Teachers and education policymakers from all over the world have left Salzburg determined to continue efforts to mainstream social and emotional learning (SEL) in schools globally.

The six-day program, titled Social and Emotional Learning: A Global Synthesis, brought together more than 60 participants working in various educational subfields from curriculum to psychology and testing to training. The program was held in partnership with Educational Testing Service, Microsoft, Qatar Foundation International, the British Council, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, and the Inter-American Development Bank.

The program at Schloss Leopoldskron was a follow-up to an offsite program which took place in Princeton, New Jersey in June 2018.

Last week, participants engaged in a series of plenary discussions that touched on the demand for SEL, the politics of educational reform, teacher preparation and measurement and assessment. During the plenaries, participants reflected on case studies involving several countries including Finland, Mexico, Kenya, and Sri Lanka.

A video message from Delhi’s Minister of Education, Manish Sisodia, which involved him explaining the introduction of a Happiness Curriculum in the Indian capital, also resonated with participants. The place of social and emotional learning in post-conflict societies and those dealing with ongoing violence was also examined in detail.

Participants were taken to task to work in small knowledge cafes and working groups for more intimate deliberations and to come up with ideas which could contribute to the drafting of a Salzburg Statement in the future.

Recommendations from the working groups included a global alliance of organizations working in SEL and new, effective ways of testing the efficacy of incorporating SEL in the curriculum. Initiating a worldwide SEL Day to celebrate and raise awareness about the possibilities of SEL was also mooted.

Working groups have also agreed to advance conversations about their specific topics with a series of Twitter debates.

It’s not only participants who will look to take the work forward. Salzburg Global and partners are continuing to look ahead in this field.

In March 2019, a new cohort of participants will convene again at Schloss Leopoldskron, in Salzburg, Austria, to review the topic with a new focus - Social and Emotional Learning: Time for Action.
Transforming the Citizens of Tomorrow through SEL

Salzburg Global explores SEL practices in India

India’s population is approaching 1.35 billion. With 29 states and seven union territories, a one-size-fits-all model might not be appropriate for its education system. Changes to just one region, or even city, can affect vast numbers of people.

An example of this is in Delhi, through the emergence of a happiness curriculum. Launched by the Dalai Lama, the policy is a considerable shift towards social and emotional learning (SEL). The Delhi Government is responsible for 1,000 schools, around 20,000 teachers and 1.5 million students. It provides happiness classes for students from nursery to Grade Eight.

These classes often take place at the beginning of the day and have three parts: mindfulness exercises, a story, and a discussion where every student has to speak. Students are encouraged to question teachers instead of just writing and memorizing.

Shailendra Sharma is the principal advisor to the director of education for the Government of NCT Delhi. In his position, he was heavily involved in reforms which he hopes will develop mindfulness, critical thinking, and empathy in Delhi students.

When asked why the Delhi Government made this ambitious move, Sharma said, “Privately, everybody would complain about the aggression, maladjustment, corruption, you name it, and these are issues that are cited. They would all expect that something should be done in the school. ‘We are not doing enough.’ But, these two narratives [of social problems and SEL] were not converging, and through [the] happiness curriculum, we have attempted to bring about this convergence.” Sharma believes unless societal issues are addressed in schools, systems will not transform, and another generation will carry on cycles of behavior.

He hopes this mandated happiness class is the first step in introducing SEL principles to Delhi classrooms, and once teachers get used to the methods used, they will integrate them with their lessons throughout the day.

However, SEL is still not widely visible in India’s education system. Despite this issue, there are other informal avenues for SEL to take place, as Dream a Dream in Bangalore demonstrates. The organization currently works with 10,000 young people through its School Life Skills and Career Connect programs, with the aim of helping young people overcome adversity and thrive.

Vishal Talreja was working in investment banking before he set up Dream a Dream in 2000. Talreja had the desire to spread the idea “every human being is unique and special, and they need to be respected for who they are, irrespective of the background they come from.” But this leads to a dilemma. Talreja asks, “How do we enable that in a society that largely has been established on a strong caste and class system?”

