# Lecturers' stories of teaching: understanding hidden curriculum enactment in a private higher education institution[1]

Nina Rossouw, The Independent Institute of Education, South Africa and Stellenbosch University, South Africa

Liezel Frick, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

## ABSTRACT

*The hidden curriculum is embedded in all levels of education, and an integral part of higher education. However, the hidden curriculum remains a challenging concept to understand and define. The focus of this study was to gain insight into the lecturer dimension of the hidden curriculum, as research on the lecturer dimension of the hidden curriculum is limited, even more so in private higher education. A narrative approach was adopted and provided valuable stories and reflections from lecturers regarding the main areas that they enact the hidden curriculum in their classroom (developing graduate competencies, supplementing the formal curriculum, enhancing the student learning experience), the importance of lecturer reflection, and the relevance of the private nature of the higher education institutions. This study contributes to a more holistic understanding of the enactment of the hidden curriculum by lecturers in private higher education, and what lecturers experience the hidden curriculum to be.*

**Keywords:** hidden curriculum, teaching, narrative study, graduate competencies, private higher education

## INTRODUCTION

> *The hidden curriculum is that set of implicit messages relating to knowledge, values, norms of behaviour and attitudes that students experience in and through educational processes. These messages may be contradictory, non-linear, and punctuational and each student mediates the message in her/his own way* (Skelton, 1997:188).

The hidden curriculum has proven to be subjective and situational (Martin, 1976; Oztok, 2013 making it a highly flexible system. The meaning of the hidden curriculum can differ, depending on the institution and the kind of students it serves (Margolis, 2001; Thielsch, 2017). The hidden curriculum is referred to per institution seeing as that institutions function in a specific place and time, and within a specific setting (Kujawska-Lis & Lis-Kujawski, 2005). It follows that the structure and institutional goals of a private higher education institution might differ from those of public institutions (where the majority of published studies on the hidden curriculum are situated). There is currently limited literature on the hidden curriculum in specifically private higher education institutions (Kujawska-Lis & Lis-Kujawski, 2005).

---

110

The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning - Volume 19(1) / 2024
Formerly *The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning*

Lecturers play a crucial role in the manifestation of the hidden curriculum (Peters, 1966; Knowles, 1973; Bitzer & Botha, 2011; Tyson, 2014; Li, 2019). Yet current literature focuses more on the student experience of the hidden curriculum (Ahola, 2000; Pitts, 2003; Lempp & Seale, 2004; Blasco, 2012; Winter & Cotton, 2012; Çengel & Türkoğlu, 2016; Koutsouris, Mountford-Zimdars & Dingwall, 2021), even though the teaching element represents a crucial dimension of the hidden curriculum. Furthermore, many lecturers are not aware that the hidden curriculum exists, and the potential it can therefore bring to the classroom (Pitts, 2003; Bitzer & Botha, 2011; Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018). Lecturers' storied experiences of teaching in a private higher education institution formed the unit of analysis in this study. Allowing lecturers to reflect on their teaching through storytelling enabled a consideration as to how the hidden curriculum manifested in their teaching. The question that guided the study is: How do lecturers' stories of teaching deepen our understanding of the hidden curriculum in a private higher education institution?

### Conceptual background

A conceptual framework of the hidden curriculum in private higher education was developed (see Rossouw & Frick, 2023) and adopted for this study (refer to figure 1 below).

*Figure 1:*
*A conceptual framework of the hidden curriculum (Rossouw & Frick, 2023)*
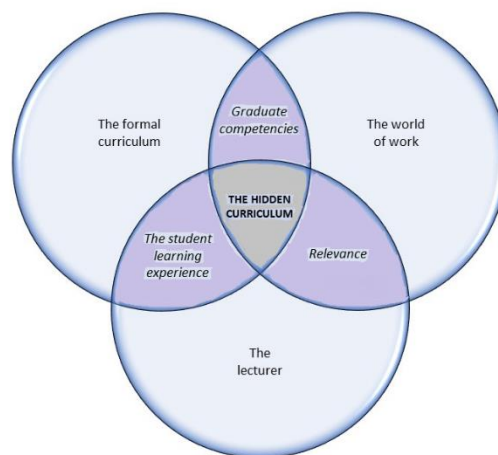


As can be seen from figure 1, the *hidden curriculum* is an irreplaceable element in the enactment of the curriculum, and a valuable resource in teaching and learning. The lecturer forms an integral part of the enactment of the curriculum. Furthermore, the world of work requires students to learn relevant skills and competencies. These skills and competencies can be demonstrated and incorporated into the classroom through hidden curriculum teaching. This illustrates the need to place the hidden curriculum in greater focus in higher education and make the hidden curriculum more explicit within higher education so that the hidden curriculum can be used more deliberately and effectively. Outward of the *hidden curriculum*, the shape that is formed between *graduate competencies*, *relevance*, and *the student learning experience* make up the student or student development in higher education. The *formal curriculum* refers to skills and knowledge that students should attain. These skills and knowledge should aid in the holistic development of students, be relevant, and foster lifelong learning. *The world of work* is a valuable tool in ascertaining the skills and knowledge that are crucial graduate competencies that students need to successfully enter the workplace. The world of work influences the relevance and responsiveness of the curriculum. There is an identified gap between the world of work and the curriculum, and the hidden curriculum can be used to bridge that gap. *The lecturer* demonstrates the important role that the lecturer

plays, over and above that of the formal curriculum. Lecturers with industry experience are able to identify, demonstrate and teach relevant skills to students through the hidden curriculum. The lecturer forms a central part of the social relationships in the classroom, the 'the principle of experience' and overall student development. Lecturers are valuable agents in the teaching of relevant competencies that students require to be professionally and personally fulfilled (Rossouw & Frick, 2023).

