

# Ethically resilient teachers, what might that be?

## A comparison across two educational levels: pre-school and university in South Africa

### Structured Abstract

#### **Purpose:**

When comparing pre-school teachers with university lecturers, society generally acknowledges the latter as a highly skilled professional while the former does not achieve such admiration or financial reward. Upon studying this status quo, the authors introduce ethically resilient teaching as a set of seven+1 common qualities that are shared by both levels of educators. The purpose of this paper is to present these qualities, describing how they relate to the function of teaching and learning with the aim of bridging the perceived gap between these two levels of educators.

#### **Approach:**

Over several years, the authors observed patterns in the ideas and comments surrounding ethically resilient teaching that have arisen in teacher training sessions in both the pre-school and university domains. Through these reflexive communal conversational training sessions, attributes that are commonly associated with ethics and resilience in teaching and learning were identified. These attributes were then clustered into seven groups or qualities which represent the authors (and their participants') compilation of ethically resilient teachers.

#### **Findings:**

Ethically resilient teachers are not specific to a single educational level with there being considerable overlap in the qualities that describe ethically resilient teaching in both the pre-school and university levels.

#### **Research limitations:**

The study considers two educational contexts: pre-schooling and tertiary education only. The outcomes arise from an urbanised South African multicultural context.

#### **Practical implications:**

The qualities (seven+1) that describe ethically resilient teachers may be used as predictors for ethical resilience in teaching in both the pre-school and university levels.

#### **Social implications:**

There are many ethical teachers who leave the vocation as they are not resilient. There are many resilient teachers who would not be labelled as ethical. It is proposed that ethics should be a qualifier to the term resilience in terms of teaching and learning for highly effective sustainable pedagogy.

#### **Originality/value:**

The topic of ethically resilient teaching has not been found in the literature. The authors have proposed that an ethically resilient teacher is one who for various reasons, has found a strategy for

continuing in a self-fulfilling vocation as a teacher in which his or her students achieve their goals in a sustainable manner. These teachers are steadfast, hardy, and committed, even in the face of turbulence and are deeply concerned with their students' results and experiences within the classroom.

**Keywords:**

Cybernetics, education, ethics, ethically resilient teachers, pre-school, resilience, training, university

## **1. Introduction: Resilience and ethics in education**

### **1.1 Resilience in educational contexts**

Resilience is described as a multi-faceted and unstable construct (Day et al., 2011). The term was traditionally used in child developmental studies whereby it refers to the capacity to recover from adverse events<sup>1</sup> (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). It is often used to describe the ability to overcome extreme challenges such as famine, war, or serious physical or psychological trauma (Day et al., 2011). Resilience is thought of as a dynamic aspect resting not only on the attributes of an individual but also on the environmental and social factors that are intermingled in a person's life (Luthar & Brown, 2007; Day et al., 2011; Mansfield, Beltman & Price, 2014).

Recently, resilience has been positioned as a topic of study that addresses an adult's capacity to maintain a career path. The vocation of interest in this paper is teaching, as resilience is believed to be an important characteristic in teacher effectiveness (Day et al., 2011). Resilient teachers have been found to promote positive outcomes for students academically, socially, and emotionally (Day & Gu, 2014). This characteristic of teacher resilience has been described as the capacity to manage unavoidable uncertainties inherent in the daily challenges of teaching (Gu & Day, 2013).

Much of the scholarly works on resilience in educational contexts deal with strategies that the leadership of the organisation may adopt to support the resilience of their teachers (Sardar & Galdames, 2018; Day et al., 2011). One reason for this focal point is that resilience is an important factor for achieving positive outcomes, engagement, enthusiasm, and motivation for one's job (Day & Gu, 2014; Gu & Li, 2013). Lack of teacher resilience is related to work-related psychological ill-health, such as anxiety and depression (Smethem & Hood, 2011); thus, resilience is an important factor in maintaining a staff complement who are committed to their work.

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<sup>1</sup> There are also subsets to the term, for example, emotional resilience refers to the ability to actively sustain an emotional connection without being overwhelmed (Steward, 2013).

## 1.2 Ethically resilient teaching

There are many ethical teachers who leave the vocation as they are not resilient. There are many resilient teachers who would not be labelled as ethical. We define ethical resilience as the teacher, who for various reasons, has found a strategy for continuing in a self-fulfilling vocation as a teacher in which his or her students achieve their goals in a sustainable manner<sup>2</sup>. We acknowledge that there are resilient teachers who are ineffective educators but have a fervent motivation to continue, irrespective of the outcomes, even if the students do not reach their own goals<sup>3</sup>. This teacher may be called resilient but not ethically resilient; therefore, the word ethical is used to qualify the word resilient. We take a systemic view, acknowledging the relational context of teachers and students with the goal that each benefit from the interaction, hence the ethical component. Thus, this label of ethical resilience implies that these teachers are steadfast, hardy, and committed, even in the face of turbulence. It also implies that these educators are deeply concerned with their students' results and experiences within the classroom. These teachers acknowledge their own role in the students' outcomes<sup>4</sup>.

## 2. Context of study: A move to ethical teaching and learning

### 2.1 Attitudes concerning educational stages

For many people, there is a perception that one educational stage is more important than another. When comparing the pre-school teacher with the university lecturer, for example, society generally acknowledges the latter as a highly skilled professional while the former does not achieve such admiration or financial reward. Table 1 shows a summary of differences and similarities between these two levels of teaching.

Table 1: Comparison of pre-school teachers and university lecturers across several domains in an urban South African context.

