



AECED

aesthetic and embodied
learning for democracy

DATA ANALYSIS REPORTS

Deliverable 4.4

MARCH 2025



Funded by
the European Union



UK Research
and Innovation

This project has received funding from the European's Union HORIZON Research and Innovation Actions under Grant Agreement no. 101094052 and the

UK Research and Innovation

Deliverable 4.4 Data Analysis Reports

Case report, by each partner, giving an account of their case(s), data analysis and implications for the prototypes

Project Title	Transforming Education for Democracy through Aesthetic and Embodied Learning, Responsive Pedagogies and Democracy-as-becoming
Project Acronym	AECED
Grant agreement	101094052
Project start date	1 April 2023
Project end date	31 March 2026
Call	HORIZON-CL2-2022-DEMOCRACY-01
Participants	University of Lapland (ULA) Riga Technical University (RTU) University of Zagreb (UNIZG) Philipps University Marburg (UMR) Universidade Aberta (UAb) University of Hertfordshire (UH) – Associated partner
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Deliverable	4.4 Data analysis reports Case report, by each partner, giving an account of their case(s), data analysis and implications for the prototypes
Work Package	4
Lead Beneficiary	Philipps-University Marburg
Work package leaders	Kardelen Dilara Cazgir Prof. Dr. Susanne Maria Weber
Version	4.0
Due Date	31.03.2025
Submission Date	31.03.2025
Dissemination Level	PU - Public
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Document History

Version	Date	Main modifications	Modified by
1.0	28.02.2025	Reports from partners are compiled as the First draft of Deliverable 4.4 with introduction	Kardelen Dilara Cazgir
2.0	03.03.2025-10.03.2025	Internal review	<p>Pilvikki Lantela</p> <p>Sandra Wallenius-Korkalo</p>
2.0	04.03.2024	Comments from the Ethics Advisor	Simo Kyllönen
3.0	04.03.2025-13.03.2025	Each partner edited their national reports according to the internal review and ethics comments.	<p>Monika Pažur, Katarina Aladrović Slovaček, Vlatka Domović, Maja Drvodelić, Maša Rimac Jurinović (UNIZG);</p> <p>Kardelen Dilara Cazgir, Vero Pinzger, Susanne Maria Weber, and Lea Spahn (UMR);</p> <p>Pauliina Jääskeläinen, Sandra Wallenius-Korkalo, Susan Meriläinen (ULA);</p> <p>Karine Oganisjana, Konstantins Kozlovskis, Natalja Lace (RTU);</p> <p>Cláudia Neves, Juliana Oliveira, Ana Patrícia Almeida, Marta Abelha, Pedro Abrantes (UAB);</p> <p>Jo Barber, Suzanne Culshaw, Claire Dickerson, Karen Mpamhanga, Philippa Mulberry, Marie Toseland, Philip Woods (UH).</p>
4.0	10.03.2025-19.03.2025	Finalizing the Deliverable 4.4 in accordance with the internal review and the ethics advisor's comments.	Kardelen Dilara Cazgir

Abbreviations

ABE	Aesthetic and Bodily Engagement
ABEL	Arts-based and embodied learning
ABER	Arts-based and embodied research approaches
AECED	Project Acronym for Transforming Education for Democracy through aesthetic and Embodied Learning, Responsive Pedagogies and Democracy-as-becoming
AEL	Aesthetic and Embodied Learning
AELD	Aesthetic and embodied learning for democracy
AG	Acceptive gaze
APC	Aesthetic Pattern Cards
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CI	Commons-Institute Germany
DAB-Move	Democracy-as-Becoming MOVE
DSG	Daugavpils State Gymnasium
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EU	European Union
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HE	Higher Education
JSG	Jurmala State Gymnasium
Ofsted	Acronym for The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
ONSO	Openness to Newly 'Seeing' the Other
PAR	Participative action research
PLC	Pattern Language of Commoning
PLC-F-Lab	Pattern Language of Commoning – Future- Laboratory
PLCs	Pattern Language of Commoning Cards (deck)

POL	Professional and Organisational Learning
PWC	Price Waterhouse Foundation
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
REF	Research Excellence Framework [used in UK higher education]
RQ	Research Question
RSS 22	Riga Secondary School Nr. 22
RTU	Riga Technical University
SLT	Initialism for Senior Leadership team
SPT	Social Presencing Theater
UAb	Universidade Aberta
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
UH	University of Hertfordshire
ULA	University of Lapland
UMR	Philipps University Marburg
UNIZG	University of Zagreb
VEN	Visual, Embodied and Narrative

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Part 1: Introduction

Scope of the Deliverable

This deliverable contains the completed case studies of the 19 cases outlined in the AECED project proposal. These case research reports were handed in separately for each case study by each country. Case study reports include the following sections:

- 1) Case Description: a descriptive overview of participants, location, purpose - relevance to democracy-as-becoming, research activities and methods, researchers, and timeframe.
- 2) Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis: a concise ground before presenting research findings, including data types and sources, research methodologies and methods, and theoretical background.
- 3) Research Findings: the key outcomes and findings related to the AECED Project common research questions (RQ1-4).
- 4) Limitations: reflection on research methods and methodological limitations.
- 5) Relevance of context: reflection on how context-specific factors influenced the findings, and how contextual elements shaped participants' engagement and interpretation of the Framework and Guides.
- 6) Learnings for the Pedagogical Framework and Guides: evidence-based outcomes and key findings for improving the Pedagogical Framework and Guides with reflection on three dimensions of transformation, referencing the AECED Project methodological framework.
- 7) Ethical reflection and Gender dimension: reflection on the ethics and gender dimension in research and data analysis.

The references for each country's case research are compiled into a single reference list at the end of the country reports.

Each country reported the key findings of the research according to the common research questions of the AECED research presented in the D4.1 Methodological Framework (AECED, December 2023, P.21) as follows:

RQ1. Regarding process: a) How do participants experience being introduced to and working with the Prototype Framework and Guides? b) In what ways is AELD co-created and facilitated through ABE methods?

RQ2. Regarding the transformational change in participants: In what ways do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, lead to individual and collective growth in regard to

- feelings for democracy,
- aesthetic awareness and qualities (such as empathic, ethical, and spiritual sensibilities),
- collaborative, reflexive and critical capabilities,

- openness to newly ‘seeing’ the other,
- willingness to move towards more reflexive and critical modes of awareness and
- knowing that reconnect with the body as a source of learning,
- capacity to challenge social injustices and engage creatively with conflict and
- antagonisms
- any other aspects that will be developed in and through the PAR process

RQ3. What influence, if any, did the researchers have on how the Framework and Guides were used and the designs of AEL for democracy that emerged in the trials?

RQ4. What evidence-based conclusions for revision and refinement of the Prototype Framework and Guides emerge from the experience of using the Prototypes and addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

The AECED countries completed the case studies in the following educational phases (see table 1):

Primary (including Early Years)	Secondary	Higher Education	Adult/professional/organisational learning	Intergenerational
Croatia Portugal	Latvia UK	Croatia Finland Germany	Finland Germany Latvia Portugal UK	Latvia

Table 1: phases of education for each partner

Data Analysis Process

The data analysis began with the data collection process and concluded with the writing of the case reports as an iterative process. As the AECED Project methodologically adopted the PAR approach, it was essential to critically discuss and reflect within the research teams throughout the PAR process. Since the submission of D4.2 (Design of Case Research), the WP4 leader has hosted sixteen WP4 meetings to support the multi-case trialling process. These meetings provided an opportunity to present preliminary findings, monitor the progress of case research, critically discuss initial findings, and address challenges within the AECED Consortium.

In addition to the WP4 meetings, six Consortium Meetings held on 21 May, 29 May, and 5 June 2024; and on 23 October, 30 October, and 6 November allowed partners to present preliminary findings and research progress for critical discussion and reflection.

To report the data analysis, project findings, and learnings for the refinement of the pedagogical framework and associated guides, the WP4 leader designed a template. This template was first shared with partners in March 2024. Based on the feedback received, the WP4 leader finalised the first version. During the case trialling phase, the WP4 leader further refined the reporting template and shared it again with the AECED Consortium in November 2024. Partners provided additional feedback during a WP4 meeting, and the written feedback round remained open until the first week of January 2025. The final version of the country report template was then completed.

For writing up case analysis reports, the AECED Consortium used memos that had been transferred to the Shared Memoing Matrix, as explained in the next section. After the partner countries submitted their reports, D4.4 underwent both internal and ethics review (internal review conducted by the Coordinator and ethics review conducted by the Ethics Advisor).

Memoing and Shared Memoing Matrix

In the AECED Project, memoing serves as the foundation for capturing descriptive, conceptual, reflective, and theoretical notes throughout each research phase. Since the PAR methodology is inherently iterative, it encompasses the stages of designing (planning), trialling (acting and observing), analysing (reflecting), and re-designing (re-planning). As a result, memoing plays a crucial role in preserving ideas that emerge during the research, particularly regarding description, conceptualisation, reflection, theorising, and verification. The AECED Project developed a Shared Memoing Matrix that each partner used for memoing. This matrix is based on the memos of the researchers, with all data shared in the matrix being pseudonymised or anonymised before memoing. Following the D4.2 report, UMR and RTU collaborated to develop the Shared Memoing Matrix. The Latvian Team provided the model structure, while the WP4 leader developed the analytical structure and template for memoing.

When discussions about the model structure began within the AECED Consortium, we initially researched and debated using examples from the Metadata Matrix. Consequently, our early discussions and template structures became known as the Metadata Matrix. Later, since we had not added any data—only researchers’ memos—and to avoid any confusion with metadata, the Project Manager Group decided to rename it. Therefore, from D 4.4 onwards, it has been referred to as the “Shared Memoing Matrix.

This matrix was created not only for case reporting but also to support cross-case analysis in the following phase. The 19 case studies reflect a variety of differences and similarities within and between educational phases in individual countries and across countries. These differences pose challenges for cross-case analysis in international projects. To address these challenges, it is crucial to systematise categories, characteristics, parameters, and processes that can be controlled, based on guiding principles. Memoing can serve multiple roles:

- Capturing and documenting thoughts, insights, and questions arising from data collection and analysis,

- Clarifying and developing ideas,
- Facilitating connections between different pieces of data, aiding in the identification of relationships and trends,
- Encouraging researchers to reflect on their biases, assumptions, and perspectives,
- Recording the research process, making it easier to track progress.

According to Glaser (2013), there is no set time for memoing; the key is to write down one's thoughts whenever an idea comes to mind to avoid losing it. There is no specific structure or format for memos, and it is important not to judge one's own memo style. One never knows when memos might become valuable.

The Shared Memoing Matrix includes the following key components:

- **Creation of Shared Memos:** Memoing in English, focusing on specific aspects identified during different phases of the PAR process.
- **Analytical Layers:** Organising memos into three layers: PAR phases, comparison criteria (memoing dimensions provided by the WP4 leader – the German team), and templates with questions and tables.
- **Memos Storage:** Developing a system for storing researchers' memos, with pseudonymised or anonymised data, that ensures easy and quick access when needed.
- **Comparison Approach:** Formulating a comparison approach that ensures full transparency, critical reflection, and enables meaningful comparison.

The Shared Memoing Matrix is an Excel file designed to organize memos from all 19 project research cases across six PAR phases. It offers a user-friendly and secure solution for creating a foundation for cross-case analysis.

Constituent Parts of the Shared Memoing Matrix (Columns):

- **Project Case Number:** 19 project cases in total.
- **Country Case Codes:** Country code + national case number (e.g., FI1 – Finnish case 1, DE3 – German case 3, PT2 – Portuguese case 2).
- **Duration:** Duration of each PAR phase in each case (for informational purposes).
- **Six Phases of PAR:** (1) Introduction, (2) Familiarisation, (3) Collaborative Reflection, (4) Planning, (5) Action, (6) Analysis & Synthesis.
- **Sub-columns with Hyperlinked Cells:** Each PAR phase has four sub-columns for each memoing dimension – Descriptive, Reflective, Conceptual, and Theoretical.

Thus, using the Shared Memoing Matrix through memoing provides an opportunity for each case to reflect on every PAR phase, incorporating descriptive, reflective, conceptual, and theoretical dimensions, from the case trialling to the completion of data analysis.

Advantages of the Shared Memoing Matrix:

- **"Alive" Container:** The Matrix is interactive; users can click on hyperlinked cells to access linked files.
- **Holistic Overview:** It offers a comprehensive view of 6 PAR phases with 4 dimensions for all 19 cases research within one matrix.
- **Research Ethics Compliance:** The shared memos do not include any identifiable personal data.
- **Flexibility:** The structure is adaptable, allowing the addition or removal of columns as the comparison criteria evolve.

Analysis Capabilities for Cross-Case Analysis: for the transnational reports (D4.5) as well as for the scientific publications:

- Cross-national case analysis
- Intra-national case analysis
- Cross-educational analysis

The Shared Memoing Matrix is logical, flexible, and user-friendly, making it an effective tool for comparative research analysis and enhancing the overall research process.

Project Case number	Country Case Codes	1. Introduction				2. Familiarisation				3. Collaborative reflection				4. Planning				5. Action				6. Analysis & Synthesis				
		Dimensions of memoing for comparison of the cases				Dimensions of memoing for comparison of the cases				Dimensions of memoing for comparison of the cases				Dimensions of memoing for comparison of the cases				Dimensions of memoing for comparison of the cases				Dimensions of memoing for comparison of the cases				
		Duration of the PAR phase From ... to	Descriptive	Reflective	Conceptual	Theoretical	Duration of the PAR phase From ... to	Descriptive	Reflective	Conceptual	Theoretical	Duration of the PAR phase From ... to	Descriptive	Reflective	Conceptual	Theoretical	Duration of the PAR phase From ... to	Descriptive	Reflective	Conceptual	Theoretical	Duration of the PAR phase From ... to	Descriptive	Reflective	Conceptual	Theoretical
1.	DE1	DE1D	DE1R	DE1C	DE1Th	DE2D	DE2R	DE2C	DE2Th	DE3D	DE3R	DE3C	DE3Th	DE4D	DE4R	DE4C	DE4Th	DE5D	DE5R	DE5C	DE5Th	DE6D	DE6R	DE6C	DE6Th	
2.	DE2	DE2D	DE2R	DE2C	DE2Th	DE2D	DE2R	DE2C	DE2Th	DE2D	DE2R	DE2C	DE2Th	DE2D	DE2R	DE2C	DE2Th	DE2D	DE2R	DE2C	DE2Th	DE2D	DE2R	DE2C	DE2Th	
3.	DE3	DE3D	DE3R	DE3C	DE3Th	DE3D	DE3R	DE3C	DE3Th	DE3D	DE3R	DE3C	DE3Th	DE3D	DE3R	DE3C	DE3Th	DE3D	DE3R	DE3C	DE3Th	DE3D	DE3R	DE3C	DE3Th	
4.	DE4	DE4D	DE4R	DE4C	DE4Th	DE4D	DE4R	DE4C	DE4Th	DE4D	DE4R	DE4C	DE4Th	DE4D	DE4R	DE4C	DE4Th	DE4D	DE4R	DE4C	DE4Th	DE4D	DE4R	DE4C	DE4Th	
5.	DE5	DE5D	DE5R	DE5C	DE5Th	DE5D	DE5R	DE5C	DE5Th	DE5D	DE5R	DE5C	DE5Th	DE5D	DE5R	DE5C	DE5Th	DE5D	DE5R	DE5C	DE5Th	DE5D	DE5R	DE5C	DE5Th	
6.	DE6	DE6D	DE6R	DE6C	DE6Th	DE6D	DE6R	DE6C	DE6Th	DE6D	DE6R	DE6C	DE6Th	DE6D	DE6R	DE6C	DE6Th	DE6D	DE6R	DE6C	DE6Th	DE6D	DE6R	DE6C	DE6Th	
7.	HR1	HR1D	HR1R	HR1C	HR1Th	HR2D	HR2R	HR2C	HR2Th	HR3D	HR3R	HR3C	HR3Th	HR4D	HR4R	HR4C	HR4Th	HR5D	HR5R	HR5C	HR5Th	HR6D	HR6R	HR6C	HR6Th	
8.	HR2	HR2D	HR2R	HR2C	HR2Th	HR2D	HR2R	HR2C	HR2Th	HR2D	HR2R	HR2C	HR2Th	HR2D	HR2R	HR2C	HR2Th	HR2D	HR2R	HR2C	HR2Th	HR2D	HR2R	HR2C	HR2Th	
9.	HR3	HR3D	HR3R	HR3C	HR3Th	HR3D	HR3R	HR3C	HR3Th	HR3D	HR3R	HR3C	HR3Th	HR3D	HR3R	HR3C	HR3Th	HR3D	HR3R	HR3C	HR3Th	HR3D	HR3R	HR3C	HR3Th	
10.	HR4	HR4D	HR4R	HR4C	HR4Th	HR4D	HR4R	HR4C	HR4Th	HR4D	HR4R	HR4C	HR4Th	HR4D	HR4R	HR4C	HR4Th	HR4D	HR4R	HR4C	HR4Th	HR4D	HR4R	HR4C	HR4Th	
11.	LV1	16.06.16.02.2024	LV1D	LV1R	LV1C	LV1Th	16.02.16.03.2024	LV2D	LV2R	LV2C	LV2Th	16.02.16.03.2024	LV3D	LV3R	LV3C	LV3Th	16.02.16.03.2024	LV4D	LV4R	LV4C	LV4Th	16.02.16.03.2024	LV5D	LV5R	LV5C	LV5Th
12.	LV2	16.02.16.03.2024	LV2D	LV2R	LV2C	LV2Th	16.02.16.03.2024	LV2D	LV2R	LV2C	LV2Th	16.02.16.03.2024	LV2D	LV2R	LV2C	LV2Th	16.02.16.03.2024	LV2D	LV2R	LV2C	LV2Th	16.02.16.03.2024	LV2D	LV2R	LV2C	LV2Th
13.	LV3	16.02.16.03.2024	LV3D	LV3R	LV3C	LV3Th	16.02.16.03.2024	LV3D	LV3R	LV3C	LV3Th	16.02.16.03.2024	LV3D	LV3R	LV3C	LV3Th	16.02.16.03.2024	LV3D	LV3R	LV3C	LV3Th	16.02.16.03.2024	LV3D	LV3R	LV3C	LV3Th
14.	PT1	16.02.16.03.2024	PT1D	PT1R	PT1C	PT1Th	16.02.16.03.2024	PT2D	PT2R	PT2C	PT2Th	16.02.16.03.2024	PT3D	PT3R	PT3C	PT3Th	16.02.16.03.2024	PT4D	PT4R	PT4C	PT4Th	16.02.16.03.2024	PT5D	PT5R	PT5C	PT5Th
15.	PT2	16.02.16.03.2024	PT2D	PT2R	PT2C	PT2Th	16.02.16.03.2024	PT2D	PT2R	PT2C	PT2Th	16.02.16.03.2024	PT2D	PT2R	PT2C	PT2Th	16.02.16.03.2024	PT2D	PT2R	PT2C	PT2Th	16.02.16.03.2024	PT2D	PT2R	PT2C	PT2Th
16.	PT3	16.02.16.03.2024	PT3D	PT3R	PT3C	PT3Th	16.02.16.03.2024	PT3D	PT3R	PT3C	PT3Th	16.02.16.03.2024	PT3D	PT3R	PT3C	PT3Th	16.02.16.03.2024	PT3D	PT3R	PT3C	PT3Th	16.02.16.03.2024	PT3D	PT3R	PT3C	PT3Th
17.	PT4	16.02.16.03.2024	PT4D	PT4R	PT4C	PT4Th	16.02.16.03.2024	PT4D	PT4R	PT4C	PT4Th	16.02.16.03.2024	PT4D	PT4R	PT4C	PT4Th	16.02.16.03.2024	PT4D	PT4R	PT4C	PT4Th	16.02.16.03.2024	PT4D	PT4R	PT4C	PT4Th
18.	UK1	16.02.16.03.2024	UK1D	UK1R	UK1C	UK1Th	16.02.16.03.2024	UK2D	UK2R	UK2C	UK2Th	16.02.16.03.2024	UK3D	UK3R	UK3C	UK3Th	16.02.16.03.2024	UK4D	UK4R	UK4C	UK4Th	16.02.16.03.2024	UK5D	UK5R	UK5C	UK5Th
19.	UK2	16.02.16.03.2024	UK2D	UK2R	UK2C	UK2Th	16.02.16.03.2024	UK2D	UK2R	UK2C	UK2Th	16.02.16.03.2024	UK2D	UK2R	UK2C	UK2Th	16.02.16.03.2024	UK2D	UK2R	UK2C	UK2Th	16.02.16.03.2024	UK2D	UK2R	UK2C	UK2Th

Figure 1: AECED Shared Memoing Matrix, illustrating its structure and key components.

Project Case number	Country Case Codes	1. Introduction				2. Familiarisation				Du		
		Duration of the PAR phase from ... to	Dimensions of memoing for comparison of the cases				Duration of the PAR phase from ... to	Dimensions of memoing for comparison of the cases				
			Descriptive	Reflexive	Conceptual	Theoretical		Descriptive	Reflexive		Conceptual	Theoretical
			Codes of dimensions of memoing for the phase "Introduction"					Codes of dimensions of memoing for the phase "Familiarisation"				
ID	IR	IC	ITh	FD	FR	FC	FTh					
1.	DE1		DE1D	DE1R	DE1C	DE1Th		DE1FD	DE1FR	DE1FC	DE1FTh	
2.	DE2		DE2D	DE2R	DE2C	DE2Th		DE2FD	DE2FR	DE2FC	DE2FTh	
3.	DE3		DE3D	DE3R	DE3C	DE3Th		DE3FD	DE3FR	DE3FC	DE3FTh	
4.	DE4		DE4D	DE4R	DE4C	DE4Th		DE4FD	DE4FR	DE4FC	DE4FTh	
5.	FI1		FI1D	FI1R	FI1C	FI1Th		FI1FD	FI1FR	FI1FC	FI1FTh	
6.	FI2		FI2D	FI2R	FI2C	FI2Th		FI2FD	FI2FR	FI2FC	FI2FTh	
7.	HR1		HR1D	HR1R	HR1C	HR1Th		HR1FD	HR1FR	HR1FC	HR1FTh	
8.	HR2		HR2D	HR2R	HR2C	HR2Th		HR2FD	HR2FR	HR2FC	HR2FTh	
9.	HR3		HR3D	HR3R	HR3C	HR3Th		HR3FD	HR3FR	HR3FC	HR3FTh	
10.	HR4		HR4D	HR4R	HR4C	HR4Th		HR4FD	HR4FR	HR4FC	HR4FTh	
11.	LV1	31.01.- 15.02.2024.	LV1D	LV1R	LV1C	LV1Th	15.02.-15.03.2024.	LV1FD	LV1FR	LV1FC	LV1FTh	16.02.

Figure 2: Closer Look at the AECED Shared Memoing Matrix: *Zooming*

Before starting to use the Matrix the AECED Consortium hosted one training session on how to use it.

Overview of the Case Reports

All 19 case studies vary to some extent and reflect the variety of scientific backgrounds and academic traditions represented in the project. One of the aims of this project is to promote democracy and inclusivity in Europe. The case reports reflect this ethos by being interdisciplinary, inviting and incorporating varied theoretical perspectives, methodologies and methods. This variety can be seen as a challenge but simultaneously it is this project's strength, and it might give a more robust picture of "bottom-up democracy" or democracy-as-becoming in different cultures and contexts.

Consequently, the overall case design and processes across the countries are summarised as follows:

Case 1 focused on primary school and kindergarten teachers in Croatia who engaged with the Framework and Guides through two iterations of the PAR phases. They implemented activities related to democratic principles in their own contexts, which led to shifts in attitudes toward democracy. The process deepened their understanding of democracy's fundamental principles and their role in the educational process. Teachers recognised opportunities to influence change and foster democracy within their institutions, highlighting the importance of embodied learning and narrative methods in facilitating this transformation.

Case 2 involved elementary school teachers, a school psychologist, and a school pedagogue in Croatia exploring themes of power, democratic school culture, and leadership. Through the research, participants identified limitations in their ability to influence decision-making at the school level. However, they found that engaging with aesthetic and embodied learning methods empowered them, encouraged cooperation, and fostered mutual support within peer

groups. The research revealed hierarchical decision-making structures within the institution, but a more democratic dynamic emerged in professional and peer interactions, where ideas and support were exchanged freely.

Case 3 engaged teaching staff and postdoctoral students from the Faculty of Teacher Education in Croatia, focusing on integrating democracy into their teaching practices. Participants acknowledged the importance of democratic principles but struggled to translate these theoretical concepts into practical application, particularly within Croatian language and Civic Education. The study identified the need for further refinement of the framework to address diverse participation needs and improve facilitation methods, aiming to strengthen the practical application of democratic principles and cultivate a democratic ethos within educational environments.

Case 4 involved students from the Faculty of Teacher Education in Croatia, exploring education for democracy through aesthetic and embodied methods. Participants reflected on their role as active citizens and the limitations they experienced within their educational institution regarding democratic engagement. The process led to transformations in both personal and collective identity, highlighting the potential of the Guides to enhance learning outcomes, foster emotional engagement, and encourage civic responsibility. The participants recognised the importance of integrating democratic principles into their educational practice and advocated for a more active student role in promoting democracy.

The purpose of the ULA's **Case 5** was to develop the AELD Prototype Framework and Guides in collaboration with HE teachers and students and in **Case 6** to test AELD ideas in professional learning workshops for HE teachers and Dance and Movement Therapists by the ULA team. In addition, the AELD ideas were developed in professional co-learning discussions with colleagues whose work elsewhere is close to what AECED aims at. This meant that researchers were co-producing, co-interpreting and co-meaning-making the data with the participants and via collegial discussions. The embodied and aesthetic methods used in these cases focused on body movement-based, aesthetic and arts-based reflection activities. Special focus was on development of the Acceptive gaze as embodied intervention and theory for democracy-as-becoming in educational settings. Key findings relate to the transformation, which happened in participant teachers in regard to connecting the meanings of embodied methods to the democratic practices in learning processes. Also, the results concerning the experiences of the acceptive gaze are promising in relation to the cultivation of democratic values and AELD principles in education.

In the German **Cases 7-10**, aesthetic and embodied approaches are employed in HE (Cases 7 and 8) and professional and organisational learning (**Cases 8 and 9**). Visual and embodied VEN approaches are applied throughout. **Cases 7-9** work with the Framework and Guide, focusing on the Pattern Language of Commoning (PLC), while **Case 10** uses the Aesthetic Pattern Card Deck (APC) for embodied transformation and embodied dance performances on democracy-as-becoming (HE). Commoning is understood as a process that shows "how the 'great transformation' can succeed." The PLC introduces flexible patterns that support liveliness and offer practical solutions across contexts, intervening in the interplay of context,

problem, and solution. Grounded in imagination, it aims to foster new ways of thinking. The PLC is a methodology for collective transformation, encouraging a re-imagining of democracy-as-becoming and contributing to the Framework and Guides.

The cases, though distinct, are interconnected. When viewed sequentially, they depict a transformation for democracy-as-becoming. This journey shifts from habitualised, externalised learning in higher education (HE) to a more intentional, transformative approach (**Case 7**). The shift reveals a pattern of conditioned democratisation in traditional education, characterised by modern, enclosed, individualised, and competition-oriented structures. In this context, there is a need to challenge the institutionalised 'order of the gaze'—both from students and professionals.

