A School for Humanity: Confronting Division and Trauma Through Lived Values in Burundi

Jonathan Barnes[1], Alex Ntung[1]

[1]Education4Diversity, UK

Correspondence: Jonathan Barnes; Education4Diversity, UK. Email: education4diversity@outlook.com

Abstract

The Burundi American International Academy is an independent school in central Africa. It was established eight years ago expressly to generate potential leaders motivated to build peace, humanity and economic development in an impoverished country beset by political, ethnic, environmental and development challenges. The purpose of this research is to evaluate progress toward achieving the school's aims to create such leaders through instilling and modelling the values of integrity, excellence, responsibility, passion, compassion and respect .

The study used qualitative approaches including semi-structured conversations, observations, video, questionnaires and follow-up interviews to provide data. Data was analysed using Grounded Theory to identify the characteristics of a model intended to deliver sustainable positive change in social processes through education.

Significant findings were that the school had developed a strong, united, persuasive and perhaps self-fulfilling narrative about its successes. This narrative shared between teachers, students, governors and parents, included convincing evidence of deep understanding of the relationship between values and action at macro and micro levels. The strong motivation among teachers and other adult participants towards sustaining its aims was reinforced by evidence of frequent values discussions and values-focussed in-service training.

Theory arising from grounded research led to discussion on staff training and curriculum coverage. This included suggestions on involving connections to the school's humanitarian values and philosophy, cross-curricular approaches to Sustainable Development Goals and closer relations between the subject disciplines. Establishing inclusive values within a privileged minority in a divided and impoverished society and balancing charitable attitudes with aspirations to high status, were revealed as significant challenges for the school. While student admission to North American universities may result in losing of some promising future leaders, the school offers a globally transferrable example of how to establish and sustain a values-creating school.

Keywords: school, education, values, curriculum, humanity, inclusion

1. Introduction

On Lake Tanganyika's northern shores, a courageous attempt at social transformation through education is unfolding. A new school stands near the junction of three countries with a violent recent history: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Burundi. The Burundi American International Academy (BAIA) in Bujumbura is unusual for its American links, but its strong philosophical focus on inclusive values and, peace-building in a troubled country may be unique. Burundi is the poorest country in the world (World Population Review, 2023). With poor literacy levels, low life expectancy, meagre resources, frequent inter-ethnic violence and often failing schools, it is not a country many want to invest in. BAIA stands out as a successfully-led, centre of liberal, creative, critical thinking with a strong focus on science and technology, computing, English and mathematics. Its founder envisaged a school more than excellent in these key subjects for economic development however. It was intended to bring social change to the region by educating future leaders in an inclusive educational environment dedicated to exemplary character, reconciliation and peacebuilding. The school was deliberately built near a place of ultimate exclusion - *Gatumba,* site of an ethnically-motivated massacre of Congolese Tutsi refugees in 2004.

BAIA's founder, a refugee from the DRC, lives a world away from Burundi, 30 miles north of the Arctic circle in Alaska. The school memorialises his father and three young brothers brutally murdered in 1996 by Congolese militias that still

terrorise members of his Tutsi community across the region. This independent school will never be profit-making. It is a project of faith and hope, founded on humanitarian values held in the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* – sometimes translated as, *'I am because you are'* and understood as '*humanity towards others'*. The selection of 80% of the school population by family income, is clearly contradictory to its egalitarian aims. In a nation where state schooling is defined as 'inefficient' and 'poor' (UNESCO, 2022), the founder reasoned that independence was the only way to provide a sustainable model of excellent education and daily experience of compassion, respect, personal/communal responsibility and integrity. A passion for those values and for learning, plus a continual quest for excellence summarise the aims of the school. The hypothesis underpinning BAIA is that the Ubuntu, values-based education there will generate a body of inclusive, benevolent leaders, ready to take Burundi to a peaceful, prosperous future.

BAIA has much in common with other American international schools. It delivers a US curriculum in English, is accredited and regularly inspected by a large international education organisation and follows American Common Core Standards. It has a roll of 125, over 90% of whom are African, the children of diplomats, business people, government officials and church leaders and covers US grades (Gds) 1 – 12). 20% of places are given on scholarship. There are 20 teaching staff, half are Burundian and others come from Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and the US. The school's director, an experienced veteran of American international schools, has successfully led the school through Covid pandemic, international accreditation, financial difficulties and serious flooding.

The purpose of this research was to seek and analyse evidence on BAIA's progress towards it aims, adherence to its values and the development of its curriculum. Because of its unique peace-building qualities in a war-torn region it was hoped that transferable educational theory would emerge from this analysis

2. Literature Review

The literature review will provide the educational context and outline the significance of the study. It introduces the research questions and assesses theories underpinning the research. This research sought to develop new theory from what was seen as a unique experiment. Developing theory from data collected from research participants ranging from 7 year old students to 60 year old governors, required a systematic approach that could handle different types of input. Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was chosen to facilitate this. Data collection involved asking the same questions to many different people and repeatedly asking for illustrative stories. Personal narrative concerning perceptions of life at BAIA became a significant feature of this iterative process. Recognising Bruner's assertion that, *'we become the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives,'* (Bruner, 2004, p. 694), his thoughts on the culture of educational establishments helped shape the theories that emerged.

Education in Burundi

Education today in Burundi takes place within a post-conflict environment badly damaged by more than 60 years of war, mass killings, inter-ethnic violence and political instabilities. This violence periodically closed schools, divided communities and regularly sent the economy into decline. Even before independence under German, then Belgian rule, largely church-run education separated Burundi's two dominant communities in the curriculum and privileges they received. Division and enmity between Tutsi and Hutu groups continued after independence in 1962 (LeMarchand, 1996; Obura, 2008). Colonial underinvestment, and disinterest in education resulted in an over-dependence on the church contribution and low educational standards. An almost total absence of graduates, poor school enrolment and attendance, low levels of state participation and social discrimination meant that Burundi was, '*singularly unprepared for independence'* (Obura, 2008, p.73).

In the 1970s education became nationalised and given much greater emphasis. Schools became community centres for adult education in civics, health, and agriculture and access to primary education was seen as a right for all children. In 2005 primary education became compulsory and free. Attendance and literacy rates have subsequently grown toward an African average (World Bank, 2018). Ethnic tensions continued however and an upsurge in violence in 2015 closed many schools and painfully reminded today's children of the dangers, divisions and inequalities in their communities (USAID, 2004; BBC, 2022).

