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Rethinking Music Teacher Education in Spain: Popular Music, Folklore, and the Pluralistic Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the hegemony of the Western European classical canon in the university education of future music teachers in Spain and proposes a pluralistic curriculum structured around three axes: students' musical cultures, re-signified local sound heritage, and active methodologies supported by emerging technologies. The Spanish music teacher education context is shaped by conservatory traditions, oral heritage, and digital cultures. Drawing on critical pedagogy, praxial theory, and culturally relevant pedagogy, the article argues that legitimizing multiple musics constitutes a political and pedagogical stance. The article explores curricular possibilities and institutional resistances, advocating for the democratization of music teacher education through disrupting entrenched musical hierarchies.

Keywords: music teacher education, social justice, popular music, folklore, critical pedagogy, Spain

Introduction

University-level training for music teachers in Spain, particularly within Early Childhood and Primary Education degrees and music specializations, continues to be largely shaped by the Western European classical canon (Cabedo-Mas and Díaz-Gómez 2015; Pozo, Torrado, and Baño 2022). This curricular orientation, strongly influenced by conservatory-based traditions in Spanish higher education, has historically privileged symphonic, choral, and folk repertoire approached from a technical and patrimonial

perspective (Cabedo-Mas and Díaz-Gómez 2015; Pozo, Torrado, and Baño 2022). As a result, an implicit cultural hierarchy is established in which modern popular musics—such as rock, pop, jazz, blues, reggae, and bossa nova—tend to occupy a marginal or residual position in initial teacher education programs (Green 2008; Porta 2014; Wright 2010).

This exclusion is a significant issue. The musics that accompany the everyday lives of university students constitute an essential part of their affective and social identity (Green 2008; Turino 2008). While Western European classical music often forms part of the musical identities of Spanish teacher candidates with conservatory backgrounds, it does not encompass the full range of their everyday musical practices nor the diverse sound worlds of the pupils they will later teach. Ignoring this plurality in the curriculum perpetuates a gap between academic culture and students' experiential culture, reducing motivation and limiting the ability of future teachers to critically integrate diverse repertoire into Early Childhood and Primary Education classrooms. Recent scholarship has increasingly highlighted the importance of bridging students' everyday musical practices with formal learning environments in order to foster engagement and meaningful musical participation in schools (Campanini 2023; Hess 2019; Karlsen and Väkevä 2012; Powell 2023).

The inclusion of modern popular musics has been the subject of sustained scholarly debate. Scholars such as Lucy Green (2002, 2008) have demonstrated the potential of popular music pedagogy, emphasizing informal learning, collaborative creation, and connections to students' real interests. More recent research has expanded this discussion by examining the historical development of popular music education and the need to prepare future teachers to work with contemporary musical practices in school contexts (Campanini 2023). At the same time, critical research has warned that the Eurocentric canon reinforces dynamics of cultural exclusion and limits the possibility of music education oriented toward social justice (Allsup 2016; Hess 2019). Thus, more than a methodological question, the selection of repertoire constitutes a political act: deciding which musics are taught and which are not is deciding which voices are recognized and which are silenced.

In the Spanish context, the tension between tradition and change becomes particularly visible within university-level music teacher education. While folk and oral traditions—such as jotas, romances, and work songs documented in the cancioneros[1] of Martínez Torner (1920) and Manzano Alonso (1982)—are frequently presented as relics to be preserved, contemporary popular musics associated with media, commercial, and globalized cultural forms are often perceived as having limited academic value. This dichotomy reduces the potential of both repertoires: folk music ceases to be experienced as dynamic heritage, and contemporary popular genres remain largely absent from the training of future teachers.

This article takes these tensions as a starting point to propose a curriculum articulated around three interrelated axes: (1) students' musical cultures as a central and sustained component of the curriculum, informing both pedagogical processes and epistemological choices; (2) local sound heritage re-signified in dialogue with global musics; and (3) active methodologies supporting emerging technologies that enable inclusive and culturally relevant experiences. From a critical perspective aligned with the MayDay Group's Action Ideals (MayDay Group n.d.), the proposal does not seek to replace one canon with another, but rather to open spaces of agency and democratization in which different musics coexist on equal terms throughout the educational process. This positioning explicitly avoids models in which students' musical cultures are mobilized merely as an initial motivational strategy before reverting to dominant repertoires, a practice critically problematized in music education scholarship (Hess 2015).

Music teacher education in Spain is shaped by a dual institutional framework that combines university-based teacher education programs with conservatory-based professional music training. Future primary and early childhood teachers complete a four-year university degree (Grado en Educación Infantil or Educación Primaria), in which music is typically included as a compulsory subject within the broader area of arts education. However, the number of credits allocated to music is generally limited,

[1] *Cancioneros* refer to scholarly compilations of traditional songs based on processes of collection, transcription, and classification, often organized by region, function, or musical characteristics. In Spain, they have been central to the documentation and preservation of oral musical traditions and have significantly shaped both ethnomusicological research and music education practices.

particularly for those students who do not specialize in music, resulting in inconsistent levels of musical competence among graduates. In parallel, specialized musical training is provided through conservatories, which follow a separate educational pathway focused on performance, theory, and historically canonized repertoires.

