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Title	Materials and Activities for an English Language Course Focusing on the Beatles
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Citation	Hiroshima Studies in Language and Language Education , 25 : 15 - 28
Issue Date	2022-03-01
DOI	
Self DOI	<a href="https://doi.org/10.15027/51958">10.15027/51958</a>
URL	<a href="https://ir.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/00051958">https://ir.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/00051958</a>
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Relation	



# Materials and Activities for an English Language Course Focusing on the Beatles

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As a 14-year-old English learner, my teacher played us a Beatles' song. This inspired me so much, that I decided then and there to become an English teacher (anonymous respondent quoted in Tegge, 2018, p. 284)

This article presents a report on innovative pedagogical practices focusing on seven of the Beatles' most famous songs. After some considerations regarding both using songs in general in language teaching and the cultural importance of the Beatles as musical artists, the author describes the materials and activities used in a Beatles-themed course of English classes at a Japanese university. The purpose of the article is simply to share practice and stimulate the professional reflection of fellow teachers, as well as acquaint or re-acquaint readers with the story of the Beatles. The general methodological philosophy of the course is similar to Krashen and Terrell's *Natural Approach* (1983), with its emphasis on comprehensible input and a low-anxiety environment. The author makes the uncontroversial claim that the Beatles are culturally important as popular artists. The aims of the course, therefore, also included, alongside providing comprehensible input in a low-anxiety environment, providing knowledge of the cultural heritage of the English-speaking world. Some positive reflections on the course will be presented later in the article; however, it should be stated at the outset that no claim (and no evidence) is presented that the course offers a superior or more effective method of teaching English than any other. Even if fellow teachers find themselves in some sympathy with the idea of using such materials to teach English, the hope is that they may be stimulated to find other materials and better activities that work in their particular situations. This is all the more the case because the structure of the course being reported was arbitrarily constrained by the unusual pre-existing curricular context in which it was embedded. The official title of the course was vague: *Communication Practice*. At 51, the number of students (mostly majors in elementary school education) was quite large for a 'communication' class. The class hours were unusually long: seven sessions of three hours each. The number of songs used – seven – was determined by pedagogical context, not cultural analysis. Thus, what is presented in this article should be understood as a practice report informed by scholarship, but not driven by empirical 'science'.

## BACKGROUND

### The Use of Songs in Foreign Language Teaching

The use of songs has been advocated in theoretical writings on foreign language teaching. A useful summary of English-language theory is provided by Engh (2013) who, whilst highlighting the potential of music to lower learners' affective filter and increase motivation in language classes, also draws attention to

a lack of literature discussing how music is actually used by teachers in practical contexts. Music as a source of positive affect in language learning has been championed by the Spanish academics, Fonseca-Mora and Machancoses (2016). And affective and motivational concerns have also been emphasized in recent German-language literature, exemplified by the following statement by Lütge and Owczarek (2019):

Zunächst kann Musik eine “aktivierende und kommunikationsfördernde Atmosphäre (Lütge 2010: 102) schaffen, die sich förderlich auf die Gruppendynamik einer Lerngemeinschaft auswirken kann [First of all, music can create an activating atmosphere that may be conducive to communication and the group dynamics of a learning community]. (p. 24)

In the same edited volume, Usbeck-Frei (2019) adds as an advantage of (pop and rock) songs that they are a source of authentic rather than artificially contrived foreign-language input. On the other hand, writers who prioritize experimental research have pointed out the paucity of experimental evidence that the use of songs is more effective than traditional methods of language teaching. For example, Davis’s (2017) review of empirical literature, whilst it reaches positive conclusions about the use of songs in the young-learner classroom, also states:

... although songs were shown to be effective at improving various features of learners’ L2, when they were directly compared against other formats of presenting identical text such as stories (...) or choral repetition (...) no statistically significant pedagogical advantages were found. (p. 453)