Case 8 discovered a path towards inclusive organising. This case, in a further education MA programme in Austria, used PLC methods to explore new organisational models. By contrasting hierarchical organisations with inclusive patterns, it demonstrates how change can occur through imaginative thinking.

Case 9 explored democracy-as-becoming at the transformational level of organisational learning. It examined how methods of democracy-as-becoming contributed to both individual and collective transformation, highlighting the importance of social togetherness, peer governance, and care economy. The case also identified the need for more effective introduction of the PLC card deck, prompting the development of a Handbook for Organisational Education in Commoning.

Case 10 focused on embodied transformation from within the self. In contrast to Case 7, it demonstrated how full internalisation of democracy-as-becoming was possible through embodied interventions, even within a 'conditioned university.' It showed how imagination allowed for alternative ways of thinking, supporting de-institutionalisation from within. The case fostered transformation linking ethics, care, embodiment, and the practice of democracy-as-becoming. It contributes to seeing ourselves differently and connects to ethics, care, embodiment, and the heterotopic practice of embodying democracy-as-becoming. It is then about individual and collective learning and the transformation of the self. Becoming – b-e-c-o-m-i-n-g – then spells Being – Emergence – Creative – Otherness – Making – Intuitive – Nurturing – Gutful.

Cases 11, 12, and 13 from Latvia were conducted by the AECED research group at RTU in two iterations. The first iteration followed a standardized approach, integrating drama sketch and collage creation into subject learning to explore democracy-as-becoming in diverse educational contexts. The second iteration was tailored to each case, emphasizing embodiment as a means of fostering democratic ethos and civic participation. Despite their distinct focuses, these cases played complementary roles, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the shared RQs on the Prototype Framework's impact on openness to newly "seeing" the other.

Case 11, conducted at Daugavpils State Gymnasium, examined the impact of AELD on students' openness to newly "seeing" the other from three perspectives: students, teachers,

and researchers. To enrich findings, data from students at additional schools were also analyzed.

Case 12, based at Jurmala State Gymnasium, focused on teachers as the main participant group. Beyond exploring AELD's impact on teachers, it addressed additional research questions related to enhancing the Pedagogical Framework and Guides, incorporating data from teachers across all project schools.

Case 13, linked to Riga Secondary School Nr. 22, uniquely investigated intergenerational learning between teachers and students. Data from all project schools were analyzed, highlighting teachers' perceptions of students and vice versa. Together, these cases demonstrated the transformative potential of AELD in fostering cognitive, emotional, relational, and embodied openness, reinforcing the role of aesthetic and embodied learning in democratic education.

The Portuguese case studies (**Cases 14 and 15**) focused on early years and primary education, exploring the integration of AELD in teacher training through an online course. Using the PAR approach, educators engaged in co-research, designing and implementing pedagogical interventions that promoted power-sharing, collaborative reflection, and multimodal learning. Key findings indicate that embodied and aesthetic learning strategies enhance democratic engagement, yet practical implementation remain challenging due to curricular rigidity and institutional barriers. Participants highlighted the need for clearer facilitation strategies and hands-on resources to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The study underscores the importance of professional development and institutional support in fostering democratic and inclusive education.

The Portuguese case studies (**Cases 16 and 17**) focused on vocational and adult education, examining the role of AELD in professional learning through an online teacher training course. Using the PAR approach, educators engaged as co-researchers, applying and evaluating embodied and arts-based methodologies to foster democratic teaching practices. The study revealed that while AELD enhances participatory and experiential learning, practical application remains challenging due to institutional constraints and the need for clearer implementation strategies. Participants emphasised the importance of structured facilitation, real-world examples, and interdisciplinary collaboration to make these approaches more adaptable. The findings highlight the potential of aesthetic and embodied methodologies to transform vocational education, reinforcing the need for policy advocacy and professional development to ensure sustainable integration.

Case 18 focused on doctoral supervisors within UK universities, offering a professional learning opportunity to reflect on democratic supervisory practices using arts-based and embodied (ABE) approaches. Participants from various universities, disciplines, and supervisory experiences engaged in a complex, multi-layered process of learning and reflection. The case highlighted how the supervisors incorporated ABE pedagogies into their supervisory practices, with an emphasis on developing democratic approaches to supervision. Preliminary analysis of data suggests that participants' reflections and experiences have

provided valuable insights, contributing to the ongoing refinement of the Framework and Guide to better support democratic practices in doctoral supervision.

Case 19 involved two secondary teacher case studies, examining how one teacher engaged with the Framework and Secondary Guide through the stages of introduction, familiarisation, planning, action, and reflection. The study aimed to explore how the teacher's engagement with AELD affected their democratic sensibility and pedagogical practices. An emerging finding revealed the critical importance of reflective critique in the process, as the teacher navigated professional risks and challenges in adopting AELD methods. This reflection on identity, professionalism, and systemic structures was key to enhancing the teacher's democratic sensibility and transforming their teaching practice.

References of country specific case reports are listed at the end of the last case per country.

Ethics in the AECED Research

To ensure compliance with research ethics requirements, including the EU GDPR and its British equivalent, the AECED Consortium has been continuously supported by the Consortium's ethics advisor. The ethics checklist, prepared by the Project Coordinator with the support of the ethics advisor, guided both the research and reporting processes.

The Ethics Group, with representatives from each partner, was responsible for discussions on ethics within the AECED Project. D4.4 was discussed during an Ethics Group meeting, where the ethics advisor provided advice on the distinction between anonymisation and pseudonymisation, the anonymisation process, and the safe handling of data (for details, see the Progress Report, March 2025).

Once all partners had collected their data, they carried out the necessary steps for pseudonymisation or anonymisation. During the transfer of memos, the consortium agreed that no personally identifiable information should be included. A video clip of the dance performance at the end of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) in the Germany Case Study 10 was created and uploaded to the AECED social media accounts. All participants in the video signed a consent form and retain the right to withdraw their consent at any time.

As mentioned earlier, case reporting began with the trialling phase, after which research teams started the memoing process. Memoing allowed the AECED Consortium to ensure compliance with both the EU GDPR and the British equivalent, ensuring that no personally identifiable or harmful information was included in the Shared Memoing Matrix. All partners shared their memos by the end of the data analysis phase, enabling their use in the next step—transnational reporting.

Gender Dimension in the AECED Research

The gender dimension has been addressed in previous WP4 deliverables (D4.3 and D4.4). During the multi-case trialling phase, partners reflected on the gender dimension in various WP4 and PMG (Project Management Group) meetings, sparking discussions on the topic. One WP4 meeting was dedicated to discussing the gender dimension in the AECED Project, with a presentation by the project PI Susan Meriläinen. Following this, the AECED Consortium participated in group discussions in breakout rooms. These discussions highlighted diverse perspectives from the partners and focused on integrating the gender dimension into research, communication, and cooperation. They also revealed how gender perceptions and approaches vary across the six partner countries, shaped by theoretical, cultural and linguistic differences.

A key point of focus was the use of gender-sensitive language and imagery. It was agreed that all communication, including reports and resources, should reflect inclusive language, avoiding stereotypes and incorporating diverse gender identities. However, challenges arose due to the differences in how languages express gender, such as Finnish's neutral language versus English's use of "they" as a gender-neutral pronoun. The group also emphasised the importance of visual diversity in images, ensuring they represent a wide range of gender identities, cultures, ages, and abilities. Developing guidelines for inclusive visual representation was seen as essential moving forward, with external diverse voices involved in the review process.

Another major discussion centred on the PAR process itself. It was recognised that using AELD in the educational field is often gendered, with women being the predominant participants across the cases. The research teams, too, are mostly female, and while gender analysis is becoming part of the data analysis process, challenges remain in ensuring gender inclusivity, particularly in countries where gender identity data was not collected. Reflecting on the potential biases in data collection and analysis was seen as vital, and a collective approach to data analysis was suggested to avoid gender blindness.

The question of whether to emphasise binary gender or adopt a more fluid understanding of gender also arose. There was consensus that gender sensitivity should be promoted without reinforcing rigid binary norms, but the balance between sensitivity and inclusivity remains a key consideration. This extended to discussions on stakeholder engagement, focusing on potential and current AECED Project collaborators and which intersectional gender elements should be considered in these partnerships.

Finally, there was recognition that gendered dynamics influence how AELD is perceived and practised in different countries. In Finland, for example, AELD is often associated with femininity, and the importance of making gendered practices more approachable for all participants, regardless of their gender identity, was discussed. The group proposed incorporating gender perspectives into educational events and resources, ensuring that future materials reflect intersectional inequalities and provide concrete guidance on addressing these issues.

In summary, the discussions underscored the importance of continuously reflecting on and adapting our approach to the gender dimension, both in our research and communication, and dissemination strategies. Despite varying national contexts, there is a shared commitment to ensuring that gender inclusivity remains central throughout the project.

Advancing Research Towards Transnational Conclusions

WP4 has successfully coordinated the case analysis process, ensuring effective research progress and collaboration among partners. The next step involves submitting the transnational conclusions (D4.5) by May 2025. As outlined in the project proposal, a Cross-Case Analysis Group has been established to work on the cross-case analysis report. The formation of this group was announced through the PMG and WP4 meetings, and partner countries sent representatives to join. This group will continue to work after the AECED Consortium Meeting in Lisbon. By this point, WP4 meetings had shifted focus towards discussions on the transnational report template, comparison proposals, and the development of the Framework and Guides. This working group has now commenced and will continue until the end of May 2025.

The WP4 leader has planned a two-stage transnational reporting process, as outlined in the proposal. This plan was discussed in one of the WP4 meetings and subsequently integrated into the next on-site Consortium Meeting Programme. The first stage will take place in Lisbon in March. Prior to the meeting, all partners will receive educational-phase-based reports written by other partners, which they will review in advance. Additionally, all partners will bring best practice examples based on their PAR phases. Cross-Case Analysis Group representatives from each country will coordinate the national teams. The findings from these discussions will be compiled and presented in a plenary session, with each of the four educational phases having the opportunity to present their insights for the transnational report. The Consortium will then critically reflect on and discuss these findings. Following the Lisbon meeting, the Cross-Case Analysis Group will begin drafting the transnational reports for each educational phase. These evidence-based insights will support the next phase of the AECED Project, focusing on refining the pedagogical Framework and Guides.

References

AECED (2023). D4.1 Report of Methodological Framework. [Transforming Education for Democracy through Aesthetic and Embodied Learning, Responsive Pedagogies and Democracy-as-becoming | AECED | Project | Results | HORIZON | CORDIS | European Commission](#)

Glaser, B. G. (2013). Introduction: Free Style Memoing. *The Grounded Theory Review*, 12(2), 3-14. <http://groundedtheoryreview.com>

Part 2: Country Reports

Croatia Case Report

Case 1

Phase/Educational Setting:

Primary Education

VEN-Approach:

Narrative

1. Case Description

Participants: This case involved a total of 11 participants, two of them were classroom teachers working in two different primary schools from Rijeka, and the others were kindergarten teachers.

Location: Case 1 was conducted in a hybrid format. Two two-days lasting encounters were held in-person, at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka, Rijeka (Croatia). The planning and reflection phases of PAR were held online.

Purpose – Relevance to Democracy-as-Becoming: Three elements of this research connect with four dimensions of democracy:

- **Inclusive participation:** Throughout the entire research process, participants were active and had the opportunity to ask, share, and influence activities that were conducted. They were able to express their opinions and attitudes freely.
- **Experimental learning:** All methods used in PAR were based on learning through experience. Participants learned by experimenting with different forms of narrative methods: through these methods, they engaged with the curriculum content in a holistic experiential, inclusive, and interactive way. It was precisely this part that significantly contributed to their immersion in the content and learning through experiments.
- **Continuous reflection:** Throughout the workshops, the participants had the opportunity to reflect, which took place through transformational dialogue and sharing the positive aspects that the participants saw in the activity itself. During the workshops, after each topic -responsibility, identity, transformational dialogue and communication, and helplessness and insecurity - the participants presented their reflections. These related both their experience of the workshop and its content, and as well as their learning process: that is, their experience of the topic and the story that changed them, and how that is connected to democracy.

Research Activities and Methods: Within Croatian cases there are some similarities in research activities and methods. That is because, for all Croatian cases (two in primary and

two in HE), the Croatian research team developed a research design that included the main research questions (**RQ1-4**) and a detailed research plan outlining the data collection methods to be used. Along with the research design, instruments for data collection were also developed. As a result, all Croatian cases followed a similar flow in the PAR phases and utilised comparable data collection methods.

Research activities:

- **First In-Person Encounter (Two Days) - Introduction and Familiarization:** Introduction to the project, focus group discussions on key project topics, collection of participants' opinions, and educational activities conducted by researchers with integrated reflection moments (topics: responsibility and identity, insecurity and helplessness, transformational dialogue, and communication).
- **Online Planning Phase:** Two sessions dedicated to preparing activities based on the Framework and Guides for research participants to implement in class or with a group of children.
- **Action and Reflection:** Participants implemented their activities, followed by three online reflection group sessions where both participants and researchers discussed and evaluated their experiences.
- **Second In-Person Encounter (Two Days):** Collection of participants' opinions on the Framework and Guides and the concept of democracy-as-becoming; final testing and data collection activities.

Narrative methods: storytelling (e.g., letter to the author, guided fantasy, writing a story about an unusual character, telling a story about a character facing a problem and solving it, detective stories), techniques to gather what participants have learned (e.g., brainstorming, random concept), techniques to gather opinions and values of participants (e.g., associative cards, shared pictures, backpack, magic shop).

Researchers: Monika Pažur, Katarina Aladrović Slovaček.

Time Frame: Within this case, iterations were happening during the PAR process while working with participants.

- **Introduction:** 9-10 February 2024
- **Familiarisation:** 9-10 February 2024
- **Collaborative reflection:** From 10 February to June 2024
- **Planning:** From 10 February to 15 April 2024
- **Action:** 10 April – 15 May 2024
- **Analysis & Synthesis:** From 15 May to June 2024

After the introduction phase, during PAR iterations of phases, familiarization, planning, and acting occurred two times. During the whole process, reflection occurred. After those two iterations, analysis and synthesis occurred.

2. Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis

Data Types and Sources

Types of Data: Qualitative, quantitative.

Sources of Data:

- Interviews (two group interviews with 11 participants and four individual interviews) – all interviews were transcribed into a Word document and anonymised;
- Quantitative data regarding democratic school culture (questionnaires completed by participants – 11 during the initial testing phase and 10 during the final testing phase) – data entered into SPSS;
- An instrument for defining key concepts of democracy (a document with 10 concepts listed, where participants are asked to define these concepts in their own words – 11 in the initial testing phase and 10 in the final testing phase) – all responses were transcribed into a Word document and anonymised;
- Field notes (researchers' notes from educational activities and reflexive groups) – entered into a Google Drive form (N=10 entries) and later transcribed into a Word document.

Research Methodologies and Methods:

Quantitative data – statistical analysis (descriptive statistics, t-test for dependent groups) for data gathered at the beginning of the PAR and at the end of the PAR to see if some changes in understanding the democratic culture of educational institutions happened.

Qualitative data:

- thematic analysis with detecting categories and codes of themes to see differences among participants and their reactions and transformations on topics of democracy after being part of a PAR process;
- coding of definitions of main democratic concepts to follow a better understanding of main democracy elements;
- thematic analysis (with themes connected to each phase of PAR) to understand better how to improve different elements of Framework and Guides;
- discourse analysis - observing which words, sentences, word forms and phrases participants use in their reflections, how they express themselves verbally - sentence length, word choice, word frequency and the like.

Data Analysis Process: Inductive process

STEP 1 – Reading the transcripts of focus groups (2) and interviews (4) to identify themes and subthemes reflected by the participants.

STEP 2 – Uploading memos into Shared Memoing Matrix by researchers.

STEP 3 – Connecting themes and subthemes with the researcher’ research diary and researchers notes group reflection (N=10).

STEP 4— Analysing data collected through a thematic analysis – that we used for defining the main concepts of democracy to better understand students' opinions and thoughts.

In identifying subthemes, all four steps were taken into account and used to describe important codes for the democracy process in primary education, due to the reflections of preschool and primary school teachers.

Theoretical Background: Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2012) was chosen as a method especially suitable for analysing empirical data. Following a Thematic Analysis approach, it was made sure that the proposed themes stem closely from the data. Also, discourse analysis was used where we analyse sentences and words in action.

3. Research Findings

Findings are presented as themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. They are closely aligned with the project concepts, as the research was developed based on the Pedagogical and Methodological Framework.

RQ1. Regarding process: a) How do participants experience being introduced to and working with the Prototype Framework and Guides? b) In what ways is AELD co-created and facilitated through ABE methods?

RQ3. What influence, if any, did the researchers have on how the Framework and Guides were used and the designs of AEL for democracy that emerged in the trials?

During the whole PAR, but especially in the first phases of introduction and familiarization with the Framework and Guides, participants were experiencing their connection with the main project concepts. For participants, learning about democratic concepts is often linked to a shift in attitude, a deeper understanding of societal and global events, the acquisition of fundamental knowledge about democracy, and a comprehension of core democratic principles both within our society and in the broader community. Within these phases, the researcher’s role was crucial. Participants needed support from the researcher to connect their experiences with various theoretical concepts discussed. It was essential for researchers to navigate their dual role—both as an authority in knowledge and as a facilitator who, within the concept of democracy-as-becoming, supports participants' learning through AELD.

Table 1: Introduction: attitudes about main project concepts

Themes	Sub-themes	Examples of statements*
Education for democracy	Institutional level	<i>‘... I think that today in schools’ democracy is very pronounced. We have different classes of people and everyone is accepted and everyone is given the maximum to satisfy their right to education. Even</i>

		<i>among us teachers, we can express some of our wishes, introduce some of our own innovations that are not exactly prescribed in the education system and that most schools and teachers have the opportunity to implement them. I think that in terms of acceptance and children's rights, they are enabled...` (IG)</i>
	Individual level	<i>ˆ...I have no problem expressing my position, opinion, in front of anyone. I can express it, and whether I will continue the debate depends on the person I'm talking to, whether it will be perceived as an attack on someone. It comes with some measure, if the other side is open, yes, if not, no...` (IG)</i>
Aesthetic and embodied methods	Cognitive dimension	<i>ˆ... Through this education, I became even more aware that the most important thing is to work with teachers, educators, to raise awareness of these changes, the elements of democracy. I'm not sure that these elements exist. You can express your opinion, but it doesn't mean that there won't be sanctions, that you won't be called out for it, even if you're right and if you're referring to your basic rights, to what is prescribed and the like. There are a lot of differences between theory and practice...` (IG)</i>
	Emotional dimension	<i>ˆ... What I remember is more the feeling of pleasure than the content. I found the way the project was implemented pleasant. The benefit of the project is the encouragement to think, to look at facts from different angles. I was already aware of the importance of developing democracy, especially in children, but this somehow prompted me to some deeper reflections. I think the project was great, because everything we experience that encourages us to think is a benefit...` (Ind)</i>
	Social dimension	<i>ˆ... I think that if we really want it and look at the bigger picture and shift responsibility to that area of responsibility, I think there is a solution, and that is not typical persuasion, but possibly some kind of education, examples of good practice, and then surely someone will be touched...` (RG)</i>

**IG – initial group interview at the beginning of the project; FG – final group interview at the end of the project; CiA – concepts in advance; RD – researchers diary; RG – reflexive groups; Ind – individual interview

In the familiarisation phase, participants had some thoughts about each concept. They mostly connected democracy-as-becoming with a sense of belonging to some group. At first, they associated democracy with freedom. During the workshops, they realised how embodied and narrative methods helped them as an individual become aware of where they are with others,

but also to themselves. They became aware of their responsibility for what they say and where they say it. They also recognized the importance of personal growth, both emotionally and professionally, and found the tools used in AEL learning and embodied methods valuable for both their personal development and professional work. Notably, all of this learning took place through conversation, highlighting the significance of dialogue as a fundamental method of theoretical learning. The researcher's role was crucial in promoting and nurturing transformative dialogue. Many participants were not accustomed to freely sharing their opinions, as they described this as something not welcomed in their organisational realities. Therefore, the researcher continuously worked to create a safe space for open sharing and learning.

Table 2: Familiarization: Three project concepts through the words of participants

Themes	Sub-themes	Examples of statements*
Democracy-as-becoming	responsibility	<i>'... I feel free to express my opinion, on the other hand whether it will be accepted. I believe that it is my responsibility to react...' (RG)</i>
	belonging	<i>'... It actually stayed the same for me, but I realised that with belonging comes responsibility. How involved we are. Wherever I find myself, I feel the same.....' (FG)</i>
	openness	<i>'... Yesterday and now, in our last conversation, I realised that I could work on myself to try to be more open with myself in that discussion, and not me respecting you, and you respecting me, and that's where we ended up. I guess that's how I got out of my comfort zone...' (FG)</i>
	dialogue	<i>'... The project brought me some insights, or rather some name that I have and possess within myself. Especially these last two days, my conclusion about democracy is that like everything else we try to develop among people, it is necessary for us to be together, to think and talk. Nothing can be done without spending time, talking, getting to know each other and including emotions in it. All democratic values will then be much easier to adopt...' (FG)</i>
Aesthetic and embodied methods	knowledge	<i>'... encouragement to think, to look at facts from different angles...' (Ind)</i> <i>'...I can say that I felt enormous support in my professional journey with children and somehow all the knowledge I gained there helped me...' (RG)</i>
	experience	<i>'... Learning through movement can help on an experiential level, a level of awareness, a level of movement, both of the body and of the mind. ...' (RG)</i>

	thoughts	<i>... This somehow prompted me to some deeper thoughts. ...` (RD)</i>
Responsive pedagogy	empathy and connection	<i>...I feel connected to everyone who works hard and thinks and knows what they are doing. It's not a group, it's individuals. I also feel a little connected to my colleagues in the team, we are developing something together. I feel a connection with the children...` (IG)</i>
	conversation	<i>...I like to say what I think and I love debates and I constantly encourage debates, so at some meetings of educational workers it is useless for me to talk about how wonderful we are, I think that without debates and honesty there is no democracy or development....` (Ind)</i>
	sharing ideas	<i>... I share some of my ideas at work, with colleagues from the neighbouring group, I used to hold trainings or workshops where people could see what and how I do, but I think that at least a first level of democracy would be reached if it were much more important for both sides to be open, and unfortunately that is not the case in kindergarten, and there is no critical mass that would dare to stand up for the profession, but everyone looks out for themselves and everyone is for themselves...` (Ind)</i>

*IG – initial group interview at the beginning of the project; FG – final group interview at the end of the project; CiA – concepts in advance; RD – researchers diary; RG – reflexive groups; Ind – individual interview

RQ2. Regarding the transformational change in participants: In what ways do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, lead to individual and collective growth in regard to

- feelings for democracy,
- aesthetic awareness and qualities (such as empathic, ethical, and spiritual sensibilities),
- collaborative, reflexive and critical capabilities,
- openness to newly 'seeing' the other,
- willingness to move towards more reflexive and critical modes of awareness and knowing that reconnect with the body as a source of learning,
- capacity to challenge social injustices and engage creatively with conflict and antagonisms
- any other aspects that will be developed in and through the PAR process.

In the phase of collective reflection, it was visible that participants experienced transformation on individual level of themselves connected with their position in society, growth and thoughts. However, transformation was visible as well on the level of collective identity, level of their interaction with people around them, especially colleagues and society in whole. For this case,

a significant fact was that the participants did not know each other beforehand. When they shared their experiences of existing hierarchies in decision-making processes within their institutions—experiences that were similar despite working in different places—it was a crucial realisation for them. They discovered that there were others “out there” who thought and felt the same way they did, which greatly impacted their sense of connection with others. Their personal stories provided them with intrinsic motivation to move forward and continue working on democracy-as-becoming within themselves as well within their working realities.

They often started from a personal perspective, emphasising the need to work on themselves, as they believed that professional and personal development was crucial for everyone. They also highlighted how this project and the use of art-based methods contributed to that growth. This self-improvement was something they recognized as a value that they could then pass on to their students or kindergarteners. Additionally, they emphasized the need for support when working with children with special needs, communicating with parents, and collaborating with colleagues in their institutions. They frequently expressed dissatisfaction with the attitudes of superiors and professional services, which they felt demotivated them in their work. However, they saw the project and its guidelines as an opportunity for a new perspective and personal growth. At the same time, they acknowledged the need to adapt these ideas to the age group they work with—whether preschool or school-aged children—to achieve the intended goals. Most of the changes they experienced were in their attitudes, beliefs, and ultimately their relationships within their work environments (schools, kindergartens), particularly with colleagues and superiors. They also reflected on their own teaching practices by asking themselves questions such as, “How often do you talk about values in your teaching?” or “How often do you encourage children to speak about their problems, such as violence?” They emphasised that personal growth occurred through answering these questions, both during the workshops and through engagement with the provided documents.

Table 3: Collective reflection: Values on individual and collective level

Themes	Sub-themes	Examples of statements*
Support	Personal	<p>‘... We worked on ourselves. Guidelines as an idea come in handy for me...’ (FG)</p> <p>‘... I’m working on myself. I can contribute to truly getting to know these children because that’s pure gain for me...’ (RG)</p>
	Others	<p>‘... I see that the knowledge and opinions of others are important. The most important thing for me is that kind of support, because it’s hard to find....’ (RD)</p>
Attitudes	On personal level	<p>‘... What’s actually most important to me is that I asked myself what I was thinking, looking at myself and looking at my children, how I approached something, whether I succeeded or failed...’ (RG)</p>

	Groups	<i>‘... Experiential exercises allowed me to understand more deeply some groups and how someone feels at a certain moment. The workshops really worked on the level of beliefs, rather than on the level of knowledge, which was very important...’ (RG)</i>
Growth	Personal	<i>‘... I really enjoyed the workshops and focused on myself and my personal growth and development...’ (FG)</i>
	Environment	<i>‘... I think that when the work environment is geared towards doing something new, for changes to happen, then every idea is welcome. ...’ (IG)</i>

*IG – initial group interview at the beginning of the project; FG – final group interview at the end of the project; CiA – concepts in advance; RD – researchers diary; RG – reflexive groups; Ind – individual interview

The transformation of participants took place continuously throughout the project. They learned and understood some main concepts of democracy and the AECED project better. Almost simultaneously, participants started connecting theoretical concepts with their experience with the Guides and how they can reinforce education for democracy-as-professionals in their future teaching practice.

