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# A child inmate's stories of schooling and the possibilities for self-change and self-care

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## Abstract

*Going beyond the static, dangerous version of a single story about who an African child inmate is, is an ethical responsibility – especially when we consider the structural and material forces that are tangled in this evil deed. Drawing on a sociological framing of self and Foucault's theory of ethics, we take a narrative inquiry stance to explore what can be learnt about being an African child from a juvenile ex-inmate, Bakhona who negotiates the complex educational experience as a poor, orphaned and homeless child. The three storied vignettes represent our attention to the multiplicity and fluidity of self – negotiated through the entangled pathways of learning to and from prison. The analysis releases our eyes to a deeper understanding of the young African child who turns to crime driven by a desire to learn, know, and live differently. The choice to learn to care for self differently within dislocating and unproductive material and structural conditions is complex and possible if schooling as a system can become more educationally relevant, socially responsive and inclusive teaching and learning sites.*

**Keywords:** *crime, vignettes, self-care, stories, juvenile inmate,*

## 1. Introduction

*A tradition of sub-Saharan Africa as a place of negatives, of difference, of darkness, of people who, in the words of the wonderful poet, Rudyard Kipling, are "half devil, half child." (Aditchie, 2016: n.p.)*

*To create a single [African] story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become. (Aditchie, 2016: n.p.)*

## 2. How do we compose the stories of the African child who does crime?

To move beyond the stereotypes of the African child entrenched by colonialism and the white man's burden – immortalised in the words of Rudyard Kipling as "half devil, half child" – we take seriously this danger of the single story (Adichie, 2016). In this paper we are careful about the use of 'African child'. This term has historical roots that functioned to reproduce race, class and age inequalities. Soudien (2006) for instance argues that the term was used to classify, judge, police and 'other' the African child as pathetic and passive, premised upon essentialist notions of

race. This paper rejects the use of African child that serves to reproduce racist apartheid logic. Rather our use of the term is situated in a context where race, class, space, geography and history intersect to provide a particular understanding of the inequalities through which the African child is produced.

Adichie (2016: n.p.) reminded us that the danger of single stories “is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.” They imprison us (Falzon, 1998), from thinking and understanding the complexity of an actual life lived and experienced from the individual’s perspective. As educational researchers, we know the potential of stories to evoke empathy and reflection and as social constructions, they allow us to question the social world in which they are entrenched (Goodson, 1994). Stories also function as arguments in which we can learn something unique about an actual life lived (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), and *thoughtfully disentangled*, they can elucidate the reasoning of the individual courses of action and the effects of system-wide constraints within which these courses of action evolved. Our attempt in this article therefore is not to objectify the experiences and accounts of the African child. Rather we are careful to focus on the unequal social, political and economic consequences for the complex experiences of an African child inmate’s pathways to learning to and from prison, that are documented in this paper, and that require attention to race, class, and gender inequalities.

The architects of apartheid ensured, through the Bantu Education Act of 1953, that the African child had little or no access to proper formal educational opportunities – as a basis for being trained to become the unequal Native to Europeans (Verwoerd as in Kallaway, 1984). Being denied the “right to claim an identity other than the one ascribed and enforced” (Bauman, 2004:39), meant that education ensured social exclusion and the perpetuation of a deliberate silencing of the minds and hearts of the African children. The call for research to explore what and how basic educational provisioning and schooling sites in these present shifts can act as potent spaces to mitigate the impact of poverty, unemployment and the many other related social ills on the African child, is a compelling one (Msibi, Hemson & Singh, 2018).