Today, just 10% of primary schools have electricity and only a third have access to clean water (UNESCO, 2022a). The average class size is around 60. Over 65% of the rural population live below the national poverty line and violence, floods, landslides, food insecurity and overpopulation commonly affect communities (World Food Program, 2023). Government schools are poorly equipped with only basic furniture, little support or in-service training. Teacher absence is common. Teachers and children often have to combine subsistence farming with education and significant numbers drop out of schooling (US Department of Labor, 2022) . Despite government aims for every Burundian child to be in education until 13, the proportion of children outside education at secondary level remains high. Early pregnancy, insecurity and widespread poverty mean that fewer than 70% continue to secondary education and only 30% complete it (UNICEF, 2023). Just 5% enter tertiary education (WFP, 2021).

Peace studies and HIV/AIDS education were added to an already overloaded curriculum in 2012 but inadequate training and meagre resources remain issues (Perry, 2017; Timpson et al., 2015). Regional education policy throughout the East African Community (EAC) stresses the liberalisation of education through emphasis on science, technology skills, critical thinking, creativity, collaborative learning and a competence based curriculum (Akala, 2021). EAC guidance also stresses 'child friendly' attitudes, practical learning and competition (UN *Africa Renewal* website). However lack of staff training and conservative pressures from teachers, parents and local communities mean slow progress (Bunyi, 2013, Akala, 2021). Direct instruction and rote learning continue to dominate and supress the voice of the individual (Nasibi, 2015).

The importance of values in education

Lived and often discussed values appear to build sustainable, pleasant communities (see for example Wenger, 2000, Perry, 2018,). BAIA's founder believed in the power of shared and inclusive values of *Ubuntu* to change society (see Ncube, 2010). Applying the *Ubuntu* philosophy of humanity to schools, mirrors Gandhi's claim that championing compassion, kindness, fair mindedness, truth and the dignity of labour would radically change the unfairness of Indian society (Ghandi, 1922; Sharma, 2021). Other 20th century education luminaries like Friere, (1970) and Giroux challenged existing concepts of pedagogy by linking education to hope and social participation for the oppressed and marginalised. Giroux's 'Critical pedagogy' summarised proposals that teaching should become a revolutionary activity capable of bringing social justice to society. He argued that schools should not be '*extensions of the workplace',* but places of participation, hope and equity. This would be achieved in education through, '*critical inquiry, meaningful dialogue and human agency',* (Giroux 1988, p.xxxii). In Africa a similar argument has been taken up by the EAC in its push towards a values-based competences curriculum (Akala, 2021)

Equally political, values-creation in schools was considered essential by Japanese educationalist, Makiguchi (1871 – 1944). His *Soka[1]* schools were founded on the belief that the purpose of education was the happiness of the child. Happiness was to be felt in the present, not in terms of hedonistic pleasure but in each child's growing consciousness of values that promoted personal and community flourishing. Such thoughts have even more currency today. The happiness that comes from values like peace and security appears threatened across the world. Education for peace and conflict resolution has become a focus in many countries (UNESCO, 2022b). A peace and reconciliation unit of work was successfully trialled in 10 Burundi secondary schools in 2008 (Wilson Centre, 2008) and now included in its civic education curriculum at primary and secondary levels.

Values may be defined as, 'Fundamental beliefs that act as guides and prompts to action' (Booth, 2010). Schools that embody inclusive values (*Figure 1*), where all learners have equal access to the same curriculum, (Ainscow, 2006, 2020) are argued to be supportive and high achieving communities (Booth and Ainscow, 2011; UNESCO, 2017). The fact that Ainscow's *Index for Inclusion* has been translated into more than 40 languages suggests wide agreement on the importance of such values. Earlier research showed that most teachers traced their fundamental beliefs back to mentors and incidents in their childhood, reinforcing the priority of attending to values in the school years (Barnes 2013, 2018; 2019; 2022). Schooling covers the most fruitful years for values creation, but the key question is which values are they exposed to? Values can be exclusionary and destructive (*Figure 2).* Compassion is pushed aside by self-interest, connectedness by an emphasis on individualism and love or care negated by a relentless focus on authority (Noddings, 2005). Booth (2018) argues that those who seek to improve society through inclusion have a responsibility to make inclusive values explicit in their conversations and actions in the real world. The research aimed to discover if BAIA's values are meaningful to staff and students (Research Question (RQ) 1). It also sought to document some of differences the values make to its curriculum and pedagogy (RQ 2) and explore global and values-based contexts such as the Earth Carter (2012) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.(2015).

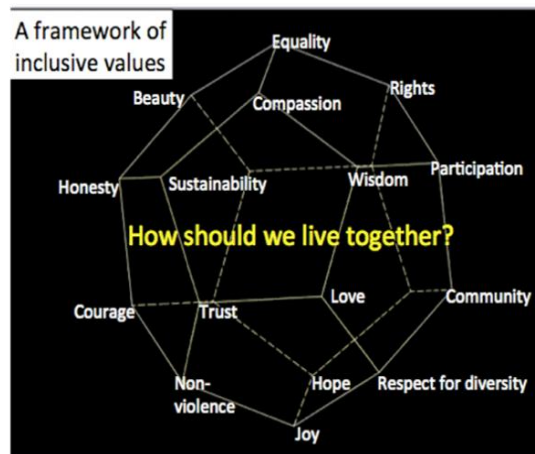[1] *Soka* in Japanese means value-creating

Figure 1. Inclusive values (Booth, 2018)

Figure 2. Excluding values (Booth, 2018)

A connected curriculum

Work on a connected, positive and integrated curriculum (Barnes 2015, 2018, 2023) has developed the ideas of Robinson on creativity (2022), Dewey (1897/1998) on relevance, Bruner (1996, 2004) on personal stories and school culture, Bandura (1997) on confidence, Dweck (2017) and Fredrickson (2010) on positivity, Gardner (2000, 2009) on the disciplines and inter-disciplinarity, Immordino-Yang (2020) on social and emotional learning, Kidd (2020) and Nunez and Goulah (2021) on hope. Such researchers, against opposition from neo-liberal governments and conservative academics like Hirsch (2020), have provided scientific and professional evidence to support educational developments that offer hope for an interdependent and diverse world. They argue that through education, human creativity and conviviality can unite across national and cultural boundaries to address the threatening global issues of climate change, environmental degradation, violence and inequality Many boundaries are crossed by the stories we tell.

Humans are storytellers. Bruner (2004) suggested that stories sustain cultures and communities; without them they fall apart (Achebe, 1962). They are understood across cultures (Jung, 2012). As well as telling the stories of others, internally we narrate our own lives. These personal stories help us navigate problems and map our futures (Gottschall, 2012: Stefanovski, 2018; McAdams, 2012). Psychologist Adler suggests we 'live into' our key stories (Adler 2012; Adler and Singer, 2022) and suggest that schools should become settings where affirmative autobiographical fragments are created.