Within university teacher education programs, music is often taught by faculty whose own training has been influenced by conservatory traditions. As a result, curricular approaches may privilege Western European classical music, both explicitly and implicitly, through the selection of repertoire, analytical frameworks, and assessment criteria. At the same time, recent educational reforms, particularly those associated with the Organic Law Modifying the Organic Law of Education (LOMLOE), the current Spanish legislative framework regulating the non-university educational system, emphasize competence-based learning, inclusion, and cultural diversity, creating a tension between traditional curricular models and emerging pedagogical priorities. This tension is especially visible in the preparation of future teachers who are expected to engage with diverse musical cultures in increasingly heterogeneous classrooms, despite having received limited training in popular music, oral traditions, or culturally responsive pedagogies.

Theoretical Debates

The Academic Canon And Its Critique In Music Education

The training of music teachers at the university level has traditionally been dominated by a Eurocentric canon rooted in historically white, Western European classical music traditions, which have been institutionalized as superior forms of musical knowledge. Inherited from conservatory models, this canon has privileged symphonic, chamber, and choral repertoires, while marginalizing musics that, although meaningful to students, have been deemed "unfit" for formal teaching (Wright 2010). Rather than operating as a purely aesthetic framework, this hierarchy embeds aesthetic judgments within broader political and cultural value systems, reinforcing distinctions between "high" and "popular" culture and thereby reproducing cultural inequalities in education.

Building on critiques that can be traced back at least to the late 1960s—most notably the Tanglewood Symposium (1967)––recent scholarship (Hess 2019; Karlsen

and Väkevä, 2012) has shown how this curricular framework systematically excludes the musics that are part of most students' lived experience and reinforces hierarchies of cultural value within formal music education. The question is therefore not only which repertoire is taught, but who has the authority to decide what counts as valid musical knowledge. This political dimension shifts the debate beyond methodological issues, situating music education as a space of cultural struggle in which legitimacies and exclusions are continuously negotiated.

In this context, popular music pedagogy has emerged. Lucy Green's work (2002, 2008) demonstrated that informal learning practices typical of popular musics—learning by ear, group creation, imitation, and reinterpretation—not only possess significant formative value, but can also be productively integrated into university contexts to broaden teaching and learning experiences. Subsequent research has expanded these insights by examining how popular music pedagogies operate within higher education and teacher education contexts (Smith et al. 2017). These approaches challenge the dichotomy between "canon-based" and everyday musical knowledge by showing that everyday musical practices also generate complex, transferable, and culturally relevant knowledge.

Similarly, scholars working from praxial and critical philosophical perspectives in music education have argued that a committed approach to teaching must challenge historical hierarchies and open itself to pluralistic repertoires that recognize students' cultural diversity as a legitimate source of knowledge (Allsup 2016; Regelski 2009). From this perspective, teaching shifts away from teacher-centred models of instruction focused on the accumulation of canonical works toward a praxial orientation that prioritizes shared musical experience, creative engagement, critical reflection, and the capacity to connect musical practice with broader social and cultural contexts.

Cultural Hybridity And Stylistic Diversity In Music Education

The debate on incorporating contemporary popular musics into teacher training takes place within a historical global context of cultural hybridity (Appadurai 1996; Bhabha 1994; García Canclini 1995). While processes such as intercultural exchange, migration, and re-signification have characterized cultural production across historical

periods, current conditions of globalization and digital mediation have significantly intensified their scale, speed, and visibility. In this context, music increasingly operates in continuous transformation, shaped by transnational circulation and hybrid cultural logics. From the perspective of music education, this intensified hybridity challenges the rigidity of the Western European classical canon and opens the possibility of designing curricula in which diverse repertoires coexist on more equitable terms (Karlsen and Väkevä 2012).

Hybridity is not a simple juxtaposition of styles but an uneven, power-inflected creative process shaped by historical asymmetries, circulation, and cultural negotiation. Recognizing this hybrid character within the university not only expands the range of repertoire, it also provides students with critical tools to analyze music as a cultural and political phenomenon (Turino 2008).

Within this framework, stylistic diversity gains central pedagogical value. The following examples are not intended to reflect the most statistically prevalent genres in the everyday listening practices of Spanish music teacher candidates, but rather to illustrate a set of repertoires that have been widely theorized in music education research for their pedagogical, cultural, and critical affordances (Aróstegui 2011).

- Jazz: fosters improvisation, active listening, and creative dialogue (Berliner 1994; Campbell 2018)
- Blues: connects with African American narratives of resistance and offers an expressive framework linking emotion and technique (Campbell 2018)
- Reggae: introduces social consciousness and syncopated rhythms associated with struggles for justice (Smith et al. 2017)
- Bossa nova: exemplifies cultural hybridity and harmonic complexity (Castro 2000)
- Hip hop: provides a platform for self-expression and critical analysis of inequalities, with strong rhythmic and textual potential (Perry 2004)

- Rock and pop**:** connects with students' everyday media culture and fosters motivation and belonging (Green 2002, 2008)
- Reggaeton and trap: reflects contemporary youth cultures and digital circulation, offering opportunities to explore identity, representation, and globalized musical production (Campbell 2018; Partti and Karlsen 2010)
- EDM (electronic dance music)**:** highlights technology-mediated creativity, production processes, and participatory musical cultures in digital environments (Partti and Karlsen 2010).
- Mainstream Western European classical music: provides access to historically dominant repertoires while allowing for their critical reinterpretation within more inclusive curricular frameworks (Hess 2019; Regelski 2009)

While these genres differ in historical origin, modes of circulation, and pedagogical use, they collectively illustrate diverse pathways for engaging with music as a cultural, social, and creative practice within teacher education. Their inclusion is not intended to establish a new canon, but to support a pluralistic and critically informed approach in which different musical traditions can be explored, questioned, and re-signified within inclusive educational frameworks.