If we move away from theory and look at practice-oriented literature, the advocacy of songs has been a staple at least since the origins of the British communicative teaching movement in the International House trust, established by John Haycraft in 1974. In his handbook for language teachers, Haycraft (1986, p. 95) categorized songs together with games, projects, and homework as “other language activities”. It is perhaps unfortunate that this may have reinforced the image of songs as suitable mostly for the “dreaded Friday afternoon gap-fill” (Tegge, 2018, p. 274). Nevertheless, in the early 1990s, two educators based in Japan – Tim Murphey and Dale Griffiee – published resource books listing a wide variety of practical classroom activities that could be used with songs (Murphey, 1992; Griffiee, 1992). A more recent compendium of activities is Arnold and Herrick (2017). In an interesting section of Murphey’s introductory chapter, he draws up contrastive lists of what people typically do with songs in everyday life and what they typically do with songs in language teaching, and suggests that activities from the former list should also be used in classroom activities, for example reading about the writing, production, and performance of songs. In other words, it is possible in classes to combine songs with reading about the songs, and create a course structure that is cultural and narrative rather than purely linguistic. A drawback of some song-based coursebooks, for example Kadoyama and Capper (2014), is that each unit features a song by a different artist without any unifying cultural theme or narrative to the course. The present author has sought to avoid this by teaching courses with a historical theme, such as the history of African-American artists in popular music (Howell, 2019). The eight years of the Beatles’ recording history also comprise an interesting narrative with a beginning, development, and ending. In the following sub-section, the cultural importance of the Beatles

and how their recording history can be summarized in seven songs is outlined.

### **The Story of the Beatles**

In 1957 Paul McCartney joined John Lennon's band *The Quarrymen*, which with the later addition of George Harrison and Ringo Starr became *The Beatles*. After acquiring what Malcolm Gladwell (2008) famously called their 10,000 hours of practice in the bars of Hamburg's red-light district, they found success in the U.K. when George Martin produced their first album in 1963. In 1964 they first toured America, where hitherto British artists had been almost completely unnoticed (Hall, 2014), and went on to become the dominant musical artists of the rest of the decade until their break-up in 1970. They remain the best-selling musical artists in history. Culturally speaking, their cultural influence on the 'Baby Boomer' generation is difficult to overestimate, even if one holds a negative view of that generation (e.g., Gibney 2017). A positive, yet nuanced, evaluation of their lyrical importance can be found in MacDonald (2008):

Attached to the most original and imaginative popular music of the last fifty years, the Beatles' lyrics enjoy a charmed existence in which their relative inconsequentiality is nothing beside their association with joy, love and freedom. (p. xi)

For Womack and Davis (2006), the cultural value of the Beatles songs is equivalent to that of great literature:

... their songs – like our greatest works of literature – almost exclusively concern themselves with the human condition and the dilemmas that confront us regarding the interpersonal relationships that mark our lives. (p. 2)

Their popularity did not end with the break-up of the band in 1970. In 2000, a compilation of their greatest hits, entitled *I*, was the best-selling album in nineteen countries (Decker, 2006). It might also be pointed out that by now the Beatles have become part of the U.K.'s economically important heritage industry, and the houses in which John and Paul grew up in Liverpool are both owned by the National Trust and open to visitors and tourists from throughout the world. Looking beyond the U.K. and the U.S.A., Woodhead (2013) goes as far as to claim, on the basis of his interviews in post-Soviet Russia, that the Beatles helped lay the counter-cultural foundations for the collapse of communism:

"Nobody even tried to understand the words of the songs," he said. "We were trying to understand the feeling behind the music."

"What do you think that was?" I asked him.

"I think freedom, the wind of freedom." (p. 91)

As for the Beatles' connection with Japan, they performed at the famous Budokan arena in Tokyo in 1966, and John Lennon's second marriage was to the Japanese avant-garde artist, Yoko Ono. Even fifty years after the band broke up, it is still possible to find books written in Japanese about, for example, the changing fashion styles of the four members (Yoshino, 2021). More than one book has been published by Japanese authors using Beatle lyrics to explain points of English grammar (Akiyama, 2008; Sato, 2021). Thus, it would be difficult to claim that using the Beatles to teach English is something completely alien or unheard of in Japan.

