

## FOR-PD's Reading Strategy of the Month



(Developed by Smith, L. & Zygouris-Coe, V., 2007)

"I write with experiences in mind, but I don't write about them, I write out of them." ~John Ashbery

## Rationale:

Many say that it is through our experiences that we gain knowledge and understanding. That it is through simple and special happenings in our lives that makes life worth living. We may travel on an adventurous trip, partake in an exciting family event like a wedding or christening, or even simply live through daily experiences like riding a bus or eating breakfast.

Students in today's classrooms come with a wide variety of backgrounds, cultural experiences, and language understandings. It is vital that we nurture these aspects to better support students in developing literacy skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. These experiences and how students link them to their schema will benefit the student's connection between school life and their everyday life, in which they have the most understanding (Dorr, 2006).

The language experience approach (LEA) dates back at least 40 years (Ivey & Fisher, 2006) and assists students with connecting their own life experiences to what they are learning about in the classroom. Consistent with the schema theory that focuses on incorporating new information with the network already developed in our minds, language experience writings are seen as a good way to assist adolescent learners with connecting their own thoughts with the new material and topics that are being covered in the classroom. Content area teachers will find this strategy assists with summarization and drawing conclusions. It also works well with struggling readers and writers and English language learners (ELL) (Roe, Stoodt-Hill, & Burns, 2007).

## How to Use the Strategy:

The language experience approach to reading and writing offers teachers a way to scaffold instruction while still allowing students to have a bold voice in the construction of the literacy materials. Often seen as a "writing-to-learn" activity, this strategy lends itself well to motivating students who are struggling or striving in their literacy development. It helps students understand that what they have to say is important and worthwhile to write down.

### Steps to Language Experience Approach

#### Before you Begin

Think about the experiences, background knowledge, and literacy needs of your students with regard to the content being covered. Decide if you will work with the entire class or a small group during your instruction time.

Consider having students use a strategy such as "**Making Connections: Text-to-Self**" and "**Making Connections: Text-to-World**" when reading or discussing the content/text. This will help them reflect on memories and thoughts they have about the material.

LEA concentrates greatly on students using their own words based on their thoughts and feelings. Teachers of particular content areas can still enhance vocabulary instruction and comprehension by offering a specific word bank that students will need to use in connection with their discussion of the material.

#### Implementation of the LEA

##### Discuss

Take time to **develop a classroom discussion** on the topic(s) covered. Have students openly discuss their experiences on the material and describe how they connect it with their schema.

##### Write

An important piece of the LEA is for the student to dictate to the teacher their thoughts while the teacher records the information on a large piece of chart paper or their chalk/whiteboard. Personal stories can be recorded separately than basic facts from the content and incorporated together during or after the dictation. Exact words should be used as this will provide great assistance to ELL and struggling students. The strength of the language experience approach is that it uses natural language from the students in your classroom.

##### Organize

As content area teachers use this strategy, an organization phase may follow the regular writing stage. Students can help the teacher by contributing to the discussion on how the material should be ordered (e.g., chronological, story-frame, cause-and-effect).

##### Follow-up and Extension

After duplicating the language experience writing, the teacher can distribute to class members for various uses. A student who is confident in the material can use the writings as a review for an assessment. A struggling student can use the writing as a way to think deeper into the material as the teacher uses purposeful questions as follow-up (Roe, Stoodt-Hill, & Burns, 2007).

Students that feel confident in the LEA strategy can use it on their own in more of an "interactive writing" activity where they each take part in the creation of the language experience writing. This would work well in groups of students working on a scientific experiment, writing the process of how a math problem can be solved, and connecting a timeline activity in a history classroom.

## Assessment:

Language experience approach writings are usually not graded by the teacher, but are used more as a learning aid (Roe, Stoodt-Hill, & Burns, 2007). Observations that teachers make during the dictation and reading of the writings can provide the teachers with insights into specific student's literacy difficulties.

## Resources:

#### The Language Experience Approach

<http://literacyconnections.com/InTheirOwnWords.php>

The language experience approach is a great way to reach reluctant or struggling readers.

#### What is the Language Experience Approach?

<http://www.sil.org/lingualinks/literacy/referencematerials/GlossaryOfLiteracyTerms/WhatIsTheLanguageExperienceApp.htm>

The language experience can be described as an approach to reading instruction that is based on activities and stories developed from personal experiences of the learner. Benefits of this strategy and sources are also available from this link.

#### Language Experience Approach

[http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/ela/e\\_literacy/language.html](http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/ela/e_literacy/language.html)

Objectives, materials needed, and procedures for use of this approach are outlined nicely for classroom use. This approach supports children's concept development and vocabulary growth while also offering many opportunities for meaningful reading and writing activities.

#### Language Experience Approach: Talking, Reading, & Writing about a Shared Experience

<http://www.pnc.edu/ed/Eisenhauer/LanguageExperienceApproach.htm>

Basic points of this approach and steps for using the Language Experience Approach are outlined.

**References:**

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[Go to Strategy of the Month Archive.](#)



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