

Embedding Primary School English into Physical Education: A Kuwaiti Experiment

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Abstract

This study was carried out to determine the effect of embedding English into physical education (PE) lessons, at first primary grade in Kuwait, to enhance the pupils' achievement in EFL learning.

Two experimental and two controlled classes were selected from two schools in the City zone, one for boys and one for girls. The number of pupils in each class ranged from 22 to 26 with an average age of six years and three months.

A proposed PE programme utilizing EFL terms and structures of seven units in Pupils Book 1, and seven teaching units in the PE teaching plan, was applied on the experimental classes for three consecutive months extending from October to December 1994. An oral achievement test involving all the groups, was administered at the end of December. Findings indicated significant differences between the experimental and controlled groups with respect to the achievement test irrespective of their sex. This implies that the programme was effective in improving the performance of pupils in learning English. The study concluded with recommendations to conduct similar experiments in other subjects and stages.

Introduction

There is widespread interest in developing effective approaches for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). It assumed urgency after its introduction in Kuwaiti primary schools in the autumn of 1993. The attainment of FL proficiency necessitates the allocation of sufficient time and resources. There have also been recommendations to integrate FL programmes into the primary school curriculum (Met and Rhodes, 1990; Curtain, 1993). Various approaches have been suggested to achieve this objective. One of them is content-based instruction (CBI), that is teaching elements of the curricula areas through language. Foreign language proficiency can then be achieved by embedding the language into other subject contents (Hurrell, 1991; Leaver and Stryker, 1989). However, there is controversy about the role that content should play in language teaching, and whether it can be integrated with language teaching purposes.

This controversy, on the one hand, has led to a re-examination of the role of content in language teaching, and the emergence of a widespread belief that contextualizing language lessons around structures or functions is not enough. On the other hand, practitioners have suggested the use of authentic texts, written or oral, designed for purposes other than FL teaching. Such texts provide in concrete form the structures, functions, and discourse features to be taught. One view is that these features, once identified, can subsequently be taught at least partially in isolation, with lessons focused on particular language forms, functions and patterns. A second view is that the emphasis on the informational content itself provides an effective means for acquiring FL features. Content-based language-teaching approaches often combine focus on form with experiential techniques (Dunbar, 1992; Brinton et. al. 1989).

Many recent approaches in FL instruction have evolved from developments in linguistics and psycholinguistics. In the seventies FL specialists stressed communicative competence in developing new concepts and methods for their classrooms, especially content-based instruction. Initially this method enjoyed greater popularity in FL programmes at elementary schools, than in adult FL classrooms (Leaver, 1989). However, interest among FL educators has been growing and more teachers are beginning to experiment with the same methods in FL classes for adults.

Content-based language instruction is thus concerned with integration

of particular content with language-teaching aims. Its primary goal is communicative competence in the FL. The aim is to teach content in the target language at the same time as language skills are developed (Oxford, 1993; Curtain, 1993; Halliwell, 1992; Leaver, 1989).

A variety of approaches can be used in the content-based language lesson. Activities can be introduced using different methodologies such as total physical response (TPR). Children demonstrate their comprehension by acting out commands issued by the teacher. Primary emphasis is placed on listening comprehension (Philips, 1993; Anderson, 1988). Furthermore, FL teaching at the primary level is basically aural. There should thus be development and concentration of listening and speaking skills as a basis. Reading and writing can be introduced at a later stage to support the oral skills (Schimek, 1995; Felberbauer, 1992; Prochazka, 1992; Campbell et. al., 1985).

Embedding FL into content instruction has also become an interesting and valued addition to curricula at various educational settings. The number of schools teaching at least one course that integrates language and content objectives is increasing rapidly, and has exceeded 1,400 in the United States (Short, 1994).

In some cases, the methods course is widened to enable participants to demonstrate such techniques as Total Physical Response (TPR). In North Carolina, for example, the FL course at the elementary school centres around the curriculum guides for the K-6 subject areas, namely language, arts, social studies, science and maths. Physical education was not excluded since play and games are essential to FL programmes in the elementary schools (Mitchell and Redmond, 1991).

