AI, rather than pull those qualities away.

- + **For kids:** AiDigiCards creates a safer first encounter with AI. Children already meet AI through platforms, toys, games, and voice assistants, usually without guidance. The deck offers a more intentional introduction before kids are asked to use AI or trust its answers. By starting with play, language, and adult support, it helps them build confidence, curiosity, and critical thinking, so their first relationship with AI is one of questioning rather than blind reliance.
- + **For families and educators:** AiDigiCards makes AI easier to talk about. Many adults know AI matters but don't feel prepared to explain it to children. The deck gives parents, teachers, librarians, and caregivers plain language and ready-to-use activities, helping them become guides in the conversation instead of letting platforms become a child's first teacher.
- + **For the field:** AiDigiCards offers a screen-free-first model for emerging-technology literacy. The lesson for other designers is that teaching children about technology doesn't have to start with more technology. Physical play, storytelling, and co-learning are powerful design choices, especially for young kids. Digital tools still add value, but they work best when introduced with purpose, boundaries, and care.



Joan Ganz Cooney Center

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



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.

Asante Asiedu



Asante Asiedu is the founder of Udēesa, a spatial learning platform focused on helping institutions turn events, real-world locations, stories, and skill-building pathways into guided interactive experiences. His work sits at the intersection of educator support, immersive infrastructure design and cultural learning, with projects spanning museums, classrooms, and youth-centered learning environments.



UDEESA
XR For You.

PRODUCT: Udēesa **TARGET AGE:** 5–10

Udēesa is a spatial learning platform that helps educators and institutions turn events, real-world locations, stories, and skill-building pathways into guided interactive experiences accessible across devices.

→ UDEESA.COM

Udēesa was developed in response to a gap in how young people experience learning about culture, place, and real-world skill-building opportunities. Too often, digital learning tools either flatten meaningful content into passive media or overemphasize technology at the expense of reflection, facilitation, and human connection. We wanted to explore a different model: one in which immersive environments could help children move through experiences with intention, build skills through guided interaction, and connect what they are learning to the people and communities around them.

Our broader work at Udēesa focuses on immersive infrastructure—tools and systems that allow museums, schools, and youth-serving organizations to create reusable digital learning experiences rather than one-off activations. Through the fellowship, we focused this work more directly on children's well-being by testing how our XR User Interface (XUI) could support curiosity, agency, reflection, and social learning in ways that are accessible across devices and supportive of educators. The fellowship helped us sharpen both our product itself and the philosophy behind it: immersive media should not replace teaching or relationships, but strengthen them.

WHAT COMPONENTS OF WELL-BEING DOES MY PROJECT ADDRESS?

Udēesa is designed to support children's learning by turning immersive environments into structured spaces for exploration, decision-making, reflection,

and guided discovery. Our XR Editor tool connects to child development by supporting educators as they foster agency, curiosity, emotional safety, and social learning to help children build confidence through achievable challenges and educator-led interactions.

“

We want to know what YOU [educators] know.

CO-DESIGN STUDENT, AGE 15

”

Udēsa addresses several components of children's well-being, specifically safety, competence, emotions, and identities. The XUI framework guides children through immersive environments (e.g. 360-degree media & spatial scans similar to matterport virtual tours) using clear goals, progress indicators, and interactive prompts, helping them explore at their own pace with built-in checkpoints and downtime to reduce confusion and overload. Because experiences are designed to be facilitator-friendly, our platform also supports co-regulated learning by leaving room for conversation, reflection, and educator guidance. This helps children feel supported rather than isolated while using technology, and gives educators the confidence to explore new teaching tools without sacrificing pedagogy and crucial student teacher relationships.

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

+ Strengthen choice and flexible pathways

We want to build in more intentional opportunities for children to choose how they move through an experience, what they explore first, and how they respond. During the fellowship, it became clear that children value room for choice and feel more engaged when technology supports exploration rather than forcing a single path.

+ Improve social and peer-supported interaction

We plan to better support co-learning by designing more prompts and interaction models that encourage discussion, teamwork, and shared reflection. Fellowship feedback reinforced that children often want technology to be part of a more social learning experience, not a replacement for peer-to-peer or teacher-supported engagement.

