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## Tender Leaders Behind Bars- Smokescreens of the Self-Identity of Child Inmates in Borstal Institutions of Kenya

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### Abstract

*Nurture moulds and provides leadership qualities in human beings. This indicates how significant childhood is yet children constitute vulnerable populations especially those in conflict with the law. In Kenya, such children aged 15-17 years are placed in correctional facilities known as borstal institutions. There are three such facilities in Kenya namely, Shikusa and Shimo La Tewa for boys and Kamae Girls Borstal Institution for girls. In this paper, these children are referred to as child inmates. They make up the most vulnerable group of all inmates because they are in their developmental and formative years and have not yet grown into functioning adults. Their experiences provide them the opportunities to develop their potentials such as those of leadership. Although correctional facilities are not the best place for children to learn their mistakes and make changes in their behaviour, there are indices, smokescreens of leadership that can be teased from their everyday talk. The main objective of this theoretical paper is to identify and interrogate the different forms of expressing negative self-image by the child inmates that hide their leadership potential. The paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach with applied linguistics as the cornerstone. Four theories namely; Discursive Psychology, Foucault's Constructionist Theory of Meaning and Representation, Discourse-Historical Approach as well as Becker's Labelling Theory were used to conduct the desk review. Inmates discursively construct their self-identity through the negative expressions in their daily talk.*

**Keywords:** *Child Inmates, Indices/Smokescreens, Self-Identity, Tease Out, Vulnerable Populations.*

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## **Introduction**

Nurture moulds and provides leadership qualities in human beings. This indicates how significant childhood is yet children constitute vulnerable populations especially those in conflict with the law. In Kenya, such children aged 15-17 years are placed in correctional facilities known as borstal institutions. There are three such facilities in Kenya namely; Shikusa and Shimo La Tewa Borstal Institutions for boys and Kamae Girls Borstal Institution. In this paper, these children are referred to as child inmates. They make up the most vulnerable group of all inmates because they are in their developmental and formative years, and have not yet grown into functioning adults. Their experiences provide them the opportunities to develop their potentials such as those of leadership. Current correctional facilities are not the best place for children to learn their mistakes and make changes in their behaviour. However, there are indices, smokescreens, of leadership that can be teased from the everyday talk of child inmates.

## **Methods**

Whereas, Karagianni and Montgomery (2018) selected nine articles for their research. For this paper, sixteen works were reviewed and analysed.

## **Data Analysis**

The study was guided by four theories namely, Discursive Psychology, Foucault's Constructionist Theory of Meaning and representation, Discourse-Historical Approach, as well as Becker's Labelling Theory. In Discursive Psychology, the focus is in what people do with their talk rather than using discourse as a way of accessing what goes on in their mind. The outstanding child inmate thinks and says much about themselves (Horton-Salway, 2001). Blame management is one of the tenets of the theory. The outstanding child inmate must manage blame. Foucault's Constructionist Theory of Meaning and Representation is best illustrated through his work 'Discipline and Punish' (Foucault, 1979) which provides insight into the 'birth of the prison'. As has been indicated already, practically, the borstal institution is a prison. According to this theory, there is always more than can be seen about an issue. The child inmate has much leadership potential than the society could comprehend. Discourse-Historical Approach is problem-oriented (Wodak, 2015). A child inmate being outstanding despite the challenges in the borstal institution is an issue that requires interrogation. The tenets of the theory include ideology, power, history, triangulation, critique and context. The approach is premised on categorization and stereotyping. According to Becker's (1973), deviance is a consequence of external judgements, or labels. Unless the child inmate is keen, they will 'become what they are labelled' within the system. Self-identity and behaviour of the child inmate may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them. Thus the label overtakes the self-identity of the labelled inmate.

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## Results and Discussion/Findings

### Adolescence and Leadership

Leadership instils confidence, and helps children solve problems creatively, work in a team, and collaboratively with others. Leadership skills enable them to have control of their lives and ability to make things happen and opportunities to develop responsibility. They participate in new experiences with confidence and independence (extension.psu.edu). Thus, all children including those in correctional facilities have the potential to develop leadership skills. Thus, though such children may be away from society, there are those who are honest; diligent; willing to serve others; good listeners; sharp decision makers; encouraging; responsible; reliable and trustworthy; collaborative and amiable; capable, positive and enthusiastic; creative and flexible; motivated and committed (<http://elthamnorthps.vic.edu.au> ; <https://www.teachstarter.com> ).

These skills are important for adolescents, including child inmates and helps them to learn the art of building relationships with their peers; achieving tasks effectively; providing opportunities to learn to identify and display effective communication and interpersonal skills; and more importantly defining identities. These enable them, even as child inmates, to stay authentic; keep an open mind and always listen; know how to delegate tasks to achieve common goals; seek knowledge; and quite significantly learn from mistakes to improve for the future. As a result of all these they are transparent in their actions and decisions. Good leaders will communicate with the group throughout their decision-making processes, developing trust between them and those who they represent. This is the case with the outstanding child inmate (<https://www.envisionexperience.com> )

Tough child inmates, are self-sufficient; they like to dabble-they have lots of interest; they are team players-good listeners, have the potential to inspire and empower, know how to include others in their activities, ensure everybody felt comfortable and others look up to them in moments of decision making; they are flexible; they are empathetic-having a deep comprehension of how to relate to others; they trust their intuition; are butterflies; they know and state independent thoughts (<https://101productivity.com> ) .