Building on the previous discussion of cultural hybridity and stylistic diversity, in contemporary contexts, processes of musical re-signification are not confined to folk or oral traditions alone. Rather, they frequently emerge at the intersection of popular music and local heritage, where contemporary artists actively negotiate tradition, identity, and global circulation through hybrid forms. These dynamics, which are particularly visible in recent popular music practices, anticipate the discussion of folklore not as a static repository, but as a site of ongoing cultural negotiation.

Folklore And Oral Tradition: Between Heritage And Living Identity

In the Spanish context, oral tradition constitutes a key cultural resource for the

construction and expression of collective identity, particularly insofar as it is embedded in localized, intergenerational, and community-based practices of transmission. Spanish songbooks such as those of Martínez Torner (1920) and Manzano Alonso (1982) document romances, jotas, and rondas[2] that, in regions such as Extremadura, have historically functioned as shared repertoire linked to collective memory, social rituals, and everyday life rather than to formal institutional training (Nettl 2005; Seeger 2004). Unlike Western European classical music, whose transmission has largely been mediated through written notation and specialized institutions, this oral repertoire derives its identity value from processes of situated practice and communal continuity.

However, within Spanish universities these musics have often been treated in a "museum-like" fashion: as relics of the past rather than as living repertoire capable of dialoguing with the present. This heritage-oriented, "museum-like" approach to folk musics in university education cannot be understood outside its historical context. The institutionalization and folklorization of traditional musics were central to the cultural politics of the Francoist regime,[3] where selected regional songs were preserved, standardized, and depoliticized as symbols of a unified national identity, while their social, critical, and contextual dimensions were neutralized (Díaz Viana 1999; Labajo 2010; Nettl 2005). The persistence of this heritage-oriented framework continues to shape how folk musics are approached in higher education today.

Reconfiguring the role of folklore within university music teacher education requires moving from passive conservation to active re-signification. In line with broader dynamics related to cultural hybridity, identity negotiation, and pedagogical innovation in music education, these processes take on particular complexity in contemporary popular music. This is especially the case for oral traditions, given their strong links to territory, community, and heritage. For this reason, re-signification cannot be approached as a neutral creative operation. Practices such as fusing a traditional ronda with a reggae pattern or reinterpreting a romance through bossa nova represent only

[2] *Romances* are narrative ballads of medieval origin transmitted through oral tradition; *jotas* are regional song-dance forms in triple meter widely found across Spain; *rondas* are collective singing practices associated with social, festive, or ritual contexts, often performed in public spaces.

[3] The Francoist regime (1939–1975) was an authoritarian dictatorship in Spain under Francisco Franco, characterized by centralized cultural policies that promoted a unified national identity, including the institutionalization and standardization of regional folk traditions.

one dimension of re-signification. More broadly, re-signification may involve processes of reinterpretation, contextual reframing, pedagogical adaptation, and critical reflection on the cultural meanings of musical practices. These processes may open intergenerational and transcultural dialogues when they are situated within reflexive, ethical, and community-aware pedagogical frameworks (Campbell and Wiggins 2013; Turino 2008). This approach aligns with conceptions of intangible cultural heritage that emphasize active, situated, and socially accountable transmission rather than mere preservation (Seeger 2004; UNESCO 2003).

Social Justice, Diversity, And The Pluralistic Curriculum

The inclusion of modern popular musics and oral tradition repertoire in teacher training cannot be understood solely as an aesthetic expansion or as an innovative didactic resource. From a social justice perspective, teacher educators and preservice teachers have an ethical responsibility to critically examine which musics are legitimized in the curriculum and who has the power to decide (Hess 2019). From this perspective, the music curriculum emerges as a political space in which identities are negotiated, hierarchies are established, and cultural experiences are either recognized or rendered invisible. This critical lens is particularly necessary in contemporary Spain, where increasing cultural and migratory diversity means that an unreflexive emphasis on traditional Spanish musics may function as a mechanism of exclusion for teacher candidates whose cultural identities and musical heritages lie elsewhere. A socially just curriculum must therefore approach local traditions not as normative or exclusive references, but as dialogic resources situated alongside the musical cultures of immigrant and minoritized communities.

A music education centered exclusively on the Eurocentric canon reproduces inequalities, privileging the cultural capital of certain groups while marginalizing the musical knowledge of many students, including those from immigrant and minoritized backgrounds (Allsup 2016; Wright 2010). Including genres associated with the Spanish cultural diaspora and processes of resistance, such as blues, reggae, hip hop, corridos, or reguetón, broadens stylistic diversity and makes visible historically excluded narratives. In the Spanish context, critical traditions such as *canción de autor* can contribute to the

same aim. Together, these repertoires strengthen students' critical capacities by enabling them to question dominant musical hierarchies, reflect on the socio-political contexts of musical production, and engage with issues of identity, representation, and power (Karlsen and Väkevä 2012; Regelski 2009).