One example of content-based programmes in the primary and secondary levels is that used in the Los Angeles Unified School Districts (Brinton et. al. 1989). Pupils in grades 5-7 are instructed in language skills through content-modules, with their teachers trained in content-ESL instructional techniques.

An experimental programme in Nebraska was begun in 1994 on content-related FL at the Elementary School (FLES) through distance learning (Louton, 1995). Its objective was to develop a three-year, content-related, integrated German language programme beginning at grade 3. The project

included videos which form the primary unit of instruction. This was augmented by other technological features such as telephone connections to each classroom from a telelinguist, and Internet communications. The initial reactions of the project team indicate that the pupils have responded to learning the language quickly and effectively.

In British Colombia, implementation of content-based FL instruction has been taking place for several years. Based on the framework for integrating language and content learning, the teacher's resource book underlying this project contains a wide range of sample lessons for use in K-12 classrooms (Brinton et. al., 1989).

Other modules were also employed in grades 9-10 of the Ontario public school system (Allen and Howard, 1981). They were intended to establish links between language practice and other courses of ESL pupils within the school curriculum, and to present local, geographical, and cultural content of interest to students.

In Europe, a national pilot study on teaching Spanish in primary schools was introduced in 1989 in Scotland. An integrated approach was utilised. It is not yet clear how far one could go in promoting the use of Spanish in the teaching of other subjects, though there are some hopeful signs (Connelly, 1991).

An EFL project in the primary school, called "Lollipop", was launched in Austria in 1989. Pupils learn English in very short terms every day within the context of the subject matter being taught. During the PE lessons, children play games or do exercises using English (Felberbauer, 1993).

A similar programme for schools in Tyrol called "Butterfly" was subsequently started in 1992. English was integrated into physical exercises, arts, science and maths (Doye' and Edelhoff, 1994).

Some studies aimed at assessing the level of pupils' achievement in the FL according to special programmes such as specific methods of teaching or a different curriculum. They generally did not indicate significant differences between sexes in performance. Other studies dealing indirectly with the level of FL performance showed no significant differences between the two sexes. Instead, they found significant differences with respect to other descriptive variables such as the economic or social status and the residence (Ahmed,

1990; Amin, 1984; Khedr, 1984).

Embedding primary FL into the curriculum has a number of advantages. It gives priority to the promotion of FL use as a communicative tool. The teachers can help the child reinforce specific concepts such as colour or time introduced in other subject areas. It also shows learners that the FL can be used in different settings. Moreover, it takes into account the interests and needs of the learners, and allows a focus on fluency and accuracy (Genesee, 1995; Brewster, 1992; Anderson, 1988; Brinton et. al., 1989).

It has been suggested that instruction in the primary school can be initiated in English in linguistically less demanding areas such as art, maths, music and physical education (Argondizzo, 1992; Chamot, 1993; Piepho, 1992). Accordingly, this study has chosen physical education. It has some attractive features, namely its inherent interest to young learners especially those coming from the kindergarten where learning depends wholly on play. Besides, many teachers seem to enjoy incorporating PE into their EFL lessons (Ministry of Education, Evaluation EFLPS Report, 1995). Thus, both the reserachers (one majoring in TEFL and one in PE) decided to lead the present experiment.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to determine the effect of embedding English into PE lessons on raising pupils' achievement in English in primary schools. This study may be regarded as important for a number of reasons. First, it allows for an interdisciplinary and integrated primary-school curriculum. Second, embedding some English into other subject areas will develop pupils' skills and knowledge. Third, employing this approach could be considered an additional effort for extra EFL exposure, besides the four periods allotted for its teaching in Kuwaiti primary schools, hence resolving problems caused by shortage of EFLPS teachers and condensed timetables. The sex variable was also included, and some findings indicate that females often prove more perceptive than males in FL learning and teaching (Al-Mutawa, 1997; Gold, 1995; Al-Mulla, 1994).

Limitations of the Study

The application of this study is, however, restricted to (a) the first form in the primary school; (b) physical education, on the ground that each

* There are five Zones in Kuwait, namely City, Farwaniyah, Ahmedi, Hawalli and Jahra.

subject-area has its own characteristics; and (c) the City zone* to avoid heterogeneity arising from such variables as socio-economic status.

The study relies on controlled and experimental group design instead of pre- and post-treatment procedure, because it was the first exposure of children to EFL. Thus the pupils' level in English cannot be evaluated.