Table 4: Planning and action: Main principles of democracy in theory and in action

Themes	Sub-themes	Examples of statements*
Power sharing	Cognitive bias (how participants understand it)	<i>‘... Equal powers given to certain people...’ (CiA)</i>
	Individual learning (with using guides)	<i>‘... It gave me a lot of ideas for group work that we can use with children and parents, I felt good and comfortable. We worked on ourselves. The Guidelines as an idea are useful to me...’ (RG)</i>
Transformative dialogue	In theory (how participants understand it)	<i>‘... A different conversation, outside the usual forms – perhaps without words or phrases, but with your own actions...’ (CiA)</i>
	In practice (with using guides)	<i>‘... Association – transformer. It moves from one side to the other, changing, shaping, building on the concept, and so on, over and over again, for the purpose of developing something...’ (CiA)</i>
Holistic learning	In theory (how participants understand it)	<i>‘... It begins with a desire for new knowledge. An open mind, putting in the effort, but ultimately satisfaction...’ (FG)</i>

	In practice (with using guides)	<i>‘... The learning process and the methods we use are very important when it comes to any type of learning because they can be crucial for motivation and overall quality of life...’ (CiA)</i>
Relational well being	In theory (how participants understand it)	<i>‘... Very difficult...to achieve this in society and individuals should be at a very high intellectual level where they would not put themselves first but society and its well-being...it sounds a bit utopian....’ (CiA)</i>
	In practice (with using guides)	<i>‘... Learning about different information and knowing how it is possible to connect and integrate it in certain circumstances, for the common benefit of people in society or community.’ (CiA)</i>

*IG – initial group interview at the beginning of the project; FG – final group interview at the end of the project; CiA – concepts in advance; RD – researchers diary; RG – reflexive groups; Ind – individual interview

RQ4. What evidence-based conclusions for revision and refinement of the Prototype Framework and Guides emerge from the experience of using the Prototypes and addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

The participants saw great and significant potential in this project. They found important topics in it: through the project participants became more aware of their role in the educational process and their professional life. In the Guides they found ideas how to make small changes or upheavals in their institutions or in their class or even in their environment that would influence a change in consciousness and encourage democracy as a way of living. In this case, the Framework and Guides were perceived as clear and easy to follow. However, some participants expressed concerns about their lack of preparedness to address topics related to democracy in general, as well as their ability to apply AEM effectively. Many participants discussed the lack of interest among their coworkers and institutional leaders regarding these topics. Some even expressed fear about introducing them into their work, believing they might face negative reactions not only from parents but also from colleagues. It was mentioned multiple times that they would need support in implementing the Framework and Guides.

Table 5: Analysis and synthesis

Themes	Sub-themes	Examples of statements*
Potential of the resources and activities carried out	Learning outcome and involvement	<i>‘...through this experience, I became even more aware that the most important thing is to work with teachers, educators, to raise awareness of these changes, the elements of democracy...’ (Ind)</i>
	Emotional response	<i>‘... You can express your opinion, but it doesn't mean that there won't be sanctions, that you won't be called out for it, even if you're right and if you're referring to your basic rights, to what is prescribed and the like. There are a lot of differences between theory and practice....’ (FG)</i>

Aesthetic and embodied methods	Critical thinking	<i>‘... I feel free to express my opinion, but I still feel uncomfortable expressing it to someone who may not want to hear it. I see communication as the cause of the problem ...’ (RG)</i>
	Personal engagement	<i>‘... I believe that it is my responsibility that when I see someone endangering a child's life, I am the one who must react, even if there is an attack on me....’ (FG)</i>
	Democratic values	<i>‘... The project brought me some insights, or rather some name that I have and possess within myself. Especially these last two days, my conclusion about democracy is that like everything else we try to develop among people, it is necessary for us to be together, to think and talk. Nothing can be done without spending time, talking, getting to know each other and including emotions in it. All democratic values will then be much easier to adopt...’ (FG)</i>
Individual and collective transformation	Personal growth	<i>‘... Well, yes, people who are not focused on personal growth and development and now expect professional development from us. If people have no interest in it, then it was better for them before...’ (Ind)</i>
	Behaviour change	<i>‘... Our kindergarten is a large, sluggish system that has had the same principal for many years, and there have been some behavioral models that were the only acceptable ones, the norm, the rule, for a very long time. Now we have a new principal who is trying to change that, but compared to those years of incredibly long behavior, mobbing, it's hard to change that. Especially those people who have been there for a long time....’ (Ind)</i>
Written documents	Readability/clarity	<i>‘...I find the Guidelines to be extremely interesting and clearly written, which makes them easy to read and understand’ (RG)</i>
	Visual elements and layout	<i>‘It could be more visual elements in text...’ (RG)</i>
	Content/organisation	<i>‘... easy to read, interesting, concrete; include more concrete examples; we went through the workshops through them so it makes it easier to understand and read; inclusion of topics related to music, rhythm; incentive to perform part of the activity outside; in addition to the above, describe a slightly easier version of storytelling so that it is also applicable for younger children (early and preschool age); insert music and dance games; for younger children, include suitable picture books or an animated film...’ (Ind)</i>

**IG – initial group interview at the beginning of the project; FG – final group interview at the end of the project; CiA – concepts in advance; RD – researchers diary; RG – reflexive groups; Ind – individual interview

To foster teachers’ democracy competence along with their students, it is necessary to set outcomes that will enable the development of civic knowledge, skills and attitudes so that the teachers themselves become role models of active and responsible citizenship (Huddleston,

2005). Certainly, the first dimension of this competence is the teacher's knowledge and understanding, which implies an understanding of the fundamental principles and values of democracy and human rights (Brett et al., 2009). Furthermore, teachers should promote an active learning environment and student involvement in collaborative and stimulating activities (Huddleston et al., 2007). Also, teachers must develop certain social competencies to facilitate more engaged discussions about political representatives, the media, civil society organisations and various social events (Audigier, 2000). The final dimension is to support the teachers' civic competence to reflect, evaluate and improve their work (Birzea, 2000). The researchers' work and continuous support with this group demonstrated that the Framework and Guides contribute to the development of democracy competence and prepare them to use art-based methods in their work. However, the broader Croatian context, as outlined in Section 5 of this case, raises important questions about how to implement improved concepts such as democracy-as-becoming and AEM in a national context that is still resistant to fostering active and responsible citizens.

4. Limitations

One of the key limitations of this research is the small sample size (N = 11). Additionally, not all participants attended every workshop, leading to gaps in context for those who missed certain discussions. The perspectives of 11 individuals cannot be generalised; however, they still provide valuable insights and a cross-sectional view of institutions in the Republic of Croatia. Another limitation is that participants engaged only with narrative methods, making it difficult to compare findings with cases that incorporated both narrative and drama-based approaches. Moreover, while all participants received the Framework and Guides, not everyone actively engaged with these materials, limiting their ability to provide meaningful feedback. It also became evident that the effectiveness of the methods depended on participants' skills and commitment, with some struggling due to a lack of familiarity or willingness to engage. Lastly, the unequal representation of participants across different levels of the education system posed an additional constraint.

5. Relevance of Context

To work in the field of education for democracy in Croatia, the aim is to develop democracy competence through education, focusing on specific civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic attitudes among students. This is, among other things, the goal behind using the Framework and Guides. In order to use these two documents in their true sense, two conditions must be met: (1) a teacher must want to implement these documents in a democratic institution; (2) they must have developed civic competence.

Is the Croatian educational system part of democratic institutions that foster democratic culture? To address this, let's first consider Croatian society. According to 2019 report by the US non-governmental organisation Freedom House analysing democratic development in 29

transitioning nations, Croatia is still a young, emerging democracy (Freedom House, 2019). The report rates democracy based on seven categories: electoral processes, media independence, civil society, and governance structures. Based on these ratings, Croatia is categorised as a semi-consolidated democracy. The report highlights ongoing national debates about the rights of minorities (ethnic minorities, sex minorities, social minorities, etc.) as a key aspect of this status.

Additionally, research assessing the knowledge of democracy among current and future Croatian citizens (Bagić & Šalaj, 2012; Spajić-Vrkaš et al., 2016; Pažur, 2016; Spajić-Vrkaš & Horvat, 2016) showed concerning results. The studies identified the absence of a systematic approach to teaching human rights and democratic citizenship in schools. Furthermore, the findings highlighted little difference in the understanding of democratic principles between fourth-grade elementary students, eighth-grade students, and those in their second year of high school. Moreover, teachers feel unprepared to address democratic topics effectively (Spajić-Vrkaš et al., 2016; Schulz et al., 2016). This is further evidenced by alarming media reports highlighting students' confusion about democracy. Some students struggled to define even fundamental concepts, such as the meaning of citizenship and the basic principles of democracy. Further research (Pažur, 2016; Spajić-Vrkaš et al., 2016) has shown a lack of democratic practices and culture in Croatian schools, suggesting that fostering a democratic culture is a complex, long-term process that must be addressed at multiple levels and through various approaches.

Lastly, the training of future educators in education for democracy is still questioned. A comparative study on European civic education (European Commission, 2017) reveals that some countries have introduced robust frameworks and regulations ensuring that teachers are trained in civic education (e.g., Denmark, Spain, France, Austria). This is in line with the recommendations of the Teacher Training Tool for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights (Huddleston, 2005). In Croatia, however, teacher education does not have a standardised approach for developing civic competencies. Instead, the development of these competencies largely depends on the individual teacher's motivation and interest in these areas (Pažur, 2023). Previous studies (Pažur, 2016; Schulz et al., 2016) indicate that teachers often feel unqualified to deliver civic education effectively, especially in human rights and political education (Spajić-Vrkaš et al., 2016). Citizens who are not well-informed struggle to engage in societal issues and decision-making, making it even more difficult to expect that insufficiently trained teachers can adequately prepare students for democratic processes.

This context leads us to the crucial question: How can we better equip teachers in Croatia to implement Framework and Guides for civic education effectively, especially compared to countries with more established democratic systems?

6. Learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guides

Individual and collective learning

The Framework is more focused on learning together and proposing activities that nurture collaboration. However, some participants in the process very much appreciated activities where they had an opportunity to work on themselves, think about something, and then later share it. Thus, there should be a balance between individual and collective reflection.

The Framework could benefit from some parts that have a reflexive moment or reflexive questions that would improve the customization of document to personal or contextual needs.

In the Croatian context, which especially emerged as relevant in this case, some challenges in organisational learning for democracy are relevant for implementing the Framework and Guides. These include resistance to change from educational institution leaders and colleagues, as well as existing power imbalances that prevent democratic learning from benefiting all citizens equally (Pažur, 2023).

Working with Prototype Framework and Guides encourages epistemic transformation, and individual and collective learning as well.

Findings to improve Framework and Guides based on observations, and data results:

- Include more practical examples, particularly those incorporating music and dance;
- Provide examples of outdoor activities;
- Allocate more time to individual and collective reflection, suggest some questions for those;
- Introduce elements of evaluation – for example reflexive groups on institutional level (that will answer well to problems about organisational structures that enable the development of democracy);
- Connect theory with some activities – to get to know the topic better in order to work on the practical activity;
- Recognise that teachers with varying levels of experience in democracy education & using aesthetic and embodied methods understand the Guides differently – video material might help those with less knowledge;
- Not applicable for younger children (age 5-7); some activities could be adjusted to age 7-10;
- Could be added more activities for connection with different subjects – Croatian, Maths, English, Arts... (cross curricula);
- Describe possible shortcomings of the workshop or method in working with children with special needs (can they participate in all activities, what are the limitations);
- An idea of a „participant diary”- how to follow the transformation of participants on topics of democracy;
- Activities could propose connecting with different organisations in the local community (like „go step forward” in your activities) – connect it with cultural centres, youth centres, etc.;

- Ensure that activities maintain a strong focus on democracy rather than solely on creativity, as some teachers struggled to stay aligned with democratic objectives during implementation;
- Classroom observations were conducted properly, but time constraints prevented some from being completed. To address this, developing post-action reflection materials could be a useful solution;
- Offer additional questions to better connect the three main elements of the project— aesthetic and embodied methods, democracy-as-becoming, and responsive pedagogies.

7. Ethical Reflection and Gender Dimension

For the refinement of the Prototype Pedagogical Framework and Guides, it is crucial to address the following ethical considerations and gender dimension reflections: gender sensitivity and responsiveness, intersectional perspectives, positionality, and reflexivity, accessibility and inclusion, as well as ethical data collection.

Firstly, the Framework and Guides must reflect diverse gender identities while avoiding the reinforcement of stereotypes. Professional development programs for educators should focus on raising awareness of unconscious biases and provide strategies to create sensitive learning environments. These efforts will support eliminating gender bias to ensure that all participants, regardless of their gender, feel seen and supported. In Croatia, inequalities between sexes persist, for instance in job markets, where men will be more likely hired than women.

An inclusive Pedagogical Framework recognizes the effects of intersectional social identities—such as gender, race, class, disability, and migration status—on students' educational experiences. By incorporating intersectional perspectives, educators may address systemic barriers and prevent the marginalisation of certain groups within the classroom. The Framework and Guides should promote diversity, particularly those that have been historically underrepresented, ensuring equitable representation. Responsive pedagogies that incorporate intersectionality will allow for democratic engagement that reflects the complexity of students' lived realities and the power dynamics at play.

Croatia Case Report

Case 2

Phase/Educational Setting:

Primary Education

VEN-Approach:

Embodied and Narrative

1. Case Description

Participants: The participants in this study were teachers from a primary school in Zagreb. The school has a total of 61 teachers of which 55 are women. Ten participants voluntarily participated in the study. Among them, 5 were subject teachers who teach in grades 5 to 8, 3 class teachers (grades 1-4), one school psychologist, and one school pedagogue.

Location: Case 2 was conducted in a hybrid format. Meetings with teachers were conducted in person in Zagreb in the school where the case was conducted, including four face-to-face and three online sessions.

Purpose – Relevance to Democracy-as-Becoming: Three key elements of this research connect it to the four dimensions of democracy:

- **Inclusive participation:** Throughout the entire research process, participants were actively engaged and had the opportunity to ask questions, share their thoughts, and influence the activities being conducted. In this way, the research implemented power-sharing while also enhancing participants' sense of belonging, contributing to their relational well-being.
- **Experiential learning:** All methods used in the PAR were based on learning through experience. All encounters were conducted in person, using drama and narrative methods to support holistic learning and help participants strengthen their connections with their communities.
- **Continuous reflection:** To ensure opportunities for transformational dialogue, power-sharing, and relational well-being, researchers incorporated methods of reflection in action (during the research's educational activities) and reflection on action (at the end of encounters, following the educational activities). This approach significantly contributed to the development of participants' critical thinking skills.

Research Activities and Methods: In the Croatian cases, there are some similarities regarding research activities and methods. This is because the Croatian research team developed a research design for all cases (two in primary education and two in HE) that included the shared RQs and a detailed research plan outlining the data collection methods

to be used. Along with the research design, instruments for data collection were also developed. As a result, all Croatian cases followed a similar flow in the PAR phases and utilised comparable data collection methods.

Research activities: 7 encounters with research participants and researchers.

In-person sessions

- The first encounter (9 February 2024) included an introduction to the project, a focus group on important project topics, collecting participants' opinions on a concept in advance, and group improvisation.
- Second encounter (22nd of February 2024): educational activities conducted by researchers connected with reflection moments (topics: safe space for learning, personal identity, responsibility, equity, diversity, identity, dialogue and communication, empowerment, sense of insecurity and helplessness).
- Third encounter (21st of March 2024): educational activities conducted by researchers connected with reflection moments (topic: personal identity, responsibility, equity, sense of responsibility, sense of insecurity and helplessness, dialogue and communication, diversity).
- Fourth encounter (24th of June 2024): presenting the activities carried out with pupils, collecting opinions of participants regarding Framework and Guides; collecting views of participants regarding democracy-as-becoming, a focus group on topics important for the project.

Online sessions

- First online session (18th of March 2024): creating an implementation plan for activities with pupils.
- Second online session (28th of May 2024): planning activities with pupils.
- Third online session (5th of June 2024): analysis of activities carried out with pupils and suggestions for improving the Framework and Guides.

Drama methods: Techniques that create group dynamics (drama games, the role on the wall, group improvisation, frozen pictures); techniques to gather opinions and attitudes of participants (hot seat, diagonal of attitudes), techniques for individual reflection (guided fantasy, thoughts in the head, diary to a friend, "Minute please").

Narrative methods: Problem-solving methods (storytelling), gathering opinions (brainstorming).

Researchers: The research in the primary school was conducted by the AECED research team, consisting of Vlatka Domović, Maša Rimac Jurinović, and Maja Drvodelić. As part of the final evaluation, the last focus group was conducted by Monika Pažur. All four researchers are employees of the Faculty of Teacher Education at the UNIZG. Teachers, school counsellors, and their students from the school were involved in the PAR.

Time Frame:

- **Introduction:** 09/02/2024, 12:00-14:00
- **Familiarisation:** 22/02/2024 and 21/03/2024
- **Collaborative Reflection:** The step called "collaborative reflection" for Case 2 was not a separate phase. Instead, reflection was integrated into each PAR phase on two levels. The first level of reflection involved peer reflection on the implemented activities and provided materials, conducted during each face-to-face meeting. The second level of reflection consisted of the researchers' reflections after each meeting on the activities carried out. This reflection also included a meta-reflection on the reflection process itself.
- **Planning:** 21/03/2025 – 05/06/2024
- **Action:** From the first meeting, activities were conducted with the research participants. Additionally, the involved teachers carried out activities with the pupils between April and June. In the action phase, we distinguish between the actions of the researchers and those of the participants. The researchers' actions began with the first meeting on 09/02/2024 and continued until June 2024. The research participants took part in educational activities from February 2024 until the end of April. From April to June, they initiated independent actions, implementing their activities with students.
- **Analysis & Synthesis:** After each meeting with the project participants, basic analyses based on the researchers' reflections were conducted. These analyses aimed to enhance the process and improve the planning of project activities. The analysis of all data collected during the project began in June 2024 and is still ongoing. The data synthesis has been carried out in phases. In the first phase, project data were synthesised to address the questions from the Shared Memoing Matrix. This phase concluded in September 2024. The synthesis of data from each case is currently underway, alongside the overall synthesis of all data at the national level.

2. Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis

Data Types and Sources:

Types of Data: Qualitative and quantitative data.

Sources of Data: Two live group interviews with all participants (N=10) were conducted, transcribed into a Word document, and anonymised. Quantitative data regarding democratic school culture (questionnaires) (N=10) were entered into SPSS. An instrument for defining the main concepts of democracy (N=10) consisted of a document with 10 concepts, where participants were asked to define each concept in their own words. This instrument was tested initially with 12 participants and later with 10 participants during the final testing. All answers were transcribed into a Word document and anonymised. Field notes (researchers' notes from educational activities and reflexive groups) were collected (N=7).

Research Methodologies and Methods:

Analysis of data collected through questionnaires: descriptive statistics

Qualitative data analysis:

- Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)
- Content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018)

Data Analysis Process:

Thematic analysis

The thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) is particularly suitable for qualitative research, especially for:

- **Identifying patterns (themes) in data:** Thematic analysis helps recognise key recurring themes in narratives, interviews, focus groups, or other qualitative data.
- **Ensuring flexibility in approach:** It can be applied within various epistemological frameworks and is not tied to a specific theoretical perspective.
- **Analysing a wide range of data:** It is effective for analysing interview transcripts, open-ended survey responses, diaries, and more.
- **Using both deductive and inductive approaches:** Thematic analysis can be applied to research that starts with predefined codes (deductive) or develops themes from the data (inductive).
- **Exploring subjective experiences and meanings:** It is particularly useful for research that examines how people perceive and interpret specific phenomena.

Steps applied in this research:

STEP 1: Data Familiarisation

- Transcribing.
- Uploading memos into the Shared Memoing Matrix by researchers.
- Reading the transcripts several times to gain an overall understanding.

STEP 2: Coding the Data

- Identifying meaningful segments of text and assigning labels (codes) to them.

STEP 3: Identifying and Refining Themes

- Grouping related codes into broader themes.
- Refining themes to ensure clarity and coherence.

Content analysis (Krippendorff, 2018) to describe and interpret the definition of terms before and at the end of PAR.

Theoretical Background: This analysis is grounded in PAR, incorporating drama, narrative, and embodied methods as dynamic approaches to fostering democracy-as-becoming in primary education. Rather than perceiving democracy as a static system, this perspective emphasises its evolving nature, shaped by continuous engagement, dialogue, and experiential learning.

Winston (2022) highlights that participatory drama serves as a powerful pedagogical tool, encouraging students to engage in storytelling and aesthetic playfulness while deepening

their understanding of human interactions. Through dramatic enactments, students not only enhance their linguistic competencies but also develop moral reasoning and empathy—critical skills for democratic participation. Moreover, process drama, as examined by Uştuk (2022), facilitates authentic communication by creating scenarios that resonate with students' lived emotional experiences. This method empowers learners, fostering a classroom environment where their emotions are acknowledged and valued, thereby strengthening their sense of belonging and engagement.

Embodied learning methods further contribute to inclusive and participatory education. By integrating arts-based and embodied learning, schools create spaces where students actively navigate uncertainty and experience democracy as an ongoing process. These approaches encourage collaboration among diverse stakeholders within the educational community, transforming schools into learning organizations that continuously adapt and evolve. Such collaborative engagement aligns with Dewey's (1916) vision of education as an inherently democratic process, where active participation and experiential learning are central to civic development.

Additionally, storytelling and story-acting techniques play a crucial role in fostering democratic educational communities. Mardell and Kucirkova (2016) argue that these practices allow children to articulate their perspectives while actively listening to others, cultivating essential skills for democratic engagement. Storytelling, as a collective and interactive process, nurtures a shared sense of humanity, fairness, and social responsibility—fundamental values in democratic societies. This aligns with Bruner's (1991) perspective on narrative as a central mechanism for meaning making, reinforcing identity formation and ethical reflection in children.

Furthermore, the application of these participatory approaches in education aligns with contemporary research on social-emotional learning (SEL). Studies indicate that engaging in drama and narrative-based activities enhances students' socio-emotional competencies, including self-awareness, perspective-taking, and conflict resolution (Zins et al., 2004). These skills are indispensable in fostering an education system that not only imparts academic knowledge but also cultivates democratic dispositions.

3. Research Findings

During the collaboration with teachers, the theme of power and un/democratic school culture became essential. In other words, through cooperation, the theme of power and school leadership was imposed, whereby themes related to the perception of power but also to taking the initiative and responsibility for influencing and participating in school processes were highlighted.

RQ1. Regarding process: a) How do participants experience being introduced to and working with the Prototype Framework and Guides? b) In what ways is AELD co-created and facilitated through ABE methods?

Throughout the entire PAR process, but especially during the initial phases of introduction and familiarization with the Framework and Guides, participants explored their connection to the project's key concepts (Table 1).

The participants' statements in the Introduction phase were analysed regarding their understanding and attitudes towards the fundamental concepts in the project (Table 1).

Table 1 - Introduction phase: Understanding of main project concepts

Themes	Sub-themes	Examples of statements *
Democracy-as-becoming	Possibilities	"... It takes a lot of strength and determination to do that. ... We as a community are very powerful." (IG)
	Obstacles	"..." There are some parallel groups here. Some come to the principal when they want something. We are different groups in the same space. It's not that we don't like each other or don't hang out, but we are not the same groups. We don't have the same problems. There are formal and informal spokespersons who go to ask the principal something." (FG)
Aesthetic and embodied methods	Possibilities	"...I don't know and I'm curious what it is." (RG) ... I want to learn with all my senses." (RG)
	Obstacles	"...We do not have time for that. When will I use this in class?" (RD)
Responsive pedagogies	Possibilities	"..."I tie it to process and relationships and feedback." (RG)
	Obstacles	"..."I don't know what that is." (RD)

*IG – initial group interview at the beginning of the project; FG – final group interview at the end of the project; CiA – concepts in advance; RD – researchers diary; RG – reflexive groups

Table 1 presents an analysis of participants' statements on their understanding and attitudes towards the project's basic concepts. Two subcategories, Opportunities and Obstacles, were identified.

Concerning the opportunities for the development of democracy, collective strength was emphasised. On the other hand, the critical issue of group divisions and informal power dynamics was revealed as a barrier which can affect participation in democratic processes. Overall, the participants perceived that they have limited opportunities to express their thoughts at the school level and autonomy in teaching content within the curriculum but that participation in decision-making at the school level is limited. In other words, participating in democratic processes is not easy, especially concerning formal and informal centres of power.

Concerning AELD, curiosity and the need for multisensory learning were emphasised. Still, practical problems such as time constraints and applicability, which are common challenges in educational settings, were highlighted. Through engagement with aesthetic and embodied methods, the participants emphasised that these approaches could empower them, help them understand other people’s perspective including emotions, and develop cooperation among group members.

When trying to define responsive pedagogy, participants associated the concept with processes, relationships, and feedback. However, the responses also indicated a lack of knowledge of the concept, which indicates a need for further clarification or training.

RQ2. Regarding the transformational change in participants: In what ways do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, lead to individual and collective growth in regard to

- feelings for democracy,
- aesthetic awareness and qualities (such as empathic, ethical, and spiritual sensibilities),
- collaborative, reflexive and critical capabilities,
- openness to newly ‘seeing’ the other,
- willingness to move towards more reflexive and critical modes of awareness and knowing that reconnect with the body as a source of learning,
- capacity to challenge social injustices and engage creatively with conflict and antagonisms
- any other aspects that will be developed in and through the PAR process.

Table 2 shows examples of teachers' understanding of concepts relevant to democracy-as-becoming at the beginning and end of PAR (Phases Introduction and Analysis & Synthesis).

Table 2: Phases: Introduction and Analysis & Synthesis

Concept	Initial testing	Final testing
Social identity	Teacher 2 - A sense of belonging in a group.	Teacher 2 - Belonging to a specific group with whom one collaborates, shares certain values, characteristics, and preferences.
Social justice	Teacher 5 - Equality within various social groups in society, the ability to choose, express opinions, make decisions, and receive protection in adverse situations.	Teacher 5 - Equal opportunity for growth, development, education, employment, respect for human rights for all groups.
Empowerment	Teacher 8 - A process in which other people can help us in various ways to make us feel better in relation to some	Teacher 8 - An activity that should be carried out with all "sensitive" groups in society, in these areas.

	situations or problems in which we find ourselves.	
Community	Teacher 8 - A group of individuals who tolerate each other's differences and collaborate in life or business situations, coming up with solutions together.	Teacher 8 - A group of people of the same affiliation (religious, geographical, ethnic, regional).
Transformative dialogue	Teacher 1 - Dialogue that results in some change, perhaps a change in attitude towards acceptance.	Teacher 1 - A conversation at the end of which a change occurs.
Embracing diversity	Teacher 9 - Accepting what is different from something we may not agree with but respecting the other person and other/other's opinion = respecting different.	Teacher 9 - The foundation of a nascent democracy is accepting and understanding something that is different from us.
Responsibility	Teacher 7 - It should be more concretely defined in democratic societies so that at any moment (in the case of important issues, decisions, events, state management) it is known who is responsible for which part of the process and that he bears responsibility for it.	Teacher 7 - It is our responsibility in a democratic society to express our opinion and stand up for values that we believe will benefit all of us in society in the short term, but even better in the long term (social, economic, cultural...).
Power sharing	Teacher 8 - The balance of power and responsibility. The possibility of choice.	Teacher 8 - Sharing responsibilities, respecting relationships. Rights and responsibilities and duties.
Learning	Teacher 9 - In the learning process, the process itself and the engagement around it are sometimes more important than the factual knowledge itself, often in fact. In the process, something always happens to us subsequently and often positively. Which we may only realize afterwards.	Teacher 9 - The learning process and the methods we use are very important when it comes to any type of learning because they can be crucial for motivation and overall quality of life.

The table presents paired responses from teachers at two points in a PAR process. Overall, the analysis reveals both subtle and more marked shifts in how teachers conceptualise ideas related to democracy-as-becoming. In some cases, definitions became more nuanced; in others, they shifted in emphasis or specificity.

- Refinement and Nuance: In several instances (e.g., Social Identity, Social Justice, Embracing Diversity), teachers' definitions became more nuanced or expansive. The final definitions often incorporate additional dimensions like collaboration, opportunity.
- Shift in Focus: The focus shifts noticeably for some concepts. For example, the Community moved from emphasising collaborative tolerance to defining community by shared affiliation
- Consistency vs. Change: While some definitions remained relatively consistent (such as Transformative Dialogue and Power Sharing), the evolution in wording suggests an ongoing process of reinterpreting these concepts considering the participants' experiences during PAR.

