NCLRC
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Helping Struggling Students Become Good Language Learners

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http://nclrc.org
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**WHO IS THE STRUGGLING LEARNER?**

**Definition:** A struggling learner is a student who has difficulty keeping up with classmates of the same age in a developmentally appropriate learning environment. They may not qualify for special education services, remedial or other school services. While the learning disabled child has high and low levels of knowledge and skill levels, often the struggling learner’s strengths and needs can be described as “flat.” Struggling learners often:

- Have difficulty organizing themselves and their work environment.
- Have trouble following verbal instructions
- Are overwhelmed by work tasks and need work chunked for them.
- Have weak social and emotional skills.

These children can easily fall between the cracks of the educational system unless we provide them with the assistance they need. (Fischer n.d.)

**ACTIVITY:** With a partner, discuss a struggling student whom you have recently taught or who you know in your administrative role. Then listen to your partner describe such a student. Compare experiences and approaches to helping the student. Note: the first section below refers to the students’ first language. The second section refers to the students’ performance in the target language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile of a struggling learner</th>
<th>Student 1</th>
<th>Student 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of learner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting: (Elementary/Secondary)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Language Strengths/Weaknesses</td>
<td>Write S or W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Literacy Level (appropriate to grade level)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Interacting with Peers</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Interacting with Adults</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Motivation to Learn</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Organization Skills</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Doing homework</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Other:</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Language Strengths/Weaknesses</td>
<td>Write S or W</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Literacy</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Interacting with Peers</em></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Interacting with Adults</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Motivation to Learn</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What similarities did you find between your and your partner’s students?

What similarities or differences did you notice in how you and your partner tried to intervene with the students?
What obstacles have you found that FL students have in achieving academic success?

**BRAINSTORM: TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR INDEPENDENT LEARNING**

What are some of your most effective teaching strategies?

When you use these teaching strategies, what are your students doing or thinking?

How do you know?

How do you encourage your students to learn independently?
THE COGNITIVE ACADEMIC LANGUAGE LEARNING APPROACH

The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) is an instructional model for second and foreign language learners based on cognitive theory and research. CALLA integrates instruction in priority topics from the content curriculum, development of the language skills needed for learning in school, and explicit instruction in using learning strategies for academic tasks.

The goals of CALLA are for students to learn essential academic content and language and to become independent and self-regulated learners through their increasing command over a variety of strategies for learning in school.

CALLA can be used in ESL, EFL, bilingual, foreign language, and general education classrooms.

CALLA’s principal objectives are to assist students in:

- Valuing their own prior knowledge and cultural experiences, and relating this knowledge to academic learning in a new language and culture
- Learning the content knowledge and the language skills that are most important for their future academic success;
- Developing language awareness and critical literacy
- Selecting and using appropriate learning strategies and study skills that will develop academic knowledge and processes
- Developing abilities to work successfully with others in a social context
- Learning through hands-on, inquiry-based, and cooperative learning tasks
- Increasing motivation for academic learning and confidence in their ability to be successful in school
- Evaluating their own learning and planning how to become more effective and independent learners.

CALLA was developed by Anna Uhl Chamot and J. Michael O’Malley, and is being implemented in approximately 30 school districts in the United States as well as in several other countries.
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: A COGNITIVE-SOCIAL LEARNING MODEL

- The learning process is mentally active and strategic.
- Learning involves higher level thinking, not just memory.
- Social context and interaction are critical.
- Students learn content by relating it to their prior knowledge.
- Students learn processes through integrative practice individually and with peers.
- Learning strategies can be taught and learned.

WHAT IS A LEARNING STRATEGY?

Learning strategies are steps taken by students to assist their own learning. These steps may be either thoughts or actions. Strategies are ways to understand, remember, and recall information. They include ways to practice skills efficiently.
## Examples of Learning Strategies

Match the learning strategy with its description.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Strategy</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use Background Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Make sure I am understanding the task and material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Predict</strong></td>
<td>Imagine or draw a picture to help me understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Take notes</strong></td>
<td>Check whether I have completed the task correctly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use real objects/role play</strong></td>
<td>Find another way to say it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cooperate</strong></td>
<td>Use what I already know to help me learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Substitute/paraphrase</strong></td>
<td>Guess the meaning from the context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monitor</strong></td>
<td>Guess what will happen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use imagery</strong></td>
<td>Work with other students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Make Inferences</strong></td>
<td>Make groups of similar words or images.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluate</strong></td>
<td>Write down important information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group/Classify</strong></td>
<td>Pantomime or use objects to help me understand.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHAT ARE YOUR OWN LEARNING STRATEGIES?

Identify a challenge you have faced in the last two weeks.

Example: I bought a new cell phone and had to learn how to add my phone numbers to it.

The strategies I used were:

• trying the way I used with my old cell phone (that didn’t work)
• asking my daughter – she said she hadn’t figured it out yet either
• looking in the user’s manual – the instructions were not in clear English
• calling the help line – finally I got the answer I needed!

My Challenge: ___________________________________________

Describe to a partner the strategies you used to meet the challenge.

What did you learn about your partner's strategies?
Using Strategies for a Purpose

Communicating with Others
- Substitute/Paraphrase
- Cooperate
- Read all about it!
- Use Real Objects/Roleplay
- Transfer/Use Cognates

Presenting Information Orally or in Writing
- Calendars
- Organize/Plan
- Talk Yourself Through It (Self-Talk)
- Make Predictions

Using Strategies for a Purpose

Comprehending What You Read and Hear
- Make Predictions
- Use Selective Attention
- Use Background Knowledge
- Manage Your Own Learning

Find/
Apply Patterns
Sound Out

Face yourself

I can do it!

Self-Talk

Crystal Ball

Monitor

Check

Crystal Ball

Make Inferences
Learning and Teaching with the Standards: What are the challenges?

The American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages has established these “Standards for Foreign Language Learning.” (see http://actfl.org/files/public/execsumm.pdf) “The purposes and uses of foreign languages are as diverse as the students who study them. Some students study another language in hopes of finding a rewarding career in the international marketplace or government service. Others are interested in the intellectual challenge and cognitive benefits that accrue to those who master multiple languages. Still others seek greater understanding of other people and other cultures. Many approach foreign language study, as they do other courses, simply to fulfill a graduation requirement. Regardless of the reason for study, foreign languages have something to offer everyone. It is with this philosophy in mind that the standards task force identified five goal areas that encompass all of these reasons:"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTFL Standard</th>
<th>Problematic? Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Communication</em> is at the heart of second language study, whether the communication takes place face-to-face, in writing, or across centuries through the reading of literature.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through the study of other languages, students gain a knowledge and understanding of the <em>cultures</em> that use that language and, in fact, cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning languages provides <em>connections</em> to additional bodies of knowledge that may be unavailable to the monolingual English speaker.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparisons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through <em>comparisons</em> and contrasts with the language being studied, students develop insight into the nature of language and the concept of culture and realize that there are multiple ways of viewing the world.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTFL Standard</td>
<td>Problematic? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities</td>
<td>Together, these elements enable the student of languages to participate in multilingual <strong>communities</strong> at home and around the world in a variety of contexts and in culturally appropriate ways.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CALLA-FL Instructional Sequence

CALLA Model

Teacher Responsibility

Teacher's role in . . .

Preparation
- Activate Background Knowledge

Presentation
- Explain
- Model

Practice
- Prompt use of strategies
- Give Feedback

Self-Evaluation
- Assess strategies

Expansion
- Support transfer
- Apply

Students . . .
- Attend
- Participate
- Apply strategies with guidance
- Self-assess strategies
- Use strategies independently
- Transfer strategies to new tasks

Student Responsibility

EXPERIENCING A CALLA-FL LESSON

Use this page for your notes on the lesson and its analysis.

What might appeal to a struggling learner in this type of lesson?

What modifications would you make for the struggling learners in your own class?

How would you balance cooperative and independent learning in activities such as those seen in this lesson?
CALLA-FL INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE

The sequence described below contains questions teachers should ask when planning each stage of the lesson.

**PROCEDURES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• How will I find out what my students already know about this content topic and what related prior experiences they have had?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How will I find out what language skills and learning strategies they already know for this type of task?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What vocabulary needs to be taught?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What advance organizer will give students an overview of the lesson?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• What is the best way to present this content so that students understand the concepts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What language skills will they use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What learning strategies do I need to model, explain, and/or remind them to use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How can I differentiate instruction?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• What kinds of activities will help my students apply the new information?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What language skills will they be practicing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How will they apply learning strategies during practice activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How can I differentiate their practice activities?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-evaluation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• What is the best way for my students to assess their own learning of language, content, and learning strategies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How can I make sure students are accurate in their self-evaluation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Expansion:
- How can I connect the topic of this lesson to students’ own lives, culture, and language?
- How does this topic connect to other content areas?
- How can parents become involved?
- How can I help students transfer what they have learned to new situations?

ASSESSMENT:
- How will I find out what students know and are able to do as a result of this instruction?
- How will I know if students have met the objectives of this lesson or unit?
TEACHING LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

How to Help Struggling Students Become Good Language Learners

Anna Uhl Chamot & Jill Robbins
National Capital Language Resource Center
Summer Institute 2006

Who is the Struggling Student?
This student has problems with...
- keeping up with classmates
- organizing him/herself and the work environment
- following verbal instructions
- longer-term work tasks and need work chunked for them
- social and emotional skills

CALLA-FL: The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach for Foreign Languages

COMPONENTS:
- AUTHENTIC CONTENT
- SOCIAL & ACADEMIC LANGUAGE
- LEARNING STRATEGIES
**Five instructional principles in CALLA-FL**

- Recognize and build on students' prior knowledge.
- Provide meaningful learning tasks.
- Engage in interactive teaching and learning.
- Focus on learning processes and strategies.
- Help students evaluate their own learning.

**DEVELOPING METACOGNITION**

- Model metacognitive awareness.
- Ask students to describe their thinking processes.
- Have students take responsibility for their own learning.
PREPARATION

- Identify objectives.
- Elicit students’ prior knowledge.
- Develop vocabulary.
- Provide motivation.

PREPARATION

- How would this help the struggling learner?

PRESENTATION

- Present new information in varied ways.
- Model processes explicitly.
- Explain learning strategies.
- Discuss connections to students’ prior knowledge.
PRESENTATION

- What kinds of presentation methods would help the struggling learner?
- Are you already presenting with a variety of media?

PRACTICE

- Use hands-on/inquiry-based activities.
- Provide different cooperative learning structures.
- Use authentic content tasks.
- Ask students to use learning strategies.

PRACTICE

- What kinds of practice activities would help the struggling learner?
**SELF-EVALUATION**

- Students discuss their own learning.
- Students keep learning journals.
- Students assess their own strategy use.

**SELF-EVALUATION**

- How can you help struggling learners to evaluate themselves more accurately?

**EXPANSION**

- Students apply information to own lives.
- Students make connections between content subjects and the target culture.
- Students relate information to first language knowledge of content and culture.
EXPANSION

- How can what has been learned in FL class help struggling learners in their other classes?

CALLA Instruction Summary

Teacher Responsibility
- Prepare
- Present
- Practice
- Self-Evaluate
- Expand

Student Responsibility

Changes over time

Teacher's role in...
- Preparation: Activate Background Knowledge
  - Explain
  - Model
- Presentation: Prompt use of strategies
  - Give Feedback
  - Assess strategies
  - Support transfer
- Practice: Apply
CALLA-FL Assessment

› Use authentic content tasks.
› Evaluate content knowledge.
› Evaluate language proficiency.
› Use self-report for learning strategies.
› Use self-assessment and reflection.

CALLA-FL Assessment

› How can you use assessment to better understand your struggling students?
› Can assessment become a more positive experience for your struggling students?
What makes independent learning most effective? The independent learner has a strong goal in mind. They understand WHY they are learning the language and are thus motivated to learn. One of the most important aspects of independent learning is that the LEARNER CHOOSES their own goal, rather than having it imposed on them by outside forces. If the goal is one chosen by the learner, the motivation is said to be intrinsic, or internally generated. Intrinsic motivation is considered more enduring and stronger than extrinsic motivation.

Success in language learning is another motivating factor. When the learner sees that they are making progress and are able to produce or communicate in their target language, they are motivated to study further. Structuring opportunities for success in the language is an important goal for teachers to keep in mind.

Setting Goals: Short-term vs. Long-term

Students are often not realistic in setting goals for themselves – they may say, “I want to be able to talk like a native speakers of (target language).” This is a long-term goal that is achievable after years of study, depending on the age and aptitude of the learner. A more achievable short-term goal might be, “I want to be able to talk about my job in (target language).” Helping our students to make realistic, achievable goals will help them to become more effective and independent learners.

How about you? Do you communicate to students that they can set their own goals in learning the target language? Do you understand what your students’ goals are? How do you guide them toward realistic, achievable goals? (See Appendix: Goal-Setting Lesson)

THINK-ALOUD DEMONSTRATION

Thinking aloud is the process a teacher uses to make thought processes...
observable. The purpose of thinking aloud is to model application of learning strategies to a language task. Teachers can develop the skill of thinking aloud through practice with challenging material or with material that is at student level. Students can also do thinking aloud as a way to become more aware of how they are processing language and applying strategies.

Watch as the presenters demonstrate a think-aloud. Be aware of the general approach as well as the details; pay attention to what she is doing and saying before, during, and after the task.

DEMONSTRATION NOTES:

Before

During

After

Strategies I noticed
THINK-ALOUD PRACTICE

Choose a partner. Decide who will be the thinker, and who will be the observer.

First think-aloud:

THINKER:

Pretend you’re in a foreign country and trying to figure out the street signs. Choose one of the illustrations in a language or from a culture you don’t know. Think aloud as you figure out what the meaning might be.

OBSERVER:

Listen and watch carefully as your partner works on the assigned reading task. If s/he is silent, use one of the prompts suggested below to stimulate expression of the thought processes your partner is going through. Take notes on what you observe during this think-aloud.
Second think-aloud:

THINKER:

Write a paragraph in your own second (or third...) language about the teacher you most admire. This could be a teacher you knew when you were a student, or a fellow teacher you have met as an adult. Before you touch your pen to paper, tell your partner what you are thinking. As you write, think aloud to let your partner know who you are writing about and decisions you make about how to describe that person.

OBSERVER:

Ask your partner to tell you their thoughts before they begin to write. As s/he writes, gently prompt your partner with questions such as those suggested below. Take notes on what you observe during this think-aloud.

What are you thinking? What’s going through your mind right now?
How are you doing this? How are you figuring this out?
What are you looking at? Why?
How did you know that?

**Prompts to get more information**
Is there anything else you are thinking?
Can you tell me more?
What were you thinking when you were silent a moment ago?

**Prompts responding to what your partner has said or done**
How did you figure that out?
Why do you say that? How do you know? How does that help?
Why did you change your mind?
Why did you decide to speak or write about this? (For think aloud 2)
How did you come up with that?
Is that working for you?

**Prompts for when a partner faces problems**
What are you going to do about that?
How will you figure it out?

**Prompts at the end of the task**
Were you able to tell me out loud what was going through your mind?
Is there anything you would like to add about what you were thinking as you worked?
How would you change the way you do this task the next time?

(Adapted from The Learning Strategies Handbook, p. 70 – 71)
EVALUATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF A LANGUAGE LESSON

Choose a lesson and work with 2-3 others to examine it. Write your own thoughts and then discuss with your group. Prepare to share with the institute as a whole after you have come to consensus about how the lesson might be improved.

How would you make the lesson better?

How would you address the needs of the struggling learner?

Group members’ suggestions:
STRATEGY QUESTIONNAIRE: LEARNING VOCABULARY IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

(see other questionnaires at http://www.nclrc.org/materials/assessment/index.htm)

Learning new words is a major part of learning a language. You have to learn vocabulary given to you by your teacher. You might also learn words that you want to know. Think about how you learn new words, and then answer the questions.

How often do you do each of the following to help you learn new words and phrases in Spanish?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. As I think about a Spanish word, I imagine or draw a picture of the object/idea the word represents.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I think of something or someone in my life that the word reminds me of, and I remember that connection when I need to recall the word</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I make a point of learning words that relate to my life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. I group words that are similar or are related in some way</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. I hold or point to an object that the Spanish word represents while thinking or saying the word</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. I think of an English word that looks or sounds like the Spanish word, and I think about how the meanings are related.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I look for structural rules (prefixes, suffixes, roots, etc.) that give clues to the word's meaning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I think of an English word that sounds like the Spanish word, AND I get a picture in my mind to link the meanings of the Spanish and words in my own language</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I review new words with a classmate.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I test myself to see if I have learned the words.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**LEARNING STRATEGIES THROUGH PLAY**

*Learning Strategies Through Play: Ideas for Associations with toys*

**Toolbox:**

Hammer = Summarize (*build something up by yourself*)

Saw = Problem-Solve (*separate it into parts you can handle*)

Screwdriver = Find/Apply Patterns (*twist and turn to see the patterns*)

Flashlight = Use selective attention (visual imagery) (*What do I see?/Hear*)

Pliers = Manage your own learning (*get a grip!*)

Measuring Tape = Evaluate (*how much did I learn/ how well did I learn?*)

Magnifying Glass = Make Inferences (*look closer*)

Monocular/Binocular: Make Predictions (*what’s ahead?*)

Duct tape or electrical tape = Substitute (*how can I make this work?*)

Play wood & Nuts & Bolts = Use what you know (*You build with what you have*)
**Stuffed Animals:**

**METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES**

Plan / Organize
- PLANNING PANDA

Monitor / Identify Problems
- MONITORING MONKEY

Evaluate (Check)
- CHECKING CHICK

**TASK-BASED STRATEGIES**

*USE WHAT YOU KNOW*

Use Background Knowledge
- BACKGROUND BEAR

Transfer / Use Cognates
- COGNATES CAMEL

*USE YOUR SENSES*

Use Images
- PICTURING PENGUIN

Use Sounds
- SINGING SEAL

Use Your Kinesthetic Sense
- HANDS-ON HIPPO

*USE A VARIETY OF RESOURCES*

Access Information Sources (Resources)
- RESEARCHING RACCOON

Cooperate
- COOPERATING COW
Spanish Animal Mascot Names

El Perro Planificador
El Pato Planificador
El Elefante Evaluador
El Pez Planificador
El Sapo Selectivo
El Leon Lector
El Conejo Cooperador
La Oveja Organizada
La Tortuga que Trabaja en Equipo
El Venado Visualizador
El Asno Agrupador
El Delfin Deductor
ONLINE RESOURCES

The World of CALLA: http://calla.ws
You will find resources, handouts, a mailing list, message forum, and contact information on our site.

Strategic Learning Unlimited: http://jillrobbins.com
Jill’s site has more learning strategies resources and presentations.

National Capital Foreign Language Resource Center: http://nclrc.org
NCLRC’s site has teacher guides for learning strategies and foreign language teaching resources.

TESOL: http://tesol.org
TESOL’s site has many resources for teachers’ professional development and information on the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages

Contact for workshop information: jrobbins@calla.ws

SELECTED REFERENCES

REFERENCES SPECIFIC TO STRUGGLING STUDENTS

Fischer, R. What is a Struggling Learner? Accessed 6/19/06 at: http://www.pasadenaisd.org/Curr_instr/intervention/What_is_a_struggling_learner.pdf

Software for Reading aloud tests and texts: http://www.freedomscientific.com/LSG/

Reading Rockets’ articles on helping struggling readers: http://www.readingrockets.org/articles/c42/


GOAL-SETTING LESSON