Our purpose is to understand Bakhona’s life beyond the single story of incarceration, and it requires us to reflect, question and turn the act of crime on its head. We pay attention to the multiplicity and fluidity of self-connected to larger contexts of society. We read the lines between the pleats for the textures and nuances of an actual living life, whilst acknowledging the ongoing negotiation with the social, economic, and political miseries and vulnerabilities that African children, in particular, continue to experience. According to Mathews and Benvenuti (2014):

*The breakdown of community and family structures due to apartheid policies such as the Group Areas Act and migrant labour system; the HIV/AIDS pandemic; gender inequality; unequal access to essential services; poverty and social exclusion; high rates of unemployment and substance abuse; migratory patterns; and a high incidence of violent crime all contribute to children’s experiences of violence... Different forms of violence are more prevalent at different stages of a child’s life, and it is important to understand how violence impacts on children’s psycho-social functioning at different developmental stages and across the life course*

Racial inequalities are salient (Hall & Sambu, 2014). Despite the historical shift to democracy, the “beast of the past” (Tutu, 1998, 22), continues to have undesirable, enduring effects on the lives of specific population groups, and detrimental to children in particular (Mathews and Benvenuti 2014). According to Hall & Sambu (2014, p. 95), 37% of African children have no working adult at home, as compared to 12% of Coloured children, 7%

of Indian children and 2% of White children, who live in similar circumstances. As South African researchers, we see the danger in taking a one-dimensional view of the African child and childhood, 24 years after the legitimate end of the vicious and racist apartheid regime (Msibi, 2012; Pillay & Pithouse-Morgan, 2016).

In this article, we, first present a review of key debates and issues on children and crime and the systemic issues that continue to reproduce the ongoing violence and inequalities that African children, in particular, confront daily. We then explain how we generated the storied data with Bakhona, for this article. This is followed by an analysis of Bakhona's pathways of learning, to and from prison presented as three storied vignettes and framed by sociological understanding of identity and Foucault's theory of ethics and ethical practice. We demonstrate how turning to crime and being incarcerated is one of Bakhona's many small stories negotiated within a broader social order. We conclude our article by highlighting the value of stories as critical instruments for opening up our understanding of the African child, learner and inmate - as one with capacity and desire to learn as a practice of care for the self.

### 3. The African child and crime

While much anthropological research has focused on the central role that African children play within families and communities, especially in conditions of social and economic distress (Bass, 2004; Grier, 2004; Bhana, 2017), it patently silenced the voices and lived experiences of the African child.

The growing increase in child orphans due to the many social ills – disease and political conflicts, and the growing youth population and unemployment – has, according to Bhana (2017), exacerbated the violent and inhuman conditions of existence for many children growing up in African households and attending South African schools. The dislocation and dysfunctionality of the family as a system to support, protect children from harm and take care of their physical and emotional needs has left the school vulnerable to the asocial behaviour being transmitted to its system (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014; Maphalala and Mpofu, 2019). A serious consequence is the high crime rate as poverty increases and adolescents in many townships are drawn into crime and violence, which provide them with a "sense of power and respect that they are otherwise denied" (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014:32).

Walmsley (2012) noted that of South Africa's estimated population of 53.1 million people, the prison population totalled 156 370 people, and that prisons stood at 139.9% capacity in 2009. Also of significance is Roper's (2005) study that highlighted the alarming growth in the number of children and young people arrested, charged and convicted in South Africa. Statistics of imprisonment in South Africa from Walmsley (2012) also shed light on the number of people who are incarcerated, in terms of race and gender, with incarceration rates of black males far in excess of those of any other race or gender.

Taking a cue from recent work on juvenile crime and incarceration in Africa (Roper, 2005; Walmsley, 2012), our article offers a perspective on the African child's experiences and practices that lead to doing crime. The urgency to understand school learners and criminal practices, intersected by issues of class, gender, sexuality, disability and other social identifications, is compelling (Ngubane, 2017; Msibi, Hemson & Singh, 2018). The call invites us to go beyond and apprehend the statistical, disembodied accounts of the African child who attends school and commits crime as violent, uncaring and without agency. Instead, we frame our understanding of the African child inmate, as one who desires learning and to live and be

known differently whilst recognising the material and social conditions in and through which this position is negotiated and produced.

