

The Teacher as Leader: The Challenge of Diverse Classrooms

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Abstract *The concept of teacher as a leader is beginning to take centre stage in South African research. Teachers are pressured to touch more lives and magnify the future of many learners in their classrooms. However, few of our teacher training programmes prepare teachers well for the crucial challenge of teaching diverse classrooms. Yet an aspect like poverty is perceived as one of the major hindrances to the majority of many black (at-risk) African children. This article explores the case of Mr. J who tried to redefine his role in his classroom and emerge as a teacher leader. Mr. J was observed for a period of four months to understand the ethos of his teaching and see how his own practice evolved while trying to positively inspire the futures of his learners. Through his motivation, his commitment and desire to continuously learn and develop as a professional; much can be possible in enhancing learner motivation and success. He also proved that it is a committed teacher who will close the achievement gap among at risk learners and many become what the teacher perceives them to be.*

Keywords: *leadership, classroom, motivation*

1. Introduction

Currently, around the world the concept of teacher leadership is widely being recognized as being crucial in education. The concept is also being gradually adopted by South African practitioners in education. The latter is no surprise though for the post-apartheid education in South Africa motions for inclusiveness and democracy in classrooms. The policy states that the post apartheid curriculum needs to enable all learners to achieve their maximum ability (DoE, 2002). Furthermore, this policy points out that there is a promotion of certain values that needs to be supported not only for the sake of personal development but also to ensure that a national South African identity is built on values very different from those that underpinned apartheid education. "the kind of learner that is envisaged is one who will be inspired by these values, and who will act in the interests of a society based on respect for democracy, equality, human dignity, life and social justice" (DoE 2002:3). This require empowered teachers, hence the concept *teacher leaders*. Grant (2005) defines teacher leadership as a form of leadership beyond headship or formal position. It is about teachers taking up formal and informal leadership roles both in the classroom and beyond in the area of school development and community involvement.

The case discussed in this article deals with a focus on one educator's attempts to enhance effectiveness in his diverse classroom by utilizing strategies of teacher leaders. With many at-risk children in his classrooms, Mr J wanted to ensure that the values of democracy and inclusiveness are introduced in his classroom. With the support of his principal who introduced the concept of teacher leadership he was able to succeed where some of his colleagues have given up. It is a critical commonplace that the main forms of teaching are directing; participating, delegating and combined styles and all these are the main forms of teaching and leading. Effective teachers will have these qualities. Teachers, like leaders are supposed to provide purpose direction and motivation. Teachers with these and many other positive leadership qualities will be able to enhance learning in their classrooms as they transform their classrooms to be teacher leaders. Mr J also uses his own biography to inform his classroom practice. The following sub-headings will be discussed in this article:

- Teacher leadership defined
- Mr J the teacher
- The learners' context
- The challenge of diversity
- Student motivation and teacher leadership
- Challenging learners to learn: teacher leaders' achievement
- Conclusion

2. Teacher Leadership Defined

It is a critical commonplace that the quality of learners is as good as the quality of teachers they have. More writers are contending that for education transformation to be successful there needs to be the empowerment of teachers and redefining their roles as leaders. Childs-Bowen, Moller & Scrivner (2000) posit that redefining teachers as leaders will have direct implications for learners' achievement. Feiman-Nemser (2001) contends that the need to redefine teachers' role as leaders in order to make them meet the demands of ensuring learning standards and current teaching culture. Teacher leadership is no fantasy and the case is too strong that it is becoming an increasingly visible presence in schools and that it can contribute much to improving their health and performance (IEL, 2001). However, the IEL document (2001: 4) also adds:

But implying that the teacher as leader is poised to become a controlling force in the near future is delusional. If there is one urgent requirement that cannot be emphasized too often as teacher leadership inevitably becomes more influential, it is that teaching must become a genuine profession rather than one still seeking public legitimacy. Without greater recognition of them as partners in making schools work better rather than as semiskilled functionaries, too many teachers are faced to remain second-class citizens in their workplace.