This content analysis indicates that, throughout the PAR process, teachers' conceptualisations of these key democratic concepts underwent subtle refinements and more pronounced shifts. These changes may reflect evolving understandings influenced by participation in the project and increased exposure to the theoretical and practical dimensions of democracy-as-becoming.

RQ3. What influence, if any, did the researchers have on how the Framework and Guides were used and the designs of AEL for democracy that emerged in the trials?

The role of the researcher in shaping the use of the Framework and the Guides can be analysed through three key themes that emerged from the PAR process: power sharing and hierarchy, transformative dialogue and collaboration, and relational well-being.

The research process revealed that hierarchical decision-making structures exist within the institution involved. Participants expressed scepticism about their ability to influence institutional decisions despite the Framework's emphasis on participation as one of the fundamental elements of democracy-as-becoming. Statements by individuals, such as "It's not that you can't express an opinion, but that doesn't mean it will be respected," highlight the difficulties in achieving a meaningful redistribution of power. At the institutional level, respondents noted that decisions were made top-down, often without genuine consultation/participation/sharing of ideas.

However, within professional and peer groups, a more democratic dynamic was observed. Teachers demonstrated strong mutual support, and students engaged in the exchange of ideas with each other. This suggests that the researchers facilitated the identification of existing spaces for collaboration, strengthening the potential for democratic engagement at the broadest level.

Another significant impact of the researchers was their role in fostering dialogue among different stakeholders within the educational setting. Participants reflected on their experiences of acting as mediators between various groups but also expressed concerns about the risks of open dialogue, particularly regarding career stability.

At the institutional level, the research highlighted barriers to effective negotiation and power dynamics within the school structure. One participant described the school as "managed

rather than led”, indicating a perceived lack of participatory leadership. This suggests that, although the researchers provided space for critical discussion, systemic constraints remained largely unchallenged.

Collaboration with the researchers positively influenced the participants’ motivation and professional self-awareness. The PAR process stimulated reflection on democratic practices in the classroom, even if institutional transformation is more difficult to achieve.

However, challenges remain at the institutional level. A participant involved in the quality team noted that the group's potential for meaningful change was limited.

RQ4. What evidence-based conclusions for revision and refinement of the Prototype Framework and Guides emerge from the experience of using the Prototypes and addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

Based on reflections with participants, researchers’ insights, and the analysis of focus group data, it can be concluded that the Framework and Guides should allocate more attention to the following themes:

- The various dimensions of identity, particularly the distinction and interrelation between personal and professional identities.
- Relationships with others, especially those who differ within hierarchical structures, warrant closer examination.
- The distinction between respect and fear, as these concepts are often conflated. Furthermore, the perception of “external expectations” plays a crucial role in shaping identity and behaviour.
- The challenge of fostering democratic values within the constraints of a centralised educational system must be addressed. This involves considering both personal identity and how individuals present themselves to others.
- Religious appreciation* should be incorporated into the Framework and Guides, particularly in defining what constitutes religious appreciation.
- School autonomy requires further discussion.
- The development of a democratic school culture must be emphasised.
- The distinction between management and leadership needs to be clarified, as these concepts carry different implications for educational governance.

*In the context of Eastern European societies where Roman Catholicism plays a significant role in cultural and educational life, **religious appreciation** refers to a deep understanding and respect for the role of religion in shaping personal identity, moral values, and communal life. Religious appreciation is not about promoting a single faith but about fostering awareness of how religious traditions influence societal values, ethics, and democratic participation. Incorporating **religious appreciation** into the Framework and Guides ensures that teachers/students develop a nuanced understanding of the role of religion in democracy—not as a divisive force but as a source of values that support ethical citizenship, solidarity, and respect for human dignity.

4. Limitations

This study is subject to two key limitations that should be acknowledged.

- First, the research was conducted within a single school, with participation in the PAR process limited to voluntarily enrolled teachers. Consequently, it is impossible to infer how the broader school staff responded. Moreover, all participants were women teaching social sciences, humanities, and arts subjects. Their motivation for engagement in the study stemmed from a predisposition towards or an interest in ABE methods, despite some having no prior experience with them. Notably, STEM educators—who are predominantly male—did not participate in the project. This absence may suggest a lower level of interest in fostering "soft skills," integrating aesthetic and embodied methods, or perceiving the cultivation of democratic values as part of their professional responsibilities.
- Second, as this study is based on a single case, its findings cannot be extrapolated to the entire primary education system. Rather, the results should be interpreted as illustrative examples that provide insights into specific dynamics without serving as a basis for generalisation.

5. Relevance of Context

Croatian primary schools are significantly shaped by the country's cultural, political, and social conditions. Several interrelated factors influence how democratic education is understood, integrated, and practised within schools, as well as how teachers engage with it.

Croatia has a complex socio-historical context. Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, it transitioned from socialism to democracy. This shift continues to influence public attitudes towards democracy, participation, and civic engagement. While democratic values are formally promoted, remnants of hierarchical structures and traditional authority-based models persist in various social institutions, including education. Schools often reflect broader societal tendencies, meaning that while democratic principles may be included in curricula, their practical implementation can be limited by ingrained hierarchical decision-making processes. The school from the case study has a strongly emphasised hierarchy, which was evident from the first meeting, where some of the participants stated that they were "brought in by the principal" because they still had available hours in their work schedule or were not involved in as many programmes or professional training as their colleagues. Moreover, there is a prevailing perception that decision-making within schools and in broader society tends to be top-down rather than participatory. This affects how students, teachers, and parents engage with democracy-as-becoming. Teachers may recognise the importance of fostering democratic principles but often lack institutional support or professional autonomy to implement student-centred, participatory approaches. Additionally, cultural attitudes towards

authority may make encouraging open discussions on controversial topics challenging, limiting opportunities for critical engagement and democratic learning.

The Croatian education system is highly regulated at national level, with centralised decision-making processes influencing school policies and curricula. Civic education initiatives formally support the inclusion of democratic education in primary schools, yet its implementation varies significantly. While the Croatian National Curriculum includes elements of civic and democratic education, these are often fragmented, integrated into different subjects rather than treated as a comprehensive goal for which everyone is responsible. The teachers in this case study frequently expressed that the curriculum-defined teaching process lacks sufficient space for aesthetic and embodied learning and democracy-as-becoming. When planning activities independently, they found that homeroom class was the most suitable time to implement educational activities based on the Framework and Guides. However, they struggled to integrate these activities into subject-specific lessons, as these are more rigidly structured around predefined content areas.

Furthermore, political shifts and ideological influences play a role in shaping educational priorities. Changes in government can lead to shifts in education policy, affecting how democracy-related topics are emphasised. For instance, debates over curriculum reforms—including those related to civic education—have often been politically charged, reflecting broader societal divisions regarding national identity, European integration, and historical narratives.

Teachers' ability to engage with democratic education is influenced by their professional training, institutional constraints, and the local democratic culture within their schools. Some educators actively seek to incorporate democratic principles into their teaching by fostering open discussions, encouraging student participation, and implementing classroom collaborative decision-making processes. However, others may feel constrained by rigid administrative structures, lack of professional development opportunities, or concerns about potential resistance from colleagues, parents, or school leadership. The researchers in this case study observed that teachers' ability to engage with democratic education depends on several factors, including the subject they teach, their years of service and professional experience, their openness to diversity, their employment status (whether they are employed full-time or on a fixed-term contract), and the extent of their professional connectedness with colleagues.

Schools operate within different microcultures that shape their openness to democratic engagement. Some schools foster intense collaborative environments where teachers, students, and parents work together to promote democratic values, while others maintain more hierarchical structures that limit participatory decision-making. The presence of supportive leadership and institutional willingness to experiment with democratic practices can significantly affect whether democracy is actively practised within a school community.

Teachers play a crucial role in shaping democratic learning experiences, but their engagement depends on institutional support, professional training, and the broader democratic culture

within their schools and communities. Addressing these challenges requires systemic efforts to strengthen civic education, empower teachers, and create school environments that genuinely reflect democratic values in practice.

6. Learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guides

Individual and Collective Learning

- **Empowerment through Reflection and Dialogue:** The PAR process underscored the importance of structured opportunities for teachers to reflect on democratic values and practices. Over time, teachers developed a clearer understanding of key democratic principles, including social identity, power sharing, and transformative dialogue.
- **Overcoming Hierarchical Barriers:** Teachers acknowledged that institutional hierarchies often limit democratic participation in schools. However, they identified peer collaboration within professional groups as a key area where democratic engagement could be enhanced.
- **Aesthetic and Embodied Learning for Democracy (AELD):** While teachers showed interest in AELD, time constraints and uncertainty about its relevance in traditional classrooms were significant challenges. More targeted training is required to support the integration of these methods into daily teaching practices.
- **Ongoing Professional Development Needs:** Teachers associated responsive pedagogy with feedback and relationships but lacked a comprehensive understanding of its concepts and principles. Additional training on this topic would support more effective implementation of democratic education.

Organisational Learning

- **Navigating Institutional Constraints:** Teachers perceive decision-making in schools as predominantly hierarchical, which limits their ability to participate meaningfully. The Framework and Guides should include concrete strategies for fostering participatory school leadership, including professional learning communities and collaborative decision-making structures.
- **Strengthening Internal School Democracy:** While top-down decision-making was identified as a significant obstacle, professional teams and subject groups demonstrated greater democratic engagement. Schools should leverage these existing structures to encourage more participatory approaches to decision-making at the institutional level.
- **Clarifying the Role of Leadership:** Participants differentiated between management and leadership, with some expressing frustration that schools were "managed rather than led." The Framework should explicitly address the role of leadership in fostering a democratic school culture, advocating for a shift from hierarchical to participatory leadership models.

- **Balancing Respect and Fear:** Teachers highlighted a tendency to confuse respect for authority with fear of repercussions. This suggests a need for discussions on power dynamics, particularly concerning how schools navigate teacher autonomy, student participation, and institutional accountability.

Epistemic Transformation

- **Democracy-as-becoming:** The Framework should reinforce the idea of democracy as an evolving process rather than a fixed state. The gradual shifts in teachers' understandings of key concepts throughout the PAR process reinforced this perspective.
- **Interdisciplinary Approaches to Democratic Education:** The fact that the study did not include STEM teachers points to potential disciplinary divides in how democracy is integrated into teaching. Future users of the Guides, or possible further iterations of the research could explore ways to engage educators from all disciplines in democratic pedagogies.
- **Recognition of Identity and Social Contexts:** Teachers emphasised greater emphasis on how personal, professional, and institutional identities shape democratic participation. The Framework should incorporate a more explicit focus on identity formation and relational dynamics in educational settings.
- **Religious Appreciation and Democratic Values:** Given the sociocultural context, the Framework should clarify the role of religious appreciation in democratic education. This includes addressing potential tensions between democratic values and spiritual beliefs while fostering a culture of mutual respect and inclusion.

7. Ethical Reflection and Gender Dimension

The Pedagogical Framework and Guides should reflect diverse gender identities, avoiding the reinforcement of stereotypes. Professional development programmes should address unconscious biases, equipping educators with strategies to create gender-equitable learning spaces. During our case study, unconscious biases and stereotypical beliefs occasionally surfaced during educational activities. Discussions with research participants highlighted the need for more frequent dialogue on these topics, as this would help uncover and address unconscious biases that teachers may inadvertently transmit to students through the hidden curriculum.

The Pedagogical Framework should acknowledge how overlapping social identities—such as gender, race, class, disability, and migration status—shape educational experiences. Integrating intersectional perspectives may help educators address systemic barriers and prevent marginalisation within the learning environment. The Pedagogical Framework and Guides should incorporate diverse perspectives, ensuring the representation of historically

underrepresented voices. Within responsive pedagogies, intersectionality ensures that democratic engagement is attuned to multiple lived realities and power structures.

Educators and researchers must critically examine their biases, privileges, and positionality in relation to their students and colleagues. Reflexivity involves continuous self-assessment and the acknowledgement of power dynamics within educational spaces. Creating an inclusive classroom means fostering dialogue, valuing student perspectives, and promoting critical engagement with knowledge. Democracy-as-becoming requires educators to navigate these dynamics intentionally, recognising how their perspectives influence the co-creation of knowledge.

Integrating ethical considerations into the Pedagogical Framework may support to foster a more just and inclusive learning environment. By embedding gender sensitivity, accessibility, intersectionality, and reflexivity into practice, educators can create spaces that empower all students, regardless of their identities or backgrounds. Within the study of democracy-as-becoming, embedding ethical pedagogy may enable a more engaged, responsive, and inclusive learning process.

Croatia Case Report

Case 3

Phase/Educational Setting:

Higher Education

VEN-Approach:

Drama & Narrative

1. Case Description

Participants: In this case involved a total of 14 participants- teaching staff and postdoctoral students.

Location: Case 3 was conducted in person at the Faculty of Teacher Education, at the UNIZG.

Purpose – Relevance to Democracy-as-Becoming: Three key elements of this research connect it to the four dimensions of democracy:

- **Inclusive participation:** Throughout the research process, participants were actively engaged and had the opportunity to ask questions, share their thoughts, and influence the activities being conducted. In this way, the research fostered power-sharing while enhancing participants' sense of belonging and contributing to their relational well-being.
- **Experiential learning:** All methods used in the PAR were based on learning through experience. All encounters were conducted in person, utilizing drama and narrative methods to support holistic learning and help participants strengthen their connections with their communities.
- **Continuous reflection:** To ensure opportunities for transformational dialogue, power-sharing, and relational well-being, researchers incorporated methods of reflection in action (during the research's educational activities) and reflection after action (after encounters, following the educational activities). This approach significantly contributed to developing participants' critical thinking skills.

Research Activities and Methods: Within Croatian cases, there are some similarities regarding research activities and methods. This is because, for all Croatian cases (two in primary and two in HE), the Croatian research team developed a research design that included the shared RQs and a detailed research plan outlining the data collection methods to be used. Along with the research design, instruments for data collection were also developed. As a result, all Croatian cases followed a similar flow in the PAR phases and utilised comparable data collection methods.

Research activities: 5 in-person encounters with research participants and researchers.

- **First encounter:** an introduction to the project; focus group on topics important for the project; collecting opinions of participants on main project concepts.
- **Second encounter:** educational activities conducted by researchers connected with reflection moments (topic: individual and social identity; social inequalities and social justice).
- **Third encounter:** educational activities conducted by researchers connected with reflection moments (topic: powerlessness and empowerment).
- **Fourth encounter:** educational activities conducted by researchers connected with reflection moments (topic: responsibility and transformative dialogue); planning activities based on the Framework and Guides that participants will implement in their practice with students in schools and in certain classes at the faculty.
- **Fifth encounter:** reflecting of participants activities that they implemented with students; collecting opinions of participants regarding Framework and Guides; collecting opinions of participants regarding democracy-as-becoming.

Drama methods: Individual reflection (e.g. stepping out of roles and talking about what happened in the imaginary world, hot chair, diary, creating a character, etc.) and reflection in the group (statues, still image, thoughts in a head, role on the wall, improvisation, etc.)

Narrative methods: Storytelling (e.g., letter to a character or Letter to the author; guided fantasy), techniques to understand what participants have learned (e.g., INSERT - I know, it's new to me, I'm conflicted about it, it confuses me; double diary - I also learned commentary; table *I know, I want to know, I learned*), technics that gather opinions and values of participants (e.g., associative cards and connection with content)

Researchers: The research was conducted by the AECED research team: Monika Pažur, Katarina Aladrović Slovaček and Maša Rimac Jurinović.

Time Frame:

- **Introduction:** 20th March 2024: Introduction to the Project and Opportunities for Participation
- **Familiarisation:** 7th April 2024: Personal and Social Identity, Stereotypes, and Prejudices (Monika Pažur); 17th April 2024: Feelings of Helplessness and Responsibility through Storytelling (Katarina Aladrović Slovaček); Dialogue and Communication through Drama Techniques (Maša Rimac Jurinović)
- **Collaborative Reflection:** From 20th March to 20th May 2024
- **Planning and Action:** From 17th April to 20th May 2024
- **Analysis & Synthesis:** 20th May 2024: Project and Personal Development Evaluation of Participants

NOTE: The HE case will be described according to the given guidelines for iterations. However, at the outset, we would like to immediately note that in the case we are describing,

the stages are not always so clearly separated (for example, the stage of reflection, evaluation, and re-planning based on the insights obtained was carried out during each meeting).

2. Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis

Data Types and Sources

Data Types: Qualitative and quantitative data.

Data Sources:

- interviews (two group interviews with 12 people present and three individual interviews) – all interviews are transcribed in word document and anonymized;
- quantitative data regarding democratic school culture (questionnaires fulfilled by participants – 13 in the phase of initial testing, and 12 in the final testing) – data entered in SPSS;
- an instrument for defining main concepts of democracy (a document where 10 concepts are written and participants are asked to define those concepts in their words - 13 in the phase of initial testing, and 12 in the final testing) – all answers are transcribed in word document and anonymized;
- field notes (researchers' notes from educational activities and reflexive groups; N=14) – entered in google drive form, and later on transcribed in word document.

Research Methodologies and Methods:

Quantitative data—statistical analysis (descriptive statistics, t-test for dependent groups) of data collected at the beginning and end of the PAR to see if there were any changes in understanding the democratic culture of the educational institution.

Qualitative Data:

- Thematic analysis to identify categories and codes within themes, allowing for an examination of differences among participants and their reactions and transformations regarding democracy after participating in the PAR process.
- Coding of definitions of key democratic concepts to track participants' understanding of fundamental elements of democracy.
- Thematic analysis (with themes linked to each phase of the PAR) to better understand how to improve various elements of the Framework and Guides.

Data Analysis Process: Inductive process:

STEP 1 - Reading the transcripts of focus groups (2) and interviews (3) to identify themes and subthemes reflected by the participants.

STEP 2 - Uploading memos into Shared Memoing Matrix by researchers.

STEP 3 - Connecting themes and subthemes with the researcher' research diary and researchers notes group reflection.

STEP 4 - Analysing data collected through the instrument used to define key concepts of democracy to gain a deeper understanding of students' opinions and perspectives.

In identifying subthemes, all four steps were taken into account and used to define essential concepts for the democratic process in HE based on the students' experiences and perspectives.

Theoretical Background: Thematic Analysis (e.g., as described by Braun and Clarke, 2012) was chosen as a suitable method for analysing empirical data. Following this approach, the proposed themes were ensured to stem closely from the data.

3. Research Findings

In this section, statements from participants will include the source from which the data was gathered: IG – initial group interview at the beginning of the project; FG – final group interview at the end of the project; CiA – concepts in advance; RD – researchers' diary; RG – reflexive groups; Ind – individual interview.

RQ1. Regarding process: a) How do participants experience being introduced to and working with the Prototype Framework and Guides? b) In what ways is AELD co-created and facilitated through ABE methods?

Participants emphasised the significance of mutual support during all PAR phases, highlighting the necessity of having a guiding presence—someone to "hear and lead" them through the process. One participant reflected, "*The conversations meant a lot to me, and the whole project helped me confirm some things I've been reflecting on for the past two or three years. Sometimes it feels like I'm the only one who sees them, so this means a lot to me.*" (IG). The role of a "critical friend" was particularly valued, as this figure provided constructive feedback and an external perspective, whether as an expert or a trusted colleague. Additionally, reflective practice was recognised as an integral component of the process, categorised into three levels: real-time reflection (reflection in action), immediate post-activity reflection (reflection after action), and retrospective reflection (reflection with distance). These reflective stages enabled participants to uncover nuanced insights about their practices.

Since education for democracy is not integrated in any way within Croatian educational institutions (neither in elementary or secondary schools, nor at faculties), it was a challenge for the participants of this case to integrate the Framework and Guides into their work and plan their actions based on them. Many of them decided to connect democracy-as-becoming with classes related to literature learning, such as literary analysis; and extracurricula activities connected with citizenship education or drama. There were also examples where they worked with other staff members employed in their institutions using the Framework and Guides (for example one principle of a preschool education institution worked with her teaching staff and guided them to implement Guides in their everyday practice). While they acknowledged a

collective commitment to democratic values, they also recognised their lack of formal training in explicitly teaching democracy. However, they perceived democratic principles as inherent to their professional ethos and institutional values. An early childhood educator regarded the kindergarten setting as intrinsically democratic, with principles conveyed through creative methods, such as theatrical performances. The educator noted, however, that outside of the immediate teaching context, democratic processes in broader societal structures often felt "artificial."

Familiarization phase, where researchers were implementing Framework and Guides with participants, provided them with an environment conducive to open discussion, fostering a sense of shared perspectives on societal and structural issues. This sense of belonging encouraged engagement in social change discourse and transformative actions. A key finding was the participants' openness to embodied learning techniques, which suggests the potential for integrating such methods across various educational levels.

Participants generally found incorporating AEL approaches into their practice feasible. While some successfully linked these methods to the concept of "democracy-as-becoming," others struggled to make this conceptual connection, indicating a gap between theoretical understanding and practical application. One participant expressed, "*I would definitely say that it contributed to both my personal and professional development, with lots of great ideas that can be applied moving forward.*" (FG). Discussions frequently led to unanticipated topics, necessitating a flexible facilitation approach to maintain focus while allowing for emergent discourse.

Table 1: Main themes and subthemes important for HE level that were detected in this case

Theme	Subthemes	Key Findings
Organisational context and realities	Autonomy and Constraints	Teachers feel autonomy in classrooms but face structural constraints in decision-making.
	Role of Leadership	Some institutions encourage participation, while others maintain strict hierarchy limiting involvement.
	Expression of Opinions	Participants selectively express opinions due to fear of conflict and hierarchical pressures.
Personal responsibilities for democracy development	Individual vs. Collective Change	Some believe individuals can drive change, others emphasize need for systemic support.
	Belonging and Inclusion	Sense of inclusion varies; some feel excluded by systemic barriers or personal withdrawal.
	Empowerment Through the Project (Final Phase)	Participants gained confidence in expressing opinions and advocating for change.

Personal and professional growth through the AECEED project	Greater Awareness of Systemic Limitations (Final Phase)	Increased recognition of legal, political, and administrative barriers to democratization.
	Belonging at Different Levels (Final Phase)	Participants reflected on their alignment with local, national, and professional communities.
	Gap Between Formal and Actual Democratization (Final Phase)	Growing awareness of the difference between declared democratic principles and their real application.
	Dialogue and Changing Opinions (Final Phase)	Participants acknowledged the importance of dialogue, even when opinions remain unchanged.

RQ2. Regarding the transformational change in participants: In what ways do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, lead to individual and collective growth in regard to

- feelings for democracy,
- aesthetic awareness and qualities (such as empathic, ethical, and spiritual sensibilities),
- collaborative, reflexive and critical capabilities,
- openness to newly ‘seeing’ the other,
- willingness to move towards more reflexive and critical modes of awareness and knowing that reconnect with the body as a source of learning,
- capacity to challenge social injustices and engage creatively with conflict and antagonisms
- any other aspects that will be developed in and through the PAR process.

Participants' engagement in the workshops facilitated both personal and professional development. Their experiences underscored the importance of a structured yet open environment where dialogue could evolve organically. Many participants reported gaining new insights, validating prior reflections, and recognising the diversity of perspectives as both a challenge and an opportunity. One participant noted, "*A positive and beautiful experience, mainly because we are all here open to change—above all, personal change. It's nice to work in a group where participation is voluntary.*" (FG)

Participants noted that we do not live in a genuinely democratic society. While individuals may possess a personal sense of democratic values, there is often a lack of a supportive environment to nurture these values. The observation of one participant supports this perspective: "*People need to be empowered. Some individuals often go unnoticed simply because they struggle with confidence and question whether they are ready to learn in the environment they find themselves in. They are not recognised; their voices are unheard because they are not sufficiently empowered. I have a colleague who constantly questions every step she takes.*" (RG)

Expression of opinions emerged as a particularly significant theme. Initially, participants expressed confidence in their openness; however, further discussion revealed a tendency to withhold views due to fear of judgement, particularly in conversations surrounding social justice and diversity. This highlights the need for a learning environment that fosters safety.

Non-verbal communication was also pivotal, with drama techniques allowing participants to express thoughts and emotions in a non-verbal manner. This reinforced the significance of embodied expression as a reflection of internalised ideas and feelings.

Moreover, participants demonstrated an evolving discourse throughout the process. For instance, an individual initially defined identity in a broad social recognition framework but later refined this understanding to emphasise community belonging. She explained, "*Identity is something by which we can be recognised in society.*" (RD). Still, after engaging in activities, she revised her perspective to view identity as tied to community, national identity, religion, and customs. Such shifts illustrate the dynamic nature of participants' conceptual development through engagement and reflection.

Transformative dialogue was perceived as a mechanism for influencing others' perspectives. However, participants tended to frame the dialogue in adversarial terms—an "us versus them" dichotomy—viewing conflicts as scenarios with definitive winners and losers. This suggests the necessity of targeted communication training to foster a more nuanced understanding of transformative dialogue to bridge perspectives rather than reinforce divisions.

One of the key obstacles—particularly for emerging democracies—is that certain topics remain undiscussed, as they are not seen as suitable subjects for dialogue. A revealing example comes from participant "*It's a very difficult situation. I have a colleague I'm very fond of, but our worldviews are opposite. At one point, we realised we couldn't open any topic except the weather. Both of us make compromises to avoid conflict.*" (RG). While it is positive that such challenges were acknowledged and recognised as barriers to democratic dialogue, progress among participants was also observed. For instance, one participant reflected: "*When I expressed an opinion related to inclusion, I hesitated, wondering whether I should say it because I wasn't sure how you would react.*" (IG). It's important to raise participants' awareness continuously (so they can do the same for others) about what dialogue truly is and how it contributes to change.

RQ3. What influence, if any, did the researchers have on how the Framework and Guides were used and the designs of AEL for democracy that emerged in the trials?

Researchers played a pivotal role in shaping the Framework's implementation. Their influence was evident in guiding discussions, structuring reflective exercises, and balancing theoretical exploration and practical application. The facilitation approach encouraged critical engagement while allowing participants the autonomy to explore topics relevant to their experiences.

A particularly illustrative example involved a private school educator who, empowered by workshop discussions, initiated a dialogue with her school principal regarding salary advocacy

for native language teachers. This case underscores the potential of guided educational interventions to translate democratic principles into professional action.

The researchers' structuring of workshop activities also impacted participants' perceptions of their agency within democratic processes. Many participants, particularly those without extensive professional experience, reported being accustomed to passive roles in educational settings. Consequently, they found it challenging to assume an active role in shaping their learning experiences. This suggests a need for explicit guidance on fostering student agency and participatory learning methodologies.