#### **4. A sociological framing of the African child**

According to Yoo (2017:451), taking on a sociological perspective as researchers calls for special “cognitive ability’ to look at the world through the particular framework or lens of sociological imagination.” Through writing within this paradigm, we wanted to develop an eye for observing unique patterns of behaviour” (Yoo, 2017:451) that otherwise go unchecked and remain invisible. From a sociological perspective, we considered “the mechanisms and ways of knowing” (Pillay & Saloojee, 2012:43) that are adopted by a child not only for understanding and negotiating the external world but for being a certain kind of individual and learner. We open up and explain the course of action taken up by the individual for negotiating the complexity of everyday situations in and through which the child seeks to live and learn outside of his or her static biological limits and the normalising discourses of being a poor, rural, and African. The premise we take from this stance is of identity as socially produced, socially embedded and worked out in individuals’ everyday social lives.

We also found it important to think in alternate ways with Foucault’s theory of ethics, and to explain the self’s capacity for both resistance and transformation when negotiating everyday practices in and through which self is produced and addressed. Interestingly, to unravel Bakhona’s complex learning pathways to and from prison required us to challenge our own narrow ways of framing individuals who do crime and to understand more deeply what “determine[d] which [was] the main danger” in this choice, and had the potential to harm him or others (Foucault, 1984:343). The sociological framing assisted us to exercise imagination and to interpret Bakhona’s “hyper- and pessimistic optimism” (Foucault, 1984:343) as an African child, “orphaned” and homeless and driven by an ethical need to live fully and differently.

#### **5. Accessing Bakhona’s stories through poetry, photos and narratives**

Sithembiso, the one author, first met and worked with Bakhona at a halfway house near Durban, where he lived with his brothers after his release from prison. Sithembiso started by asking him to reflect on his childhood memories as a boy growing up in a rural area near Scottburgh, in KwaZulu-Natal. Adopting a narrative inquiry approach enabled Sithembiso to draw on long, open-ended interviews complemented by arts-based methods and journalling (Olivier, Wood & de Lange, 2009) to elicit stories about a life lived and experienced historically, culturally and politically. Sithembiso, who is male, black and an isiZulu first-language speaker conducted the interviews mostly in English – code switching at times while he listened and probed as Bakhona told his stories: “*Can you explain what you mean by this?*” “*How did this come about?*” “*How do you feel about . . . ?*” “*Tell me more . . .*” Through probing, Sithembiso took the opportunity to delve and elicit information that a participant might not be consciously aware of, allowing for deeply concealed beliefs and ideas to emerge of a life lived, told and experienced (Bruner, 1984). To enhance the trustworthiness and ethical responsibility of the research process, Sithembiso also made extensive field notes in which he reflected on his own sense making of his face-to-face encounter with Bakhona, and the prejudices and biases he felt and experienced as a victim of crime himself. Also, being an older male researcher meant acting responsibly and sensitively to Bakhona’s memories around potentially harmful issues and experiences of growing up with adults who betrayed and abandoned him as a

child. Sithembiso paid careful attention to his own positioning in the research relationship, knowing that “narrative identities are dynamic, partial, fragmented and context dependent” (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995:128). The participant was asked to verify the accuracy of the data that was reconstructed into these storied narratives for the doctoral study.