The framework (figure 1) illustrates the dynamic, relational and reciprocal nature of the hidden curriculum. The framework furthermore pointed out that the hidden curriculum is situational and subjective (Martin, 1976; Oztok, 2013), confirming the need to conduct empirical research in a specific contextual setting (a private higher education institution in this study).

Lecturer conduct is one of the key factors that determine the hidden curriculum (Peters, 1966; Knowles, 1973; Bitzer & Botha, 2011; Li, 2019). 'It is the teacher who teaches, not the official documents' (Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018: 490). The hidden curriculum contributes to a holistic learning experience, and it is confirmed to be a concept that is *taught* by the lecturer (Tyson, 2014; Li, 2019; Rossouw & Frick, 2023). Making it explicit through the mission and vision statement of the institution is not enough (Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018). Margolis (2001) and Yüksel (2005) confirm the importance of lecturers as a factor of the hidden curriculum, and this supports the value that lecturer input on the hidden curriculum experience can make.

Furthermore, necessary preparation for the world of work is demonstrated as an outcome of the lecturer enactment of the hidden curriculum (Rossouw & Frick, 2023). James (2018), although writing from the school perspective, provides valuable insight into the *teaching* of the hidden curriculum and that it is essential in developing the necessary graduate competencies. Employers require soft skills such as grit, resilience, self-mastery, communication, and emotional intelligence. Teaching social, emotional, and behavioural skills through the hidden curriculum (Margolis, 2001) can provide students with the competencies that they need to be professionally (and personally) fulfilled in the future (James, 2018).

Smith-Han (2013) illustrates how the hidden curriculum can be uncovered and be made more explicit to the lecturer. Reflection allows lecturers to think about what they are communicating to their students about their values and beliefs about their research, subject, students, and teaching (Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2004; Smith-Han, 2013; Thielsch, 2017). Ahola (2000) provides some feedback from students on lessons learnt from their lecturers. Students mention (hidden curriculum) skills such as curiosity, willingness to learn, critical thinking, self-control, perseverance, time management, and the ability to tolerate stress. These skills still form part of crucial graduate competencies in more recent times (Gray, 2016; James, 2018), and demonstrates the importance of the lecturer dimension of the hidden curriculum.

## METHODOLOGY

Skelton's (1997) definition of the hidden curriculum guides towards a personal research approach, acquiring insight into 'messages' that are conveyed in the classroom. A narrative inquiry was therefore appropriate in creating an understanding of lecturers' experiences of the hidden curriculum (Clandinin, Caine, Murphy & Steeves, 2015; O' Grady, Clandinin & O' Toole, 2018), as the literature reviewed earlier illustrated, lecturer reflection can contribute to an increased understanding of the hidden (Smith-Han, 2013). Increased understanding of the hidden curriculum can furthermore assist in it being utilised more deliberately and effectively in higher education.

Dewey's principle of experience (1938) (that underpins the concept of the hidden curriculum) is central to narrative inquiries as it allows for a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin et al., 2015) because it can use narratives to conceptualise experience. Clandinin and Huber (2010) describe 'stories' as a portal through which a person enters the world, and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made meaningful. Narrative inquiry offers reflective, creative,

and emancipatory possibilities within educational settings and therefore allowed participants to freely share their understanding and experiences (O'Grady et al., 2018).

Ten lecturers[2] shared their stories and reflected (often for the first time) about their hidden curriculum teaching. An overview was sent to each participant prior to the interview that outlined what they would be asked to share/reflect on. The aim of the open-ended interviews was to give a voice to the participants and allow them to share their experiences rather than just answering questions.[3] The notion of a narrative study is that knowledge originates from the participants' true life subjective experiences (as discussed above), and this is what gives it authenticity, depth and value. The conceptual framework of the hidden curriculum (Rossouw & Frick, 2023) (as discussed above) and the research question guided this narrative study (Creswell, 2007), which framed the process of re-storying and links amongst ideas mentioned by the participants.

The interviews were analysed to make meaning of the stories through narrative analysis to look for themes that emerged (Creswell, 2007; Fouché, Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021). Transcriptions were read, re-read and then handwritten mind maps were drawn up to make sense of the data. Certain key ideas mentioned by participants were summarised, and it was realised that there were distinct overlaps between participants' narratives, from where other mind maps were drawn – one for significant quotes/ideas from participants that illustrated their experiences, and another where main themes emerging from the narratives were presented. This process was refined until four main themes were identified (connected by certain key ideas/experiences from participants). The four themes were later reduced to three themes, to make the findings more presentable and to align with literature. The transcripts were utilised throughout typing up the data analysis, to ensure the focus was kept on the participants' views and experiences, and to never lose sight that *their* voices should be heard in the results of the study (Maree et al, 2016).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 10 participants'[4] experience of lecturing in private higher education ranged between six and 20 years, with four having lectured at public higher education institutions as well. Nine of the participants had worked in a professional environment before becoming a lecturer in their area of expertise. The participant group was made up of five males and five females ranging between 40 and 70 years of age. They taught in various modules in the fields of Education, English and Communication, Research Theory, and Economic and Management disciplines.

