

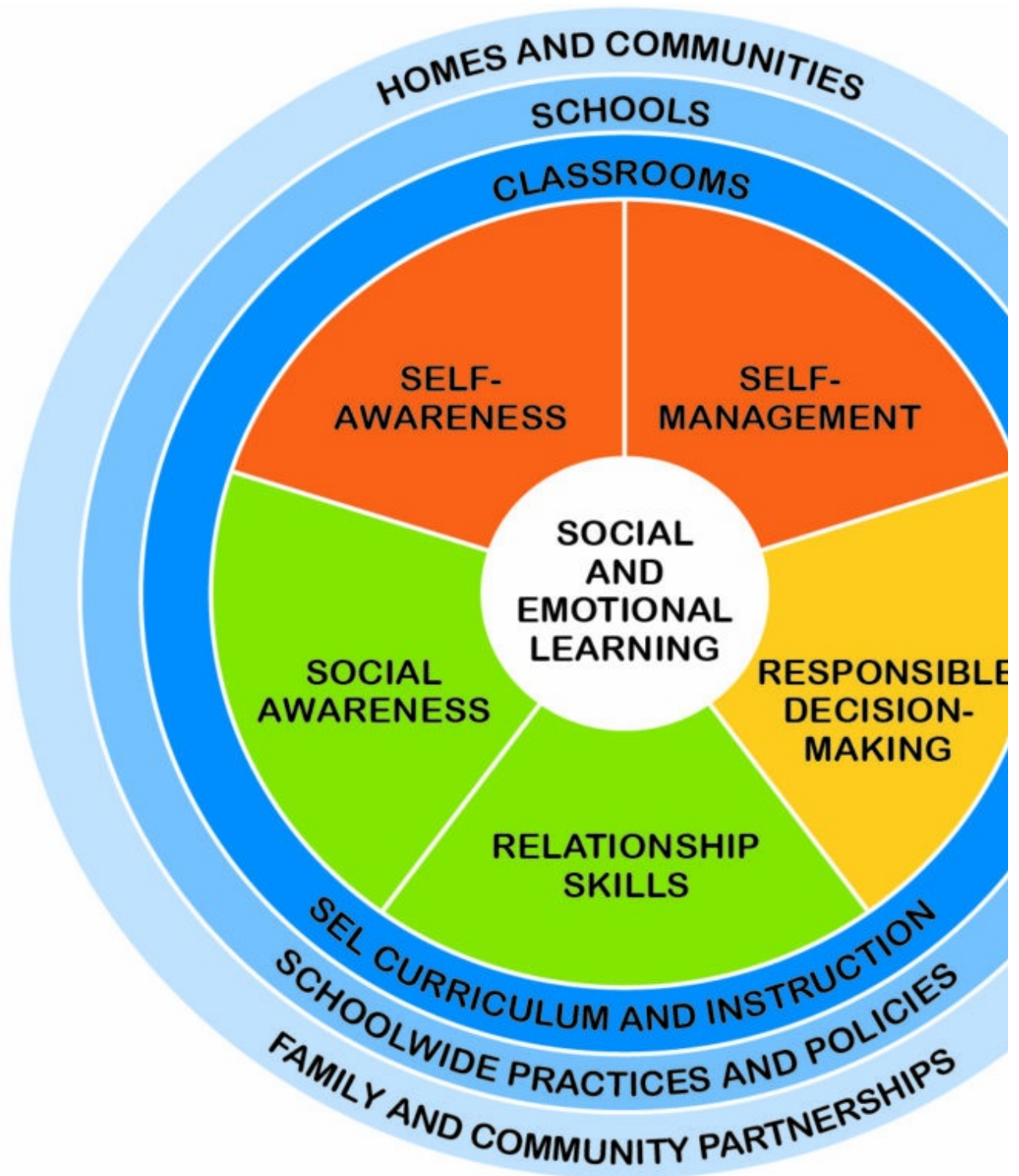
# The Best Way to Learn Something is to Teach it to Someone Else

By Elizabeth English | Categories: Social-Emotional Learning

*Docendo Discimus—By teaching we learn.*

Recently, the two of us had an opportunity to partner with the Maryland State Department of Education to offer a series of five webinars on the importance of incorporating social-emotional competencies into research-based instructional practices that support the literacy development of our youngest readers. We learned so much from this series as we explored the link between between social emotional learning and literacy learning and how together, they support the development of three through eight-year-olds.

In each one-hour session we focused on one of the five social competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.



During the webinars we provided an explanation of the benefits of a particular competency and how teachers might specifically engage in the development of this competency with their students. We shared a video of a primary classroom illustrating a specific instructional practice that demonstrates how the SEL competency could be developed within the context of literacy instruction, thereby highlighting that the social and academic curricula are interdependent and integrated.

By focusing on one of five competencies in each session, we came away with a deeper understanding of the significance of each competency as well as a greater appreciation for the thoughtful design of lessons offered to primary educators in resources

developed by Center for the Collaborative Classroom. Every lesson in *Making Meaning*, *Being a Writer*, and *Being a Reader* has both a social and academic goal. These two goals are embedded within well crafted lessons that exemplify best practice instruction. As such, teachers develop a deeper understanding of how to meet both the social-emotional and academic needs of their students within authentic literacy experiences and more importantly, students receive learning opportunities that develop each of the five social-emotional competencies as well as develop their independence as readers and writers.

As we explored all five SEL competencies, we found three organizing elements that are necessary for teachers to develop in their classroom instruction:

- building a community
- teacher modeling
- opportunities for reflection

These competencies are best learned and practiced when students feel a strong sense of community. It is no surprise that both *Making Meaning* and *Being a Writer* begin with units entitled “The Reading Community” and “The Writing Community” respectively. Having a sense of community and connection together enhances learning and allows students to develop trust and respect, essential to taking risks when sharing thinking both orally and in writing.

Collaborative Literacy is filled with opportunities for teachers to model their thinking in think-aloud and write-aloud lessons. The guidance with facilitation techniques such as using open-ended questions that allow students to do more of the deep thinking helps teachers model the importance of listening while respecting the opinions of others. Their responses to students, neutral but with interest, allow all students to continue thinking as we probe and encourage divergent thinking.

Most Collaborative Literacy lessons end with reflection. We ask students to reflect on their partnership development just as we ask them to reflect on an aspect of their writing or reading. Reflection is a powerful tool. It is through reflecting that deep learning takes place as we consider what went well and what we will do to make it better next time. This is true with learning literacy as well as with learning social emotional skills. At the end of our webinar series, we have reflected on all that we have learned through this process—about the five SEL competencies, about how remarkably they merge with literacy instruction, and about how the intentional design of Collaborative Literacy supports the development of strong readers, writers and members of society.

You can view the entire webinar series here. You can read the thoughts on this webinar series from our colleague Ava Spencer of the Maryland Department of Education here.

*Co-authored by Elizabeth English and Mary Tavegia.*