Bakhona's experiences, represented as storied vignettes and developed from the poems that he wrote and reflected on, the photographs that he shared and the little stories he remembered of his relationship with significant others, were central to our analysis of the storied vignettes. In our representation of some of the storied vignettes, we ensured that we stayed as close as possible to the particular in Bakhona's stories to make authentic connections that were not “disembodied and impersonal” (Butt *et al.*, 1992:122) so that we could learn differently from the actual life lived (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The following three storied vignettes allowed us to magnify those in-between spaces of Bakhona's negotiation of self, in particular, social settings so that we could “make judgments about the feel and significance of the particular” (Eisner, 2002:382):

- Vignette 1: A knowledgeable self: Seeking school knowledge as a practice of care for self
- Vignette 2: A creative self: Seeking healing as a practice of care for self
- Vignette 3: Ethical self: Seeking social spaces and relationships to practice care for self as responsible school learner

### **5.1 Vignette 1: A knowledgeable self: Seeking school knowledge as a practice of care for self**

Brought up in an impoverished rural setting in the late 1990s in KwaZulu-Natal, Bakhona's life, like many other young black boys', was narrated in insidious ways by the racialised structures of apartheid and the persistent economic inequalities that set the path for migrant labour and the disruption of family life (Nkani & Bhana, 2010:3):

*I was born on the 27 January 1991 and brought up by my grandmother who was a pensioner. My mother abandoned me when I was 6 months old. I attended the Primary School near where I stayed with my grandmother from 1997 to 2003. My father left home to look for work in Durban. The pension that my grandmother received was not enough to satisfy all our needs. Sometimes we went to bed without having had a meal. I did very well at school and passed Grade 5 in 2003.*

Abandoned by his mother when he was just six months old and raised by his grandmother, a pensioner, Bakhona's life was no different from that of many children growing up in rural settings (Carpena-Méndez, 2007). Regulatory power dispersed through a social network of gender, poverty and a community life plagued by seemingly insurmountable challenges, was what many African children like Bakhona had to negotiate and, most often, with no change in sight (Moletsane & Ntombela, 2010). The absence of one or both parents is also a familiar narrative of many black children living in economically disadvantaged rural areas in KwaZulu-Natal (Bhana, 2010). Whilst acknowledging Bakhona's life as in “crisis, calamitous and catastrophic” (Bhana, 2017:2), looking wider and beyond the external discourses that institutionalise and regulate the African child's life, we shift our gaze and look beyond to who he is, what he thinks, desires and knows – and what kind of person he wants to become (Lawler, 2008). His success at school as a learner foregrounds an alternate form of relation with the self – a form of hyper-pessimistic activism (Foucault, 1984:343) that enabled a transgression from the narrow borders that confronted him daily. Bakhona's capacity to work on himself and acquire

knowledge offers him a new and different way of knowing himself. Acknowledging himself as a successful Grade 5 learner offers hope for a different kind of existence.

## **5.2 Vignette 2: A creative self: Seeking healing as a practice of care for self**

*Things started to fall apart when my grandmother passed away in July 2004, after being sick for a long time. I had to move to live with my "father" in Phoenix, Durban. A year later he passed away and I had to live with an "aunt." In 2003, my aunt accused me of raping her two daughters. I was detained in Westville Youth Centre for six months. I was only 13 years old at that time and was accused of something I did not do. After being released from prison, I ended up as a street kid . . . until the social workers accommodated me at the Valley View Place of Safety where I was able to continue my schooling.*

Bakhona's experience of homelessness and abandonment is a central plot in his life even when he leaves the rural life to take up schooling in the township. Finding himself on the streets of Durban was another glimpse into the intimacies of his pessimistic world and his choice to be addressed as a street kid. Studies highlight a close relationship between homelessness and school drop out for children who live on the streets or in children's homes or suffer from parental bereavement (Operario *et al.*, 2008), because of weakened social bonds (Schwartz *et al.*, 2008). However, the greater need for Bakhona, daily, was determining which "the main danger was" (Foucault, 1984:343) and what practices would enable him to transform his traumas whilst trying to negotiate life on the streets, in a halfway house and in a shack in Claremont with his alcoholic mother. Below, we present one of the many poetic writing pieces that Bakhona shared with Sithembiso.

