Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study. And thank you for signing the participant consent form and completing your demographic information. This interview will be recorded and then transcribed. Your identity will be anonymized in the transcription of this interview, as well as any other information that may identify any other person or institution. You're welcome to switch off your camera or keep it on and you may at any point withdraw from this study.

Understood, thank you.

Perfect. Do you use blended learning in your classroom?

Yes, we do at my institution. We we do adopt as approach we have done so since the start of COVID-19. And we are continuing with that intended approach for going forward into 2022 as well. However, for my my subjects, which are more on the business side of things, it is about a third roughly across my classes, we would have an online lecture, the rest are on campus to try and encourage students to come back post lockdown in South Africa. It's going to be a little bit more tailored at my institution going forward for 2022. Because we recognise that some subjects require more on campus time and that the students are not necessarily benefiting from being away from campus. So a little bit more on the practical side of things and more creative side of things as well.

So how would you define blended learning?

I see it as being multimodal. So a combination between on campus lecturing and

virtual lectures in a virtual classroom. As well as, depending on the subject being taken, and the kind of assessment points, one to one sessions with students, because we tend to have a smaller sample or you know, smaller classrooms on my particular campus. So those are offered either face to face in person on campus or via virtual meeting, like in the virtual classroom, or something like Google meet. Just in normal circumstances, not so much during COVID, obviously, with different restrictions, and from a safety and security perspective. Again, depending on the subject, sometimes it would also involve sort of like field visits. So for example, Retail Management, I would normally take my students into store so that they could have a real world experience and conduct a teaching session in that environment sort of outside of the classroom.

So previously, you said that you had about 1/3 of online classes or virtual classes and two thirds of classroom classes or campus classes. When you think of your online classes, what what three things do you tend to do in class?

Um, I tried to emulate as far as possible, the normal experience. So when we started last year, in this blended approach, where it's you know, and by that I mean, online and on campus specifically. There wasn't a lot of time to sort of shift mentality in terms of what is best practice in the online space. So certainly in the beginning, it was almost just literally taking what you do in the classroom and just doing it, just in the virtual classroom. But over time you realise from an engagement perspective, you can't do that. And really best practice and things like that. So the three things that are still important, I think are making sure that there is at least a decent significant part is still an actual lecture, where you are where I'm taking students through a set of slides, covering the core themes that I have allocated for that particular section, for sorry for that session. It involves discussion, and where possible open questions to encourage students to engage and to have time to think about something and then reply back and contribute to a discussion on the topic. So, I would encourage, a lot of them are quite shy about speaking out virtually in front of the classmates, but much more comfortable on campus. So because of that, and I say to them, feel free to raise your hand and take the mic to voice your response to the question posed, or I say, if you're not comfortable with that, then write up your answers in the chatbox. So I allow more time for that. And in the third element that I do try to build in quite regularly is setting a task, for example that they need to either go to, to materials I've saved on to the system for them to review, or to follow a link to an online article or to watch a YouTube video. And I give them time to go away and do that and reflect on on a set of core questions, and then bring them back to discuss those questions. So those are kind of the three main points that I that I tried to build in.

Okay, let's first do the classroom and then I'll I'll cycle back to these ones. So in a typical in a typical campus face to face class, what would a typical lesson look like?

It's it's kind of difficult to say that. I teach across first year, second year and third year. And I find not everything would work the same on the different levels. So I find that for first years, they don't engage as much in terms of talking. It takes a long time for them to get comfortable. Certainly this year, with last year being online for the for the matric year, for example, they kind of gotten out of the habit of interacting and feeling confident in expressing themselves. They're kind of that fear of being wrong, or having the wrong answer or, you know, being made to look stupid by a comment or a question. So I find that I tend to teach more for them. So there's quite, I would say the majority of the time is actually lecturing. So again, with a base method of PowerPoint slides, and then discussing it. So me going through the themes and teaching it but then obviously asking them questions as we go along to try relate it to real world examples, to try and help them understand and engage with the material a bit more. And again, where possible, I involve other class discussion, or I set an activity, which is an in class an exercise, basically. So that can range from, again, reading an article that might be on the system, it might be playing a game. It might be getting them to do mini presentations. So instead of having them go away to to read an article and then discuss it, maybe it's to teach the rest of the class what the article was saying in terms of, you know, adding to our insights and knowledge around a particular theme. And, yeah, those sorts of things. And then I kind of find that as they get a bit older for second year and third year, they're just better equipped or more confident in themselves to participate a little bit more. So I tend to again, still use my PowerPoint slides with the key themes, but I would try to push more of the time back on to them, where I get them to, to answer questions, maybe breakaway into pairs or trios or pods, for example, wherever they're sitting in the classroom and depending on the size of the class and they will do the readings or the exercise together, discuss, and then again, give me the viewpoints or present to the class. Or for example, well, if we've got a debate happening, then they might take the one side. And then another group takes the other side. And then they discuss the two different perspectives on a theme, for example. So I'm able to ask more open questions to, to particularly the third year is more reflective. And again, that does speak to the subjects that I teach personally as well. So I have themes more like project management, consumer behaviour, retail management and organisational studies, basically organisational psychology. So again, in the subject matter that I teach also allows me to open that discussion element, rather than say, for example, having to teach in the rules of stats, maths, accounting, and ecos, for example.