The process of data analysis by listening, re-listening, and mind mapping the participants' stories indicated three main themes regarding the manifestation of the hidden curriculum as discussed below.[5] In addition to the three themes (the development of graduate competencies to prepare students for the world of work; the hidden curriculum supplements the formal curriculum; the student learning experience (academic skills and holistic development), a further three aspects emerged from data analysis that are worth discussing. Firstly, the value of the storytelling process became evident in that it allowed lecturers to reflect on (and realise) what they have been doing in the classroom which underlines the benefit of

---

[2] Lecturers had to have at least five years of teaching experience in private higher education to partake in the study. They were purposively sampled. All 10 participants signed consent forms. Institutional permission was granted by the institution within which the study took place. Ethical clearance was obtained from the institution where the study originated.

[3] The concept of 'hidden curriculum' was not referred to during the interview, as the aim was not to test the participants' understanding of the concept, but rather their enactment of it.

[4] Pseudonyms were given to participants to protect their identity, and to enhance the personal nature of their experiences.

[5] The themes are discussed separately but during the analysis process, it was realised they do not stand in isolation from one another.

The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning - Volume 19 (1) / 2024
Formerly *The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning*

113

lecturer reflection (Kane et al., 2004). Secondly, the private nature of the higher education institution proved to be a relevant factor, aligning with earlier discussions on the differing institutional goals of private higher education (Kujawska-Lis & Lis-Kujawski, 2005).

Lastly, it is relevant to note that there were no references made to specific modules during the interviews, however, all the participants referred to the modules that they lecture during the interview, to provide *'necessary background'* (David). During storytelling, there were universal hidden curriculum elements that were discussed by the participants, however, all the participants related skills and examples back to the specific modules they teach. Given that various modules proved relevant to consider confirms the literature regarding the diverse (and unique) skills that the hidden curriculum enabled within different areas of study in higher education (McCabe & Trevino, 1995; Lempp & Seale, 2004; Yüksel, 2005; Hafferty & Castellani, 2009; Blasco, 2012; Ssebunnya, 2013; Martimianakis et al., 2015).

### Theme 1: The development of graduate competencies to prepare students for the world of work

The hidden curriculum is essential for the development of graduate competencies (Gray, 2016; James, 2018). The conceptual framework (Rossouw & Frick, 2023) also demonstrated the interplay between the hidden curriculum, the lecturer and the world of work. Nine participants referred to 'the post-university world' and preparing students for 'the world out there'. These nine participants either had current or previous experience working in industry. Brandon specifically mentioned that he tries to develop students who will be disciplined, hardworking employees or business owners,

> But I think the level of student that we try to cultivate, I would hope that they would leave university with a couple of life lessons that they have learnt. I think our role as lecturers to a point, is to navigate or help some students prepare themselves for the fact that it's hard out there…if you don't put the hard work into master your skills, just like we do with their modules, they're going to battle to develop any type of competitive edge in a very competitive world.

Hannah mentioned the importance of tact in the professional world, and through leading by example, she tries to instil a culture of accountability and responsibility in her classroom. These are skills that, according to Hannah, are important in the professional work environment. Penny referred to her industry experience quite often during the interview to draw on skills that she teaches her students:

> You know I worked in (industry) for many years, and I worked for a real monster and the one thing she taught me… that no matter what's happening around you, you know the show must go on, so just that type of resilience…at the end of the day in a work environment, nobody actually cares. You need to get the job done. You need to pass the exam, whether you like it or not.

The essence of the hidden curriculum, according to David, is *'moving beyond the theory',* into a state of *'thinking and being'.* Simon believes the hidden curriculum provides students with the tools to *remove blinkers, push boundaries* and *ask questions* – competencies that are needed in the real world, to enable students to contribute and make a difference in society. Aloha (2000) mention skills such as curiosity and a willingness to learn.

Thomas is responsible for a work-integrated learning (WIL) module that aims to prepare students for industry through real-life case studies.

> So often in (WIL) modules, I will actually refer to the hidden curriculum, I will say to students: … 'there are lots of things that you're going to learn inadvertently, and you may not even realise it, but when you look back…you would realise you have learned other skills like communication in a group, negotiation, leadership skills and so on.' So, I would specifically mention that WIL is a nice module to put on their CV for those specific reasons… (and when they are) in an interview

114

The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning - Volume 19 (1) / 2024
Formerly *The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning*

with someone…they will be able to talk about it (and)…be able to reflect on the skills that they've learned.