### **5.2.1 "Because all I needed was love and care"**

*My new home was the streets of Durban,*

*I found no peace moving from rural to urban,*

*There was no need to live with my aunt,*

*When I had no happiness in my heart.*

*Valley View Place of Safety was my new accommodation,*

*That is when I continued my education,*

*At Burnwood Secondary School,*

*And was transferred to Ziphathle Secondary School.*

*Social workers traced my mother,*

*They handed me over to her,*

*She had nothing, an alcoholic,*

*My new home was a shack in Clermont.*

*I accepted my mother,*

*Because all I needed was love and care,*

*We stayed with my younger brother,*

*My new home had no love and care.*

Bakhona's experience of success as a learner in the different schools he attended, and his experience of learning to write, emphasise the workings of language as a tool for making sense of his life and gaining control of his thinking and behaviour. His poetry takes us into the "intimacies of [his] world" (Yoo, 2017:457), and to his reflections of his traumatic experiences. It engages us as readers through its aesthetic and evocative language. By accessing "carnal knowledge or the inner artist" (Eisner 2002:382), Bakhona opens up the fluidity within his daily routinised life through his creative reconstructions. His poem enables him to adopt the "creative consciousness that underlies such writing" (Yoo, 2017:451), and to "engage the world creatively, he draws on his emotions to "ignite his thoughts" (Murray (1992:15) and develop an ethical relation to the self. It is this exercise of writing by which he makes himself an object to be known (Foucault, 1985:30) and addressed, in "a real and taxing situation" (Foucault, 1997:236), differently. Writing poetry, according to Foucault, is "to show oneself, make oneself seen, makes one's face appear before the other" as a reflective mode of being, desiring a connection with meditative self (1997:243). Using poems to express his emotions heightens his consciousness of his own presence and agency in the knowledge he creates to heal himself.

### **5.3 Vignette 3: Ethical self: Seeking social spaces and relationships to practice care for self as responsible school learner**

The upshots of the iniquitous apartheid legacy are the reservoirs of unskilled labour and high unemployment crisis we struggle with daily. Many, historically designated, black residential areas and makeshift residential spaces are still "the dumping ground of the poor and unemployed" (HSRC-EPC, 2005:136). This scenario remains unchanged post our democracy, as schools continue to produce students who have limited chances of obtaining a meaningful education and life after matriculation – because of the combination of poverty and poor quality education (HSRC-EPC, 2005; Spaul, 2013). Women whose lives as domestic workers mean low salaries in South Africa, often head families, this type of work is usually done by African women (Cook-Daniels, 1998). As a consequence, it is a common trend in South Africa for young African children to drop out of school or to be subjected to different forms of menial labour and domestic work (Ansell & van Blerk, 2004; Robson, 2000) while also attending school – in order to supplement the demands of home. Bakhona's "role of worker at a young age" (Bushin *et al.*, 2007: 78), living in a shack in a township with two siblings was not an option, as he narrates below:

#### **5.3.1 A gardener, high school learner and the juvenile inmate**

*I worked as a gardener during weekends and earned R100, which I used for transport to school. I was surprised one Sunday when my employer's wife told me that I did not have a job anymore. I was confused and all I could see was a dark future for my schooling career. I was writing exams on Wednesday. There was more frustration and confusion in me. I borrowed an illegal firearm from a man who was our neighbour. I went to New Germany and spotted two white females who were walking towards the car park. I pointed the firearm at them and demanded money and cell phones which they surrendered. I ran*

*back home . . . A few hours later I was apprehended by police and was identified positively by the victims. I was arrested, tried and sentenced to six years imprisonment.*

The choice to work was what Foucault (1984:343), describes as “pessimistic activism” – something that Bakhona had to do in order to attend school and succeed as a school learner. Having to work was dangerous but an ethical choice for Bakhona the high school boy; without work Bakhona had to “determine what the main danger” was (Foucault, 1984, p. 343) when he had he decided to rob two women so that he could have the money to get to school. We learn, from the dramatic situation described above, about the conflict Bakhona is faced with alone – in search of the ethical choice to make – among conflicting options in relation to different individuals and relationships (family, self, school, the neighbour and the two white women), in essence, his ethical dilemma. As Fransson and Grannäs (2013:7) remind us, “Dilemmas are not ‘out there’ per se... dilemmatic spaces are social constructions resulting from structural conditions and relational aspects in everyday practices.”