The study is based on the assumption that pupils attending the first primary grade have a similar aptitude in EFL study since it is their first exposure to the language.

Teachers' opinions were taken into consideration to ensure equality of the selected groups in terms of their exposure to EFL outside school.

Hypothesis of the Study

The study is based on the premise that regardless of sex, pupils exposed to EFL instruction through PE lessons will score higher in an achievement test than pupils whose EFL learning is restricted to regular English classes.

The Sample

This consisted of 100 first form pupils in two primary schools from the City zone, one for boys and one for girls. Two classes were selected from each school: one experimental and one controlled. The selection of the two schools is based on the following:

1. Both schools are from the first district (Al-Fayha) thus ensuring equality of socio-economic status.
2. Both researchers have easy access to the two schools, these being opposite to each other.
3. Both school administrations expressed willingness and interest in implementing the experiment.

The classroom density is balanced. Table (1) shows that the number of pupils ranged from 22 to 26. The choice of classes was determined by the availability of EFL and PE teachers to undertake both experimental and controlled classes concurrently. Boys constituted 48% of the sample with an average age of 6.4, compared with 52% girls, whose average age was 6.3.

Table (1)
Distribution of Sample

<i>School</i>	<i>Class/Section</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Group</i>
Ibn Rushd (Boys)	Section One	22	22	Experimental
	Section Two	26	26	Controlled
	Total	48	48	
Al-Fayha (Girls)	Section One	26	26	Experimental
	Section Two	26	26	Controlled
	Total	52	52	
Grand Total		100	100	

The Programme

A PE-based English language programme was designed to provide a wider range of activities, and to link English to physical education. Certain steps were taken prior to its implementation. They included the following choices:

1. Fall semester extending from October to December 1994.
2. Seven units of the first grade English Pupils' Book and the accompanying cassette of songs, plus seven teaching units of the physical education teaching plan (assigned by the Ministry of Education).
3. Classification of terms and structures included in the seven units of the Pupils' Book.
4. Design of lesson plans constituting three phases (beginning, middle, end) each with English terms, structures and songs being embedded into PE exercises and games (Appendix I).

5. Preparation of materials and other non-technical aids by Art teachers for the experimental classes.
6. Design of achievement and evaluative oral tests.
7. Two teachers, one majoring in PE and another in EFL were nominated by each school administration to participate in the pilot study according to a number of criteria, namely teaching experience ranging from five to ten years, adequate command of English of PE teachers, interest and willingness. Both experimental and controlled classes were taught by the two selected (EFL and PE) teachers. Each class was allocated four periods a week in English and three in PE at forty minutes per period.
8. Juridicial validity for the programme was secured through the opinions of two referees majoring in TEFL and two majoring in PE. Amendments were introduced to take into account the evaluation.

Both researchers initially held meetings with the pilot study teachers to acquaint them with the programme's aims and procedures. They were instructed to implement the teaching guidelines distributed by the Ministry of Education in the controlled classes. However, the PE teachers were handed guidelines and a teaching plan covering seven weeks distributed over the semester, to implement only in the experimental classes. During three PE periods a week the PE teachers employed English terms, structures and songs in games and physical exercises, reinforced by audio-visual aids and additional PE terms in English.

The teachers' performance and the pupils' interaction with PE/English integration, were supervised by the reserachers regularly during each week. The researchers also administered two provisional short oral tests to monitor the progress of the project and to initiate rapport with the children. Each test was conducted after the completion of two units. At the end of the semester an oral achievement test was administered for four days. One class was tested each day by both researchers.

The Achievement Test

The test was devised to assess the pupils' aural-oral abilities on the one hand, and listening for Total Physical Response (TPR), on the other. The contents of the test were derived from the seven units of the EFL Pupils' Book

1. These embraced vocabulary, short sentences, numerals, games, songs and music.

The test consisted of sixty marks distributed over fourteen items, of which 1-7 and 9-14 dealt with listening and speaking skills, while item 8 concerned listening for (TPR), (Appendix II). The test also included variables relating to sex and type of class (experimental or controlled).

The reliability of the test was obtained through inter-raters conformity quotient (0.92). In addition, Cronbach Alpha (.075) implied high internal consistency.

