

# **Title: A Small Step that Matters! Ways to Enhance Students' Learning Motivation in English Lessons**

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## **Introduction**

Many students lack motivation in learning. This is especially true in English lessons as many students are not using English to communicate once outside schools. In order to arouse students' interest to learn English and extend their learning after lessons, teachers of *The Hong Kong Chinese Women's Club Hioe Tjo Yoeng Primary School* and *Kowloon City Baptist Church Hay Nien (Yan Ping) Primary School* have taken further steps in designing and developing their school-based learning and teaching resources which have succeeded in arousing students' learning motivation as well as improving their academic results. Teachers of both schools shared their successful experiences in the methods and e-devices that they used and the small steps that they took in developing learning and teaching materials for KS2 and KS1 students respectively.

There are various reasons why students feel bored in the classroom, in most cases, students feel the lesson is boring because of the following reasons, such as:

- they do not feel interested in the subject matter being taught
- the work is too easy for them (the lesson content is not sufficiently challenging)
- the work is too difficult (they lack knowledge and skills in the subject matters)
- the material is not presented in a way that motivates them
- the work does not engage them

All these are some of the common causes why students do not pay attention in classes. In fact, "*An under-motivated child is not the same as a lazy child. In some cases, the lack of motivation is tied to a feeling that what he's learning isn't personally important — that the learning process has no meaning for him and his life.*" (Morin, 2019, para 7)

In order to motivate students to learn, teachers have thought of many ways to enhance students' learning incentives and to encourage them to participate in class activities, e.g. having group activities, using e-learning devices, giving them awards, like stars or snacks and/or having friendly competitions. In addition to all these, the most effective way, perhaps, is to design lessons which students are interested in and develop learning materials that students feel enjoyable. As said, "*If a child can't learn the way they teach, maybe they should teach the way they learn.*"

## **Background**

*The Hong Kong Chinese Women's Club Hioe Tjo Yoeng Primary School* was founded 55 years ago and is located in Sai Wan Ho with 30 classes. The social economic status of the students are not high, students are mostly from lower or medium level income groups and families, their parents usually need to focus on their work and students lack sufficient support, especially English language support at home. In addition, students have not developed a habit of reading English books unless they are requested by the teachers.

In 2016 and 2017, the school joined the service provided by School-based Curriculum Development (Primary) Section (SBCDP) support and reviewed all their existing P4-5 teaching plans and learning materials, which were developed years ago. They focused on how the learning objectives were achieved through various learning activities. The aim was to find ways to enhance students' learning motivation in the lessons. They then re-developed and designed more interactive, interesting, realistic and practical learning and teaching materials for use in the lessons.

*Kowloon City Baptist Church Hay Nien (Yan Ping) Primary School* has similar background, the school is located in Sun Chui Estate, Tai Wai. Students are mostly from the nearby low cost housing estates and some are new arrivals from mainland China. Most students have very limited English foundation; therefore, lots of input for students is needed in order to achieve a smooth transition from kindergarten to KS1 as well as prepare them for Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) in KS2. Taking the advantages of using a new textbook and joining the SBCDP support in 2017 school year, the teachers decided to give more support to students and reviewed their teaching methodologies. Seeing that the materials from textbook publisher were a bit advanced for their students, they started to develop more school-based learning and teaching materials to replace them. The aims were to develop school-based learning and teaching materials which not only matched the school-based curriculum, but also suited their students' needs and abilities.

## **Enhancing students' learning motivation**

In developing the learning and teaching materials, teachers became more student-centered. They bore in mind what learning focuses should be delivered, students' level of abilities and what learning tools could arouse students' learning interest most. The main purpose was to teach students according to the way they liked to learn. In their lesson design, they first recalled students' prior knowledge through interesting video clips, songs and/or PPT slides; from that starting point, they developed sequential input through short theme-based activities. They also tried to make learning meaningful and authentic by relating the learning to students' daily experiences. Different readers and reading worksheets were also included in lessons to encourage reading. Skills for reading, writing and speaking were infused into the learning activities. Taking into consideration that students were all fond of and familiar with using computer or iPads, they also made use of the rich e-resources and incorporated language learning into various kinds of e-learning devices in lessons.