The conceptual framework of the hidden curriculum (Rossouw & Frick, 2023) is that there is a relationship between the 'world of work' and the 'hidden curriculum'. It was stated that the hidden curriculum is crucial in developing graduate competencies, to adequately prepare students for the 'world of work'. Three participants specifically addressed the knowledge and skills they acquired from industry as relevant when teaching the hidden curriculum. The 'world of work' and skills needed in industry, can, therefore, inform the teaching (and understanding) of the hidden curriculum. Furthermore, it is evident that lecturers with industry experience are valuable agents in developing and teaching students the skills required to enter the workplace. The hidden curriculum, therefore, is an important element in developing graduate competencies (Gray, 2016; James, 2018; Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018). Participants' stories illustrated the importance of the teaching (lecturer element) of the hidden curriculum in preparing students for the world after higher education. The literature illustrated (Margolis, 2001; Yüksel, 2005; Smith-Han, 2013; Li, 2019) and the interviews confirmed that the lecturer has the potential to utilise the hidden curriculum to equip students with relevant knowledge and to develop much-needed graduate competencies to prepare them for life and enabling them to become contributing citizens to society.

### Theme 2: The hidden curriculum supplements the formal curriculum

Four participants specifically mentioned certain aspects they teach their students to supplement the formal curriculum. Incorporating these aspects that are lacking from the formal curriculum, forms part of what the participants understand to be the teaching of a hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum enables a more wholesome curriculum and has been illustrated as an important dimension of a curriculum (Bitzer & Botha, 2011). The main areas that were identified regarding 'supplementing' the formal curriculum were reading, writing and computer literacy skills, referencing skills, engagement, and practically implementing the theoretical concepts that were taught.

Ursula, teaching an English literature module, told me that her most important aim was to teach students how to write properly.

> So, my focus has always been on teaching students writing skills. I believe it is very important and lacking in the curriculum. Writing skills are very important, not just reading skills…students tend to think doing a BA and doing English as a module is about liking to read, and enjoying books, but it is also about writing and how to work with the literature. Students really battle with this.

Nicole lectures education students, and for her, the practical element of *how to teach* and *how to transfer knowledge* is missing from the curriculum.

> They (the students) have the theory, but they don't have the practical way of transferring that information over in a class. They haven't had the opportunity to practice that in a class…the first year I taught it, they (the students) said to me that there is a lack, they feel there's a huge gap in their knowledge, on didactically how to teach, and so I changed the way (I teach)…I give them advice and I show them different ways of engaging and teaching, (also) class discipline, ideas on how to engage with their students, how to win over their students so that they have good discipline within their classroom.

The hidden curriculum incorporates elements into the classroom that the formal curriculum often overlooks (Bitzer & Botha, 2011). The conceptual framework (Rossouw & Frick, 2023) also demonstrated the hidden curriculum manifests where the curriculum and the lecturer meet. This meeting furthermore gives rise to the student learning experience being cultivated (see theme 3 below). Participants' stories demonstrated that the hidden curriculum can be utilised to supplement the formal curriculum, in areas

where lecturers feel their formal curriculum is lacking. It furthermore emphasizes the hidden curriculum as an irreplaceable and valuable resource in how the curriculum plays out in the classroom (Li, 2019).

### Theme 3: The student learning experience (academic skills and holistic development)

All 10 participants discussed the importance of the student learning experience – developing students both academically and holistically. The hidden curriculum contributes to a holistic learning experience (Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018). In discussing student development, a few participants mentioned the phrases *growing as a person* (Zara), *wholesome education* (Penny), and *holistic development* (Nicole). Some participants discussed academic development while addressing shortcomings in the formal curriculum, and some connected the academic and holistic development as part of preparing students for the world of work. However, not all participants integrated the abovementioned themes, and during analysis, it emerged as a separate theme. Specific skills regarding academic development mentioned were: knowledge contextualisation, reading and writing abilities, comprehension, work etiquette, and the ability to think critically, analyse, evaluate and problem-solve. The main areas that participants addressed when discussing the holistic development of students are confidence, respect, worldviews, punctuality, time management, resilience, a culture of joy, and being an ethical person and good citizen. Participants also provided valuable examples of how they try to instil and develop these in their students. These skills overlap with skills mentioned by students when asked what they learnt from their lecturers through the hidden curriculum (Aloha, 2000).

Contextualisation was a concept that four participants regarded as important when teaching their modules. Ursula contextualises the curriculum, by educating students regarding the surrounding political background and history and reminding students that books do not exist in isolation. Lucas and Penny hoped that students would be able to view work done in class in a broader context.

> I hope that they can see work-related things in a broader context. So not just 'oh this is marketing, oh this is finance' … to look at the bigger picture… (Penny)

Simon spoke more broadly about contextualising knowledge:

> By making concepts come alive to the students, they bridge the conceptual gap between theory and the real world. I think the problem with a lot of educational processes is the inability for us as educational institutions in general, to be able to say this is the theory, and it doesn't always work like that in practice … there's only X number of examples you can have in a textbook … the world is alive with different scenarios, consistent different scenarios.

David realises that reading and writing skills are crucial for students to master in the module that he teaches:

> The problem is that students need those skills of reading and writing...so that aspect of the hidden curriculum, is therefore something I'm very aware of, this idea that it's about reading and writing. These are skills that students don't necessarily enjoy…so, with that in mind, when I was designing a course… it's always a matter of getting the students to <u>do</u> something…and that <u>doing</u> aspect is, of course, the reading aspect and the writing aspect.