One of the greatest points of interest in the Beatles music is that it was not static, but developed throughout the eight years of the group's recording history. They began as a live act mainly covering songs by other artists, and only four of the ten songs on their first album *Please Please Me* were Lennon and McCartney compositions. But when their third studio album, *A Hard Day's Night*, was released in July, 1964, all the songs were written by John and Paul. In their last recorded album, *Abbey Road*, George Harrison had also become a major contributor of songs. The Beatles stopped live touring in 1966 and became exclusively a recording band. Whereas *Please Please Me* had been recorded in one day, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart Club Band* took four months, and whereas the subject matter of the early albums was primarily about romantic love, *Sgt. Pepper* clearly shows the influence of countercultural themes such as eastern religion and expanded consciousness. However, by the time of recording their final album to be released, *Let It Be*, the focal point of the four members' concerns was no longer with the band itself, but with their individual personal and musical aspirations. The break-up, decided by Lennon in September 1969, but announced by McCartney in April 1970, was inevitable. The Beatles had given one brief final performance as a group on the roof of 3 Savile Row, London in April, 1969.

Another point of interest in the trajectory of the band lies in the personal development of the four members, and in particular the central dynamic of the relationship between Lennon and McCartney. Chronologically speaking, John Lennon was the founder of the band and clearly the dominant member in the early years. By the time of the break-up, Paul had become dominant in song writing, producing, and management in general, to the extent that John complained that the other three had become "side-men for Paul" (Wenner, 1970). Critics have seen the relationship between the two very different personalities as a major factor in the creative success of the band. For the critic and biographer Albert Goldman (1989, p. 291), Paul was "a born show-biz hustler", whereas John "fancied himself a proudly aloof artiste". Although their songs were always credited equally to Lennon and McCartney, for the most part they composed separately, "bringing each other songs either two-thirds done, or complete and requiring only fine tuning" (MacDonald, 2008, p. xiv). Usually, the main composer of the song would also sing the lead vocals on the record.

The course described hereafter aimed to logically bring together and summarize themes taken up in Beatle songs over the course of their career. Even if one has only seven weeks in which to hold a course of English lessons, much of the story of the rise and fall of the Beatles can be covered in the seven songs listed in Table 1. In the seven songs used, there is a narrative of transition from Lennon to McCartney: the first four songs were sung by John on lead vocal, and the final three by Paul. It is also possible to associate the songs with various aspects of what Womack and Davis (2006, p. 2) call "the human condition and the dilemmas that confront us regarding the interpersonal relationships that mark our lives". So, although there is some inconsequentiality in individual lyrics (yeah yeah yeah!), a plausible claim can be made that the songs, as a

whole, tell a fascinating story and address a wide range of human concerns.

TABLE 1. A Narrative of the Beatles' Career in Seven Songs

Song (year of release)	Main Composer	Associated Career Stage	Associated Human Concern
<i>She Loves You</i> (1963)	John Lennon and Paul McCartney	Beatlemania in U.K.	Love
<i>A Hard Day's Night</i> (1964)	John Lennon	Beatlemania in U.S.	Love
<i>Help!</i> (1965)	John Lennon	Global Touring	Disillusion
<i>Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds</i> (1967)	John Lennon	Recording innovation	Transcendence
<i>Hey Jude</i> (1968)	Paul McCartney	Death of Brian Epstein and John's Divorce	Loss and Renewal
<i>The Long and Winding Road</i> (1970)	Paul McCartney	Break-Up	Regret
<i>Let It Be</i> (1970)	Paul McCartney	Break-Up	Acceptance

## MATERIALS

Pearson's *Penguin Readers* series has published a Level 3 reader telling the story of the Beatles from John and Paul's 1957 meeting to John's murder in 1980. Written by Paul Shipton, the book accompanies a recorded reading by a professional actress, which is divided into 26 short and easily accessible tracks (Shipton, 2000). This was used to introduce all seven sessions of the course. Sleeves with the lyrics and their Japanese translations from the respective CDs were used for learning the words to the seven songs. For reading about the songs, it was decided to use Hunter Davies' 2014 book *The Beatles' Lyrics*. As there is a Japanese translation by Yuji Okada, relevant excerpts could be used in parallel text form. Davies was the official biographer of the group, a friend and contemporary, so his explanations of the songs carry considerable weight. His book is a simpler and more story-like account compared to MacDonald's *Revolution in the Head* (2008), which also gives an account of every Beatles' song, though in a more evaluative and critical way.

