

Dónal O'Mathúna (Dublin City University)

Using Songs in Teaching Ethics

Music appeals to almost everyone. Throughout history songs have rallied people to action and drawn people into deeper reflection. Students already spend many hours listening to music. But do they think about what they are listening to? Many songs address ethical issues. Carefully selected songs can be ideal pedagogic aids to encourage careful reflection and critical thinking about ethical issues. This presentation will discuss the practicalities of using contemporary songs in teaching ethics in a variety of subjects. Strategies for identifying and locating suitable songs will also be presented.

Preliminary findings from on-going research into music and ethics will also be presented. This research is developing a theoretical framework for how music can engage our emotions, our imaginations, and our intellects. Songs can play a role in helping develop students' moral perception and moral imagination. Basic principles of musicology will be used to demonstrate how the emotional responses to music can complement and carry the message of the lyrics. Understanding how the music and the lyrics work together brings further depth to the critical analysis of the songs.

My goal for my students is that they will no longer passively imbibe the messages their songs are delivering, but that they will listen critically to and actively reflect on the ethical messages they are being given. This will hopefully draw them into having informed discussions of the ethical issues. My goal for this presentation is to share with you some of the excitement and enthusiasm that contemporary songs have brought to my teaching of ethics.