I have read and approved this paper as an Honors Paper for Joyce Martinez.

Dr. J. David Cooper
Dept. of El. Ed.
A Practical Understanding
Of The
Language-Experience Approach to Reading

Joyce A. Martinez
Senior Honors Project
Table of Contents

Part I--A General Understanding of the Language-Experience Approach to Reading ........................................ 1,
Part II--The Conceptual Framework and the Twenty Basic Language Experiences ................................. 7,
Part III--The Language-Experience Classroom .................. 7,
Part IV--Activities ................................................. 42,
Part V--Strengths, Weaknesses, and Research ................ 53,
Part VI--Personal Opinion ........................................ 62,
Part VII--Examples of Sctation Representing the Normal Range of Abilities in a Classroom........ 63.
Part I

A General Understanding of the Language-Experience Approach to Reading
The language-experience approach to reading is basically a learning technique based upon the experiences of the learner. In actuality, it is an expanded form of the commonly used supplementary experience chart method. Experience charts were and are used in conjunction with other forms of reading instruction, commonly the basal reader. However, the language-experience approach uses the experience chart as only a portion of a complete program which brings together in one instructional area all of the language arts. That is, there is no distinction between a reading program and all other language activities, such as writing, grammar, phonics, listening, speaking, and spelling. Language arts is presented as a whole, and therefore negates the necessity of a child being taught fragments of a language and being expected to piece the jigsaw back into a total language understanding.

This language arts approach has been used in various forms since the 1890's. However, its present day popularity was introduced through the work of Coach Van Allen, the former Director of Curriculum coordinating of the San Diego County Schools. He developed a more complete program from the fragments in
existence, by setting down basic rationale behind the program. By means of the San Diego County Reading Study Project (1958-1967), Roach Van Allen, with the help of teachers participating in the research program, set up a framework for the teachers as well as identified the experiences to be used in developing skills. This teacher framework, as well as the selected experiences, will be further explained in part II.

The language-experience approach has been appropriately named since it is based on a child's own language and the experiences he has met, as well as planned experiences and opportunities provided for experiences in the classroom. The program is based on the theory that "the teacher must accept each child where he is." (3,109) The child is taught according to the background he has upon entering the classroom. All children who enter our schools today have had experiences which can form a basis for language instruction, reading included. These experiences range from television to billboards, and usually include such varying subjects as weather (hot, cold, wet, dry), plants, time of day (morning, afternoon, dark), faces of people (happy, sad),
texture (smooth, rough), colors, shape, feeling, action, size, signs, brands, names of stores, names, labels, picture captions, and stories. (1,30) From this basis of known words, facts and feelings, the teacher builds up a reading program concerned with the identified need of the children using their own oral and written expression.

The language-experience approach is based on a process of creative thinking. In actuality, the children design and build the curriculum, both individually and as a group. Instruction is accomplished not through a series of books as are most reading instruction programs, but rather through the use of the child's own writing and dictated stories as reading and working material. Each child works with his own interests, ideas, and language. They are encouraged by the teacher and the environment to talk about what they are thinking about and what they are interested in. Each child's thoughts and words are valued, and through this individual encouragement, children are urged to communicate more, and further share their language experiences. (4,9)

Often, we as educators fit children into a
pre-patterned curriculum. Sequences of learning such as words, phonics, and language understandings are predetermined both as to how they are to be presented and when, even before the child is met. It is admittedly easier to follow a preplanned basic program, even though it is a program with the inherent fault of lack of consideration for the needs and capabilities of each child. The language-experience approach seeks to correct this in reading instruction. Instead of teaching a child to immediately read the thoughts and words of others, he is taught to read and write his own words first. From this point, the children become interested in reading the thoughts of others, once they comprehend what reading actually is. 

