Tony's story

Tony is a curriculum studies specialist who began as an ECD tutor, teaching at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. His highest qualification is a Masters degree and is currently pursuing his PHD. He discloses arriving into the Discipline of Curriculum Studies by default. He admits that with the massification of higher education, teaching large classes has become extremely challenging in *keeping student attention and stimulating interaction with non-responsive students, and it is demanding controlling students and maintaining discipline while trying to teach at the same time.* With the large classes, assessment is a huge challenge and assessors are outsourced. The outsourcing of assessors has resulted in variations in marking. Tony has resorted to using online assessment strategies to deal with the matter of teaching and assessing large classes, but this brought with it its own challenges of academic dishonesty and plagiarism. Students screenshot and share the responses and students work in groups to complete the online assessment tasks within the limited time frame.

Tony feels that his role in the entire process of dealing with academic dishonesty and plagiarism is confusing and frustrating as the time spent *teaching* is now spent acting as a *security guard* and police officer. He describes student behaviour who plagiarise as *naughty* and *lazy, they look for the easy way out*, and the *best student does it* (plagiarise). Students are not proactive and are not responsible and accountable for their learning at university. He recalls the challenges he encountered coming from a historically disadvantaged schooling background and entering higher education and how he overcame these challenges by being responsible and proactive in his own learning. Some students struggle to write, and they lack academic writing skills and while universities do have programmes in place to assist students, it is simply not enough. Students considered if they have paraphrased and not cited the source, then they have not plagiarised. He states that students' feel *using big words is academic writing.*

Some of Tony's experiences of plagiarism included:

- Students submitting the same assignment to different lecturers
- *Historic assignments* that is assignments taken from previous years
- Students use 'spin it' as a sophisticated way of subverting plagiarism but these submissions are filled with jargon
- Submissions made on Turnitin is in isiZulu, or contains students' CVs.
- Students photo shop or *doctor* the Turnitin certificate to obtain a Similarity of below 10%.

Tony makes use of Turnitin as a plagiarism detection strategy as prescribed by the University. He states that Turnitin checks Similarity and not plagiarism. *It is not useful for undergraduate teaching and instead* he has moved *away from it and introduced 'Open Book tests' as a method of assessment*, a more traditional assessment method that is monitored when assessing large classes. *It (Turnitin) is wasteful expenditure* when used for teaching and assessing large undergraduate classes. *Turnitin is definitely effective in small classes and you can monitor the small groups* (Honours groups and Postgraduate students). It (Turnitin) *works for honest students.* Tony does not believe Turnitin is effective in deterring plagiarism in the large undergraduate classes. If students are caught plagiarising *the SRC will get them out, the SRC is not there to protect the students* against academic dishonesty and plagiarism.

Tony has a negative attitude towards Turnitin. Students have found loopholes in beating the Turnitin system. Clearly, plagiarism and academic dishonesty is a *big issue*. In managing plagiarism, Tony is guided by the University's policy on plagiarism. Tony perceives the policy as *lenient* to those committing acts of plagiarism. He elaborates how he assesses the extent of plagiarism and engages with students with minor offenses, giving them a second opportunity to submit.

Instead he calls for academics to demand quality and stop accepting excuses that undermine the integrity of the university. He campaigns for a fully functional academic writing centre, and for management to bring the SRC on board in a collaborative effort to uphold the integrity of the university in promoting quality teaching and learning, and assessment. He further advocates for the necessity to educate students on ethical issues, good behaviour, accountability and acceptable practice.

Ruby's story

Ruby is a *mother of two boys, married to a staunch Zulu man.* Her highest level of education is a PHD in education. Ruby began her teaching career as a high school teacher. She always strives to be regarded as a *hard-working, self-driven and with high regard for quality service; hence the ability to survive and continue teaching under very unwelcoming and unsupportive structures in the schools (at that time).* Ruby's academic life at the university began *nine years ago as a full-time postgraduate student registered in the Curriculum Studies Discipline,* then as a tutor and then as a permanent lecturer in the Discipline of Curriculum and Education Studies. She recalls that as a contract staff, *one is not really exposed to all the aspects of being an academic since one's responsibilities mainly focus on the teaching in the undergraduate programme.* Her intention was to study towards becoming *an expert in curriculum issues (design, development, evaluation) so that she could be involved in decision-making at a national level as the country was having a surge of curriculum changes.*