Okay, I'm going to cycle back to online. And I'm going to summarise for you what I understood with what you said, and correct me if I'm wrong. So your base for online is a is a lecturing-style, where you use a slideshow, and that is to get content across. And then you would actually ask for participation where you can where you would ask open ended questions, for instance, or you would want to have some sort of a discussion. But you allow your students to choose the method of participation. So they can either either either raise a hand, or they can put off the mute button, or they can write from the chat. And then a third thing is you sometimes give them a task to do. And it sounded to me like that task doesn't necessarily happen in the online classroom. It's more like, they get a link, they go look at the YouTube video or the article. And then they come back to class. And then perhaps there's some sort of a discussion.

Yeah. Okay. There's a couple of reasons for that. So firstly, before I forget, the other thing that I do as a method is if I want their answers is I can open up the whiteboard that is available, so they can scribble type text, so they can respond that way. Especially if I'm asking a question, that's more of a brainstorm. So I was like, what words do you associate? Or what do you understand this, this, this, this, this particular theme to me, or this particular word, and I'll get them to brainstorm around that as an example. So just before I forget that, and the the other things that I just that I wanted to build on as examples of other things that I can do is, sometimes when I'm asking them to do a task, it's by themselves, or sometimes I'm getting them to go away in pairs, or many groups as well. And so I'll use the function where we can create smaller groups on [company specific programme deleted] as well, and perhaps give them different things to look at. So again, if in one of my modules, we look at different motivational theories and the models, so I would get pairs, for example, to take one of those models, go away, discuss it themselves, look for information online, and in their course materials, put that together in terms of a two to three minutes overview, where they have to create one or two slides, and then bring them back to the main classroom after a period of time, say half an hour to 45 minutes depending on the task, and get them to present the findings and sort of teach the rest of the class or flip the classroom that way. So so the reasons partly for that are also because hearing my voice, and looking at PowerPoint slides for say a three hour session can be very boring. And I'm very conscious of disengagement with the students, especially because they're spending so much more time on online these days. So it's also doing those sorts of exercises just helps to break the pace up a little bit and keep it fresh. So it's by getting them to go away and do something, it's changing the tempo, the pace, and shifting the brains to doing different things as opposed to just listening and staring at a PowerPoint slide. So it helps with engagement, it helps with energy. And when I'm saying go away for half an hour and then come back. It's also kind of on the assumption that the task would maybe takes 20 minutes to do and then they've got a 10 minute window to go and have a break. And just refresh and revise to come back and focus on the next part of the lecture.

When you use lecturing, so the slideshow for the content, what is the reason that you would use, specifically a slideshow?

Do you want the honest answers? Okay, so so number one, not everyone's coming to sessions. First and foremost, we are struggling big time, not just at my institution, but I know, nationally globally. Students say they prefer the virtual classroom because they can come in and it's more convenient, they don't have to come to campus, it's safer, and so on and so forth. But they also kind of know that they they have these PowerPoint slides that they can refer back to, because those are required by my institution. So yeah, it's a I use them because I have to, but number one, because the requirements, but I'm used to using PowerPoint presentations, because I worked in corporate before I became a lecturer. So that's my comfort. When it comes to lecturing style, it's good to have that base of reference of information. The slides are also uploaded afterwards. So the students can refer back to those materials as summaries of the the course material that they have to then learn for tests, assignments, and so on and so forth. And yeah, and I think also, because, again, from an engagement and and a comprehension perspective, as well, it's good. If you know that then we've got that mix of different information sources and methods of conveying that information as well, because some kids are more audio, some learn better from reading something on a screen or seeing it on a PowerPoint slide. So and also some are better at absorbing information if they've gone away and had to, again, present it back to the class or have an opinion on it. So I'm trying, as far as possible, to engage all different kinds of students in a way that they will absorb that information. But I think it's also important because of poor attendance, these days that we do have this backup of a deck of PowerPoint slides that they can refer to when they're going away and learning information on their own.