Understanding the complexity of the dilemma that confronted Bakhona, and why he made the choice to do crime, assisted us in making sense of his behaviour differently. The motivation for Bakhona’s choice was “not bad” (Foucault, 1984:343) but in accordance with the rule that “everything is dangerous” (Foucault, 1984:343). To effect the process of transformation of unethical self into an ethical subject of his behaviour (Foucault, 1885:26) meant serving time as a juvenile inmate in prison.

## **6. Ethical work: Rebuilding moral self as a learner and facilitator in prison**

Foucault’s explanation of ethical work helps us to focus on Bakhona’s learning journey towards self – his transformation into a moral being. We now draw on the poem he wrote, a found photo and memories of critical experiences to highlight the moral aspect of Bakhona’s transformation of self through a process which Blacker (1998:362) explained as a kind of “controlled and self-regulated dissemination of the subject into the world”.

### **6.1 “I’m the star to shine in the dark”**

**I’m the Star to Shine in the Dark**

*Today is the day,*

*I’ve lost my strengths,*

*Today my life is made up of my weaknesses,*

*Because I’ve been placed in the darkness,*

*Today I’m the star to shine in the dark,*

*Don’t cry but try.*

*They’ve made sure that I’m in prison,*

*But never realise that it was my new season,*

*I've seen the tears of the innocents,  
 But who realised I've been in need of life assistance,  
 I've cried but it wasn't loud,  
 I've tried but it wasn't enough.  
 Yesterday I've seen my life crashing,  
 Today I view it sparkling,  
 It was burning to ashes,  
 And I wrote about it till I finished my book pages,  
 Yes to God I'm a sinner,  
 Yet in this world I could be stronger.*

The written poem, as a practice enacted of the self, evokes the care of what exists for him as an inmate – and might exist in the future (Foucault, 1988:328). It offers a crystallised sense of reality and his determination to throw off his familiar ways and weaknesses and to look at prison space as a potent site for transforming self: to practice a sense of social belonging as a moral being. Involvement in a range of enacted practices in interaction with others served as acts of “social worship and social binding” (Lawler, 2008:111) as a necessity of establishing conduct that seeks the rules of acceptable behaviour in relation to others (Allan, 2013:29).

*There are two things that you can do in prison. You can learn to be a hard criminal or change your life for the better. Being in prison marked the starting point of rebuilding my own life. It was the beginning of the new world. There are inmates who continue committing crime while in prison like fighting and doing drugs because of peer pressure and influence from gangsters. I knew that my intention was to help my brothers to live a decent life.*

Bakhona did not have much choice as an inmate working within the specifics of prison space built on particular rules of behaviour. Of importance, was Bakhona's choice to “foreground the self as the principal object of care” (Allan, 2013:29), and as a means through which care for his siblings could be made possible:

#### **6.1.1 I continued learning while I was in prison**

*I continued learning while I was in prison because I wanted to become a teacher. I liked commercial subjects and registered to study them in Grade 12. I was very happy that I passed Grade 12 with good percentages*

#### **6.1.2 I was chosen as a tutor and facilitator in prison**

*I was chosen as a tutor for English and Life Orientation in the prison school. I used to facilitate lessons during school hours and also assisted other inmates after school hours. This made me gain some practice and confidence a learner.*



**Figure 1: Tutoring inmates**

### **6.1.3 I was chosen as a motivational speaker**

*My English teacher also sent me to neighbouring high schools to make other learners aware of the consequences of committing crime. I enjoyed motivating other learners about focusing on their studies because I knew that education was key to a better life.*