These arguments however have largely been made in the 'developed world'. This research seeks to discover theory arising from a majority world setting in war-torn and poverty-scarred Burundi and asks what difference do the values and ethos articulated by BAIA make to the curriculum and pedagogy of the school (RQ 2) measure any progress towards change in attitudes to compassion, respect and personal/community responsibility (RQ 3).

Research focus

The research took place in April 2023 and sought a preliminary understanding of BAIA's aims, values, ethos, pedagogies and curriculum, asking the following questions:

1.   Are BAIA's values meaningful to staff and students and shown in action?

2. What differences have BAIA's values made to its curriculum and pedagogy ?

3. Has BAIA made progress towards change in attitudes to compassion, respect and personal/community responsibility within the wider community ?

Participation in this research was voluntary. The details of data gathering activities were previously shared with and approved by BAIA governors and the director (*Appendix 1*). The school gained permission from parents for student involvement and teacher, parent and governor participants were all volunteers. All were asked for permission to be videoed and reminded that they could withdraw from the research at any time, refuse to answer questions and delete noted responses or videos without the need for explanation. Respondents were assured of anonymity in the written paper and given opportunities to read it before submission.

3. Methods

To discover whether BAIA's values were understood, acted upon and making a difference, the team used mixed qualitative methods collect data to reduce the likelihood of only positive responses: 26 face to face and internet interviews with students, teachers, governors and parents[2], video analysis, questionnaires, email follow-up, informal focus group discussions, questionnaires on curriculum delivery, classroom observation, collaborative teaching, informal conversation, whole staff discussion and desk studies.

Invitations for respondents, were made by the director. Tendencies towards an unrepresentative sample were mitigated by freedom for researchers to consult any additional respondents encountered during the week of contact with the school.

Research conversations and semi structured interviews were videoed and lasted approximately 30 minutes each and were recorded. Conversations were led by separate sets of questions for non-teaching stakeholders (P), teaching staff (Te), and students (S). Questions were designed to minimise the use of prepared responses, elicit stories of real-world experience, and reflection.

Individual Follow-Up, was carried out with teachers by email and a proforma designed to gather details of teaching and curriculum approaches.

Observations provided an unplanned source of data. Interview timetables allowed gaps where lesson observation, related conversations and participation was accommodated by teachers. Planned pottery lessons provided opportunities for informal conversations with students. Sessions on music, art, science, mathematics, social studies, and school clubs were observed .

Whole staff discussion occurred during a staff development conference held as part of the school's training programme. Teachers were invited to share their personal values (*Appendix 5*) and introduced to the concept of a connecting curriculum (*Appendix 2*) and cross-curricular learning (*Appendix 3*).

Desk Studies used UNESCO (2022b) and other websites regarding education, aid and legislation. We also studied the curriculum followed at BAIA, in Science, Technology, Mathematics and English as well as the *Cognia[3]* assessment exercise of 2022.

Data arising from these sources was gathered and systematically examined in the manner of Grounded Research (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Themes, categories and properties that occurred more than 13 times were identified using a coding system, and confirmed by re-readings, re-categorising and reiterated questions by researchers. (see *Appendix 4*) This analysis including verbatim comments, was summarised as *Findings* and became the subject of *Discussion* and *Conclusions.*

4. Findings

The research sought evidence on BAIA's progress towards it aims, adherence to its values and the development of its curriculum. Data-gathering and analysis[4] generated the following **themes** (T): *School aims, School ethos, Dominant pedagogy and curriculum.* Each theme involved several **categories** (shown at C1, C2 etc in italics) each category had its **properties** (*Appendix 4*). This paper evidences the analysis outcomes with verbatim quotations.

Theme 1. Aims and values

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[2] 10 teachers, 10 students and 6 Parents/governors

[3] Cognia - a non-profit, non-governmental organization that accredits primary and secondary schools throughout the US and internationally see: https://www.cognia.org/

BAIA's mission is well-articulated on its website [5]. The founder's aims for an education towards humanity and peace result in the declared values of: **integrity, respect, compassion** and **responsibility**. In his words:

> …my happiness cannot be complete unless you are happy. When I spread that happiness to other people.. that is Ubuntu, our ethos …We want the school's children to be considerate to others and those that are vulnerable… With one child at a time, we [at BAIA] plant a seed that will flourish past my lifetime, within a society where what happened here in central Africa will never happen again…whatever the child learns after their time at BAIA it will be building on the strengths that they have learned here. (FK, 4.23)

Recognition that future leaders must be both knowledgeable and humane generated the addition of **passion** and **excellence** to the *Ubuntu* values. Unbidden comments on the humanitarian aims of the school were offered by 19 of the 26 respondents. A cross-section of students and teachers agreed that the effective route towards achieving BAIA's mission was through its ethos of respect and calm and pedagogical attention to: peace-building, human diversity, charitable action, fair leadership and educational excellence. Discussions within those categories were often animated, but though adults and children were remarkably articulate about values, there were differences in their responses.

Students described many incidents of compassion and respect, while the African philosophy of *Ubuntu,* - was frequently mentioned by adults. One parent picked up this theme:

> I have witnessed how the school applies its value to Ubuntu: my child has learning difficulties and has resisted attending school. However, BAIA provided her care, a sense of acceptance and relevant and adequate additional learning support. She gradually improved and became a completely different child. Yet, my child had been to another independent school, which had not worked. It is not about only resources but values. (P5)

T1 C1: Values-consciousness

Sensitivity to BAIA values was the most elaborated-upon category (26/26). Recognition of personal and communal responsibility to show kindness, sharing, caring, compassion, respect, support and common purpose linked almost every student response.

> *Sooo many people made me feel I am not the only new one here…* (S 5 Gd 7)

> *…people here are very compassionate….* (S 4 Gd 12)

> *Muslim students are respected here, they're not teased about the hijab or Ramadan, we are comfortable talking about religion.*(S 1 Gd 10)

Teachers and other adults stressed integrity as a value. They emphasised how values should be 'shown in action' and linked the school's academic excellence with its adherence to inclusive values. Several elaborated on this theme:

> *We see integrity to apply amongst ourselves and the administration team, not just the children …even outside our watch they should be doing and being the same things, even we as teachers, we should. Values like this describe or define our community* (Te 1)

> *This school stands for integrity, we do what we think is right even if not observed* (Te 4)

> *Even if a challenge is difficult you don't raise your voice here- you speak very kindly and say, 'don't worry we will find a solution for any problem.'* (Te 8)

> *Values play a big role when we want to correct a student, we use them so they don't disappear, we are empowered by them.* (Te 3)

> *BAIA is piloting the change we want, preparing inclusive leaders as children learn about issues that can bring people together*, (P 2)

Love, kindness, generosity and *honesty* in addition to *family* peppered discussion in our workshop on teachers' personal priorities (*Appendix 5*).