Shah and Pathak (2015) asserted that many thinkers say that good leaders are made, not born. If one has the desire and willpower, they can become an effective leader. In this presumption good leaders thus develop through a never-ending process of self-study, education, training and experience. This is the case even with the child inmate within the borstal institution system. The leader is expected to be friendly, likable, attentive in class, honest and confident.

Among the ways in which leaders emerge in school settings include popularity among other students as well as initiatives through taking up responsibilities. The qualities and characteristics among adolescent students include respecting others; being a problem solver; maintaining discipline; being effective speakers; being courageous; being intelligent; being diligent; being wise; being helpful; being loyal; being competent; being visionary and

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insightful (Shah and Pathak 2015). It is strange that the last three are of little significance to the child inmate.

Karagianni and Montgomery (2018) argued that there is a gap in the literature with regard to the experience of leadership among school children. Adolescents experience their first formal organization at school and models of leadership are developed from this critical period. Otieno, et al (2017) argued that adolescent waywardness is a major health concern and that Waywardness and related crime is on the increase and are widespread in Africa. However, since adolescents are in their formative years, they deserve and require special handling (Otieno, et al, 2017). The term 'leadership' has different meanings among scholars. Approaches can differ in terms of their relational influence, cognitive and/or emotional abilities, character in relation to group orientation, and to appeal to self-versus collective interest. In this study, the focus is on personality characteristics, the disposition due to the restrictive environment of the borstal institution.

Karagianni and Montgomery (2018) elucidated that leadership is regarded in many cases as a complex, multi-component competency rather than a fixed personality trait. Thus, Children of all ages can take leadership roles. School, represented by the borstal institution system in this paper, is the first formal organization that the majority of individuals' experience. School is our primary organization experience in childhood and adolescence. It is communicated to children as being their most important organization experience throughout childhood. Consequently, our primary learning about organizational culture and organizational roles begins there. For some child inmates, the experience begins in the borstal institution system where the inmate may spend up to three years. Children spend on average 15,000 hours (12 years) of the most formative years of their lives in school as an organization hence it can be hypothesized that our adult organizational behaviours are rooted in how we experienced school (Karagianni and Montgomery (2018) and that secondary school students have the ability to develop leadership skills via getting along with others, working with groups through taking part in many youth leadership organisations in school, decision making, and self-awareness as well as learning the organization of self.

The emphasis in this paper constitutes the last three. Thus, it is useful to examine leadership during childhood and adolescence as what occurs during the developmental years can have an impact on the leadership behaviours exhibited later in the workplace as an adult. Studying adolescent displays of leadership should further our understanding of adult leaders. Shah and Pathak (2015) asserted that the school is a microcosm of society and elucidated that contemporary leadership, scholars and researchers have questioned the place of leadership within the school system. However, much of the confusion surrounding leadership as a field of study may be attributed to lack of understanding regarding trans-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary, and multi-disciplinary academic fields of study in general.

According to Karagianni and Montgomery (2018) family factors mould the leadership development of adolescents. Thus, leadership potential is greatest among the youngest

siblings of the family, for children in families of four or five children, and for those children whose parents provide stimulating environments, opportunities for decision-making, encouragement and acceptance.

### *The Borstal Institution System*

Notably, the borstal institution is a 'children's prison' that operates more like a school on the model of approved schools in Kenya. This is ideally and practically, a prison. Karagianni and Montgomery (2018) asserted that adolescence is an important time for leadership growth. Increasing leadership in adolescence can reinforce self-esteem and be a catalyst for flourishing adulthood. Yet many adolescents are never offered the chance to act as leaders. Further, adult leadership models are often inappropriate for teenagers since the latter have unique developmental needs. Today, the lines between the 'teen' years and adulthood become blurred. There is an increase in interest in adolescent leadership since adolescent leaders develop from both pro-social and anti-social constructs. The unique power of both should be recognized. Pro-social leaders are inclusive and build affiliation; anti-social leaders are exclusive and rely on power. Some of the 'anti-social' leaders are found in borstal institutions.

The borstal institution system was intended to separate child inmates from the influence of older habitual criminals and provide education and training, in the hope that this would make inmates less likely to reoffend once released. Thus, the system is meant for character reformation and eventual reintegration. In the borstal system, the concept of rehabilitation heavily borrows from the premise that there are some underlying factors that influence criminal behaviour. Thus it is also presumed that Religious attachments/association can reduce the child inmates' behaviour.

Rehabilitation of the child inmate admitted to the borstal institution system starts at the very beginning of the admission process right from the reception board to discharge and community re-integration. The rehabilitation regime provides them with basic education to tackle illiteracy, empowering them with knowledge and work skills for support and sustainability once they are discharged. With regard to formal education, we have class 7 and 8, as well as form one and two, vocational training, psychosocial programmes, recreation facilities and services, as well as sports and positive entertainment (Chumo 2021). Thus, while in these facilities, the inmates develop and implement strategies for change on the premise of these programmes (Otieno et al, 2017).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Child inmates deserve and require special handling because though committed, they are in their formative years and have much leadership potential. These can be teased through analyzing their everyday talk.

thus the programmes within the borstal institution system should be used as platforms to display these potentials upon which leadership skills can be developed and enhance.

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