

Ligoniel Primary School

LIGONIEL



Primary School

Activity

Based Learning (ABL)

Policy

May 2021

Rationale for ABL

Active learning is central to learning and teaching in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. Active learning is an umbrella term that encompasses both play and activity based learning. In Ligoniel Primary School we believe that activity based learning (ABL) is a fundamental part of the learning process in Key Stage One. One of the most important aims of education is to help each child to achieve their full potential in all areas of life, not solely academically. Through all curriculum areas, including ABL we believe that ABL allows for progression in a child's thinking and understanding can provide the context in which these principles become the reality for all of our children.

“Children learn best when learning is interactive, practical and enjoyable. Self-initiated play helps children to understand and learn about themselves and their surroundings. Motivation can be increased when children have opportunities to make choices and decisions about their learning, particularly when their own ideas and interests are used, either as starting points for learning activities or for pursuing a topic in more depth.”

NI Curriculum Primary 2007

Activity Based learning at Key Stage 1

Activity based learning at Key Stage 1 builds on the active, hands on learning that has taken place in the Foundation Stage. It is usually linked to topics or themes and allows children to engage in a variety of focused play activities and independent child led games, for example, construction, drama, UICT, art/design and table top games.

Activity Based Learning consolidates previously learnt play based learning skills and aims to provide a learning programme which will:

- provide opportunities for adults and children to plan learning together (KWL);
- enable children to develop their own ideas and interests;
- develop natural curiosity and stimulate imagination;
- provide practical, interactive and enjoyable learning experiences;
- create opportunities for children to make choices and decisions;
- develop Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities, managing information, thinking and solving problems, being creative, working with others and self-management;
- develop the fundamental skills of literacy, numeracy and oral communication;
- allowing children to review and evaluate their own and others work;
- provide opportunities for developing fine motor skills.
- develop UICT skills.
- allowing children to work individually, in pairs and in groups.
- provide opportunities to revisit and consolidate previous learning.

Links with Areas of Learning

Children learn best when learning is connected. The experiences provided for our children during activity based learning will encompass all areas of learning – The Arts, Language and Literacy, Mathematics and Numeracy, Personal Development and Mutual Understanding, Physical Education, UICT and The World Around Us. The learning is integrated through a planned topic based approach and enables children to develop learning across the curriculum and make appropriate connections. All topics will meet Curriculum requirements to ensure continuity and progression.

The Learning Environment

At Ligoniel Primary School ABL takes place in the year group classroom and when appropriate utilises other facilities within our school, such as sports hall, playground, polytunnel/ garden area, Foundation Stage outdoor provision and adjoining classrooms. Children need to have access to a stimulating environment that is well organised and encourages all pupils to explore, investigate and learn through first-hand experience. The learning environment should be attractive, welcoming and comfortable so that pupils are able to be active and confident learners.

We strive to ensure that materials and equipment are readily available so that children can select what is needed for their activity to make their own choices and decisions. This enables adults to spend more time interacting during ABL. As space is limited pupils are aware of the set up and tidying up systems in place for each individual classroom and promotes further independent learning. This is carefully modelled and guided by all staff members involved. Pupils follow the carousel model of activities each week. The ABL sessions follow the initial modelling session to address any barriers to learning. Subsequently, each ABL session follows the introduction and plenary format.

Our learning environment reflects the learning taking place within the classrooms and pupil ideas on topic based learning.

We consider:

1. The Physical Environment:

- Safe, bright, inviting and stimulating
- Adequate heat and fresh air
- Clean and tidy
- Mixture of teachers'/children's work
- Print rich environment
- Flexibility with space and equipment
- Clearly defined for both adults and pupils
- Freedom to move activities to more comfortable spaces for them
- Opportunities for indoor and outdoor learning
- Range of purposeful resources that are maintained and replenished

- A learning journey display board of ABL learning- including pupil voice, examples of work, photographs etc

2. The Cognitive Environment:

- Active involvement and enjoyment
- Shared awareness of learning intentions and success criteria
- Thinking and problem solving
- Reviewing learning
- Afl strategies used

3. Social/Emotional Environment:

- Children feel happy, safe and secure
- Positive relationships and attitudes
- Successes celebrated and shared with pupils, staff, school community and parents
- Everyone's efforts valued
- Pupils can make their own choices and decisions

4. Learning/Teaching Environment:

- Variety of strategies used
- Stimulating and challenging activities
- Activities linked to children's interests and experiences
- Monitored and evaluated by staff and pupils

We try to ensure that the classroom environment promotes independence and that the skills fostered in the Foundation Stage continue to be developed in Key Stage 1. In order to promote independence and support active learning, the following resources are accessible to pupils:

- UICT- laptops and Ipads
- Library area-Topic Books and class library
- Writing materials – e.g. paper (variety of sizes and type), pens, felt-tips, pencils, rubbers, stapler, paperclips, cello tape, scissors, hole punch etc
- Writing/Drawing aids e.g. Art and Design materials e.g. paint, coloured paper, tissue paper, glue, card, pipe cleaners etc
- Recyclable materials
- Construction, e.g., lego, duplo, polydron etc

- Table top games, e.g. Literacy and Numeracy games
- Drama and role play opportunities
- Water/sand if required
- Outdoor learning provision
- Small world

Due to limited space in some classrooms, it is necessary to be flexible in the layout of the classroom and other areas of the school are utilised.