DOMAIN	PRE-SCHOOL TEACHER	UNIVERSITY LECTURER
Status	Non-professional	Professional
Average remuneration <sup>5</sup>	R87 000 [\$6214] <sup>6</sup>	Lecturer: R355 305 [\$25378]
Qualification	Not formally required. RPL is common	Master's degree or higher.
Teaching portfolio / philosophy	Not required.	Required
Criminal record	No criminal record and must be cleared from any child protection registry.	NA
Employment	Formal/informal - depending on the institution/school	Formal
Benefits	Little, some offer funeral and disability cover.	Medical and pension.

<sup>2</sup> We have not found the topic of ethically resilient teachers in the literature and hence provided a possible definition.

<sup>3</sup> There are educators who manage to get high achievements from their students, although not ethically.

<sup>4</sup> As described later in this paper, ethical educators have reported that there is a relational and circular nature of their teaching role.

<sup>5</sup> These values were obtained from [www.payscale.com](http://www.payscale.com) and reflect the province of Gauteng in South African, which is the largest financial hub in the country.

<sup>6</sup> Exchange rate at \$1 equalling 14 South African Rands as at 11 November 2017.

Gender <sup>7</sup>	99% female; 1% male	49% female; 51% male
Main duties	Teaching and caregiving Plan and implement curricula Perform assessments Lead classroom activities of teaching and providing discipline. Attend to safety concerns in the classroom and in the play areas.	Teaching and research Plan and implement curricula Perform assessments Lead classroom activities. Provide supervision for post graduate studies Perform research for publication

From Table 1, it is noted that there is considerable overlap in the teaching duties of the two vocations, with the role of teaching and learning representing a large proportion of both these two educators' duties. This raises a few questions.

A first question is why should there be a difference in status between these two levels of educators? Many people (specifically parents of young adults) are especially concerned with the educational years preceding employment. Employers who are seeking new employees are interested in the applicant's final year report—they do not ask for an applicant's pre- or primary school report. Thus, there is a strong link to employment in terms of university education and thus there is importance assumed to this education level. The lecturers are often seen as the specialists in the fields in which the graduates wish to achieve employment and are thus respected accordingly.

In the psychologies, however, the idea of there being a more important life stage is rejected. Whichever model of psychology one reads, well-known scholars have made important observations about the development of a child's learning in the pre-school years. Erickson (1995) in his psychosocial model for example, believed that every child needs to master certain tasks in their life for successful development, such as gaining a sense of autonomy, purpose, and competence. In Piaget's (1969) pre-operational stage, he describes a progression of how children's thinking evolves. Freud (2005) went as far as saying that by age seven, a person's personality traits are already solidified. From a biological epistemology, Luria (1970), whose early studies on neurological processes which are still valid today, noted that there is a sensitive time frame for language development in the brain and that children must be exposed to auditory linguistic sounds early on. Thus, in terms of development, early childhood is not less important than any other developmental stage. It is not surprising that a book (Fulghum, 2003)<sup>8</sup> titled "All I really need to know I learned in Kindergarten" is a #1 New York Times bestseller.

### 2.1.1. Aim: Ethically resilient teaching as a set of common attributes

A second question, which is the theme of this paper, is more difficult to answer. This question relates to whether there is a difference in the factors that contribute to resilience and ethics in teaching when comparing the pre-school and tertiary levels of educators. To address this question,

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<sup>7</sup> Data obtained from Payscale website.

<sup>8</sup> In this best seller, Fulghum recounts how the lessons and experiences he had in kindergarten are relevant to life, love, and other aspects of living. Well known cyberneticist Ranulph Glanville (2012) also stated how his Froebelian pre-school time was an important foundation for his later development.

the authors have evaluated their contexts (described under section 3) and found seven+1<sup>9</sup> consistent characteristics that are common to both the pre-school teacher and the tertiary lecturer. In this paper, we postulate that there is considerable overlap in terms of resilience and ethics in both university and pre-school educators. Our argument rests on the underlying qualities that ethically resilient teachers demonstrate in their ability to teach. We base this deduction on the findings from both educational levels. The purpose of this paper is to present these qualities, describing how they relate to the function of teaching and learning, with the aim of bridging the perceived gap between the pre-school teacher and the university lecturer in terms of ethically resilient teaching. We have thus focussed on educators who have the goal of teaching and learning as part of their vocation, enacted in an ethically resilient manner.

The remainder of this paper describes our approach to studying this topic and thereafter we explore this overlap between ethically resilient tertiary lectures and pre-school teachers.

### **2.1.2. Epistemological consideration: Two different worlds—Early-childhood development and tertiary education**

Since the world of higher education is vastly different from the world of early childhood development, attempting a comparison would require a person who inhabits both these worlds. Philosopher Alistair McIntyre (1987) suggested that to understand another person's epistemology, one would need to live in the linguistic domain of the other to begin to understand and conceptualise it in terms of the domain to which this different *weltanschauung* arose. As the two educational contexts of pre-school and tertiary education differ, it would be unfair for someone to provide judgment unless they have been actively involved in both arenas. This is uncommon as educators usually consider themselves pre-school teachers, or high-school teachers, and so forth. Their qualifications (and training) align to the respective ages of teaching practice and it is rare to find a teacher who works in both the pre-school and tertiary educational domains. Thus, to address this obstacle, the paper is written by two scholars who are equally involved in their respective levels of educational tuition. Philip from the university context and Anne from the pre-school level. Both Philip and Anne each have more than 14 years of vocational experience in teaching and learning (elucidated in the next section). Anne also has a fair knowledge of the university arena being married to Philip who too has a fair knowledge of pre-schooling. We thus write from the combined background of pre-schooling and university education, summarised next.