Results

Regarding the question of the study, the mean and standard deviation for both groups and sexes have been calculated (Table "2").

Table (2)
Means and Standard Deviation
of Groups Divided by Sex

<i>Group</i>	<i>Boys</i>			<i>Girls</i>		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Experimental	22	51.77	5.70	24	51.08	10.49
Controlled	25	44.32	8.08	25	44.48	11.00

As Table (2) shows, there is a wide discrepancy between the experimental and controlled groups with means of the experimental groups being higher in the test.

With regard to the hypothesis of the study, two way Anova was employed using two variables. These were group (controlled, experimental) and sex (boys, girls) Table (3). Findings revealed significant differences between the two groups in favour of the experimental classes, irrespective of their sex. It can thus be concluded that embedding English into PE lessons can enhance achievement in English for young learners.

Table (3)
Two Way Anova for Achievement Test by
Group and Sex

<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>M Square</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>Sig (.05)</i>
Group	1179.6	1	1179.6	14.1	.00
Sex	1.4	1	1.4	.01	.89
Interaction Group x Sex	4.3	1	4.3	.05	.82
Explained	1184.1	3	394.7	4.7	.00
Residual	7689.4	92	83.6		
Total	8873.5	95	93.4		

Discussion

These results correspond with the hypothesis of the study. That is, the scores of the experimental group in the achievement test were higher than those of the controlled group. Such findings provide a number of encouraging implications for EFL instruction. First, the programme proved effective in augmenting the performance of pupils in EFL learning. Second, the programme may be presented to both sexes concurrently. Third, embedding language into the primary curriculum can be adopted as an interesting and promising development in teaching English to children. Fourth, acquisition of language structure and functions should not be taught in isolation from content. But then neither should content be taught without regard to the language involved (Met, 1994). Horizontal consistency among subject matters

is thus strongly recommended especially in the primary stage. Content-based language-approach may also be adopted to promote ELT at this stage. Young learners in the first and second forms may benefit greatly through incorporating dramatization and physical activities into the English syllabus.

Another implication of this study relates to contribution of this approach in reducing the teaching load. Because of shortage of staff, EFL teachers at primary schools often suffer from a heavy teaching load and at times a condensed timetable (Al-Mutawa, 1996). In such circumstances, the content-based language-approach may be considered as another alternative if it is implemented properly. In this connection, primary teachers may be offered specially designed INSET courses to enable them to embed English into their subject areas.

Moreover, embedding English into linguistically less demanding subject areas as PE, art and music will increase children's motivation which will in turn promote their language level. This necessitates co-operation and collaboration between EFL teachers and their colleagues in other subject areas. Both will benefit from combining their differing expertise and thereby supporting each other through peer-coaching.

Conclusions

The study indicates that content-based language instruction is a promising development in the teaching of FL to children. The results are consistent with the findings of previous investigations. They illustrate the encouraging implications of this approach to FL teaching.

The experiment in Kuwaiti primary schools shows that motivation and greater exposure to English are likely to improve when CBI elements are added to the programme. The study points to the utility of considering the following recommendations for embedding FL into the school curriculum:

1. Experimenting with the content-based language approach may be undertaken in other stages and subject areas. In order to take into account its special characteristics each subject area must be investigated separately.
2. Initiating INSET courses for teachers of other subjects for embedding the FL into the school curriculum.

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Appendix (1)
Experimental PE/English Programme
(A) Pupils Book 1, Unit One, Steps 1-6
pp8-13

From 8/10/94 To 13/10/94 (One week)

<i>No</i>	<i>Vocabulary/ Structure</i>	<i>Music / Song</i>
1.	Good morning.	Music and Alphabet Song: a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
2.	Hello. I'm-what is your name?	
3.	How are you? Fine, thank you.	
4.	Hello Bunny - Hind - Majid.	
5.	Goodbye-Miss-Mr.	
6.	Stand up-sit down- (Please).	
7.	Alphabet (a-b-c-d-e-f-g-h-i-j-k-l-m-n-o-p).	
	<i>Lesson Plan</i>	<i>AVA + Materials</i>
1.	<i>Beginning of Lesson</i> Walking-Clapping on Alphabet (Music and Song).	1. Cassette / Recorder. 2. 2 to 3 pictures (Size 30 x 20 cm) of each alphabet in one colour. 3. Three large boards of Hind, Majid and Bunny (100x70) cut into 5 or 6 pieces of different shapes.
2.	<i>Mid-Lesson</i> Collecting and dropping cards of similar alphabets in one basket.	
3.	<i>End of Lesson</i> Competition of Where's Hind, Bunny and Majid - fixing pieces of board.	