When teachers are leaders in their classrooms, they touch more lives meaningfully. Teachers who are leaders will motivate their learners, will play a part in the learners' success, they will also spend more time with the learners than most parents do (FreeEssays, 2010).

3. Mr J and his School Context

The school is situated in KwaZulu-Natal. It is a high school which was an Indian school under apartheid legislation in the past. Indian schools were governed by House of Delegates in the deplored tricameral parliament which excluded the majority of the people in South Africa. However, today the school has 1000 learners and only 86 are Indian, the rest are black learners mainly from the neighbouring Eastern Cape Province. The majority of the learners are without their parents, they share rooms with their peers in the school vicinity. Mr J is new to the school although he has been teaching for 15 years, mainly in Gauteng. When he came to the school which we shall name Rise High School, he was given a class labeled, a class of low performers. On his first day one of his colleagues had come to him and said chuckling, "you have the most challenging class, but we will always wish you good luck". He did not understand this comment until he got to his grade 10 class for the first time. He remembered similar classes in his previous school where teachers knew that they could not waste time and energy in classes where they knew that "the learners will never learn anyway". He got into a class of giggling learners who were carefree. There was a sense of sluggish disposition among the learners who appeared to believe the teachers' judgement that they were really the ones who would never make it. There were 35 learners in the class whose members showed peculiar behavior; whenever one of them attempted to answer a question there would be suppressed laughter across the classroom.

4. Mr J's Background

Mr J originally had a teachers' diploma qualification that he received in a Gauteng college of education in 1986, English and History being his teaching majors. Then in 1988 he registered at Vista University and studied part time until he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1992 majoring in English and Psychology. He argues that his teaching philosophy has changed drastically over the years. When corporal punishment was outlawed for example, he says he was one of the despondent teachers who maintained that teachers were now going to have dwindling powers. He said he realized that there were no alternatives to corporal punishment and learners would not learn well if they are not punished. He was also opposed to the mingling of races in schools as he believed that culture and identity is strengthened when a learner is with her own kind in terms of race, religion and culture. There were a number of similar aspects that changed in his teaching journey and a number of these are reflected in this essay. Before coming to Durban to teach at Lilac Valley High School Mr J had taught in two other schools; one school is in Johannesburg South, a former Coloured school. He was in that school from 1987 to 1997. Then he went on to work in a historically white school in Johannesburg from 1998 until 2007.

Mr. J's day starts at 7am, 45 minutes before the school bell rings to start the day. Usually during these minutes he finalises the planning of the day ahead. Frequently though, he is usually disturbed by his learners who normally come with a variety of problems. Many of the learners do not live with their parents in KwaZulu Natal. Therefore, he finds himself acting as a parent in many instances. Problems would range from noise by fellow learners in the evening to unreasonable behavior of some landlords and land ladies. Some cases are serious and include various kinds of abuse. One evening he had to rush to a local public hospital when he was phoned by the principal, one of the learners was shot on his way from the nearby café.

He was seriously injured and the bullet in his spine left the learner a quadriplegic for life. He tells stories of how the school changed him from being "an ordinary educator" into being a committed "teacher leader whose boundaries for learner commitment are endless". Mr J maintains that he got most of his inspiration from his principal, whom we shall call, Logan.

Logan is indeed an insuring leader. He believes in walking about the schools at least 30 minutes each day. He seems to know each learner by name, something incredible for a person who is hands on in every aspect of the school. The teachers are not always talking positively of him because some say, "he just pushes us so much. Teaching is generally depressing, he is a hard worker, but at times he expects too much from us." When I was in the school Logan was registered in the Advanced Certificate in Education School Management and Leadership (ACE-SML) programme. He intimated that he was trying all the good practices from the course and found that many aspects from the programme were working in the school. He highlighted his fascination in understanding and trying new concepts in his staff; instructional leadership and change management were some of these concepts. Every two weeks he personally ran one and a half hour workshops exploring various concepts with his teachers and among these was being a teacher leader; this is where Mr. J got some inspiration to turn his class of no-hopers around. It was always crucial to see what Logan highlighted as pillars of teachers leaders:

- Expertise, Commitment
- Community engagement
- Transformation
- Values

In one of the workshop notes that Logan had given his teachers, Mr J had highlighted a quotation from Frank Crowther which is:

The term teacher leadership refers not solely to pedagogical expertise, professionalism, enthusiasm, passion, and commitment. Certainly, schools need all these qualities from their teachers. But what we are talking about is a form of leadership that is responsive to the imperative that schools transform themselves and, in so doing, demonstrate for communities how organizational transformation can be managed positively

and effectively. Ultimately, teacher leadership, as we intend it, is about action that enhances teaching and learning in a school, that ties school and community together, and that advances quality of life for a community. (Crowther 2009: xvi-xvii)

When he arrived at the school, Mr J was informed about the socio economic status of the learners in the school; that the majority are very indigent. The principal as well as his head of department informed him that there were many challenges in the school and many learners might never have the necessary resources required for learning. However, Mr J was to realize the challenge he was coming across when he realized the learners also had various learning problems and they were labeled slow learners by many members of staff. In his first encounter with the class Mr J asked all the learners to introduce themselves and he was moved to hear some of the stories from the learners. For example he had heard about child who are bread winners in their homes but had never taught them. He never imagined that he could have survived were he put in the shoes of the learners, growing up alone in another province because the majority of the learners in his classroom were from the Eastern Cape and they lived without their parents. This is where Mr J realized he needed more than just teaching but needed "zeal, passion and commitment". He says;

When I came to the school, I knew I would need more than just mere teaching skills. The class conditions were very depressing and these are the conditions that make many colleagues to be despondent and be burnt out. I nearly quit, the circumstances at the school were daunting. I was coming from a better ex model C school, my learners' parents were middle class learners, mainly black but far from needy like what I found at Lilac Valley High school. I had a good principal; LM (Logan) was a good motivator. He made me believe that I can handle any classroom if I have a will.

Mr J planned his classes maintaining that if he can be a leader he could be able to teach any classroom. The poverty that he experienced reminded him of his own upbringing in Lenasia in the Gauteng. He was better off than many of his learners because his poor single parent mother was always besides him, a privileged not shared by many of his learners. However, he decided to use his own biography to understand the situation better. He saw himself in many of the learners in his class. He tried to go back and think of his own upbringing, his needs and how he was supported or neglected by the system. Assuming his role as a teacher leader, Mr J used the following to try and attain his goals as an effective educator:

- Using own biography as a guide
- Constant learner motivation
- Building relationships
- Enabling learners understand poverty

5. Using Own Biography

Mr J used reflective practices to ensure that he becomes effective in his classroom. He used his experiences as a learner in the 1980s and his teaching experience in two previous schools. Much of his experiences were used to inform some of the strategies he used to enhance effectiveness in his class. Mr J said:

I asked myself several questions when I realized I was to deal with a class that was exposed to several challenges. I thought of my own schooling and what I really wanted as a learner. Some questions rang in my ears as I retraced my own biography:

- What made me like school?
- Who were my best teachers?
- What kind of support did I require as a learner?
- As a teacher in my previous schools, who were the best learners and why?
- What really satisfied me in being a teacher?

I asked myself several questions about my own life and experiences and these helped me in understanding where I am. I learn not only about myself but more importantly about my learners too. Another strategy that Mr J tried out was the use of journal writing which had several date entries where he was always recording his experiences. His autobiography and experiences were propelling his everyday practice. These experiences were recorded in his journal. Some of the entries he shared include the following:

12 May

Sipho was again withdrawn today. I tried to involve him with his other group members but he was detached. He might have been close to his aunt who was like his mother. Her mother passed away four years ago and his aunt had since acted as his mother. The news shattered him.

16 May

Nomsa is back to class after they were caught drinking beer in a schools' sports meeting. I can see she does not want our eyes to meet. She was caught last week by teachers of another school drinking with three boys and two other girls from the neighbouring school...

