Promoting Optimistic Thinking
in YMCA Afterschool Students

Nikki Ballein, Lauren Barker, Jazmyn Battie, Brittaney Beckler,
Emily Chunguyen, Megan DeVous, Devon Dillard, Emily Herdeman,
Jamila Johnson, Kiyana Kershaw, Taylor Lovett, Kara McPeters,
Bekah Montgomery, Preet Neki, Sarah Robb, Mackenzie Saffin,
Don Schille, Chandler Thomas, Alina Tilford, and Sally Wilson

UNIVERSITY OF
Cincinnati

Introduction

Social-emotional learning (SEL) skills are crucial for children to learn at a young age to build positive character and be successful in their future lives. Socio-emotional factors can compete with student's academic attention causing students to not fully reach their educational potential (Elias, DeFini, Bergmann, 2010). Properly developed social and emotional skills have been shown to be related to positive academic outcomes, while poor socio-emotional skills has been associated with behavioral problems, drug problems, and more sexual partners (Denham & Brown, 2010; Hessler & Katz, 2010). Social and emotional learning skills include the ability to identify emotions, cope and empathize with these emotions, set goals and build the steps to reach said goals, develop interpersonal relationships and maintain them, and make decisions. (Payton et al., 2008). Many SEL programs have shown positive progress in increasing socio-emotional development in children, however, modifications to these programs need to be made in order to increase all aspects of socio-emotional learning and better prepare children for their futures.

SEL programs have been shown to have a positive influence on the way children feel about themselves. For example, one SEL program conducted with over 500 middle school students showed strong gains in categories representing student respect and friendship and belonging (Elias, DeFini, & Bergmann, 2010). Another study involving a program called the Healthy Kid Mentoring Program (a program consisted of relationship building, self-esteem enhancement, goal setting, and academic assistance) showed that 4th graders who received mentorship from the program had significantly higher scores at post-test than pretest on self-esteem, school connectedness, peer connectedness, and

family connectedness. (King, Vidourek, Davis, & McClellan, 2002). In a meta-analysis of after school programs across the US seeking to promote personal and social skills, child self-perception and school bonding were found to increase significantly in students participating in SEL programs (Durlak, Weissberg,Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, 2011).

Positive academic achievements have also come from effective SEL programs. According to teacher ratings, SEL programs demonstrate positive effects on academics including improved classroom behavior and more effective academic engagement, including increased self-control and on-task behavior. (Bierman, et al., 2010). Previous research suggests that SEL programming is associated with an average gain of 11 to 17 percentile points on achievement test scores. (Payton et al., 2008). In the meta-analysis done on after school SEL programs across the U.S seeking to promote personal and social skills, overall achievement test scores increased along with overall school grades (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, Schellinger, 2011).

In addition to increasing socio-emotional functioning and academic achievement, SEL programs have also been successful in reducing problem behaviors. In a study done in the U.S with the participants beginning intervention in first grade and ending when the children were in third, children in SEL intervention schools significantly lowered problem levels at Grade 3 from Grade 1 and had less of an increase in problems than children in the groups receiving no SEL intervention. (Bierman et al., 2010). Another study involved 40 kindergarten, first, and second grade classrooms using Dinosaur School, a comprehensive program that works to eliminate disruptive child behaviors and foster prosocial behaviors. Children in the intervention group of the Dinosaur School had

significantly more prosocial responses in response to conflict situations than control

children had. (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004).

Many existing SEL programs are effective at improving academic achievements,

self-esteem, self-efficacy, and behavioral problems, but very few focus specifically on

optimistic thinking, a core component of socio-emotional learning (Naglieri, LeBuffe &

Ross, 2013). Schools and afterschool programs have a demonstrated need to target

optimistic thinking in their programs because this outcome is measured by the Devereux

Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA), a comprehensive system rating socio-emotional

competencies and resilience (LeBuffe, Ross, Fleming & Naglieri, 2013). One curricula

that emphasizes optimistic thinking and goal setting as SEL targets is the Dream

Playbook, a workbook-based SEL curricula that provides children with the opportunity to

explore and think about their future in a fun and interactive way. The Dream Playbook

allows children to explore their options for the future in a way that positively creates the

foundation of life goals by guiding the children to be open-minded and self-motivated. In

this project, students from the University of Cincinnati facilitated the Dream Playbook

with children in YMCA afterschool programs. We investigate the feasibility of the

Dream Playbook as a SEL curriculum in the YMCA afterschool setting. Specifically, we

hypothesize that the students participating in the Dream Playbook program will

demonstrate increases in optimistic thinking after participating in the program.