I want to go back to this discussion that's online. And they can unmute, they can chat. And you also mentioned how the whiteboard application, do you find that your students unmute themselves?

Only a handful. So again, that speaks to natural extroverts as you would in any group, I think they're the most comfortable. Some students are, you know, having to type a lot with making notes in class as well. And I think just they just prefer it's, it might be easier for them to voice as opposed to write up a full answer in the chatbox as well. And again, it depends on the kinds of questions that I'm asking. So if I'm asking a straight hands up for you know, who thinks, you know, who would write this or that? Who, who would read the other one as the top option, you know, in that case, then I just use the the poll function very quickly with a click to say yes or no, or an option one or option two, we can get the results straight away in their class session. I don't use it so often, again, because of the nature of the content and the things that I'm teaching. So because my, my questions are often a little bit more self reflective, more challenging, or critical thinking, particularly a third year. I just find that sometimes people are just, they find it easy to voice, their response back as opposed to having to type up long things in the chatbox.

You said sometimes they can just choose yes or no..?

Yeah, so it's, it's another function of the platform that we use, where you can ask, you can set up a mini poll as part of your session where you can write a question, you can quickly give options for responses. You can make it like a multiple choice or a yes or no response. And then once you post that, it goes by very quickly, and then the students can respond back. So it's effective as a way to again break the pace and get them to concentrate again and to engage in an activity or interact with you. I don't use it as often as I have in the past though. Again. I had more first and second year subjects last year. And then I can gauge to see quite quickly who's comfortable. But yeah, again, third year subjects, I'm asking a more questions like, you know, how do you how do you manage your stress? Or how stressful do you find a certain situation? So again, depending on the theme, I'm asking them quite personal stuff. So it's not going to be able to, I'm not going to get the response that I'm looking for by using that poll. But but I do find that that's quite a fun function as well. And it is a it's really big for engagement as well, it gets it gets them doing something, particularly for say, a first year or a second year class.

You also mentioned that you use the whiteboard for brainstorming. Can you explain to me what you mean with that?

Okay, so for example, if I was in a physical classroom on campus, I might write up on a whiteboard characteristics of good leadership, or what makes a good leader in your eyes. And then I get them to shout out words, and I've captured them on the board or get them to come with extra marker pens and add the thoughts to the board. So I do the same where appropriate in the virtual classroom as well. So in that case, I would say, you know, who is a good leader, and on a whiteboard, I'd get them to just write those in either draw, or tap on the text. And then I might clear that and say, okay, but what makes him a good leader? What are the characteristics that they have, that make them a good leader, as opposed to a bad leader. And again, we'll just give them an opportunity to start writing. And then we can have a discussion around that as well. So if someone has written a word, like, people focused, or someone has written something like forward thinking, or visionary, I can say, okay, so who wrote that word? Do you want to expand a little bit more about that? What do you mean by that? We'll use an example of a leader who has done that. So it just acts as a jumping off point for it, or kickstart for a conversation where they might, once they've given enough, picked up on that. And they feel a little bit more comfortable and expanding on the point. And then they can jump into the conversation again, grab the mic, or write in the chat box, or again, on the whiteboard itself to expand.

So if I understand this correctly, you would use this whiteboard brainstorming in both online and face to face classes. And the aim seems to be to get students to engage, but also to get them to understand that they are comfortable with this topic. And they have something to say.

Yeah, yeah. So I try, we, you know, where possible as well to say great, I love that, oh, that's an interesting one. That one helped me understand a little bit more, those sorts of encouraging phrases to try. Encourage them again, to expand on their points and feel comfortable taking part.