Reading and approaching questions correctly was mentioned by Penny and Thomas

> There are lots of discussions around what a good answer looks like. Never mind what the question is. What does a good answer look like? What do you need to bring into that answer? So, for me, that is the hidden curriculum, the approach or way of going about trying to solve the problem and to get to a good answer. (Thomas)

116

The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning - Volume 19 (1) / 2024
Formerly *The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning*

True understanding and comprehension are aspects that were specifically addressed by Brandon and Lucas. They both stressed the fact they do not just want students to *'parrot study'* (Brandon) or rote learn the work, they emphasise truly grasping the relevance of the work that students are doing.

For Penny and Brandon, work etiquette and commitment are important skills for students to be successful in their studies.

> Look…things don't fall in your lap, and there is no such thing as a free lunch. So, you need to put the work in. I must be honest … in academics, trying to study, there is not much room for laziness. You are not going to get away forever. So, I try to motivate them to do more than just sort of the bare minimum. (Penny)

> I always start my very first lecture of the semester and I'll say to the students: 'If you're not willing to put in 200 hours of practice into the examples and the questions we're going to do, then consider yourself under pressure to pass this module, not to get 80%, but even to pass it'…the amount of work you put in will determine your final mark and it's as simple as that. I always say there are no shortcuts. You either do the work, and there's no excuse for you not to do it. Or you can look at your marks at the end of the semester and say, 'I should have….' (Brandon)

Critical thinking skills of problem-solving, analysis, and evaluation were competencies that five participants aim to teach their students. Lucas and David addressed the 'problem-solving' element by referring to the importance of students using feedback effectively to enable them to find their own solutions. Simon, Brandon, and Thomas emphasised the ability to evaluate and critically analyse information.

> I think what we're doing in teaching and linking to real-life problems allows them to expand their own critical thinking analysis. Because we're here to teach students to critically think and analyse. These theories are good, and you can always learn a theory in a rote learn fashion, but if you can't apply it, you can't critically analyse things. Then I think we haven't done our job and I think an implied component of this hidden curriculum is the ability to give those students critical analysis or analytical framework. (Simon)

Brandon and Simon furthermore explained their goal at the end of the semester is that students have the ability to ask 'why questions'. Brandon, teaching quantitative modules, explains:

> I think we are very quick to throw the textbook at a student. We are very quick to justify why the answer in the textbook is A, B, and C. But the essence that we want the student to walk away with at the end of the semester (and with a degree), is why?…(using a tax module as an example) Why do we calculate income tax? etc. Instead of just teaching them a calculation…And the same goes for (other modules). So, every number, I will say, tells a story of a particular important relevance in relation to business.

Zara and Hannah highlighted the importance of cultivating a 'safe space' environment in their classroom to enable the holistic development of their students.

> I make it clear to them that I'm here to help and everything that I do is to support them. And that we need to create a safe space. And yeah, I'm not sure everyone will do that, but I assume I think that's my personality. But I want my students to know it is OK to talk to me. (Zara)

David promotes a culture of *trial and error*, and *it is ok to be wrong*.

> … This is something I also tell the students when they're doing research … it's OK to make a mistake. That is why I am here. The book cannot tell you if you're making a mistake, but as a lecturer, I can tell you what you are doing, and point you to where you are wrong. They (the students) are terrified of being wrong. And … education is not about being right, it is about

The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning - Volume 19 (1) / 2024
Formerly *The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning*

117

learning what you **don't** know…that ability to understand that being wrong is not bad, and making a mistake is not a failure.

Five participants discussed the importance of developing confidence in students and the importance of students' ability to articulate their ideas. Lucas mentioned the learning and growth path in re-doing something and the confidence gained in learning from your mistakes.

Hannah and Zara promote confidence through public speaking in their classrooms.

> I make sure to tell them that the educational space is a space for them to try things out. This is where they can showcase what they know without being reprimanded. You know, this is where you do your trial and error, and we need to give each other the space for that trial and error. (Hannah)

> I make them go and stand in the front (of the class)…they have to start feeling confident about getting their message out there, having a voice. To me, probably the most important thing is public speaking in their class… I want them to go out in the world and really contribute to society and feel confident with who they are as a person. (Zara)

Nicole shared a moving story about one of her students and the confidence skills that he gained from her teaching:

> I had a student from Angola who could barely speak English, and he had to do an oral in the classroom and he said to me: 'I can't do this oral in front of the classroom'…and he really struggled, but he did well, and he managed to stumble through it. (This was quite a couple of years ago), and this year he contacted me … he said: 'You remember that time you made me speak in front of the class? So, you know I was so scared, but I just want to tell you part of my job now is I have to do public speaking … and the way that you dealt with me that time and explained to me how important it is to be able to do public speaking …' So that was the biggest reward, this student came back out of nowhere and came and told me that I had helped him. That is something that I am passionate about, is to develop each student's confidence in themselves.

Respect is an aspect that Hannah, Simon, and Zara regard as important in their classroom. Zara discussed respect together with cultivating a culture of inclusivity, equality, and dignity in her classroom:

> I want them to show respect…to themselves, to their peers, to the environment…so respect, diversity. Having respect for other people, gender issues, cultural differences…I don't just want to teach them book knowledge. I want them to be good citizens of the world and caring people.