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<sup>9</sup> The +1 is a place holder for an undefined quality. It acts as a variable quality.

### 3. What is good teaching practice?

#### 3.1 Experiences at the tertiary level

South African public universities are currently facing many challenges as they address the decolonisation of knowledge, free education for the poor, social justice, and diversity, amongst other pressing needs. These challenges have resulted in extensive protest action, vandalism, violence, and policy changes at public universities. Philip, as a senior lecturer at the University of Johannesburg, has a role of teaching and training educators at the tertiary level. He is acknowledged as a leading tertiary educator in South Africa<sup>10</sup> and has been published on the topic of the scholarship of teaching and learning. Philip is concerned with the sustainability of teaching in the face of turbulence or obstacles, that is, resilience and ethics in teaching. This research includes the behaviours and contexts that support educators' level of motivation to perform their task of ethical teaching and learning<sup>11</sup>, but more specifically, what strategies teachers use that enable students to reach their goals.

Lecturers who want promotion are motivated to attend various workshops on teaching and learning. In these workshops, they seek solutions to challenges that are negatively impacting their teaching. Some challenges include students not showing up for classes, students not performing well on assessments, lack of involvement in the class, students not interested in the content, challenges with blended learning<sup>12</sup>, and economic obstacles faced by students. Philip, who presents at these workshops, has found a few characteristics that are linked to educators who have resiliently and ethically overcome obstacles in their approach to teaching and learning.

##### 3.1.1. University of Johannesburg's annual academic staff training<sup>13</sup>

As part of the training provided to lecturers in the university context<sup>14</sup>, the participants are asked a series of reflective questions, namely:

- a) What is a teacher?
- b) When is teaching taking place?
- c) How do you know learning is taking place?
- d) How do you measure this learning?
- e) How do you know you are a good teacher?
- f) What is your approach to teaching, learning, and understanding?

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10 In 2015, he was awarded the University of Johannesburg's Vice Chancellor's award for teaching excellence, and in 2016, the South African national tertiary education award for teaching excellence by the Council for Higher Education. Philip was probably the youngest lecturer at the former Technikon Witwatersrand at 20 years old.

11 Including ethical curriculum design in which the curriculum reflects the participants who use it addressing community engagement in curriculum development (Baron, 2018).

12 The move to mix traditional face-to-face instruction with technological platforms for online learning.

13 The content presented here also includes the outcomes from training provided at other South African universities.

14 This is the format of my training at the University of Johannesburg's annual Academic Staff Development workshops as well as at other key-note presentations.

These questions open the floor to a conversational discussion on the topic of what it means to enact good teaching practice. The initial goal is to explore the audience's individual thinking about their pedagogy in a self-reflective manner, similarly to what Schon (1984) described as reflection-on-action and in-action. In this first step, the participants reflect on the six questions and how they have adapted, improved, and reduced problems in their approaches to teaching and learning.

In this training there is another goal: to challenge the audience to think about their thinking while in community with others, which is a recursive process. In this second loop, case scenarios are presented to the audience with the hope that they may now reflect in community—participants comment/reflect on the reflections of their colleagues, which has been termed reflexion by von Foerster (1991) and Glanville (2013). During these reflexive discussions, additional questions are posed to the participants which have ethical aspects. A few examples include asking the participants, what is a poor performing student? Who is responsible for poor student performance? Who is responsible for the learning in the classroom? How should assessments be conducted for students who do not have the funds to purchase textbooks<sup>15</sup>? If the teacher has done his or her best but the students do not achieve a good result, how should this be interpreted? Is a dominant discourse ethical in a class that is multicultural? In this forum, the reflections that the participants have made are then open for comment by their peers who may reflect on their colleagues' reflections. This amounts to a challenging and rigorous process as it deals with people's beliefs and values in a communal setting.

Upon examining the participant responses in these training sessions, a pattern has emerged in the comments and conversational themes provided by lecturers who have consistently achieved good results from their students. There seems to be a few underlying attributes that ethically resilient lecturers have in common. These commonalities are summarized together with the findings from the pre-school context under the heading "What comprises an ethically resilient teacher?".

### 3.2 Pre-school experiences

Anne, who is the owner and principal of a medium to large pre-school in South Africa<sup>16</sup> (80-90 children), has been working in the early childcare environment for two decades, managing, teaching, and training teachers in several pre-schools. Her various roles have provided her with a view of what personality and environmental aspects are aligned to sustainable, resilient, and ethical teaching in pre-schools. Her observations are based on the following criteria:

- critical evaluations from parents regarding their child's development and enjoyment of pre-school,
- the willingness of children to attend daily pre-school and their attitudes towards their teacher,

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<sup>15</sup> For e-books, the same applies. Philip calls this technological discrimination whereby some students are not in a financial position to purchase a laptop, for example, to view the e-book.

<sup>16</sup> Little People's Montessori Pre-School situated in the city of Germiston in Ekurhuleni metropolitan.



- the motivation, interest, and passion shown by the teacher in performing her<sup>17</sup> teaching,
- the teacher's level of engagement and fun within the classroom and outdoor play areas,
- the teacher's ability to manage their energy levels in a sustainable manner,
- awards/achievements that past graduates have achieved in their new primary schools.

Using the above list as a marker for ethically resilient teaching has been useful. For example, if the children in a certain teacher's class are not enjoying their learning and do not want to attend school, Anne has subsequently found that the teacher too is disinterested.

