

Language Experience Approach in the Multilevel Classroom

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As I was ripping lettuce leaves into my salad last night, pondering what this week's blog topic would be, I realized that we hadn't really touched on language experience activities as a multilevel instructional tool. What's the lettuce leaf-language experience connection? Well, it went something like this: lettuce...salad...fruit salad...making fruit salad.... language experience activity: making fruit salad. (Not even six degrees of separation!) And so, as California's spring time offerings make their way into our classes, I thought it might be good to remind everyone what a little fruit salad (or vegetable salad or no-bake raspberry-coconut cookies) can bring to the classroom.

For those of you who read this and say—*Hmmmm. The Language Experience, weren't they a techno-pop group in the 80's?* I say gently, "no." The Language Experience Approach or LEA began as a literacy instruction tool. Educators such as Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Roach Van Allen, and R.G. Stauffer knew that new readers' oral vocabulary exceeded their written vocabulary. They also knew what we adult ESL educators find out the first time we step into a classroom, learners are motivated by materials that are relevant to their lives. These are the principles of the LEA technique. Also underlying LEA is the idea that learners can read what they can say, and once learners have their story in print there are numerous ways to exploit that story as a reading strategy builder.

Typically the LEA activity in the beginning-level adult ESL class follows these steps:

- 1) Students have a special classroom experience
- 2) They dictate a story about the experience to the teacher who writes what the students say on the board or types it for real time LCD projection.
- 3) Students are given time to read over and edit their work as a class.
- 4) Students read their story and use it in a series of activities that develop reading skills, such as circling key vocabulary words, sequencing scrambled sentences from the story, or looking at phonics within the story.

In the multilevel class, the LEA activity can be handled a bit differently. On the first day, cross-ability groups can work on the "experience" together, then higher-level learners can elicit and write the story that lower- and mid-level learners dictate. On the following day, learners can work in like-ability groups. Higher-level learners can be asked to edit the previous day's stories using a checklist. Mid-level learners can be asked to compare one of the previous day's stories and its corrected version and find the differences, or they can look at the model story and write questions they'll use to quiz the class later. Beginning-level learners can work with a strip story version of one of the stories and sequence the sentences.

Some of the language experience activities I've done with classes are:

- 1) making a fruit salad
- 2) drawing the perfect teacher, spouse, world leader, etc.
- 3) making coco-coconut berry balls (no-bake cookie recipe)
- 4) making a friendship quilt
- 5) creating a city model
- 6) having a guest speaker
- 7) field trips

The fruit salad LEA activity and cocoa-coconut berry balls recipe (which follows the same basic steps as the fruit salad LEA) follow. You are welcome to reproduce the LEA activities below for use with your own students.

I'll post directions for the other activities above in our e-CoP, but with your help, I'd like to create a Materials Archive that reflects all the language experience activities that have worked in our classes. Each activity could include any of the following: basic directions, required materials, sample worksheets, and even samples of students' LEA stories.

Recommended resources

Using a Language Experience Approach Activity

<http://www.sil.org/lingualinks/literacy/implementationliteracyprogram/UsingALanguageExperienceApproach.htm>

Marcia Taylor, Job Link. (1992) The Language Experience Approach and Adult Learners. CAELA ESL resources.

http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/LEA.html

FRUIT SALAD PROJECT



1) Form a group of four or five. Assign roles:

- The executive chef watches the time, assembles the ingredients, and distributes cups of the group's fruit salad to the other groups.
- The head chef reads the recipe to the group and makes changes.
- The two or three sous chefs prepare the salad.

Ingredients needed

apples
 oranges
 bananas
 grapes

Equipment needed

colander
 paring knife
 peeler
 large bowl
 trash bags
 cups and spoons

Optional

yogurt
 nuts
 raisins
 apricots
 coconut
 paper bags for compost

2) Listen to the recipe for the fruit salad. What changes do you want to make?

Fruit Salad Recipe

1. Wash all the fruit.
2. Chop the apples.
3. Peel and cut up the oranges.
4. Peel and slice the bananas.
5. Separate the grapes.
6. Put all the fruit in a bowl.
7. Mix the fruit together.
8. Add your own ingredients.
9. Serve the fruit salad in cups.
10. Taste your fruit salad!

3) Keep Going: Taste Test

- **Ask other groups for a taste of their fruit salad.**
- **Compare the fruit salads.**
- **Vote on the fruit salads and complete the sentences below.**

Group # _____ made the sweetest fruit salad.
 Group # _____ made the most interesting fruit salad.
 Group # _____ made the most beautiful fruit salad
 Group # _____ made the most delicious fruit salad.
 Group # _____ made the biggest bowl of fruit salad.
 Group # _____ made the smallest bowl of fruit salad.

Form a group of four or five. Assign roles:

- The executive chef watches the time, assembles the ingredients, and arranges the cookies on the plate.
- The head chef reads the recipe to the group.
- The two or three bakers prepare the cookies.

Ingredients

1 bag of coconut	3 Tbs of raspberry jam*
2 c. of vanilla wafers	¼ c. chopped walnuts*
½ c. of powdered sugar	½ c shredded coconut*
3 Tbs cocoa	

Equipment needed

a food storage bag
a bowl

Make the cookies. Use the recipe below.

Coco-Coconut Berry Balls

Note: Be sure to wash your hands very well before you begin.

1. Crush the vanilla wafers in a plastic bag.
2. Put the crushed wafers in the bowl.
3. Add the cocoa to the wafers.
4. Mix the coconut, jam and nuts into wafers and cocoa.*
5. Form small balls from the mixture with your hands.
6. Put the balls on a plate.
7. On a hot day, refrigerate the cookies for ½ hour.

***Variations:**

Add ¾ c of coconut

Use blackberry, blueberry, or strawberry jam.

Omit the nuts. (Omit = don't put in)

Keep Going: Taste Test

- Head chefs label and place two cookies on the judging plate up at the front of the room.
- Blindfold one taster from each group and have them try a piece of each group's cookie.
- Have the tasters identify the best cookie.