+ Refine age-appropriate scaffolding and emotional pacing

We aim to improve how different age groups enter and move through our experiences by making instructions, pacing, and challenge levels easier to understand. This fellowship showed us the importance of creating experiences that feel inviting and manageable, especially for younger users who need clarity and encouragement to stay engaged.





REFLECTION

This fellowship reinforced that designing for well-being is not just about making technology safer or more appealing. It is about designing experiences that respect children's developmental needs, attention, and relationships. I learned that structure matters as much as content: children benefit when they know what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how they are progressing. From the Youth Design Team, I learned that students are highly aware of when technology is actually helping them and when it is simply being added for its own sake. They consistently pointed toward tools that make learning more engaging, more social, and easier to navigate.

LOOKING AHEAD

Going forward, Udēesa will continue to help institutions design and deploy guided immersive experiences across devices. We aim to build spatial learning systems that are easier for educators and institutions to use, easier for children to navigate, and more grounded in real learning contexts. One important area of growth is the continued development of our XR User Interface (XUI), which acts as a lightweight pedagogical layer for content creation and interaction across devices. We are also refining our XR editor so that institutions can more easily organize media, prompts, and guided interactions into reusable learning experiences.

This fellowship has pushed us to think more intentionally about how these tools should function in practice. Rather than treating immersive media as something that should stand alone, we are designing around the idea that meaningful experiences need facilitation, reflection, and choice. This will shape how we build future experiences, onboarding tools, and educator supports. It also strengthens our long-term infrastructure model by making our XR products and platform more useful not just for learners, but for museums, schools, and programs that want to responsibly integrate immersive technology into children's learning environments.

+ For kids: more accessible and supportive immersive learning

Udēesa's approach gives children a way to engage with immersive environments without requiring expensive or specialized hardware. By focusing on guided exploration, reflection, and age-appropriate scaffolding, our platform can help children experience interactive learning in ways that are more supportive, less overwhelming, and more connected to real educational goals.

+ For educators and institutions: immersive tools that strengthen, not replace, teaching

One of the clearest lessons from this work is that immersive technology becomes more valuable when it is designed to work with educators rather than around them. Our framework leaves room for facilitation, discussion, and adaptation, which makes it more practical for classrooms, museums, and youth programs that want to use immersive learning responsibly.

+ For designers in the field: pedagogy matters more than novelty

A major lesson from this fellowship is that children's well-being is better supported when immersive design focuses on structure, clarity, and meaningful interaction rather than technical spectacle. Designers should think less about whether a technology looks advanced and more about whether it helps children explore, reflect, connect, and learn with confidence.



SESAME WORKSHOP

Joan Ganz Cooney Center

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



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.

→ CHRISTOPHER@BXC.M.ORG

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.



Joan Ganz Cooney Center

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



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.

Kati Baker



Kati Baker is a Video Game Developer and Designer at Social Cipher who has been creating games since her first game jam in 2016. She is a programmer by trade and has spent part of her professional career working in STEM Education for NASA and 4-H. She is a big believer in continuing to learn, no matter what.



PRODUCT: Social Cipher

TARGET AGE: Middle and High School-aged youth

Social Cipher is a company that supports neurodivergent youth through Social Emotional Learning, or SEL content, to build self-confidence and self-advocacy skills.

→ [SOCIALCIPHER.COM](https://socialcipher.com)

Social Cipher makes social and emotional learning games for middle and high schoolers. Currently, our game has 3 different modes: story/platforming, creative building, and tower defense. Our games center neurodivergent experiences with social situations, gives players agency to choose, and doesn't talk down to them.

For the Well-Being by Design Fellowship, we brought a prototype of a new type of gameplay to teach social and emotional skills in classrooms and therapy centers. The central theme of this prototype is "keeping up with others to belong." In the game, the player creates a character and then follows Ava, an autistic Space Navigator attending her first convention with friends. The goal is to help her navigate the space and spend her time wisely.

With this new mode of play we wanted to create a game that was more accessible for both students and teachers: for teachers, that means providing more bite-size chunks of curriculum and gameplay time to discuss, and for students, offering one-button controls and mechanics for gamers and non-gamers.



WHAT COMPONENTS OF WELL-BEING DOES MY PROJECT ADDRESS?