Methods

To assess the feasibility of *The Dream Playbook* in improving children's

optimistic thinking and socio-emotional learning, University of Cincinnati students

facilitated *The Dream Playbook* with a sample of Cincinnati Public School students

participating in the YMCA Afterschool programs over the course of eight weeks. Our

participants are de-identified to ensure confidentiality of their work.

Participants

A total of 55 YMCA Afterschool students participated in the Dream Playbook

program. Ten of these students were enrolled at the Academy of Multilingual Immersion

Studies (AMIS), and 45 students were enrolled at The School for Creative and

Performing Arts (SCPA), both part of the Cincinnati Public School system. Participants

ranged in ages and grades. Group 1 included ten students, ranging in age from third to

seventh grade; Group 2 included twenty-eight students ranging from second to third

grade; Group 3 included seventeen students ranging from fourth grade to sixth grade. For

more detailed information about the distribution of the participants, see the table below.

Table 1. *Participants*

School	Total	Ethnicity			Gender		Grade
		White	African American	Other	Male	Female	
AMIS	10	0	10	0	5	5	3rd-7th
SCPA	28	3	19	6	13	15	2nd -3rd
SCPA	17	3	12	2	0	17	4th-6th
Total	55	6	41	8	18	37	

Measures

In order to determine the feasibility of *The Dream Playbook* for the YMCA after-school

program, we created two de-identified surveys that were completed each week, one final

student interview questionnaire, and an optimistic thinking ratings measure. Each of these

measures are included in the appendix.

Youth Weekly Report. The youth weekly report was given to each of the participating students at the end of each session. The report included three quantitative questions rated on a 1-5 Likert scale and two qualitative questions referring to the value of the day's lesson.

Facilitator Weekly Report. The facilitator weekly report was given to the University of Cincinnati student facilitators at the end of each session. The report consisted of four quantitative questions rated on a 1-5 Likert scale and three qualitative questions that apply to feasibility and future recommendations.

Final Child Interview. The final child interview survey was created in order to determine an overall consensus of what the children thought about the program as a whole. This survey was completed and collected on week eight, the final day of the program. The facilitator acted as an interviewer and recorded the child's responses for each question. With a total of eight questions, the survey asked two quantitative questions rated on a 1-10 scale in regards to the progress of their dreaming ability, four close-ended "yes" or "no" questions, and two qualitative questions.

Optimistic Thinking Ratings Measure. In order to determine the potential progression of the students' optimistic thinking scores, rating measures were created and modeled after the DESSA forms used by the YMCA. The measure consisted of seven quantitative questions rated on a 0-4 linear scale ranging from "Never" to "Very frequently". Each UC student facilitator was asked to complete the measure for each student that they worked with. The facilitators completed the measure in regards to when they first met the child, and completed the measure again at the end of the program. To

determine change in each child's optimistic thinking, scores at baseline were subtracted from the score after the program was completed.

Procedure

The Dream Playbook experience was a partnership among University of Cincinnati college seniors participating in the Community Capstone, the authors of *The Dream Playbook*, and the YMCA afterschool program. The authors of *The Dream Playbook*, Dr. Sara Williams and Scott Stoll, served as trainers (for a total of 4 hours) introducing and teaching the UC students about *The Dream Playbook*. The YMCA program coordinated the children in the afterschool program who participated in the study and the UC college students served as the facilitators who implemented *The Dream Playbook* and worked through the book with the kids.