Talreja suggests more needs to be done within education to move away from the system inherited from India’s colonial past. Talreja wishes education could do more to encourage the traits of empathy, respect, and dignity that nurture citizens of tomorrow.

He believes SEL has a vital role to play in helping children living in poverty by facilitating them as they learn to learn, build life skills, and encourage them to help others. Talreja has found kids that have been through his program want to go on to become active citizens in their communities, and currently, 40% of their 92 people strong team are graduates from Dream a Dream programs.

Dream a Dream has grown massively in the 18 years it’s been active, but how can SEL be spread on a nationwide scale in India? Sukhmani Sethi, program manager for Porticus, in Delhi, believes philanthropy has an essential role in the SEL space in India.

Sethi says, “Philanthropy really helps amplify a voice or a theory of change, because… if a couple of funders back up a certain approach… that voice for that approach gets amplified. I think that’s how those kinds of approaches get traction by even policymakers.”

Sethi studied history at Delhi University where her professors encouraged her to “invest in knowing more about outside your bubbles.” She ended up in educational research by accepting a job at Pratham, an NGO, which changed her understanding of privilege. Now, she aims to move the needle on SEL in India and encourage school systems to look at a child’s development as a whole, and she looks for others who share the same goal.

Different charitable funders could be vital in helping provide opportunities for researchers and organizations who can help deliver the social and emotional learning that is key to children’s development. As Vishal Talreja says “If you want to impact how society looks in the future, then you have to impact children today.”

By Anna Rauw
Your Salzburg Snapshots!

Toward the end of the program, our photographer Sandra Birklbauer captured photos of participants working hard in their working groups at Schloss Leopoldskron. A selection of these photos can be seen below.

These photos have also been uploaded to Facebook and Flickr. Fellows are welcome to use these photos in other publications. We only ask, in return, you credit Salzburg Global Seminar/Sandra Birklbauer.
HOT TOPIC: What was your take-away from this week?

Anna Rawe

“I learned a lot during this conference. I’m quite new in the field of SEL, but in Uruguay, we are implementing the new pedagogies, which is mainly the introduction of cross-curricular competencies in the Uruguayan curriculum, which is a very traditional one. We don’t have a specific line of work in SEL but it’s quite connected to some of the content in the cross-curricular competencies, so I wanted to learn to explore the field. I learned a lot from very interesting people here, coming from the academic field... from different areas. The fact that we had people from many countries, and even continents, it was useful and interesting.”

Claudia Brovetto, Uruguay
Cluster Lead of New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (NPDL) at Plan Ceibal

“What I think is that SEL, it’s good that we talk about it, but we need to make sure that evidence actually comes into policies. That’s actually one of the main - I guess - conclusions but at the same time unresolved issues. I don’t think we are going to be able to find an answer, not even in one, two or even three weeks because it’s an ongoing process. But I think it should be one of the main goals or next steps after this [program] ends... [we need to] raise awareness, of course, among policymakers, educators... to bridge the divide... between horizontal and vertical you need to engage policymakers because they are the only ones who can transform a nationwide education system.”

Carine Allaf, USA
Senior Programs Advisor at Qatar Foundation International (QFI)

“It’s really impressive and inspiring to get this sense of energy from people from very different educational backgrounds, with their thinking coalescing around some really core ideas related to SEL. Now, not everyone uses the language of SEL, but the core ideas and the strength and determination that we should make progress on this agenda is really inspiring... I’m inspired and motivated by that. I think some of the challenges that have come out... about how do we gain political support, both with ‘big P’ political with ministers, but also ‘small p’ political across multiple players to get SEL approaches accepted as fundamental to education... [and] the absolute criticality of teachers and local contexts [stood out to me]. So, while we have to create a successful movement at a high level... with the structure of [the] educational system, I think at the most basic level it will come down to individual teachers changing their pedagogy, their practice, [and] their approach.”

Mark Herbert, UK
Director of Schools and Skills Programs at the British Council

“Have an opinion on our HOT TOPIC? Tweet @SalzburgGlobal with the hashtag #SGSedu”

Bruno Macedo, Portugal
Project Manager at Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation