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BAICE Support for Students and Early Career Researchers

Alison Buckler and Carly Christensen

*We each are here
Guardians of their futures.
Yet they teach us –
Nervous, projecting, fools –
The preciousness of now.*

It is testament to BAICE's commitment to engage students and early career researchers (ECRs) in the field of international and comparative education that – as a [BAICE student representative](#) and an ECR – we have been invited to contribute to this Anniversary Forum. We have taken the opportunity to explore the impact BAICE initiatives have had on the experiences of student and ECR members, and to consider how the Association could be even more responsive to the needs and aspirations of people at the start of their (academic) career. This isn't a traditional Forum piece, but a reflective response which both frames the value of BAICE for new academics, and challenges the Association to do more in relation to this framing. More pragmatically, we highlight the different types of support BAICE provides to students and ECRs, and propose the launch of a new BAICE initiative.

We generated ideas for this Forum piece informally through conversations within our own institutional and collegial networks, the BAICE Executive Committee, and through BAICE Student Forums, and more formally through two questionnaires. We sent one questionnaire to students and new academics, and the other to established academics who work closely with these groups.¹ In the process of sifting through the responses we were reminded of two things. The first is a poem² written by a colleague (and friend) who has devoted his career to championing the agency and collective action of young people across the world. We recognise that not all students and ECRs consider themselves 'young' in age-terms, but we enjoyed the poem's resonance with broader perspectives around experiential and inter-generational learning that emerged from the questionnaires.

*Look, I say,
To four score years and ten:
In none here today,
Nor across our fragile fen,
Will life's gift stay.*

*Except,
By course,
By force's will,
These shrill
Smallest*

¹ Some respondents were happy to have their name and affiliation included in the piece, others requested that their responses be anonymous. This is made clear in the text. Thank you to everyone who responded to the questionnaire and helped us to shape this piece.

² *A Festival for Newborns; speech from a Saxon Queen* By Nik Hartley. The poem was written for his children at their Naming Ceremony. The full version is available on request. Please contact Alison Buckler.

*Before us,
May just
Live still.*

*Handing on a world
We cannot start to know.*

The second is the concept of *buen vivir* which was articulated as a contradiction to contemporary global education agendas in a recent Compare Forum (Brown and McCowan 2018). Although it has roots particularly in Latin American societies, it also bears similarities with concepts of ecological humanity from across the world. More importantly, it brings together multiple alternative perspectives to the neoliberal framing of development. We are not suggesting that as an academic association BAICE can (or should even attempt to) *achieve* the principles of *buen vivir*; rather, by existing alongside rather than directly within the neoliberal higher educational space, it has the advantage of being able to question and re-articulate its mode of operation in this parallel space. We have highlighted some principles of *buen vivir* below in order to explore how they may be used as a benchmark to explore ways of working with new academics.

Epistemological pluralism (acknowledging and transiting between different forms of knowing); Porosity of boundaries (non-rigid classification of the educational space, education professionals and disciplines).

As an academic association which grew out of two distinct professional cultures (Crossley 2008), BAICE prides itself on its appreciation and promotion of diverse perspectives and open, inclusive intellectual enquiry. It builds skills and connections with the intent to introduce and include researchers in the community(ies) of international and comparative education research – bringing students into an often unexpectedly broad field with which ‘they can identify’ (anonymous, PhD student, Rwanda). Students highlighted how engagement with BAICE had increased their awareness of ‘the vast comparative research community’ (Andrea Detmer, University College London Institute of Education) and ‘a wide range of issues’ outside their research topic that ‘enrich overall academic development’ (anonymous). Dr John Willott (Leeds Beckett University) emphasised the importance of the Association as an ‘intellectual space for part-time and distant students’ who, because they largely work outside tangible university boundaries, are at risk of being excluded from institutional activities.

BAICE places a high value on cross-disciplinary work. The questionnaires we received came from members studying and working in education departments, politics, peace and development studies, as well as practitioners working on international development programmes across the world. One of the most exciting projects funded through the [student fieldwork grant](#) was Nerea Amorós Elorduy’s study into the architectural design of early childhood education settings in refugee camps.³ BAICE also creates opportunities for its student members to work across the academia/policy/practitioner boundary, for example volunteering at events such as the UK launch of UNESCO’s Global Education Monitoring Report and at the influential biennial [UKFIET conference](#).

³ Awarded in SFG round 2016/01

Cooperativism (avoidance of competition-based education and the consequent progressive filtering out of students from level to level); Compassion and non-violence (recognition of the importance of peace in all aspects of life, including non-violent communication)

BAICE hosts a range of initiatives designed to assist students and ECRs to enhance, complete and communicate their research. BAICE's fieldwork grant, for example, made Carly's research concerning indigenous views of disability in Canada's subarctic possible. It is more challenging to align these formal activities with *buen vivir* principles because, of course, the [student essay prize](#), [conference bursaries](#) and research [grants](#) are awarded competitively through peer review. However, an ethos of compassion is embedded in the evaluation criteria for the grant schemes which have a dual focus on academic rigour and financial need, and the emphasis on reasonable budgeting is to ensure as many applicants as possible can be funded within each round. In addition, the [student fieldwork grant](#) provides supportive and detailed feedback to all applicants. This commitment was recognised in the questionnaire responses: 'although my application was not funded, it served as a learning experience and I was grateful that the association provided feedback as to what could be improved in my application, as well as encouragement to reapply' (anonymous, PhD student). The [BAICE student conference](#) committee take the principles of inclusion and cooperativism further by inviting *all individuals* who submit abstracts to present their work.

Meaningful livelihoods (a link with enriching forms of work rather than alienating employability); Living in the present (education as a state of being, not aimed at the exchange value of qualifications)

Many new academics are working within institutional pressures of constant performativity, measured outputs and the expectation that they play, and win, the 'grant game' (Hicks 2012; Petersen 2016). BAICE acknowledges that these pressures exist, and aims to offer authentic and supportive experiences aligned with these expectations by encouraging new researchers to occupy professional spaces in academia. This has been highly valued by us (as members of the Executive Committee) as well as by the questionnaire respondents who highlighted a 'culture of inclusiveness for young researchers' (anonymous, ECR), with participation in the main programme of the conference in particular seen as shaping and enabling the development of student and ECR research. There is an expectation that students receiving financial support from BAICE submit research papers to *Compare*, and priority in evaluating the [research networking and seedcorn grants](#) is given to proposals which demonstrate genuine inclusion of junior staff as named investigators. Contributing to professional academic research projects and events alongside studying for their PhDs was reported as having a 'tremendous impact' on students' thinking and ambition (anonymous PhD student).

However, through and beyond these ideas and initiatives, BAICE aims to make room for more enriching and meaningful relationships and knowledge exchange (Villalba 2013 in Brown and McCowan 2018). This extends to a point where students and ECRs feel that BAICE offers more than an apprenticeship model which trains young academics to exist in an established system, but supports them to be thought-leaders with an understanding that they will define and shape new ways of working in academia: 'the future of educational research is linked to what early career researchers in education are doing and learning to do' (Petersen 2016:46). For example, participating in a BAICE writer's workshop provided the 'strong base' for one respondent's work as a journal editor: 'I am ever indebted to BAICE for the opportunity to partake in its workshop'. (Rebat Kumar Dhakal, Kathmandu University School of Education, Nepal). The annual conference organised by the BAICE student representatives is designed to go beyond simply being a platform for students and ECRs to disseminate research findings, to focus on

the generation of new thinking in comparative study. These student-led events have shaped participants' research and led to [collaborative published work](#). It was this notion in particular, the sense that BAICE genuinely values the knowledge and contribution of new researchers and acknowledges that they bring personal and professional experiences to the discipline, which so neatly aligned the poem, the concept of *buen vivir* and the questionnaire responses: rather than preparing and shaping students and ECRs for a distant and predictable future (McCowan 2009), BAICE recognises that they have original ideas to offer and shape the field in the 'now'.

*Not guardians therefore
My fellow fools,
But stewards,
Porters even,
Heaving open oak-wood doors
To help them in
To their world
Not ours.*

We were asked in this Forum piece to reflect on what BAICE already does, but also challenge it to do more. Thinking through the lens of *buen vivir*, we feel that the focus should not be on using the Association's resources to provide more and larger grants, but to utilise resources more creatively to facilitate and strengthen intellectual connections and networks, and knowledge generation across discipline and career-stage boundaries. There are some relatively simple suggestions that came from the questionnaires that BAICE could act on, for example reaching out to Masters students and those in the earlier years of their PhDs, and – without compromising the inclusive atmosphere - providing parallel spaces within the main conference for students and ECRs to share and shape their ideas within. But there is also a more significant initiative which we propose. Respondents called for more online engagement opportunities for distance and part-time students, as well as those in more geographically remote and international institutions. They talked about the shortage of opportunities for teaching in their institutions, and highlighted the need for more opportunities to shape their research into new thinking. They talked about the importance of linking up with people in parallel fields to expand the boundaries of comparative and international education, and making academic resources available for practitioners working in the field, but without institutional journal access. Bringing these ideas together, we intend to pilot Teach@BAICE. Teach@BAICE will be an annual series of ten webinars conceptualised and led by students and ECRs. Any BAICE member will be able to propose a webinar, with priority given to collaborative, interdisciplinary proposals with an interactive, co-learning agenda. The webinars will be open to anyone across the world with an interest in international and comparative education, and any learning materials used will be released under a creative commons licence. A small honorarium will be offered to cover associated costs and to recognise the time and effort invested.

Ten years ago Crossley (2008: 332) challenged comparative and international education to re-imagine and re-create spaces for 'different ways of understanding' and 'different forms of knowledge' – we understand this to be a geographical and sociocultural expansion of co-learning. So, our challenge to BAICE on its 20th anniversary is to promote a reframing of this epistemological expansion to include a generational dimension. Teach@BAICE would be an opportunity to create accessible spaces where the ideas and expertise of emerging academics is recognised and shared beyond institutional and academic boundaries, but we also suggest this reframing should extend to a focus on promoting research which

includes a youth-centred or youth-led (or learner-centred / learner-led) agenda. By valuing genuine co-generation and co-construction of knowledge across generational and career-stage boundaries, comparative and international education research could more appropriately shape the world (and the discipline) with the people who will live, and learn, in it.

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