10 May

Today Ndyebo has broken his silence. The second test has motivated him. He got little more than 50% but I see he has gained confidence now. He wants to lead his group already. He has always been a distraction to other learners. He wants to work now. His actions are contagious; two other boys, (his friends are beginning to take part in class discussions. I hope this will be sustained.

Mr J uses these when he reflects. He says it is burdensome though to be able to sustain the writing of these journal entries. Sometimes he skips a week without writing them, he says ideally, it would help if he could be able to have entries each day. However, he argues that the work of teachers is already too administrative that it is difficult to add more paper work. The journal entries are informed by his own autobiography for he uses his past history to understand the learners' actions. He remembers what he did not like at school when he was a learner; he remembers what he would have liked his teachers to do in certain situations. For example he remembers well that he did not like sarcasm from the teacher, giggling from others when he was attempting to answer a question; he tries to avoid these as he frequently wears the learners' shoes. He also knows a few practices that have been counterproductive in his classrooms previously; he avoids these. Threatening learners when they give wrong answers, calling them names even in jocular manner are some of the aspects that he has decided to cut from his teaching. He wants the learners to achieve; he wants them to participate in his classroom. He has come to realize that every learner given enough chance, they can succeed.

The utilization of his biography helps him in understanding his beliefs ensuring that he uses them well in understanding his own classroom. Sometimes he says he hears various ways of teaching in the staffroom but because he knows his beliefs and understands his practice some of these will work and some will not. As a teachers using biography and journal entries he has come to realize that some theories apply to individuals and some are universal. Reflection at the end of each day and each week has enabled him to grow as a teacher leader; he knows his shortcomings and is aware of his strong points. The latter helps him in his professional development. Mr J says:

Sometimes we work for years without really understanding our own practice. It helps to reflect upon your practice. Not everyone will use journal entries or biography-these are just skills I learnt from a researcher in my previous school. We can use colleagues; we can use our own experience to look back into our own practice. This is necessary for professional development. Teachers who do not reflect have no sense of direction and will hardly grow. I prepared myself well for my challenging diverse class simply by reflecting upon my practice.

Mr J also states;

How we shape and perceive our teaching philosophy shapes the way we teach. I used to instill fear in my students when I was a novice teacher. However, coming here I have realized the importance of making the classroom an enjoyable place. I was aware that many learners do not have families and it was important for

me to create a homely environment for them. When they arrive in the morning I want them to see that the school is where they want to be, they should feel the warmth. Poverty can be devastating for any learner; I know this from my own experience.

Mr J appreciates what his principal does in the school for every break time he collects loaves of bread for the learners. A group of community women avail their services to fill in the slices of bread with tomato, pickle fish, and so on. Mr J says it helps because he knows how difficult it is to motivate a hungry learner. He also believes that many learners do not succeed, or are truant at school because they are hungry and poor. He also maintains that if teachers could be able to teach the poor and the hungry learner, there can be positive results in many South African schools. He says the best of teachers have failed to achieve results because they do not have the skills to deal with learners from diverse backgrounds. He says his rich experience born and bred in the townships, having taught in an ex Model C school have enhanced his experiences as a teacher.

6. Motivation in Diverse Classrooms

When Mr J arrived at Lilac Valley, he realized that there is general poverty among many learners in the school. In his class he could see how the learners tended to lack the necessary zeal to learn. The majority of his learners were always aware that they are not meant to succeed—"they knew that they are not like grade 9 P. Ms Prabhakar's class was always on the news because it had better achievers, learners who were always seen as exemplary in the school. They were negative and probably they had also noticed that other teachers did not expect them to succeed; some kind of a self fulfilling prophecy. Mr J says there was no desire to learn in his learners, school for them "was like this institution for children to while away time". He started by underscoring the rewards that schooling can bring. In several lessons that I observed him teach I noticed how he used success stories of individuals who used schooling as a springboard to success. In one assignment that the learners had to collect data, some form of research to hear what people say is the benefits of education and schooling. Many themes that Mr J used in his teaching had in some way something to do with motivation.

