

Taking off from the intermediate plateau

Antonia Clare

Co-Author of Speakout

Many learners encounter problems when moving from Intermediate (B1) to Upper Intermediate (B2) levels of language proficiency. They struggle to perceive their language progress and often feel frustrated. This workshop will look at strategies and activities (including the use of authentic video material from Speakout Intermediate Plus) to highlight ways to help your learners take off from the Intermediate plateau.

Language learning does not always follow a smooth progression. As language learners move from Elementary to Intermediate level, they often appear to make clear, noticeable progress and usually feel a sense of satisfaction and achievement. However, once they reach Intermediate level, progress is less marked and many learners begin to feel frustrated. They have reached the Intermediate plateau.

This workshop will look at what it means to reach a plateau in your learning, and why this might occur. We will reference Jack Richards's paper *Moving Beyond the Plateau: From Intermediate to Advanced Levels in Language Learning* in which the author outlines issues language learners at this level often encounter: a gap between receptive and productive competence, fluent but insufficiently complex or natural-sounding speech, limited vocabulary range, fossilized errors.

We will then consider a variety of activities and strategies that teachers can use to help their learners take off from the Intermediate plateau. These will include motivational strategies; activities the teacher can use to encourage learners, particularly outside the classroom, to engage with English through various media, including video and Whatsapp; ideas for delving more deeply into the detail of spoken language and for improving pronunciation through focussed shadowing activities; ways to encourage learners to notice new language and use frameworks to build their collocational competence; and the use of contrasting word clouds to emphasise progress. The audience will share their own ideas and be involved in practical activities.

Antonia is an English language teacher trainer, international conference speaker and award-winning materials writer. Her special interests include the use of video and new technologies in ELT, creativity and the psychology of language learning. She has taught and trained in many countries around the world, and co-authored many successful course book titles including *Total English* and *Speakout*.

Key takeaways

- Tap into learners' intrinsic motivation – what drives them and can you use this to help them learn English?
- Set up mini goals and learning feedback loops to help learners monitor their progress.
- Upgrade their language, working on lexical complexity and natural-sounding language, using video.
- Focus on productive skills, getting students to speak and write more and working with student output.
- Get learners to do something creative, so they are using language in new and interesting ways.

Further Reading

- Richards, Jack. (2008). *Moving Beyond the Plateau From Intermediate to Advanced Levels in Language Learning*.
- Tin, Tan Bee. (2013). *Towards creativity in ELT: the need to say something new* (ELT Journal)

Key links

- www.english.com/blog/iatefl-antonia-clare-intermediate-plateau
- www.pearsonelt.com/speakout
- www.pearsonelt.com/iatefl

Pearson English hopes to see you next year!