In designing the materials, both schools had some underlining principles to follow:

### Principles of materials design

1. **Make learning fun:** use lots of visual stimulants to arouse SS' interest – YouTubes, interactive games, ppts, posters, realias, songs
2. **Use a variety of materials:** various sets of ppt slides with the same teaching focus, readers, samples, vocab, phrases, useful expression (to enrich and equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to complete the task)
3. **Relate lessons to students' daily experiences** (help retain learning points, able to transfer knowledge and apply what they have learnt in real life)
4. **Involve students** in the development of learning materials (increase sense of ownership)
5. Use **free Apps**

\*\*\* Textbook as supplement only\*\*\*

### Visual stimulants

Teachers believed making learning language a fun thing was a good way to arouse learning motivation. They made use of lots of visual stimulants, YouTube clips, games, group activities, etc. in classes. Students like watching video clips. They included short video clips of the target learning focuses to motivate students to learn. They incorporated lots of video clips relating to the same learning theme, vocabulary, incident, grammar structure, etc. for students to watch in the motivation part of the lessons, within lesson activities or as extended learning.

Just giving the web links to students was not sufficient to arouse their interests to make the move to watch them. Therefore, teachers provided easy access QR codes and captured the screens of the web links (See Figure 1) so as to attract their students to watch the videos before and/or after the lessons. With easy access and interesting, appealing screens captured, they found students were more willing to watch the selected video clips by themselves. Teachers also used video clips to start off the teaching of grammar rules and discovered that students could master the learning in a quick way.

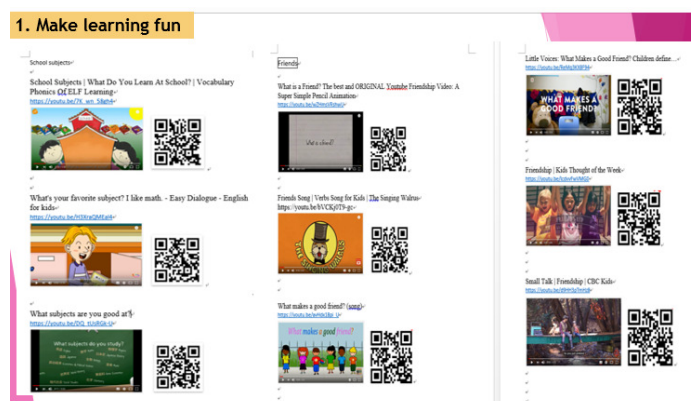


Figure 1: Make Learning Fun

## Songs

Songs are another useful stimulant for learning languages. As “*Music plays a very important part in learning both our native language, as well as additional ones... Music helps us retain words and expressions much more effectively.*” (Doron, 2013, Para 4) Though not every topic has suitable songs on YouTube, teachers of both schools still tried their best to use this language art to help motivate students to learn. Students loved to sing and could follow the tune quickly. As posted out by Doron (2013) that “*The rhythm of the music, as well as the repetitive patterns within the song, help us memorize words. Bilingual children, in particular, can benefit from singing songs in their second language.* Teachers also developed self-designed music videos if they could not find the right one which catered for the needs of their students. In making the songs, the teachers chose popular cartoon characters, easy melody and scenes that students were familiar with, such as folk songs, kindergarten songs or songs and chants that students’ had learnt in PLP-R/W lessons. Alongside eye-catching pictures related to the self-composed lyrics as well as students’ daily life experiences, students were highly motivated in all the singing sessions in the English lessons.

## Web links

The following web links as shown in Figure 2 suggested by teachers showed how grammar could be easily mastered through a short video. Teachers asked students to view it before a lesson when teaching the grammar usage of “While and When”. The others were popular YouTube channels and the free Apps for making songs.

