

CETL-MSOR Conference 2015

Maria Meehan: Designing and using informal learning spaces to enhance student engagement with mathematical sciences

In 2010 I, along with four mathematics lecturers from different higher education institutions in Ireland, set about practicing/implementing John Mason's Discipline of Noticing (2002) in order to reflect on, and improve, teaching practice. As a result of this project, for three years from 2011-12 to 2013-14, I kept "brief-but-vivid" accounts on my lectures for a first year Maths for Business module in University College Dublin, Ireland. An average of 250 students were assigned to my module and I "delivered" three lectures per week for twelve weeks.

While any given brief-but-vivid account may be interesting in its own right, reading the first set of accounts from 2011-12 in one sitting right before I started teaching the module again, proved quite disturbing for me as certain themes became apparent – poor attendance was irritating me; students being disruptive when they did come to class was distracting; and I was frustrated at the futility of trying to really help students in such a large-group setting. But this disrupted my thinking and caused me to question what use the large lecture actually has to play in today's digital world. In particular, I started to question one of my most deep-rooted beliefs in relation to university learning – that students must attend lectures.

In CETL-MSOR 2014, I presented on how I had introduced over sixty short videos to complement/substitute for lectures in the Maths for Business module in 2013-14. In this talk I will present an analysis of three years of brief-but-vivid accounts from teaching in a large lecture setting, and how my practice has changed (for better or worse!) as a result of this reflection.

Is the large lecture a thing of the past then? Or is it that it needs to evolve to if it is avoid extinction? I suspect the latter but let us discuss!