### 3.2.1. Findings from Anne's pre-school contexts

Training in the pre-school is conducted in a similar way as the university staff training described earlier. The pre-school's annual workshops have provided interesting findings. These findings suggest there is considerable overlap between the responses of pre-school teachers to that of university lecturers. This means that the ideas surrounding teaching and learning may not be that different between the two levels of educators. This similarity is presented next.

## 4. What comprises an ethically resilient teacher?

### 4.1 A lecturer is not necessarily a teacher

Teaching skill has often been taken for granted in higher education in favour of the lecturer's research and publication record. Laurillard (2013:12) notes that there are no professional training requirements for university academics in terms of their teaching competence, and there is still little research on tertiary students' learning styles. Educators frequently design their curricula as a form of control over the learning process. In this format, many educators create or revise their curricula based on "what was done before," adhering to some body of knowledge or layout that has become dominant at their school or university (Lewis & Pask, 1972:7). Many educators do not get the outcomes they envision, even with their best efforts<sup>18</sup>. This challenge, which many educators experience, is conflated by the ongoing rupture in the ideas and values surrounding mainstream education and what its purpose and outcomes should be.

There has been a realisation that specialisation in one's field does not automatically make one a teacher. However, it is unfortunate that in most classrooms in South African public universities, educators expect the students' learning strategy to be aligned to the teaching style of the instructor. This traditional format does not cater for multiple learning styles. A dilemma arises whereby the lecturers' specialised knowledge does not necessarily provide a basis for good teaching. Top lecturers in terms of teaching are not necessarily top academics in terms of research. These factors, amongst others, highlight ethical considerations in teaching (Baron, 2016a, 2018).

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<sup>17</sup> There have been no male pre-school teachers in Anne's pre-schools. Table 1 also shows how the pre-school teaching vocation is dominated by females.

<sup>18</sup> This point is based on the comments that educators have made in the training sessions at the University of Johannesburg and other universities that Philip has been invited to present at.



Lecturers in many universities are now required to create a teaching portfolio or present their teaching philosophy. Promotion requirements have also been adapted to include the scholarship of teaching and learning. New styles of teaching and learning have emerged and some lecturers have been motivated to become more professional in their approach to teaching, matching their approach to academic research in their field of specialisation (Laurillard, 2013).

## **4.2 A pre-school teacher is not necessarily a teacher**

In the early childhood arena, taking care of young children is part of the job description—providing pre-school educators with their other title of caregivers. These parenting behaviours include knowing when to take a child to the toilet, since many children get excited in their play time and do not go to the toilet in time. Caregivers need to address the immediate needs of children and thus must be acutely aware of young children’s routines. These include the seemingly obvious task of taking jackets off when it’s hot and putting them on when it’s cold, but it is surprising how many primary caregivers do not consistently get this right. Reminding children to drink liquids, wash hands prior to eating and after using the toilet, and so forth, are some of the myriad of caregiving behaviours that are required. These care activities rest on a hyper-awareness that pre-school teachers must have; however, these behaviours do not necessarily amount to teaching. Thus, there are some excellent caregivers who offer better care than many parents, but they simply are not effective teachers.

Ideally, in the early childhood development centres, there are supposed to be clear differentiators: day care versus pre-school, for example. In the pre-school, there should be a curriculum for each age, a pedagogy, and a reporting mechanism for each child’s progress. While in the day care or aftercare, the primary focus is the observing and caring for children with the classroom learning assumed to take place at home or in school. Unfortunately, in many developing countries, this differentiation is not always clear, and many day cares call themselves pre-schools resulting in a misrepresentation<sup>19</sup>.

## **4.3 A summary of common viewpoints concerning ethically resilient teaching**

Upon comparing our findings in the two levels of teaching, we found considerable similarity in the participants’ views on the topics. The viewpoints from the tertiary educators could also be understood as being present in the pre-school context. We believe that if both groups of educators—pre-school teachers and university lecturers—shared the training sessions, it would

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<sup>19</sup> In South Africa, there are requirements that early childhood centres need to adhere to for registration as a pre-school. These requirements differ from those of a day care, for example. These are set by the Department of Basic Education.

be difficult to differentiate set boundaries between these two vocations, apart from the assignment of the word children in place of students<sup>20</sup>. Some of the common viewpoints are described next:

Teaching is thought of as giving of oneself in the act of imparting knowledge to another person/group with the hope that this knowledge may help the other person/group. Words such as 'sharing' and 'authenticity' are commonly used to describe the process of teaching, with the hope that the students will embrace the teacher's knowledge and use it in their life. There is a sense of positivity in the teaching and learning system whereby educators have positive attitudes and enjoy the process. They enjoy seeing their students' growth and are open to their students' experiences.

Most educators now acknowledge that simply transmitting information is not teaching, and thus the words 'presenting' and 'lecturing' can be differentiated from the word 'teaching'. The attainment of learning takes place when the teacher believes that the learners can demonstrate their new skill. This highlights the reciprocity and dependent nature of the relationship between teacher and students as one is required for the other (Baron, 2016). For example, upon posing the question of whether teaching has taken place if the student cannot perform the new skill/outcome, educators acknowledge that effective teaching has not yet taken place or is only mid-way. Educators mostly measure their skill based on the students' achievements and attitudes, which is the common response to whether they are good teachers. Thus, we argue that ethical teachers acknowledge their responsibility in the learning system.

This congruency between tertiary educators and pre-school teachers was inspiring and it provided a basis for justifying the idea of there being generalisable behavioural approaches to ethically resilient teaching and learning practice. Upon studying the participant responses, year after year, the authors attempted to categorise the attributes into clusters or a set of qualities. The authors formally compared their contexts and analysed these findings<sup>21</sup>.

