

# An Ode to SEL and Teachers

Categories: Social-Emotional Learning, Uncategorized

If you're like me, there's a feeling you get when you walk into a school that's committed to helping students flourish not only academically, but also socially and emotionally. The feeling brings me back to my own days as a student, when I saw my sixth-grade teacher standing in the doorway of the classroom, waiting to greet me with a smile, a silly anecdote involving the latest Road Runner cartoon, or words to encourage me to bring my best thinking to that day's social studies lesson. For me, the feeling I recall consists of equal parts joy, security, and acceptance.

There are lots of little ways we get that feeling when we're visiting a school: an offer from a parent to help carry in a heavy Being a Writer classroom kit; the shy smiles and friendly greetings of students lined up in the hallway on their way somewhere; the teacher who warmly welcomes district personnel and coaches into his classroom, then proceeds to engage a group of excitable kindergarteners in a discussion about a favorite food they plan to write about.

At Center for the Collaborative Classroom, we are lucky to experience these feelings frequently as we travel to schools and classrooms to participate in school observations and model lessons. We are grateful for the many teachers around the country who invite us in to observe their practice, and who-through their inclusiveness-spark conversations with their peers about the best ways to help students learn. These observations would not be possible if classroom teachers weren't willing to model for their students and colleagues the five SEL competencies described by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and woven into Collaborative Literacy:

1. **Self-awareness:** Standing, waiting outside a classroom door, we saw the teacher approaching with her students. "I just got nervous!" she exclaimed, revealing a common reaction we see in teachers involved in classroom observations. Many times, we know teachers wrestle with anxiety as they anticipate a lesson unfolding in front of an outside audience. By identifying their feelings while maintaining a sense of calm and composure, these teachers reveal a deep-rooted sense of self-efficacy in their power to teach, even while in a fishbowl. What a great trait to model for a roomful of students!
2. **Self-management:** It is not easy for many of us to manage the stress involved in being in the spotlight-especially when it's a spotlight intended to illuminate teaching practices. Teachers are so adept at managing their emotions, however, that it's often impossible to detect anything other than confidence. In classroom after classroom, we see skillful teachers-first-year to veteran-facilitate lessons that put students at the center of the learning.
3. **Social awareness:** When a group of strangers enters your classroom, everyone's social awareness is usually on high alert, especially the students! Teachers participating in an observation model this skill for their students by introducing their guests, reassuring the class to proceed as they normally do, and otherwise putting both groups at ease.
4. **Relationship skills:** Teachers who willingly share their practice with their colleagues demonstrate a hallmark of this skill-the ability to collaborate. By inviting district administrators and their colleagues in to observe a lesson, they help foster and advance deep questioning, feedback, and collegiality in their school and district. Their practices become fodder for reflection and debrief, and can often inspire collaborations and incremental improvements in teaching and learning that might not have

been possible otherwise.

5. **Responsible decision-making:** In a given class period, teachers make countless decisions. During an observation, these decisions are assessed in light of lesson objectives, aligning with standards, and the extent to which they impact students academically and socially.

Thank you to the thoughtful, caring, and gifted teachers who make these classroom observations possible. Your SEL skills contribute to the mission of the Center for the Collaborative Classroom: to provide programs and professional learning that support children's academic and social development.

*To learn more about the SEL competencies visit, the CASEL webpage [Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies](#). To see the SEL competencies at work in CCC's programs visit [inside.collaborativeclassroom.org](http://inside.collaborativeclassroom.org).*