### *She Loves You*

*She Loves You*, written jointly by John and Paul, was the Beatles' biggest U.K. hit and the record that launched Beatlemania in the U.K. MacDonald (2008, p. 83) describes it as "an authentic distillation of the atmosphere of that time, and one of the most explosive pop records ever made". The lyrics are somewhat unusual in that they are written from a third-person perspective, offering advice, even remonstrance ("apologize to her!") to a negligent boyfriend. It is also in *She Loves You* that appears the famous refrain "yeah, yeah, yeah". A beautifully restored color video recording of the group performing the song at the ABC Cinema in Manchester is included at the beginning of the documentary film *Eight Days A Week: The Touring Years*. Tracks 2, 3, and 4 tell the early story of the Beatles, including their musical apprenticeship in Hamburg, and the joyful humor and exuberance of the four young men as a group is well captured in sound and image. As Richard Curtis comments when interviewed for the documentary, "the Beatles were kind of the dream of how you might be with your friends as you went through life".

## ***A Hard Day's Night***

In early 1964, *I Want To Hold Your Hand* became their first No.1 on the American charts, and in February they undertook a massively successful tour in the US. To capitalize on such success, a feature film (Lester, 1964) was made starring the Beatles, mainly with the intention of promoting a soundtrack album. After some deliberation, the title of *A Hard Day's Night* was decided upon, drawing upon an off-the-cuff remark by Ringo one night after a day of work on the film set. The album of the same name has been described as a “*tour de force* for John, the major contributor to 10 of the album’s 13 tracks” (Turner, 2015, p. 66). It was John who wrote the title track. With its famous opening guitar chord, it is described by MacDonald (2016, p. 116) as a “powerful, bluesy song – a performance made incandescent by Starr’s excited contribution”. The song appears in the film during both the opening and closing credits. Just before the closing credits, the Beatles give a lip-synched performance of *She Loves You* to a screaming audience. Thus, pedagogically, showing the closing credits can be combined with a recap on the song from the previous week’s class.

## **Help!**

Part of the appeal of the film *A Hard Day's Night* lies in its exuberant sense of fun. Surrounded by non-stop adulation, the young men appeared to be enjoying themselves in a succession of wacky situations, ever ready with zany repartee. The reality of sustained full-on Beatlemania and non-stop touring in the U.K., the U.S., and Asia was evidently less fun than this public image projected. John’s song, *Help!*, written for the eponymous feature film in 1965, is a remarkably upfront plea for help from its composer, openly laying out the writer’s disillusionment that success has not brought mental well-being in its wake, but quite the opposite. Turner (2015, p. 102) dubs it “his great song of honest self-examination”, which would remain “one of his favourites right up to his death”. Davies (2014, p. 94) is again a useful bilingual resource, and describes John at this time as “often down, fed up, miserable, sitting around, doing nothing, remote, distracted”. From a pedagogical point of view, it is also an advantage that the lyrics of the song contain some more formal items of vocabulary: “self-assured”, “appreciate”, “independence”, “insecure” (Davies, 2014, p. 97). A well-matched visual counterpart to Davies’s explanation of the lyrics, can be found in Tracks 8 and 9 of Andrew Solt’s documentary *Imagine: John Lennon* (Solt, 1988), which uses archive material of John’s interview comments as the voice-over narration. Before a clip in Track 8 of the Beatles performing *Help!* to tens of thousands of screaming fans at Shea Stadium, New York, Lennon himself describes how, unable himself to hear what he was playing, touring had become “just a sort of freak-show”. Track 9 shows footage of the Beatles in Tokyo, and also the Christian fundamentalist backlash to the Beatles in the U.S., exemplified in an interview with a threatening Ku Klux Klan member in Memphis, Tennessee.