- + The new story mode module encourages **autonomy** from the RITEC framework by allowing youth to engage with a game at their own pace and focus on the elements they enjoy. Specifically, players control the narrative through their dialogue choices, leading to multiple story endings. They can also explore different locations within the world at their own pace and/or skip parts of exploration altogether. Narrative freedom is extremely important, as it provides youth an opportunity to build the SEL skills we want them to acquire as well as tracking the SEL skills they naturally lean into using.
- + Another dimension our game focuses on is **emotions**, because we intentionally put the player in social situations that have lasting effects. The goal of play is to experience character development and have strategies for emotional regulation modeled while providing exposure to a variety of SEL skills. We do this by creating careful narrative design alongside art to highlight characters' range of emotions that occur in a given social situation. Finally, we provide space in our game for the player to practice that regulation in future situations in the game.
- + A final dimension we prioritize is **relationships**. In social situations throughout the game, we allow players to choose from branching dialogue options, with characters responding based on their choices. This allows players to better understand how the words they use and their actions affect others.

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

- + After many design discussions, we decided to include player stats, or attributes, as part of the new prototype game experience. For example, friends ask the player to hang out with them rather than do what the player originally wanted to do. Each option for the player is tied to a specific attribute, tracked, and then modified when chosen. It provides real-time feedback to the player on their choices and builds a connection with them about the importance of their choices. This reinforces **competence**, **emotion**, and **relationships** by allowing players to see exactly which narrative choices shape the reactions in their relationships with other characters and the world. We want to provide more ways for our players to be **creative**, which can sometimes be challenging when providing a specific narrative or social situation to players. By interweaving a card game into the narrative, we think we can provide a space for greater creativity beyond selecting branching dialogue options. The card game has lenticular design, allowing players to create a wide array of strategies for success.
- + While our game provides a lot of exposure to those with different backgrounds, identities, and levels of neurodivergence, the player often plays as the same protagonist which limits their ability to truly explore **identities**. With our new gameplay mode, players will be able to change protagonist based on the topic and focus, allowing them to experience different identities.



REFLECTION

- + The fellowship inspired multiple changes we're making to our internal process of design. Specifically, being aware of the differences between making a game for fun versus making a game for an educational audience. While we were aware of this to some extent already, it was reinforced and highlighted again. Being exposed to different perspectives from other Fellows with very different use cases combined with the resources provided helped me to think in new ways going into our pre-production design process for the story module game, which was scheduled just as the Fellowship wrapped up.
- + Co-design with kids as early as possible to identify and iterate on the strongest ideas. The important piece of co-design I've learned throughout this fellowship is that it's not about incorporating every detail that's expressed by youth but rather looking at the larger picture of what they are excited about and how to translate it into usable pieces. It's an interesting mix of part guide, part collaborator in providing language, constraints, and context for what, why, and how something is made.
- + Watch rather than listen sometimes - self-reported play has bias and misses things that watching a youth play can't account for. It can be helpful to record playtests for anyone who tries our prototype whether that's internal or external and reviewing with the design team, because self-reports on playtesting are not very reliable among both adults and youth. Playtesting is research and should be regarded as such.

LOOKING AHEAD

I'm now requiring everyone on my team to evaluate how they think our game is meeting each component of the RITEC framework. The goal was to spend time aligning the team's focus and intentions around the RITEC-8 to ensure the design moved forward with a clear focus on the dimensions that are most important to us. Results were varied and jump-started some good discussions on game's strengths and weaknesses when it comes to well-being. The varied results stemmed predominantly from each person's role on the team. Developers and designers viewed the framework differently than classroom teachers or other consultants.



One of the highlights from working with the Youth Design Team was the feedback that tools for divergent audiences should not “force us into a mold.” Rather than design a game that forces a “correct path” or response to social situations, our game should provide multiple pathways for players to express themselves, highlighting a variety of SEL strategies to incorporate them. Hearing this confirmed by the Youth Design Team reinforced our team’s design process.





- + I hope the impact of our game for youth is that they find the content of the new gameplay mode relatable and maybe even a little cool. In addition, I hope our game can help youth to realize they have a choice in how they present themselves, how they should be treated, and develop good coping strategies that are lifelong skills.
- + For teachers, we want to provide as much support as possible, knowing they may not have much video game exposure or understanding of how mechanics and systems interact with each other. In this, we try to use cohesive terminology when we speak with teachers. At a high level, we want to provide ways for teachers/facilitators to get data quickly and easily see where students are in the game to assess how to support or guide them, if needed.
- + I would love to see more tools similar to RITEC developed to provide a jumping off point to create those formal, internal processes for designing learning games for well-being. Having someone to liaison between design and education, much like a science communicator, is essential to the design being seamlessly communicated across the entire team.



