

ESL Developmental Continuum P–10

Teaching strategy – Language experience

Focuses on

Speaking Listening Reading Writing

Most useful for students at stages

A1 A2 BL B1 B2 B3 SL S1 S2 S3 S4

Language experience is a strategy that is best used with lower primary students and older students who are beginning to develop their literacy skills.

Purpose of this activity

Language experience helps students to understand the connections between speaking and listening, writing and reading. It involves the students talking and writing about a shared experience which they later read about. The spoken text becomes a written text, demonstrating that what can be said can be written down. The written text is read, demonstrating that what is written can be read. Language experience draws on shared experiences to enrich language through the development of vocabulary, knowledge of the structures of English, using language for different purposes and the extension of the students' world knowledge and understanding of concepts.

How this helps ESL students in particular

Language experience:

- shows the interrelationship between speaking and listening, writing and reading
- develops both language and literacy skills in English
- supports the teaching of concepts about print
- extends the students' language through an authentic experience
- involves the students in creating extended oral and written texts with teacher support
- provides a structured means for recounting and describing personal experiences, as well as extending them to talk and write about ideas beyond the immediate environment
- provides an opportunity to highlight the language features of texts
- develops students' bank of commonly used words in context
- allows the teacher to model the writing process
- involves the students in using language to create texts for different purposes.

Procedure

The key steps of language experience are:

- Plan an experience for students to take part in. Common experiences include excursions, cooking, making something etc. Alternatively, use a spontaneous or unplanned event, for example a windy day, an unexpected visitor etc.
- Involve students in activities to generate talk about the event, for example, take photos for students to talk about, have students draw about the experience, ask guiding questions about the experience.
- Write about the experience using the students' own language as much as possible. The teacher can scribe for a group or individual. Students can later write their own text based on the experience.
- Vary the type of text and purpose for writing for different experiences, for example, a recount, a procedure, a thank you letter, a poster etc.
- Re-read and edit the text with the students.
- Publish the text for individual or shared reading.

Using language experience with ESL students

Preparing for the experience

Prepare students for talking about the experience, for example, teach vocabulary items, build word lists, model sentence structures, read texts about the topic.

Expose the students to a variety of text types and purposes through spoken and written texts to extend their understanding of how texts are used and their language features, and how the text and its purpose impacts on the language choices.

Talking about the experience

Students at the beginning stages of learning English might not have sufficient oral language to talk about an experience. The teacher might need to provide a model or structure for the students.

Scaffold the students' spoken language during the experience, for example describe what is happening, recount or retell the experience, ask questions and provide a structured response.

Use 'think-pair-share'. Have students think about what they want to say about the experience, then tell a partner about the experience before asking them to share it with the whole group

Writing about the experience

When re-reading the text, model how to edit a text before publishing the text. The editing can be focussed on one aspect of the text, for example, punctuation, vocabulary choice.

Model a plan for writing by drawing a sequence of pictures.

Reading about the experience

Have students sequence or match words or groups of words taken from sentences in the written text. The sentences could be split into grammatical components, for example subject-verb-object, adverbial phrases, noun groups.

Use the written text to highlight sound-letter relationships, letter patterns or clusters.

Provide the students with individual copies of the text to allow them to re-read the text independently.