## **Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds**

The Beatles played their last official concert in San Francisco in August 1966, and switched from a performing to an exclusively recording group. Paul McCartney had noticed the long names of American bands, and came up with the idea of recording an album under the moniker of Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band. Paul was the driving force of the recording of the album, which MacDonald (2016, p. 233) describes as “a shrewd fusion of Edwardian variety orchestra and contemporary ‘heavy rock’”. MacDonald also suggests that Paul’s dominance in the recording was enabled by John Lennon’s consumption of the

hallucinogenic drug LSD. The song which can be most associated with the consciousness-expanding effects of LSD is John's *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*. John, in fact, always maintained that the *Lucy Sky Diamonds* suggestion of LSD was pure coincidence, and that the images in the song were inspired by the works of the 19th century writer Lewis Carroll and a painting by his four-year-old son, featuring his classmate Lucy O'Donnell. Again, the story is available in parallel text form in Davies (2014). It is probably best to take Lennon's explanation at face value, all the more so because John could often be remarkably candid and honest in interviews, sometimes to his own disadvantage. Nevertheless, it would seem almost impossible for listeners not to connect the idea of a surreal trip by boat and train with a 'trip' on LSD. The surreal imagery of the lyrics is also well captured in the animated film, *Yellow Submarine* (Dunning, 1968). The song *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds* is inserted into the film during the imaginary trip to the location of Pepperland. Viewing track 19 of the DVD allows students to listen to the song again, whilst allowing visual enjoyment of the spectacular imagery. Although the Beatles themselves had minimal involvement with the making of *Yellow Submarine*, the film has met with critical acclaim, in particular for the innovative animation directed by Robert Balser and Jack Stokes (Williams, 2018).

### **Hey Jude**

The years 1967–8 were years of endings and beginnings in the personal lives of Paul McCartney and John Lennon. In August 1967, the Beatles' manager, Brian Epstein, died of a drug overdose. In 1968, Paul's long-term girlfriend and fiancée, Jane Asher, broke off their engagement and Paul began living with Linda Eastman, who became his wife in 1969. In the same year, John had abandoned his first wife, Cynthia, and five-year-old son, Julian, in order to be with Yoko Ono, whom he married in 1969. Paul felt sorry for Cynthia and Julian, and wrote a lyric originally entitled "Hey Jules", hoping to express words of comfort to Julian. To make the song slightly less personal, "Jules" was later changed to "Jude". John did not think of the song as a chastisement for leaving his wife and son, but rather as an encouragement to his new relationship with Yoko ("You have found her / Go out and get her"), whilst Paul took the song to also be relevant to his own new relationship with Linda. In any case, the song was a massive hit and is the Beatles' best-selling single in the U.S.A., remaining at No. 1 for nine weeks. The group lip-synched to a pre-recording of the song on *The David Frost Show* in the U.K., and this performance can be seen on Track 4 of Part 8 of *The Beatles Anthology* documentary (Smeaton and Wonfor, 2003). In the same track, Paul gives an explanation of the origins of the song, and thus the written information in the lesson can be recycled in aural and visual channels.

### **The Long and Winding Road**

The last Beatles' album to be recorded was *Abbey Road*. However, the last album to be released was *Let It Be* in May 1970. The delay was caused by the fact that the album was largely a work salvaged from a much larger project, which was to involve a live concert and a filming of the rehearsals conducted at Twickenham Film Studios. But, as Turner (2015, p. 272) comments: "Intended to be a record of a group at the height of its powers the film instead became a drama about a group finally falling apart". Negative recollections of the time recording at Twickenham are voiced by John, George, and Ringo in the *Beatles Anthology* documentary (Part 8, Track 5). The album which finally emerged is dominated by two sad and reflective Paul compositions, which can be deemed appropriate to end a Beatles English course. Although



*The Long and Winding Road* was released as a single after *Let It Be*, the latter was chosen to be the final song in the course, a chronological reversal also made in the *Beatles Anthology* documentary. The inspiration for the title of the song comes from the long road to Paul’s isolated cottage in Scotland, but the theme is one of “fatalistic regret” (MacDonald, 2008, p. 340). According to its composer, “it’s a sad song because it’s all about the unattainable, the door you never quite reach” (Turner, 2015, p. 286). It is also a song that caused considerable bad feeling between Paul and John because, without consulting Paul, John allowed the American producer Phil Spector to add lush orchestration and choral backing. The version of the song that was released as a single was a version that Paul hated. The original version without Spector’s production can, however, be heard on the *Beatles Anthology* documentary (Part 8, Track 7).