Joan Ganz Cooney Center

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



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.

Dr. Mariya Nikolayev



Dr. Mariya Nikolayev is a Senior User Researcher at Stride, Inc., where she helps shape digital learning experiences for K-12 students and families nationwide. With expertise in child development, educational technology, and digital media, she has spent more than a decade studying how children learn, connect, and grow. Through her work, she seeks to bridge research and practice to create products that make a positive difference in the lives of children and families.

Stride

PRODUCT: K12 Launch Pad
TARGET AGE: K-12

Stride's K12 Launch Pad is a centralized virtual school hub that helps students manage academics, schedules, and daily learning tasks.

→ STRIDELEARNING.COM

During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools had to abruptly transition to online learning, and it quickly became clear how difficult it is to translate important parts of the school experience, including personal connections with teachers and peers, informal everyday interactions, and a sense of belonging, into online environments.

Yet for a sizable population of students in the United States, virtual school remains a way of life. Whether due to individual needs, geographic constraints, family preferences, or other circumstances, many students choose to complete their schooling online. Classrooms, teachers, friendships, and daily interactions all exist online, making the digital environment their primary space for both learning and connection.

Unlike the emergency remote learning many experienced during the pandemic, virtual schools are intentionally designed to support learning in fully online environments. During the fellowship, I explored how to expand a purpose-built learning system to encompass well-being and support students in building relationships, feeling recognized by others, and developing a sense of belonging in spaces where informal social interaction is limited.

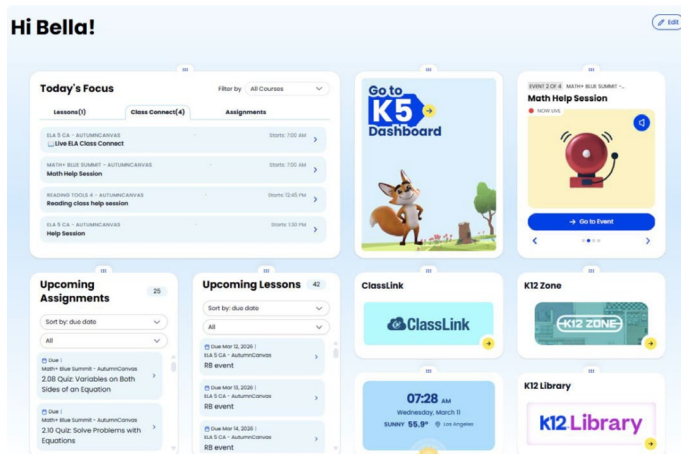
WHAT COMPONENTS OF WELL-BEING DOES MY PROJECT ADDRESS?

K12 Launch Pad currently supports the **safety & security**, **competence**, and **autonomy** dimensions of well-being in the RITEC framework. As a managed school platform with controlled access, it provides students with a secure and protected digital environment by design. The platform is centered around academic progress, course access, and task completion, helping students track their work, monitor progress, and build a sense of mastery and effectiveness. It also supports autonomy by giving students some flexibility in structuring their asynchronous school day and customizing their task-related widgets.

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

As a result of the product audit, I found that Launch Pad can better support well-being through three RITEC domains: **identities**, **relationships**, and **creativity**. All three can be addressed through a thoughtfully designed avatar feature. In a virtual school where students rarely turn their cameras on, the avatar becomes their primary visible self, making it a uniquely high-leverage design element. Avatars are cross-dimensional and versatile, giving students opportunities to explore who they are, connect with peers, and see themselves represented within their learning environment.

- + **Identities:** Avatars should be highly customizable to support identity exploration, creative expression, and personality, including features that reflect different ages and abilities, forms of cultural or religious expression (such as headscarves and other coverings), and fantasy or non-human options. Youth Design Team panelists also emphasized that avatars should be context-aware, looking different across informal social spaces, live classes, and virtual lounges, or alternating with a live video image depending on the moment.
- + **Relationships:** Youth Design Team members recommended avatars to reflect special interests as a way to establish social connections and make them feel that they belong. Panelists also envisioned avatars displaying current moods and birthdays as small but meaningful bids for connection. They felt that signaling academic availability, both willingness to tutor classmates in specific subjects and openness to receiving help, would help build community.
- + **Creativity:** Avatar modifications will be treated as a creative outlet. Per Youth Design Team recommendations, students will be able to mix and match preset features, draw or design original avatar elements, express themselves through fantasy or non-human forms, and experiment with facial expression shifts and small props that signal mood or interest. Students will also be encouraged to exercise their creativity through avatar design competitions, with winning designs added to the platform's mix-and-match library for everyone to use.