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[5] https://baiaexcellence.org/

Figure 3. Each teacher drew a 'values hand' to provoke discussion

T1 C2: Peace-building

Though questions about violence were avoided, hopes for peace were clearly central for students and teachers. Many had witnessed violence in their community. Guns are common in the streets as is personal knowledge of murders and massacres, indeed weeks after our research visit a senior governor was kidnapped by a militia group and has not been heard of since. Student references to peace, acceptance, collaboration and friendship, were particularly poignant against this background:

> *There's no fighting, bullying or shaming here* (S 4 Gd 12)

> *There's no violent action or enemies around here, nothing is bothering you* (S 9 Gd 5)

> *Peace means a lot to us, it means being free from disturbance, free from war, lately it* [Bujumbura] *has been really better, no gunshots,…the school is a peaceful place where students don't think of killing each other, this is important for the country also.*(S 1 Gd 10)

> *The school operates in a country still receiving refugees from the DRC. There are also many internally displaced people in Bujumbura. These marginalised social groups are all represented at BAIA.* (P 5)

Some students linked peace with the eradication of poverty and like their teachers saw regular links, with an impoverished Batwa community as an important gesture towards *community harmony* (P 6)*.*

Teachers cited the importance of interdependence and co-responsibility when describing their motivations. Many gave their own summary of *Ubuntu*.

T1 C3: Diversity

Diversity at BAIA may not be instantly visible to western outsiders. Though many students are Burundian from Tutsi and Hutu communities, the school also hosts students from other east African countries and beyond, each with a distinct language and culture. Diversity was continually and positively referred to by the children:

> *BAIA is special because it's very diversified - there are lots of kids form different countries here and we get exposed to different cultures…. we interact more with different people, everybody knows each other….we all have something in common – we are here to learn, we have freedom and no one is laughing at each other…* (S 2 Gd 10)

> *The school respects all religions -- kids are not teased they are comfortable in talking about their religion* (S 6 Gd 5)

Some recognised that diversity was not defined simply by differences in appearance or culture but evident between people of the same community:

> *… some are challenging, some are smart, some negligent, some dependent, some academic – in this school we help the weak to think by themselves, help people out.* (S 8 Gd 12)

Teachers noted strengths in diversity:

> *Here at BAIA we are multi-cultural, we learn from each other, students help each other become integrated across race and culture.. there's ethnic respect, no one demeans each other.'* (Te 1)

> *…education needs a more holistic approach producing children who are both academically inclined, competitive*

in the global market but also human and humanitarian. (Te 8)

T1 C4: Community

BAIA's small size, '*where I know 60 or 70% of all the names,*' (S 1 Gd 10), was mentioned by all participants. Many claimed it promoted community:

- *It's easy to approach a teacher - sometimes even on personal issues* (S 1 Gd 10)
- *We share common interests and have a common purpose* (S 2 Gd 10)
- *Group events go smoothly without rough points* (S 5 Gd 7)
- *You have freedom in a small community* (S 3 Gd 11)
- *I was a really stressed and lonely kid when I came here and the first person I met showed me around without being asked, others volunteered to help too - that has continued.*(S 8 Gd 12)
- *Because of its size students can feel a sense of acceptance and significance, they are recognised, 'I belong to this classroom and I can have individualised learning'* (Te 5)
- *Our 'Buddy' scheme allows big students to be in contact with elementary kids to talk and play together* (Te 6)
- *It feels like a family, we share.* (Te 1)
- *The school is an integral part of the community – sometimes we get out and clean up a street or de-clog the drainage channels* (Te 1)
- *We have a staff band twice and month* (Te 7)
- *The small community makes it possible to follow through any problems, track students and make them feel secure. Students can more easily be held accountable too* (Te 10)

Despite the emergence of *Charity* (C5) as a category, aims toward the wider community are not yet fully developed. Governors and school leadership recognised the need for a research centre, gym and science laboratory, and most felt that such facilities should be accessible to the wider community, *These kids are rich - they should share,* said one.

T1 C6: Leadership

Generating enlightened, compassionate leaders is an explicit aim of BAIA.

> *……education has in the past focused on such relatively remote areas of human life as science and technology, and has overwhelmingly failed to concern itself with the moral or spiritual dimensions…if we are to survive as a species, and avoid …the endless chain of historical atrocities … we desperately need our education system to adopt a more holistic, more human approach* (FK 4/23)

Student and staff understanding of critical thinking was evidenced as they spoke about leadership:

> *Problems can be solved in many different ways, it's good to compare the reasonings of different people* (S 4, Gd 12)

> *We are encouraged to think about what could happen when you make a decision, and what might happen if you don't make a decision.* (S 5, Gd 7)

> He (S 7 Gd 7) *is very smart and always helps others out; when they don't understand, they mostly work with him – he's humble* (S 5 Gd 7)

> *Our teaching is not just academic but constructing someone's personality…*(Te 6)

> [students] *have a responsibility for the environment ...* (Te 2)

T1 C7: Excellence

Excellence shows in BAIA's grades and PSAT and SAT [6]scores above the expected levels, but also in students' attitudes and interpretations of success. Students had broad views on excellence – looking beyond test scores and explicitly praising *collaboration, team work, tenacity, new ways of thinking, creativity, exploration, comparison, questioning, curiosity*. One elementary student put it simply:

> *We work hard together and have the same goal of learning --- we look how people work and see they have a good future.* (S 6 Gd 5)

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[6] SATs (Scholastic Aptitude Tests) are US standardised pre-college assessments. PSATs are Junior versions

Teachers emphasised high standards across the curriculum but also good scores in traditional measures like: *grades, tests, evaluation, training, analysis, objectives, comparisons and tenacity.* They appreciated the accreditation by *Cognia* and standardised assessments across the school and spoke of wishing to *'maintain the highest standards,'* (T3). They saw the school as the best in Bujumbura and quickly becoming, *'one of the best schools in the region'.*

Theme 2. Ethos

Perceptions of an ethos of friendliness and positivity arose throughout the research conversations.