Ruby employs a range of assessment strategies, such as group presentations, online quizzes, written tests and assignments but she admits each comes with its own set of challenges especially when teaching and assessing large classes. She uses group presentations *to minimise the number of scripts to be marked,* however, *the challenge with this form of assessment would be non-participation of some group members (since the groups are large). We usually try to overcome this challenge by asking the students to indicate each group member's contribution towards the assessment task. This is done in order to ensure that marks are given to students who actually engaged in the doing of the task.* Online quizzes are designed on the Moodle the online teaching site, *and is open for a particular period of time for students to be able to engage with it. Students can access and do the quiz at the comfort of their home. This form of assessment relieves the stress and pressure of marking large numbers of scripts because the quiz is marked and graded online. As a lecturer, I then manage the marks. The challenge with this form of assessment is that some students may sit together and share the questions and answers; others would take screenshots of the questions and share with their friends. As a result, most students perform extremely well in the quiz.*

With the written assignments, *students still need to learn how to write academically, therefore, this form of assessment is necessary; although it comes with a lot of baggage because of the high volumes of marking. However, we usually seek help by employing postgraduate students (masters and PhD) to assist with the marking. This too, comes with its own problems, because, the extra markers are usually not involved in the teaching of the module and are often not well versed with some of the aspects being assessed. Therefore, as the module coordinator one needs to spend hours and hours explaining (discussing) to the markers all the requirements and expectations regarding the assessment task. Over and above one's own marking, as a module coordinator, one is still left with the task of moderating the marked scripts from the extra markers in order to ensure consistency. This form of assessment is the one that comes with issues of plagiarism as some students often just copy information from the internet sources or research papers without proper referencing.*

Ruby only uses Turnitin as a plagiarism detection software because it is a *university rule. As a module coordinator, I create a class on Turnitin which the students registered on the module will join using their student email addresses. After completion of the set assessment (usually in the form of a written assignment), students are required to submit their work into this Turnitin class. If their Turnitin reports reflects a similarity report of more than 10%, the students are required to re-work those sections that indicate high similarities in order to reduce the overall similarity percentage to be below 10%. Thereafter, the student can print and submit the assignment together with the Turnitin similarity report to the lecturer to be assessed.*

Interestingly, Ruby's view is that *Turnitin detects similarities, but not all similarities result from plagiarism.* She explains that *not all similarities detected by Turnitin are an indication that the work has been plagiarised. Turnitin is a good tool for plagiarism detection, however, it also has proven to be easily manipulated* by students. *Students have managed to identify gaps with Turnitin, and they are able to fiddle with it so that it shows 0% similarity even for a piece of work which is highly plagiarised.*

From her experience Ruby reveals that *any students (postgraduates and undergraduates) are prone to plagiarism if they are not aware of what it constitutes, and undergraduates are usually caught out with plagiarising tendencies.* The reason students plagiarise is because *they did not give themselves sufficient time to do their work, they end up doing shoddy work and* they do not understand *the proper way of in text referencing.*

Pearl's story

Pearl is a single mother of three and prides herself in her *educational experience and life in general*. Her biggest inspiration in life is from her mother, *a very confident, brave, persistent, resilient, intelligent and beautiful woman,* whom, despite her difficulties in life has endured to save for her children's education, qualities that Pearl finds *hereditary*. Pearl began her career in education as a primary school teacher and her highest qualification is a PHD.

Pearl describes large undergraduate classes as *emotionally draining to teach. In particular, given the attitude of students towards their academic work in general. The student numbers are overwhelming, and the intellectual effort to get quality out of the teaching or assessment tasks is emotionally and psychologically draining.* She strongly feels that *the current generation of students' lack commitment and dedication towards their studies: Students, do not attend classes, they do not want to engage in lectures, they play with their phones and chat with friends.* Pearl emphasises that the *traditional lecture model which perceives the lecturer as the sage on the stage also contributes to perhaps challenges in the teaching and assessment* processes of large classes. This lecture method impedes engagement with students in the lecture venues and becomes a barrier to students when they have to do assessment tasks that require deep learning of the content.