Simon extended the notion of respect in the classroom by referring to perspectives. Bergenhenegouwen (1987) referred to worldview as one aspect of the hidden curriculum. Simon emphasized that we have limited perspectives, and we have our perceptions, backgrounds, and experiences that should be kept in mind when communicating with students:

> …respect for your students in the way you deal with them in terms of questions…students come from a variety of heterogeneous backgrounds. And one thing I have learned (that I try to show students) is that one's own background is only a very narrow stratum or sliver of the world out there.

Ursula and Thomas referred to perspectives to illustrate to students that there are different viewpoints, and multiple perspectives to consider when they are developing an argument.

118

The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning - Volume 19 (1) / 2024
Formerly *The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning*

> If I'm approaching any kind of situation (in life), I need to maybe just take a step back and look at it and go OK, well, how should I try and solve this problem? Should I only rely on maybe one viewpoint for example? (Thomas)

Time management, planning, and accountability are aspects that were focused on by Simon, Brandon, Thomas, and Penny. Hannah illustrated the importance of time management and accountability by sharing a story about illustrating responsibility and accountability to a student who missed an appointment and failed to inform her. Thomas shared Hannah's views:

> I always tell students… if you want to be successful, I don't think you essentially have to be incredibly smart or intelligent, but you definitely have to work hard and be diligent in terms of what you're doing, and…(then) your chance of being successful and passing and even getting a very high mark is very, very high in my opinion.

Penny referred to grit and resilience as necessary attributes.

> You have to have resilience, motivation…because you can't give in to your despair…whether you are having a (bad) day or a good day, it actually doesn't matter. You still put on your PR face and you get on with it. That's what it's about.

Hannah and Penny attempt to cultivate a culture of joy, fun, and embracing life in their classrooms. Nicole places a focus on ethics with her education students:

> …it's also about being an ethical person. I find it sometimes a little bit of a challenge for them to understand. The ethics around dealing with other people. I keep on trying to get them to understand that you are not only just working with the academics of a child, but you are working with the whole child.

Participants' stories regarding the student learning experience provided depth to the understanding of the lecturer enactment of the hidden curriculum. Lecturers demonstrate the hidden curriculum through messages conveyed to students (Portelli, 1993; Yüksel, 2005). Literature furthermore illustrated that attributes such as confidence, intellectual reasoning, ethics, motivation, and commitment are developed through the hidden curriculum (Ahola, 2000; Li, 2019). The participants' stories confirmed the importance of the hidden curriculum in the student learning experience to enable academic and holistic development and provided valuable insight into how lecturers cultivate it in their classrooms.

### The relevance of private higher education

It is practice for the private higher education institution within which this study was situated, to employ lecturers with industry experience. Four participants mentioned their industry experience as an important dimension when discussing and reflecting on their teaching of the hidden curriculum. Simon has taught in both private and public higher education institutions (for the last 14 years), as well as working in the corporate sector for more than 20 years. He believes private higher education institutions are ahead of public institutions in the sense that lecturers bring skills into the classroom from their formal job (industry).[6] His experience is that *we can link theory to practice better*, and that *we can make the theory come alive* by connecting the work to real-world examples that the lecturer has experienced.

> But also, as a part of the hidden curriculum, I suspect will be the way that you can flesh out a theoretical concept or framework with real-life problems that become so real and tangible to

---

[6] It is relevant to note that this is Simon's viewpoint from working in both public and private higher education institutions, and his views are related to the subject discipline that he lectures.

The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning - Volume 19 (1) / 2024
Formerly *The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning*

119

them that they can start linking and hanging concepts in terms of what you're telling them. And that is where I think that a private tertiary institution often is ahead of the curve from the publics.[7] (Simon)

Penny and Brandon shared Simon's views regarding the experience that lecturers bring into the classroom that bridges the gap between higher education and the world of work. Penny, with 15 years of teaching experience in private higher education, mentioned an important dimension that she brings to the classroom: *What I bring is work experience … I can kind of convert (the theory) into real-life experiences.* It is evident that the hidden curriculum in the private higher education institution is influenced by industry-experienced lecturers who have the ability to bring industry skills to the classroom and use examples to make the theory 'real'.

The public or private nature of institutions was not referred to during the interviews,[8] yet it became clear that the nature of the institution was relevant to consider. For Hannah, the nature of private higher education institutions was relevant to consider,

> …also, who are we kidding here? This is a private institution, so it's not cheap to study. So, to milk it for what it's worth. To have my students get in there and really get something out of it besides the actual content that they have to go through.

Nicole, having taught in both public and private higher education institutions, believes that the smaller class sizes in private higher education institutions aid the transferral of her hidden curriculum teaching because she can provide her students with more individual attention and feedback.

### The reflection and storytelling experience
Four lecturers mentioned that the reflection and storytelling process was valuable to them. Simon mentioned how reflecting on his teaching made him realise:

> My own pushing of the boundaries was now initially instituted by you asking me to reflect on an implied curriculum. I've never thought about it, so I've never realised how what I've done was implied…As a lecturer, who enjoys what they're doing, you do try your best, but you don't realise that there's actually a framework of implied action behind those things, so this had allowed me to reflect on it. And to think that 'yes, there is some important stuff that I haven't got right' and now I can try at least be more aware of it and use it more efficiently.