RQ4. What evidence-based conclusions for revision and refinement of the Prototype Framework and Guides emerge from the experience of using the Prototypes and addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

Key Recommendations for Refinement

- **Enhancing Understanding of Responsive Pedagogy:** Participants exhibited limited comprehension of responsive pedagogy, often equating it solely with inclusivity. Its principles must be clearly articulated within the Framework to facilitate more effective implementation.
- **Addressing Introvert-Extrovert Dynamics in Democratic Participation:** Discussions frequently highlighted the marginalisation of introverted individuals in Croatian educational institutions. The Framework should incorporate strategies for fostering inclusive participation, ensuring all voices are represented equitably.
- **Bridging Theory and Practice:** The gap between conceptual understanding and practical application of democracy-as-becoming suggests that additional scaffolding is needed. This could be achieved through case studies, applied exercises, and guided reflections explicitly linking theoretical constructs to real-world scenarios.
- **Fostering Non-Adversarial Transformative Dialogue:** Given participants' tendencies to frame discussions regarding winners and losers, targeted training in conflict resolution and dialogical engagement should be integrated into the Framework.
- **Explicit Guidance for Engagement:** Given that many participants were unfamiliar with actively shaping their learning processes, the Framework should include dedicated components on fostering learner agency and participatory education methodologies.
- **Flexible Yet Structured Facilitation:** Participants preferred open-ended discussions while recognising the necessity of facilitator guidance. The Framework should outline strategies for balancing structure with adaptability, ensuring that discussions remain goal-oriented while accommodating emergent themes.

Conclusion

The findings of the research underscored the potential of the Prototype Framework and Guides to foster individual and collective growth within democratic education. However, to

maximise effectiveness, targeted refinements are necessary—particularly in bridging theoretical concepts with practical applications, addressing diverse participation needs, and strengthening facilitation methodologies. Integrating these recommendations will enhance the Framework’s capacity to cultivate a democratic ethos within educational environments, ensuring that participants not only conceptualise democracy but actively engage in its realisation.

4. Limitations

The limitations to this case can be grouped in three categories: (1) Sample size, selection bias and generalization; (2) Subjectivity and researchers’ bias; (3) Use of AEM methods.

The case involved a limited number of people, which is particularly important in this context since teaching staff in higher education is a highly heterogeneous population, regarding their previous knowledge, both on democracy but as well AEM. This is especially true for the Faculty of Teacher Education, which has departments for almost all scientific disciplines, ranging from mathematics, biology, and geography to the Croatian language and pedagogy. In this case, participants from specific scientific disciplines were involved; however, the findings cannot be generalized or not even give basic insights to other teaching staff.

Regarding subjectivity and researcher bias, a limitation of this case is that three researchers were involved, each taking the lead in one of the cycles of planning and acting. Even though reflection between cycles took place, it is possible that participants did not feel equally connected to all three researchers. As a result, group dynamics and the process of democratization that may have begun in one encounter could have paused when another researcher took the lead. Researcher bias also becomes important when maintaining the research diary. In the diary, some initial data analysis was conducted, which heavily relied on the researcher’s perspective and observations.

Finally, in the higher education setting in Croatia, the use of AEM methods is generally low. Most teaching staff rely on traditional methods, meaning that participants had little experience and competence in applying these methods. This presents a limitation in the study in two ways. First, when commenting on the Framework and Guides while researchers led educational activities based on them, participants’ reactions may have been more influenced by the novelty and interactivity of the learning approach rather than by the AECED research questions. Second, when planning and implementing their activities in practice, participants may have equated the mere use of participatory methods with democracy itself, without fully grasping the connection between these methods and democratic issues.

5. Relevance of Context

HE in Croatia primarily follows traditional, lecture-based teaching methods, but there is a growing trend towards student-centred learning. However, significant challenges remain in

implementing democracy-as-becoming with aesthetic and embodied method in HE. Despite the increasing demand for student-centred learning, traditional methods still dominate. This is likely due to a lack of pedagogical training for university professors, many of whom rely on lectures rather than interactive methods.

In Croatia, initial education does not provide everyone with exposure to embodied learning methods, and this case study clearly illustrates that both (teaching staff and students) express a need for such approaches. Given their interest and willingness to participate in this type of education, it is crucial to ensure that all individuals have access to creative and embodied methodologies, as previously described. These methods offer significant benefits in fostering personal and professional growth.

While the use of technology in education is expanding, digital learning is still in its early stages. Most importantly, and particularly relevant to this project, there is very little focus on democracy and civic engagement in teaching, especially in teacher education. Specifically, at the Faculty of Teacher Education, most lectures follow a lecture-based format due to the large student groups (approximately 100 students per lecture and 30 students per seminar group). Consequently, implementing aesthetic and embodied method in this setting is challenging, and many of the methods proposed in the Guides needed to be adapted to accommodate such large groups.

When considering the development of democracy-as-becoming at the level of HE institutions in Croatia, several challenges emerged in shaping its implementation. While Croatian universities operate under principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, democratic practices in teaching, governance, and student participation remain limited. As mentioned earlier, traditional lecture-based teaching methods dominate, leaving little room for participatory and democratic learning approaches. Concepts such as democracy-as-becoming and active student engagement are not systematically integrated into curricula, particularly in teacher education. Although some initiatives and projects (such as this one) promote student-centred learning, widespread implementation is still lacking.

A key consideration for this case and the HE Guide is recognising the existing barriers to implementing democratic education in Croatian universities. There is still visible resistance to change, as many professors and administrators continue to favour traditional hierarchical structures. Since there is no systematic education for democracy at any level of the Croatian educational system, university educators themselves often lack training in participatory and democratic teaching methods.

The participants in this case emphasised that Croatian society is not democratic to a satisfactory degree. They also noted their efforts to establish and uphold democratic principles in their classrooms. However, an interesting observation is that, according to their statements, they tend to avoid discussing potentially sensitive topics and primarily recognise like-minded individuals among other participants. Another noteworthy finding is that, during the initial assessment, the male participant stated that he had difficulties implementing inclusion in his classroom. Although he later reported in the final assessment that he had gained ideas and

tools for applying inclusive practices through the PAR process, this finding remains intriguing, particularly in the context of gender roles. However, to draw any definitive conclusions, further research is required.

Overall, while Croatia's HE institutions uphold democratic structures on paper, the practical application of democratic values in teaching, governance, and student life remains limited. There is growing awareness of the need for change, but meaningful reforms are still in their early stages.

6. Learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guides

- **Enhanced Planning Tools:** Develop more detailed planning steps within the Guides to help educators align their learning activities with the project's objectives.
- **Multimedia Resources:** Create videos, audio recordings, and other materials that clearly explain key concepts, allowing participants to explore topics more deeply.
- **Support for Reflection:** Design activities and Frameworks that facilitate meaningful reflection, ensuring that aesthetic and embodied method is purposefully connected to educational goals related to democracy-as-becoming.
- **Democratization in Practice:** It is essential to guide participants in exploring democratic practices within educational settings. Effective facilitation fosters democratic engagement, encouraging critical thinking and participatory dialogue.
- **Group Dynamics:** The success of workshops depends on the dynamics within the group, which is influenced by the backgrounds and experiences of its members. Cultivating positive group dynamics is, therefore, fundamental to achieving desired learning outcomes.
- **Caring Democracy:** The concept of caring democracy frequently surfaced in discussions and activities, reflecting its resonance with participants as a central value in both education and civic life. During the research, it was mentioned several times that participants strive to understand their students and take on the role of mediators between different opinions. However, they sometimes avoid engaging in direct confrontation with colleagues of equal professional status. Reflecting on this, a concept emerged based on the idea that in the process of confronting opinions and viewpoints, we should strive—despite being personally involved—to also care for our interlocutor, even when they hold opposing views.
- The **planning phase** emerged as a critical area of concern. It serves as a bridge between conceptual Framework and practical implementation. Participants often struggled to:
 - Connect new concepts with their existing practices without losing focus.
 - Integrate aesthetic or embodied methods meaningfully, beyond superficial application.

- Engage in deep reflection on the relationship between learning activities and democratic principles.

To address these challenges, it is recommended that clear planning guidelines be developed, potentially including checklists to support educators in aligning their activities with responsive pedagogies and democratic education goals. We can strengthen educators' capacity to foster inclusive, reflective, and democratically engaged learning environments by embedding these recommendations into future workshops and Guides.

7. Ethical Reflection and Gender Dimension

When creating the final version of Pedagogical Frameworks and Guides for Practice, it is crucial to address the following ethical issues to ensure inclusivity, equity, and diversity: 1.) Gender Sensitivity, 2.) Accessibility and Inclusion; 3.) Intersectional Perspectives & 4.) Positionality and Reflexivity.

Gender Sensitivity

- Reflect diverse gender identities, avoiding the reinforcement of traditional stereotypes.
- Promote gender-equitable learning environments by equipping educators with strategies to address unconscious biases through professional development programs.
- Foster learning spaces where all students, regardless of gender identity, feel seen, valued, and supported.

In the Croatian language, we distinguish between masculine, feminine, and neuter grammatical genders. Most official documents are written in the masculine form, and it is common for an introductory note in official documents to clarify that nouns in the masculine form are used to refer to both genders (e.g., both male student - *student* and female student - *studentica*). On the other hand, the teaching profession is predominantly female.

One of the researchers of this case study, a professor of the Croatian language, personally advocates the use of both forms—male student and female student, and in the plural female students - *studentice* and male students - *studenti*. There are also activist efforts promoting gender-inclusive language; for example, addressing a mixed-gender group in the feminine form when the majority are women or alternating between grammatical genders within a single text based on a specific pattern.

Accessibility and Inclusion

- Integrate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, offering multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression.
- Ensure accessibility for students with disabilities through:
 - Assistive technologies
 - Flexible assessment methods

- Alternative content formats
- In the context of AEL, extend accessibility to sensory and experiential dimensions, ensuring meaningful engagement for all students.

Intersectional Perspectives

A robust pedagogical framework acknowledges how overlapping social identities—such as gender, race, class, disability, and migration status—shape educational experiences. Key considerations include:

- Applying intersectionality to address systemic barriers and prevent marginalization within learning environments.
- Incorporating diverse perspectives, particularly voices from historically underrepresented groups.
- Ensuring that democratic engagement within the classroom is sensitive to multiple lived realities and power dynamics.

Positionality and Reflexivity

Educators and researchers must critically reflect on their positions within educational contexts. This involves:

- Examining personal biases, privileges, and positionality in relation to students and colleagues.
- Practising reflexivity through continuous self-assessment and acknowledging power dynamics in teaching and learning spaces.
- Creating inclusive classrooms that foster open dialogue, value diverse student perspectives, and encourage critical engagement with knowledge.
- Recognising that democracy-as-becoming requires intentional navigation of these dynamics and understanding how educators' perspectives shape the co-creation of knowledge.

A pedagogical framework grounded in ethical principles fosters a more just, inclusive, and responsive learning environment. By embedding gender sensitivity, accessibility and inclusion, intersectionality, and reflexivity, educators can create spaces that empower all students, regardless of their identities or backgrounds. Within the study of democracy-as-becoming, an ethical pedagogy enables deeper engagement, critical reflection, and transformative learning experiences.

Through interactions with participants and reflections after the workshops, one of the researchers of the case have considered how teaching democracy using AEL approaches should always be conducted by a team that includes at least one drama teacher. In Croatia, we have a Postgraduate Specialist Study in Drama Pedagogy, which the researcher has also completed. Her long-term application of drama techniques has enabled her to respond quickly and improvise on the spot, which is crucial when addressing potentially sensitive topics. At the

same time, the drama approach employs protective mechanisms such as metaphor and role-playing, creating a safe space for participants.

However, it is essential that the team also includes at least one expert specialising in democracy-related topics who can recognise and articulate key concepts and issues emerging from participants' responses, requiring in-depth analysis. In addition to these experts, another team member should be dedicated to closely observing the participants throughout the process. This recommendation should be included in the final set of guidelines.

Croatia Case Report

Case 4

Phase/Educational Setting:

Higher Education

VEN-Approach:

Narrative

1. Case Description

Participants: Participants were students from the Faculty of Teacher Education, UNIZG, from various study years (first to fifth year) and study programs (preschool teacher education or primary education teacher education).

Location: Case 4 was conducted in a hybrid format. The five encounters during March and April 2024 took place in person at the UNIZG. After commenting on the Framework and Guides, online (via feedback forms) and in-person interviews were conducted in June 2024.

Purpose – Relevance to Democracy-as-Becoming: Three key elements of this research connect it to the four dimensions of democracy:

- **Inclusive participation:** Throughout the entire research process, participants were actively engaged and had the opportunity to ask questions, share their thoughts, and influence the activities being conducted. In this way, the research implemented power-sharing while also enhancing participants' sense of belonging, contributing to their relational well-being.
- **Experiential learning:** All methods used in the PAR were based on learning through experience. All encounters were conducted in person, utilising drama and narrative methods to support holistic learning and help participants strengthen their connections with the communities they are part of.
- **Continuous reflection:** To ensure opportunities for transformational dialogue, power-sharing, and relational well-being, researchers incorporated methods of reflection in action (during the research's educational activities) and reflection after action (at the end of encounters, following the educational activities). This approach significantly contributed to the development of participants' critical thinking skills.

Research Activities and Methods:

Research activities: 5 in-person encounters with 15 research participants and researchers.

- First encounter: an introduction to the project; a focus group on topics important to the project; and collecting opinions of participants.

- Second encounter: educational activities conducted by researchers connected with reflection moments (topic: individual and social identity; social inequalities and social justice).
- Third encounter: educational activities conducted by researchers connected with reflection moments (topic: powerlessness and empowerment).
- Fourth encounter: educational activities conducted by researchers connected with reflection moments (topic: responsibility and transformative dialogue).
- Fifth encounter: collecting participants' opinions regarding Framework and Guides and democracy-as-becoming.

Drama methods: individual reflection (e.g., stepping out of roles and talking about what happened in an imaginary world) and reflection in the group (e.g., joint improvisation, searching for solutions).

Narrative methods: storytelling (e.g., letter to a character, letter to an author, guided fantasy); techniques to understand what participants have learned (e.g., INSERT – I know, it's new to me, I'm conflicted about it, it confuses me; double diary – I also learned commentary; table – I know, I want to know, I learned); and techniques that gather opinions and values of participants (e.g., hot chair, associative cards and connection with content, frozen image).

Researchers: Monika Pažur and Katarina Aladrović Slovaček.

Time Frame:

Within this case iterations were happening in the process of PAR while working with participants.

- 1) Introduction:** *Duration of the PAR phase from March to 8th April 2024.*
- 2) Familiarisation:** *Duration of the PAR phase from 8th April to 29th April 2024.*
- 3) Collaborative reflection:** *Duration of the PAR phase from 15th April to June 2024.*
- 4) Planning:** *Duration of the PAR phase from 8th April to 6th May 2024.*
- 5) Action:** *Duration of the PAR phase from 15th April to 13th May 2024.*
- 6) Analysis & Synthesis:** *Duration of the PAR phase from 13th May 2024 to July 2024.*

After the introduction phase, during PAR iterations of phases, familiarisation, planning, and acting occurred three times. During the whole process, reflection happened continuously. After three cycles of other PAR phases, analysis and synthesis were made.

2. Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis

Data Types and Sources

Types of Data: Qualitative, quantitative.

Sources of Data:

- interviews (two group interviews with 12 people present and two individual interviews) – all interviews are transcribed in word document and anonymized;
- quantitative data regarding democratic school culture (questionnaires fulfilled by participants – 15 in the phase of initial testing, and 15 in the final testing) – data entered in SPSS;
- an instrument for defining main concepts of democracy (a document where 10 concepts are written and participants are asked to define those concepts in their words - 15 in the phase of initial testing, and 15 in the final testing) – all answers are transcribed in word document and anonymized;
- field notes (researchers' notes from educational activities and reflexive groups) – entered in google drive form, and later on transcribed in word document.

Research Methodologies and Methods:

Quantitative data: Statistical analysis (descriptive statistics, t-test for dependent groups) was conducted on data gathered at the beginning and end of the PAR to determine whether any changes in understanding the democratic culture of educational institutions occurred.

Qualitative Data:

- Thematic analysis to identify categories and codes within themes, allowing for an examination of differences among participants and their reactions and transformations regarding democracy after participating in the PAR process.
- Coding of definitions of key democratic concepts to track participants' understanding of fundamental elements of democracy.
- Thematic analysis (with themes linked to each phase of the PAR) to better understand how to improve various elements of the Framework and Guides.

Data Analysis Process: Inductive process was taken:

STEP 1: Reading the transcripts of focus groups (2) and interviews (2) to identify themes and subthemes discussed by participants.

STEP 2: Entering data into the Shared Memoing Matrix by researchers.

STEP 3: Connecting the identified themes and subthemes with researcher diary notes and notes from reflective groups

STEP 4: Analysing data collected through the instrument used to define key concepts of democracy to gain a deeper understanding of students' opinions and perspectives.

In identifying subthemes, all three elements were considered and used to define essential codes for the democratic process in HE based on the student's experiences and perspectives.

Theoretical Background: Thematic Analysis (e.g., as described by Braun and Clarke, 2012) was chosen as a suitable method for analysing empirical data. Following a thematic analysis

approach, it was made sure that the proposed themes stemmed closely from the data. Thematic Analysis is a process of *seeing* and *making sense* out of material. (Boyatzis, 1998).

Using themes coded from raw information is conducive to verbally describing the phenomena, people, organisations, cultures and events (Boyatzis, 1998). Since there was a PAR process of working with people connected with their organisational realities and culture in the research, this process of analysis was chosen. The process of analysis helped the researcher to become familiar with the people and their organisations to be able to analyse data on individual and collective relevance.

3. Research Findings

Research data are presented as themes and subthemes that emerged from the analysis.

RQ1. Regarding process: a) How do participants experience being introduced to and working with the Prototype Framework and Guides? b) In what ways is AELD co-created and facilitated through ABE methods?

Participants explored their connection to the project's key concepts throughout the PAR process, but especially during the initial phases of introduction and familiarization with the Framework and Guides (see *Table 1*). When reflecting on education for democracy, they considered it on a personal level, as active citizens, and within the context of their educational institution.

Their perception was that they had limited opportunities to express their thoughts at the faculty and that education for democracy was not being effectively implemented. Through engagement with aesthetic and embodied methods, they emphasized that these approaches helped them learn and understand better. Unlike some other methods, these techniques allowed them to incorporate emotions and foster cooperation within the group during the learning process.

At this stage, however, students could not fully connect these two concepts or recognize their similarities and differences.

Table 1: Introduction: attitudes about mail project concepts

Themes	Sub-themes	Examples of statements*
Education for democracy	Institutional level	<i>‘...I believe our institutions are like that that one person takes too much power and others believe there is no sense of acting in any way. That is how disbalance of power is happening...’ (IG)</i>
	Individual level	<i>‘...I do not feel free to share my opinion regarding democracy issues with professors. There are also different opinions among students, and they often attack you if they do not agree with you, more liberal attitude...’ (IG)</i>

Aesthetic and embodied methods	Cognitive dimension	<i>‘...it is important for me to learn through practical examples...’ (RD)</i>
	Emotional dimension	<i>‘...I really loved that I was invited to show emotions while talking about democracy important topics. Always, emotions should be outside of learning process, it is bad if something makes you mad, but these topics often made me frustrated or annoyed and I want to show it somehow...’ (RG)</i>
	Social dimension	<i>‘...it makes possible learning where you can share your opinion. It is not important that everybody agrees but people are there, with an open mind to hear you ...’ (RG)</i>

*IG – initial group interview at the beginning of the project; FG – final group interview at the end of the project; CiA – concepts in advance; RD – researchers diary; RG – reflexive groups; Ind – individual interview

Students shared key thoughts about each concept during the familiarization process (see *Table 2*). They primarily associated democracy-as-becoming with a sense of belonging to a group. Within the broader idea of democracy, they discussed their responsibilities.

When using aesthetic and embodied methods during the familiarization process, they began to reflect on what they gained regarding competence. They realized that ABE methods allowed them to simultaneously develop their knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

When discussing responsive pedagogies, students focused more on the role of others—those who enable or hinder responsiveness—rather than on their own role in the process. They emphasized the importance of being “open-minded” and willing to listen to different perspectives. From their perspective as students, they did not feel that their institution was responsive to them. However, they believed that responsiveness could improve if students, as a group, were empowered to take action toward positive change. To achieve this, they emphasized the importance of methods that promote both speaking and listening.

Table 2: Familiarisation: Three project elements through the words of students

Themes	Sub-themes	Examples of statements*
Democracy-as-becoming	Sense of belonging	<i>‘... I think that every time I contribute to something, I feel that I belong, be it family, work, kindergarten, if we have made a positive change in that group, we are part of that group....’ (FG)</i>
	Responsibility for democracy development	<i>‘... I feel like a citizen of the world because even some small steps I take are significant for the world, we have</i>

		<i>access to some rights and with that we can help others....` (Ind)</i>
Aesthetic and embodied methods	Knowledge and understanding	<i>´...I feel, and then I understand so much more...` (RG)</i>
	Skills	<i>´...for skills development I would highlight improvisation as a method, so that each person can learn some content in their own way, for some, movement will be better, for others, presentation...` (Ind)</i>
	Attitudes	<i>´...using those methods with democracy issues gives you the feeling that there are no prejudices in the group, and that everything could be settled with dialogue and positive approach ...` (RG)</i>
Responsive pedagogy	Empathy and perspective-taking	<i>´...there must be a place for a conversation about democracy at our college, because if we don't learn to include each other, if we can't comment or have a quality discussion with each other in a group, then it's not surprising that we can't have a discussion with the professors. Why is there no debate today, because we just listen even when we really feel that something is wrong.´ (FG)</i>
	Pedagogical approaches	<i>´...the important thing is talking, listening and giving practical examples ...` (CiA)</i>
	Institutional factors	<i>´...We (faculty) would be much closer to democracy if we had fewer passive students, and fewer professors who feel the need to impose their opinion. When we look through history, students have always been the initiators of change, and here everyone will comment in small groups and hardly anyone will dare to express their opinion. And with professors, the situation is often that they express their opinion right from the start, and we see how they are oriented and even if we want to say something, the question is how much sense it makes to say anything to them.´ (FG)</i>

* IG – initial group interview at the beginning of the project; FG – final group interview at the end of the project; CiA – concepts in advance; RD – researchers diary; RG – reflexive groups; Ind – individual interview

RQ2. Regarding the transformational change in participants: In what ways do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, lead to individual and collective growth in regard to

- feelings for democracy,
- aesthetic awareness and qualities (such as empathic, ethical, and spiritual sensibilities),
- collaborative, reflexive and critical capabilities,
- openness to newly ‘seeing’ the other,

- willingness to move towards more reflexive and critical modes of awareness and knowing that reconnect with the body as a source of learning,
- capacity to challenge social injustices and engage creatively with conflict and antagonisms
- any other aspects that will be developed in and through the PAR process.

During the collective reflection phase, it became evident that participants experienced transformation on two levels (see *Table 3*):

1. Personal identity – their individual understanding of themselves in relation to their role in society, personal growth in the field as democratic citizens, and evolving thoughts.
2. Collective identity – their interactions with others and their place within society.

Their reflections consistently sought to balance these two aspects. The questions they raised included: *Do I feel free? Does my environment provide me with the opportunity to be free? Do I grant freedom to others? Is equality present in my society? Am I equal to the majority or am I somehow different?*

They actively engaged in group reflections to answer these questions, benefiting from each other's experiences and perspectives. Establishing a supportive group atmosphere beforehand was crucial, allowing them to feel safe sharing their opinions.

During these collective reflections, it became clear that students were transforming. Many of them frequently began their sentences with phrases like, *before this project, I didn't know... or I used to think...*, highlighting their evolving perspectives.

Table 3: Collective reflection: Values on individual and collective level

Themes	Sub-themes	Examples of statements*
Equality	Personal	<i>‘...now I just understand how much I still have to work on myself. How prejudiced I still am and how often I judge differences....’ (FG)</i>
	Others	<i>‘...every day we witness the expulsion of those who are different from their environment....’ (RD)</i>
Freedom	On personal level	<i>‘...with my friends, I have the opportunity to speak my mind and I can grow with them even though our opinions do not agree. However, I had a situation on the way while riding the bus, I didn't feel like I could say anything to that woman, I would be a child who doesn't know anything....’ (FG)</i>
	At the level of institution	<i>‘... I think that, in some professional setting, I think it has come to this that if we really want to express our experience honestly, we have to take a big risk every time, especially if the majority of the environment does</i>

		<i>not agree with that opinion. It is a big social problem. I run the risk of being shunned by others....` (FG)</i>
Responsiveness	Personal	<i>‘... The biggest problem is when it comes to accepting something, when we need to get out of our comfort zone and accept someone as he is, we are all angry that he doesn't want to change and become more like us. Why wouldn't that someone else be a little more similar to me and then I would accept him too, and not actually accept him with what he is...` (FG)</i>
	Environment	<i>‘... Along with all the groups that are different and don't fit in, there are also people who are introverts by nature, these people don't get the chance to express their opinion because of their insecurity, but also because of the environment that suffocates them even more...` (RG)</i>

* IG – initial group interview at the beginning of the project; FG – final group interview at the end of the project; CiA – concepts in advance; RD – researchers diary; RG – reflexive groups; Ind – individual interview

Participants' transformation was evident during the planning and action phases. They gained a deeper understanding of key concepts of democracy and the AECED project. Simultaneously, they began connecting theoretical concepts with their experiences using the Guides, considering how they could apply these democratic elements in their future work with children (see *Table 4*).

Table 4: Planning and action: Main principles of democracy in theory and action

Themes	Sub-themes	Examples of statements *
Power sharing	In theory (how participants understand it)	<i>‘...If we consider the society democratic, then power and decision-making cannot be the work of one person only but work together on something. That should be like that in learning process as well...` (CiA)</i>
	In practice (with using Guides)	<i>‘...elders and superiors should not have all the rights to decide everything, but everyone should be involved in big important decisions and certainly obedient in smaller ones. In this Guides we are invited to work on ourselves to share our power in teaching and create safe space for learning...` (RD)</i>
Transformative dialogue	In theory (how participants understand it)	<i>‘... The one who allows learning and change of mind, the one who is ready to hear and learn, enrich and accept the different....` (CiA)</i>
	In practice (with using Guides)	<i>‘...After this project I see we need to pay more attention to include others and create opportunities for them to express their opinions...that could be reached</i>

		<i>by using aesthetic methods, so people feel more connected with those around them...` (Ind)</i>
Holistic learning	In theory (how participants understand it)	<i>‘... Dialogue, security, adaptation, expression of opinion, effective and ineffective methods, emotions, support...` (CiA)</i>
	In practice (with using guides)	<i>‘...what I loved the most about this project is that I was able to show my emotions on different topics that make me happy, sad, afraid or even mad. My emotions were part of this process and that is actually very important when you discuss such issues...` (RG)</i>
Relational well being	In theory (how participants understand it)	<i>‘...Group membership, acceptance, equality, power. A feeling of belonging to a group/community...` (CiA)</i>
	In practice (with using Guides)	<i>‘...to work on democracy-as-becoming you really have to create a safe space, where everyone can be just who it is...and we should all learn a little bit more, see a little bit more.` (Ind)</i>

* IG – initial group interview at the beginning of the project; FG – final group interview at the end of the project; CiA – concepts in advance; RD – researchers diary; RG – reflexive groups; Ind – individual interview

RQ3. What influence, if any, did the researchers have on how the Framework and Guides were used and the designs of AEL for democracy that emerged in the trials?

Since PAR was the primary research methodology, the researcher played a crucial and complex role, influencing both the process and its outcomes in multiple ways. As a result, the research involved close collaboration between researchers and participants to address social issues and drive change (see *Table 5*).

Two main themes emerged in relation to **RQ3**:

1. Participants' perspectives on the role of researchers (expressed either directly or indirectly).
2. Researchers' perspectives on their own roles (identified through research diaries).