### Let It Be

As Turner (2015, p. 281) points out, *Let It Be* “sounded as if it had been written as the Beatles’ swansong”, even if in fact it had been composed more than a year before the group broke up. According to Davies (2014, p. 346), the song is “a pastiche of a choral hymn, with lots of biblical overtones and allusions such as ‘hour of darkness’, ‘a light that shines on me’ and the image of Mother Mary” (Davies, 2014, p. 346). Mary did not primarily refer to the mother of Jesus, but in fact to Paul’s mother who had died of cancer when he was fourteen. The song’s origins lie in a dream that Paul had when tensions and disagreements within the group were causing him stress and sleepless nights. In the dream, he saw a vision of his late mother who told him to let things be and they would work out all right. Background to the project that became the *Let It Be* album and the tensions leading to the break-up of the group can be given to students from Davies’ (2014) account and its translation. A studio performance of the song is available in video form in the *Beatles Anthology* (Part 8, Track 9). This can be presented to students in combination with the previous track, which explains and shows the group’s final live performance on the roof of 3 Savile Road, London.

## LANGUAGE COURSE ACTIVITIES

As a consequence of the peculiarities of curriculum planning at Hiroshima University, the class was assigned to a three-hour timetable block on Monday mornings. It was decided to hold two consecutive sessions separated by a break time of 20 minutes, with a different mixture of classroom activities in each session (although the overall pattern of activities was the same every week). The activities are listed in Table 2, and the student/teacher behaviors for each activity will be explained in the rest of this section of the article.

**TABLE 2. Class Activities**

Session 1	Activities
	Preparatory Reading
	Listening to Songs
	Guided Conversations
<b>BREAK TIME</b>	
Session 2	Activities
	Re-seating
	Text Construction
	Video Viewing
	Coda: Free Q&A

The first session of each weekly class meeting began with preparatory reading of one A4 sheet excerpted from the simplified reader. Each excerpt, corresponding for practical purposes to a track on the accompanying audio CD, provided background information on the relevant stage of the Beatles' career. To concentrate focus on lexical form, some letters were deleted from the latter half of selected words, and students were required to complete the spelling of these words. While they were doing this, the teacher circulated and attached a sticky message 'post-it' to each sheet. Next, students listened to an actress reading the passage on the CD. This helped them with any words they had been unable to complete and heightened the probability that they had written correct answers. Students were then asked to swap their answers with their neighbor and, after the teacher had written the words on the board, asked to mark as correct or incorrect each other's answers. Before returning the sheets to each other, they wrote a short message in English on the 'post-it'. The content of the message could be about anything they liked: the weather, university life, or just how they were feeling that morning.

After this introductory activity, the lyrics of the song were introduced. This was done in the following manner. Slips of paper containing lines from the song were given out randomly to individual students. Copied from the CD sleeve, half of the slips were in English and the other half were the Japanese translations. The lyrics were not distributed in their entirety as they contained repetitions as well as very simple lines not requiring translation to be easily understood. Then, starting from the beginning of the song, the teacher read a line aloud and asked the possessor of the corresponding English slip to come and write the line on the board, and the possessor of the Japanese translation to come and do likewise. This procedure was repeated until most of the lyrics were written on the board. The teacher then had the class repeat them in choral form, using simple drilling techniques such as full repetition (the teacher reads the phrase exactly as written on the board), reduced repetition (the teacher reads part of the phrase written on the board), and expanded repetition (the teacher reads more than the phrase written on the board). Finally, the actual song was listened to from the CD.