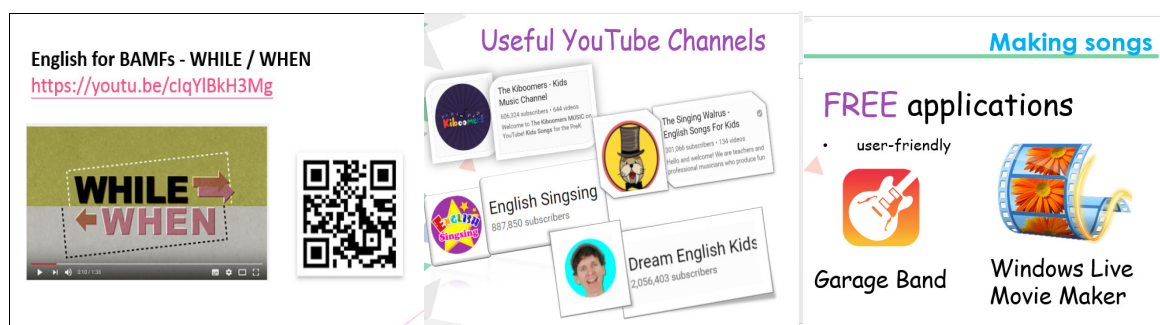


Figure 2: Web Links

## Games

Students like to play games. In developing the school-based PPT slides, teachers also integrated games such as picking cards and making sentences. In addition, various types of fun-filled games were also included in lessons. For example, riddle guessing games, matching games, jumbled sentences, domino, board games, etc. were frequently used to motivate students to learn. An example of popular game used for learning adverbs of frequency was that students were asked to draw a card and spin on the wheel with a clip; on the wheel there were frequency of visits to a scenic spot. Student A asked student B ‘How many times have you been to...?’ Student B replied according to the number of times he/she spinned. Through playing these games with partners or group members, students were provided with more chances to read and speak the language as well as apply what they had learned in the lessons. In KS1 and 2, games serve as an important tools for warm-up activities, learning and

practicing vocabulary as well as enhancing interaction among students. Students recalled prior knowledge and learned new concept in fun-filled games like drawing flash cards, matching pictures with words. To arouse more interest in the learning processes, teachers also made use of different tools when they asked students to point at the correct answers, such as using fingers, a magic wand, a toy or shooting with a toy gun. Students were eager to join the games and use the interesting pointers to indicate their answers.

### **Hands-on tasks**

High engagement was also a good way to enhance motivation in class. Teachers tried to involve students in different language learning activities so that they could move around and practise what they were learning, e.g. role playing, guessing game, interviewing, conducting survey, etc. For example, when teachers taught students to write procedural text, they asked them to write procedures of making a 'banana split'. Students wrote the procedures in groups first, then they started making the dessert and presented their products to the whole class. After that, they were given time to share the joy of eating the dessert together.

### **Working as a group**

Co-operative learning strategy and friendly competitions were adopted in the schools. Students were divided into groups with mixed ability. When they could answer questions correctly they could get points for their groups. Some mini score boards were used for recording marks. The points that they scored in the lessons would contribute to a reward scheme in which they would be rewarded stamps that ended up in prizes. This had successfully motivated students to participate actively in the lessons.

### **Authentic materials**

Authentic materials related to students' daily experience were frequently used to help them recall prior knowledge, transfer and adopt to the new learning points and apply what they had learnt in their real life. For example, when teaching some text types, such as invitation cards and posters, teachers collected some real objects first and showed them in the lessons. Students were asked to collect similar materials at home, take pictures or tell their classmates where they could find those realias. These helped relate the learning focuses to students' daily life. Students' involvement also made learning more meaningful and interesting.

### **e-books**

To equip and enrich students with necessary knowledge and skills to complete the tasks, teachers adopted a variety of materials with the same teaching focus such as different sets of PPT slides, YouTube clips, posters and readers. In order to promote English reading, at least one e-book was included in each unit and students would read that book together in the lessons. The e-book was related to the language focuses or themes that students were learning in that unit. The purposes were to help equip students with sufficient knowledge (including vocabulary, phrases, expression) as well as encourage them to read. Besides, lots of reading recourses were uploaded online in the internal e-

platform, put in the school library or the English corner at the back of the classroom so that students had free and easy access to the recommended reading materials. They could read in the morning reading sessions or borrow them home to read. Students were found very interested to read some books introduced by the teachers. They were actually some popular readers for teenagers. For example, to widen students' scope of learning, students not only had to review their performance and reflect on their learning in the Unit "Be a Star Pupil", they were also introduced to the book "7 Habits of Happy Kids" after learning the key focuses of "how to be a star pupil". The web links related to this topic and the video clips with songs and work that students in other countries had done to this topic were shown to students. In doing so, it not only widened students' knowledge, value education was also incorporated in the lessons.

### **YouTube clips**

YouTube clips were very popular learning tools for enhancing learning. Along with their effectiveness in helping students to learn grammar items and vocabulary, there were abundant resources on YouTube, for example, when teaching Unit 5 "The New Cinderella", teachers recalled students' memory on the contents of this famous story through asking students to watch YouTube clip as pre-lesson activity. The inclusion of subtitles also helped students with less ability to further understand the content and to learn according to their own pace.

### **Thinking skills before writing**

Before asking students to complete their writing tasks, they were given more input before the actual writing. PPT slides with useful vocabulary, expressions and necessary writing skills were shown to students before they did their group writing tasks, then individual writing tasks. Pictorial clues were always adopted to stimulate students' thought and help them enrich the contents. Writing skills like mind maps, flow charts, concept maps were also used to help students organize their ideas. The aims were to equip students with sufficient knowledge and skills to complete the tasks, to build up their confidence and to let them have a sense of achievement when they could produce good pieces of writing.

### **Relate learning to students' daily activities**

Students were found very interested to learn new things that they had not seen before. Pictures of some interesting items that were related to students' daily life were frequently adopted to arouse their learning interests. For example, in P5 unit 2 which was about new inventions, the PPT slides included guessing the usage of the new inventions from Japan with photos, video clips of children's new inventions from the US. They made use of students' curiosity to guess what these things were for, to help introduce the use of gerund after 'used for' as well as to introduce the structure of reasons and effects. The lessons were really successful as students were all engaged. They were attracted to the inventions and laughed at some of the functions. In the meantime, they were all practicing the focused grammar structure with fun.

To help sustain what students had learnt, different sets of PPT slides related to the same topic were used in each unit. For example, in teaching the unit “Look out”, 3 sets of PPT slides about injuries that students might have in their daily lives were used in the lessons. Short video clips related to common minor injuries were shown in classes. These video clips were used to demonstrate the grammar points of using ‘when’ in the past tense. Students loved watching the video clips as they were accidents that were familiar with in their daily life.

### **A language-rich classroom**

To enrich students’ vocabulary and to make more visual impacts on students, in addition to the PPT slides and video clips, related posters, word cards and real objects were posted in the classrooms to help create a rich learning environment as well as to arouse students’ learning interests. When teachers developed their school-based materials, they wanted to let students have sense of ownership in their learning; in some units, they involved students in making some teaching materials. For example, some of the word flashcards (See Figure 3) were drawn by KS1 students and teachers together or they initiated the ways to present the words or memorise the words. In doing so, students were strongly motivated to learn the words when they saw their flashcards being posted on the wall and/or ideas being used in the lessons. Students loved to refer to them in their writing and the flashcards also encouraged students to continue their learning after the lessons. In developing teaching resources in teaching the grammar usage of “While and When” (See Figure 3) in KS2, teachers in each class contributed one scenario and they asked students from different classes to act. They did not tell them why they made a video of those actions. When students watched the video clips in that specific lessons, they were impressed and other students cheered up on their performance. There was great involvement in the speaking and writing exercises thereafter.

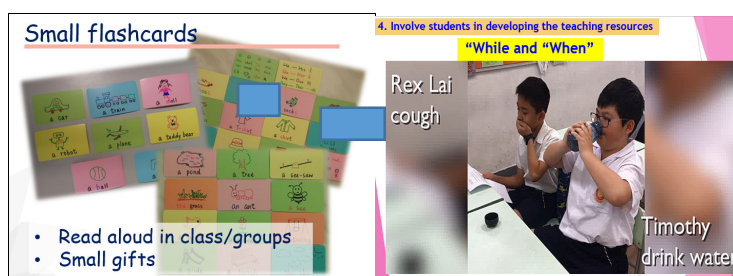


Figure 3: Language-rich classrooms

In order to increase students’ involvement in learning and make learning more effective, students were assigned to do pre-study worksheets before lessons. Various ways could be adopted in pre-study. Sometimes they were just asked to finish a worksheet with their previous knowledge. Sometimes they were asked to finish an attribute listing worksheet, a mind map or just watch a video clip. The aims of the pre-tasks were to retrieve students’ prior knowledge on the topics, help them prepare for the lessons and cater for different learning abilities and pace.

## Use of e-learning resources

Seeing that students were all attracted to using e-devices, many free Apps on the internet were adopted as e-learning resources in the lessons. For example, in *The Hong Kong Chinese Women's Club Hioe Tjo Yoeng Primary School*, iPads, Nearpod, Kahoot, Padlet, Quizzes (See Figure 4) were used in many subjects in KS2. Specific school-based App called Grwth, where parents and students could receive messages from the school or teachers, was widely used to infuse e-resources in daily communication. Some teachers chose the platform 'Edmodo' and created accounts for students. They asked students to do the pre-study of watching video clips on vocabulary or grammar focus related to the subsequent lessons beforehand. Some teachers also made use of Edmodo platform in assigning holiday work, such as revising some PPT slides, grammar video clips and doing the quizzes afterwards. In the Nearpod slides, video clips related to the topic were embedded to extend students' learning after the lessons. A quiz was usually added at the end of the lessons to test students' understanding and to feedback on further lesson planning. In another lesson, students were asked to write steps of making Egg Sandwich on Padlet in groups and all students viewed and gave comments on the Padlet. Though there were mistakes from their work, most of them did not resist doing short tasks or quizzes on these platforms. Teachers could also give immediate feedback to students via the e-platforms. In fact, many students enjoyed using them to communicate with their teachers.



Figure 4: Free e-resources

For KS1 students, *Kowloon City Baptist Church Hay Nien (Yan Ping) Primary School* adopted Bitsboard (See Figure 5), which was a free App used in IOS devices, in these 2 years. Teachers made use of this App to create tailor-made learning games for students. The games were shared and edited by teachers according to the needs of their students. A wide variety of games types for vocabulary learning, matching and sentence building were developed. Teachers set the level of difficulties according to students' learning needs and provided instant feedback to them. They were extremely popular among students in KS1.





Figure 5: Games types of Bitsboard

In most of the lessons, instead of asking students to work on what were provided in their textbooks or grammar books, teachers included multi-modal learning resources as they wanted to make learning fun and provided opportunities for more interaction in the classes. The use of these e-resources and platforms enabled students to be fully engaged in the learning processes. The video clips were all carefully selected with sub-titles for easy reference. All of these e-devices increased students' learning interests, enhanced their participation in classroom activities and encouraged self-learning after the lessons.

### Impact on students

Students were highly motivated and responded actively in lessons. They were attentive in classes and showed improvement in answering questions and recognizing vocabulary items. Students had more confidence to speak the language; they gave longer elaboration and justification to their answers and were able to use a wider range of vocabulary even though they still needed to work hard on spelling. In their writing tasks, they produced longer and concrete pieces of writing.

When compared with the test and exam results of previous years, students performed better than they were before. The overall result was better and there was obvious improvement in 'tenses'. Also students were not afraid of using English to express their ideas even though they still made mistakes in their spontaneous answers. Some students even asked for more self-learning activities on Edmodo during long holidays. With all the fun-filled learning activities and attractive input in learning, students expressed that they looked forward to having English lessons.

### Impact on teachers

There were many useful materials for each lesson which could be shared among teachers. A rich resource bank with sustainable materials was built up. Even though it took lots of time to absorb all the materials, they were more student-centered and liked by students. Seeing that students responded well and participated happily in the English lessons, teachers were seen spending more time to adapt and adopt the materials according to the ability and interests of the students in their own classes. There were also positive impacts on other levels of teachers. They also started to involve students in the production of learning resources and infuse a variety of IT tools in developing interesting activities

for their students both inside and outside the classrooms. To conclude, teachers were all pleased to see the change of their students. No matter what levels of English proficiency they were at, they were willing to participate and express their thinking and feeling in the learning activities in lessons.

Every teacher participated in the SBCDP support programme admitted that they tried their best to plan, create, adjust and try out using the multi-modal learning and teaching resources in lessons. They did spend a lot of time on meetings and evaluating the teaching strategies. The feedback from students and their smiles rewarded the effort that they put in these 2 years.

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