David realised how much 'confidence students gained in being wrong and then learning from their mistakes', *which is something I've actually never thought about (until now).* Hannah and Simon came to a similar realisation, that reflection on the hidden curriculum of their teaching will assist them to adapt, develop and improve their teaching of the hidden curriculum.

The participants' stories confirmed the notion in literature (Pitts, 2003; Smith-Han, 2013) that the hidden curriculum is shaped and informed by lecturer reflection, and lecturer reflection on the hidden curriculum influences our understanding of the hidden curriculum. The participants' stories made it evident that reflection is a valuable experience (Kane et al., 2004). Telling their stories allowed participants the

---

[7] This furthermore highlights the role that institutional contexts plays in our understanding of the hidden curriculum and serves as justification to research the hidden curriculum in other contexts (such as public institutions) to ascertain how it might be different from private higher education institutions.

[8] The study did not want to influence the participants' narratives by referring to the nature of the institution because the interview questions guided the participants in that direction (that might have caused them to draw a comparison between public and private higher education institutions). Instead, the study wanted the participants' experiences and narratives to come across freely. Furthermore, private higher education forms part of the participants' status quo. It was interesting to see however, that the nature of private higher education was still a dimension worthy of discussing when the participants reflected on the hidden curriculum.

opportunity to reflect on their practice, and identify the areas that they can adapt, develop, and improve their hidden curriculum teaching.

## CONCLUSION

The process of reflection and storytelling by lecturers enabled an enhanced understanding regarding their experience of the hidden curriculum in their classroom. Through telling their stories, lecturers were able to provide valuable insight into their understanding of the hidden curriculum and the skills that it can develop in students, as well as their experience in teaching these skills and competencies to students. Storytelling proved to be a valuable experience to enable reflection by lecturers to increase awareness and understanding of the hidden curriculum. The study enables a more holistic understanding of the hidden curriculum as the lecturer's view has been a dimension that is lacking in current research. The areas identified by lecturers provide valuable information regarding the enactment of the hidden curriculum and highlight the potential of utilising the hidden curriculum in higher education. Increased awareness and understanding of the hidden curriculum can aid in increased efficiency of the teaching of skills and competencies that lecturers aim to develop through the hidden curriculum. It was discussed earlier that literature pointed to the hidden curriculum being highly flexible, subjective, and situational, and this was confirmed to be the case in the results of the study, as it was clear that the nature of the institution, the module taught, the individual lecturer's beliefs and experiences all played a role in how they understood the hidden curriculum.

More studies with empirical research on the hidden curriculum within specifically private higher education institutions are necessary to understand the enactment of the hidden curriculum in a different type of institution with different institutional goals. It would also be valuable to conduct studies on the hidden curriculum within specific academic disciplines, to gain a further understanding of how the hidden curriculum manifests within different areas of study.

## REFERENCES

Ahola, S. (2000). Hidden Curriculum in Higher Education: something to fear for or comply to? In *Innovations in Higher Education conference.* 1-21. Helsinki: University of Turku.

Bergenhenegouwen, G. (1987). Hidden Curriculum in the University. *Higher Education, 16*(5), 535-543.

Bitzer, E. & Botha, N. (2011). *Curriculum inquiry in South African Higher Education.* (1st ed.). Stellenbosch: SUN PRESS. https://doi:10.18820/9781920338671

Blasco, M. (2012). Aligning the hidden curriculum of Management Education with PRME: An inquiry-based framework. *Journal of Management Education, 36*(3), 364-388.

Çengel, M. & Türkoğlu, A. (2016). Analysis through hidden curriculum of peer relations in two different classes with positive and negative classroom climates. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice, 16*(6), 1893-1919. https://doi:10.12738/estp.2016.6.0103

Clandinin, D.J. (2006). Narrative inquiry: A methodology for studying lived experience. *Research Studies in Music Education* 27(1), 44-54. https://doi:10.1177/1321103X060270010301

Clandinin, D.J. & Huber, J. (2010). Narrative Inquiry. In B. McGaw, E. Baker, & P.P. Peterson (Eds.) *International encyclopedia of education*, 1-26. New York, NY, US: Elsevier.

Clandinin, J., Caine, V., Murphy, M.S. & Steeves, P. (2015). Places of Practice : Learning to Think Narratively. *Narrative Works, 5*(1), 22-39.

Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches.* Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Inc.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience And Education*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Fouché, C.B., Strydom, H. & Roestenburg, W.J.H. (2021). *Research at grass roots: For the social sciences and human services professions*. (5th ed.). Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Gray, A. (2016). *The 10 skills you need to thrive in the Fourth Industrial Revolution*. Retrieved 29 November 2019 from https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-10-skills-you-need-to-thrive-in-the-fourth-industrial-revolution/

Hafferty, F.W. & Castellani, B. (2009). The hidden curriculum: a theory of medical education. In C. Brosnan & B. S. Turner (Eds.) *Handbook of the Sociology of Medical Education*. New York: Routledge. https://doi:10.4324/9780203875636

James, B. D. (2018). Why you need to know about the 'hidden curriculum', and how to teach it. Retrieved 6 September 2019 from https://www.tes.com/news/why-you-need-know-about-hidden-curriculum-and-how-teach-it-sponsored-article

Kane, R., Sandretto, S. & Heath, C. (2004). An investigation into excellent tertiary teaching: Emphasising reflective practice. *Higher Education 47*(3), 283-310. https://doi:10.1023/B:HIGH.0000016442.55338.24

Knowles, M. (1973). *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*. Houston: Gulf Publishing Company.