After this activity, a guided conversation activity took place. Students were given five questions in English, with three answer options for each question. The pre-written options were provided to make the activity easier and stress-free for students who were non-English majors. The questions were related to the lyrics, including the human concern associated with the song. Where possible, the actual lyrics themselves were recycled in the questions. For example, in the case of *She Loves You*, questions were asked such as "Have you ever lost your love?" and for *Let It Be*, "What do you do when you find yourself in times of trouble?" To begin the activity, the teacher read aloud all the questions and answer options to familiarize the students with them and their meanings. Students were then asked to talk firstly in pairs, and then in groups of four. Deviations from the 'script' were accepted and encouraged. Finally, two students were randomly selected to sit on 'hot seats' at the front of the class and answer the five questions, plus any new questions posed by the class. After this, the class took a 20-minute break, with students leaving the classroom so that reassignment of seats could take place smoothly after the interval.

The second session began with a reseating of students in new randomly-assigned pairs. While the students were out of the classroom during breaktime, the teacher placed numbers on seats so that two students would be sitting next to each other. Two students were assigned to randomly distribute small slips of papers with numbers written on them to the other class participants as they re-entered the room after the break.

Students were asked to sit in their assigned seats for the second half of the class that day and the first half of the class the following week, after which seats would again be reassigned. Although this meant that they could not sit with their friends, it offered an opportunity for first-years to talk to students they might not otherwise have spoken to and to make new friends and acquaintances. After seat reassignment, the second session began in earnest with an activity in which students constructed a short passage about a song excerpted from Hunter Davies' book about the Beatles' lyrics. To ensure comprehension, students were asked firstly to silently read the Japanese translation of the passage, and secondly to match ten English expressions, presented in a random order, with their Japanese translation equivalents. The expressions were selected simply to help with comprehension, not on the basis of a linguistic rationale or needs analysis. Then the English text was constructed by students in a two-step process comprising a standard blank-fill exercise and a pair-dictation task. When this was complete, the teacher read the full passage aloud while students listened and completed an exercise in which they sequenced the previously highlighted ten English expressions in their textual order.

The final core activity was watching the video material and answering easy multiple-choice comprehension questions. Before viewing, the five questions were distributed to students and read aloud by the teacher. The questions were simply confirmative of the video's English voice-over, comprehension of which was assisted by Japanese subtitles. Students then peer-checked their answers by Q&A with their neighbors, and confirmed correctness by asking the questions to the teacher. Teacher-fronted Q&A was kept to a minimum to maintain a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere. As a coda to the class, the teacher required 'volunteers' to raise their hands and ask three or four free questions to himself about any topic. Incentivized in this way to bring an end to the class, questions were usually promptly forthcoming.

## PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

In this section of the article, some post-implementation reflections on the course will be presented, with some subjective insights firstly from students and secondly from the teacher. Owing to sudden contact restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the student reactions were solicited using the Internet and in a non-anonymous fashion. Forty-one out of 51 students responded. A major goal of the class was to provide a social venue for learning English with a low-anxiety, positive emotional environment. Students were, therefore, asked to what extent they agreed with the statements "the class was enjoyable" and "the class was meaningful". Responses are shown in Table 3.

**TABLE 3. Student Responses to a Questionnaire about Enjoyment and Meaning**

	<i>Statement 1: The class was enjoyable</i>	<i>Statement 2: The class was meaningful</i>
<i>Strongly agree</i>	38 students	26 students
<i>Agree</i>	3 students	12 students
<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	0 students	3 students
<i>Disagree</i>	0 students	0 students
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	0 students	0 students

Nearly all the respondents strongly agreed with the statement, "the class was enjoyable". They were also asked to write a reaction to the class in general and a number of positive comments were received:

There were a lot of smiles in the lessons so we could enjoy speaking English.

The class was the most enjoyable of all the classes for me.

The English class is my favorite one.

A specific comment was made about the social benefits of seating changes:

Thanks to the seating arrangement change, I was able to talk classmates and make many friends. I want to take your class again.