The program began the week of September 29th, 2014 and continued for an eight-week period. The program was implemented one hour per week at each school. During each session, students would try to complete 4-5 pages in their *Dream Playbook*. This book includes activities to help them discover their dreams, questions to determine if they already have a dream and how to obtain it, and many more interactive activities. Facilitators led students through the activities in *The Dream Playbook*, focusing on providing a positive experience with dreaming rather than work completion or "correct" answers. Each week, students and facilitators each completed weekly surveys. Responses were collected from all groups and recorded into a shared spreadsheet for later analysis.

Results

Data from the Child Weekly Surveys, Facilitator Weekly Surveys, Optimistic Thinking Ratings, and the Child Interview Questionnaire were analyzed to determine the

feasibility of *The Dream Playbook* as an socio-emotional learning program at the YMCA afterschool program.

Facilitator Weekly Report

Each week the UC student facilitators completed a survey that asked how satisfied they felt with the session, how realistic the sessions goals were, how engaged the children were, and the overall fit of the program. These questions were answered on a 1-5 Likert scale. The average ratings of each variable across the eight-week period are presented in Table 1. We also discovered that these ratings differed between the three different groups of students; a one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare facilitator data between each group. It was found that Group 3 reported significantly higher satisfaction scores [$F(2, 132) = 5.6$, $p= .005$], realism scores [$F(2, 131) = 7.44$, $p= .001$], and overall fit scores [$F(2, 130) = 7.13$, $p= .001$] than Groups 1 and 2.

Table 2
Ratings of Facilitator Weekly Surveys Across Weeks

Survey Question	Mean Across Weeks	SD Across Weeks
1. How satisfied were you with today's lesson?	3.74	0.88
2. How realistic were today's goals?	3.95	0.80
3. How engaged were the children?	3.87	0.95
4. Overall, how well do today's activities fit with the YMCA after-school program?	3.73	0.85

Youth Weekly Report

The participating children completed the Child Weekly Survey after each session throughout the eight-week period. The most important information gathered came from the questions "How do you feel after completing today's activities?" and "How do you feel about dreaming?" which were answered on a 1-5 Likert scale. The average ratings of

those two variables across the weeks were: feel-after (*M*= 4.66, *SD*= .80) and dreaming

(*M*= 4.77, *SD*=.76). Using a t test to compare mean scores by gender, we found that

females (*M*=4.91, *SD*=.38) rated dreaming significantly higher than males (*M*=4.50,

SD=1.11) *t*(123.86)=80.05, *p*=.000 . We also found that the ratings given across the

weeks were negatively correlated with age in terms of the feel-after variable (*r*=-.125) so

that older children tended to rate their feelings lower after the program than younger

children.

Final Child Interview

During the last session of the eight-week period the UC student facilitators

interviewed each child to determine their overall opinions about the program. Four close-

ended "yes" or "no" questions were asked and the results of those interview questions are

shown in Table 2. Overall, the overwhelming majority of youth looked forward to *The*

Dream Playbook and would recommend it to a friend. Every student reported that they

thought more about dreaming and enjoyed working with the UC facilitators. Rated on a

1-10 linear scale found in *The Dream Playbook*, the average improvement in dreaming by

the after-school students about three and a half points (*M*=3.45, *SD*=2.97). Results from

this survey showed that there was no significant difference in dreaming improvement in

terms of gender (*t*=12.709 = -0.945, *p*=.001). None of the variables collected through the

child interview were significantly correlated with grade level, suggesting children at all

levels had a positive experience with *The Dream Playbook*.

Table 3
Child Interview Questions Results

Question Asked	% Children said "yes"	% Children said "no"
Did you look forward to The Dream Playbook sessions each week?	89.5%	10.5%
Would you recommend The Dream Playbook program to a classmate?	94.7%	5.3%
Do you think about your goals more since using The Dream Playbook?	100%	0%
Was it helpful to have the facilitators at each session to guide you?	100%	0%

Optimistic Thinking Ratings Measure.