The concept of a pluralistic curriculum seeks to move beyond the opposition between "high culture" (i.e., Western European classical music) and "popular musics" by reconfiguring these categories as fluid, relational, and historically constructed rather than fixed and hierarchical. In this model, the local intertwines with the global, the traditional with the mediated, and the heritage-based with the emergent (García Canclini 1995; Turino 2008). Teacher training programs thus enable future educators to recognize cultural diversity not merely as a characteristic of students, but as a central pedagogical and ethical principle of their professional practice.

Committing to a pluralistic curriculum also entails rethinking the purposes of music education. Beyond transmitting repertoires or techniques, the goal is to educate critical citizens capable of analyzing the cultural dimension of music and using it as a tool for democratic participation, identity expression, and social transformation (Regelski 2009; Hess 2019). While such aims are already present in some innovative initiatives within Spanish music teacher education, they remain unevenly developed and are often constrained by enduring conservatory-based traditions and heritage-oriented approaches in university training (Cabedo-Mas and Díaz-Gómez 2015; Pozo, Torrado, and Baño 2022). A pluralistic curriculum seeks to consolidate and extend these critical orientations more systematically across programs.

Active Methodologies And Emerging Technologies As Catalysts

Transforming the curriculum does not only involve deciding which musics to include, but also how they are taught and learned. In this sense, active methodologies have proven to be catalysts for the democratization of the university music classroom. Instead of centering learning on the faithful reproduction of scores, these approaches seek to engage students in processes of exploration, creation, and critical reflection.

In teacher training, approaches such as Orff-Schulwerk (which integrates movement, percussion, and play), project-based learning (which fosters knowledge

construction through collective challenges), and gamification (which introduces game dynamics to enhance motivation and collaboration), are especially relevant (Allsup 2016; Burnard 2012). In the Spanish context, methodologies such as Orff-Schulwerk are already present in many music teacher education programs, particularly in Early Childhood and Primary Education; however, their implementation remains uneven and is often oriented toward technical application rather than toward broader critical and transformative aims (Cabedo-Mas and Díaz-Gómez 2015; Pozo, Torrado, and Baño 2022). Across contexts, these approaches coincide in recognizing students as active subjects with voice and agency in the educational process.

The impact is amplified when these methodologies are combined with emerging technologies. Digital recording and editing, the creation of mashups and remixes, and more recently the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for generating repertoire open a pedagogical horizon that can connect academic learning with students' everyday cultural practices (Partti and Karlsen 2010; Savage and Barnard 2019). However, these technologies are not neutral tools. Alongside their pedagogical potential, they also introduce new power dynamics, including the increasing influence of private platforms, data-driven logics, and market interests, as well as the environmental implications of digital and cultural production, within public education. From a critical perspective, the use of digital and AI-based tools in music teacher education must therefore be approached reflexively, not only as a motivational resource or a bridge to the contemporary media ecosystem, but as a site where issues of authorship, access, surveillance, and cultural commodification are actively negotiated.

Recent examples in Spanish university contexts illustrate the potential of these approaches when implemented within carefully framed pedagogical settings (Cabedo-Mas and Díaz-Gómez 2015; Green 2008; Partti and Karlsen 2010; Pozo, Torrado, and Baño 2022). Innovation projects in teacher education have explored sound hybridization practices—such as combining traditional repertoire with popular music idioms or jazz-based reinterpretations—not as aesthetic ends in themselves, but as reflective exercises aimed at questioning musical hierarchies, authorship, and cultural positioning. Similarly, experimental uses of artificial intelligence in music education, including AI-assisted composition tasks connected to themes such as sustainability or

social responsibility, have been developed as pedagogical spaces where critical reflection, experimentation, and the questioning of musical hierarchies can take place rather than as technological solutions in themselves. These experiences should therefore not be understood as anecdotal innovations, but as situated practices that—when embedded in explicit curricular frameworks—can challenge historical musical hierarchies and open spaces of creative agency for future teachers (Hess 2019; Regelski 2009). At the same time, their educational value depends on acknowledging the broader ethical, environmental, and political implications of digital and AI-based tools, including issues of energy consumption, platform dependency, and the increasing entanglement of public education with private technological infrastructures.

In summary, active methodologies and emerging technologies can operate as catalysts for a hybrid, diverse, and socially just curriculum when they are embedded within explicit curricular frameworks that question musical hierarchies and processes of legitimization. However, these methodologies and technologies are not inherently transformative: they can also be deployed within traditional large-ensemble formats and Eurocentric repertoire without altering the underlying curricular logic. Rather than replacing the classical canon or traditional folklore, their critical potential lies in how they are mobilized pedagogically and epistemologically to reconfigure what counts as musical knowledge. When aligned with curricular intentions oriented toward inclusion and cultural relevance, they can provide a framework in which Western classical music traditions, popular musics, and local musical practices coexist on more equitable terms, fostering the preparation of teachers who are critical, creative, and culturally responsive.

Spanish University Contexts

University-level music education in Spain is shaped by a structural tension between tradition and change. Recent legislative reforms, such as the Organic Law amending the LOE (LOMLOE 2020) in basic education and the Organic Law of the University System (LOSU 2023), have introduced a discourse that emphasizes competencies, cultural diversity, and pedagogical innovation. Nevertheless, in practice, teacher training continues to be marked by a conservatory-based model that privileges Western European classical music and a patrimonial treatment of folklore (Pozo et al.