**Figure 2: Addressing and motivating youth preparing for their final examinations in Chesterville**

Within the setting of the prison and the rules of interaction that were possible, Bakhona fashions an alternate and oppositional routine for himself as an inmate, determined to conduct himself according to the rules of acceptable behaviour. To effect transformation of himself into an ethical subject, he trains himself to focus on “how to be, how to act” (Pillay & Ngubane, 2015:6) through poetic forms of writing, tutoring, studying and motivating other inmates. For Bakhona, learning to conduct himself according to rules of moral conduct meant engaging in activities that encourage reflection, social interaction and thinking that aligned with good behaviour.

## **7. Our learning and concluding remarks**

### **7.1 Imagining schools differently**

The architects of apartheid used education as an anaesthetic tool – intended to traumatise and painfully deaden (Nkomo, 1990) African children’s capacity to think, know and act as

embodied, creative social beings. Research studies conducted nationally continue to narrate public education in South Africa as a national disaster (Bloch, 2009), in which vast inequities remain evident. Spaul (2013) reiterated that a vast majority of South African learners who grow up in poorer communities and attend poorer, less resourced public schools in urban and rural settings remain destined for failure if we continue to offer inferior education.

As an ethical obligation to explore and understand the lived educational experiences from the perspective of an African child, school learner and ex-inmate, we draw from our learnings to highlight how an impoverished schooling environment (Pillay & Pithouse-Morgan, 2016) might be understood as a potent learning environment that can offer spaces for enlivening learners' thinking, creativity and moral development. Our learnings emphasise the need for schooling as learning spaces where African learners can seek out something more (Boulton-Founke, 2014) than book knowledge, namely:

- Schooling as a potent learning environment for constructing different content knowledges to evoke care to know and think of self with a refined sense of reality.
- Schooling as a potent learning environment for practising the deliberate cultivation of voice (not silencing of voice) and creative knowledge for feeling, healing and to evoke care of self differently.
- Schooling as a learning environment for developing ethical social knowledge through peer collaborations, role-modelling and public activism in the moral aspect and care of self.

Questioning schooling spaces – inside and outside of imprisonment – are open to different possibilities for producing different knowledges that assist individuals like Bakhona to “look at the same things in a different way....a lack of respect for the traditional hierarchies” (Foucault, 1988:328) that oppress and limit better ways of knowing one's self. If we are serious about researching the African child's complex lives differently and with greater insight, we must open up what and how we think about school spaces, and related practices, in ways that can nurture the learner's own funds of knowing (Foucault, 1997); and in what ways can schools become more responsive to developing learners as caring, ethically responsible citizens who have the capacity to connect with self and society in more embodied and interconnected ways. This is core to the human condition (Krall, 1988).

## **7.2 Imagining the African child and schooling sites differently**

In setting the African child inmate's stories of experience as the agenda, our article argues that children who do crime and are incarcerated can be strongly invested in learning, and can care enough to develop self as intellectual, creative and moral beings. Bakhona's narrative, beyond the danger of the single narrative, alerts us to the complex, pleated and nuanced versions of the African child relational to broader structural and material constraints.

Importantly, this article highlights for us the need for the school as a system to strengthen its response and relevancy in its role for social transformation. As an official learning space, the school is a potent system for creating an enabling environment where teaching is inclusive and supportive of children's emotional, psychological and intellectual development across different developmental stages of the child's life (Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014). Notably, appropriate support, resources and protective measures and initiatives may be integrated into the school life and culture to mitigate the impact of poverty and unemployment and increase the chance of a child's positive psychological and emotional realignment.

For children who are victims of violence, live in poverty and without family support and parental love and care, schools may serve as safe and nurturing learning settings. As spaces of affective containment (Dale and James, 2015), they can open up possibilities for children to learn as embodied beings, who desire and seek out new and different practices to heal the self as a condition for developing the capacity to care for others.

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