The next section provides the clusters that we believe describe ethically resilient teachers in the tertiary and pre-school levels.

## **5. Attributes of ethically resilient educators: Seven + 1**

We propose seven+1 attributes which were consistently present across both groups of educators. These qualities do not reflect a single group, they are qualities which are consistently found in the people who have been labelled as ethically resilient educators. The label of ethical resilience was provided in community with the participants in the training as the various groups reflected on what they deem ethical and resilient teaching<sup>22</sup>.

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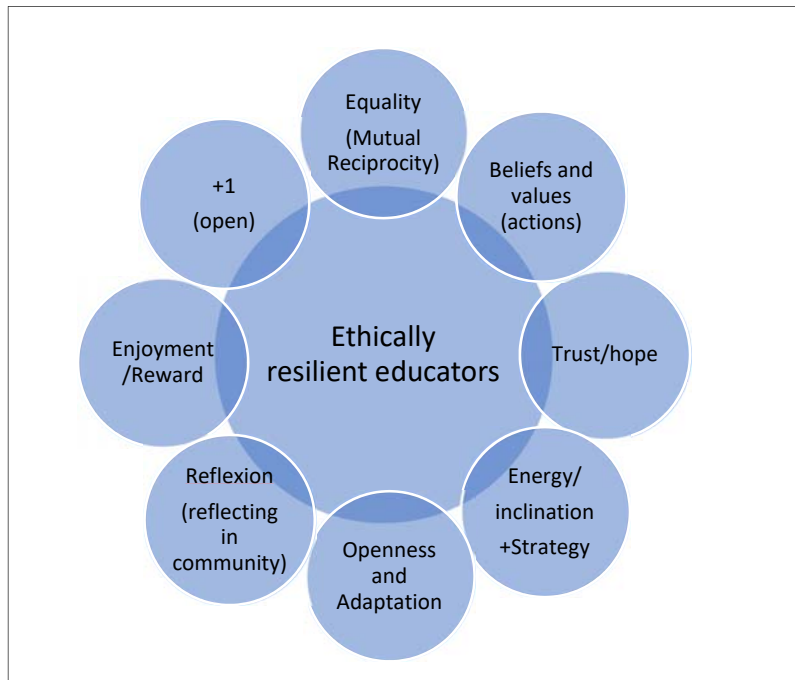
<sup>20</sup> This statement is made in terms of ethical teaching and not in terms of the other duties fulfilled within each vocation.

<sup>21</sup> Both Anne and Philip have attended one another's training several times and discussed the patterns that have emerged from the training sessions.

<sup>22</sup> These seven attributes coincided with the authors' personal findings from their own educational contexts acting as educators and trainers of educators, which was a motivator to report back on this similarity between two seemingly dissimilar educational domains.

Figure 1 represents the seven+1 qualities that educators who have been termed ethically resilient have demonstrated. The seven qualities are not mutually exclusive. These qualities overlap and are related to each other; however, for presentation purposes the qualities are shown as independent. The +1 is a place holder for an undefined quality or any further qualities not discerned in this study, acting as a variable quality.

Figure 1: Cluster of overlapping qualities entailed in ethically resilient educators both in university and pre-school levels.



### a) Equality

Ethical educators have realised that the students’ view of the learning process is equally important as the teachers’. There is a view that the students (children or adults) should be seen as equals within the learning system<sup>23</sup>. This attribute relates to the importance of the students and their role in co-creating the context for teaching and learning. The teacher is not more important than the learners, as each requires the other for the system to function. Teachers require learners and learners require teachers for the definition of the process to be fulfilled. This entails an expression of care for the learner and his or her attitude and unique approach<sup>24</sup> to learning— realising that the students’ achievements are often related to the teacher’s behaviour.

<sup>23</sup> Equality does not mean that teacher and learners share the same background or knowledge, it refers to the importance of each role in the teaching and learning system.

<sup>24</sup> Pask (1976a; 1976b) had the aim of exteriorising the mental process of learners. He posited that by understanding that each person has a different learning strategy, educators need to create scope for multiple learning approaches

Both authors have found that teachers who demonstrate mutual reciprocity<sup>25</sup> (Glanville 2008) — the awareness that the teacher’s experience of the class may be similarly matched by the learners—obtain a better rapport with the class. For example, a teacher who experiences the class as boring should assume that the same may be true for the learners.

There are varying degrees of heterarchy exhibited by ethical teachers. Some opt for student-directed classes, while others prefer their own leadership role; however, teachers who prefer to direct the class, do so while acknowledging that they are ultimately moderated by their students, also learning from their students. Thus, hierarchical approaches to teaching and learning are uncommon<sup>26</sup>.

### b) Beliefs and values (actions)

Ethical educators who have thought about and reflected on their pedagogy, have examined their beliefs and values and how this impacts their teaching and learning. They have found that their attitudes and beliefs influence their method of teaching. Maintaining an inauthentic approach to teaching is exhausting. Educators who achieve positive results tend to believe that the students can exceed the outcomes even in the face of turbulence. An example includes educators who have decided that learning does not necessarily have to follow a traditional pattern of classroom attendance, followed by passing written assessments. Life happens in the process and many students/children have unforeseen occurrences that impose challenges to their daily life. In the university context, a student may opt to write a sick test or special exam which arrives as a surprise to the lecturer; however, the ethical teacher has already proactively attended to special cases by being aware of the students who are not coping. From the teachers’ past-experiences they note that students tend to obtain better results when the teacher gets involved rather than leaving the student to be dealt with by the “system”. In the pre-school context, some children require additional individualized support. Ethical teachers try to tackle these developmental obstacles instead of simply passing the problem on to the next teacher. If these educators fail to make progress with certain students, they seek guidance.