  The UC student facilitators completed the Optimistic Thinking Rating Measure in order to determine the progress made for each individual student's socio-emotional optimistic thinking skills. The measure was completed once at the beginning of the program and once at the end, the average scores and the average change in scores are provided in Table 3. Results proved that there was no significant difference in optimistic thinking scores by gender ($t=(31.52) = .425$, $p= .391$). The progression of optimistic thinking scores was determined to be negatively correlated with grade level ($r=-.929$).

Table 4
Optimistic Thinking Scores

	Average Optimistic Thinking Score
First observation: Week 1	2.70
Second observation: Week 8	3.80
Progress made between weeks	1.10

Discussion

Current findings suggest that *The Dream Playbook* is a feasible socio-emotional learning curricula to use in YMCA afterschool programs. All students reported thinking more about their goals since using *The Dream Playbook*, which indicates that the program is an effective strategy for increasing and strengthening optimistic thinking skills. The effectiveness of the program in promoting optimistic thinking is further supported by the improvement in dreaming scores, which showed that on average, students reported a 3.45-point improvement in dreaming on the 10-point linear scale. Additionally, since there was no correlation between students self-reported dreaming improvement score and grade level, the data supports *The Dream Playbook* as an effective tool for a wide range of ages. Data collected from the Child Interview Questionnaire did not reveal significant differences in optimistic thinking scores between genders, which suggests *The Dream Playbook* is useful to both boys and girls to teach this important socio-emotional skill. Furthermore, because all students reported finding the University of Cincinnati facilitators helpful during the sessions, the mentorship element of the program may have had a positive effect on overall feasibility and success of the program. Previous research has revealed a positive interaction between students and mentors involved in socio-emotional learning curricula (Kahne et al., 2001); the findings of our study indicating that students found their facilitators helpful is consistent with this idea.

Previous research has found that socio-emotional learning programs increase student achievement scores, decrease violence, and improve attendance (Flay & Allred, 2010). With 100% of students in our study reporting thinking about dreaming more, *The*

Dream Playbook may be an effective tool to increase student achievement through increasing dreaming and goal setting. Additionally, with 89.5% of children reporting looking forward to each session, *The Dream Playbook* may contribute to improved school attendance by providing many students with an exciting reason to go to school. Overall, the results of our study suggest that *The Dream Playbook* is an effective program for teaching socio-emotional skills, increasing optimistic thinking, and is enjoyed by students.

The negative correlation found between progression of optimistic thinking scores and grade level suggests that facilitators observed less change between initial and end-of-program optimistic thinking in students who were in higher grade levels. These results could have been effected by many factors, including enthusiasm and interest in the playbook. Based on these results and results suggesting that students enjoyed working with facilitators, it is possible that decreasing the facilitator-to-student ratio in groups will help older students make more progress in regards to optimistic thinking in future iterations of *The Dream Playbook* at the YMCA.

Our study had several strengths. Our data was collected from two different schools, which suggests that *The Dream Playbook* can be successful in a variety of environments. In addition, the students who participated in this study are ethnically and socioeconomically diverse; this demonstrates the relevance and usefulness of the playbook for a diverse group of children. Primarily, our study has targeted optimistic thinking skills; our program is unique because it goes beyond general socio-emotional learning and focuses on helping students think positively about their futures. The Cincinnati YMCA afterschool program measures optimistic thinking as part of their

evaluation of socio-emotional learning in their program and the Dream Playbook appears to be a good fit to help improve optimistic thinking in elementary school students.

While our study had many strengths, several limitations suggest avenues for future research. For example, attendance tended to be inconsistent. While implementing the program, several students missed several sessions and several groups welcomed new students after the initial starting date or lost group members. Another possible limitation was social desirability. It is possible that children responded to the feedback forms and interview questionnaire in a manner that they felt would please their facilitator, rather than how they truly felt; future research could capture data from observer ratings or blind report to further study the effect that *The Dream Playbook* has on socio-emotional learning and optimistic thinking skills.