Mr. J always said that motivation is key in ensuring that even poor learners will be able to know how to cope with the demands of life. Even when one of the class members won a provincial poster competition Mr J used this seemingly small incident to motivate others. While many of his colleagues maintained to Mr. J that many of his children would simply not make, he continued to set goals for the, he was always saying it is important to set goals for "they are like a beacon at sea". Diverse classrooms where poverty is rife should consider motivation as one of the crucial aspects that can drive learners to success. The themes that teachers teach everyday should also reflect this motivation. Mr. J says that poor children can display various behaviours that display that they know that the world has negative expectations from them. Yet he always tried to show them that there are things they do that will always be appreciated however, small. Mr. J also tried to magnify the learners' attempts to do good.

In one other lesson I noticed how he was trying to turn bad behaviour to positive behavior. One group was clearly rowdy and barely containable during the discussion time. Mr J asked the group to come and present "their interesting findings". The group presented the best of all the groups. Had he rebuked the group and told them "to keep quiet, the class could have missed some of the best arguments. Moreover, the group was among the best in drama presentation of their findings for a group project that looked at how the community perceived helping one another or "Introducing the Spirit of *Ubuntu*". Mr. J frequently stated that he had discovered in his years as a teacher that "the students' mind is simple to capture". He says that if learners see that you believe in their capability and you show this in a sincere and authentic manner, they tend to want to prove to their teacher that indeed they can do it. He also stated that when children do not perform sometimes, it is because adults are showing them that they do not expect much from them. In his classes the strategy of motivation was so invaluable and he infused it all the time.

Goal setting is one other aspect that Mr J emphasized. He maintained that many learners do not achieve anything in life because they were not prepared to have goals. "Have a vision, have a goal" was the mantra that Mr J instilled in the children. Whilst it might have sounded like an ordinary saying initially to the learners, I could see that they kept it to keep their focus. Whilst groups were working Mr J would move around reminding the learners all the time, "think of your goal". He would utter these words when learners are stuck with an activity and are struggling to continue. This motivation usually worked as the learners were made to believe that what they want to achieve can be attained. Mr J stated it clearly that in school he himself made it because he believed that he could make despite what some of the teachers were saying to the contrary. He also added that the best of teachers would fail if their learners are not motivated.

His belief in the power of motivation was proven to hold the truth when he looked at grade 12 in his school. When he arrived at the school he noticed that despite the many challenges the school managed to achieve grade 12 pass rate that is beyond 80%. However, he wished that this could be done earlier because motivation should cut across the grades especially for poor learners. His argument was that some learners might drop out of school before they reach grade 12 therefore, there should be learners motivation throughout the school. Each month in this class Mr J started what he referred to as the Oscars of 9J. These were recognition certificates for various categories such as *The most improved learner/group*, *The most consistent learner or group*, *The speaker of the month*, *The most helpful learner* and a few others. He explained these to the learners before they were introduced. They worked well to ensure that learners tried to improve in various aspects because they were aware that there was continuous assessment of whatever they did in class. It also made them to be independent learners who drafted their own goals. Mr J found it amazing the manner in which the learners treasured the "monthly awards".

7. Building Relationships

Mr J maintained that effective teacher leaders will enhance relationships especially where learners are at a disadvantage. He acknowledges that one aspect that is very positive in the post-Apartheid national curriculum is the ability of learners to learn in groups. He says even when many may say that Outcomes Based Education has failed in South Africa; it does have small pockets of success; discouraging competition and fostering the working in teams. Mr J usually rotated groups in his class so that learners can get to know other members of the class as well. He found it a challenge for his learners to open to their peers; they are very suspicious of their situation. According to him, they appear to fear judgement and are scared of what others might say. Yet it was one aspect that made his learners to enjoy school, when they knew they could be natural in class without fear of being ridiculed or scorned. He says that his learners needed a teacher they could trust and peers that could laugh with them not at them. They needed study companions who would challenge them to explore more learning avenues. Mr J's theory was that learners develop well cognitively in a safe environment of people they could trust. He says that the supportive nature of peer assistance is invaluable in diverse classrooms.

