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## ACTIVITY ONE: LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH (LEA)

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It takes time to design activities and tasks that both target language skills and encourage critical thinking. Project-based learning (also known as experiential learning) is one approach you can use to integrate language-learning goals with critical thinking skills. Project-based learning tasks and activities combine language and action so that learners learn by doing (Brown and Lee, 2015). Learners must understand, examine, analyze, evaluate, and create while using English to complete a task or activity. The result is a language skills task or activity that promotes critical thinking skills.

One of the most popular types of project-based learning in the language classroom is the Language Experience Approach (LEA). LEA gives language learners a chance to recount a personal experience in their own words (Brown and Lee, 2015). This week's Teacher's Corner offers an LEA activity that can be conducted in the classroom using minimal resources.

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### LEVEL

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High Beginning

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### LANGUAGE FOCUS

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Writing  
Speaking

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### GOALS

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During this activity, students will be able to the following:

- Use English to talk about a special meal they shared with their family.
- Organize their experience into a written story.

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### MATERIALS

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- Paper, pencils

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### PREPARATION

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- Write the following prompt on the board:
  - Describe a special meal you ate with your family.
    - When was it?
    - What did you eat?
    - Where were you?
    - Who was with you?
- Have your own story of a special meal ready to share with students.

### PROCEDURE

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1. Begin class by telling students: “Today you are going to talk about a special meal you ate with your family.” Direct their attention to the prompt and questions on the board.
2. Ask students to think about a meal. You might say, “Do you remember a special meal with your family? Do you remember two?”
3. Encourage students to begin sharing what they remember. For example, one student might share that they remember a time when they had a family dinner for a birthday or holiday. Use the questions on the board to guide the discussion.
  - a. Keep the conversation moving with different students responding and sharing their memories. The more students talk, the more it will encourage and support other students to remember and share additional details.
  - b. Some students might not be able to think of all of the language required immediately. This is fine. Encourage those students to think about other parts of the meal, and tell them you will come back in a moment.
  - c. Give plenty of time for the discussion so that all students have a clear idea of an occasion that they can write about.
4. Tell students that now they are going to work on writing their story of a special meal.
  - a. Depending on the group, feel free to give them guidelines for writing, but try not to put limitations on what they write. For example, you could say that everyone needs to write at least 5 sentences, but they could write more if they choose.

- b. Part of LEA is to encourage a learner’s autonomy over their own experience. Allow learners to share their ideas in English without worrying about grammar or spelling. In this way, you can give learners freedom to play with the language, navigate their own story, and negotiate meaning through their language choices.
5. As students write, walk around and support them by helping them write down exactly what they say.
  - a. If you have a student who wants to know how to spell something correctly, you can tell them the correct spelling. On the other hand, if a student spells some words incorrectly, do not correct them. Encourage learners to use the English they know and are comfortable using in their stories.
6. After students have written their stories, give everyone a chance to share what they have written.
  - a. One way to share the stories is to divide the students into two groups. Have one group hang their stories on the wall and stand next to them. Tell the second group that they are visiting the story gallery, and they can go around the room reading the different stories and asking the authors questions. After students have circulated, the groups can switch tasks. The second group now hosts a story gallery, and the first group gets to read stories and ask questions.
7. Keep all of the stories up on the walls so students can see their work, or encourage students to take their stories home to share with their families.

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### VARIATIONS

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One variation of this activity is to have learners write their stories in small groups of three or four students. Have one student tell their story out loud while the other students in the group write down the story as they hear it.

An additional variation could involve a whole-class shared experience. Rather than have learners share their individual experiences, you could ask the class to recount an experience you shared as a group. For example, if the class went on a field trip recently, ask the class to recount the field trip together. The teacher becomes the scribe and writes the story on the board, and the students can see their experiences taking shape in writing.

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### EXTENSIONS

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This activity can be extended to include a visual component. Once students have written their stories, ask them to draw a picture depicting the events in the story. This could be done simply with pencil and paper or, if magazines and pictures are available, students could make picture collages to go with their stories.