Table 5: Researchers roles in the PAR process

Themes	Sub-themes	Examples of statements *
Participants view on researcher roles	Facilitator of Knowledge Co-Creator	<i>‘...I learned the most because you (taking to a researcher) gave me a safe space to share my opinions....` (FG)</i>

	Capacity Building and Empowerment	<i>‘...Even though everything we did was interactive - we discussed a lot and shared a learning process - I feel like I learned so much...’ (RG)</i>
	Catalyst of Social Change	<i>‘...People like you (talking to a researcher) are our change. We want to inspire others, like you inspired us....’ (RG)</i>
Researchers view on researcher roles	Facilitator of Knowledge Co-Creator	<i>‘...I feel like in the end of discussion students always look at me waiting for my explanation of everything that was said. In those moments, I always reflect on how to respond to their needs while ensuring I don’t influence them too much....’ (RD)</i>
	Power Dynamics and Ethical Considerations	<i>‘...one participant is very introvert. From previous interactions, I know she has so much to share, but how can I encourage her without influencing the process too much?’ ...’ (RD)</i>
	Sustaining the PAR process	<i>‘...Students loved talking today about how they feel at the faculty on a daily basis. However, I struggled to connect the topics of democracy with aesthetic methods. It seems that they know so little about both that they are unable to see the connection...’ (RD)</i>
	Data Interpretation and Reflexivity	<i>‘...One participant mentioned today that they don’t like when it is obvious from the first lecture what a professor’s political stance is. From that moment on, all I could think about was—Is it obvious with me as well? Do they feel the same about me in this very project?...’ (Ind)</i>

* IG – initial group interview at the beginning of the project; FG – final group interview at the end of the project; CiA – concepts in advance; RD – researchers diary; RG – reflexive groups; Ind – individual interview

Participants saw researchers as individuals who helped guide discussions, ensuring that community voices were heard. Furthermore, participants emphasized the importance of researchers in helping them develop skills and encouraging their self-reliance. This role was likely recognized due to the specific HE context in Croatia, where professors are primarily responsible for the academic empowerment of students. It was evident—both through observations and student statements—that they viewed researchers as change agents advocating for policy improvements.

As researchers, we have actively reflected on our roles. One of the key roles we identified was that of a facilitator and knowledge co-creator. However, it was crucial for us to ensure that we did not overuse this role in a way that would resemble the traditional role of professors, as our aim was not to teach students but to support their learning. Within this project, which involved

the PAR process and the aesthetic and embodied methods, it was essential for students to create knowledge and develop their own understandings.

Another significant role we assumed was navigating power relations to prevent certain participants from dominating the process. Since participants came from different study years and had diverse individual characteristics, it was important for us, as researchers, to create an inclusive and safe environment where everyone felt welcome and encouraged to interact. We aimed to respond to participants' needs while maintaining a clear focus on the PAR process. Students at the Faculty of Teacher Education do not have courses that specifically address democratic issues and events. As a result, many of them expressed that they had finally found a space where they could freely share their thoughts. While this was more than welcome, we, as researchers, had to remain focused on the project's research questions.

Finally, the researcher's perspective inevitably influenced how data was collected, interpreted, and presented. We engaged in reflexivity by continuously evaluating our own impact on students and incorporating these reflections into our processes. It was particularly important for us to ensure that students understood that, while we shared our perspectives, we remained open to different opinions.

RQ4. What evidence-based conclusions for revision and refinement of the Prototype Framework and Guides emerge from the experience of using the Prototypes and addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

Participants recognized the significant potential of linking education for democracy with AEL (see *Table 6*). They believed that utilizing Guides could enhance both learning outcomes and emotional responses, meaning being more emotionally connected with the content of educational activities, which they considered the greatest value of the AECED Framework and Guides. Their proposals included additional activities designed to connect students with topics related to civic engagement and its impact on the community. They asserted that students should play a more active role in promoting and nurturing democracy, and they saw potential in these Guides to strengthen and motivate students to embrace this responsibility.

Table 6: Analysis and Synthesis

Themes	Sub-themes	Examples of statements*
Potential of the resources and activities carried out	Learning outcome and involvement	<i>‘...I love connecting democracy with aesthetic activities. I would like that there are more activities that are happening outside, in the nature...’ (RG)</i>
	Emotional response	<i>‘...every time in these educational activities, that was 2 hours, that I was just here, not thinking or doing anything else; I was completely emotionally engaged and I felt I was doing something very important for the society...’ (FG)</i>
	Critical thinking	<i>‘... maybe it would be good to include some music-dance games/activities, because they can also fall under artistic</i>

Aesthetic and embodied methods		<i>activities, and children enjoy them. With this type of activity, for example, you can work on connecting the group, showing diversity, children can be encouraged to explore on their own and be innovative, and critically think about things around them ...` (RD)</i>
	Civic engagement	<i>ˆ...some activities could be more connected with local communities and looking for a positive change; as responsibility of active citizens...` (RG)</i>
	Democratic values	<i>ˆ... Anyone who begins to think about emerging democracy in education, and let's assume that they know the terms used in planning the teaching process, will easily use the Guides and plan activities within their lectures. If someone initially does not decide to independently select activities and plan the workshop, they can always use the already given example of good practice written in the guides. By doing so, the goal of the workshop will be achieved, and the teacher's motivation for further planning and implementation of methods will be greater...` (Ind)</i>
Individual and collective transformation	Personal growth	<i>ˆ... the first meeting was liberating for me, I felt I can be whoever I am, and grow with others through the process...` (RD)</i>
	Behaviour change	<i>ˆ...I want to do more things related to developing democracy in my everyday life. I have this strong feeling that even a little action of positive change makes difference and is important for the society in general...` (FG)</i>
	Impact to the community	<i>ˆ...I feel more motivated to think about all those things in society that I have time "of all that work" to think about usually. ˆ (FG)</i>
Written documents	Readability / clarity	<i>ˆ...I find the Guidelines to be extremely interesting and clearly written, which makes them easy to read and understand` (Ind)</i>
	Visual elements and layout	<i>ˆ...I easily followed and read the text. It is good that all important terms are explained, so that a theoretical basis is obtained. There is a very useful part about the way of implementation in organizations (curriculum, cooperation, etc.) and practical instructions on what to expect in the work (possibility of unpleasant feelings, etc.). My only gripe is that I occasionally have a feeling of visual unevenness, but I guess that's because it's a working version. ˆ (Ind)</i>
	Content / organisation	<i>ˆ...More detailed examples would provide users with a clearer picture of how activities can look in reality, which would increase their confidence in carrying them out. In addition, the guidelines would help them in maintaining the necessary documentation. ˆ (RG)</i>

		<p><i>...Although most of the participants are familiar with the methods suggested as useful for application in the workshops, it might be good to explain each method in more detail, regardless of the fact that they are later presented in examples of good practice. (RG)</i></p>
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* IG – initial group interview at the beginning of the project; FG – final group interview at the end of the project; CiA – concepts in advance; RD – researchers diary; RG – reflexive groups; Ind – individual interview

Students' comments on their experiences with the Framework and Guides and their individual growth demonstrate that they were engaged on all these levels. The results indicate that by implementing the Guides with students, they worked on knowledge, the principles of democracy, collaboration, and the development of their social competencies, as well as addressing globally important topics. They were able to reflect on and evaluate their work, benefiting particularly from discussions with one another. Most of all students emphasised that using aesthetic and embodied methods helped them to interact with Guides and Framework in a more individual and transforming way.

4. Limitations

The methodological limitations of PAR when using AEL to discuss methodology are as follows:

- **Subjectivity:** The researcher's personal perspectives, preferences, or vested interests could influence the findings.
- **Limited Generalizability:** This PAR process was very much connected with a special context at the Faculty for Teacher Education, and that is that there are no subjects where students can learn about democracy and discuss democratic issues. So, an interest for this project has shown students who have interest in the topic of democracy. Other students would likely react completely differently to AELD and Framework and Guides than those who were involved. So, results are limited to the group involved.
- **Ethical Concerns:** Since researchers were professors of those students in previous years, their already existing relationship might open some ethical concerns during the process. The relationship between students and professors in HE in Croatia is usually very hierarchical. Students do not feel like sharing their opinions about social and political issues. The researchers had good relationship with students who decided to enrol in this project.
- **Power Dynamics:** Power imbalances may emerge since action research often involves collaboration between researchers and participants (especially in educational or community settings). Researchers may unintentionally dominate the decision-making process or influence the participants' contributions.
- **Complexity in Data Collection and Analysis:** Since all four cases in Croatia followed the same research design, some data were gathered to make analysis on a larger number

of participants (with participants from all four cases). Therefore, some data that were gathered weren't presented in this deliverable.

5. Relevance of Context

There are two relevant contextual perspectives for the presented results.

The first is related to HE practices in Croatia. In Croatia (now an independent republic, formerly part of Yugoslavia), initiatives aimed at improving teaching in HE exists only sporadically and periodically. Although universities in Croatia generally show little interest in enhancing the quality of teaching, some attempts to improve university teaching and learning can be found. Research by Ledić (1995) showed that university professors in Croatia did not recognise the need for their own professional development, and many had only a limited understanding of HE teaching methods. Teaching at Croatian universities is, in most cases, traditional, as teachers primarily rely on their own educational experiences and are not provided with information on more effective teaching methods. At the same time, students have expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of teaching, indicating serious problems in university education. Several indicators suggest a decline in teaching quality: dissatisfied students, traditional teaching approaches, a lack of appreciation for pedagogical improvement, and scepticism towards educational theory and practice as a means for better teaching (Ledić et al., 2011). Research conducted in Croatia in 2010 examined how university teaching is perceived in Croatian HE. Based on an analysis of 15 criteria, the assessment results (from 203 teachers) suggest that quality teaching is primarily associated with: (1) teachers being well-prepared for their lessons, (2) expertise in their subjects, (3) clearly defined teaching objectives, and (4) fair student assessment. This perspective reflects a rather traditional view of quality teaching, particularly considering that factors such as respect for students' individual differences, responsiveness to student feedback, and soliciting feedback were ranked the lowest. Therefore, implementing AELD at the HE level in Croatia is something very innovative, and most of the students interacted with them for the first time within this project. Their comments on Framework and Guides are therefore, comments of someone who is completely new to such methodology. This is also important because the idea of this project is to work on democracy-as-becoming at the personal but as well institutional level. Students involved in this project developed some motivation for becoming more involved in the democratisation of HE institutions. However, even though Croatian HE institutions formally include students in decision-making processes through student councils and representatives in university bodies, their influence on institutional policies and curricula is often limited, and many students feel disengaged from university governance. That was more than once highlighted within this case by the participants themselves.

The second relevant contextual issue is that Croatia lacks a systematic approach to learning for democracy at all levels of formal education. At the Faculty of Teacher Education, there are no mandatory courses designed to develop students' competencies for becoming active and responsible citizens. This gap is significant for this project because the individuals expected to use the Framework and Guides lack the relevant knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to

democracy. Previous studies indicate that teachers in elementary and secondary schools do not feel adequately prepared or competent to address various topics within education for democracy (Spajić-Vrkaš et al., 2016; Schulz et al., 2016). Additionally, research (Pažur, 2016; Spajić-Vrkaš et al., 2016) has highlighted the absence of democratic practices and characteristics within Croatian educational institutions.

Since this is the case implemented with faculty students who will become future preschool and elementary school teachers, a critical question arises: **Are future teachers adequately prepared through their initial education to engage in education for democracy?** A comparative study of civic education in Europe (European Commission, 2017) reveals that some European countries, such as Denmark, Spain, France, and Austria, have implemented regulations or recommendations to ensure that all teacher education programs develop specific competencies related to civic education. These align with the recommendations of the **Teacher Training Tool for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights** (Huddleston, 2005). In contrast, the Faculty of Teacher Education in Croatia lacks a systematic approach to developing teachers' competencies for democratic society, and students' motivation for these topics typically depends on their personal interest (Pažur, 2023). Previous research (Pažur, 2016; Schulz et al., 2016) indicates that teachers feel insufficiently competent in achieving educational outcomes related to human rights and political education (Spajić-Vrkaš et al., 2016). Uninformed or poorly informed citizens struggle to engage in discussions on social issues and rarely participate in decision-making processes (Popkin and Dimock, 1999). Therefore, it is difficult to expect inadequately prepared teachers to effectively equip students for democratic participation.

This national context raises a key question: **How can we support students, teachers and faculty professors in effectively implementing the Framework and Guides, similar to how it is done in more democratic countries where classes are conducted in less traditional way compared to Croatian universities?**

6. Learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guides

Working with students in the PAR process was successful, and their personal and professional growth was evident. The Guides should emphasise that implementation of the AELD with a group of students should be a longer process or a project rather than just a series of partial activities.

It was important for students to assume the role of a researcher with knowledge about the topic. Students are not accustomed to assuming authority in the learning process, and they needed some time to feel prepared to do so.

The Guides should include a specific section on how to work with students, which is different from working with any other group in HE. This is a special group without work experience, and they are heavily focused on their own experiences as learners in various educational

institutions. Students in Croatia are not used to taking responsibility for the learning process and don't know how to "include" themselves in the process or take control of it.

It is important to highlight and provide in Guides more examples of continuous reflection of students, like ways to:

- Connect democracy topics with students' reflections on previous experiences.
- Offer more examples of individual reflections (through art, words, or body movement).
- It would be useful for students to have a diary to track their thoughts and help them connect some of these to democracy topics. Idea: Perhaps develop a personal growth map with tasks and a process that participants can follow.

About content:

Based on this case, some topics for the HE Guides, that could be added as important to students are:

- How to take the risk of acting or saying something different from what the majority thinks – what does risk mean, and how can a person deal with it?
- Emotions in discussing democracy – how to create learning surroundings where I can show my emotions on topics that are important for me and for the society?
- Fear – the fear of expressing opinions to those who are "higher" than them (e.g., older individuals, professors, institutional management).
- Responsibility – what is my responsibility in the development of democracy?

About proposed activities:

Students really enjoy working with AEL because these approaches help them connect their learning process with their emotions and their sense of self. However, some elements of proposed activities could be added, so students would profit even more from these Guides:

- Activities where participants observe each other in drama simulations were useful. They helped students when they took on someone else's role.
- When working with students, it's important to have many experiential learning situations.
- Students need their peers, but more than that, they need knowledge and self-confidence to speak.
- Include activities that connect them with the wider community and encourage active participation.
- Propose more practical activities that focus on working in small groups.

7. Ethical Reflection and Gender Dimension

Ethical reflections that came up as important during different phases of PAR:

Preparation phase:

How to choose student participants?

The initial idea in the research design was to implement this case within an optional course called *Volunteerism in Education*, which is led by one of the researchers and covers similar topics and methods. However, during the first-class session, when the project was introduced, many students appeared to have low motivation to participate.

As a result, the researchers decided to issue an open call, which was published on the faculty's website and also sent to the email addresses of various student groups. Through this open call, 15 students applied, and all were selected to participate in the project.

Introduction phase:

Creating an informed consent

Special effort was made in the process of creating informed consent. Due to the nature of PAR, it was not possible at the beginning of the study to predict all the directions the project might take. Additionally, data were collected at multiple levels (e.g., interviews, research diaries, reflective groups), making it essential to clearly explain these various methods of data collection to participants.

When designing the informed consent, we emphasized that if any changes occurred during the PAR process (which is common in this type of research), an additional informed consent form would be signed. Although participants initially signed an informed consent form, we sought additional consent whenever audio or video recordings were made or when someone was cited in reflective notes. We also ensured that there was always a shared understanding of the ongoing process.

Already existing relationship before researchers and participants

It is not uncommon for researchers to have or develop some form of relationship with participants in PAR. In this case, this was an important ethical issue to consider, as the pre-existing relationship between the researchers and students was shaped by the hierarchical roles of professor and student.

The researcher addressed this issue at the beginning of the process and revisited it several times during reflection groups. However, the students expressed a clear understanding that this project was entirely different from a regular course at the faculty and stated that they had no issue with the researcher also previously being their professor. They also emphasized more than once that they felt comfortable sharing their opinions freely, both when the researcher was their professor and now in the role of a researcher. During the reflective groups, students openly shared many of their experiences at the faculty, and there was no indication that the researcher's dual role as their professor created any issues for them.

Familiarization phase:

Identity issue

Discussing identity issues was a crucial aspect of democracy-as-becoming and an essential part of connecting education with emotions through implementing AELD. We aimed to begin with individual identity, providing each participant with the opportunity to introduce themselves. This process involved both ethical and gender considerations of researchers. Rather than offering predefined categories (such as gender, employment status, or education level), we wanted participants to introduce themselves based on what they personally found relevant. To facilitate this, we designed an activity called "The Identity Flower", where each participant wrote down the identities or words that best described them in 6 petals. This activity allowed everyone to share as much as they wanted, without feeling confined to predefined labels or categories.

Reflection phase

How to deal with stereotypes and prejudice during a reflection

Since continuous reflection was an integral part of this case, participants were simultaneously learning and reflecting on activities. Occasionally, during spontaneous reflections on certain activities, stereotypes and prejudices toward other groups emerged. For example, one girl once said: *"In elementary school, there was a boy who had the wrong approach. There were more of us, and we kind of accepted him, but not completely. Then a girl came along, and she just couldn't adapt—she was always crying, and no one did anything. If she, as just one person, could have at least tried to fit in with us."* (FG). This statement was clearly not aligned with the core principles of democracy-as-becoming, transformative dialogue, or the acceptance of differences. As a researcher, I faced an ethical dilemma in that moment—whether to immediately address her reflection (which might make participants feel less free to share their thoughts) or to let it pass (which could give the impression that I agreed with her statement). I chose to let it go for the moment, but later planned an activity that would explore the issue of assimilation more deeply. In the end, another participant, after some time, responded to her by saying: *"The biggest problem arises when we need to acknowledge something, step out of our comfort zone, and accept someone as they are. We all get frustrated, wondering why that person doesn't want to change and become more like us. Why shouldn't they be a little more like me so that I could accept them, instead of us accepting them just as they are?"* (FG). This was a meaningful moment because the group took shared responsibility for learning from one another. I allowed them to navigate this discussion on their own, without stepping in as an authority figure.

Planning and action phase

Dualism of Researchers' Roles

During the planning and action phases, we, as researchers, continuously questioned and adjusted our relationships and positions in relation to both ourselves and others. Due to the intensive relationships developed with participants through ALED, an exchange of

experiences, emotions, perceptions, and states frequently "happened." In these situations, it was challenging not to "slip" into the role of a helping professional (such as a professor or counselor) while also ensuring that we did not remain detached as mere researchers. To navigate these challenges effectively, continuous reflection took place among different researchers working on this case, as well as on other Croatian cases.

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Finland Case Report

Case 5

Phase/Educational Setting:

Higher Education

VEN-Approach:

Visual and Embodied

1. Case Description

Participants: 17 HE teachers from the ULA, Aalto University and University of Arts, of which 10 did the teaching trials.

Location: Trials were done all in person at the ULA, Rovaniemi, Finland.

Purpose – Relevance to Democracy-as-Becoming: The purpose of the ULA's Case 5 was to trial and develop methods and theoretical basis for the AELD Prototype Framework and Guides in collaboration with HE teachers and students. From the beginning, the research design in the ULA cases was planned to promote democratic values and address democracy as a process of becoming, connecting to the principles of power-sharing, transforming dialogue, holistic learning, and relational well-being. This meant that researchers were co-producing, co-interpreting and co-meaning-making the data with the participants. The process of analysis happened in continuous discussions with the participants, our research team and colleagues from other universities whose research interests overlapped with ours. Inclusive participation, open exchange of views, connectedness to others as well as aesthetic and embodied awareness and critical thinking were emphasised in the learning and research processes with participants and stakeholders, as well as in the team through critical considerations and discussions during the research.

Research Activities and Methods: Research activities were: (a) six workshops for teachers and twelve individual mentoring sessions provided by the researchers, (b) teachers' AELD trials on their courses, (c) seven interviews after trials. In workshops, the focus was on body movement-based exercises and the acceptive gaze¹ as an embodied intervention for democracy. Teachers used also the exercises they learned in the workshops.

Researchers: Pauliina Jääskeläinen: corresponding teacher in the course "Work Counselling as Embodied Dialogue" for Psychology of Leadership students; corresponding facilitator of the

¹ The acceptive gaze (Jääskeläinen 2023): An attitude and practice, where one aims at looking at the reactions, emotions, movements and thoughts (one's own and the others') with acceptance. This is a shift from the tendency to classify things we observe with dichotomies of good/bad, beautiful/ugly etc. and instead open up to see what happens and how things emerge without instant judgment. Refusing instant judgments makes recognising our internalised ways of thinking and acting possible. The acceptance is considered here more like opening to new perspectives and taking an empathic attitude towards what is happening in us and in others than accepting e. g. others' opinions as such. Instead, it gives space for emphatically critical evaluation of the movements (emotions, thoughts and kinaesthetic movements) emerging in relationships. The acceptive gaze as an embodied intervention is based on the understanding of attitudes as reversible movements in us (Merleau-Ponty 1968) in the sense that movements in our thoughts become sensible to others via our gestural movements. Therefore, practising the acceptive gaze is always a reciprocal action, happening in the joint flow of movement with something or someone and with that, it contributes to the qualities of the shared experiences.

professional learning workshops for the HE teachers, facilitator of the bodyfulness exercise in the course “Towards an Equal Global Economy”, collector and primary analyst of the research data.

Joonas Vola: Co-facilitator of the professional learning workshops for HE teachers. Teacher and facilitator in the course “Work Counselling as Embodied Dialogue” for Psychology of Leadership students. Trial participant teacher in the course “Towards an Equal Global Economy”. Collector of the research data.

Susan Meriläinen (Project PI): Teacher-participant in professional learning workshops for HE teachers. Trial participant and corresponding teacher of two iterative trial cycles of the course “Towards an Equal Global Economy”. Collector and analyst of the research data from the course.

Sandra Wallenius-Korkalo: Teacher-participant in professional learning workshops for HE teachers. Trial participant and corresponding teacher of trial course Bachelor’s Seminar and Thesis in Political Studies. Co-analyst of the research data.

Olga Válková Tarasová: Observant and movement analyst in one workshop for HE teachers.

Time Frame:



Figure 1: PAR phases in ULA cases

2. Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis

Data Types and Sources

Types of Data: Qualitative

Sources of Data:

Researchers fieldnotes and reflection research journals in written and audio recorded /transcribed format (AI transcription) (based on the teachers' workshops, teacher tutoring meetings and lectures of HE).

Learning diaries from the students of HE in written format.

(9+12+12) = **33** learning diaries from three trials

Filled in commoning card templates

7 templates from exercise within a lecture with students of HE

Trial-participant teacher interviews recorded in audio format and transcribed (AI transcription) into textual format. The transcriptions are checked to ensure it does not include any identifiable personal information. 10 interviews.

Research Methodologies and Methods: The ULA research team's understanding of research within PAR aligns with methodologies, which take researchers as fully entangled as co-moving bodies in the research process (see Jääskeläinen, 2023; Land, 2023). This means that researchers are co-producing, co-interpreting and co-meaning-making the data with the participants. Therefore, the data gathering and analysis happened progressively throughout the PAR process, not only after the encountering events. The process of analysis happened in continuous discussions with the participants, our research team and colleagues from other Universities (see Case 6) whose research interests overlapped with ours. We would like to emphasise how knowledge production always happens in between the moving bodies, but the final interpretations, hence writing the results, research articles and other outcomes, are done from the researcher's unique *body situation* and through their *reach-searching* movements (Jääskeläinen, 2023).

One big influence on our understanding of research is post-qualitative research (St. Pierre, 2017; 2019), which questions the "normative", neoliberal (researching) humanist subject build of Enlightenment philosophies, where subjectivity is stable, and the world exists for humans to unpack and bring into the light its secrets. In the face of humanism's reliance on calculations, order, and discovery, post-qualitative research proposes that what is at stake is not a quest to get the "best" knowledge, but instead questions of what kinds of knowledges we need for what kind of lives we want to be part of" (Land, 2023, p. 11). In post-qualitative research, it is acknowledged that research practices are messy material-discursive enactments where the purpose is not to find final answers but ideas to be worked further (Taylor 2017 as cited in Land 2023, pp. 12-13). "It is the not yet, the yet to come—the immanent—that marks post qualitative inquiry (...) In an ontology of immanence, one becomes less interested in what is and more interested in what might be and what is coming into being." St. Pierre 2019, 4). What unites the post-qualitative approach with the phenomenologically informed *reach-searching* (Jääskeläinen 2023) is the understanding of research as a constant flux of becoming with.

In the AECED research context, we illustrated that researcher(s)' *body situation* as being part of the 'flesh' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) of the research context, enactments with participants

(Jääskeläinen, 2023), Finnish cultural-historical context, and the collected research material (see *Figure 2*). In the phase of analysing, the researcher interprets the results in constant movement between these different dimensions through the notes, recorded and transcribed interviews, from a uniquely constructed *body situation* with its previous learning history and current research environment (see Jääskeläinen, 2023b). Jääskeläinen (2023; 2023b) developed this research methodology by thinking of it with the interconnected body movements, thereby viewing research, as *reach-searching* movements with the participants, and in the data analysis process as thinking-with-movements with the collected research material (see St. Pierre, 2017).

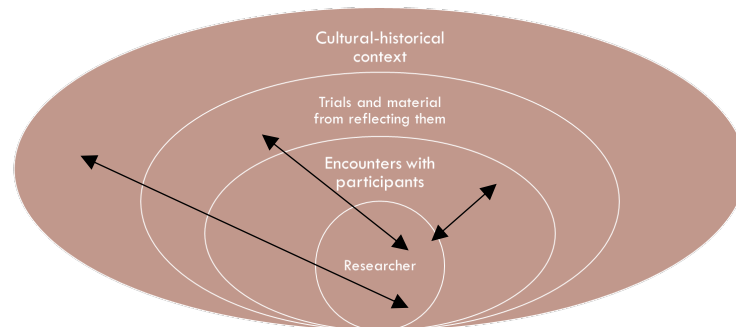


Figure 2: Researcher as an embedded part of the research material

To be able to answer the project’s shared RQs developed in the AECED Methodological Framework (AECED, 2023, p.21), we kept them in mind throughout the research process—during the planning of workshops and teaching trials, in our discussions during mentoring sessions and workshops, and while structuring and conducting semi-structured interviews with participant teachers. Written materials and embodied experiences were summarised in the Shared Memoing Matrix, which we used to organise the data thematically and according to different research phases. In this summarisation process, we applied thematic analysis, focusing on the aspects addressed in the four RQs.