### c) Trust/Hope

Educators often used the term ‘mentor’ as one of their roles within the classroom. In this line of thinking, the teachers acknowledge that they should trust that their students can achieve their goals. These educators believe they must provide good examples of behaviour to influence their

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within their classrooms to enable individual students to reach their goals. This point is noted presented as it aligns to a cybernetics approach to teaching and learning which is discussed in the discussion and future work section.

<sup>25</sup> Glanville (2008:168) highlighted the circularity in human interactions whereby if one party to the interaction assumes a quality in him/herself, he or she should assume it to be present in the other person as well. For example, if one thinks of oneself as intelligent then one must also allow this quality to be present in the other with whom one interacts. This is called the Principle of Mutual Reciprocity which is a topic in cybernetics.

<sup>26</sup> Teachers and students are equally important in the system. Students’ inputs may inform the activities within the classroom thus challenging a top down hierarchical approach in lieu of heterarchy.

students in a positive manner<sup>27</sup>. They believe that their students can take their own responsibility for their actions with the belief that the students will perform well. However, this does not foreclose the option of failure. On the contrary, failure represents an opportunity for learning. This is a diametrically different attitude to a teacher who does not trust their students, in turn hovering over them to manage and control every aspect of their learning. The somewhat derogatory term “helicopter parent<sup>28</sup>” could be extended to “helicopter teacher”. Thus, ethical teachers promote students to make attempts at solving the classroom activities seeing failure as an opportunity for learning which they respond to in a positively supportive manner.

#### d) Energy/inclination and strategy

Simply put, the teacher must want to do the job of teaching and learning and have the physical and mental capacity to do it. There is a need for experiential trial and error to achieve effective strategies in managing one’s teaching role. Teachers who develop strategies that aid them in their daily tasks fair better than those educators who have not developed a ‘toolbox of tricks’. Teachers who are constantly tired and “burnt out”, have not found a strategy for managing their energy levels<sup>29</sup>. In the pre-school, teachers may not leave the class unattended as young children should not be left unmonitored, even for a few minutes. It is common for the teacher to physically engage with the children by doing activities, dances, games, and to also act as a disciplinarian in resolving conflicts. A pre-school teacher who thinks she is going to sit on her chair for most of the day, does not achieve a good result<sup>30</sup>.

There are reduced energy times for both levels of educators, for example, nap time for the pre-schoolers affords the teacher an opportunity to rest, although still in the presence of the children—some of whom do not sleep but still need to be cajoled into resting quietly. Student examinations or assessments are examples of times for reduced engagement for the lecturers while still in the presence of their students who write/perform their assessments.

#### e) Openness and adaptation

In both the pre-school and the university levels, we have found that teachers who can adapt to change, survive. Adaptation relies on an openness to new information. This applies to adapting to changes in management in the educational organisation, changes in pedagogy, and changes that are student driven. In the South African tertiary educational context, there has been a move to

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<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Steward (2014) in her interview study on teachers also found that resilient teachers had a ‘moral purpose’ to make a positive difference in the lives of others. Nias (1999) noted that many teachers remain committed and continue in their vocation to make a difference in their students’ lives.

<sup>28</sup> This is a term used to describe a parenting style whereby parents pay extremely close attention to every aspect of their child’s experiences, often impeding the child’s freedom and creativity.

<sup>29</sup> Steward (2014) also noted that energy should be purposively directed with agency to achieve resilience.

<sup>30</sup> Anne has adopted a work week trial for new pre-school teachers. The basis for this approach is to observe the prospective teacher’s ability in regulating her energy levels over the five-day work week which has been beneficial to both the school and the teacher.

decolonise knowledge. This has resulted in turbulence with many educators uncomfortable within the uncharted territory within which they work (Baron, 2017, 2016a). Other challenges include new requirements for teaching such as ICT (information and communication technology) in the classrooms, additional assessments, or even conflicts in the employment contract, and so forth, also requires a level of adaptation. It is obvious that educators who have found methods to manage their changing contexts exhibit resilience.

However, *ethically* resilient teaching rests on another feature: an openness and interest in exploring their students' worlds. In this sensitive and careful enquiry, educators provide an account of listening and learning from their students—immediacy. This feature is linked to the other qualities of equality, trust, beliefs, and reflexion. The reason for teachers aspiring for openness is based on their view that student interaction and feedback informs their teaching. Whether the educators term this feedback, teachback<sup>31</sup>, open conversations, collaborative learning etc., it highlights the teachers who are genuinely interested in their students' learning. This quality is intimately linked to the next quality of reflexion.

#### f) Reflexion (reflecting in community)

We have found that educators who experience their classes as original and spontaneous tend to remain interested in their vocation. These educators are open to hearing their students' feedback regarding their own knowledge, behaviours, and attitude (that is, the teacher's). This is an uncommon feature in traditional classrooms as many educators do not think it is relevant to provide the scope for students to reflect on the teachers' actions. However, the educators who are committed to their vocation are also keen to improve their pedagogy and thus are up for the challenge of student feedback (which may also be satisfying). The students' reflections may be on the topic of the curriculum content, or even the pedagogy.

The attribute of reflexion<sup>32</sup> is provided to those teachers who exhibit an openness to students' experiences of the classroom content and context. This openness is exhibited by teachers who strive for ethical teaching by creating a scope for students' voices, making space for, and taking them seriously within the classroom. Listening to what matters to the students does not imply that the teacher simply does what the students want. Reflexion is a relational activity, not a matter of the teacher abrogating their responsibility assuming that "anything goes". To engage with the learners in this reflexive manner, these educators have developed a trusting and caring context and thus may also challenge the students in a circular process of reflecting in community—reflexion.

