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

Okay, I agree.

As you know, my study is concerned with blended learning. Do you use blended learning?

At the institution where I am at the moment? Yes. But I've worked for previous, I worked for two previous institutions, one a local one private, and one international one, which was American based, where we didn't do blended learning at all, where it was just purely online. So I've got experience in both factors, if you want to call it contact, then blended in the middle, and purely online. So yes, at the moment, yes, I am using.

So how would you define blended learning?

Blended learning is is supposed to be an integrated mix between online learning and contact session learning, the way you will learn playing certain factors, which will portray better on online and certain factors which will portray better in contact sessions, unfortunately, and that's been my experience all around, is that it does not work like that. The perception exists, that people that you can actually replicate the one to the other one, and vice versa, and that is not blended learning. That is a misconception. And that's where I feel the true concept of blended learning is falling apart, because the of that assumption that what works for the one will work for the other one, and the techniques that you use in the one will work in the other one, and that is not true. And that is that is why I feel blended learning is not working for at most institutions because of that perception.

That's a very interesting perception that you have of blended learning. What would you say are the techniques that people are trying to replicate from the one to the other that isn't working?

It's the simple matter of using a slideshow, you know, you will use a slideshow in contact learning and I'm very much against just slide after slide after slide after slide because they the students gets bored bored with it and so do I, you know, at the end of the day. So it's the way it has been practiced for me and because nowadays, they trying to the whole thing is people are or educators are trying to, is trying to force something traditional into a modern media, and that is that is not working. You know, if you're going to do let's take something like a slideshow. The slideshow should just act as the vehicle for interaction if you understand what I'm saying. I would rather like to see if I can explain to you how I see the whole thing working is if you really want to go blended learning, there are plenty of these group games and strategy strategies ,oh, there goes the English, strategy games available online, you know, at license fees, and I've worked with that before which is absolutely wonderful. So what you can do to make this work is do the theory in claws, but then have the strategy game where they form groups and where they compete with each other as let’s say separate businesses. In the online component thing, you have a blended learning situation happening. So then if you want to go completely online, you should not even teach, it should be a matter of using scrum piles, having the theory, having formative exercises up to a point where you then if they fail the formative they have to go back and repeat the module, you know, until they pass it or the section in the module, and do the formative parts that go on to the next section have three or five sections, which then leads to the first official full formative you know, and then scaffold, but the practical application you can still do in the online environment with a strategy game or something like that that's happening where they compete with each other, because then it becomes real life simulation.

Yes. So, um, what I'm hearing from you is that a lecturer almost shouldn't be part of the online session and it should …

No, they should.

They should?

They should. They should be the moderators that is the role that you take on then you move from educator to moderator in the online in the blended learning environment. So, you will be moderating that game, literally. So you will be checking in, you will be giving advice, they should be able to speak to you. So you become in the games’ sphere, you become the CEO kind of thing, you know, where they are executing. So you move from instructor to moderator.

Very interesting. Okay. Um, so with the strategy games that you were talking about, what is the aim of using a strategy game for the for the learning purposes?

That the aim is is is like with most of our POEs [portfolio of evidence], written POAs is, is, you're supposed to do simulation of reality and do some added research and bla bla, bla, bla, bla [unclear]. Whereas where they, where they do the strategy game that actually physically engage, you give them a product, you give them an industry, you, they must draw up their own budgets, they are literally all the time in competition with each other, they do proverbial sales, which which calculates up, you know, they do competitive pricing, you know, because the full groups, they don't operate in isolation, they operate as competitors, you know, for six or ten groups, no matter how many they, they actually operate as, as competitors to each other. So they have to have the vision, they mission, although it's the same product, let's say shoes. We use, we use a high end, high heeled shoes, you know, just for a matter of a topic, or for a product, then they they are in [unclear], because it's a niche market, you know, your Jimmy Choos, all those kinds of things. And so now, not only are they in competition with each other, they have to do the situational analysis, well, they have to do the pricing analysis, they have to do a market analysis, they have to do the marketing analysis, you know, they have to create their own brand, you know, because they're all in competition. They're all not all working for the same brand. Whereas then as an instructor, you you work through the theory of what all those concepts are, what is the situational analysis? What do you use in a situational analysis? What is your big marketing idea? How do you progress through that, where where they then use the knowledge that you've given them to actually physically execute it, and the one with the highest highest profit margin at the end of the day, is the one that wins. So there are many ways that you can set up those kinds of games, even in corporate training, to simulate the reality, you know, so it's all about simulation. But there is real results to it, you know, so instead of writing a 20 page POE which is absolute hell to write first of all and hell to grade. You know, so the mark, the physical experience mark, it's almost a simulation of work integrated learning if you want to, but it just happens online. So that the mark the end of the day for the portfolio of evidence is is then based on what the company performance was, you know, so. The strat games that are developed for for the industry, I call it strat games now, but there are several of those kinds of setups which you can customise to your field of teaching, you know, so you can also just take brackets out of it, and so just create a marketing strategy and start competing with each other, you know, there don't have to be a budget, and a budget plan and a sales plan and all that. So most of them nowadays are more customisable, you know? So for me, it is really that, that actual performance is the in the POE.

So in this case, it seems like you're not talking about gamification, you're talking about a game?

No, no, no, no, it is it is virtual simulation. But that's what we're talking about, your virtual simulation.

Okay, then you said that the educator should give the theory about how to do the market analysis and you know, these sorts of things, would that thing happen in face to face class?

If you're talking blended learning, it can either happen in a formal online class or it can happen in a contact class, but it is about bringing two components together, the one component is teaching theory, and the other component is that is where you are the educator where you put your educator jacket on in your teaching theory, and they put a student jackets on and they are students learning from you. Where then when you blend, and you go into the virtual sim simulation, you are just the moderator, and they are the actual executioners of this project. Then you have two components that are blended with each other successfully.

In the virtual simulation, is the aim also that they do peer learning?

Yes, they can learn they will obviously learn from each other because they are in competition with each other, they also learn more effectively to work in groups because you have to assign somebody is the financial manager, somebody is the marketing manager, somebody is the sales manager, you know, somebody is the MD you know, so that would be the group leader, the MD will be the group leader. So they take on roles, and they have to literally communicate with each other and, and compete with each other with other groups, you know, so, yes, I think they, it is actually a very good learning because of the virtual similary simulation that is happening. [Cough] I'm sorry.

Um, so in a strategy game, it seems like there would actually be a few elements. So for instance, they would have role playing, they would team work that needs to do, I think would be some form of competition, which is a motivator ...

That is really the instigator to the actual outcome of the competitive factor is actually the instigator to the outcome of it all of teamwork, of taking leadership, of taking responsibility of making it work. And, you know, I've seen a lot of infighting because the MD said this, and then the sales manager decided to go there and financial manager said, but we don't have budget, and it's a reality, it's how it works in business. You know, it is, if you've worked in the industry, that's how it is, you know, I can't tell you how many times I've been instructed to do something and then I said, well give me the money, and they said, there's no money, make it work, you know, and then you turn around on your heels and you go back and you go and do it, you make it work, you know. You move within your own budget allocation, you know, so, that is that is literally what it is. So yes, there's a lot of peer learning, if you want to put it that way, I actually refer to it as peer maturity you know, where they mature in the process, peer maturity because of teamwork, because of competition because of all of those kinds of things. So when they actually come or they actually enter into the business or into the working world, they already have that level, some level not that but some level of maturity to know this is where I fit in and this is what the consequences are if I don't do it this way. As when they do a written POE it still remains a postulation. It is it is not, they haven't had that experience.

So we have spoken a lot now about an online session and specifically strategy games. What what would you do in a normal face to face class?

That would be group work. [Cough]. What I often do in my current situation is to put a challenge out. I work on both the physical campus and on an online campus for the same institution. So, I'm both in the contact and pure online, operating in both. So what I like to do, especially in the brand building environment, and that kind of thing, I would, I would get a template, let's say an objective. I've got a whole folder here after 30 years of teaching tools, you know, so I often pull a few tricks out of that hat. So let’s take objective writing and writing SMART objectives, you know, students think they should use S M A R T, that each should each be an objective. No, you you write an objective, and then you check them according to the smart components, you know, so that is where often where students go wrong. So I will take a template like that, and I would hand it out in class, or I will do a certain amount of theory time timewise, you know, it's a half an hour theory, and then say to them, okay, even in online, there, you go in your groups, now develop three SMART objectives for this business. You know, so I normally, at the beginning of my class because of the, it's the nature of the of the subject that I teach, which allows me to do that. So it will obviously differ across disciplines. But I, right at the beginning of the very first class, so to speak, I have a set of 17 questions, which in the long run, also serve as an example of how to construct a questionnaire. So there are some behavioural questions in there, there are some some demographical some geographical questions, but it's all mixed up, you know. And then I give them four colours. And I say, okay, for groups, and everything is based on that colour. So for instance, if it's a fruit, what colour would it be, you know? Who will buy that fruit? If it's a juice? What colour will it be? And you'll often be surprised how the truth that they associate and the juice that they associate is different, you know? So it's human behaviour. That's the kind of context you get from questionnaires. And where does this person buy? What else is in their shopping basket? Where do they live? You know, what do they do for leisure? We do it in class, or physically online. And then right at the end of that session, I normally say something like okay, guys, welcome. Thank you for the research you've done, you know, and I say this right at the end, and then you see the frowns go up. And I say, I am the managing director of drop juice. We are a new juice company who manufactures you know, and then now we'll have a set of, let's say, just five objectives of which to our business objectives, and three, our marketing objectives. And that's where we start, we start distinguishing. So for the remainder of the semester over here, we work with drop juice, because we've already done the insights. Now, that makes it a bit easier to say, okay, here is an objective sheet now develop three objectives per group, you know, for drop juice, you know, to do that. I do the same online, you know, but that is still not for me blended learning. It is that that's what I'm talking about. It's a replication. If I construct a game, and I could divide them into four groups and say, okay, you are competing as agencies for drop juice, then they would have been blended. But in this case, it's still just contact session, the one is in person, and the other one is online. But that is the way I go about it. So I will actually give them something physical that they will recognize in the industry, and say, okay, we have a fictitious company. Now, let's do that, you know? The thing is, if you do it like that, you sidestep this stuff, like go into a Coca Cola or a KFC or whatever, and Google it quickly and get the answers. They don't learn anything from that. All they learn is how to search for answers on Google, you know, so, I might add that added thinking out of the box component to set the tone for the year and then work from there.

I have any questions… The first one is, so it seems very clear to me that you feel that blended learning happens when you cannot replicate whatever is happening in a face to face class on an online class.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, that is absolutely it, because you got to look at the components of the course. So this is where blended learning is happening for me, is when you have laid, like I explained at the beginning, a theoretical component, and then a practical component which happens online then you can marry the two ways of teaching and that's what we mean blended learning does not mean you're trying to force something into an a modern digitized load, you know, then it's just replication on a different platform.

Yeah. You're the first person who said at like this. So yes.

Okay, sorry about that. But that's how I feel about it.

Second question, when you do group work in a face to face class, what do you aim your students to learn? Or why would you put them in a group?

Because of that peer interaction, and that they bounce ideas off you more and more these days. The autonomous decision making in the industry is also fading out, you know. There's always either a board or a committee or somebody that makes decisions, you know. I'm from that the decision store photos down, we think it will take quite a while for the traditional organizational structure to dissolve. But that, then it's never a single decision until unless you're a one person, small business owner, you know, then it's your decision. But in the in most, even in that most isn't it, and I've consulted many of them. There's always more than one decision maker, and they always come together, you know, because of the different factors that influences decisions. When students do group work, then they actually bounce off each other, they learn from each other, they infuse each other's thinking, because the one might have this idea, and the other one might pick up on that idea. And the whole thing might grow, or somebody might object to that because, and then they restructure. And it's actually quite amazing to see when they put it on the table with the lovely different ideas that they come up with. So you're, that's why I do group work, because of that, that interaction and learning from each other and sharing of ideas, which I think is just infusing creative thinking to a large extent.

Another thing that you mentioned was roleplay, in the face to face class. And what I found especially interesting was that you took on a role of the MD and secondly, your students were unaware that they were taking on a different role of research participants. Why do you do that? And what what have you found happens in such influences the influences the thinking, and their approach?

If I tell them before the hand, what what are we what we are doing, so after we've done it, then I would say, okay, look at it in a matter of four lines and 17 questions, look at the diversity. It's amazing what what consumer profiles you can pull out of it. My product changed over the years, you know. I at one stage had 2pm, which is a cereal bar that will last you the whole day. So you take it as a supplement for breakfast, you know, so who's the competitors to that, you know, that would be jungle bars, and, you know, whatever these energy bars or whatever, whatever they had with with the juice, we have served juice and cereal bars. And so we can actually do competitor analysis as well. But coming back to what you asked, I was stepping off the point again, is, I found that the moment you say to them, we're going to do research, they think differently about the audience. And they start arguing and reasoning with you while you're going through the 17 questions. Whereas you just say to them, pick a color, you know, these four groups pick a colour, or you assign the colours to them. And then you start asking questions, then it is far more innovative questions to get. It's only once you have finished and you give them the final product product and say to them now did you see how easy research is? Let's see what we found. Oh, that is the geographics. That is the demographics. This is the behavioral component, then they're interested. Then they want to continue with the plan. If you give them the objective sheet, then they want to write that objective, you know, so it's sometimes the surprise element I think which makes it more interesting and make them more intuitive-reactive to what is happening.

Then, I want to know about your student engagement. To me, it seems like because of the way that you are teaching your classes and not replicating from face to face to online, that the engagement might be the same on both levels…?

To a large extent, yes. And what is interesting is the students in the online environment are more mature students. And they are most probably working in the industry already. I've quite a few that is working in the industry. So yes, you've got to be actually more attentive on on about those, or being more aware of those factors, but that I've found that there’s equal excitement when you start working with it. I can almost say they struggle with the same issues. And they struggle and they get excited about the same stuff, you know, and it's when that big idea, that real creative stuff come where you actually are able to distinguish, like, this one's gonna be a good market researcher, you know, and that one's going to be a very good creative director you know, you actually start sifting, but you don't say to them, but in your, you as a seasoned teacher, you start to be able to identify identify, so when you start doing assignment grouping, you know, when you have to put them in, you know, like okay, with that one and that one with that one with that one with that point, you know, so yeah, it's also a good, I can almost say yardstick, for you to measure your students and and strong you know, weaknesses and strengths and those kinds of things.

Yeah, just to be clear, are we speaking about replicating the same? So remember at the beginning, you see that you have two types of classes that you specifically have you've got your online and then you flip the switch? Are you do you just answer for the mix or for both?

Both.

Both?

Yeah, I find that approach sits well with both types of classes, you know. What I will do with the with the online way you have a third component. A third of your teaching time, which happens in an hour or so online, is that I would actually task them to do something and then they must present because I feel that then gives them that that that instead of standing in a class and presenting they feel more secure in the online environment to bring up a two or three slide presentation and tell me what they have found and then I normally open the floor, okay, any critique any comments and after, after a while, it becomes a cheering on and whatever environment, you know. It is just to get them to get used to it, you know, but I always feel that we do too little about presentation, and a lot of the industry is about presentation. So you just need to put that foundation out there. And then allow them to present you know, if you are restricted with whatever your blending options are.

So if you want your students to present online, you doing that, almost because you want them to practice, but also as a motivating factor..?

Yes, and as an assessment factor for me to see, to assess what the knowledge base are. That they grasp the theory or they're able to apply it or they say there's a hell of a lot that goes into that presentation. From a teaching, both a teaching and learning perspective.

How do you find the student engagement with the person who is presenting? So, with the other student that's presenting?

At first there is very little but like I said, eventually, they actually start criticizing and and or applauding, you know? And and at first they wait for you to say something, you know, to make a comment and then some of them will pick up and it slowly progresses, but I must honestly say 90% of the time I've found that they actually start engaging critically with with the their fellow students. They so, they don't often criticize directly - they will address it by me, the facilitator. They’d say but sir don't you think that that is a bit far fetched or sir what about that, you know, and then I will address that without being critical towards anyone you know. You take that neutral stance and actually put the facts on the table and motivate.

Can I ask, how do they engage?

They use the chat function. Very few use the mic, unless I prompt them to. As I've outlined with the online class, the further we progress through the semester, the more likely they were to speak up, you know, but I find with the contact sessions when we are in the online learning environment, they would rather use chat than switching on the mic. I think it's a thinking process, you know, that they feel that they they have time to think when they write than putting themselves on the spot. That is that is just my layman's assessment. It's not the research.

Do you find that in a face to face class they would speak verbally? So when other other groups give their opinion? Or would they still prefer not to verbally say something?

They, they will, though they they more inclined to talk about their own work then about another, you know, the group's work. They do they do, interact and respond and whatever. It is only when you prompt them to say, okay, guys, what do you think about this strategy, there's something specific here that's quite commendable, you know, that they will, some of them will, you will get those guys who will never say anything. But when you only talk to them about this, I then they keen to explain and motivate and so forth. So that's why I normally try in the class to, let's say, we have four groups to take at least let's say we're working with our objectives, take at least one object one of the three objectives from each of the groups and put it on the board and say, okay, take a picture, there's our objectives for, you know, to just equalize the thinking and have an equal amount of importance created amongst the students not to not to create that that animosity, almost that some I've seen some lecturers do, which is just not conducive for the learning.

So I've asked everything that I wanted to know. Is there anything that you think you would like to add that would add value to this study?

I think you must clearly define what blended learning is and what the expectations of blended learning is, from the student perspective. Because I think that blended learning has become a buzzword, which is incorrectly applied in our current situation and it's not just South Africa. I've seen it across the board, you know. So I think we need a clear definition of what blended learning is and what the components of blended learning is, and how you practice it, like I explained to you. Through blended learning for me will be whether you do it online, or, or in contact sessions, as the theory component, but then have that strategy game type of thing that happens and I'm not, you know, you can go and have a look at some of it, I think I still have a link to a few of them. If I remember to find them, I'll send them to you. But but they there are so many. Instead of you know, this is what frustrates me about about education institutions, the mismanagement of money, you took blended learning what are you giving me? You're giving me an LMS. There's more to it, you know, this, there's a lot of plugins like your strategy games and the one specific one I worked on actually plugs into black Blackboard you know, so the marking, everything happens on the you know, the you go from, you go into the game platform, actually, but they they limit the LMS options that you have, because they don't want to spend that money on the plugins that can make you know, so I think, my suggestion to you is get that, unblur the lines, if I can put it to you that way. Get clear parameters of this is what blended learning is and what feeds into blended learning and what the expectation of our students are.

I will do my best. Okay, well then I'm going to say thank you so much for your time. I'm going to stop recording.