(B) Unit Two (1 - 6)

pp14 - 19

From 15/10/94 To 26/10/94 (Two weeks)

No	Vocabulary / Structure	Music / Song
1.	Good morning - Goodbye.	Music and "I'm Sue"
2.	Alphabet (q-r-s-t-u-v-w-x-y-z).	song:
3.	What's this?	I'm Sue. I'm Sue. Hello
4.	A book - bag - pencil - ball.	Sue. Hello, Sue. How are
5.	Yes - No - good.	you?
6.	Is it? Yes - No.	How are you?
7.	I'm Sue.	I'm fine, thank you.
	Types of PE Games	AVA + Materials
1.	Beginning of Lesson a) Walking and running in small circles to music (I'm Sue). b) Running to attach ropes to every two new similar alphabets.	1. 2 cards for each alphabet (30x20 cm) in one colour. 2. 5 meters of ropes of different colours.
2.	Mid - Lesson A Guessing game = Teacher hides (pencil-ball etc.) then asks any pupil in the circle to guess what he/she hides.	3. Large objects (pencil - book - ball - bag).
3.	End of Lesson Competition completing the alphabet which follows the alphabet displayed by teacher	

(C) Unit Three (1 - 6)

pp20 - 25

Form 29/10/94 To 8/11/94 (Two weeks)

No	Vocabulary / Structure	Music / Song
1.	Hello - good morning (repetition).	Song: Is this a door?
2.	How are you? Fine, thank you (").	Is this a door?
3.	Stand up - Sit down please (").	Is this a door? No, it's a table
4.	Listen - Is it? Yes, No (").	Is this a door? No, it's a board
5.	Door - window - table - box - car - ball - pencil - bag.	Is this a door? No, it's a win- dow.
6.	Look at the	Is this a door? Yes, it's a
7.	Show me (book - table).	door. It's a door. It's a door.
8.	Let us play - O.K. - very good.	
	Lesson Plan	AVA + Materials
1.	Beginning of Lesson Running and jumping on one foot, and clapping while listening to the song.	1. 5 to 7 large models (30x20 cm) of each alphabet having the same colour.
2.	Mid - Lesson Searching for the picture or alphabet similar to the one displayed by teacher.	2. Colours - pencils - mag- netic board to place the al- phabet for colouring it.
3.	End of Lesson Colouring similar alphabet in the same colour. (Standing in rows and running to the place of the similar alphabet).	

(D) Unit Four (1 - 6)

pp25 - 31

From 11/11/94 To 22/11/94 (Two weeks)

<i>No</i>	<i>Vocabulary / Structure</i>	<i>Music / Song</i>
1.	Hello - good morning, How are you?	1. Alphabet Song. 2. Door Song.
2.	Show me (door - window...)	
3.	rubber - book - box - car - table.	
4.	Let us play! O.K.	
5.	Very Good.	
	<i>Lesson Plan</i>	<i>AVA + Materials</i>
1.	<i>Beginning of Lesson</i> Running to the place as directed by the teacher (go to...).	1. A mask of (Bunny).
2.	<i>Mid - Lesson</i> Playing the role of Bunny with eyes closed trying to identify names of things by touching them. (Standing in a circle).	2. Objects of ball - pencil - book... 3. Coloured ropes.
3.	<i>End of Lesson</i> Joining every two similar pictures with rope.	4. Two identical pictures in different places.