2022). This model, deeply rooted in the institutional history of music education in Spain, reproduces cultural hierarchies that situate modern popular musics at the margins of the curriculum (Allsup 2016; Wright 2010).

This situation produces an increasingly evident cultural gap between the university curriculum and students' musical experience. Students entering Faculties of Education bring with them diverse and hybrid soundscapes shaped by digital media, transnational circulation of musical practices across digital platforms, media industries, and migratory networks and everyday listening practices, rather than by any single dominant tradition. Their playlists typically combine pop, alternative rock, vocal jazz, reggae, hip hop, trap, K-pop, and fusions with Latin American roots such as bossa nova. These musics play a central role in students' social and affective identities (Green 2008; Karlsen and Väkevä 2012) and closely mirror the cultural environments of the children with whom they will later work as teachers. The resulting tension is therefore not between past and present musical cultures, but between the institutional logics of university curricula and the plural sound worlds that characterize contemporary musical life.

Yet their university training often ignores these genres and focuses instead on choral technique, tonal-harmonic analysis, or the patrimonial study of traditional Spanish songbooks (Cabedo-Mas and Díaz-Gómez 2015). The result is a formative dissonance: current educational legislation and curricular frameworks expect future teachers to connect with children through music, yet university training programs often render invisible the very musics that constitute the everyday soundscape of young people, a tension that has also been highlighted in recent research on popular music education and teacher preparation (Campanini 2023; Powell 2023).

However, the integration of popular genres into university curricula is hindered by several structural factors, including limited faculty training in these genres, uneven access to technological resources, and the persistence of discourses that frame such musics as "less serious" or of limited pedagogical value (Hess 2019). This situation is further complicated by the fact that many music teacher candidates enter university with a strong conservatory-based background centered on Western European classical music, while their engagement with popular genres often remains informal, experiential, and

weakly articulated in academic terms. As a result, the explicit incorporation of popular musics into teacher education does not respond to a lack of familiarity among students, but to the need to transform informal musical practices into reflective, pedagogically grounded, and critically situated knowledge. These resistances are therefore not neutral; they express relations of cultural power that regulate which musics are legitimized as academic knowledge and which remain marginal within the university (Regelski 2009).

Paradoxically, the same legislative framework that sustains the inertia of the canon also opens limited but significant windows of opportunity. Current Spanish legislation does not mandate specific repertoires or curricular revisions, nor does it establish concrete consequences for university programs that maintain traditional, canon-centered models. Instead, frameworks such as the Organic Law amending the LOE (LOMLOE 2020), Spain's current national education law regulating the structure and curriculum of compulsory education emphasizes cultural and artistic competence as a transversal dimension of citizenship education, while the Organic Law of the University System (LOSU 2023), Spain's current university system law, promotes teaching innovation and institutional flexibility. It is precisely this non-prescriptive and competence-oriented character—combined with the absence of strict enforcement mechanisms—that creates a space of institutional autonomy in which curricular change becomes possible, though not guaranteed. Although formulated in general terms, these directives can thus be mobilized by faculties and teacher educators as legitimizing tools to question the historical exclusion of modern popular musics and to re-signify the role of folklore in dialogue with global repertoire, rather than as top-down mandates for reform.

In this sense, the Spanish case functions not as an exceptional scenario, but as an illustrative case for thinking about music education in the twenty-first century. The tension between Western European canon and popular culture is not unique to Spain; rather, it reflects dynamics that are similarly present across multiple geopolitical contexts. In the Spanish case, these tensions become visible through the coexistence of three forces: (1) an academic tradition inherited from the conservatory, (2) a rich but frequently museumized oral heritage, and (3) a student body immersed in digital and globalized sound cultures. Together, these forces offer a lens through which to examine

broader challenges faced by music teacher education internationally. The central question is therefore not whether more repertoire should be included, but how to reconfigure university curricula so that they cease to function as spaces of hierarchical cultural reproduction and instead become spaces oriented toward social justice and musical democratization.

Curricular Proposal

Transforming the university music curriculum cannot consist simply of replacing one canon with another. The task is to destabilize hierarchies and open spaces where multiple musics coexist as legitimate resources for teacher education. This hybrid perspective is grounded in the idea that music education is not neutral: legitimizing some repertoires while excluding others is a political act that reflects relations of power (Hess 2019; Regelski 2009).

The model proposed here is articulated through three curricular axes—students' musical cultures, local heritage, and critical methodologies—which together inform the design, organization, and epistemological orientation of teacher education curricula.

Students' Musical Culture As A Starting Point

Recognizing students' sound cultures means overturning the deficit logic that has long dominated university music education. Rather than assuming that students "lack" adequate academic training, this perspective starts from the recognition that music teacher candidates bring diverse forms of musical expertise developed through informal learning, participatory cultures, and everyday engagement with popular and digital musics (Green 2008; Karlsen 2011; Partti and Karlsen 2010). These forms of cultural capital, shaped by globalized and mediated musical practices, are not secondary to formal knowledge but constitute meaningful resources for pedagogical reflection and curricular design. This approach not only facilitates motivation but positions students as valid epistemic subjects whose knowledge deserves recognition within the university context.