Koutsouris, G., Mountford-Zimdars, A. & Dingwall, K. (2021). The 'ideal' higher education student: understanding the hidden curriculum to enable institutional change. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education 26*(2), 131-147. https://doi:10.1080/13596748.2021.1909921

Kujawska-Lis, E. & Lis-Kujawski, A. (2005). Two Cheaters' Game. The Hidden Curriculum in Private (non-public) Institutions of Higher Education. In M. Misztal & Mariusz Trawiński (Eds.) *Studies in Teacher Education: Psychopedagogy*. Krakow: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pedagogicznej.

Lempp, H. & Seale, C. (2004). The hidden curriculum in undergraduate medical education: qualitative study of medical students' perceptions of teaching. *British Medical Journal, 329*(7469), 770-773.

Li, H. (2019). The Significance and Development Approaches of Hidden Curriculum in College English Teaching. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research,* 286, 262-265.

Maree, K., Creswell, J. W., Ebersohn, L., Eloff, I., Ferreira, R., Ivankova, N. V., Jansen, J. D., Nieuwenhuis, J., Pietersen, J. & Clark, V. L. P. (2016). *First steps in research*. K. Maree (Ed.) Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Margolis, E. (2001). *The Hidden Curriculum in Higher Education*. E. Margolis (Ed.) New York, NY, US: Routledge.

Martimianakis, M. A., Michalec, B., Lam, J., Cartmill, C., Taylor, J. S. & Hafferty, F. W. (2015). Humanism, the hidden curriculum, and educational reform: A scoping review and thematic analysis. *Academic Medicine, 90*(11), S5–S13. https://doi:10.1097/ACM.0000000000000894

Martin, J. R. (1976). What Should We Do with a Hidden Curriculum When We Find One? *Curriculum Inquiry, 6*(2), 135-151. https://doi:10.1080/03626784.1976.11075525

McCabe, D. L. & Trevino, L. K. (1995). Cheating Among Business Students: a Challenge for Business Leaders and Educators. *Journal of Management Education, 19*(2), 205-218. https://doi:10.1177/105256299501900205

122

The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning - Volume 19 (1) / 2024
Formerly *The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning*

O' Grady, G., Clandinin, D. J. & O' Toole, J. (2018). Engaging in educational narrative inquiry: making visible alternative knowledge. *Irish Educational Studies, 37*(2), 153-157. https://doi:10.1080/03323315.2018.1475149

Orón Semper, J. V. & Blasco, M. (2018). Revealing the Hidden Curriculum in Higher Education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 37*(5) 481-498. https://doi:10.1007/s11217-018-9608-5

Oztok, M. (2013). *The hidden curriculum of online learning: Discourses of whiteness, social absence, and inequity*. Toronto: University of Toronto.

Peters, R. S. (1966). *Ethics and Education*. New York: Routledge.

Pitts, S. (2003). What do Students Learn when we Teach? An investigation of the 'hidden' curriculum in a university music department. *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education, 2*(3), 281-292.

Portelli, J. P. (1993). Exposing the hidden curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 25*(4), 343-358.

Rossouw, N. & Frick, L. (2023). A conceptual framework for uncovering the hidden curriculum in private higher education. *Cogent Education, 10*(1) https://10.1080/2331186X.2023.2191409

Skelton, A. (1997). Studying hidden curricula: Developing a perspective in the light of postmodern insights. *Curriculum Studies, 5*(2), 177-193.

Smith-Han, K. (2013). The Hidden Curriculum - what else are students learning from your teaching? Dunedin: University of Otago. Retrieved 28 April 2020 from https://www.academia.edu/5726516/The_hidden_curriculum_what_else_are_students_learning_from_your_teaching_p_21

Ssebunnya, G. M. (2013). Beyond the hidden curriculum: The challenging search for authentic values in medical ethics education. *South African Journal of Bioethics and Law, 6*(2), 48. https://doi:10.7196/sajbl.267

Thielsch, A. (2017). Approaching the Invisible: Hidden Curriculum and Implicit Expectations in Higher Education. *Journal for Higher Education Development, 12*(4), 167-187.

Tyson, C. (2014). *The Hidden Curriculum*. Retrieved 28 April 2020 from https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/08/04/book-argues-mentoring-programs-should-try-unveil-colleges-hidden-curriculum

Winter, J. & Cotton, D. (2012). Making the hidden curriculum visible: Sustainability literacy in higher education. *Environmental Education Research, 18*(6), 783-796.

Yüksel, S. (2005). Kohlberg and Hidden Curriculum in Moral Education: An Opportunity for Students' Acquisition of Moral Values in the New Turkish Primary Education Curriculum. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice, 5*(2), 329-339.

123

The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning - Volume 19 (1) / 2024
Formerly *The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning*