

## RESEARCH ESSAY

# A Curriculum That Can Listen Back: Music Pedagogy Beyond the Fixed Canon

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A fixed canon teaches students what to hear before it teaches them how to listen. Repertoire can quietly define musical complexity, historical importance, and professional possibility in the image of works already secured by institutions. What would a curriculum look like if its repertoire could answer back to the categories used to organize it? Music pedagogy moves beyond the fixed canon when repertoire selection, critical strategy, and assessment are revised together. A useful account must keep formal detail beside social result. Here, syllabi, assignment verbs, repertoire time, assessment rubrics, student listening journals, and relationships with practitioners disclose the link between representational breadth and epistemic authority as a process rather than a fixed attribute.

Evidence must follow the object through its changes. For that reason, the approach uses curricular audit that follows values from selection through classroom activity and grading and treats syllabi, assignment verbs, repertoire time, assessment rubrics, student listening journals, and relationships with practitioners as a sequence of interventions rather than a miscellaneous source list. The resulting claim is accepted only to the extent that it satisfies whether unfamiliar music can alter the course's concepts rather than merely illustrate them across more than one setting.

Constant curricular expansion can become superficial sampling, overburden instructors, and ask students to speak beyond their preparation. This limit guards against a familiar interpretive shortcut: turning complexity into automatic approval. Complexity can describe exploitation as readily as emancipation. The conclusion therefore remains conditional on whether unfamiliar music can alter the course's concepts rather than merely illustrate them, with dissenting evidence preserved where it changes the outcome.

Adding one non-Western ensemble

work to a harmony course changes little if students must still translate its organization into chord labels designed for another tradition. Inclusion without methodological change preserves the old center. Seen closely, the scene contains its own internal relational study: before and after, near and distant, permitted and discouraged, stable and revised. Those contrasts show how the alignment between representational breadth and epistemic authority is produced. They also identify which part of the interpretation derives from evidence and which part remains a hypothesis about intention.

The mechanism can now be stated more exactly. Syllabi, assignment verbs, repertoire time, assessment rubrics, student listening journals, and relationships with practitioners locate determinations in a recoverable sequence, while the association between representational breadth and epistemic authority explains why those determinations matter beyond the finished appearance. The inference remains bounded by whether unfamiliar music can alter the course's concepts rather than merely illustrate them. If that condition is absent, the case may still be evocative, but it cannot support the same account of consequence or responsibility.

A rotating listening archive offers a stronger model. Students contribute recordings with provenance, consult culture-bearers where appropriate, and compare how contrasting communities define expertise, variation, and faithful performance. Paired analysis also exposes a temporal problem. Effects that seem minor at the moment of production can become decisive after circulation, repetition, or institutional adoption. The scene therefore expands the association between representational breadth and epistemic authority beyond immediate experience and into the artifact's later social life.

Together, the cases distinguish cate-

gory from operation. Two examples can share a medium yet organize the association between representational breadth and epistemic authority differently because control, duration, and access have changed. Curricular audit that follows values from selection through classroom activity and grading makes that difference legible. The concept remains useful only when it identifies a mechanism and when whether unfamiliar music can alter the course's concepts rather than merely illustrate them can be evaluated rather than assumed.

Programs should build durable partnerships, teach fewer works in greater depth, compensate invited expertise, and make the rationale for selection revisable. Adoption should not be measured by the presence of a policy alone. The relevant evidence is whether actors can understand the process, alter it in time, and obtain a reasoned response. Regular review should include cases of refusal and failure, since those cases reveal limits that successful examples rarely disclose.

Temporal case alignment is especially central. The meaning of syllabi, assignment verbs, repertoire time, assessment rubrics, student listening journals, and relationships with practitioners can shift as technologies, institutions, and communities change. Revisiting the same case makes it possible to separate immediate reception from durable aftermath and to identify whether unfamiliar music can alter the course's concepts rather than merely illustrate them was maintained, weakened, or redefined by later users.

Future work should test the framework through collaborative replication. Independent teams could apply curricular audit that follows values from selection through classroom activity and grading to contrasting sites, exchange only their criteria before account, and then compare where judgments converge. Disagreement would be informative if each

team can identify which evidence changed its conclusion and whether whether unfamiliar music can alter the course's concepts rather than merely illustrate them proved too narrow or too permissive.

A further limit concerns causation. The presence of syllabi, assignment verbs, repertoire time, assessment rubrics, student listening journals, and relationships with practitioners may coincide with a change without fully producing it. Economic pressure, institutional history, bod-

ily difference, or unrelated technical conditions can redirect the same form. Comparative study should therefore identify plausible rival causes and reserve causal language for cases in which sequence and mechanism are sufficiently documented.

The broader value is diagnostic. The framework helps locate where inference becomes authority, where participation becomes labor, and where preservation becomes transformation. Those boundaries are rarely fixed, but they can be

documented well enough to support practical disagreement.

The relational study replaces a broad celebration of the form with a testable account of its operations. A listening curriculum becomes plural by changing what counts as a good question and not simply by enlarging the playlist. The canon begins to listen back when the music at its edges can revise the classroom's center of gravity.