"He learns as did the little mountain boy who saw his first copy of Chase's Grandfather Tales, that "Writin' ain't nothin' but talk wrote down." (12, 10) In more modern terms, in the words of Roach Van Allen, the child learns that: "What I can think about, I can talk about. What I can say, I can write (or someone can write for me). What I can write, I can read. I can read what others write for me to read." (4,1)

The child progresses from seeing that what he says
can be put in writing by himself or by someone else. This leads to seeing that what he says and writes, he can read or others can read. And this, in turn, leads him to reading the written language of others from a variety of sources. Also, according to this method, this systematic understanding of language influences the thinking, oral language, spelling, writing, and all-over reading of the child. (4,1)

Therefore, the success of the language-experience approach depends on the development of a child's own personal language and communication. It has been said that "teaching is the act of raising the level of sensitivity of each child to his environment."(3,34) This is indeed the case in the language-experience approach. "The basis of children's oral and written expression is their sensitivity to their environment, especially their language environment, both within the classroom and in the world at large." (4,2) This statement points out that it is the teacher's job in the language-experience method to increase each child's sensitivity to the world around him, and to free the child to express his feelings and thoughts through varying media. The classroom should be a stimulating environment, so that the child can grow in experience and have an ever-increasing source of ideas on which to base his language growth.
Part II

The Conceptual Framework and the Twenty Basic Language Experiences
"The language-experience approach is dependent on the evolvement of a conceptual framework more than on the practice of certain methods or the use of certain materials." (11,62) This framework was set up by the San Diego County Reading Study Project with the aid of Coach Van Allen as mentioned in Part 1. The following is the conceptual framework set up for teachers using the language-experience approach to reading. It is a pattern of thinking that is necessary to any teacher utilizing this approach.

1. As a basis for reading, the child should gain the feeling that his own ideas are worthy of expression and his own language is a vehicle for written communication.

2. The basis of children's oral and written expression is their sensitivity to their environment both within the classroom and in the world at large.

3. Freedom in self-expression, oral and written, leads to self-confidence in all language usage which includes reading skills.

4. Children's oral expression may be stimulated and strengthened through paintings, drawings and other graphic art or sound symbols.

5. The child's own thoughts may be used as the main basis for development of reading materials in the initial stages.
6. There is a natural flow of language development in children. The flow proceeds in the following stages:
   a. The child's oral expression is stimulated and strengthened through art expression.
   b. The child's written expression flows easily from his oral expression.
   c. Motivation for reading follows easily from the child's seeing his own language in written form.
   d. After reading his own language in written form, the child moves naturally into reading the written language of other children and adults.

7. Numerous activities, experiences, and devices are used to provide for interaction of children, such as those included above.

8. Utilization of the child's language as a basis of reading instruction resides in a high degree of independence in writing and reading. (11,63)

These eight points give organization and meaning to the teacher of reading, but what of the actual process of learning to read. How is it accomplished, and through what methods in this approach.

The San Diego County Reading Study Project also identified the twenty language experiences that would basically contribute to the development of skills for reading progress. These skills were divided into
three groups to help the teacher organize.

I. Extending experiences to include words, oral and written sharing of personal experiences, stories, etc.

II. Studying the English language

III. Relating ideas of authors to personal experiences. (4,4)

Based on these three groups of skills, three major goals were decided upon. These are:

1. Developing a basic sight vocabulary and word recognition skills.

2. Providing a wide variety of reading materials.

3. Developing a genuine desire to read. (11,63)

When the major goals of the language-experience approach to reading were decided upon, the twenty elements that characterized the method were further studied and expanded. These twenty elements form the practical pattern to follow by which to develop a language-experience approach to the teaching of reading. The steps are in the general order in which they will normally occur. But it must be remembered that the children's needs and development must be the starting point for all experiences.
Therefore not all children will follow the pattern.

1. Sharing Experiences

The rock bottom beginning of the language-experience approach is the sharing of experiences by all pupils. Since the child's own vocabulary will be the words he is most interested in, these are the words that he should naturally first learn to read. To accomplish this, a child must first feel free to express his thoughts. It is up to the teacher to provide the environment whereby the child will feel free to communicate.

An increase in communication can be accomplished by many means. The most common method is oral. Children can be stimulated to talk about their feelings, experiences, and thoughts by means of pictures, discussions, films, filmstrips, records, or by the thoughts of others. Often young children need concrete objects to talk about, and therefore these stimulators are necessary. Children may be encouraged to talk about many things ranging from vacations, pets, and family to dreams and aspirations. In addition to sharing experiences orally, children may also communicate by means of drawing, painting, writing, and even creative music.

Whatever methods are employed, they must characterize a daily program of openness that will aid the child to refine his ability to express ideas and increase vocabulary. From this point the child will gain
readiness for written expression which is introduced through dictation.