From a pedagogical standpoint, engaging with students' everyday musical practices—such as analyzing personal playlists, reconstructing individual musical life trajectories, and collectively arranging popular songs—supports the development of

critical listening, reflexive engagement with cultural appropriation, and practical skills in music production. These activities invite students to examine their own musical habits as sites of learning, while also fostering collaborative processes through which musical meaning is negotiated and reworked in shared educational spaces.

At the same time, this approach foregrounds a critical dimension by legitimizing genres such as pop, rock, hip hop, or K-pop as objects of serious academic inquiry. Doing so directly challenges entrenched hierarchies that reserve educational value exclusively for Western European classical music and reframes the central pedagogical question. Rather than asking which music is inherently "better," the focus shifts toward what different musics can teach within specific educational, cultural, and social contexts.

An illustrative example of this orientation is a seminar in which each student selects a song from their everyday playlist and analyzes it from both musical and cultural perspectives. The group then collectively reinterprets selected pieces using classroom instruments, using this process as an opportunity to discuss the narratives of gender, class, ethnicity, or identity that emerge from the music. Through such practices, popular music becomes not only a familiar point of entry, but also a powerful medium for critical reflection and collaborative knowledge construction in teacher education.

Local Sound Heritage in Dialogue with Global Musics

Folk and oral traditions hold an ambiguous place in the university: valued as heritage but often presented as relics. The proposal is to re-signify folklore as living material capable of dialoguing with contemporary musics. From a pedagogical perspective, the pluralistic curriculum proposes working with songbooks—such as documented in Spanish traditional song collections (Manzano Alonso 1982; Gil García 1961; García Matos 1951; Martínez Torner 1920) —not merely as objects of historical documentation, but as pedagogical resources for creative re-use, improvisation, and comparative engagement in dialogue with global repertoire (Manzano Alonso 1982; Campbell 2004; Gil García 1961; Nettl 2005; Martínez Torner 1920). Approached in this way, these collections move beyond patrimonial study to become active materials through which students can explore musical processes, stylistic transformation, and cross-cultural relationships.

This pedagogical orientation is inseparable from a critical dimension that reframes practices of musical juxtaposition and hybridity. Relating a Castilian romance to an African American blues, or an Extremaduran ronda to a reggae rhythm, is not about "modernizing" folklore, nor about presuming it to be politically neutral. Rather, such practices make explicit and re-articulate the political dimensions that have historically shaped all musical repertoire, including those that have been institutionalized, folklorized, or deliberately depoliticized through specific cultural regimes. These juxtapositions foreground how musical meanings are continuously re-signified within shifting social, historical, and power-laden contexts.

An illustrative classroom application of this approach is a project in which student groups select a traditional song connected to a cultural, regional, or familial context relevant either to the group itself or to the location of the teacher education program. Students research the song's historical and social background and then transform it into a hybrid arrangement—for example, reworking an Extremaduran jota with a funk groove. Throughout the process, they explicitly reflect on what is gained and what is lost through such transformation, as well as on how questions of identity, belonging, and cultural positioning are negotiated. In this way, work with traditional repertoires becomes both a site of creative experimentation and a space for critical inquiry into heritage, power, and musical meaning.

Active Methodologies and Emerging Technologies as Catalysts

How music is taught is as important as what is taught. Integrating active methodologies and technological tools is not merely a didactic strategy, but a way of redistributing agency within the learning process. These approaches are not inherently opposed to any specific musical tradition, including Western European classical music; rather, they shift the pedagogical focus from reproduction toward participation, reflection, and meaning-making. In this sense, students are positioned not as passive reproducers of a given canon, but as active and critical producers of sonic knowledge, regardless of the repertoire involved.

From a pedagogical perspective, the pluralistic curriculum is activated through approaches that foreground exploration, collaboration, and creativity. Orff-Schulwerk

facilitates musical experimentation through accessible instruments and embodied practices, while project-based learning supports collective processes of inquiry and co-construction of knowledge. Gamification introduces playful forms of engagement that can enhance motivation and participation, and the use of artificial intelligence opens new possibilities for inclusive compositional practices adapted to diverse learner profiles. These approaches do not function as ends in themselves, but as means of reshaping how musical knowledge is produced and shared within teacher education.

At the same time, the proposal foregrounds a critical dimension in the use of technologies, emphasizing that digital tools should not be adopted solely for their novelty or perceived innovation. Instead, their integration must be accompanied by critical interrogation of digital culture, including questions about how music circulates on platforms such as Spotify, whose voices and aesthetics are amplified or marginalized, and what kinds of biases may be reproduced through algorithmic and AI-based systems. In this way, technological engagement becomes a site for examining power relations and cultural politics in the digital age.

An illustrative example of this approach is a workshop in which students collaboratively generate an AI-produced song addressing sustainability and subsequently engage in a critical analysis of the tool itself. Such analysis may focus on the system's limitations, the cultural assumptions embedded in its outputs, and the broader implications for artistic authorship, creativity, and responsibility. Through this process, technology functions not only as a compositional resource but also as a catalyst for reflective and ethically informed music education.