T2 C1: Friendly

Friendly was the most commonly chosen word to describe BAIA's ethos (19/26) and evidenced everywhere. Previous quotations capture some properties of that friendliness, but comments on, *helping each other*, *mutual acceptance*, *easily accessible* teachers and director and the words *'family'*, *'community' 'open door',* confirmed it as a category. Student responses captured it well:

> *We treat each other like brothers and sisters. I can help others and they me…I love how we come together as a whole school, teachers and students for games* **…** *We have joy and happiness in our community… that makes us live like family and friends…build good relationships with those around you and you don't have anything that separates you and those other people, or anything that is blocking you from good relationships* (S 3 Gd 11)

> *When I was struggling she kept encouraging me when I felt like giving up, …and in the end I was able to do a cartwheel* (S 9 Gd 5)

Students noticed friendships between teachers, mentioning that many spent social time together outside school. All teachers answered positively and with personal examples to the word-prompt, *'belonging'* when describing their relationship to the school.

T2 C 2*: Positive*

The ethos category of positivity arose readily from the data. In corridor, playground, classes, recreation areas, clubs and on journeys, calm, politeness and order dominated. The open body language of confidence: smiles, and relaxed physical proximity was consistently evidenced in videos and photographs. Whilst occasional expressions of disagreement, irritation or impatience were viewed, all were minor. Positivity did not appear 'put on' for visitors, it was a thread visible when students and teachers were unaware of observation. One teacher summarised differences between BAIA students and those at their previous school:

> *They know how to work even when they are upset, they prepare well, search for information without getting tired, they no longer feel shame if they don't understand, their attitude is positive – they change in just a few days when they come here, they change their way of learning – focus, collaboration, good conduct.* (Te 2)

A tally of vocabulary used in responses showed an average of 21 positive comments per conversation. The most commonly used words were: *friendly* (23 times), *kind* (23 times), *help* (20), *support* (15), *share*, (13) *create/creative*, (11), *harmony* (7), *improved* (7), *free/freedom*, (7) *collaborate*, (5). A typical response to the question on ethos was:

> *….Kids here are growing, they are challenged by their age …we care about their well-being, if they are OK we are OK, if they are not we try to find out why and what can be done by the school staff, we talk very often about the children every day….My work is valued by students and teachers and I feel proud of my contributions, each person is valued, we are all concerned for each other …we feel it is our lives.* (Te 6)

Theme 3. Pedagogy

The theme of Pedagogy generated two categories, teaching style and learning environments.

T3 C 1: Teaching style

Teachers enjoyed working at BAIA because of its preferred teaching style. Their responses illustrated beliefs that tomorrow's effective leaders should leave school with strong, globally-conscious, creative, technologically confident, critical thinking skills. They believed that progressive teaching methods, learner centred, interactive and focussed on 21st century needs, applied within clear moral guidelines would generate these skills. Teachers identified properties of 'good teaching' including: *compassion for the less fortunate, fairness* (Te 10), *respect towards all* (Te 2), *integrity in public and private life* (Te3) and *appreciating the benefits of diversity* (Te 4). Two neatly summarised this approach:

> *I want to teach awareness of and sensitisation* [towards]*the local physical and social environment -this way of teaching matches what I am* (Te 2).

> *We make walks and visits to look for necessary improvements to our environment and use formal information from authorities or school not the media* (Te 1)

Some students appreciatively recognised the focus on the environment in class and after-school clubs:

> *Recently we joined the environmental issues club and collected plant species, this makes me conscious about how many plants there are and how we can protect them more.* (S 7 Gd 7)

Governors too expressed strong awareness of global challenges and see the curriculum as an essential tool in responding to them:

> *Climate change is consistently in our minds as school governors. We do not just read about it elsewhere but see it alive as we are continuously affected by the rising water level in Tanganyika Lake. We need to think creatively and use this issue as a learning opportunity and curriculum focus. We want to develop technological infrastructures to acquire scientific data needed as long-term efforts and but as short term strategy we need to create risk-mitigating efforts. We want our children to create solutions* (P 1)

Three teacher interviewees argued the learning benefits of constructivist and social learning approaches like group, pair work, and projects, claiming these liberal approaches enhanced critical thinking and promoted creativity. Individual and collaborative enquiry was mentioned by all teachers. The leadership of student research teams was changed often, giving all opportunity to experience leadership:

> *We have students to search for information from resources, we don't just write on the board for them to copy – this was new for me, very different from my previous school – it strengthens the curriculum when students have meet objectives and make evaluations and often use modern technologies . ..when it's critical thinking it becomes <u>yours,</u> it becomes part of your knowledge.* (Te 2)

The value of diversity and importance of social harmony were foregrounded and firmly linked with educational advancement, for example:

> *BAIA is already impacting on Burundi, because it is truly international with different students from different places it will affect Burundian students positively…we will learn from others and we will spread what we learn.* (Te 6)

> *Students are taught by many teachers - trust flows through me and the other teachers. We ask [students] what they have heard from other teachers and demonstrate harmony by our collaborative work with them and the way we talk with them – harmony is shown in the acceptance of other cultures, no matter how different they are we try to instil the heart of accepting others whosoever comes.* (Te 5)

T3 C 2: Learning environment

BAIA's building is clean, cool and modern. Classrooms are large, airy, with good new furniture, light and well-ordered. Corridors contain displays of children's work. There is a very well-used computer suite and library on the ground floor and computers in each classroom. An atmosphere of safety, care, order, serious study and learning was noted by all researchers.

Environment is not just physical, it included for teachers, the social and emotional settings for learning. Students and teachers frequently used words that suggested a secure, critically-alive learning environment: *independence*, *group*, *safe*, *freedom*, *friends, enjoy, choice* and *collaboration*. Comments below provide examples of this:

> *Our groups give two or more versions of the story, so we can make up our own minds about the solution and we can compare the reasonings of different people,* (S 4 Gd 12)

> *You can express your thoughts and no one will judge you, but you can also listen to others and not interrupt* (S 2 Gd 10)

For one teacher, this creative and intellectual environment created, '*…a love for learning,'* (Te 6). Others spoke of aiming for continual improvement and how this was experienced in class and curriculum:

> *When 3 students work together they make something new…they create when they work together, it's better than working alone.* (Te 2)

> *As individuals we are limited but as a group you can come up with more solid ideas, so I use real-life problems that require critical thought and we solve, creatively in teams* (Te 1)

> *We specialise in critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication – all these things engage the brain in different ways* (Te 10)

Theme 4. Curriculum

Subject-disciplines and their links were frequently mentioned.

T4 C1: Subjects

Older students often spoke about maths, science and technology. Researchers observed group challenges in science and technology which allowed students to work with new knowledge in original and imaginative ways. Social Studies – combining History and Geography with economics, civics and aspects of government – was taught through shared projects and popular with students, some of whom extended their interests after school. Art was a favourite subject for three of the 10 pupils , their paintings were displayed along the school corridors. Music, uncommon in Burundi schools, was strongly evident in BAIA's curriculum and extra-curricular activities. The sound of keyboard practise and singing was gently audible near the school entrance throughout the day. After school a weekly drumming club was led by an expert drummer who trained an ethnically-mixed troupe to high standards of performance. Games and physical education were also clearly important to the students. Weekly one mile runs involved all, and a wide range of ball skills, matches and competitions were noted daily.

The standard of conversational English reading and speaking was very high and tested regularly in the U.S. PSAT and SAT assessments. Many stressed the importance of English as a global language, essential in applications to American universities (16 out of 17 Grade 12 students had places at American universities in 2023, 6 with scholarships). French the second national language was also valued, some students spoke of the cognitive and cultural benefits of multi-lingualism:

> *We learn in two languages (French and English), but we still value the local language, Kirundi. Mostly, I have learned to communicate in cross-cultural ways. I am compassionate, think local, and proud of my identity* (S 10 Gd12)

T4 C2: Integration

Students showed enthusiasm for project work and choice within subjects. Project displays evidenced cross-curricular and the use of internet investigations activities in many rooms. Teachers pointed out curriculum integration in social studies, mathematics and science and between the sciences. Computing skills and research often resulted in co-curricular responses particularly in the older years. In the elementary years thematic integration was a standard approach to the child's day. An elementary teacher expressed how the agenda for the day's teaching was set during the first ten minutes in class:

> *I use that ten minutes to talk about values, we have a quote of the week, this week it was Gandhi's advice to 'be the change you wish to see in the world,' every student talks about how they will live that quote in action and we refer to it in lessons after.* (Te 3)

5. Discussion

The research sought to discover whether BAIA's values were meaningful to staff and students and visible in the life of the school. It looked for evidence that these values had made a difference to curriculum and pedagogy within the school and that its philosophy was making an impact on the wider community ? An Elementary teacher talking about her job summarised this philosophy as follows: words:

> *It is not easy, but a kid can go home from BAIA with a good heart and affect their siblings, parents, neighbours…when they grow up they will grow up with the values we have given them and lived with them.* (Te 3)

The founder expressed similar thoughts:

> *We want to produce children who are both academically inclined and able to be competitive in the global market, but also to be fully human, to have humility and other human values in them, the Ubuntu concept of the oneness of humanity, in the leaders of tomorrow.* (FK)

Can such idealistic statements truly effect change in Burundi? Teachers are, or should be, central to achieving positive societal change (Friere, 1970; Giroux, 1988, Gardner 2009). BAIA's teachers claim their deeply held hopes and beliefs in peace and community motivate and direct their pedagogical choices and actions. Booth's 2010 definition suggests that values become distinct from ideals when they are shown in real world *action*. Recent research (Barnes, 2013, 2019, 2022) across many cultures has intimated that teachers felt greatest job satisfaction and contributed most when their values and those of their school correlated. Many trace their fundamental beliefs to mentors and incidents in their own childhood, reinforcing perhaps the importance of attention to values in schooling (Barnes 2015, 2018; 2023).

The BAIA story began with a devastating clash of values. Its founder's experience of victimisation and genocide illustrates the ultimate application of exclusion. This exclusion affected the lives of millions of families across Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC over more than 60 years and still happening in Burundi and the DRC. At BAIA the aim is to transform grief and anger into reconciliation and hope and a focus on compassion, respect, integrity and responsibility are believed to generate that transformation. Do these values mean anything to the community at BAIA?

Parents, governors, staff and students interviewed evidenced a strong accommodation of BAIA's founding principles. While staff and student preparation for our research was anticipated, each group effortlessly provided personalised, well-illustrated examples of the personal impact of the school's values. Students unanimously described what those values *looked* like in school life and included touching stories of compassion or respect in action. Supplementary requests for greater detail, reiteration or personal reflection confirmed the internalisation and integrity of these aspects of the school's mission. This degree of consistency was unexpected and prompts some critical questions:

- *Did research respondents represent a fair cross-section of stakeholders?*
- *Did loyalty to founder and school distort responses?*
- *What is the effect of frequent values conversations?*
- *How far are BAIA's aims being fulfilled outside school?*

Did respondents represent a fair cross section?

Student and teacher participants were not a random cross-section of stakeholders. Lack of confidence in English or shyness dissuaded some from volunteering. Some participants were likely to have been selected for articulateness and support of the school. However, a convenience sample of parents, governors and ex-students were interviewed in their home language and five unselected teachers and three extra students subsequently offered unprepared comments in informal settings. Nonetheless it is likely that some negative reflections on the values were unexpressed.

Did loyalty to founder and school distort responses?

Loyalty to BAIA was almost inevitable because of its powerful founding story. The founder keeps hope and humanity at the forefront of thinking, planning and delivery. It's successes are discussed well beyond the campus and an unusually high number of outsider visitors remark on the atmosphere of security and achievement. The noticeable balance between intellectual and emotional, practical and philosophical recorded many times, evidenced an approach likely to offset over-romanticism or pretence. Respondents expressed gratitude for their freedoms and several spoke directly of their obligation towards the truth. They openly expressed worries about flooding, lack of campus resources and the need for a more coherent curriculum alongside praise of management and ethos. With the high degree of positive input staff receive it is unsurprising that our questioning generated so many affirmative responses.

Open questions partially countered tendencies for bias. Though some positive responses inevitably resulted from culturally driven politeness, the curriculum focus on questioning and critical thinking suggested that teachers were used to promoting honest, flexible, open-minded responses. Their unguarded body language and relaxed interactions observed in videos, class visits and staff meetings indicated confident, independent professionals who used and valued their autonomy. Interviews offered multiple opportunities for critical or negative responses and the different ages, cultural backgrounds and assumptions of researchers ensured a wide range of follow-up questions. The answers generated several areas for further research: the role of values conversations, the impact of an ethos of positivity and the relevance of an integrated curriculum.

Values conversations

Values matter. Our fundamental beliefs influence how we live. These beliefs often unexpressed, may be conflicting or change. Few are led consistently by wholly inclusive or excluding values. Yet it has become common for schools, hospitals and other institutions to publish written expressions of the inclusive beliefs that lead them. In well-led institutions it might be argued that these mission statements affect all daily behaviour and long term decision-making. Sadly however, there is a common perception that these high-minded statements are nominal, idealistic hopes unrelated to action.

Ainscow and Booth have shown that experience of inclusive values helps children become happier, more connected with others. This message, confirms past and present educationalists, psychologists, and neuroscientists who suggest that affirmative experiences form the bedrock of effective learning. Happy children are likely to become happy adults. If there is truth in this, then schools should talk more about the moral setting for that happiness. Happiness can be self-serving or altruistic and BAIA has offered humanity and inclusivity as the educational context and sustaining it through conversation leading to action.

Values-conversations are common at BAIA. Literally all interviews demonstrated thorough understanding of the impact of the school's values on self and curriculum. Views about the meaning of 'integrity' for example, were consistent between teachers and students. When remarked upon in research conversations, this consistency was said to be the result of continuing dialogue through the school year. Prizes and website recognition were given each month to children displaying a particular strength in one of the school values. A 'teacher of the month' trophy was also closely related to the ways in which that teacher had represented those values. Weekly assemblies highlight how they are being acted upon in school. The founder visits three times a year from Alaska to talk about them.

The frequency of values-discussions is important. Wider research suggests that such regular conversations can keep a school focussed on its main aims (Barnes, 2013). Teachers leave, new ones arrive, priorities slip, new challenges arise and visitors need information and if a schools guiding principles of are not fresh and meaningful to all, they quickly lose their effectiveness. When everyone knows and agrees the values, they legitimately use them positively to 'police' the life of the school.

BAIA might be called a *Values-creating school.* Not only are values central to discourse, but they are lived in corridor and class. They are frequently highlighted when teachers see them in action and vibrant in the minds of parents and governors too. One summarised school aims as follows:

'…*children learn to find answers to the local and global issues and to become value-led leaders.'* (P 1), another remarked, *'... we appreciate that there's an emphasis on equipping our children with the skills and values needed to understand and address local humanitarian issues.'* (P 3)

Values conversations extend beyond teachers and pupils, however. They affect some of the leading minds of Burundi counted among the school governors and parents. It is here that the wider impact of BAIA can be perceived. With its long history of trauma and present reality of poverty, positive change will come only when the priorities of the powerful change. Students of BAIA are children of the powerful and conversations about life there happen in their homes. Rightly or wrongly these students will eventually hold positions of power themselves and their lived experience of compassion, respect, responsibility and integrity is likely to influence their attitudes and decisions as adults .

Achieving BAIA's aims

All stakeholders recognised the positivity at BAIA. Students referred to school life in terms like: *respectful* behaviour; *warm, supportive* relationships; *kind* responses to problems; *encouraging* results; *exciting* curriculum; *really good* teaching; *fun* club activities; *student-led* charity and social events; *loving* certain subjects. Teachers were similarly affirmative: *loving* work; appreciating *polite* interactions; adopting *soft* approaches; asking *challenging* questions; *enjoying quality* conversations; delivering a *consistent* curriculum: *embracing* globalisation; *accepting* a multicultural community, *sharing* ideas; *engaging* mind and brain; being *learner-centred*; using *discovery* methods; *supportive, responsible* attitudes and relationships. Each positive stance forming, in the words of Te 9, '*the foundations of excellence'.*

We saw no pressure to be positive at BAIA, though we acknowledge the positive effects of being both researched and privileged. It is easy, however to imagine that frequent positive conversations and expectations impact on the quality of any organisation (Perkins, 2006). The links between positive states and good perception, relationships, thinking and learning are well researched. We know that positive emotions broaden and build our repertoire of physical, mental and social responses to life and learning (see Csikszentmihalyi, 2002; Fredrickson, 2010; Seligman, *et al*., 2009, Seligman, 2017; Marquez, *et al* 2011; Alteneiji, *et al* 2023). Current research suggests that positive mind states improve thinking and imagination and increase intellectual, social, subjective and creative connection-making. Positivity also appears to broaden visual perception, imagination, encourage risk-taking and promote trust in others. But we must take care to be balanced. Over-emphasis on the positive can have negative effects. Insensitive pressure on child or adult to turn negatives into positives or deny disappointment, sadness and trauma can sap confidence, add to anxiety or provoke other mental health problems. Honestly confronting past or present sadness, shame and fear may be an equally necessary response to current problems or to the horrors of your nation's history.

Teachers are used to finding the right balance. BAIA teachers recognised their role as models of good behaviour and wished to create classroom environments that balanced hard work with human sensitivity. These aims require more than teaching adjusted towards the affirmative, they need detailed attention to the multiple environments affecting children's development. Our research recorded many positive settings at BAIA: calm, curious and accommodating social gatherings; personalised and pleasant classrooms; inspiring spiritual and secure emotional relationships and inclusive intellectual environments. Researchers also witnessed empathic sharing of sadness and sensitive acknowledgement of problems. These ideal environments were made explicit by conversation and evidence indicated that within them most felt confident to think, speak out, risk uncertainty, ask for support and help each other. Such learning conditions commonly generate feelings of 'self-efficacy' (Bandura, 1977, 1997). This sense of confidence and agency was highlighted by new BAIA students talking of its difference from other schools. Teachers also recognised a new professional self-assurance, describing how they, *speak more positively* (Te 2) and like the way their teaching, *helps students face life challenges* (Te 3). When teachers habitually engage in this kind of positive dialogue, Hattie (2012) observes distinct improvements in the quality of their teaching.

Good teachers are effective leaders. In balancing humanity and knowledge, BAIA teachers work towards healing the legacy of a violent and divided past. Despite exceptional teaching and clear direction the school still has some distance to go in impacting on education elsewhere and seeing alumni become humane leaders in society. They are aware that educational and moral progression in this elite academy can be applied more generally but is compromised by the poverty and insecurity surrounding it. The school has addressed this in football matches, visits

and plans for music to be shared across schools, but some fear these charitable acts threaten the status of the school. BAIA teachers' knowledge and experience of facilitating critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity and collaborative approaches and could provide guidance and leadership for other schools but time, fears of competition and resources pull against these aspirations. The *Cognia* review's suggestions of input on formative assessment might offer opportunities to develop approaches to develop students' 'growth mindset' (Dweck 2017) perhaps through performance based and peer assessment. *Cognia's* agenda is being addressed with vigour and teachers are ready to apply new knowledge on the developing brain and mind and on how creativity can be taught. Such developments will add to its excellence and perhaps lead the school to expand the good leadership it desires for its students towards leading the liberalisation of education elsewhere in the region.

Integrating a curriculum for humanity

When asked about the future many respondents asked for better sports facilities, extra buildings, more equipment. Some suggested sharing these with less fortunate schools, but the vision for BAIA's contribution could be greater.