2. Developing Discussion Skills.

The second skill area is discussion. These are more planned oral sharing experiences, through which the child is introduced to a two way interaction. It is again a group experience, but is more of a talk and listen situation. Earlier the child was only interested in what he was saying, but he must now expand and listen to the thoughts of others. This can be an interaction between teacher and child or pupil to pupil. This more mature skill can center around items of interest brought into the classroom, or around a basic topic or theme. By means of these planned discussions, key words are repeated and high frequency words are used. (1, 38)

Also, the students themselves naturally evolve their own standards for participation. These may include such ideas as (1) talk only when you have something to say, (2) speak clearly, and (3) listen to others. As the children evolve these standards, they are generally led to discover that when they read, they are having a silent discussion with an author. (21, 39)

3. Listening to Stories
In the language experience approach, children should listen to stories everyday. These can be picture books read and shown to the children, just stories for listening, or taped stories piped through a listening center. But however they are presented, they must present a good balance of types of stories. The teacher must be selective and acquaint herself with the items on today's market. This is a guided listening experience that helps each child to recall his own experiences. It serves to broaden interests and extend concepts as well as enrich vocabulary and sentence structure.

4. Telling Stories

Telling stories is another activity that should be a daily part of a language-experience classroom. This may be a planned activity or a spontaneous occurrence. It is an activity that gives each child contact with an audience, and gives him experience in expressing ideas in units, using colorful language, organizing ideas in sequence, and using good action words. (21,41) It is yet another step in moving to the dictation of stories. Story telling can be stimulated in many ways by the teacher. Painting pictures, dramatization, and finishing started stories are but a few methods.

5. Dictating
Dictation is the beginning of the reading-writing process. It helps to develop the concept of what reading actually is. The child learns that reading is speech written down as he first observes the teacher writing as he speaks, and later reads what he has written and what others have written. There is no control on the vocabulary used except that which is inherent in the child.

According to Roach Van Allen, the following is the basic procedure for the dictating process.

1. The teacher asks the children to express their ideas with crayon drawings.
2. Eight to ten children at a time work with the teacher at a table.
3. One at a time the children tell about their picture. The teacher then helps each child to pick one or two things to write down below the picture. The child then observes as the teacher does the writing.
4. While the teacher is writing the short story, he talks informally about different words, the names of the letters, beginning sounds, ending sounds, vowel sounds, and anything else that can be observed while writing with letters.
5. These stories are then bound into books with the children as the authors.
6. The next day, the children again look at their book and try to recall each picture and what is written.
beneath it. They also try to find, with the teachers help, words that are alike, those starting with the same letters, etc.

7. The children now trade books and read and examine the books that another group has written.

8. From this point the books are placed in the reading center of the classroom where the children may refer to them for future use.

9. The teacher performs the same process with other types of artwork, especially easel paintings.

10. The teacher now leads the children to further exploration of words they know by the use of incomplete sentences. She leads the children to discovery and practice of reading skills by presenting sentences to the children for their completion. For example:

   See the big b____.

   John has a blue w____.

   At first the blank word is hinted at with an initial, middle or ending letter, but soon they are completely open ended.

6. Developing Speaking, Writing, and Reading Relationships

A child learns what reading is by observing the recording of his own speech and the speech of others.

This is done not to develop specific word recognition, but to help the child conceptualize a reading framework.
This is the framework of Roach Van Allen discussed in part 1, that leads to the understanding that the books we read are merely things that the author would say to us. (21,40)

Phonics are presented naturally in the program and technical aspects are taught whenever the child has a personal need for it. Some of the word recognition skills that might emerge during the program are:

1. Recognizing alike words, words that begin alike, and words that end alike.
2. Recognizing the use of letter names.
3. Recognizing one's own name in print and reading high frequency words.

Since the teacher must discuss these points whenever the need arises, she must be always ready for them, and know how to introduce and practice the skill. These speaking, writing, and reading relationships are further introduced and matured by the use of experience reading charts. By means of these charts, activities are translated into symbols.

In the language-experience approach, there are four basic types of charts used. They are (1) Work Charts, (2) Narrative Charts, (3) Personal Language
Charts, and (4) Reading Skill Charts.

(1) Work Charts

These are charts of a permanent nature. They are developed with the children and are used to give order to the classroom. Picture clues should be included to aid the children in using the charts which can be used for such purposes as helpers, planning a trip, study rules, and information about the classroom.