REFLECTION

Among many useful contributions from the Youth Design Team, one was especially impactful. At the very beginning of our co-design session, the panelists made a powerful point: they all had experience with online learning as middle-schoolers during the pandemic, and now, six years later, their main recollection was that they did not like it. This feedback highlighted the lasting effects of the school experience and the importance of grounding virtual learning in well-being.

Another important takeaway was how deeply the Youth Design Team understood online socialization, and how fundamental the safety and security dimension of RITEC is to them as a foundation for socializing authentically. Panelists had strong opinions about what should and should not be shared through avatars, asked for guardrails around personal information and data privacy, and gave concrete examples of inappropriate or harmful forms of expression they wanted to keep out.



My experience of the fellowship will shape my work for years to come. The Cooney Center didn't just teach us well-being, they modeled it, and that is what I'll carry forward.



LOOKING AHEAD

The fellowship has expanded my thinking around how to intentionally design and evaluate student experiences through a well-being lens. I have begun applying the fellowship's learnings across my research practice at Stride, integrating well-being into research questions and metrics design, and using them to prompt product thinking that centers student well-being throughout the product development cycle. I plan to expand this work beyond middle school and explore how well-being-centered design can support younger and older learners, whose developmental needs, social experiences, and opportunities for self-expression differ in important ways.

The co-design training equipped me with skills to run online and in-person co-design sessions, and I have the support of my organization to bring them into regular practice. Beyond these immediate next steps, the fellowship's learnings are gifts that keep on giving. The speakers exposed me to topics ranging from co-design methodology to rewards in games for learning. I was also provided access to a body of best practices.

I hope my fellowship work contributes to a growing shift in expectations for educational technology: from viewing digital platforms primarily as tools for learning to recognizing them as environments that support children's holistic development. As virtual learning continues to serve hundreds of thousands of students, designers have both an opportunity and a responsibility to create experiences where students feel seen, connected, and able to thrive.



Joan Ganz Cooney Center

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



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 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?

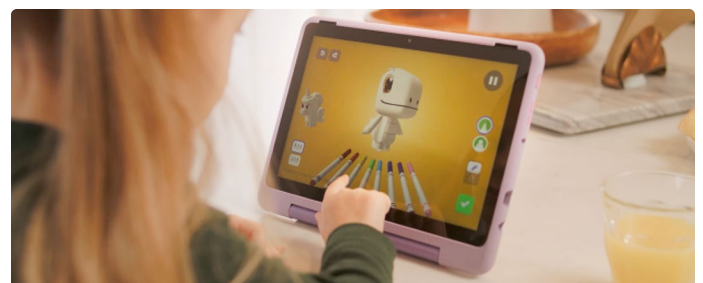
NURTURE

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](#)





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

- Brown T. & Jernigan, T. (2012). Brain development during the preschool years. *Neuropsychological Review*, 22(4), 313-33.
- Koch, A. B. (2023). Fun and laughter promotes wellbeing in early childhood education: A pedagogy of fun and big humor. *Journal of Pedagogy*, 14(1), 37-57.
- Mann, S., Calvin, A., Lenhart, A., & Robb, M.B. (2025). *The Common Sense census: Media use by kids zero to eight, 2025*. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media.
- Reymond, N.C., Nahrgang, R.G., Großmann, N., Wilde, M., & Fries, S. (2022). Why students feel competent in the classroom: A qualitative content analysis of students' views. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 928801.
- Wohlwend, K. E. (2009). Damsels in discourse: Girls consuming and producing identity texts through Disney princess play. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 44, 57-83.
- Wohlwend, K. E. (2013). *Literacy playshop: New Literacies, popular media, and play in the early childhood classroom*. Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University.



SESAME WORKSHOP

Joan Ganz Cooney Center

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



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.