Reactions to the questionnaire statement, “the class was meaningful” were positive, but less overwhelmingly so compared to the question of enjoyment. Although no one disagreed with the statement, there was less strong agreement, and three students were neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Nevertheless, positive reactions to the Beatles content were also received:

I learned the Beatles deeply and liked them through this class. Now I listen to the music of the Beatles in the morning.

I wasn’t interested in the Beatles until I attended Peter’s class, but now I love Beatles. Also, at first, I felt anxious terribly, but I got to look forward to going to university.

Students were also asked to indicate their favorite of the seven songs presented in the course. A clear favorite was *Let It Be* with 20 votes, followed by *Help!* with eight votes. One might speculate that the combination of a beautiful, elegiac melody with simple, humanistic lyrics would make it popular in any culture. So if one had to choose a Beatle song for a one-off lesson, *Let It Be* would seem to be a safe choice.

The students’ responses were non-anonymous and solicited by an interested party, so they do not in any way constitute an objective evaluation. Nevertheless, the comments were gratifying to the teacher in that they tended to confirm his own perception that there was not a heavy weight of intellectual and emotional resistance to his aims in the course, which prioritized socio-emotional and cultural over linguistic objectives. From the teacher’s point of view, the course seemed to run smoothly despite the relatively large number of students and idiosyncratic timetabling. However, in the course of reflecting after completion of the course, two absences came to mind. One was the lack of any activities requiring truly imaginative and creative responses, and the other was that, although the course was constructed around seven songs and communal singing has been claimed to “promote group cohesion and stability” (Fonseca-Mora & Machancoses, 2016, p. 364), the participants in this course did no singing in class. A similar course in the future might benefit from more creative activities and singing. One possibility, for example, would be to devise a course using the songs of the rock group Queen, and in particular the life of Freddie Mercury as depicted in the film, *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Speech bubbles from graphic novels of Freddie’s life could be used creatively, and karaoke DVDs of Queen hits could be used for ending the class. Freddie Mercury might also be seen as a

more relevant artist than the Beatles in that contemporary issues of race and sexual orientation are more central to his story.

## CONCLUSIONS

The main propositions of this article are the following:

- The songs of the Beatles represent important cultural knowledge.
- A range of authentic bilingual materials about the Beatles is available.
- A range of pedagogical activities can be devised around these materials.
- Such activities can be enjoyable for students and boost their motivation.

The Beatles are the most popular English-language musical artists in history, and their very popularity is a strong reason to consider their story for pedagogical purposes. Other possible narratives might be, as previously mentioned, the story of Freddie Mercury or, for more advanced students, the story of Bob Dylan, the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016.

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## ABSTRACT

### Materials and Activities for an English Language Course Focusing on the Beatles

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This article presents a case report of innovative pedagogical practice, outlining the materials and activities used in an English Language Course based on seven songs by history's top-selling musical artists, the Beatles. The aim is to refresh readers' knowledge of the Beatles, and to offer an example of practice that might be stimulating and adaptable for other professional English teachers. After a review of theoretical and professional writings on the use of songs in Foreign Language Teaching, a brief outline is given of the history and cultural importance of the Beatles. The core of the article is a simple description of the materials and activities employed in the course. Finally, in accord with the principles of professional practice, subjective reflections of course participants are presented.

## 要 約

### ビートルズ (the Beatles) を扱った英語語学コースの教材と活動

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本稿の目的は、史上最高の売り上げを誇った音楽グループである the Beatles (ビートルズ) の7つの楽曲に焦点を当てた、英語語学コースでの教材や活動を説明することにより、革新的な教育活動の詳細を報告することである。とりわけ、読者の the Beatles に関する知識を新たにするとともに、英語教育を専門とする多くの教師にとって刺激的で応用可能な活動例を提供することを目指している。まずは、外国語教育における歌の使用に関する理論的・学術的知見をまとめ、その後、the Beatles の歴史的・文化的重要性を概観する。続いて、本稿の目的である授業で用いられた教材と活動(実践)を詳述する。最後に、先行研究に基づいて、授業参加者の主観的受け止めを報告する。