(2) Narrative Charts

These charts are records of shared experiences of the group. They are produced when the class has a visitor, goes on a trip, or other newsworthy items occur. The charts are used to summarize and can be used for follow-up activities that lead to word recognition skills.

(3) Personal Language Charts

The personal language charts are of a very transient nature. They are meant to be produced, used by the child who wrote them, only, and then discarded. It is written on newsprint and is a duplication of a child's own language. It is not meant to be read by other children nor is it necessary for the author to read it. Its major purpose is to picture to the child his own language in writing to further strengthen the conceptual framework.
1. Look and listen.
2. Do good work.
3. Talk quietly.
4. Follow instructions.
5. Be considerate.

Manners

Work Chart
Helpers

Leaders ——— Tom — Mary
Clean Up ——— David — Sue
Feed Animals ——— Angela
Messenger ——— Kim
Papers ——— Lisa
We Want To Know

1. What are good pets?
2. How do we take care of pets?
3. Where do pets live?
Work Chart

Our Trip To the Farm

What We Want To Know

1. What pets live on the farm?
2. What do they eat?
3. Where do they sleep and play?
Billy's Puppies

Billy's mother brought two puppies to school.

We watched them walk.

They cried.

They were funny.
We went for a walk.
We found pinecones.
Some were little and some were big.
We brought them inside.
Personal Language Chart

My Family

By Tam

Stories and pictures made into a book.
My Mother

This is my mother.
I call her Mom.
She is pretty and cooks good food.
My Father

This is my father.
He is tall and works all of the time.
My Grandpa

My Grandpa lives with us. He is old but I love him.
My Brother
by Angela

I have a brother named John. He is only three years old. Sometimes I play with him. We play with his wagon. He gets mad and starts to cry.
The Pet Shop

See the mouse.
See the money.
See Mary.
See her mother.

Repetition of words
Words that begin alike.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>red</td>
<td>little</td>
<td>quiet</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>Betty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blue</td>
<td>big</td>
<td></td>
<td>ten</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>black</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vocabulary - To be added to
Reading Chart

- Painting
- Painted

- Working
- Worked

- Playing
- Played

- Jumping
- Jumped

- Reads
- Read

Add -s -ed -ing
Reading Skill Charts

Reading skill charts are used to teach and practice specific reading skills. For example, they can be used for left to right progression, awareness of sentence structure, sounding out words, word structure, and context clues. An important subsidiary use of making reading skill charts is the social development it leads to. (1,58) Children learn to appreciate and use the contributions of others.

Making and Reading Books

As more and more material is accumulated in the classroom, the teacher can collect the children's stories into class books. These books should be placed in the classroom on an equal basis with professionally published material. In this way, the children gain the status of author and are motivated to produce more. When they feel their stories have value, which they must have if they are placed in an actual book, the children enjoy writing and do not get discouraged. They gain in self-confidence, and know that they are not writing just for the sake of writing. Instead, they feel that their writing is important for future use. In addition to building confidence, the children are also practicing
language skills while they write their book. Model sentences are used to span from dictation to independent writing; and illustrations help a great deal when the child is called to read what he has written.

8. Writing Independently

When the children feel confident about themselves and feel that their ideas are worthy of recording, they move naturally to independent writing. The students prepare their stories in chart form on newsprint, beneath a picture, or even on an illustrated blackboard. The child will ask to do the writing himself and will use all the resources in the room. From this point the child will reach out and realize that since he can write and read his own writing, then he can also read other books and the preprimers in the room.

9. Developing Word Recognition Skills

Word recognition skills are learned initially through the dictation process. The child begins to recognize that everytime he says a word, the teacher used the same symbols to represent it. In this manner he comes to understand the sound-symbol relationship, and this in turn leads to word recognition.
10. Developing Awareness of Common Vocabulary

The child comes to recognize words of high frequency use in the classroom. He recognizes these words in his own stories, in the stories of others, in various charts, and in books found in the room. The words a child comes to recognize are not those of a controlled vocabulary. They are, however, words that are most important to him. Often new words can be introduced through the use of incomplete sentences.

Example: I like to ______.

The students talk about the sentence, finish the sentence with pictures, and then words, and finally collect the sentences into books which are kept around the room.