In one lesson he emphasized the importance of helping others, this was a lesson where the class was shown a video of former American President Bill Clinton and Archbishop Desmond Tutu talking about *ubuntu*. He explained to the class that *ubuntu* means that you do not leave behind people who need your help. This was later done as a comprehension passage and Mr J's main objective was to instill the values of *ubuntu*. It was however, amazing to see how the learners tried to practice this in their own everyday life. The class transformed gradually; when a learner gave a wrong answer the peers were prone to help him in a spirit of camaraderie, something that the learners did not have initially. Not all the class members were moving forward as a few struggled but it was difficult to see these because of the immense support from other learners.

Mr J was frustrated that the majority of his learners did not have their parents in KwaZulu Natal. He kept on saying that he would have liked to form closer ties with the learners' parents. He explained it was the reason why he was ensuring that there were more ties among class members. He said that he wanted the

learners to see the classroom as a home, a place where the learners could feel the warmth and protection of a family. This was not easy to achieve but when it did it paid dividends. One could see the reluctance of the learners to leave school after the last bell. They always wanted some reason to stay behind and discuss the following day's work. One of the things that lacked in his class was emotional security and need to belong. Mr J likened this to Maslow's hierarchy of needs saying that as long as learners are insecure and lack a warm supportive environment they would never learn. He says he believed that his up market school in Johannesburg was successful because learners were always free and felt secure in the classroom. He said that he believed that emotional belonging enhances intellectual development.

Drama, role play, simulation games are some of the strategies that Mr J used to try and bring the learners together. The shy quiet ones opened up after some time engaging in the various activities. In fact, Mr J stated that teacher usually underestimated the power of role play and simulation games. "Learners know they are in character when they act in these activities. They have no reason to fear for it is not them that others are seeing... Yet through this process, they learn about the society, themselves and others." Mr J though said he found some of the activities taking much time and energy and said it was always a challenge to have as many activities when there was a syllabus to chase. However, he said the well being and success of the learners also mattered immensely. The relationships built in class and the experiences transformed the quality of the classroom climate and other teachers also began to notice. Other teachers began to notice the change in the learners. The Maths teacher and the Natural Science teacher said there were still learning problems in these areas; however, they also noticed the zeal in the learners. They showed more commitment and keenness. Mr J said while there were other aspects that could be attributed to the learners' transformation, he maintained that building social relationships was the most crucial. When learners build relationships they talk about their problems, when they verbalise these challenges they learn language, when they learn language they learn to solve some of the life's challenges, Mr J averred.

Mr J said that he always knew the challenges of poverty but he did not always know how to deal with poor students and therefore his experiences in Lilac Valley were his first real experience as a teacher. What irked Mr J was that "many schools are not ready to teach poor children". Yet he contended that more than 60 percent of the South African children are coming from very indigent families. Many drop out and "the ones who reach high school are lucky". He believes that the system should not lose the few who reach high school. He states that teachers should be prepared to deal with diverse classrooms especially those with poor learners. Mr J said he remembered and began to understand years after that the many learners who did not go through the system were those who were hit by poverty. Many of Mr J's parents had suffered in various ways; neglect, no parents or absent parents, mobility, uncertain future and negative experiences at school. All these are factors that can put any child in the failure zone. When I left the school, I told Mr J I would like to see his children the following year and the year after until they reach grade 12. He said there is no guarantee that all would succeed as he would have liked them to. But he was certain that they knew the meaning of the school and were aware what education could bring in their lives. Mr J would not have said it himself but I knew that I was dealing with a teacher leader in him. His strategies affected more than the children in front of him; it went further to affect their futures and the nation. One excerpt from FreeEssays site points out:

Touching more lives, affecting the outcome of so many futures a teacher is the epitome of a leader. Just as a leader has his or her own style, their way, of motivating their students; also plays an important part in a student's success. Spending more time with our children than most parents do, a teacher is fundamental in shaping our children. If they are poor leaders our children suffer. When they shine as leaders our children blossom and the universe is wide open to them. As a teacher it is of utmost importance that you tune your leadership skills and find the best style of teaching for the students you are teaching.

