

# Mika Asaba

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UX researcher with 10+ years at the intersection of cognitive science, early childhood development, and applied product research. I specialize in translating qualitative and behavioral insights into product decisions for student- and family-facing AI tools, with deep expertise working with children ages 0–6 and their caregivers. A founding member of two academic research labs at Stanford and Yale and my current research initiative, Tangle & Thrive, at Teaching Lab Studio, I have a consistent track record of building research culture and teams in early-stage environments.

## METHODS & SKILLS

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**Qualitative Research:** User interviews, usability testing, concept testing, diary studies, behavioral observation, think-aloud protocols, thematic analysis

**Research Design & Evaluation:** Experimental design, mixed-methods evaluation, rapid-cycle prototyping and iteration, survey design, behavioral coding, human-in-the-loop frameworks

**AI & Systems:** LLM prompt engineering and evaluation, automated classification pipelines, A/B testing, AI-assisted annotation

**Data & Statistics:** R, mixed-effects modeling, Bayesian analysis, data visualization

**Collaboration:** Cross-functional partnership with engineers, designers, teachers, and families; stakeholder communication; mentorship of junior researchers

## EXPERIENCE

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### Teaching Lab Studio

*AI Fellow, Tangle & Thrive*

Seattle, WA

2025–Present

- Founded and built the UX research practice at Teaching Lab Studio from the ground up, establishing research processes, methods, and team culture for a new consumer product initiative focused on student engagement and motivation.
- Evaluated student, caregiver, and educator experiences with AI-enabled educational tools through interviews and surveys; translated user feedback into feature design priorities and iterative product improvements.
- Designed and ran experiments (n=100+ families) testing AI-delivered caregiver messaging; achieved 80% completion rates and statistically significant improvements in student math interest and math anxiety. Built a human-in-the-loop LLM pipeline to analyze user engagement and message effectiveness.
- Operationalized learning science theories into evaluation metrics and analysis pipelines to guide iterative product development in collaboration with engineers, instructional coaches, and school partners.
- Synthesized and presented research findings and tool updates to funders and internal stakeholders; mentor junior researchers and design associates.

### Yale University

*Postdoctoral Research Associate*

New Haven, CT

2021–2025 Advisors: Julia Leonard, Julián Jara-Ettinger

- Extended foundational research on young children to examine how motivation and social cognition develop through adolescence, including how students evaluate the credibility of feedback and encouragement from others. Published 12 articles in top cognitive science journals.
- Collaborated on a study (n=217 parents of 4-to-5-year-olds) testing how message framing influences caregiver behavior; found that framing tasks as learning opportunities reduced

parental takeover by nearly half, directly informing how digital products can guide caregivers in fostering early development.

- Designed and administered large-scale surveys (n=1,500+) to understand adolescent motivation across the United States; applied computational modeling and Bayesian methods to behavioral data.
- As a founding lab member, played a central role in shaping research culture and mentoring incoming researchers as the lab grew; supervised senior thesis students; presented at CogSci, SPSP, and SRCD.

### Stanford University

Stanford, CA

Graduate Research Fellow, PhD

2016–2021 Advisor: Hyowon Gweon

- Conducted a program of research on how infants, toddlers, and preschoolers (ages 0–6) reason about informant credibility, self-presentation, and reputation management, examining how young children infer the trustworthiness and informativeness of others' evaluations.
- Designed and ran behavioral experiments with young children and their caregivers at local partner schools and online platforms; developed novel experimental paradigms adopted by subsequent collaborators.
- As a founding lab member, helped build the lab's research infrastructure and onboard new researchers; received NSF Graduate Research Fellowship; served as primary instructor for Developmental Psychology and General Psychology.

## EDUCATION

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### Stanford University

Stanford, CA

Ph.D., Psychology

2021

### Wellesley College

Wellesley, MA

B.A., Neuroscience

2014

## GRANTS & AWARDS

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Teaching Lab Studio Fellowship (\$1,000,000)	2025-Present
NSF SBE Postdoctoral Fellowship (\$138,000)	2022-2024
Character Lab Research Network Grant (\$40,000)	2021-2022
NSF Graduate Research Fellowship (\$40,000)	2017-2020

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

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- **Asaba, M.**, Ong, D. C., & Gweon, H. (2019). Integrating expectations and outcomes: Preschoolers' developing ability to reason about others' emotions. *Developmental Psychology*, 55(8), 1680–1693.
- **Asaba, M.** & Gweon, H. (2022). Young children infer and manage what others think about them. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 119(32), e2105642119.
- **Asaba, M.**, Stegall, J., Hembacher, E., Frank, M.C., & Gweon, H. (2025). Young children infer the informativeness of praise. *Developmental Psychology*. Advance Online Publication.
- Shachnai, R., **Asaba, M.**, Hu, L., & Leonard, J. A. (2025). Pointing out learning opportunities reduces overparenting. *Child Development*, 96(2), 679–690.

Full publication list available at [masaba.github.io/papers](https://masaba.github.io/papers)