11. Expanding Vocabulary.

A child should always have full language power. He should feel free to use all words and should be exposed to a wide variety of words. Children can expand their vocabularies by playing games with words. Such games can be making alphabet books about "People We Know" or Animals. Also, books or charts can be made of words ending in ing, contractions, etc. These books should always be available for future use when the
12. Studying Words

Once the words have been introduced, the children should review and use them. This too can be accomplished through games with the children checking each other's progress.

From this point on, the elements to be introduced are of a more advanced nature. These are developments that occur further along in the process of learning to read.

13. Improving Style and Form

A child begins to improve his style and form of writing as he becomes more aware of correctness. He may set up a chart of items to check when writing, and may become interested in evaluating the writing of other children.

14. Using a Variety of Resources

The child comes to realize that information is found in many places. He begins to utilize all resources found in the classroom.

15. Reading a Variety of Symbols

As a child advances, he begins to understand that reading is interpreting. He learns to interpret
many things in his environment, not just books, but
calendars, signs, art, and music.


Children finally come to the point of considering
every book a friend. By first learning to read their
own writing, children enjoy reading, and reach out
naturally for more and more experiences of this happy
and enjoyable nature.

17. Improving Comprehension.

Comprehension is increased through the use of
discussion, especially in the nature of individual reading.
Since each child is reading what is of interest to him,
comprehension learning must be kept on an individual basis
except when the class is taking time for a sharing period.

18. Outlining.

Children gradually learn to restate ideas.

19. Integrating and Assimilating Ideas.

This is a personal area and again can only be aided
through personal conferences.

20. Reading Critically.

The child must react to what has been read. This
can be done through discussions with both teacher and
other pupils. It should be a skill that a child naturally
grows into by reacting to what the authors are saying. (20,174)
Generally, the language-experience approach to reading is based on the participation of all children in a variety of expressive activities. Through being sensitized to a variety of experiences, the child builds up his confidence in his ability to use language and recognize the language of other people. Each child writes his own books and bases his reading instruction upon them.

The teacher sets up an environment that will broaden the experiences of each child, and helps the child learn as he progresses. The child is motivated by pride to keep progressing and continue to grow until the skills he has acquired in the reading-writing process lead to reading in basal readers and supplementary texts.

The basic concepts of instruction in the language-experience approach can be summarized according to the following.

1. What a child thinks about he can talk about. Thoughts are basic.
2. What he can talk about can be expressed in painting, writing, or some other form.
3. Anything he writes can be read.
4. He can read what he writes and what other people write.
5. As he represents his speech sounds with symbols he uses the same symbols (letters) over and over.

6. Each letter in the alphabet stands for one or more sounds that he makes when he talks.

7. Every word begins with a sound that he can write down.

8. Most words have an ending sound.

9. Most words have something in between.

10. Some words are used over and over in our language and some words are not used very often.

11. What he has to say and write is as important to him as what other people have written for him to read.

12. Most of the words he uses are the same ones which are used by other people who write for him to read. (11,5)
Part III

The Language-Experience Classroom
The language-experience classroom must be an ever-changing source of stimulating ideas. The room should ideally be a spacious one, so that groups may be easily formed and dissolved. The room should be a restful one, but with areas of contrast for stimulation. Since there are many centers of interest, the room must be kept neat and simple. There must be collections of items to inspire each child's creativity. These should emphasize science, nature, animals, social studies, health, math, and art. Books of all kinds including primers, trade books, dictionaries, and pictionarys should be included, as well as pictures of varying subjects and showing many experiences through which the child can participate vicariously. All materials that the child might need should be included such as paste, paper, scissors, crayons, and paints. Easels should be present as well as individual film strip viewers, radios, tape recorders, record players, and listening headsets. All material should be of a nature so that the children can operate them without aid. All opportunities should be available to the children in order to expand their language possibilities.
The following is a room plan adapting an actual classroom in the Anderson School System to maximum use of the language-experience approach to reading. I have attempted to adapt this classroom to what would be considered an ideal environment for the language-experience approach. Each section of the room will be discussed according to number.

1. restroom ----Children are free to use at will.
2. teacher's planning area ---closet and desk area which adjoins another classroom of the same grade------adapts easily to team teaching which works well with this approach
3. coat closet------doors offer a large surface on which to mount work charts and reading skill charts.
4. bulletin boards
5. blackboards
6. sink and drinking fountain
7. shelf area for room supplies including newsprint, lined paper, colored paper, scissors, paint, chalk, pencils, crayons, tape, etc.
8. art center--------items on display as well as work area
9. easels

10. listening area including record player, tape recorders, individual cassetts, listening earphones, and cartels for individual work.