Implications for Teacher Education

A pluralistic curriculum transforms teacher education at multiple, interrelated levels. From an epistemological standpoint, it challenges deficit-oriented assumptions by recognizing all musics as valid forms of knowledge, rather than treating them as auxiliary or motivational resources that are subordinate to an academic canon. This shift carries clear pedagogical implications, as it prepares future teachers to design meaningful learning experiences that are connected to children's real sound environments and everyday cultural practices. At the same time, the proposal operates at

a political level by positioning music education as a space of social justice, where historically marginalized narratives can be made visible and entrenched cultural hierarchies critically examined and contested.

In practical terms, this approach entails preparing teachers who are attentive listeners to the musical cultures of their students, rather than transmitters of decontextualized repertoires. It encourages the use of folklore as a dynamic resource for connecting local traditions with global musical flows, instead of treating it as a static or museumized relic. It also promotes the thoughtful application of methodologies and technologies to foster student agency, creativity, and critical reflection, emphasizing participation and meaning-making over reproduction.

Taken together, this model aligns closely with the MayDay Group's Action Ideals by promoting inclusion, diversity, democratic participation, and the questioning of historical musical hierarchies. The aim is not to displace one canon with another, but to open a polyphonic curricular space in which multiple musics can coexist, challenge one another, and be mutually transformed in music teacher preparation.

Discussion

The proposed pluralistic curriculum model should not be read merely as a set of innovative methodological strategies, but as a critical stance toward the structures of power that have historically shaped music education. In this sense, the discussion that follows seeks to articulate the proposal in dialogue with theoretical frameworks of critical pedagogy and with the MayDay Group's Action Ideals, emphasizing its emancipatory potential and its implications for social justice.

Music Education as Political Practice

As Paulo Freire (1970/2000) argued, all education is a political act: it is never neutral, it always reproduces or questions structures of power. University music education in Spain, by prioritizing the Western European classical canon, has contributed to perpetuating a cultural hierarchy in which only certain musics are deemed worthy of study. This phenomenon cannot be understood as merely aesthetic, since aesthetic judgments are themselves embedded in broader worldviews and power

relations. In this case, they reflect a framework in which European classical traditions are privileged, while popular, global, and everyday musical practices are systematically marginalized.

Henry Giroux (1997) explains that educational institutions are spaces of cultural production as much as of content transmission. The university not only teaches music, but regulates which musics are recognized as valid knowledge and which are relegated to the sphere of leisure. This process is not innocent: it legitimizes some identities while silencing others. Thus, when students arrive at university with a soundscape shaped by rock, pop, reggae, or hip hop and encounter a curriculum that ignores these musics, the implicit message is clear: their sonic experiences are positioned as lacking academic value—a dynamic widely documented in research on informal learning, curriculum legitimation, and student musical identities (Green 2008; Karlsen 2011; Wright 2010).

This hybrid curricular proposal seeks to reverse this logic by generating a space in which multiple genres can coexist on more equitable terms. In this sense, the curriculum ceases to function as a mechanism of hierarchical cultural reproduction and becomes a site of democratic negotiation and contestation understood in a critical and cultural sense—that is, as a process through which different forms of musical knowledge are publicly deliberated, legitimized, and problematized in relation to power, voice, and representation (Freire 1970/2000; Giroux 1997; Hess 2019).

From Reproduction to Emancipatory Praxis

Tom Regelski (2009) argues that music education must be conceived as praxis, that is, as reflective action oriented toward cultural emancipation. From this perspective, a curriculum centered on the technical reproduction of Western European repertoires—score reading, choral performance, tonal analysis—reduces training to the repetition of legitimized patterns. In contrast, the pluralistic curriculum opens the possibility for students to become active subjects and critical producers of musical knowledge.

The shift from reproduction to praxis is embodied in experiences that combine creation, improvisation, and critical reflection. Incorporating modern popular musics does not mean simply adding new songs to the syllabus, but transforming the ways

music is taught and learned: working with playlists, producing mashups, improvising over traditional patterns, or critically analyzing the lyrics of genres such as rap or reggaeton. These practices not only develop musical competencies but also foster critical literacies aligned with Freirean pedagogy.

Music education, understood in this way, ceases to be a space for legitimating repertoire and becomes a laboratory of cultural empowerment. Future teachers not only acquire musical content, but also develop tools to value the sonic diversity of childhood and to design inclusive pedagogical practices.

Hybrid Spaces as Laboratories of Social Justice

Randall Everett Allsup (2016) proposes "remixing the classroom" as a metaphor for an open, democratic, and creative educational model. Hybrid spaces that combine folklore, modern popular musics, and active methodologies can be interpreted in this vein as laboratories of social justice. In these spaces, hierarchies that place some musics above others are destabilized, and conditions are created for each song to be analyzed, reinterpreted, and re-signified in dialogue with the rest.

These hybrid spaces are particularly valuable in the Spanish context. The coexistence of a rich oral heritage—jotas, romances, work songs—with the globalized musics of the present offers a unique opportunity for cultural crossings: an Extremaduran ronda reinterpreted with reggae rhythms, a Castilian romance transformed into a pop ballad, a jota dialoguing with jazz improvisations. These exercises should not be read as mere aesthetic "fusion," but as practices of cultural negotiation that allow students to reflect on what it means to engage with, transform, and re-signify music in the university.

Hybridity is thus not an end in itself, but a means of making historically marginalized narratives visible, including those shaped by African diasporic traditions (e.g., blues, reggae, hip hop) as well as by Spain's colonial and postcolonial entanglements with Latin America and other regions. From this perspective, hybridity supports the re-signification of local heritage while preparing teachers to engage critically with cultural diversity and historical power relations.

