



## A. Key Concepts & Strategic Dimensions

**What is it?** Activity-Based Learning (ABL) is, most simply, creating tasks, situations, activities, and other instructional ways to guide children to acquire, understand, and apply new information and skills that will help them in their studies and their lives. ABL expects learners not just to think but to do and to feel (i.e., to have emotions). It involves them practically, personally, and socially. The research is clear that children learn better when (i) they learn with *all five senses*, (ii) they can *handle and apply* their lessons, and (iii) they are motivated with a clear *sense of purpose*.

**How does it work?** Fundamental to using ABL in the classroom are a diverse set of learning behaviors and practices that require *students* to: (i) to observe, discover, think, and use information and techniques; (ii) have clear learning goals; (iii) link their lessons directly to the “real world;” (iv) come up with good questions and the strategies to answer these; (v) monitor, evaluate, and adjust their learning; (vi) seek information and help from outside sources, not just the teacher or text; (vii) record and communicate their work and results; and more. With ABL, they plan and do all this both together and alone.

The responsibility of the *classroom instructor* within ABL is to: (i) create meaningful, interesting, active learning tasks, situations, and other opportunities for students; (ii) provide clear, precise instructions and goals for a learning task; (iii) make sure there are suitable, safe conditions and enough of the necessary materials to perform the task; (iv) monitor and provide useful feedback to students as they progress in their work; (v) guide students to collaborate effectively; (vi) support students in assessing their work—both the process and the final results, or product; and more.

**What does it look like?** ABL methods fall into three main categories of instructional methods. The first includes more *conventional teaching methods*, such as reading. Yet, with ABL, students are at the center of their learning. They don't just respond to what the teacher asks or presents. Instead, they ask their own questions and choose what to learn more deeply. The second involves more *common learner-centered methods*, engaging students actively in exploring and applying the content from the curriculum. The third category involves students directly in *learning within the world*. Here, students to apply their full range of knowledge and skills—academic and personal—to learn independently—alone and in groups—from real-life interactions and situations.

The main ABL methods associated with *Conventional Teaching* include:

- Reading
- Dictation
- Lecture
- Question & answer

The primary characteristics associated with Conventional Teaching methods include:

- content and specific learning outcomes which come mainly from the official curriculum;
- assessment that is concerned primarily by single correct answers (but doesn't have to, especially if students are allowed to come up with their own questions);
- opportunities for learners to use diverse processes to find and even present their answers; and
- opportunities to learn on their own and as a group.

Major ABL methods associated with *Common Learner-Centered Instruction* include:

- Audio-visual aids
- Mastery learning
- Thinking maps
- Think-Pair-Share
- Demonstration
- Role-playing
- Drama
- ICT-assisted learning
- Group discussion & presentation
- Case study / Research

The primary characteristics associated with Common Learner-Centered methods include:

- non-text-based ways to engage with the content and techniques from the official curriculum;
- the availability and use of materials brought into class from the local setting;
- students' applying lessons in ways that relate practically to their lives and local context;
- students' bringing new information, insights, and perspectives, to their formal lessons; and
- students' representing what they have learned in creative ways.

Some basic ABL methods associated with *Learning Within the World* include:

- Game-based learning
- Music-based learning
- Project-based learning
- Excursion/Field visit
- Nature-based learning
- Family-based learning
- Expert visits
- Community-based learning
- Banking and shopping
- Technology-based learning

The primary characteristics associated with Learning Within the World methods include:

- learners' engagement in activities that differ from normal classroom instruction but still draw greatly on their academic knowledge and skills—e.g., reading, writing, calculations, ...;
- learners' linking lessons directly to the social, economic, cultural, environmental, and other aspects of their communities and homes, elevating relevance, usefulness, and motivation;
- learners' leading a learning activity, including: (i) defining its aims and strategies; (ii) setting the learning objectives; (iii) planning and managing the learning process; (iv) capturing, analyzing, and sharing results; and other aspects;
- the learners' (and instructor's) seeking knowledge and skills that (i) add to those in the formal curriculum and texts, (ii) permit deeper exploration and understanding of lessons, and (iii) require practical, more creative applications of formal content and techniques;
- collaboration among the learners, both working together on similar or same tasks and assigning complementary roles to cover all aspects of an activity; and
- creativity and initiative, both contributing to and relying on learners' personal competencies.