11. shelf area for resources should include film strips, film strip projectors, tapes, records, picture file, trade books, primers, encyclopedias, dictionaries, and supply of student made books. tops of shelves should be used for display items that will be changed often.

12. Cartels for individual film strip viewing.

13. language arts resource table includes pupil made books, other items from resource area to be changed regularly.

14. science center include displays either teacher or pupil made.

15. rug area for group communicating

16. round table for group work

17. chart rack to keep all charts made by the students for future use.

18. desk area can be rearranged

19. window area

20. math center includes math games, flannel board, manipulative objects.

21. doors.
Most of the work in the language experience classroom is done through multiple grouping. Groups are formed quickly and just as quickly reformed. They are based on the needs of the children and are dissolved when the needs have been fulfilled. For example, when certain children have reached the point when there is a need for clarification of the concept of initial sounds, a temporary group may be formed to fulfill the needs. Children may be members of several groups and will change membership rapidly.

In this classroom, the emphasis is on individual needs and achievements, and so the teacher uses various organizations in order to achieve maximum growth. Both small groups, class wide activities, and individual help are included. The teacher works with the entire class for the following activities.

1. Reading aloud to the children.
2. Letting the children read their stories or compositions aloud.
3. Encouraging the children to compose stories orally.
4. Directing class discussions on varying topics.
5. Extending experiences through films, filmstrips, and field trips.
6. Introducing and playing games
7. Songs and rhythms
8. Conducting seminars on the development of various skills.
The teacher works with small groups for these activities.
1. Completing activities begun in the larger group.
2. Letting children read their own books as well as those of others.
3. Giving special instruction in skills to those children needing them.
4. Playing games to practice skills.
5. Practicing effective oral reading.
6. Choosing appropriate books.

The teacher works with each individual child for these activities.
1. Suggesting ideas for each child's book.
2. Helping with spelling.
3. Giving words to independent readers.
4. Helping each child to choose and organize an independent activity.
5. Confering about reading and writing progress. (42,6)

The teacher using the language experience approach seeks to encourage individual initiation. Once in the program, "children develop a level of independence in making choices in the daily program." (4,8) That is, while the teacher is selecting and initiating certain activities to extend learning, the child is also
Selecting activities. The teacher provides the impetus through displays, and resources, and through his aid, each child chooses the activities or invents activities in which he would like to participate. Many of these activities will be described in Part IV.
Part IV

Activities
During most of the normal day in a language experience classroom, each child is working independently or with a group. Each individual is working with an activity that he is interested in and will fulfill his needs. Many activities used in all classrooms, whether utilizing the language experience approach or not, can be adapted. Good sources of ideas for the classroom are:


Ginn and Company, *Let's Play a Game*, Boston


Smith, James, *Creative Teaching of the Language Arts in the Elementary School*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston.

School City of Gary, *Developmental Reading Activities*.

Speedway Public Schools, *Enrichment*, Speedway, Indiana

Coach Van Allen, in many of his writings has suggested activities for the language experience approach. The activities listed in the following are from his book, *Learning to Read Through Experience*. (21)
Building with Words

Make word pyramids by beginning at the top rather than at the bottom. Write a noun on the chalkboard, then choose appropriate words to build the pyramid.

Taking Dictation

Let the class play a game of being secretaries. The teacher dictates short letters to pupils.

Words We Use

Make beginning lists of words that will be used in writing as a total class activity. Ask children to add to the lists as they use other words.

Blank Books

Make blank books with attractive covers and inviting titles. Invite children to add illustrations and stories.

Individual Writing

The teacher can place 15 to 20 words on the chalkboard. Children on their own time can make as many complete sentences as possible using just those words.

Expanding Vocabulary

On a chart place a series of pictures with common nouns and leave space for children to add other names for the same things. Variation—Invite children to add descriptive words.

Follow-Up Activities

A child can make an activity page for a story he has read. Place it in the book for other children to complete when they read the story.

Recognizing Beginning Sounds

The teacher can put a large piece of paper on a wall on which children can copy words which they discover that begin with a particular sound.
Recording Stories
Children read original stories on tape.

Fainting Sentences
Place sentences at the top of bottom of newsprint that is to be used at the easel. Children read and illustrate.