Tatyerra Spurlock- McPherson



Tatyerra Spurlock-McPherson is the Director of Email & Web Strategy at Sesame Workshop, where she leads the organization's digital engagement across email, SMS, and web strategy. Tatyerra drives the digital vision that connects families, educators, and caregivers with Sesame's mission to help children grow smarter, stronger, and kinder.

PRODUCT:

Sesame Workshop's digital ecosystem

TARGET AGE:

2–5



Sesame Workshop's digital ecosystem for children, spanning SesameStreet.org and the Sesame Street app, delivers interactive, research-based games, videos, and activities that help kids learn and grow through play across web and mobile.

→ [SESAMESTREET.ORG](https://www.sesamestreet.org)

SesameStreet.org and its companion app serve as the child-facing digital home of *Sesame Street*, designed to bring the show's trusted learning experience directly into kids' everyday play. Built specifically for preschoolers, the platform helps children everywhere “grow smarter, stronger, and kinder” through interactive games, videos, songs, and creative activities like coloring pages.

The experience is intentionally playful and intuitive, allowing young users to explore alongside familiar characters while building foundational skills. Content spans key developmental areas including early literacy, math, science, creativity, and social-emotional learning. Whether a child is practicing letters, expressing feelings, or learning how to navigate friendships, the site and app turn everyday moments into opportunities for growth.

WHAT COMPONENTS OF WELL-BEING DOES MY PROJECT ADDRESS?

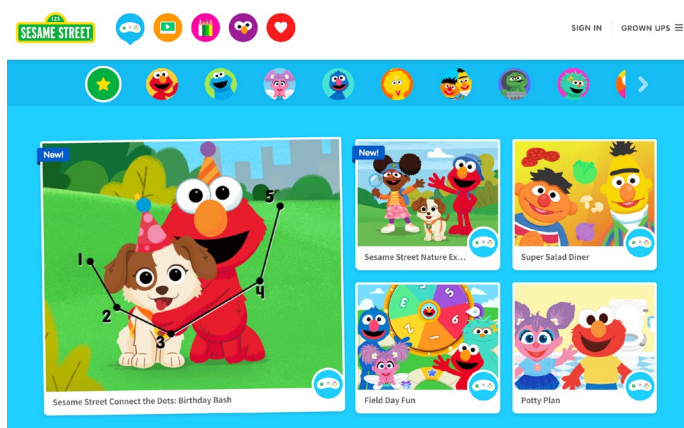
The Sesame Street website and app support digital well-being by fostering **creativity**, **emotional regulation**, and **social connection** through engaging, child-centered experiences. They promote empowerment and competence by encouraging preschoolers to explore, create, and build confidence in their abilities. Designed with inclusivity and safety at the forefront, the platforms provide a trusted environment for early learning.

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

- + **Design for digital-to-real-world balance:** Build more intentional pathways from screen to off-screen play by pairing videos and games with offline activities.
- + **Strengthen emotional skill-building experiences:** Incorporate simple check-ins and wind-down strategies to help children practice managing “big feelings” and developmentally appropriate, supportive ways across both digital and offline experiences.
- + **Enhance personalization and inclusivity:** Develop more adaptive experiences that respond to a child's age, interests, and developmental needs.

REFLECTION

The Youth Design Team pushed me to think more deeply about how we can adapt as the needs of children change in the ever-evolving digital landscape. Their concerns about how kids will engage online highlighted the importance of early digital experiences. It made me reflect on Sesame as one of the first spaces children encounter on the web, and the responsibility we have to model safe, thoughtful, and meaningful engagement. This perspective challenged me to consider how we can offer guidance that not only supports children today, but continues to shape healthy digital habits for the long term.



