

The following is an excerpt from Julie Lyonn Lieberman's book, *Alternative Styles: The New Curriculum* used with permission by the author. Julie is the artistic director for the summer program, **Strings Without Boundaries: Where Tradition Meets Creativity and Style**. (<http://www.stringswithoutboundaries>)

Meeting National Standards

You will be able to fulfill all ten national standards by including any one of the alternative styles discussed in this book into your curriculum. Certain styles will present new vantage points for your students. For instance, because orchestral music is harmonized, fiddling will give students an opportunity to play in unison. Unison playing on a short, repetitive melody such as a fiddle tune will enable weaker players to glimpse and grow into the future. They will hear the stronger players in a reinforcing manner.

In addition, students will have the opportunity to learn about musicians from their towns, states, or cultural backgrounds who created tunes that are still played today.

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music

This standard appears to be directed to choral programs, but you can use vocal call and response as a starting point to teach unfamiliar rhythmic phrases, slide techniques, ornaments, and world scales to string players. The classical Indian music system teaches all musicians—including percussionists—through the voice first. An instrument's technical demands can often complicate and even slow down the initial learning process.

2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music

Varied is the key term here. Sometimes it is interpreted only to mean a score from a Broadway show tune, a movie theme, or the like. Unfortunately, musically or technically speaking, these scores do not require anything different from classical literature.

Alternative styles give students opportunities to sample new grooves on their instruments, new left- and right-hand moves, and even a fresh interplay between the instruments.

3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments

Styles such as bluegrass, blues, rock, and jazz all incorporate improvisation in one manner or another. The suggested resources (books and videos) cited throughout this book will provide you with the warm-up techniques and exercises to explore a number of approaches to improvisation.

4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines

You can use a fiddle tune, which tends to have a shorter repetitive structure, as an easier entry point into composition than would be demanded by the classical genre. Students can also have a lot of fun trying to create a melody based, for example, on an unusual scale from another area of the world or a rhythmic motif from Afro-Cuban or African drumming.

5. Reading and notating music

Students will gain new skills as they read music from various cultures, and dictation can just as easily be given from an alternative piece as from a classical one. In fact, you can teach a fiddle tune by ear, thereby staying true to its aural tradition of learning, and then challenge your students to write the tune down.

6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music

Comparing and contrasting several different styles helps focus the ears more acutely to the variables that come together to create a style:

- tonal center
- type of scale

- preferred melodic intervals
- preferred rhythmic motifs
- meter
- tempo
- structure
- unison (monophonic) or harmony (polyphonic)
- ornamentation (left- and right-hand)
- instrumentation (ethnic or Western, quantity of each instrument and ensemble size)
- arrangement
- rhythmic groove (unison or polyrhythmic)
- phrasing (length of each idea, how entrances and exits are articulated)
- emotional feel
- dynamic feel

7. Evaluating music and music performances

Rather than drawing from a prescribed approach, you have an opportunity to invent an individualized class criteria by challenging each class to invent its own system of evaluation. What do students consider important standards for interesting, well written, and well-performed music, and why?

8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts

With each stylistic unit you present, you have the opportunity to give students an overview of the culture that created that style. This includes any variables that might have influenced or shaped that style, such as language, government, visual art, and dance.

9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture

Teaching alternative string styles provides an opportunity to present information in relevant context.

10. Understanding dance as it relates to music

There is a corresponding dance for almost every fiddle style, and for many of the world styles. This presents you with a goldmine of possibilities. Students can learn the Cajun two-step, a sixties versus an eighties rock 'n' roll dance move, a Western line dance, the tango, the mambo, or a square dance. From clogging to jazz tap-dancing, you can turn to Hollywood movie footage, dance videos, or guest specialists as resources.