Data Analysis Process and its Theoretical Background: Notes from the workshops, mentoring sessions, and courses conducted by the researchers’ teams were summarised in the Shared Memoing Matrix quite extensively. The themes that would help answer the four RQs were then identified, and sub-themes related to them were created. Students’ diaries were analysed using thematic analysis based on RQs. Themes that could bring new insights to the development of the Prototype Framework and Guides were created based on this analysis. The interviews were transcribed using the Cockatoo programme; however, due to its insufficient quality, the analyst needed to listen to the recordings while analysing them to supplement the transcriptions. The interviews were also analysed thematically, guided by the RQs, and themes that could contribute to the development of the Prototype Framework and Guides were identified. The analysis process, therefore, combined both theory-based and data-driven content analysis. The epistemological understanding of the researcher’s subjectivity in our analysis means that the researcher influences how the categories of findings are formed as well as on the interpretation of what has been meant in the discussions, interviews and when reading the research data (see *Figure 2*, Jääskeläinen, 2023). Therefore,

even in our team, different researchers would have read the collected data differently and emphasised different things. However, the strength of our analysis was the intense collaboration between our researchers' group, because the collective sense-making discussions helped to bring different perspectives into the final findings, even though most of the data analysis was made by Pauliina Jääskeläinen. Also, the richness and multitude of our research data made it possible to look at the same events from multiple perspectives: participants' sayings, doings, experiences and researcher-facilitator-co-learners' doings, experiences, sayings and thinking-analysing-sense-making were all taken into account. The categories, summaries and bullet points gained from the content analysis of the Shared Memoing Matrix materials were arranged first into the case analysis template by RQs and then combined into short texts, which summarised their content. In general, the data analyst searched for emerging phenomena that could enhance the understanding of embodied and aesthetic methods as pedagogical interventions for democracy-as-becoming. The outcomes of this analysis process are therefore in line with the qualitative content analysis as a flexible, contextual and subjective process, where the most important thing is to capture valid insights with an engaged reading of the research material (Schreier, 2012, pp. 24–27). Hence, the reach-searching movements (Jääskeläinen, 2023; 2023b) were part of the analysis as a back-and-forth movement of summarising, finding repetitive patterns of movement, sensing what reading the material evokes in the researcher's body (Guschke, 2023; Jääskeläinen, 2023) and thinking of what kinds of illustrations could describe the findings. These movements aimed to highlight the most relevant insights for the development of the AELD Framework and Guides.

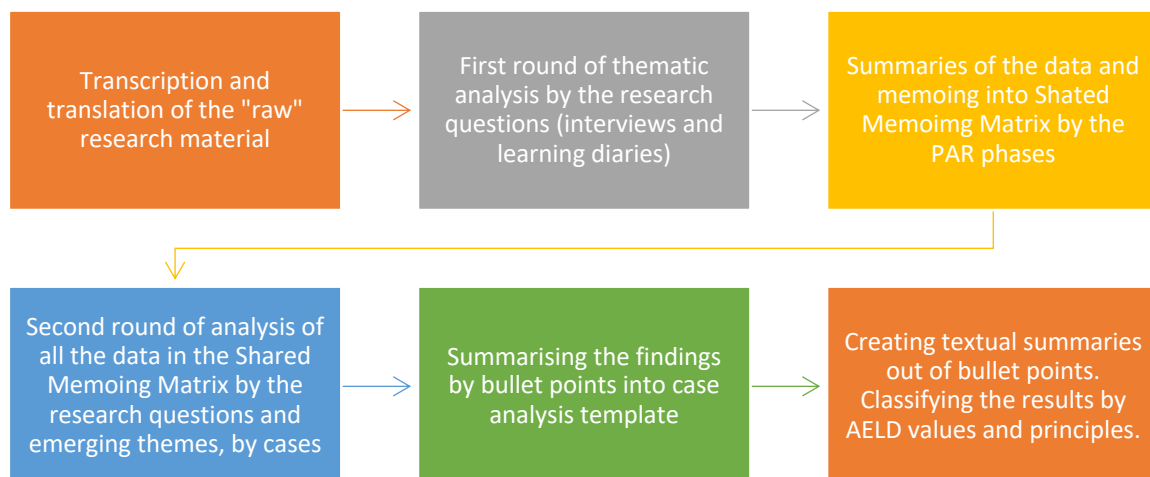


Figure 3 Data analysis process

3. Research Findings

RQ1. Regarding process: a) How do participants experience being introduced to and working with the Prototype Framework and Guides? b) In what ways is AELD co-created and facilitated through ABE methods?

In the early phases, when AELD was first introduced to potential participant teachers, there was general interest and enthusiasm towards the subject. We found out that bringing AELD to the practices of HE requires from those, who had not used embodied and aesthetic methods before, courage to throw oneself as a teacher to the unknown territory. On the other hand, some teachers were familiar with embodied methods and used them already in their teaching. For those, the AELD Framework worked as a justification and affirmation for their approach. In the introduction phase, the earliest draft of AELD was discussed with teachers, and at that time, they proposed more clarity and connections between the theoretical implications and practical pedagogical methods. More concreteness was requested on what one is expected to do in practice with AELD.

Teachers, who expressed their interest in joining the project, were invited to professional learning workshops to familiarise themselves and to have concrete, embodied experiences of how the Framework and Guides can be transformed into pedagogical practices. There were in total of 17 participants in six different workshops including our researcher-facilitator team (Pauliina Jääskeläinen, Susan Meriläinen and Joonas Vola). 10 of us ended up conducting the teaching trial. Several interested teachers expressed the lack of time to read and comprehend the Prototype Framework and Guides. Only a couple of those who did trials familiarised themselves fully with the written materials. The rest relied on their understanding of them through the workshops and mentoring sessions. In each phase, there were more interested teachers than those who did the trial at the end. The researcher-facilitators (Pauliina Jääskeläinen and Joonas Vola) offered individual mentoring sessions for teachers to help in the planning process of their trials. These face-to-face encounters, concrete trials of embodied methods and discussions based on them were crucial for teachers to become able to try AELD. If they were only given the Framework and Guides, they probably would not understand how to connect the ideas in them to their teaching practices. This shows, how important it is that the teachers understand in an embodied way for example how to a) recognise the prejudices by using the embodied and arts-based methods b) recognise the resistance towards the methods in themselves c) what it means to use body movement as a reflective medium d) recognise one's relation to one's body (e. g. notions of body shame) e) to experience concepts like democratic values with the feeling, sensing and moving body f) use arts-based and movement-based activities in a symbolic way g) surrender to vulnerability of encountering others through the whole bodies in a more direct, embodied way and practising to seeing others as whole bodies.

Based on these introductory and familiarization events and workshops, teachers defined goals for their experiments and chose methods they wanted to use in their trials. The methods the teachers chose were mostly those they had experienced in the workshops. Even though they read the HE Guide, they found that it was not suitable to implement into prevailing courses,

but was aimed at teaching democracy as such. Also, from teachers' perspectives, implementing the methods proposed in the guide would have required more work and time than they had available. Some participant teachers used several different activities to create a personal relation to the subject of teaching and to facilitate collective responsibility for the learning event. For many, the goal was to encourage students to be involved in discussions. Some teachers used only one embodied activity, but they thought more about the democracy of the learning situation by thinking and transforming their habitual practices of teaching aiming at lowering the hierarchies. Those practices related to 1) spatial arrangements, 2) making oneself as a teacher more humane and vulnerable in front of the students 3) teacher attending to the activities as an equal participant 4) stepping out explicitly of the expert role and valuing students' experiences 5) giving students possibilities to decide some of the teaching arrangements 6) developing one's responsiveness to the teaching situation and differences of the students.

Teachers experienced taking the AELD dimension into their teaching as arduous, even if they had used arts-based and embodied methods before. The most notable transformation during the AELD trials happened in teachers' learning how to think holistically the democracy of learning and to connect the embodied methods to this process. The teacher, who did two iterative cycles of trials, reported that the courage and willingness to guide embodied exercises increased on the second time. Students experienced the AELD methods very intensive and intimate when they were used extensively during the courses. This should be taken into account when planning the courses so that they do not get too weary. For example, more breaks should be included or embodied, participatory methods can be balanced with individual work and traditional lecturing.

There was variation in how teachers prepared students for the use of AELD methods. Those who had them more extensively prepared students more thoroughly than those who used only one or two exercises as part of their regular teaching. Based on our research material, some claim can be made that preparatory 'speech' about the co-creation of safe space via receptive gaze affected the feelings of trust and safety and therefore encouraged students to throw themselves into exercises as well as the discussions. In general, the learning atmosphere was experienced as safe by the students, which increased participation in discussions. However, individual experiences on this varied in the learning groups and there were even opposing opinions and experiences within the same learning group about the embodied methods (see Jääskeläinen and Helin, 2021). Also, even the same methods with the same preparation and teacher resulted in different responses in different groups.

Some teachers used fewer AELD ideas and methods than they had planned, because of sudden hesitation or embarrassment, which put the teacher too much out of their comfort zone. There was also a case, where a teacher faced strong resistance from a student's side and therefore, did not do exercises as much as they planned. This brings forth the question of how the AELD guides could prepare teachers better to face resistance in students and consider this as part of a spectrum of 'normal' responses when using embodied methods.

RQ2. Regarding the transformational change in participants: In what ways do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, lead to individual and collective growth in regard to

- *feelings for democracy, aesthetic awareness and qualities (such as empathic, ethical, and spiritual sensibilities):*

Participant teachers acted towards more democratic decision-making by lowering hierarchies in the learning interventions. They noted that recognition of individual and group level differences in students increased. They also reported both positive and negative results intending to activate students' participation in collective responsibility of the learning.

The students had notions that the theory and practising of the acceptive gaze helped to support one another in the learning events. The students noted that empathy increased between them during the course (Work Counselling as Embodied Dialogue) and that the alteration of the roles (teacher-led theory and exercises and student-led exercises) during the course increased their sense of democracy.

In the second iteration of the course Towards an Equal Global Economy course, students learned, how social structures and individual experiences as bodily sensations are connected. For example, the global economy was not anymore just a theoretical concept, but it was understood through its consequences on individuals' well-being, lives and therefore to functioning of society.

- *collaborative, reflexive and critical capabilities:*

Teachers reported increasing courage to express themselves via AELD methods during the trials. However, in some courses, the teachers did not observe any change compared to the courses they had had before. Thus, the context, the subject of study and individual differences affect the collaborative, reflexive and critical capabilities.

The students highlighted that the collective creation of trust is important when reflexive capabilities are developed through embodied methods. Some expressed notions of increased trust during the course (Work Counselling as Embodied Dialogue), but also experiences of mistrust due to unfamiliar groups were brought to attention. The students emphasised that collaborative meaning-making has an important role in understanding the meanings of the embodied methods. However, students' preconceptions about the AELD methods do not dictate the outcome: one can learn through the embodied methods even though one does not "get" them or like them in the first place.

- *openness to newly 'seeing' the other:*

The teachers reflected on the transformation from an individualistic learning culture to a more collective one, wherein the responsibility of learning would be shared, and found that this is a slow and difficult process. The notable transformation was still apparent in the teachers and how they saw themselves, their role and how they would like to relate to the differences in students. The students also expressed increased curiosity, interest and respect towards others' points of view.

- *willingness to move towards more reflexive and critical modes of awareness and knowing that reconnect with the body as a source of learning:*

The teachers recognised the importance of the skills of handling emotions, hence recognising and reflecting on them in HE, which in turn prepares students for work life. The teachers noted that some students were more capable and skilled than others in recognising their bodily sensations and feelings. Some learned skills to use body movement as a reflective medium and to connect their movement responses to their habitual patterns of relating. The teachers also highlighted differences in how students reflect via embodied and arts-based methods: some students connect to the embodied and arts-based methods very concretely, while others were able to reflect the atmosphere, sensations, emotions, thoughts and theories via them. Various viewpoints toward AELD methods were observed by the teachers: some students had quite a neutral attitude towards methods, some were nervous at the beginning, some were critical, some resisted, and some found them very useful and eye-opening. Generally, repetition relaxed the students and made them more courageous to throw themselves into activities. A couple of teachers mentioned in the interviews that it is not necessarily very easy to encourage students to reflect out loud on their experiences.

The students expressed somewhat mixed feelings and attitudes toward reconnecting with the body as a source of learning. For example, during a course “Work Counselling as Embodied Dialogue” skills of embodied reflection were learned, even though resistance was also present. In the first iteration of the course Towards an Equal Global Economy students expressed that it is challenging to reflect one’s sensations and emotions as part of writing learning diaries. Based on their own reported evaluation, skills in observing others’ bodily gestures increased especially in the course “Work counselling as embodied dialogue”. Also, skills in recognising one’s prejudices towards methods, others and self were increased in during this course. For some, it was difficult to connect the different experiential modes with each other (symbolism of arts-based and movement-based methods, emotions, thoughts and the subject of learning). However, choosing to take an open attitude helped in throwing oneself into embodied exercises that felt slightly uncomfortable at first. Certain exercises were also mentioned as particularly helpful, such as the bodyfulness exercise. Conducted at the beginning of the course, it made enabled students to find words for the sensations in the body, to relax and ground for the lecture. Some of the students realised that their attitude towards embodied exercises changed from amused, curious and surprised (for doing unusual things during the lecture) to understanding their purpose and usefulness at the end. On the other hand, some expressed that they did not “get” the purpose of the embodied reflection. Many students reported that bodyfulness exercise increased body awareness and calmed them down, which helped them to focus and to be receptive to the topic of the lecture. The importance of activating different senses, like listening, as part of learning was recognised. For example, using sound and music gave a deeper, personal and more concrete understanding of the subject of learning, brought it closer to its context and left a stronger memory imprint of the subject of learning. Using different senses brought more humane dimensions into learning theories and concepts.

- *capacity to challenge social injustices and engage creatively with conflict and antagonisms:*

In the teachers' interviews and workshops, there were discussions on the tensions between teacher's (political) opinions and the contrasting views of students and the emotional regulation, which is needed to stay responsive and open in such situations. The students' value backgrounds were not directly discussed in groups, but they were recognised indirectly from comments and gestures. The teachers brought out some examples of how the 'silent' student got encouraged and dared to express their opposing view against the 'leader' student. Thus, there was enough safety to express opposing views. Responsive pedagogy was also reflected by one of our participant teachers in the interview: "I took the diversity into account so that I wouldn't make the learning situation too uncomfortable to anyone with the exercises". Also, embodied regulation was brought into attention: understanding how 'discussion' and encouragement can be nonverbal, for example with encouraging eye contact. The students expressed that the acceptive gaze helped to support one another and they also reported experiences of participating more than they thought they would. An embodied exercise that was planned to illustrate the unequal positions in society helped students to understand how these positions affect one's choices in life, to recognise their own privileges and to realise connections between inequality and unethical behaviour. Throughout the research material, it became evident, that embodied and aesthetic methods have evocative power in how they bring emotions to the surface and evoke empathy towards others, for example in courses "Towards an Equal Global Economy", "Work Counselling as Embodied Dialogue" and in the workshops for teachers. The focus on bodily sensations and emotions helped also to reflect one's habitual ways of reacting and connect one's personal history to one's opinions. This helped to evaluate one's opinions and responses and to think also the opposing view while forming the argument of one's opinion. Students reported also that the low hierarchies between teachers and students helped to express one's opinions.

RQ3. What influence, if any, did the researchers have on how the Framework and Guides were used and the designs of AEL for democracy that emerged in the trials?

We (Pauliina Jääskeläinen and Joonas Vola) as researcher-facilitator-participants in our multiple and immersed roles were fully entangled in the whole co-creative process of learning with participants about how the ideas from AELD could be implemented and developed further. During the workshops and HE courses we taught as researchers/teachers, we balanced between multiple roles: as participants, facilitators, co-learners and researchers. These multiple roles gave us genuinely co-created collective experiences with participants and the change of roles gave a multitude of perspectives to research material. In the course "Work Counselling as Embodied Dialogue" and in workshops for participant teachers the roles were changed when one of us attended the exercises as a student or student with expertise, while the other remained more like an instructor or outsider. In some exercises, we attended as co-learners and peers, while instructing at the same time therefore holding dual positions simultaneously. This fluidity of roles lowered and sometimes even obliterated the hierarchies and dichotomies between researchers/researched; teacher/student and facilitator/participant.

Individual mentoring sessions arranged for the teachers were fruitful and transformative dialogues, where learning happened in a reciprocal and iterative way because we as researcher-facilitators brought experiences and insights from each discussion to the next individual mentoring session. For research, our immersed positions enabled the collective sense-making processes with participants and colleagues. Our proximity and hands-on way of working can be seen as a benefit in interpreting the data, as we were there as whole human beings instead of distant observers or separate interviewers. The data was therefore genuinely generated in between the bodies and collective sense-making discussions in which we participated as researchers and peers. However, the multi-roles required us to balance between sharing and taking responsibility and sharing our views and suspending them to create room for different voices.

RQ4. As the RQ4 is “What evidence-based conclusions for revision and refinement of the Prototype Framework and Guides emerge from the experience of using the Prototypes and addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?” we decided to answer this question in section 6, which summarises learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guides from RQ’s 1-3 and some additions directly from the research material that could not fit under the previous RQ’s.

4. Limitations

Approaching research as *reach-searching* (Jääskeläinen, 2023) alongside post-qualitative research methodologies, which emphasise flexibility, reflexivity, and non-traditional ways of knowing, applied in analysing the data, offer significant advantages in exploring complex, nuanced phenomena such as democracy-as-becoming. However, certain limitations to this type of research design can be recognised.

Methodologically post-qualitative research is not governed by fixed protocols or standardized procedures, which can make it difficult to replicate studies or compare findings across different settings and contexts. The emphasis on flexibility and subjectivity means each study takes a unique approach, making it harder to generalise findings. This lack of generalizability can be seen as a limitation if researchers or stakeholders seek broader applicability. Additionally, the exploratory nature of post-qualitative research can make it resource- and time-intensive in both data gathering and analysis. Integrating more traditional qualitative methods – in this case, thematic and content analysis – into the fluid, emergent nature of post-qualitative data (e.g., creative and narrative forms) can also be challenging. However, the qualitative research’s goal is not usually replicability or generalization as it recognises the complexity of human societies and the researcher’s subjective involvement in the research process (Schreier, 2012, pp. 24–27, van Manen, 2016). Instead, the purpose is to increase understanding of the complexities of democracy-as-becoming by focusing on the multitude of experiences regarding the same phenomenon.

Practical challenges and limitations in data collection and analysis included some participants dropping the courses or trials. For example, to begin with, more teachers were interested in participating, but ca. 60% (10 out of 17) continued all the way to the trials. In terms of students,

not all enrolled returned lecture diaries or reflections, resulting in less complete data. Also, just two teachers out of ten were able to complete more than one iteration of their course, thus the ability to analyse changes between iterations is limited with the available data.

5. Relevance of Context

The way cultural context affected the use of AELD showed in how the goals of trials were formed. As many things can be said to be democratic in Finnish, HE and Professional/Organisational learning, AELD worked as a justification to continue working towards democratic values through embodied and aesthetic methods. The introduction phase showed us, that Finnish educational institutions are already relatively democratic and advanced also in the use of different arts-based and embodied teaching methods. Perhaps for that reason, nobody from the faculty of education participated in teaching trials even though we had participants from every other faculty at the ULA.

The teachers (according to the interviews) would like to see more power sharing in HE settings in the form of active participation in the discussions and collective caretaking of the learning situation. There still seems to be a tendency, for the students to think that the higher knowledge is in the teacher's head and they might fear commenting to not say anything 'wrong'. This is the case, especially in larger groups. In smaller groups, it is easier to create a collectively trusting situation, where it is easier to take responsibility for the collective discussion. But this varies depending on the composition of the individual groups.

6. Learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guides

We included references to Individual and collective learning, Organisational learning, and Epistemic transformation to help further development and categorisation in the cross-case analysis. Results are categorised here by how they can contribute to the democratic values and principles defined in the Prototype Framework (AECED, 2025) because the aim of the project is to find out, how these could be advanced in the educational settings via embodied and aesthetic methods.

Results related to the AELD values

Freedom

Implementing AELD would need more freedom to challenge current institutional practices, goals and pressures. The lack of freedom showed especially as a lack of time and energy to attend the AELD. This question should be brought to the institutional level to give AELD the possibility to transform education for democracy (organisational learning). A recommendation for bringing this issue to the administrative bodies should be added to the Pedagogical Guides.

Equality/Equity

AELD needs to take the diversity of bodies into account to not become an ableist Framework e.g. different capabilities (and disabilities) in bodies and in recognising one's emotions, moving and courage to throw oneself into a vulnerable position (individual and collective learning). This can be added to the Guides as instructions, on how to a) do embodied analysis of the groups and individuals' current possibilities to attend the planned activities, b) how to teach reflective skills (e. g. recognising and naming one's emotions) and c) how to practise and teach the acceptive gaze (see Case 6) towards one's and others' limitations.

Eco-social learning should be included in AELD to extend democracy to more than the human world and to extend the value of equity to other species and nature (epistemic transformation).

The similarities of people should be taken into account in the Pedagogical Framework, to help find commonalities, not only differences in democracy-as-becoming (epistemic transformation).

The embodied methods can be used to teach and to have an embodied experience of what (un)equality means and how it feels in the body. Example activities on this matter should be included in the Guides.

Responsiveness

Responsiveness in the teacher's role requires openness and tolerance of the emerging opposing opinions in the learning situation. Instructions on how the acceptive gaze (see Case 6) might help in tolerating contrasting views in oneself and among the students should be added to the Guides.

The composition and size of the group affect how students participate. Each group is different and therefore teachers need to have flexibility and responsiveness on how and which methods to use to reach the goals. The individual composition of each group showed the problem of generalisability of any pedagogical methods. For these reasons, teachers should have training in embodied methods. This would provide them with personal experience with embodied methods, which would increase their understanding of the ideologies behind the methods and would provide teachers with multiple different activities they could use. In Guides, there could be at least a recommendation to get into such training.

Results related to the principles of democracy-as-becoming in AELD

Relational well-being

The AELD pedagogical model should have instructions on how to instruct students and teachers to sense their personal boundaries and how to work with some uncomfortableness when trying something new. The Pedagogical Guides should include information, on how teachers can recognise and work with their boundaries (e. g. deciding how much they want to share their personal experiences and matters or to take the emotional work onto their shoulders from students).

The implementation of AELD needs balancing to not burden teachers and students with the intensity of the embodied methods. Using both lecturing and embodied exercises can help in

this within the HE context. Being in responsive “mode” is energy-consuming. This needs to be considered when planning the duration of whole-body-engaging learning.

Transforming dialogue

Time emerged as a crucial factor in many ways in the research material. All the AELD methods’ outcomings and consequences, hence the transformation these methods might promote, will not become visible immediately. They can be impulses for different thinking, acting, and moving, which will be realized much later. The possibility of indirect and “hidden” future consequences of the AELD should be recognised. AELD needs repetition to become a transformative dialogue in the institutions (organisational learning). Lack of time can prevent implementing AELD because it requires extra work beyond everything else (organisational learning). Instructions on how to deal with time would be useful to add to the Guides.

The implementation of the AELD shouldn’t become individual extra work for teachers, but implemented in institutional time and work as a collective, reflective implementation of the methods and ideology behind them to become genuinely transforming dialogue at the institutional level (organisational learning). The implementation of AELD should happen in dialogic processes and in collaboration with peers (organisational learning). Instructions on how to seek for collective and peer support when implementing the AELD should be included in the Guides.

Concreteness to the definition of AELD concepts is needed. The core concepts and their meaning for pedagogical practices need clarification (epistemic transformation). Especially understanding embodied, aesthetic and democracy-as-becoming would help teachers implement AELD. This clarification should be done in Framework and Guides.

Transforming dialogue can be understood also as “inner” changes one experiences towards embodied methods. This became evident in cases, where the purpose of the embodied methods was not understood at first, but practising and reflecting them individually and in groups made participants realise their importance in learning. This notion can be added to the definition of the concept of transforming dialogue.

Holistic learning

Orientation to the exercises is important, because for example “body scanning” (bodyfullness) exercise helps to recognise and give words to the sensations and emotions, to focus, relax and calm down which all were experienced useful for the learning (individual and collective learning). It is important to present and repeatedly emphasise the idea and practices of the acceptive gaze (AG) in preparation for a safe enough learning situation. This includes aiming an acceptive gaze towards oneself and others to prevent excess inner judgments and thoughts that one could do something with the embodied and aesthetic methods “badly”. This can prevent participants and students from experiencing body shame, which can be present due to the vulnerable position the holistic learning methods done with the whole body can evoke (individual and collective learning). It is also important to have permission to quit or withdraw from the exercise at any time. This gives participants the feeling of control of their bodies and the learning experience, which is important for the feeling of safety. The possibility

to withdraw should be created without it becoming a “failure” or shameful exception. These preparatory instructions should be added to the Guides.

The symbolism of arts-based and embodied methods was difficult for some students to understand: further instructions in the Guides are needed on how to use arts-based and movement-based methods as symbolic and reflective mediums to reflect one’s feelings, sensations, thoughts and general atmosphere (individual and collective learning).

Relaxation is important to release tensions in using the AELD methods. These tensions can relate to different uses of space (lecture rooms turned into open movement spaces), being seen as a whole body and using one’s body and arts-based methods in learning especially in unfamiliar groups. All of these can bring both teachers and students on the edge of their comfort zone and therefore it is important to find ways to relax and ground (individual and collective learning). Examples of relaxation exercises should be included in the Guides.

Repetition makes the embodied methods easier to attend. Even though the response to the embodied methods was in some cases suspicious or even resistant at the beginning, the students reported, how they understood later their meaning and usefulness (individual and collective learning). The importance of using different senses and reflecting one’s sensations in the body through bodyfulness and body movement-based exercises in learning was recognised. They bring the subject of learning to a more concrete, personal and experiential level, which makes theoretical and conceptual learning deeper. There should be a notion in the Guides that even though the activities can evoke at first resistance when repeated, students (and teachers) get used to them when they become little by little ‘normal’ learning methods in HE. It should be noted that all of the emotions that are evoked while attending the embodied activities are welcomed and that they can be reflected as part of the learning process.

Others need more reasoning and instructions to be able to accept the methods while others think that giving the meanings beforehand prevents new insights from emerging. The teacher’s task is to balance between these poles and be responsive to the differences of the groups and individuals in this sense (individual and collective learning). Instructions on how to do this would be useful in the Guides. It could be useful to advise, on how much time each exercise takes (individual and collective learning). It would make planning the implementation of AELD easier.

More concrete instructions and more simple examples of the exercises are needed in the Guides. It would be useful to have both single interventions and all-course-piercing example plans.

Teachers need training to use and embody the embodied and arts-based method and their rationale. Because there cannot be universal guides which would fit every situation, each teacher needs a broader and experiential understanding of methods that can be applied. Teachers need to be in a similar, aesthetic reflexive mode (see case 6) as they ask students to be. This needs to be practised. The learners and teachers should be desensitized to

embodied methods little by little (individual and collective learning). Instructions on how to do this would be useful in the Guides.

The embodied and aesthetic methods showed their potential to connect the individual experiences to the functioning of the larger whole. This perspective should be emphasised in the AELD Framework and Guides with examples for example by adding an example from the research material.

Power sharing

The current architecture in HE often prevents the use of AELD methods and its ideology. The auditoriums and festive spaces force the bodies into certain positions maintaining the hierarchies between teachers and students. The current teaching spaces diminished in some cases participation in discussions and innovative use of embodied methods. This should be considered in Pedagogical Guides. There could be some instructions on how to use existing spaces creatively. Some examples of how participating teachers did this, could be added from the research material to the Guides.

Collective responsibility and care for others is not easy to facilitate in the current Finnish HE context. It is a big challenge to try to change the individualistic mindset and culture we have in Western countries. However, our research material showed, how the evocative power of embodied and aesthetic methods can cultivate empathy towards others and evaluate one's own actions and personal-historical backgrounds, which contribute to the understanding of power dynamics in groups. Instructions and examples on how to facilitate collective responsibility and care should be added in the Guides.