Discoveries
Provide objects on the science table. Leave a booklet on the table in which the children can write their discoveries.

This and That
Cardboard boxes or paper bags with word collections for scrapbooks, spelling words, bulletin boards.

Labels
Labels around the words.
1. Rose
2. Daisy

Flower
apple

1. round
2. red
3. ripe
Who was in the story?
What was Tom doing?
How did it end?
prepared by Sue
Words that begin with
Part V

Strengths, Weaknesses, and Research
Many educators have felt that the reading education programs in existence have several inherent weaknesses. It is felt that basically, not enough attention is paid to individual differences, that rote learning is emphasized although it lacks meaning, and that the programs are preplanned to such an extent that the child is not taken into consideration. In order to remove these limits, the language-experience approach was developed. Most people who have studied the language experience approach to reading have identified numerous advantages to the program. These general advantages are listed below.

1. The language-experience approach does not require standard English by the pupils.
2. It does not recommend or require ability groupings in the class.
3. It allows greater flexibility in organization and scheduling.
4. The content has meaning to all children since it is their own language.
5. The approach does not hold back those children with a large vocabulary, or put others at a disadvantage.
6. Special materials are not needed. Those already in the classroom can be adopted.
7. The approach allows for the effective use of teachers' aides.
8. Children begin to read using sight vocabulary that has been developing in the home and community environment.
9. Team teaching can be used to an advantage.
10. The language-experience approach is ungraded in the sense that much of the direct language teaching is done with material produced by children. Each child produces at a level that he can understand.
11. Reading skills are developed informally.
12. There is no one correct answer.
13. The child is required to do productive thinking.
14. The child is urged to reach toward the unknown.
15. The child learns to create new meanings out of old.
16. Each pupil has freedom of expression, and uses individual talents and skills.
17. Each child has the opportunity to participate in a variety of expressive activities.
18. In the language-experience approach, reading becomes purposeful, not just word calling.
19. Children learn personal discipline and independence.
20. The language-experience approach emphasizes new ways of individualizing reading.

21. The language-experience approach is concerned with the child as an individual.

In all the sources researched, only two disadvantages were commonly discussed. It was questioned if the child would easily adapt to reading the language of another, and if the language-experience approach would naturally lead to the complete understanding of all reading skills.

There have been several research studies done in the area of the language-experience approach to reading, but most of the results have been inconclusive. The results have often been in conflict and the research programs nebulous. There have been studies involving the language experience approach as early as 1926 by A.L. Gates, M. Butcher, and Jean Bletsner. Further studies were conducted by James Tippett and others- 1927, Julia Dickson and Mary McLean- 1929, Gertrude Dildreth-1930, J. Murray Lee- 1933, Elsworth Collings- 1933, Board of Education, New York City- 1942, D.S.H. Gardner-1942, J. Brighthorne- 1944, Sonja Karsen- 1954, and W.J. Allen and the San Diego Public Schools- 1961. (2,11)
In these early studies, there was some superiority shown in the achievements of students who were taught through the Language-Experience approach. However, the studies by Gate, Batchelder, and J. Murray Lee yielded evidence that the children instructed through the basal reader approach were superior.

Even in more modern studies, the same contradictions occur. Following is a chart showing comparisons of findings in the language-experience studies done by:


Comparison of Statistically Significant Differences in Pupil Achievement within Language-Experience Approaches and Other Instructional Approaches in Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stanford Achievement Test</th>
<th>Language-Experience Approaches</th>
<th>Other Approaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investors</td>
<td>vocabulary study</td>
<td>vocabulary study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harris and Serwer</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hahn</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kendrick</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sister Marita</td>
<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>McCanne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stauffer and Hammond</td>
<td>*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vilscek and Cleland</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(26,12)
Sister M. Marita, A Comparative Study of Beginning Reading Achievement Under Three Classroom Organizational Patterns: Modified Individualized, Three-to-Five Groups, and Whole Class Language Experience, Co-operative Research Project No. 2659, (1965)

Stauffer, Russell, and Dorsey Hammond, Effectiveness of A Language Arts and Basic Reader Approach to First Grade Reading Instruction, Co-operative Research Project No. 2679, (1965)

Vilseck, Elaine, and Donald Cleland, Comparison of the Basal and the Co-ordinated Language-Experience Approach in First Grade Reading Instruction, Co-operative Research Project No.2729, (1966)

If the chart is studied, the contradictions are quite evident. While the Hahn, Sister Marita, Stauffer and Hammond, and Vilseck and Cleland studies found that the language-experience pupils scored higher on word meanings, opposite findings were presented by Harris and Server, and McCanne. Paragraph meaning finds Language-experience higher in the reports of Hahn, Stauffer and Hammond, Vilseck and Cleland, but the opposite is true in the reports of Harris and Server and Hahn. Only two reports showed any difference in vocabulary and these two are contradictory. Word Study is again supported by both sides, as is student attitudes.