(E) Unit Five (1 - 6)

32 - 37

From 2/12/94 To 6/12/94 (One week)

No	Vocabulary / Structure	Music / Song
1.	Hello - good morning. How are you?	1. Song of "Numbers" This is one
2.	Stand up - Sit down - What is this? Is it?	This is 1/2/3/4/5 6-10
3.	1 - 5 / 6 - 10.	This is 2/3/4/5 etc.
4.	He - She - Chair - Sue - go to.	2. New Song:
5.	My friend - read English.	Clap with me
6.	Listen - Join - Colour - Help - Sing.	Clap Clap Clap
7.	Look - say - How many?	Clap like me 1 - 2 - 3.
	Lesson Plan	AVA + Materials
1.	Beginning of Lesson a) Running and making circles around the number mentioned by teacher after the whistle. b) Clapping and jumping forwards and backwards on both feet while listening to the song.	1. Objects of different shapes and various numbers. (Pencils - apples - books - boxes etc.) 2. Cards (30x40 cm) of numbers 1-10 consisting of three groups of different colours.
2.	Mid - Lesson Organizing objects and numbers (balls - pencils - apples with number 3-5-1)	2. Colours - pencils - magnetic board to place the alphabet for colouring it.
3.	End of Lesson Competition placing in a basket, all the numbers from 1-10 of one colour.	3. Two cards (30x20 cm) for each new word having one colour.

(F) Unit Six (1 - 6)

pp38 - 43

From 9/12/94 To 13/12/94 (One week)

<i>No</i>	<i>Vocabulary / Structure</i>	<i>Music / Song</i>
1.	Good morning - Hello.	1. Numbers Song (1-10). 2. The Door. Music and Song: Is this a door?
2.	What's the number (1 - 3 - 7).	
3.	Listen and play, where is the?	
4.	Go to (window - door - friend).	
5.	(radio - chair - rubber - car).	
6.	Girl - boy - box.	
7.	Count 1 - 10.	
	<i>Lesson Plan</i>	<i>AVA + Materials</i>
1.	<i>Beginning of Lesson</i> Running and jumping on one foot when hearing the whistle, counting 1 - 10, then running again in different directions.	
2.	<i>Mid - Lesson</i> Game: where is my friend? Children run when hearing the teacher's whistle and each catches his/her friend.	
3.	<i>End of Lesson</i> Searching for the number next to the number placed behind the teacher.	

(G) Unit Seven (1 - 6)

pp44 - 49

From 5/12/94 To 24/12/94 (Two weeks)

<i>No</i>	<i>Vocabulary / Structure</i>	<i>Music / Song</i>
1.	Hello teacher - stand up - sit down please!	Numbers Song
2.	Come here - go to.	
3.	Boat - telephone - television.	
4.	I have..... 5 pencils	
5.	List game.....	
6.	Sing - and count.	
	<i>Lesson Plan</i>	<i>AVA + Materials</i>
1.	<i>Beginning of Lesson</i> Running until hearing the whistle to catch the pupil who has the same number or picture (each pupil tries to be away from his classmates).	1. Different boards of numbers (1-10) and objects (apple - book - pencil-).
2.	<i>Mid - Lesson</i> Count and complete the missing picture - place pencils and apples on a picture. The number will be incomplete e.g., 2,3 - Pupil tries completing it by running to the board.	2. Board size 40x50 including drawings of things with missing numbers as compared to the written number. 3. Numbers of 1-5 and objects (apples. balls, pencils).
3.	<i>End of Lesson</i> Running to the place directed by teacher and back quickly to her. (Go to - come to me).	

Appendix II

ORAL Achievement Test

NAME:

Sex *Boy* 1 ☐ *Class Experimental* 1 ☐

Girl 2 ☐ *Controlled* 2 ☐

Marks	No	Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Tot. Marks
1	1.	Good morning											
2	2.	How are you? Fine, Thank you											
5	3.	What's this? (A - K - L - P - X - M - N)											
10	4.	What's this? (boat, car, telephone, television, ball, friend, Bunny, Maj- id, Hind, Sue).											
5	5.	Mention 5 colours: (red - yellow - black - green - white).											
5	6.	What do you have? I have a (book - pencil - bag - rubber - radio).											
5	7.	Look at the (ball - door - window - table - box).											
5	8.	Come here - go to the (door - window - table - your friend - teacher).											
2	9.	What's your teacher's name?											
2	10.	What's your friend's name?											
3	11.	Count 1-10											
5	12.	Song (ABC)											
5	13.	Song (I'm Sue)											
5	14.	Song (the door).											
60													