## **B. What are the challenges?**

There are some challenges, and even disadvantages, that many associate with teaching and learning using ABL. These include especially the notions that ABL can ...

- ... take a lot of time, both to prepare the activity and to conduct it as a lesson; *however, one ABL lesson can provide rich content for many conventional and student-centered lessons, strengthening greatly the quality and relevance of learning, motivating students to learn, and, eventually helping them learn better and more quickly;*
- ... require teachers to find and use more materials and manage more logistics, *but again, this is not a daily burden, and, further, the opportunity to make students responsible for managing these can contribute greatly to their learning;* and
- ... be noisy; *but excited learning noise is good noise, both encouraging and signaling learning.*

Ultimately, ABL provides students better opportunities and greater motivation to learn not just their lessons but also the wide range of skills and attitudes they will need to succeed in school and in life.

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## Activity-Based Learning: What is it?

A defining element of the Speed School model

Most simply, "ABL" is instruction that requires pupils to interact directly & thoughtfully & both intellectually & physically with the world around them to learn their lessons better.

ABL is NOT just listening passively or reading quietly, seated at a desk, to absorb & memorize information unquestioningly.



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## ABL: What do pupils do? (1)



They think & work quietly alone



They discuss, solve, produce, & analyze together



They engage physically, dancing, moving, etc.



They create, play games, act, draw, experiment



They interact with & discover in the world beyond the school



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## ABL: What do pupils do? (2)

They learn alone ...



... & together

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## ABL: How do they learn? (1)

They learn by drawing on all five senses



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## ABL: How do they learn? (2)

They learn by

- Questioning
- Planning
- Building
- Discovering
- Observing
- Experimenting
  - Thinking critically
  - Analyzing
  - Etc.



In this way they

- Gain knowledge (not just information)
  - Develop practical skills
  - Learn to use knowledge & skills in "real life" (for home, work, & society)

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## ABL: Pupils ask questions



What  
questions?

Clarification

Factual

Speculation

Discovery

Probing

"What if ..."

No one right answer

Whom do they  
question?

Teacher

Each other

Experts

Family

Community

Documents

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## ABL: Pupils find answers



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Where/how do they do this?

Books & other documents

Consult resource persons

Conduct surveys

Observe & analyze

Experiment & analyze

Speculate & verify

Consult each other

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## ABL: Learning tasks / activities



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Teacher-assigned tasks

Prepare a skit, concert, ...

Run a classroom store

Plant a class garden

An awareness campaign

Conduct field research

Conduct book research

Conduct an experiment

Always linked to curriculum

...

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## ABL: Learning to learn



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Skills pupils acquire when  
they learn actively

Plan steps / Strategize

Discussion / Negotiation

Formulate & ask questions

Analyze / Think critically

Where to get information

Time management/Organization

Self & peer assessment

...

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## ABL: Learning to present



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Pupils organize & share what they have learned & done

The present verbally

The create posters / maps

The explain their steps

They perform, sing, dance, ...

They prepare documents

They invite & host experts

They critique each other's work

...

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## ABL: Reminder

Pupils will not be good at this from the very start.

*That's okay. They are in school to LEARN!*

To help them learn, the facilitator must:

- Make learning objectives clear
- Teach the related skills & explore with pupils the related behaviors
- Create many tasks to practice
- Assess & guide self-assessment, with feedback



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## ABL: What does the facilitator/teacher do?

Active pupils does not translate into a passive instructor.



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## ABL: Lesson preparation

### ABL lessons must:

- Link directly to the formal curriculum
- Aim to strengthen precise skills: both cognitive & personal
- Link clearly to the local context & the pupils' lives

Create or choose an ABL lesson

Make ABL sufficiently challenging

Make ABL relevant & interesting

Make ABL tasks multi-dimensional



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## ABL: Lesson delivery

Create conditions for pupils to perform the ABL task(s) successfully

- Don't give the steps!
- Specify result
- Broad steps
- Time
- Answer ?s

Provide precise instructions

Ensure access to necessary resources

- Materials
- Tools
- Supplies
- Documents
- Persons
- ...

- Precautions
- Monitoring
- Planning fully
- ...