In the reports of Eykstra (14), Ganderson (15), Stauffer (23), and Wyatt (28), the same amount of conflict is found. Thus, evidence can be found both to support the language-experience approach, and to support other reading approaches. Many studies
have also concluded that there is no difference in results between the varying approaches.

I am no expert in the field of research, and so will not delve further into these studies. As a teacher, however, I know what it is like to be mystified by contradicting reports. Who are you to listen to? What reports are you to believe? For myself, all I can recommend is reading all available information, trying all methods, and deciding what method works best in each individual situation. Vilscek has offered some explanation for the contradiction in the studies done on the language experience approach. She suggests that the following six aspects may have affected the studies.

1. Selection of schools, teachers, and pupils in experimental or control groups.

2. Assignment of schools, teachers, and pupils to experimental or control groups.

3. Differentiation of operational guidelines for curricula and proposed practices between experimental and/or control groups within a study and among studies.

4. Limitations resulting from Hawthorne and/or placebo effects.

5. Information about pupils, teachers,
schools, and communities,

6. Selection of research designs and procedures in data analysis.

(26, 14-15)
Part VI

Personal Opinion
Upon completion of my study of the language-experience approach to reading, I decided to put some of its recommendations into practice in the classroom. I attempted to use the language of my students in their reading attempts. Some of these results are found in this report. However, due to my situation, I could only introduce the language-experience approach as a supplementary activity. As a result of my study and my use of this method in the classroom, I have come to some personal conclusions.

Although I wholeheartedly agree that the language-experience approach has solved many of the problems found in other reading programs, I do feel that it also has many weaknesses.
1. I believe the program to be rather idealistic. To make it work to its utmost capabilities, many materials not commonly found in the classroom must be acquired.
2. The method is time consuming, especially for the teacher.
3. I do not trust the method's claims that students will easily move into reading the language of others from reading their own language.
4. I do not believe that this method, as will no other one method, fulfills the needs of all students.

5. The method relies on the ability of the teacher to introduce all elements of language arts instruction without an outline to follow. This makes the program difficult for beginning teachers.

Even with these limitations, I do believe that the language-experience approach has its place in the modern classroom. I have found it to be a fine supplementary material, and that it especially works well with my slower students and those who need an enriched background.
Examples of Dictation Representing the Normal Range of Abilities in a Classroom
The people are not going to jail. He doesn't want to go to jail. People don't come out. He will. The police will find him again. He will.
I saw a house burn down.
And I was watching it. The fire truck arrived on time.
This is their nest. They are near a building. I see birds in the air.

Silly
I saw a policeman riding in a sheriff's car.
We are taking a walk. We saw some flowers. We went around the block.

Ellen
Two men are tearing a building down. The two men broke the windows.
This is a bus. My uncle is driving the bus. The bus is going to pick up some kids.
We were walking around the block. We saw three houses. Somebody came out.
I was sitting and I saw a wall on appearing.

and a tree. I saw a wall and I saw an appearing.
I was walking in the street.

and I saw a Volkswagen.
This is a fire truck. It is going to put the fire out. The fire is in the building.
This is a picture of a flower. I saw a lady. I saw a fire. And I saw a airplane.
I was walking in the city.

So I saw a milkman and...
I saw a fire engine going to a house.
Bibliography


5. , "Initiating Reading through Creative Writing," Claremont Reading Conference, 22nd Yearbook, p. 109, 1957.


17. Harris, Albert, director, Comparison of Reading Approaches in First Grade Teaching with Disadvantaged Children, Co-operative Research Project No. 2677, The Research Foundation of the City University of New York, 1966.


23. Stauffer, Russell, "The Effectiveness of Language Arts and Basic Reader Approaches to First Grade Reading Instruction," The Reading Teacher, 20, (October 1966), p.18.