Okay, now we're going to jump to campus and the things that you mentioned you do face to face on campus. And so again, we've already spoken about lecturing and the PowerPoint slides and why you do it. Do you do it for the same reasons in class and you would in virtually? So, we've already spoken about lecturing and slideshows, would you say that you do use slideshows implies for the same reason that you would do in an online setting. So you're reasons were it's a requirement, and you're comfortable with it, students can refer back to it, and students can have this mix of sources to use.

Yeah, and also you as a lecturer. If you've got a three hour lecture, you cannot hold that amount of information in your brain, you have to have visual prompts you just do to kickstart like, okay, we're moving on to the physiological symptoms of stress. For those again, you've got the the PowerPoint slide and visuals also, obviously, to go okay, those are my prompts to then start the conversation again. So no, you just can't host a session for three hours without having a set, of course notes on materials to refer back to simply adding as a prompt to the reasons.

And you mentioned that there's a bit of a difference between lecturing first years and second and third years. Whereas in your first years, you're lecturing at them because they’re not really participating voluntarily. But with your third years and the second years, you try to lecture but then turn it into a participatory sort of action.

Yeah, yeah, when possible.

So you mentioned that you put them into little groups or pairs or pods. And you have them do a few activities. So you mentioned things like, maybe they have to debate something, maybe they have to present something to the class. Why would you? Why would you put them into groups, pairs or pods?

For comfort for security. Students don't like to be singled out by a lecturer and asked a direct question. They don't feel comfortable, it doesn't motivate them they feel on the spot. Especially if they haven't prepared for the session in advance, which, let's be honest, not very many students do. So, yeah, it's that it's that fear of, of being wrong or being found to be dumb or perceived as dumb if they don't have an answer in front of the peers. So, I try to make it as comfortable as possible, I say, at least do a conversation, or between two people or more. So, you feel a little bit more comfortable. It's a space for the extroverts to speak first, the introverts to like, absorb what they're saying and come up with their reaction as well. And I'm very conscious of introvert versus extrovert. So again, I don't like to put introverts on the spot. It's not great. They don't they don't like it. And it's not fair on them either. You wouldn't get the right, the best response from them anyway. It’s like a focus group versus an interview. It's the same thing, once you have someone talking, sparks ideas in the other person, they go, oh, really, that's actually me, too, or no, I totally disagree. And it just helps them to be able to do that. So that when they do feedback, and they're saying, well, we had an interesting discussion, because some of us felt this, or some of us thought that or we were all on the same page, we all act the same kind of way. I, I also set the expectation at the beginning of the year, and I and I reiterated normally, over the course of the semester that, again, particularly when we're having longer sessions, I don't want to talk for three hours. So I want to hear their opinions, they've all got beautiful brains, and should be using them. So I set that expectation upfront that they can't just sit back and just stare at me for three hours that they that that I want them to tell me their opinion, just to get them going.

You also mentioned that some of the class activities you do, especially with the first years, is you sometimes have them play games. Can you explain what you mean with that?

Okay, so for example, I was teaching differences in conflict management, or conflict resolution styles in a first year project management whole class. And whilst I, so one, one thing that I got my third years to do, virtually was to go away follow a link, and actually answer questions that would denote the style, then we came back and compare to see how they would feel. For the first years. Yes, we did that. But firstly, I got them to break up into four groups, and stand around a table and I put a bunch of pins in the middle of the table. And I said, we're going to play a game now where the objective is to get all of the pins into your group. So you have to find a strategy in terms of how are you going to end up being the winner by having all of the pins available specifically with you and the rest of the teams having them. So think about it first, how you going to do it within your team. And when I say go, then you start your strategy. So it was quite a fun exercise to show just how some people would grab and not worry about the other people at all. Whereas others were prepared to negotiate and to go, Well, what about, we share the number of pins and they're like, I know that doesn't fit the task, we have to win, we can only win by having all of them in our team. So others were like, well, what about if we joined forces with another team so that we could all win? And things like that? So it was an opportunity for them to have fun, to change the pace. You know, who was very competitive in the class versus who's we're prepared to compromise and so on. Yeah, and then also after that reflect on the fact that we have very different styles of conflict resolution coming through in evidence. So, as part of that, I also kept one student aside because we had ordered numbers. And I asked you to observe the exercise. So I had explained to her what I was trying to do with it. So that at the end of the day was to show that everyone has these different conflict styles, but then also, that the only way to win was for everyone to form one team, and then everyone wins, because everyone was sharing all the pains together. So she's like, Oh, okay, so I also gave her a chance to feedback in terms of what she observed from watching the others. So it was quite an interesting experience. So yeah, it just, it again, it's it shakes things up, it gives them an application opportunity to see in play or or, you know, and then go away and reflect on themselves and like, what they what came out intuitively for them, and then recognising that there are different styles, and we had a discussion around the whole scenario.