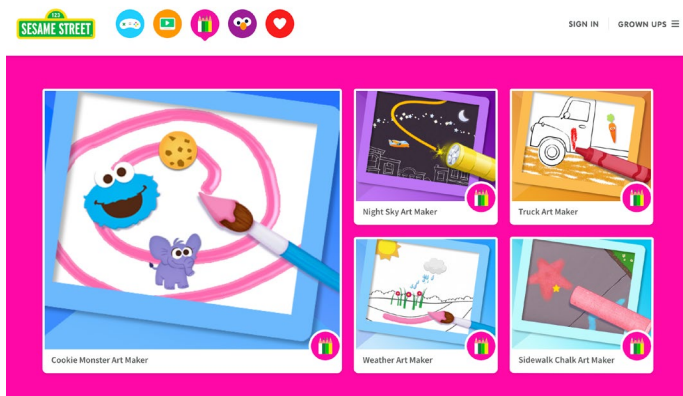
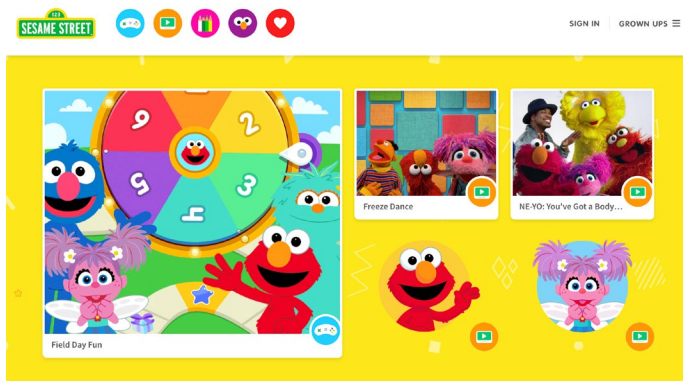
LOOKING AHEAD

One of my biggest takeaways was the importance of intentionally designing digital experiences that help children develop healthy habits from an early age, especially as technology continues to evolve. For the age group we serve, I'm particularly focused on emotional regulation because Sesame is often one of a child's first digital experiences. That creates a unique opportunity (and responsibility) to design environments that support self-regulation, reduce some of the dysregulation often associated with digital engagement, and help shape a healthier relationship with technology as children grow.

Going forward, I want to further explore ways to encourage balanced digital engagement by creating stronger connections between on-screen and off-screen experiences. This includes designing content and user journeys that promote creativity, emotional learning, co-engagement with caregivers, and real-world play.

- + **Helping children build healthy digital habits early:** As one of the first digital spaces many preschoolers encounter, the platform has the opportunity to model safe, intentional, and developmentally supportive digital behaviors that children may carry with them as they grow.
- + **Demonstrating that engagement and well-being can coexist:** A key takeaway from this work is that digital products for children do not have to choose between being engaging and supporting well-being. Thoughtful design can create experiences that are playful, educational, emotionally supportive, and commercially sustainable at the same time.

+ **Encouraging more holistic approaches to children's digital design:** The fellowship reinforced the importance of designing with the whole child in mind—considering emotional, cognitive, social, and developmental well-being together rather than in isolation. By integrating digital well-being principles into content strategy, UX, and storytelling, this work can help contribute to broader conversations about what responsible, child-centered digital design should look like in the future.



“

The Well-Being by Design Fellowship has expanded my perspective not only as a digital marketer, but in how I approach amplifying meaningful digital work. I now feel more confident in my ability to support my team and contribute to more intentional, impactful digital strategies moving forward.

”



Joan Ganz Cooney Center

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



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.

Téo Xisto



Téo Xisto (they/them) is the Creative Learning Coordinator at the Lifelong Kindergarten research group. Téo is also a graduate of the group, where they researched learning environments that foster critical consciousness. They now help develop learning resources, workshops, videos, and partnerships to foster caring and creative communities around the world.

Play is foundational to child development, supporting the growth of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical abilities. OctoStudio is a free creative coding platform that supports the type of play and creativity that children need. By using OctoStudio to create their own games, children begin to see themselves not just as consumers of technology, but as capable computational creators. We facilitate workshops for families because identity shifts rooted in shared experiences are more durable. When caregivers also see themselves as computational creators, they model and reinforce this belonging for their children. Yet adults often approach the idea of coding with more hesitation than their children do.

The Family Game Night project emerged from the insight that a lower-stakes way of tinkering with OctoStudio was needed. By starting with fun and accessible games, families can experience the joy of play together and gradually begin creating themselves. Because OctoStudio is designed to be open and accessible, every game is designed with natural remixing pathways. This invites families to progress from players to creators at their own pace, building shared identity as they tinker together.



PRODUCT: Family Game Night with OctoStudio

TARGET AGE: 7–12, and their adult caretakers

Remixable family games that turn dinner table play into opportunities for shared coding explorations

→ OCTOSTUDIO.ORG

WHAT COMPONENTS OF WELL-BEING DOES MY PROJECT ADDRESS?

Relationships deepen through Family Game Nights, which create space for authentic connection. Adults model vulnerability through play while witnessing children's creativity and humor. **Competence** grows through creative iteration. Visual coding blocks remove technical barriers, and each game is designed as an invitation to bring in your own ideas through remixing. **Diversity, equity, and inclusion** are centered through platform and game design choices. OctoStudio is completely free, doesn't rely on extractive business practices, and is available in over 35 languages. Each game requires only one device per family and will make use of common household materials.

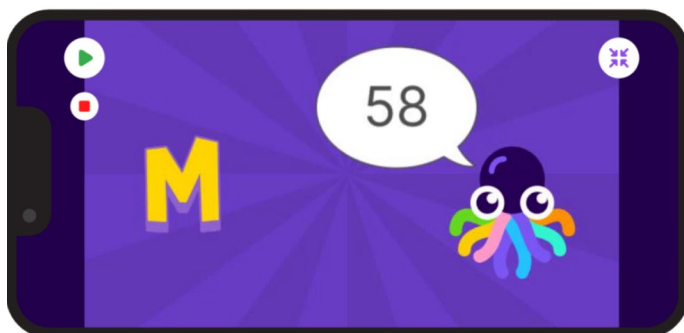
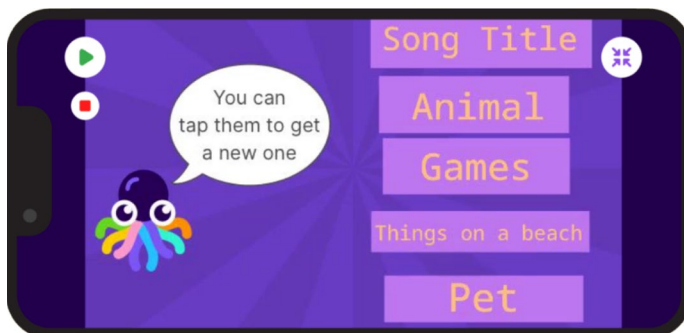
HOW CAN MY PRODUCT BETTER ADDRESS CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING?

- + **Emotions:** The instructions for each game can explicitly normalize emotions and model healthy responses. Instructions can also prompt caregivers to name feelings ("It's disappointing to lose, huh?") and celebrate resilience. The way a game is introduced can create opportunities to practice emotional regulation throughout the game night.
- + **Creativity:** Game instructions can include creative prompts and scaffolding that invite families to imagine variations of a game. For example, including a prompt like "What categories would you add?" can help families see the games as invitations for their own creative expression rather than fixed experiences.
- + **Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion:** Although OctoStudio is available in over 35 languages, this set of games and their corresponding instructions are currently in English. I'm translating all materials into Spanish and Portuguese so more families can engage in their home languages.

“

Going forward, I'll keep asking: Does my design process mirror the values I'm trying to cultivate in the product itself?

”





REFLECTION

Using frameworks like RITEC to audit well-being components of my project was a helpful starting point, but what I learned throughout this fellowship is that well-being must permeate the entire design process. This became clear to me while planning my Youth Design Team feedback session. I thought about well-being not just in relation to my final product, but also in relation to my session design. The [Youth Voice Playbook](#) reminded me to center belonging, create multiple pathways for youth engagement, and build flexibility into my structured plan. Going forward, I'll keep asking: *Does my design process mirror the values I'm trying to cultivate in the product itself?*



The Youth Voice Playbook reminded me to center belonging, create multiple pathways for youth engagement, and build flexibility into my structured plan.



LOOKING AHEAD

My immediate next step will be to share a recap of and reflections from my fellowship experience with my coworkers at Lifelong Kindergarten during an upcoming lunch session. I'm also planning local playtests with children and families this summer. The work being done by KidsTeam and the resources Jason Yip shared with us have given me tons of inspiration on design techniques for co-designing with children, and also helpful advice for co-designing with parents. I will also be referencing the Cooney Center's recently launched resource, [Co-Design with Kids](#), as I get ready for my summer sessions. Beyond testing and creating new games, I'm interested in designing a physical Family Game Night kit containing printed instructions and materials for gameplay. My local library system already loans similar educational kits with preloaded tablets, so I'm curious about partnership opportunities to distribute Family Game Nights through this channel since it is economically accessible to the families I want to center with this project.



Joan Ganz Cooney Center

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