Connection with the MayDay Group's Action Ideals

Since its foundation, the MayDay Group has defended a critical and transformative vision of music education. Its Action Ideals provide a key framework for evaluating curricular proposals (MayDay Group, n.d.). The hybrid proposal aligns closely with the Action Ideals articulated by the MayDay Group by foregrounding diversity, inclusion, agency, cultural democracy, and social relevance as interconnected dimensions of curriculum design. In terms of diversity, the proposal challenges the monocultural dominance of the Western European classical canon by legitimizing a plurality of repertoire as meaningful sources of musical knowledge. This pluralistic stance is inseparable from a commitment to inclusion, as it recognizes both students' everyday musics and local sound heritage as valid and pedagogically valuable forms of knowledge rather than as marginal or supplementary content.

The proposal also places strong emphasis on student agency by positioning learners as creative and reflective producers of musical meaning, rather than as passive recipients of predetermined repertoire. From the perspective of cultural democracy, it explicitly questions historical musical hierarchies and supports more equitable forms of participation among diverse traditions, genres, and cultural narratives within the university curriculum. Finally, the proposal foregrounds social relevance by seeking to connect university music education with children's lived environments and with pressing contemporary concerns, including sustainability, globalization, and the construction of individual and collective identities. In short, the pluralistic curriculum is not merely an innovative pedagogical strategy, but a political and ethical proposal that seeks to reorient music education toward social justice.

Conclusions

The analysis developed throughout this article has shown that university-level music education in Spain is at a crossroads. On the one hand, the hegemony of the Western European classical canon persists, sustained by institutional inertia, practices inherited from conservatories, and prejudices that consider modern popular musics to be "inferior." On the other hand, legislative discourses and teaching experiences are emerging that create cracks in this hegemony, raising the need for more inclusive,

democratic, and culturally relevant curricula. It is precisely this coexistence of strong institutional inertia and emerging counter-hegemonic practices that makes the Spanish context a particularly relevant case for examining contemporary tensions in university music teacher education.

The proposal of a pluralistic curriculum does not imply replacing one canon with another, but rather questioning the hierarchies that have legitimized it as the only form of valid musical knowledge. The aim is to build a university space where multiple genres––classical, popular, traditional, global––can coexist on equal terms, generating meaningful learning for students and preparing teachers capable of responding to the cultural diversity of childhood. More concretely, this pluralistic curriculum is articulated around three fundamental axes:

1) *Students' musical culture*, understood not as an obstacle but as a legitimate starting point for learning. Including students' everyday musics (pop, rock, jazz, reggae, hip hop, K-pop) means recognizing their cultural agency and opening the possibility of critically analyzing the meanings these musics convey.
2) *Local sound heritage*, re-signified in dialogue with global repertoire. Far from a museum-like treatment that turns it into a relic, folklore can be approached as living material, capable of generating intergenerational and transcultural bridges and problematizing the relationship between the local and the global.
3) *Active methodologies and emerging technologies*, conceived as catalysts of pedagogical change. Orff-Schulwerk, gamification, project-based learning, improvisation, and digital tools––including artificial intelligence––enable university students to move from passive receivers to creative and reflective agents.

The integration of these axes not only transforms university teaching practice but also redefines the purpose of teacher education. The goal is not simply to train musicians who teach, but to prepare critical music educators, capable of designing inclusive pedagogical experiences and of understanding that every curricular decision––what musics to include, how to teach them, what meanings to attribute to them––is a political act.

Within this framework, the Spanish case functions as an illustrative context through which broader tensions in music teacher education can be examined, rather than as an exceptional or isolated scenario. The tensions between canon and popular musics, heritage and globalization, reproduction and emancipation run through educational systems worldwide. In Spain, these dynamics unfold within a legislative framework that rhetorically encourages innovation, curricular flexibility, and cultural relevance, while many university institutions remain rooted in long-standing conservatory-based practices and inherited academic logics. The hybrid proposal presented here should therefore be understood not as a response to legislative mandates, but as an invitation to rethink the university as a space of cultural justice—one in which students' sonic diversity is recognized as a pedagogical resource rather than treated as a deficit to be corrected.

Finally, this reflection aligns with the MayDay Group's Action Ideals, which urge us to democratize the curriculum, question historical hierarchies, promote student agency, and connect music education with the social issues of our time. If music is an essential part of human experience, the university cannot continue restricting it to a repertoire legitimized solely by European tradition. The challenge is to open the curriculum to the polyphony of the contemporary world and to prepare teachers who, by listening to this diversity, contribute to building a more democratic, inclusive, and transformative education.

In other words, the future of university music education depends on our ability to interrupt musical hierarchies and to generate curricula in which folklore, modern popular musics, and critical practices coexist as equally legitimate sources of knowledge. This article does not offer a closed model, but rather an invitation to imagine, test, and collectively discuss new ways of conceiving music in teacher education. Only then can we move toward a form of university music education that is more socially just, in the sense that it recognizes diverse musical knowledges, redistributes cultural authority, and responds to the lived experiences of increasingly plural student and school communities in the twenty-first century.

Ethics protocol

Not applicable.

Conflict of interest disclosure

Nothing to declare.

AI disclosure

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