A Global Alliance for Social Emotional Learning

Salzburg Global Seminar, Fellows and partners launch new global initiative

Lucy Browett

Helen Keller once said: “Ideas without action are worthless.”


The general goal of that program was to explore regional and national initiatives, bringing together practitioners, educators, researchers and policymakers from across the world to discuss concepts and practices in SEL.

However, participants including Louka Parry, director of academy for Education Changemakers in Australia, planted the seeds for a new global organization. This “global alliance” in SEL is yet to be named but was established by a working group at the December program.

Parry, as well as several other Fellows from that initial working group, returned to Salzburg in March 2019 for the program Social and Emotional Learning: Time for Action and to take this new initiative further.

Parry said, “Salzburg has, I think, the privilege of bringing together all these fantastic innovators researchers policymakers and practitioners. So what could that look like specifically for SEL at scale?

“That really is, I think, the promise of a global alliance... [It is] an alliance of people that basically helps to curate a community that is working in this particular space.

“It helps to promote really flourishing thriving states of not just children and youth but also adult learners as well all over the world, ensuring that access is as equitable as possible between all the different nation states that are trying to do this work.”

Speaking during the March program, Parry said, “We’re here working on the same project. I began by briefing [the new Fellows] on all the work we’ve achieved to date and the progress we’ve made. The working group has stayed really active. We’ve had monthly video conferences, for example.”

The alliance has received funding from partner organizations. Funding from Qatar Foundation International meant that Parry, along with two other members of the original working group, we able to travel to Washington DC.

“We spent two days in the office literally building out a 37-page document; a preliminary position paper on what this global alliance could do and how it could contribute to the ecosystem,” said Parry, of this trip.

During the working group presentations at the end of Social and Emotional Learning: Time for Action, Parry had reconvened with Fellows to explore this alliance further, setting out a tangible action plan for funding, implementation of a digital platform and even hosting a global congress.

Parry said, “Our current thinking is on January 1, 2020, it transitions from interim arrangements with Salzburg as a secretariat, which is the current arrangement, to a standalone organization which is doing this work.”

The working group is due to reconvene at Schloss Leopoldsbron on March 29 to 30.

Parry said, “It’s just coming together to try to move forward even further.

“Afer that, it’s actually about going pretty hard after grants, pitching to funders, to philanthropists and foundations to see if we can find opportunities there.”

Ayla Bonfiglio, founder, and principal at the Conflict and Education Learning Laboratory (CELL) Foundation, presented the alliance’s principle goals during the workshop presentation at the most recent program. These are:

1. To promote understanding of SEL-LS [Social and Emotional Learning and Life Skills] and an awareness of its role in helping learners to thrive in school, work and life.
2. To connect and coordinate international, regional, national and local... SEL stakeholders, initiatives and resources.
3. To empower local and national decision-makers and practitioners with scalable frameworks for implementation and action.

Salzburg Global Seminar looks forward to supporting the still-to-be-named alliance to grow in the months ahead.
Participants at the program Social and Emotional Learning: Time for Action explored many aspects of SEL, from digital and cultural identities to assessment and measuring of SEL metrics.

While participants come from a variety of nations, backgrounds and disciplines, the importance of implementing SEL into curriculums and schools was reiterated time and time again.

Cornelia Janke is the director of Education in Crisis & Conflict Network (ECCN), a USAID initiative, which brings together policymakers, researchers, and practitioners working in education in crisis and conflict situations.

She said of SEL, “It’s important for everyone because it’s an essential element of how humans learn to be human. It’s not something that we just do once when we’re children. We do it throughout our lives.”

For the millions of children in crisis and conflict situations, obtaining social emotional skills is of the utmost importance.

Janke said, “Especially in contexts where children have experienced very adverse or violent situations, it’s helpful to have a little toolbox that includes social skills, emotional skills, and cognitive skills all working together to help them make sense of that experience at whatever life stage, whether they’re children or youth or even adults.

“Without those tools, it’s just that much harder to be resilient, bounce back, move on and grow.”

These tools are crucial for children who are dealing with various traumas as a result of the conflict situation they are in, and helping them to process their surroundings.

“Social emotional skills are taught by and honed through trusting and stable relationships with a range of people in our lives, whether that’s in our family, whether that’s in a school setting or a work setting or a spiritual community...”

“If we help children build that skill-set in one setting, they will be able to transfer it into other settings and be able to use that to continue to build relationships in their community. From those relationships, they can then begin to participate in a more cohesive social environment. That’s what we all want and need, of course.”

ECCN shares tools and practices, as well as knowledge, as part of its community of USAID staff and implementing partners.