I like how you just said it's an application in a playful manner.

Yeah, absolutely.

And you also mentioned that it's fun, it's a change of pace. So would you say …

Another example for second year for consumer behaviour was teaching, segmentation, targeting and positioning. And we talked about segmentation quite a lot. And now we're talking about targeting, and we're looking at, you know, sorry, not targeting positioning, and we're looking at how do we map ourselves versus our competitors across different attributes available in a category? So I brought in a bunch of chocolate bars, and I drew a map onto a table got everyone around us, like, which quadrant? Where would you put each of these brands? And let's have a discussion around that. So obviously, once we finish the exercise, they all got to take a chocolate and you know, have a sugar boost as part of the session. So again, yeah, it's coming back to that. Make it interactive, make it playful, just give them a different opportunity to to absorb the key themes and the theory that we're teaching them as well. It's it's just important … students’ attention spans are just not what they used to be. Yeah, and it's, it's a challenge, we've got to we've also got to just be conscious of the fact that whilst it's not, you know, lecturing is not entertainment, but there has to be an element as to how we help them absorb the material as well as opposed to just speaking it at them. It's it's finding ways to engage them, as you say, in a fun, playful way.

I have a one last question. We use the word discussion quite a lot. And you get participation through discussion using various means. What is discussion, in your opinion? And why would you want students to discuss things with you and with each other?

So discussion basically means a two way interaction between two parties either singular me one on one with them, or a party to another party. And number one, they're doing business degrees, they're going to be out in the big bad world and having to speak to people of all different levels, they've got to get used to using their voice. They've kind of get used to answering questions, having an opinion. It's also getting them to critically reflect on themes. So, to me, their opinion on something or their interpretation? It's an opportunity for me to see as well have they grasped what I'm asking them, you know, sort of a check-in on content. And again, just keeping it interesting, building a relationship with them, making them feel comfortable that they can contribute and that they're capable of contributing, because they all have beautiful brains, which I do try to remind them as well.

Okay. And so those were the last of my four questions. Is there anything that I didn't ask that you were expecting me to ask?

Hmm. I guess my opinion as to whether or not we should be going virtual with our instruction as opposed to stay on campus, possibly. And my answer to that is, no, I don't. I think there's, again, I have to review this theme with my third years from a retail management perspective, where you know, more people are shopping online these days, but actually people still prefer to be to go shop in an actual store, because there's that interaction with people, shop assistants, for example, being able to ask for help, ask for opinions, there's the picking up and touching, you know, like looking at a product, turning it around seeing the weights, looking at the colours, and so on and so forth. And I feel like that is just as important in an educational space as well. So I'm lucky again, I work in an institution where we do have small classes, it is a private college. And that's kind of also what they're paying for is that engagement with the lecturer so I don't think that going virtual full time is the way forward necessarily, it might make practical sense from a geographical perspective. But I think having a connection still with your lecturer in person helps. And again, like there's that element of when you're chatting to people and you're having what feels more like a conversation, a discussion, then you do get people responding to you as they can't get away from you. You're not hidden behind that that virtual PowerPoint slide, you know, you're not seeing each other's faces so virtuals are in very important again, it's it's the it's the way forward. It's it's a way where people can refer back to lectures, I guess, on their own time and find ways to fit it into their less structured lives these days, I guess. But I do feel that blended is important. I don't see, I would I wouldn't personally want to go all virtual myself by choice.

Would you go all classroom? Again?

Yeah, I'd be comfortable with that. I would. Because I feel that there's, there's so many ways in which technology can facilitate education certainly from a marking perspective, you know, having everything submitted online, which means we can go back and refer to things it's, in lots of ways quicker to mark things and record everything. Again, it's it enables a place where all the PowerPoint slides or extra materials or revision or pass papers or links to things can all be stored in a central hub. It's a facilitator for conversation if you want to meet a student at a time that's convenient for both of you. I'm comfortable with the proportion of blended that is happening right now.

Okay. Thank you so much. I'm going to stop the recording once I remember where the button is [laugh].