To further study the feasibility of *The Dream Playbook*, future researchers could further investigate the negative correlation found between grade level and progression of optimistic thinking scores. To increase socio-emotional learning for all students, researchers can change elements of group dynamics to help older students make as much progress as younger children. More research regarding group size, amount of one-on-one availability with facilitators, and amount of enthusiasm for specific lessons could also help future researchers explain the gap in optimistic thinking progression between younger and older students.

References

Bierman, K. L., Coie, J. D., Dodge, K. A., Greenberg, M. T., Lochman, J. E., McMahon, R. J., & Pinderhughes, E. (2010). The effects of a multiyear universal social–emotional learning program: The role of student and school characteristics. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 78*(2), 156.

Denham S. A. & Brown C. (2010). "Plays nice with others": social–emotional learning and academic success. *Early Education and Development, 21*, 652–680. 10.1080/10409289.2010.497450

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta analysis of school- based universal interventions. *Child Development*, *82*(1), 405-432.

Elias, M. J., DeFini, J., & Bergmann, J. (2010). Coordinating Social-Emotional and Character Development (SECD) Initiatives Improves School Climate and Student Learning. *Middle School Journal (J3), 42*(1), 30-37.

Flay, B. R., & Allred, C. G. (2010). The positive action program: Improving academics, behavior, and character by teaching comprehensive skills for successful learning and living. In *International research handbook on values education and student wellbeing* (pp. 471-501). Springer: Netherlands.

Kahne, J., Nagaoka, J., Brown, A., O'Brien, J., Quinn, T., & Thiede, K. (2001). Assessing after-school programs as contexts for youth development. *Youth & Society, 32*(4), 421-446.

King, K. A., Vidourek, R. A., Davis, B., & McClellan, W. (2002). Increasing self‑esteem

and school connectedness through a multidimensional mentoring program.

Journal of School Health, *72*(7), 294-299.

LeBuffe, P. A., Ross, K. M., Fleming, J. L., & Naglieri, J. A. (2013). The Devereux suite:

Assessing and promoting resilience in children ages 1 month to 14 years. In

Resilience in Children, Adolescents, and Adults (pp. 45-59). Springer New York.

Naglieri, J. A., LeBuffe, P. A., & Ross, K. M. (2013). Measuring resilience in children:

From theory to practice. In *Handbook of resilience in children* (pp. 241-259).

Springer US.

Payton J., Weissberg R. P., Durlak J. A., Dymnicki A. B., Taylor R. D., Schellinger K.

B., et al. (2008). The Positive Impact of Social and Emotional Learning for

Kindergarten to Eighth-Grade Students: Findings from Three Scientific Reviews.

Chicago, IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

Webster-Stratton, C., & Reid, M. J. (2004). Strengthening Social and Emotional

Competence in Young Children—The Foundation for Early School Readiness and

Success: Incredible Years Classroom Social Skills and Problem‑Solving

Curriculum. *Infants & Young Children*, *17*(2), 96-113.

Utilizing Community-Based Research to Increase Optimistic Thinking Skills in Students: A Reflection

Jazmyn Battie, Ngoc ChuNguyen, Taylor Lovett, Rebekah Montgomery, Preet Neki, Alina Tilford, and Sally R. Wilson
University of Cincinnati

Social and emotional skills are essential for children in order to build positive social characteristics that help lead to success later in life. Without the development of these skills at an early age, children are at risk for negative consequences. Properly developed social and emotional skills are correlated with positive academic outcomes, while poor social and emotional skills put children at risk for behavioral problems, drug problems, and risky sexual behaviors (Denham and Brown 2010). To examine how social and emotional learning influences children, psychology majors in an advanced capstone class implemented a socio-emotional learning program called *The Dream Playbook* in local YMCA afterschool programs. Our goal for this research project was to determine if *The Dream Playbook* had a positive effect on social and emotional learning, particularly the skill of optimistic thinking.

We were fortunate enough to participate in *The Dream Playbook* project over two semesters. Our teams worked with the YMCA afterschool programs at two Cincinnati public schools: the Academy of Multilingual Immersion Studies (AMIS) and the School for the Creative and Performing Arts (SCPA). We were trained to facilitate *The Dream Playbook* program by its authors, Scott Stoll and Dr. Sara Williams. Collaborating with the YMCA afterschool programs at AMIS and SCPA, each student in our class became a mentor to a small group of young children.