Excellence is not enough. An excellent curriculum for the 21st century can only developed *for all* within a meaningful context. The school locality is one such context, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or the Earth Charter (2012) are others. These are rightly addressed the social studies and science curricula at BAIA, but there is wider context too (see Scoffham and Rawlinson, 2023). Biesta (2016, 2021) argues that all education must start from the lives of those to be educated. Gardner (2009) asks teachers to consider: disciplined, synthesizing, creative, respectful and ethical ways of teaching the curriculum. After learning the key contributions and skills of each of the subject/disciplines every student should have opportunities to put their understandings to work in combination, often creative and always respectful and ethical ways. These 'minds for the future' align closely with BAIA's aims. For example, addressing the UN's 17 global challenges like: climate action, (SDG 13) peace and justice (16), and reducing inequality (10), directly affect the school. Each challenge requires different minds and their collaboration. Equally in peace education Burundi's harrowing past is best confronted through opening up the different ways individuals and communities can salve wounds and prevent violence. Through its lived values BAIA is in a strong position to model such approaches with other schools. Integrated approaches like these require new conversations about curriculum and a new sharing across subject specialisms.

Positive narratives

Research on the importance of stories was summarised in the literature review. New cultures grow from shared narratives. The research uncovered strong signs that this is happening at BAIA through its relationships, curriculum and the personal stories of pupils and teachers. We requested stories of lived values from students. They arrived in plenty, illustrating kindness, community, respect and belonging in action. Some were short, one simply said: '*In some schools people are treated as dumb, but here we learn each of us has something special and different to bring'* [S 8]. Another was shared as follows:

> *A student fell very ill and we took care of him so he could wake up softly, we called his family to pick him up… no one hesitated to help him, it all looked so natural…there are many more examples like this … we all want to treat others in the way you would want to be treated…it's a message from the school, to give help to others - this is not common in other schools.* (S 4).

Teachers used story language too. They used narrative phrases like: *we will spread what we learn (Te3); trust flows through me (Te1); it feels like a family (Te9); we're concerned for each other (Te8); we feel it is our lives (Te5), our mission; the best part of the day (Te7)*. The dominant story was that BAIA is the best school in the region and will have a positive moral impact on the community and future– in one teacher's words:

> *We want them to improve our future and I need to help them be better when they are in charge of the community…to be better than those in history.* (T 2)

Regardless of the balance of fact and fiction, the positive stories told by parents, governors, teachers and students are shaping BAIA, and could help shape the narratives of partner schools.

The role of Faith

BAIA, is not a religious school. It does not teach religion and has no faith-based assembly, children of all faiths and none are welcome and included. Though students remarked on this rare characteristic, all staff interviewed mentioned the importance of their faith to them. Burundi is a secular state, but a religious society: 80% are active Catholics or Protestants, between 5 and 12% are Muslims and the remainder follow other religions including traditional African beliefs (US Gov. 2021). Many student interviewees also spoke of faith motivating and sustaining them. Faith clearly played the major role in Burundian's resilience and survival after decades of violence and fear. It motivated BAIA's foundation, underpins its ongoing support and should not be underestimated in its influence.

Hope was a commonly used word. Students spoke of everyday hopes - a good job, a brighter future, or a football win, but teachers and older students expressed hope more broadly, speaking enthusiastically about BAIA's social influence. Discussing contrasts between BAIA and government schools, one parent remarked: *though we have American curriculum, the school continues to adapt to the local context* (P3)*.* A former student captured this hope more precisely:

> *We are a country that has been affected by conflict. BAIA has inspired me to pursue a route of searching for peace in Burundi and anywhere else that is affected by conflict. I have created and initiated fundraising events. I am going to undertake conflict studies in Canada* (P 2)

This comment however prompts another concern – how many of BAIA's successful potential leaders will remain in America once they have finished university education there? Faith may play its role, but the school curriculum needs to major on reasons to stay in Burundi if its ultimate ambitions are to be fulfilled

6. Conclusions

A week at BAIA is inspiring. Its atmosphere visibly enthuses visitors and community. This paper throughout, evidences strong faithfulness to BAIA's selfless values and well-founded hopes for Burundi's peaceful, prosperous future. Its story contrasts strongly with the violent history of its locality and speaks in powerfully humanitarian terms. Our interpretations based on intensive observation, interviews, group conversations and conclusions, remain provisional and further research is needed. We asked whether its claimed values were understood and meaningful to staff, governors and students. Their answers revealed unexpectedly consistent affirmation of the importance of a shared values-narrative. Respondents' personal stories and explanations substantiated advanced understandings of links between BAIA's values and their application in daily life. This observation suggested a hypothesis:

> *that frequent values discussions and positively acknowledged personal stories illustrating the impact of those values, help a school cultivate a shared and sustaining narrative. Such narratives generate commitment, add to resilience, provide direction and confirm a destination.*

When asked what difference BAIA's values made to curriculum, pedagogy and ethos, respondents effortlessly provided examples of the relationship between values and schooling. This evidence generated theory that:

> *(a) placing the teaching of subject/disciplines within the context of inclusive and lived values strongly influences the illustrations, activities, emphases and subject knowledge selected by teachers.*

> *(b) Teachers' resilience and their emotional commitment to curriculum, pedagogy and ethos are greatly enhanced when their personal values overlap with the school's.*

Our third research question concerned BAIA's wider influence on social change– particularly in the areas of peace, conflict resolution and community integration. The school sees itself as *being* the change that it wants to see in Burundi. Despite the evident priority of its values, BAIA faces challenges in spreading them beyond the school and students' families. Some observers may think its emphasis on charity reduces its social and educational status and saps human and financial resources. Others may fear that its alumni will remain in the US after graduation from their universities. The proximity of the school to Lake Tanganyika's shores means that it remains vulnerable to flooding. We saw convincing evidence that the school curriculum addresses such issues, but is aware that more can be done to '*pilot change'* in the community.

We suggest that BAIA could effectively extend its influence on Burundian society through further deepening the principled, broad and inclusive experience of its children. The established principles can be still more focussed on the issues of environmental damage, climate change, conflict and inequity that threaten Burundi. Its commitment to excellence and passion should be broadened across every curriculum subject and community project so that any might imagine themselves as leaders in their area of strength. The founders and supporters of BAIA believe educating the young to respond to these challenges with confidence and imagination, offers positive implications well beyond the school. We claim that BAIA provides a model for education everywhere.

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Authors contributions

Alex Ntung was responsible for study design, contacts and local expertise.   Dr Jonathan Barnes and Alex Ntung were jointly responsible for data collection, drafting and revising the manuscript

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests

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