(FreeEssays, 2003)

8. Brief Analysis of Mr J's Approach

The important quality that Mr J had and that few other teachers might have is being a leader in the classroom. The teacher leaders empathise, they care, they motivate and they give direction. All teachers need these skills and they should be accorded an environment where these can blossom. Moreover, conscientious teachers will strive to be teacher leaders consciously or unconsciously. Mr J did not sit down and plan to be a teacher leader-it was his disposal to do good for his learners that made him adopt the relevant qualities. Many teachers want to be good practitioners however; few are doing something towards this ideal. Mr. J was fortunate to have a supportive principal who enhanced the school's conducive climate.

Growing as a professional is dependent upon the will and initiative of individual teachers. The Institute for Educational Leadership (2001) points out that teacher leadership is not about teacher power but it is about mobilizing the still largely untapped attributes of teachers to strengthen learner performance at ground level and working toward real collaboration. All meticulous and diligent teachers are likely to be effective teacher leaders effective teachers leaders are not improving their practice simply because they want to please others, they do it for their professional development; because it is fulfilling and leads to learners achievement.

Teacher leadership accords teachers their creativity to shape and mould what goes on in their classrooms. However, frequently bureaucracy within and outside the school might be antagonistic to teacher leadership. Real teacher leaders are headstrong and will rise above the obstacles, they will continue to identify their styles and practice it in their classrooms.

McEwan (2002:37) contends that teaching is generally not a profession that encourages leadership in its ranks; it is very hierarchical. Oftentimes, teachers feel that the principal is in charge and teachers have to follow orders. However, it is the highly effective teacher who will lead and influence the learners and colleagues. McEwan (2002:37) writes:

Highly effective teachers wield their influence in three very different, but highly connected arenas: the classroom, the school and the community. The teaching profession, by its very nature, militates against the concept of teacher-leaders. Lieberman (1988) describes the "egalitarian ethic" that almost mandates teachers to think of everyone as the same, no matter "how experienced, how effective or how "knowledgeable" individual teachers may be.

Mr J, our case influenced learners and colleagues equally. Like a leader he inspired and empowered his learners through teaching and learning. As his colleagues saw the influence he wielded and the reverence from the learners, they began seeing him as the leader he was. Mr J showed what Fullan (2001) refers to as the moral purpose. In his work, Fullan avers that effective leaders will have five components of leadership; they will pursue moral purpose, understand the change process, develop relationships, foster knowledge building, and strive for coherence. In education moral purpose is about both ends and means (Fullan 2001:13).

Furthermore, Fullan states that an important and is to make a difference in the lives of students. The bottom line is also crucial towards this ideal; if one does not treat others well, one will be a leader without followers.

Teachers with a moral purpose like Mr J create an atmosphere of a healthy climate in their classrooms. Effective climates ensure safety for learners, cognitive development, stimulating environment. All these are very crucial for diverse classrooms.

9. Concluding Remarks

I visited Mr J again a year later in October and to my surprise he informed me that he was leaving Lilac Valley High. He had just married a British lady and they had decided to go and settle in Sussex. He showed me warm letters from his saddened learners. He himself was very touched by the teenager's messages:

Sir, thank you for making me see the world...
You were a great friend.
We will miss those discussions

These were some of the messages on a double sheet signed by the learners. Mr J argued that his class taught him more about teaching. He even said even some strategies that did not work in his first year to include all the learners were now working. He had the confidence of every single learner. I asked him about the future of his learners. He did not doubt that they would never lose what he had planted in their minds. He believed that he had motivated his learners enough for more success. Mr J scribbled on the writing board the word CARE and said that was the word that made his classes fun:

C-ommitment
A-ffiliation
R-esilience
E-mpathy

He said that poor learners from anywhere in the world can succeed if teachers introduce these four qualities.

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