

Mind the gap! Helping teens to bridge

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Friday 13th April 12:05-12:50 - Auditorium 2

Learners are achieving high levels of linguistic competence at young ages. Teenagers' language skills can get ahead of their maturity levels, creating challenges in exams, such as the Cambridge Advanced, when the full range of communicative competencies are tested. Their motivation and progress may suffer. This workshop will look at supporting this age group to close that cognitive gap.

After B2-level study, the focus of the language classroom shifts. Instruction becomes increasingly about developing the full range of communicative competencies, and it is less guided by the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar resources. Many high level teens may perceive the relative lack of new grammatical structures or the repetition of vocabulary topics as a sign that they are no longer progressing. This change in emphasis is often hidden from younger learners by their own lack of experience in L1. Communicative competence develops over time and with age and experience, and not all teenagers progressing into the next level up are ready for this change.

This workshop will look at ways to support younger learners in this process. I'll start by brain storming the challenges that teenage students at B2+ face when working towards a C1 exam. I'll briefly outline Bachman's influential communicative competency model at this level, in order to guide teachers and students towards a better understanding of how performance measures change at C1. I'll then ask participants to try out a number of activities that facilitate the development of high level communicative competence. After each activity, I'll ask participants to reflect on how the activity might improve learners' communicative competence, or make the goals at this level more explicit to teenagers. Finally, we will explore other ways to support them to achieve success in demanding exam courses, such as the Cambridge Advanced.

Key takeaways

- Young learners need to be trained in adult communication styles if they are taking an exam targeting adults.
- Make the most of opportunities to draw students' attention to differences between test style and their own style.
- Give students plenty of opportunity to self-assess their own errors in style.
- Set students projects that train them in the importance of social roles
- Have fun with it – Don't forget to celebrate what teens are great at while you train them!

Further Reading

- For an interesting case study: Chapter 7, *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell – and there are some great criticisms of his case online too.
- For a general introduction: Defining communicative competence by Vesna Bagaric, <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/42651>
- For an overview of communicative competence in exams: *The Measurement of Communicative Competence*, Michael Canale, available on the cambridge.org website

Key links

- <https://www.pearsonelt.com/catalogue/exam-prep/expert/IELTS.html>
- <https://www.english.com/blog/iatefl-clare-walsh-teens-bridge-cognitive-gap>
- <https://www.pearsonelt.com/professional-development/events/iatefl.html>

Pearson English hopes to see you next year!