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<sup>31</sup> Teachback is a conversation theory tool developed by Gordon Pask and Bernard Scott as a method in which, after the teacher has presented to the learners the topics of the learning outcomes, the learner is invited to teach back his/her understanding of this material/information to the teacher (Pask 1976a, 1976b; Scott 2000).

<sup>32</sup> The terms reflection and reflexion were each defined earlier in the paper under the section "What is good teaching?".

### g) Enjoyment/Reward

While there are many students who sit in classes and do not enjoy them, which can often lead to truancy, there are also many educators who perform their task of “teaching” without enjoyment. The level of enjoyment provides a predictor for how sustainable the educator’s or student’s future behaviour will be. Many people apply for the job of pre-school teacher with the erroneous assumption that just because they know the content, they can perform the work. Our findings show that unless the person enjoys being a teacher (and being in the presence of young children), they do not sustain the position of pre-school teacher. The reward people attain in performing their task is also a moderator. If the educator does not enjoy the task and does not achieve the reward (financial for example), there is a higher likelihood of opting out.

As challenges arise, they may disrupt a mildly committed educator. For example, in the pre-school, it is common to get a child who needs additional support, or a child who is disruptive. A teacher who is only partially committed, and does not enjoy teaching, will regard this extra effort as a burden rather than an exciting challenge to the teacher’s skill. Challenges in the university classroom also include a lack of resources, classroom equipment not working, low student involvement, inconsistent student attendance, poor assessment marks, or the requirement for high pass rates at any cost from management. Any of these, especially if more than one manifests, may be demotivating for the lecturer.

### h) Open (+1)

This last quality is a place holder for the characteristic that is uncommon yet viable for certain teachers. We thus term this the +1 in acknowledgment of the fact that we must be open to seeing new qualities that also align to ethical resilient teachers.

## 6. Discussion and future work

### 6.1 Ethical resilience as a predictor for staff continuity

Increasing teachers’ capacities to be resilient is both a moral and a strategic concern which can impact teacher recruitment, retention, training and continuing professional development (Smethem & Hood, 2011). Owners of educational organisations would like to know that their choice of staff are well suited. In the pre-school context, this is especially important, as the bonding that takes place in the classroom between the young children and their school “mommy” is critical. For instance, changing a pre-school teacher every few months results in unhappy and unsettled children. Staff consistency is vital; thus, selecting a teacher who will be sufficiently resilient, remaining engaged in the work is an important aspect of owning a pre-school.

In the university context, the independence that is attributed to lecturers often results in challenges when they leave. It is not easy for colleagues to just step into the modules and offer them mid-way. Other challenges include the finalisation of the year marks, masters’ and doctorate students’ supervision, research groups, and so forth. Instructors who have offered their courses for a few years have usually built up networks and a knowledge base that becomes highly valuable,



while also positioning the course content accurately in the degree/diploma curriculum. Thus, in the university context, consistency in the staff complement is also important.

Predicting ethical resilience is valuable in the teaching profession. The aforementioned seven qualities could be used as markers for predicting whether the educator may remain ethically resilient and committed to his or her job. Explicitly considering these factors has been successful in predicting continuity in pre-schools. Trial or probation periods are common in employment contracts and thus are useful in discerning ethical resilience. If the supervisors/managers would focus on the seven points in appraising the new teacher, they may be better able to select a teacher who can stay the course while enacting an ethical pedagogy.

## **6.2 Strategies to support new teachers and openness to variety**

Most scholarly research on resilience in education is aimed at management who may work towards creating or supporting resilience in their organisations. The purpose of this goal is for improved staff continuity and commitment to their teaching (Sardar & Galdames, 2018; Day & Gu, 2014; Gu & Li, 2013). Mansfield, Beltman and Price (2014) found that early career teachers would need support to assist them in finding their feet, also highlighting the critical roles played by family and friends in the resilience process. Thus, managers should not disregard the fact that a person may be resilient only once they have achieved a strategy to manage the ongoing challenges of their career.

Gu and Day (2013) have highlighted the need to view resilience as more than personal traits, arguing that it is insufficient to treat teacher resilience as a fixed psychological construct that can be evaluated simply from a questionnaire. This means that environmental factors are also at play. In our study, we have found that ethical resilience has several personality aspects which make ethical resilience more aligned to personality. However, we have highlighted that context is important whereby educators may be given the scope to enact their approaches while in their working environments. For example, allowance for reflexive practice, allowance for diverse teaching methods, and so forth. This would mean that the management would need to have an openness to diverse ideas about teaching and learning.

## **6.3 Cybernetics as an underlying philosophy to ethical teaching**

Readers who are interested in cybernetics and second-order cybernetics may have noticed that many of the attributes in the seven qualities represent a cybernetic philosophy. While most educators are not familiar with cybernetics, the ideas of heterarchy, ethics, equality, circularity, reflexion, and mutual reciprocity are all well explored in cybernetics. Many educators, without knowing, described their approach to ethical teaching in line with cybernetic thinking. Upon enquiry, only one educator knew about cybernetics. Scott (2016) found a similar situation in the psychologies whereby he noted that many of the principles used in psychology have their origin in cybernetics, yet these principles are not attributed as such. Thus, could cybernetics be used as a platform for ethical teaching? Several scholars (Barnes, 2007; Herr, 2014b; Pask, 1975, 1976; Scott,

2011) believe that cybernetics is a viable approach to education. In the published pedagogy of one of the authors, (Baron, 2016a, 2018) cybernetics has been extremely useful for teaching and learning in multicultural contexts.