As a community-based research capstone course, one of the learning objectives for our class was to understand the role of the scientific method in solving real-world community problems. To meet this learning objective, we designed a research project that would allow us to use research methods to analyze *The Dream Playbook*'s effectiveness. We collected data throughout the year to monitor the social and emotional growth of each child. During the 8-week session, the YMCA students completed a pre-survey about their optimism and the future. After each meeting, students and facilitators were asked to complete a data sheet reflecting on how they felt regarding the activities done that day; all questions were designed to examine both the perspective of the observer and the participant. The data was complied and analyzed after each of the 8-week programs was completed.

We faced many obstacles in our research and were challenged to meet another of the course's learning objectives: to identify the interaction between real-world communities and academic partners and understand how each contributes to research. When working in the real-world with children, there were several challenges to data collection. Initially, the team was worried about data accuracy because of difficulties faced with the weekly data forms given to the children; some children had trouble understanding the concept of a ratings system. Many of the participants chose "5" for all their responses because they felt like it was the correct response instead of answering truthfully; some students felt that they would disappoint their mentors if they gave a less-than-perfect rating of the session's activities. In order to get the most accurate response, we reminded the children that a rating of "1" meant that they did not like the activities at all, and that a rating of "5" meant that it was their favorite activity in the book. Giving students

a small amount of direction when completing the forms was effective and provided our class with more accurate data.

Another learning outcome for our class was to interact with community members in ways that show respect for social, environmental, and contextual factors affecting individuals. Although we worked hard to interact with elementary school children, the schools, and the staff of the YMCA afterschool program, we faced challenges throughout the process. Many of the challenges faced at SCPA were environmental; the location and noise level were not ideal for students or facilitators. At times, it was difficult to keep the children focused because of noise and interruptions from other students. Despite the obstacles we faced, mentors found ways to overcome challenges. Knowing that we had to make the best out of the time that we had with our students each week, we remained positive and modeled optimistic thinking skills for the students. We worked in small areas, sometimes in a larger group setting, and took turns facilitating if it became necessary. We also attempted to isolate ourselves as much as possible from other after-school programs in order to help our children concentrate better. Thanks to making creative solutions, sessions ran smoothly. At AMIS, many of the challenges faced were age-related; many older students felt that *The Dream Playbook* was for younger students and were uninterested in engaging in the activities. However, mentors created various strategies to help the older students relate to the book and engage with them. Facilitators working at AMIS overcame the challenges and managed to make the best out of every situation, even if each session needed to be altered to fit the audience.

Each mentor faced a personal challenge in this project, but by stepping out of our comfort zones and remaining optimistic, we were able to provide a meaningful experience to children and even created one for ourselves. Many members of our research group had no prior experience with young children and did not know what to expect in our first few sessions; some had negative views and low expectations in the beginning. After spending several weeks with our students and getting to know them, each facilitator's attitude towards the project became more positive. Most mentors established a relationship with a specific child or with their entire group, which helped us learn more about our community.

We often struggled to handle issues with group dynamics; for example, some facilitators had difficulty handling extroverts and introverts within the same group. More extroverted children would sometimes be a little overbearing to the introverted children; some children answered all of the questions, talked over other students, and would not allow other children in the group opportunities to speak. It took time to learn how to bring out more conversation with the introverted children and make them feel comfortable speaking and answering questions while not making the extrovert feel discouraged. Some groups developed creative solutions to overcome these problems, like using a talking stick or talking stuffed animal. Facilitators would toss the stuffed animal to a group member and whoever had it in his/her hand was the designated speaker at that time; this strategy worked for many groups. Other groups brought in candy to use as a reward for answering questions; while this encouraged children to engage more, most were more focused on receiving candy than on learning. Other challenges to facilitators were situations in which children simply did not want to participate in the program; in these circumstances, mentors had to be vigilant and open minded with students to find a common ground to work on. Ultimately, these challenges made most of us feel guilty because we felt as though we were failing our students. We found that talking to each other, taking advice from other mentors, and applying it to our own groups allowed us to better serve our students. By the end of the eight weeks, we had been through enough trial-and-error to find methods that worked

for each individual mentor and group.