On the research side, organizations such as the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) curate the work of SEL researchers on a global scale, complemented by other initiatives such as ECCN.

Margi Bhatt is the coordinator of education policy for (INEE). Bhatt said, “As a network of more than 15,000 individual members and 130 partner organizations in 190 countries, it’s really important for us to be a convener of the knowledge and evidence for Social and Emotional Learning in education in emergency contexts, so we can ensure those who need resources have access to them and duplication is avoided.

“It’s important for us to use our strength as a network to provide advocacy and impact policy, to represent voices at tables where they are generally not represented.”

Within the education policy working group of the network, members have already developed a background paper and guidance for psychosocial support and social and emotional learning, which will be disseminated by webinars and training modules.

The members are also conducting a mapping exercise of currently used frameworks and tools for academic and social and emotional learning in crisis and conflict contexts.

Additionally, the members, who are all volunteers, are also developing a unified framework for social and emotional learning in partnership with Harvard University’s EASEL Lab, and supporting, through a reference group, the Measurement and Metrics Initiative of the International Rescue Committee and New York University.

The work of INEE is important to ensure that “research gaps” are filled. Curating the already existing research prevents duplication, but there are still areas to be explored when it comes to research of SEL in crisis and conflict contexts.

Bhatt said of the journey to filling these gaps, “It’s a big, big task. But we are up for it.”

“I think one of the things that we really need to focus on is a way to harness all of the activity that’s happening in Social and Emotional Learning research and figure out a way to house all of this activity to make sure those who need it can and do access it.

“I think the INEE learning agenda will contribute to better understanding the gaps in research, regionally, in education in emergencies (including SEL) and facilitate the connection of researchers and practitioners.

“We connect and represent a wide range of stakeholders, and the resources produced by INEE are global and open resources, so we are well positioned to facilitate the curation and dissemination of SEL knowledge and resources for the education in emergencies sector.”

The conversation will be continued in the next program in the multi-year series Education for Tomorrow’s World in December 2019. Education and Workforce Opportunities for Refugees and Migrants will bring together experts, policymakers and practitioners from a wide range of organizations, sectors, and countries to develop policy and financing solutions that can create better education outcomes and life chances for both refugees and displaced people and their host communities.
Postcards from Schloss Leopoldskron

If you require non-watermarked images for your own publication, please contact Louise Hallman: lhallman@salzburgglobal.org

Any photos published outside of Facebook should be credited: Salzburg Global Seminar/Katrin Kerschbaumer.
What Are Your Hopes and Expectations Moving Forward After the Program?

Lucy Browett
“Helen Keller has a great line. She said, “Ideas without action are worthless.” My hope is that these conversations spark new collaborations. But even beyond that, actually, they spark new entities, new organizations, new research projects that actually create real change in the world.”

Louka Parry
Director of academy at Education Changemakers, Australia

“With respect to our organization, I think we are going to develop our curriculum to be an interactive curriculum. So that’s why we are very interested in integrating SEL inside our interactive curriculum to be an urgent part. In order to deliver SEL, in a soft way, which includes life skills, child protection policy... We’re looking for the sustainability of this seminar and to keep in touch with all the partners here in order to benefit from their expertise.”

Samar El Ahmadieh
Department head in the Educational Psychology Department (CERD), Lebanon

“One of the key expectations is obviously a continuation of the dialogue that we've had – the debates about social emotional learning. What I’m most excited about [are] the tangible next steps of creating this global alliance. Not just the community here that gathered in Salzburg... but the extended ecosystem that we are all connected to around the world, so that we can not just create a platform to connect each other, but go beyond that to really drive action in promoting and advocating for social emotional learning around the world.”

Manjula Dissanayake
Founder and director of the Educate Lanka Foundation, Sri Lanka

“I'd like to build on the energy and the relationships in the network that I’ve formed this week through the developing global alliance... Individuals that I’ve had the chance to connect to and use that large body of knowledge and expertise and experience. [Also], building a new school. A new school that looks at university preparation differently, not just from an economic standpoint but through a whole person standpoint, and there are tons of experts from this week who can help me do that.”

Adam Beeson
Co-founder of SI Global Academy, USA

“ECCN sponsored a number of Fellows from the Global South to participate in this wonderful opportunity to really think a bit more holistically and deeply about Social and Emotional Learning. What I really hope is that they’ll be able to take that back with them to their own place of work, in their own communities, and begin to build out the appreciation of and the use of social emotional learning in those contexts.”

Cornelia Janke
Director, Education in Crisis & Conflict Network (ECCN), USA

If you and your working group continue to work together on new projects after Salzburg, let us know! Email Dominic Regester dregester@SalzburgGlobal.org with any outcomes or impact from this program.