Role of the Adult in ABL

As pupils engage in activity-based learning, the adult's role is often that of

- provider
- facilitator,
- participant,
- questioner,
- model,
- observer,
- evaluator.

The quality of adult intervention is a critical factor in the quality of learning which is experienced by the pupils. Therefore, Key Stage 1 teachers and classroom assistants should:

- Plan for and provide appropriate activities/experiences
- Organise and provide a stimulating learning environment
- Observe ABL and make written comments in planning (this would highlight any areas of concern)
- Work alongside and interact with the pupils
- Evaluate and extend the provision
- Make use of opportunities for mini-plenary
- Ask open-ended questions, make suggestions
- Enjoy the experience

Planning for ABL

Planning underpins effective teaching and learning and takes account of the developmental stage of the children as well as their previous experiences. Planning documents are regarded as flexible and are altered or added to as the children's responses and the outcomes of activities are observed. As with all teaching and learning, planners are evaluated - good planning and effective assessment are closely related.

Pupils are involved in the planning process and we adopt the Plan-Do-Review process which fosters good thinking skills and develops more independent learners. Children's planning ideas are recorded. These ideas inform the teachers 4-6-weekly ABL planner.

Teachers use a topic based planner with activities and learning intentions clearly explained. Suggested resources are listed with room for free choice within activity. The adult role with key questions is outlined to ensure the staff involved can easily identify the learning potential within each activity. Action can be noted for any child or group of children to be taken, including differentiation within activity. The activities are evaluated and success criteria discussed and noted.

We try to help pupils make appropriate connections between the areas of learning by teaching in a topic based approach. Through our activity based learning, we aim to ensure that:

- teaching builds on where the children are;
- children's needs and interests lead the learning;
- appropriate support is given to those children who require it;
- children are motivated and their learning challenged;
- children have high expectations of themselves
- children actively participate in reflecting and assessing their play.

Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities

“At the heart of the NI Curriculum lies an explicit emphasis on the development of pupils’ skills and capabilities for lifelong learning and for operating effectively in society. By engaging pupils in active learning contexts across all areas of the Curriculum, your teachers can develop pupils’ personal and interpersonal skills, capabilities and dispositions, and their ability to think both creatively and critically.” (Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities in Key Stages 1 and 2 – CCEA 2007).

Activity based learning provides a wide variety of experiences which will help to develop the children’s knowledge, skills and understanding. Through these play based learning opportunities pupils are able to:

- Manage information
- Think, solve problems and make decisions
- Be creative
- Work with others
- Self manage

Furthermore, learning through Play at Key Stage 1 states that play through activity based learning: -

1. Develops:

- The dispositions to learn
- Self-esteem
- Self-confidence
- Positive attitudes to learning
- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Motivation
- Concentration
- Reflection

2. Encourages children to:

- Make informed and responsible decisions
- Self-evaluate
- Manage their learning
- Transfer learning to real-life situations

Management of Activity Based Learning

- Bring class together, i.e. beginning of topic, complete **KWL** to facilitate planning of activities and explain activities on offer and potential learning
- Identify one or two focus activities for some children and have a selection of independent activity based tasks for remainder of the class.
- Involve children with the setting up of activities.
- Children are informed when they have only five minutes left.
- Children tidy up materials with assistance when required.
- Children demonstrate / discuss their learning (plenary).
- Children display their learning.

Time Allocated to Activity Based Learning

Year 3 and 4 teachers have dedicated time on their timetable which can vary from week to week depending on the topic but averages at an hour per week.

Observation, Assessment, Evaluation and Recording

Observation is primarily based on:

- The learning intentions
- The agreed success criteria
- Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities
- Social interactions and engagement

Observations should take account of the child's Cognitive, social and emotional development. They can be planned or spontaneous.

Assessment is an integral part of the learning process. It enables teachers to:

- monitor progress
- plan future work
- set tasks to use certain skills
- connect learning
- assess the appropriateness of the activities provided and the learning that is taking place
- know when extra materials are required to supplement or extend the play
- assess the suitability of the equipment and materials being used
- enable children to self-assessment, peer-assessment and self-evaluation

Learning is assessed during ABL in a variety of ways.

- The teacher
- Peers
- Self-assessment
- Observation
- Discussion and reflection

Afl strategies are used in Activity Based learning, e.g. peer and self-assessment approaches – Traffic lights/Thumbs up, Two stars and a wish or scale 1 – 5, children setting success criteria and using them to evaluate their own and others work and effective questioning.

Providing Equality of Opportunity and Access for All Children

We are aware that pupils have different experiences, interests and strengths, which will influence the way in which they learn. In planning play/activity based learning, we are aware of the requirements of the equal opportunities legislation and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Order. We endeavour to have high expectations for all pupils and will aim to provide suitably challenging opportunities for them to participate in activities fully and effectively.

Visitors and out of school learning experiences to enhance Activity Based Learning

Teachers are encouraged to provide out of school learning experiences to enhance children's knowledge, learning and development. These opportunities should be purposeful, relevant and seen as an opportunity to up level children's life experiences. Risk assessments are required to be approved by the Principal prior to leaving the school premises. GDPR and relevant school policies are expected to be followed.

Visitors are welcomed into the school environment following our whole school procedures to enhance activity based learning. Examples include, RSPCA, RSPCB, NIE water services etc.