While cybernetics may be a viable framework for ethical teaching and learning, it has been noted that many people find cybernetic philosophy challenging to grasp (Baron, 2014, 2015). One author has argued that there needs to be a simplified conceptual ground-clearing approach to cybernetics, such as the popular book brand “For Dummies” or “Idiots guide” which do not yet have cybernetics in their publication list (Baron 2016c).

With the observer tied to observation, resulting in ethics having a personal domain, the role of second-order cybernetics, or newly termed second-order science (Umpleby, 2014), seems to be fit for purpose. The role of the observer in the act of teaching and learning is controversial though, which is the topic of the next section.

#### **6.4 Subjectivity versus objectivity in ethical teaching and learning**

Many educators have a firm belief that each student constructs his or her own understanding which represents his or her personal truth, yet not directly knowable by another person, i.e. these educators align to a constructivist view of knowledge. These educators agree with Von Glasersfeld’s (1992) position that people need to be allowed to make sense of their experiences for themselves, and therefore, the teacher should focus on how the learner is interpreting the teacher’s information. In this approach, the students’ view is important and remains vital in setting the trajectory for the learning system. Several scholars have found constructivist approaches useful in their teaching (Borg, Hewitt & Jones, 2016; Herr, 2014a; Richardson, 2003).

On the other hand, the idea of no objective truth that we can directly know, is unsettling for many educators who dismiss a constructivist subjective position. They expect their students to “eventually get there” in their understanding of the classroom concepts. We have found this to be common within the engineering sciences. While these educators still accept the students’ viewpoints and experiences, they do not have the same scope for personal subjective interpretations within in the classrooms. This division raises a question: Do ethical pedagogies have to be personalised?

#### **6.5 Research regarding Gender bias in pre-school teachers**

Table 1 shows that there is almost no representation for male pre-school teachers. Anne, one of the authors of this paper, also confirms that in her 20+ years of pre-school involvement, there has not been a male teacher in any of the pre-schools she has worked at in South Africa. While it is uncommon for a man to apply to be pre-school teacher, this seems to be somewhat of a taboo aspect. Our informal findings are that parents are only comfortable with men in the pre-school when fulfilling the role of security guard, groundsman, sports coach, transportation driver, or

owner, but not as a teacher or caregiver. This lack of male representation opens several avenues for further research.

## 6.6 Educational training for a combined audience

Owing to the extensive similarity in the viewpoints and actions of both the pre-school and university educators, a question arises: Could these two different groups of educators be invited to the same training? For example, could primary school teachers be invited to high school teachers' training and so forth? We believe that there are lessons to be learnt in teaching and learning which remain true across the age ranges and thus it is viable to join different level educators when the topic is on ethics and resilience in teaching and learning.

An example of a fruitful cross pollination is described next. A cybernetic teaching tool called Teachback<sup>33</sup> initially developed for tertiary students was found to be viable for pre-schoolers. In this study (Baron & Baron, 2015), a tertiary level teaching approach was adapted for a pre-school context. The outcome was favourable and became one of the common teaching tools in the pre-school.

Are there other beneficial transferrable pedagogical aspects that these two levels of educational tuition can adopt from one another? For example, language development is a major part of the pre-school curriculum. There are clear strategies that pre-school teachers may use to improve the language of the learners. Could these strategies be employed in the higher levels in situations where there are language barriers or domain specific concepts? For instance, in each academic discipline there are unique nomenclature which students are required to grasp as they master their field of study. This nomenclature is like learning a new language.

By cross pollinating educators within training sessions, interesting and uncommon ideas may be achieved when the educators are open to hearing the success stories from other levels of educators.

## 7. Summary

The findings in this paper were derived from decades of pre-school and university involvement highlighting the most common qualities that we in community with other educators have termed ethically resilient teachers. Ethical resilient teaching implies not only a steadfast commitment to the vocation of teaching and learning, but a care and acknowledgment of the actions that the teacher demonstrates and how these actions may be perceived by their students. There are many ethical teachers who leave the vocation as they are not resilient. There are many resilient teachers who would not be labelled as ethical. We thus believe that both ethical and resilient behaviours need to be present for effective sustainable teaching and learning.

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<sup>33</sup> Teachback was described in footnote 29.

There is no arguing that lecturing a class of 200 plus students on a complex topic requires a series of skills. However, managing a group of 20 plus four-year olds, attempting to get them all to reach their developmental goals, while addressing all their basic care needs, is equally challenging, and often physically taxing. We have observed many adults intending to become pre-school teachers and by the end of the week's trial, they give up. They report an immense shock as to what is involved in this career choice of pre-school teaching. The same could probably be said about any profession; however, South African pre-school teachers do not get the same level of acknowledgement for their actions. There are no international awards with large prize money like there are for expert lecturers. And while tertiary educators have an abundance of scholarly literature to support their approaches, the same is not true for the pre-school teacher. There is clearly a difference in these two levels of education tuition on many fronts. However, we have presented several core features of ethically resilient teachers that are common to both groups. Our findings suggest that ethically resilient teachers are not specific to a single educational level with there being considerable overlap in the qualities that are aligned to these behaviours. The seven+1 qualities described may be used as predictors for ethical resilience in teaching in both the pre-school and university levels. An interesting finding was that much of the attributes of ethically resilient teachers align to a cybernetic approach, yet these educators do not know of cybernetics. We encourage further study in cybernetics as a philosophy that supports ethical actions in teaching and learning.

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