In our project, we partnered not only with YMCA afterschool programs at local elementary schools, but also with the authors of *The Dream Playbook*. *The Dream Playbook* was initially created for middle school children, but many of our participants were in second through fourth grade. We noticed very early that most of the material in the book was not age appropriate for all of our audience; many students at AMIS felt that they were too old for the activities in the book, while the youngest students had trouble with abstract concepts and difficult vocabulary. Additionally, some activities were more advanced than our students could handle. For example, one activity included matching words to places on a map; the facilitators thought the activity would be fun because there was not a right or wrong answer, but in reality the children wanted to know if they were right and where the real locations were. Some facilitators could not answer those questions because we did not know either; when we didn't know, the facilitators felt they lost credibility with the participants. In another example, there was a word search activity that we thought would be fun until most of the children brought it to our attention that they did not know most of the words; again, some of the words were difficult for mentors to explain to young children. A final example is a page in *The Dream Playbook* that required children to put two feet on their book and understand a magic carpet metaphor. Author Scott Stoll facilitated this activity but the message he wanted to get out was misunderstood; unfortunately, most of the students did not understand and later felt as though that activity was pointless.

Despite the challenges, we saw the potential of *The Dream Playbook* to inspire elementary school students. We described goals or their future career as being a dream. We believed that this would help better interpret the material in the book and help them understand the main goal of *The Dream Playbook*. Most students found it difficult to differentiate between a "sleeping dream" and a goal-oriented dream at the beginning of the session. After mentors explained it thoroughly, students eventually gained an understanding of what dreams are and why it is important to think optimistically about their future. At the beginning of the program, there were many students that did not have a life goal, but through this book and the after-school program, we were able to help them establish that goal. Through *The Dream Playbook*, we also helped them build confidence in themselves and in their goals. Most were now talking to everyone about their dreams, whether it was family or friends. They learned how family and friends play a crucial part in their success. They even established a plan on how they were going to achieve their goal. *The Dream Playbook* is a great workbook for children and our experiences led us to truly believe that it made a positive impact on the children we worked with.

One final aspect of *The Dream Playbook* program we decided that the children would enjoy was visiting our college campus to see where their dreams could lead them. A tour of the University of Cincinnati was planned to help bring the children's dreams from *The Dream Playbook* and apply them to their future in college. The tour was aimed to show them what a college could offer and help them live their dream while seeking a full-time education. Students from both SCPA and AMIS were expected to participate; unfortunately, transportation needs could not be met for AMIS. Planning consisted of figuring out what to show the children without filling them with too much educational based information; we wanted to create a fun and meaningful trip for our students. Facilitators planned for students to see the College of Design, Art, Architecture, and Planning (DAAP) and the College Conservatory of Music (CCM), which aligned with several of the children's dreams. We hoped that our students would be able to imagine what they could be doing in their own futures by seeing college students reaching

similar goals. The tour ran smoothly and the children had a wonderful time visiting our campus; many children reported that they would like to attend the University of Cincinnati one day!

Despite the trials and tribulations we faced throughout our research, we deeply value the experience we received from it. We passionately feel that our community-based research impacted our community partner and the children who participated. The relationships created by this research empowered the children to think more deeply about their dreams and aspirations, which helped them learn that it is a good thing to have positive thoughts about their future.

Through this project, we learned that research in real-world settings has many challenges. Community-based research is not done in a controlled environment (such as a laboratory), and thus can be unpredictable. We learned to be flexible and to work with the challenges we faced; while aspects of our research were not always ideal, we were able to overcome the difficulties to learn more about how children learn and improve their social and emotional skills.

~

References

Denham, S. A. and C. Brown. 2010. "Plays Nice with Others: Social–Emotional Learning and Academic Success." *Early Education and Development* 21 (5): 652–680.