Assessing large classes is a nightmare because the numbers seem to defeat the purpose of why we are assessing and the quality of these assessments. She laments *how students struggle to demonstrate conceptual learning in these assessment tasks because they would have missed insightful learning during lectures because of distractions alluded in the previous question. The implementation of different types of assessment e.g. group work is cumbersome because students see it as a freeride to getting marks hence, the purpose of it which (constructive learning) is not achieved. Individual assignments also pose a great threat to quality and student engagement with assessment tasks because they copy from each other. Once a student told me that she used to write an assignment and her friends would take it and submit it as their own, to lecturers in other groups. This, despite using TURNITIN to check for similarities because of plagiarism. Forcing students to submit assessment tasks to TII is a nightmare and presents even more frustrations to lecturers because students can easily cheat the system in the most horrendous manner. For instance, they submit pages that are written in IsiZulu, CVs, in order to get a low similarity percentage. They create their own TII certificates or they take their friends' certificate and submit as their own. Theres just a lot of problems with TII as a tool to combat plagiarism in order to ensure quality. I have lost trust in the system because it brings more stress and pressure to find ways that can actually stop student form cheating it.*

In 2017 my colleagues became 'investigators' of which students had cheated TII because all of them obtained 0% Similarity on their certificates. This process took days to be completed and an additional undertaking on lecturers' schedules that were already full. The process also proved daunting because of the large numbers of students. *The process was done on a few students' assignments and not all of them thus this created discrepancies that later became an SRC 'bite'. What is even more defeating is the fact that there are no punitive measures in place to deal with this gross misconduct by students. Instead, the SRC is exacerbating the problem because it comes to the 'rescue' of students regardless of what the student has done or how badly it affects the profession they are studying towards. In short, assessing large classes is challenging. The marking is also cumbersome. Students are aggressive and cheat during tests.* To act on these challenges, Pearl has *this year decided do what protects* her *soul and does not require an overstretch of* her *limited energies that are still required by the 'business model' of the university to publish articles.* In essence, she is *finding that the 'self' matters the most* because she is *not getting any support from the university to manage assessment in large classes.*

Pearl generally uses a variety of assessment methods in her teaching but teaching large undergraduate groups demanded a rethink of these assessment methods she was accustomed to – moving back to traditional methods of teaching and assessment. *I used to do presentations and written seminar papers when I had a manageable group of 230 students because I was promoting constructivist learning in the module. However, I have since gone back to individual assignments and tests because the group that I am currently teaching is too large (423) and using the same assessment methods would have proved ineffective and created chaos and frustrations for both. These assessments are also aligned with the teaching model (traditional). As such developing the affective domain of students is questionable if the internal structures and model of the university defeats its very own vision to produce critical thinkers.*

Her initial thoughts on Turnitin was that it was *going to help us as lecturers in dealing with plagiarism by students, but I have since lost trust in it. The software needs an upgrade in order to prevent cheating it.* She admits that *TII causes an inconvenience in submission dates because students ask for extensions if they were not able to submit to TII.*

Pearl considers that student academic dishonesty and plagiarism is a result of *students' poor work ethics/laziness and doing assignments at the last minute; it is unpreparedness: lack of understanding of assignment requirements and content; and language incompetence.* Basically, *students learn for assessment* and not mastery of the content.

When pearl identifies that a student has plagiarised, she calls the *student to the office to try to reason with them but in most cases, it is a fruitless exercise because there are no punitive measures put in place in particular at undergrad. Once I tried to capture their names on SMS, but it proved ineffective because till this day no one has called me or the student to verify the information that was captured. The SRC is also not helping; it is overprotective of the students, so I no longer bother to report it.*

Pearl believes that plagiarism is an ethical issue that is *taking something that belongs to someone without his or her permission is unacceptable and tantamount to stealing which is unethical that it is a punishable offense by law.* She outlines how plagiarism can be diminished and the integrity of the institution, academic and student can be sustained: *Teaching and emphasising concepts instead of skills and knowledge in lectures should be practiced to allow students to provide insightful interpretation of content learnt. Once students are able to provide meaning to content, they are less likely to regurgitate or consume raw facts from articles. Hence, assessment tasks become easier and more manageable and 'free' of plagiarism.* Pearl further reiterates the need for higher education institutions to *provide academic support to students who demonstrate incompetence in language.*