

Language Counseling for ITAs

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How can ITA trainers help students tap into their own internal motivations? How can they optimize student participation in ITA training programs? ITAs are often overwhelmed by conflicting demands, and ITA trainers sometimes struggle to get students to invest in the language work that will help them succeed.

Increasing client motivation is an issue social work programs continually grapple with, and so similar questions have been heavily researched by social workers. Consequently, social work theory can help ITA trainers convince students that the time and effort they spend on language changes will help them succeed.

1) ITAs and social work clients share similar traits—

- Both need to develop skills to be successful in a new or difficult situation ASAP.
- Training (or counseling) is often mandated.
- Both may not believe that they have a problem.
- Both can be unmotivated to change- this is not usually their primary goal.
- **AND** both are motivated by *some* goal.

The key is to find their personal goals and link them to the goals you have for them.

2) Social work theory can give ITA trainers a new way to refine and interpret ITA training programs. Social work research on motivating “semi-voluntary” or “mandated” clients is very useful in ITA training. This model focuses on *relationship-building*, including:

- a) **Building rapport and motivation** by overtly linking the ITAs’ personal goals to the overall goals of the training class, and to the goals of the individual exercises in the training class.
 - i) **Example:** Most ITAs are interested in being successful conference presenters. The organizational structures used in presenting new information to undergrads follow the same rhetorical pattern as giving a presentation to peers. All audiences expect formal definitions, clear rewordings, concise examples, and comprehensible stress patterns.
 - ii) **How can trainers find out what ITAs’ goals and needs are?** To link the student’s goals and needs to ITA training, first find out what each of the ITAs wants to achieve, by asking them individually, or in writing, using a journal, or by giving out a questionnaire.

- b) **Assessment and goal-setting** should also be overtly linked to the student's professional goals and needs.
- i) **Example:** A student eventually interested in getting a job in industry may not be invested in learning teaching skills. The trainer can make a direct link between the skills needed to explain concepts to undergrads, and the skills needed to explain information to clients or coworkers; the student will buy into developing those particular skills more.
- ii) **ITA trainers can link professional goals to ITA training through real stories.** I make links between ITA training and my students' professional goals by telling stories about former students' experiences. A former student came back to campus after doing a prestigious summer internship. I asked him if it was a relief to work all summer with people who knew his field, and did not need explanations of basic concepts. He said "Oh, no! It was much worse, actually! This summer, all of the people I was working with were designers. None of them knew anything about engineering. At least when I teach undergraduates, I can count on them having a basic understanding of the field. I had to explain everything to everybody all summer long."

All ITA trainers have such stories; use them to overtly link your class goals to the ITAs' personal goals. They are more likely to buy into their own professional development than in doing well in a mandated ITA class.

Discussion questions

1. How does your experience fit into this model?
2. What are some of the main professional goals that your students have? How can these goals be linked with ITA training?
3. What are some teaching strategies that you use in order to overtly link ITA training to professional development?

Information for this presentation is based on Oreto, R. and Carlson, M. "Adapting social work theory to ITA training", ITAIS Newsletter, November 2006, 11, 2.
http://www.tesol.org/s_tesol/article.asp?vid=180&DID=7307&sid=1&cid=747&iid=7303&nid=3205