Ensure pupils' safety

Support true teamwork

- Set norms
- Task needs many roles
- Monitoring
- Assess for cooperation



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## ABL: Lesson assessment

Monitor learning process

- Did the pupils ...
- Follow directions
  - Execute all steps
  - Involve everyone
  - Check everyone's & own learning
  - Use materials well
  - ...



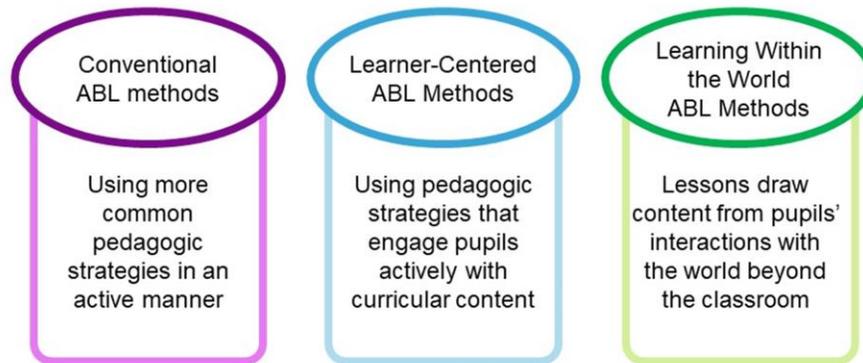
Assess learning achieved

- Did the pupils ...
- Learn the content
  - Foster personal skills
  - Build technical skills
  - Learn to apply the lesson practically
  - ...

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## ABL Methods: Three broad categories



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## ABL: Conventional methods

Reading  
Dictation  
Lecture  
Q&A

Little may seem less active than these

But the conventional can become active when ...

- ... it links directly to a dynamic activity
- ... it is pupil-led; so, pupils ...

Skit	Excursion
Research	Project
Game	Music
...	

Choose what to read
Dictate what they write
Lecture on their topics
Ask each other questions

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## ABL: Learner-centered methods

Visual aids & hands-on items

Master learning

Role playing

Thinking maps

Think-pair-share

```

    graph TD
      Food((food)) --- Apples((Apples))
      Food --- Bananas((Bananas))
      Apples --- Crisp[crisp]
      Apples --- Soft[soft]
      Apples --- VitC[has vitamin C]
      Apples --- Taste[Tasty]
      Apples --- Color[red/green/yellow]
      Bananas --- Potassium[has potassium]
      Bananas --- Yellow[yellow]
  
```

- Demonstration
- Technology-aided lessons
- Group discussions
- Independent research
- Create documents
- ...

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## ABL: Learning within the world



- Geneva Global's "calling card"
- Often takes longer
- More preparation
- Can cover more classes
- Integrated into subject lessons
- Community-based
- Technology-based
- Economy based

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## ABL: Benefits to learners



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## ABL: Benefits to facilitators/teachers



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## ABL: Main challenges



Preparation & delivery of ABL takes more TIME, but ...

... lessons are more fun, easier, & more effective, & actually save time as lose less to discipline & children learn more quickly



ABL lessons can be NOISY & BUSY, but ...

... it is good noise & busy, with pupils sharing, singing, moving to learn joyously, not the noise of boredom & mischief

ABL lessons require more MATERIALS & LOGISTICS, but ...

... lessons can cover more topics & content for many days



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## ABL: Planning a lesson (1)

Combine ABL Methods

For example, a nature-based lesson can include a field visit, an expert interaction, a project, a poster, creating a story, etc.

An ABL lesson may last many days

For example, before an excursion, pupils can plan & ready questions. After, they can discuss, write stories, draw, calculate, research, ...

Pupils can lead ABL lessons

For example, they can create their own game boards & questions; choose & organize expert visits; create songs & skits; share; ...

Cover content from >1 topic

For example, a lesson on a topic from science or social studies can (should) include vocabulary, grammar, calculations, etc.

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## ABL: Planning a lesson (2)

Plan

Planning is vital; the lesson does not come straight from the text. Plan aims, steps, materials, timing, link to different lessons, etc.

Spread out Living in the World lessons

Given all the planning, Living in the World ABL lessons should stretch out over many lessons & days & serve for learning of all topics.

Use ABL daily, but wisely

Pupils should use ABL daily. The choice of methods should not be overwhelming. One method can serve many lessons.

ABL is not easy

Both teachers & pupils will struggle with ABL at the start, but it is an education muscle that is well worth building, & it will get easier.

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