Reflecting (un)democratic practices via aesthetic and arts-based methods in educational settings

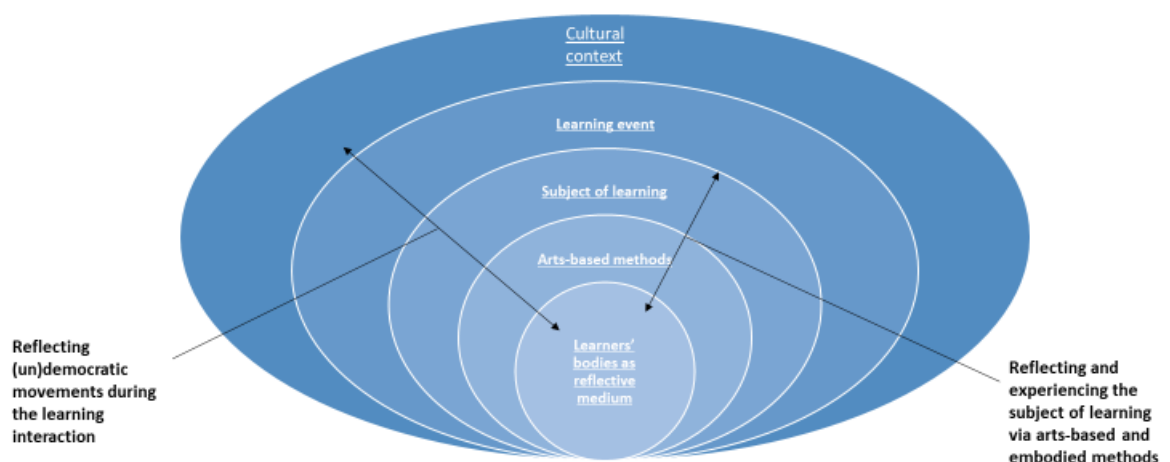


Figure 4: Proposal for AELD model

This model was done by Pauliina Jääskeläinen presented to AECED colleagues on the 12th of November 2024 and based on feedback, the circle of Cultural context was added.

7. Ethical Reflection and Gender Dimension

The research process was designed and carried out according to the code of conduct for research integrity and ethical guidelines for good research practices. The research plan underwent an ethical review by the research ethics committee of the ULA. PAR for Case 5 and Case 6 sought to promote an inclusive, participatory learning environment that is open, inviting and engaging to all. A particular challenge for this type of research was the ethical considerations that arose from deeply engaging with participants' lived experiences via ABE methods. Thus, special attention was paid to creating a safe space for learning encounters via emphasising principles of democracy as becoming and practises such as the acceptive gaze.

While gender as a theoretical and analytical approach was not specifically highlighted in the original research design, the focus on AEL necessitated identifying and incorporating a gender perspective. Furthermore, the Finnish research team includes a specialist in gender research. The research team draws from an approach to gender which recognises that gender is not a singular, static concept but a fluid and relational experience that shifts across different contexts and is shaped by the intersecting forces of power, history, and social positioning. This approach also allows for an exploration of how gender interacts with other social categories such as race, class, sexuality, and ability in complex, situated ways. Ensuring relevance involves remaining attuned to these intersections, capturing the nuances of lived experiences, and allowing space for gender and other identities to be expressed in ways that reflect their complexity and multiplicity within the data.

In practice, gender dimension was considered in the materials and processes in PAR, e.g. the course contents, tools, and the online platform, which were all designed to be gender sensitive. We actively encouraged and supported the participation of all genders in course, learning, and workshop activities. Gender stereotypes in examples and case studies used in PAR, if emergent, were critically addressed, discussed, studied and problematised respecting the safe learning space of each group or individual. The inclusive language was promoted. For gender pronunciation, the Finnish language only has a gender-neutral/non-binary third-person expression (hän). In expressions such as different professions, wherein gendered language has a history, non-gendered versions were used.

Data on participant gender was not systematically collected across all the PAR phases and trial courses. This somewhat limits the ability to systematically analyse gender as a variable or gender-specific questions, but our approach rather emphasises the embodied lived experiences in their complexity, not only, or even primarily, gender. When collected, the self-definition of gender was emphasised. For example, at the beginning of the interviews, the participant-teacher's gender was asked as an open question so that they could define it themselves. Most of the participant teachers, although not all, identified as women, a couple of them as men and one as non-binary. This gender division might be due to the consideration

of body, movement, emotions, and sensations as representing culturally feminine aspects and knowledge, therefore not being attractive for those who wish to identify with culturally respected more masculine skills and knowledge, related with rationality and objective reasoning (Lennon & Fischer, 2025). Thus, for the future development of AELD, it is crucial to consider the gendered cultural practices and valuations. AELD should not become a model that is seen as predominantly feminine or attractive to women exclusively.

During the analysis, gender-related observations were made, and gendered practices – and their interrelations to other social categories and practices – were identified when applicable. In the course "Work counselling as embodied dialogue", there were discussions and comments, which pointed out how the reflection of emotions is considered a feminine practice. The researcher who is specialized in studying gender in organizations noticed how the participants' ability to reflect on gendered practices and their own privileged position increased as the course progressed. This was most striking in the course participants' observations of the gendered use of voice in the large group (in comparison to small groups), where men were more likely to dominate the conversation, while women remained notably silent. This phenomenon reflects broader gendered power imbalances, which participants gradually began to notice and reflect upon more critically. Furthermore, as the course progressed, participants' ability to understand and articulate the significance of intersecting identities became more evident. In particular, Sámi students contributed significantly to discussions around the complexities of representation, highlighting the nuanced ways in which their Sámi identity intersected with their gender as well as other categories of social identity, and how these intersecting differences influenced the experiences of marginalised groups within larger societal frameworks. This recognition of the layered complexities of identity serves as a reminder of the importance of staying attuned to the diverse lived experiences of participants, and the need for research to create space for these identities to be expressed and explored authentically.

The ethical reflection in this research underscores the importance of adopting an intersectional approach to gender that does not treat it as a static or singular concept but as a dynamic, relational force shaped by various intersecting identities. The research highlights the necessity of creating a space for critical reflection on power structures, including how gendered practices manifest and are internalised by individuals. By providing opportunities for participants to engage with these issues, the research fosters a deeper understanding of gender and its intersections with other social categories, contributing to a more holistic and nuanced approach to gender in educational contexts and society more broadly.

Our research approach, where the researcher is embedded in the data production and research is considered a reciprocal and interactive creation between all who are involved it requires good and critical self-reflection skills from the researchers to be able to create knowledge, which includes sufficiently the diversity of perspectives. Because our epistemological understanding includes the view, that research is always situational (Haraway 1988), done from *somebody's* perspective, the constant movement of ethical reflection is needed to evaluate how the different voices are presented in data analysis. This reflective

movement is needed especially when embodied research methods are used to protect the vulnerabilities, which might emerge because these methods can get into more intimate levels than some more traditional ways of research (see Jääskeläinen 2023, 34).

Finland Case Report

Case 6

Phase/Educational Setting: Adult, Professional, and Organisational Learning

VEN-Approach: Visual and Embodied

1. Case Description

Participants: HE teachers at the ULA (see Case 5), Dance and Movement Therapists, Alex Arteaga from the University of Arts Helsinki, Professor Mar Pérezts from EmLyon Business School, France, Master's students in Psychology of Leadership at the ULA.

Location: The workshop for Dance and Movement Therapists in Tanssikeidas, Helsinki, others at the ULA, Rovaniemi, Finland.

Purpose – Relevance to Democracy-as-Becoming: The purpose of the ULA's Case 6 was to trial and develop methods and theoretical basis for the Prototype Framework and Guides in Adult, Professional and Organisational Learning settings in collaboration with HE teachers and students, researcher colleagues, and professionals in Dance and Movement Therapy. From the beginning, the research design in the ULA Cases was planned to promote democratic values and address democracy as a process of becoming, connecting to the principles of power-sharing, transforming dialogue, holistic learning, and relational well-being. This meant that researchers were co-producing, co-interpreting and co-meaning-making the data with the participants. The process of analysis happened in continuous discussions with the participants, our research team and colleagues whose research interests overlapped with ours. Inclusive participation, open exchange of views, connectedness to others as well as aesthetic and embodied awareness and critical thinking were emphasised in the learning and research processes.

Research Activities and Methods: In the workshops, mentoring sessions and the course for Psychology of Leadership students, the focus was on body movement-based exercises and the acceptive gaze (AG)² as an embodied intervention for democracy. In addition, other

² The AG (Jääskeläinen 2023): An attitude and practice, where one aims at looking at the reactions, emotions, movements and thoughts (one's own and the others') with acceptance. This is a shift from the tendency to classify things we observe with dichotomies of good/bad, beautiful/ugly etc. and instead open up to see what happens and how things emerge without instant judgment. Refusing instant judgments makes recognising our internalized ways of thinking and acting possible. The acceptance is considered here more like opening to new perspectives and taking an empathic attitude towards what is happening in us and in others than accepting e. g. others' opinions as such. Instead, it gives space for emphatically critical evaluation of the movements (emotions, thoughts and kinaesthetic movements) emerging in relationships. The AG as an embodied intervention is based on the understanding of attitudes as reversible movements in us (Merleau-Ponty 1968) in the sense that movements in our thoughts become sensible to others via our gestural movements. Therefore, practising the AG is always a reciprocal action, happening in the joint flow of movement with something or someone and with that, it contributes to the qualities of the shared experiences.

arts-based methods like drawing, modelling and collage were used. PLC card decks were used in exploratory ways in the workshops and the course.

Researchers: Pauliina Jääskeläinen: corresponding teacher in the course “Work counselling as embodied dialogue” for Psychology of Leadership students; corresponding facilitator of the workshops for the HE teachers, Facilitator of the workshop for the Dance and Movement Therapists, collector and primary analyst of the research data.

Joonas Vola: Co-facilitator of the workshops for the HE teachers. Teacher and facilitator in the course “Work counselling as embodied dialogue” for Psychology of Leadership students. Collector of the research data.

Mar Pérezts: Co-facilitator in one workshop for the HE teachers. Co-learner and developer in collegial discussions.

Sandra Wallenius-Korkalo: Teacher-participant in professional learning workshops for HE teachers, Co-analyst of the research data.

Time Frame:

- Workshops and mentoring sessions for the HE teachers Autumn 2023- the end of 2024.
- Workshop for Dance and Movement Therapists 21.9.2024
- Discussions with Alex Arteaga January-February 2024
- Course on Work Counselling as Embodied Dialogue for Psychology of Leadership students Spring 2024

2. Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis

Data Types and Sources

Types of Data: Qualitative

Sources of Data:

Researchers fieldnotes and reflection research journals in written and audio recorded /transcribed format (AI transcription) (based on the teachers’ workshops, teacher tutoring meetings and lectures of HE).

Recordings and their transcriptions of professional peer discussions with Alex Arteaga, Mar Pérezts and within the ULA research team (Pauliina Jääskeläinen, Susan Meriläinen, Joonas Vola).

Learning diaries from the students of Psychology of Leadership in written format, 12 learning diaries. Filled in PLC card deck templates.

3 templates from teachers of HE from the workshops.

60 photos from teacher workshops (of drawings, sculptures, art cards, collages, without pictures of participants). None of the photos in the data set include participants in any identifiable form.

4 drawings from teacher workshops.

Research Methodologies and Methods: The ULA research team's understanding of research within PAR aligns with methodologies, which take researchers as fully entangled as co-moving bodies in the research process (see Jääskeläinen, 2023; Land, 2023). This means that researchers are co-producing, co-interpreting and co-meaning-making the data with the participants. Therefore, the data gathering and analysis happened progressively throughout the PAR process, not only after the encountering events. The process of analysis happened in continuous discussions with the participants, our research team and colleagues from other Universities (see Case 5) whose research interests overlapped with ours. We would like to emphasise how knowledge production always happens in between the moving bodies, but the final interpretations, hence writing the results, research articles and other outcomes, are done from the researcher's unique *body situation* and through their *reach-searching* movements (Jääskeläinen, 2023).

One big influence on our understanding of research is post-qualitative research (St. Pierre, 2017; 2019), which questions the "normative", neoliberal (researching) humanist subject build of Enlightenment philosophies, where subjectivity is stable, and the world exists for humans to unpack and bring into the light its secrets. In the face of humanism's reliance on calculations, order, and discovery, post-qualitative research proposes that what is at stake is not a quest to get the "best" knowledge, but instead questions of what kinds of knowledges we need for what kind of lives we want to be part of" (Land, 2023, p. 11). In post-qualitative research, it is acknowledged that research practices are messy material-discursive enactments where the purpose is not to find final answers but ideas to be worked further (Taylor 2017 as cited in Land 2023, pp. 12-13). "It is the not yet, the yet to come—the immanent—that marks post qualitative inquiry (...) In an ontology of immanence, one becomes less interested in what is and more interested in what might be and what is coming into being." St. Pierre 2019, 4). What unites the post-qualitative approach with the phenomenologically informed *reach-searching* (Jääskeläinen 2023) is the understanding of research as a constant flux of becoming with.

In the AECED research context, we illustrated that researcher(s)' *body situation* as being part of the 'flesh' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) of the research context, enactments with participants (Jääskeläinen, 2023), Finnish cultural-historical context, and the collected research material (Figure 1). In the phase of analysing, the researcher interprets the results in constant movement between these different dimensions through the notes, recorded and transcribed interviews, from a uniquely constructed body situation with its previous learning history and current research environment (see Jääskeläinen, 2023b). Jääskeläinen (2023; 2023b) developed this research methodology by thinking of it with the interconnected body movements, thereby viewing research, as *reach-searching* movements with the participants, and in the data analysis process as thinking-with-movements with the collected research material (see St. Pierre, 2017).

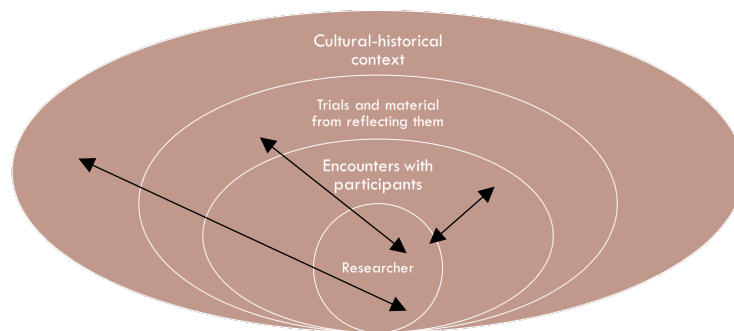


Figure 1: Researcher as an embedded part of the research material

To be able to answer the project's shared RQs developed in the AECED Methodological Framework (AECED, 2023, p.21), we kept them in our minds throughout the research process: during planning the workshops, and teaching trials, during our discussions in mentoring sessions and workshops, and while structuring and doing semi-structured interviews with participant teachers. Written materials and embodied experiences were summarised in the Shared Memoing Matrix, which we used to arrange thematically and based on different research phases. In the summarising, we used thematic analysis focusing on aspects that were asked in four research questions.

Data Analysis Process and its Theoretical Background: Notes from the workshops, mentoring sessions, and courses conducted by the researchers' teams were summarised in the Shared Memoing Matrix quite extensively. The themes that would help answer the shared RQs were then identified, and sub-themes related to them were created. Students' diaries were analysed using thematic analysis based on the RQs. Themes that could bring new insights to the development of the Prototype Framework and Guides were created based on this analysis. The interviews were transcribed using the Cockatoo programme; however, due to its insufficient quality, the analyst needed to listen to the recordings while analysing them to supplement the transcriptions. The interviews were also analysed thematically, guided by the RQs, and themes that could contribute to the development of the Prototype Framework and Guides were identified. The analysis process, therefore, combined both theory-based and data-driven content analysis. The epistemological understanding of the researcher's subjectivity in our analysis means that the researcher has an influence on how the categories of findings are formed as well as on the interpretation of what has been meant in the discussions, interviews and when reading the research data (see *Figure 1*, Jääskeläinen, 2023). Therefore, even in our team, different researchers would have read the collected data differently and emphasised different things. However, the strength of our analysis was the intense collaboration between our researchers' group, because the collective sense-making discussions helped to bring different perspectives into the final findings, even though most of the data analysis was made by Pauliina Jääskeläinen. Also, the richness and multitude of our research data made it possible to look at the same events from multiple perspectives: participants' sayings, doings, experiences and researcher-facilitator-co-learners' doings, experiences, sayings and thinking-analysing-sense-making were all taken into account. The categories, summaries and bullet points gained from the content analysis of the Shared Memoing Matrix materials were arranged first into the case analysis template by the RQs and

then combined into short texts, which summarised their content. In general, the data analyst searched emerging phenomena, which could feed into the understanding of the embodied and aesthetic methods as pedagogical interventions for democracy-as-becoming. The outcomes of this analysis process are therefore in line with the qualitative content analysis as a flexible, contextual and subjective process, where the most important thing is to capture valid insights with an engaged reading of the research material (Schreier, 2012, pp. 24–27). Hence, the reach-searching movements (Jääskeläinen, 2023; 2023b) were part of the analysis as a back-and-forth movement of summarising, finding repetitive patterns of movement, sensing what reading the material evokes in the researcher’s body (Guschke, 2023; Jääskeläinen, 2023) and thinking of what kinds of illustrations could describe the findings. These movements aimed to point out the relevant insights for the development of the Prototype Framework and Guides.

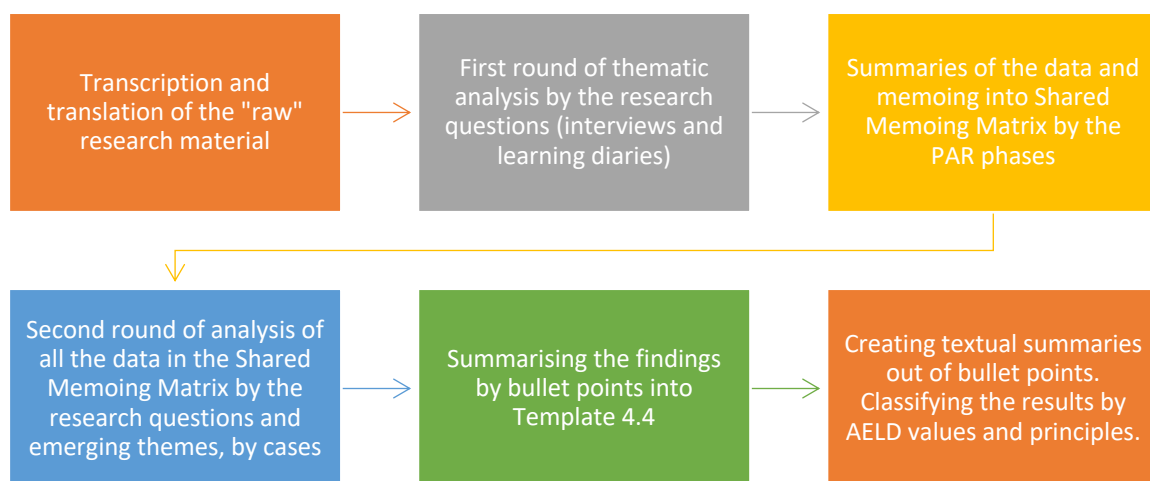


Figure 2: Data analysis process

3. Research Findings

NOTE: As ULA's research cases (Case 5 and Case 6) are overlapping in many ways, this document includes additional findings that have not already been mentioned in Case 5.

RQ1. Regarding process: a) How do participants experience being introduced to and working with the Prototype Framework and Guides? b) In what ways is AELD co-created and facilitated through ABE methods?

1) Workshops and mentoring sessions for HE teachers ULA.

In the workshops and mentoring sessions, we (Pauliina Jääskeläinen and Joonas Vola) facilitated, the major intervention for the democratising purpose was the emphasis on the AG (see Jääskeläinen, 2023), which was explained and reminded of before and during every

session. The idea was that this attitude would construct democracy in professional learning settings and connect to AELD values and democratic principles (AECED, 2025). Teachers found the AG important in many ways in their teaching trials to prepare students for the aesthetic and embodied methods but also to cultivate democratic values in teaching situations. The AG was also understood as a way to look at oneself and one's personal ways of teaching, experienced failures and teachers' own insecurities while attending the workshops where they were learning through the body movement and arts-based methods. The other goal was to develop responsiveness in our ways of facilitating the workshops and mentoring sessions. For this purpose, we aimed attention to our bodily responses and bodily expressions of the teachers to stay attuned to the teachers and their needs as well as bring our ideas raised from the conversations to serve the goals and purposes of the learning event.

The individual mentoring sessions we offered to the participant teachers became therefore iterative co-learning and co-transforming opportunities for embodied democracy in HE. Each session fed the coming workshops and mentoring sessions as we developed the ideas further by learning from the previous events. The mentoring sessions made it possible to focus on each trial and each teacher at the time, which was very beneficial because we could then help each of them plan their trial from their individual situation. Each teacher was different in their experience of using arts-based and embodied methods as part of their teaching and we took this into account when thinking with them about the suitable methods they could use for their goals. The purpose was to support teachers' current capacities and create plans they would feel safe enough to execute so that they would not feel too much out of their comfort zone.

2) Workshop for dance movement therapists

Pauliina Jääskeläinen held a one-day workshop for Finnish dance and movement therapists to discuss and teach AELD ideas and Prototype Framework and Guides with professionals of embodied methods. At the same time, Jääskeläinen was concentrating on how to make the workshop more democratic, hence, trying the ideas of AELD in a professional learning context. The workshop was conducted by altering between lecturing and body movement-based exercises and discussions based on all of these.

The focus of the body movement-based interventions was the interplay with the concepts and movement and experiences of the AG as an embodied intervention towards democracy-as-becoming.

3) Professional co-learning with colleagues Alex Arteaga, Mar Pérezts and the ULA research team

The AECED project evoked interest among our colleagues who did not attend as teacher participants but could be described as collaborative exchange partners, with whom we discussed the AELD. Dr Alex Arteaga attended one of the workshops for HE teachers, and professor Mar Pérezts co-facilitated one with the ULA research team. Arteaga had just started a democracy-related project at Uniarts Helsinki, funded by the KONE Foundation. Pauliina Jääskeläinen had a recorded discussion with him, where they compared the AELD and the project "How to Live Together in Sound? Towards Sonic Democracy." This exchange was

fruitful, especially for the conceptual development of the AELD. Pérezts planned, co-facilitated, and had a debriefing with Pauliina Jääskeläinen and Joonas Vola of one of the workshops for HE teachers. The discussions between colleagues can be thought of as reciprocal, professional co-learning events, which particularly fed our conceptual and theoretical understanding of how the AELD could be developed further. The ULA research team (Pauliina Jääskeläinen, Susan Meriläinen, and Joonas Vola) had two recorded debriefing discussions about our HE and professional learning cases, which advanced our sense-making of the AELD based on these cases.

4) Course “Work counselling as embodied dialogue” for the students of Psychology of Leadership

Even though this course was for HE students and also part of Case 5, due to its content and pedagogical methods, the students were able to offer insights on how the embodied methods could work in the work counselling context. The course had two parts: a) Theoretical foundations to work counselling, embodiment and the concept of the AG, and b) exercises led by course teachers Pauliina Jääskeläinen and Joonas Vola, after which students planned and facilitated embodied exercises in pairs to the rest of the group.

RQ2. Regarding the transformational change in participants: In what ways do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, lead to individual and collective growth in regard to

– *feelings for democracy, aesthetic awareness and qualities (such as empathic, ethical, and spiritual sensibilities):*

In the workshops, the teachers and dance movement therapists seemed to take collective responsibility for collective learning by listening to others and responding in a good spirit. There seemed to be room, enough safety and willingness for everyone to express their opinions. In the dance and movement therapists' workshop, notions of body movement emerged, as a way of regulating space-taking and how power sharing is in constant negotiation between the bodies that are present. The “weight” of the gestures, postures, and glances creates pressure for the facilitator to distribute the power. It became evident that the AG is in constant negotiation between the bodies, but the facilitator holds more power and responsibility to establish boundaries that facilitate the democracy of the learning situation. Therefore, there are tensions between practising the AG and sharing power as a facilitator.

– *collaborative, reflexive and critical capabilities:*

The facilitator needs to practise controlled freedom to be both responsive and to share the power. This balancing includes the capability to be critical towards oneself to estimate if the facilitator's insight, opinion or embodied reflection would serve the collective process. The facilitator needs to evaluate the purpose of one's comments, actions and interventions to give enough space for participants' and students' views.

– *openness to newly 'seeing' the other:*

The AG evoked feelings of liberation, both when being a “target” of it or while practising it towards others and creating space for the possibilities to open up to oneself and others in a new way. The AG enabled one to see the other as a whole body and through one’s whole body, which can be interpreted as a description of what opening up to see, sense and be with the other with one’s all senses means. Being under others AG was experienced as a healing and grounding sensation, where one has the permission to be exactly what one is at the moment without any judgments. The AG feels like a release from the expectations and endeavours of what one should be like or how one is. Practising the AG needs time and repetition and this learning needs also an AG: one cannot be perfect in practising AG. There were notions of how AG is a reciprocal and collective experience, like a symbiosis: When one can trust the other to look at them in an acceptive way – one dares to move and express them freely, which creates a feeling of connectedness and flow. The AG as an embodied movement of newly seeing the other includes curiosity and interest towards experiencing the other with the whole body. One can recognise when someone looks at you with an AG and also if the look is judgmental. Many expressed how aiming AG towards oneself is more difficult than aiming it towards others. It is more difficult to practise AG towards those who you know well than those you do not, because habitual patterns of thinking (e.g. opinions about someone you know) are difficult to change.

- *willingness to move towards more reflexive and critical modes of awareness and knowing that reconnect with the body as a source of learning:*

To reconnect the body as a source of learning requires getting in a different “mode” of openness, slowness, the ability to let things emerge and giving up too much control. This includes suspending one’s “natural attitude”-way of reacting, thinking and being (see van Manen, 2016). Using the body as a source of learning was a new thing to most of the HE teachers and students in this case. The body movement-based methods created therefore some nervousness and tension in the bodies, which was related to the fear of being judged or doing something wrong. Repetition makes it easier to throw oneself into these kinds of new exercises. There were also questions about trauma triggers when turning into a reflective mode of awareness in addressing the body as a reflective medium. Students of the Psychology of Leadership estimated that embodied methods can teach interaction skills in work communities and they can be used for example in recognising the sources of tensions between employees. Especially in students’ diaries, there were reflections on the relationship between rationalizing and being present in the body. While body movements, emotions and sensations can be reflected further, there is also value in just being calmly present in one’s body without analysing the feelings. The analysis of the sensations the body movement exercises evoke can make it easier to address them with words. For example, it could be powerful to work with a conciliation situation by asking the persons involved to step closer to each other and then reflect what kinds of feelings that evoked in them. The issue of personal boundaries came up in relation to using the embodied methods in work counselling as questions of how much one can be expected to share in work counselling about things that are considered as “too personal”. There emerged different perspectives in students’ diaries on how embodied reflection can be thought of. By connecting their perspectives, there can

be a suggestion made that responsive body awareness includes the ability to a) sense, name and empathize with one's own and others' feelings in the body b) open up to sense and observe the movements of the other with the whole body and the AG c) use this knowledge to act purposefully to advance the goals of the collective situation.

– *capacity to challenge social injustices and engage creatively with conflict and antagonisms:*

The facilitator's role in practising the AG is important in creating possibilities for the group to practise AG. The facilitator needs to become aware of their own prevailing prejudices and assumptions for example about how the embodied methods could work to take into account the differences between people in the workplace as much as possible. Practising AG requires recognition of one's own prejudices, and this can be learned through embodied methods. Even only one judgmental look can cause a feeling of unsafety, which highlights that AG is not a stable contract but in constant movement and negotiation between the bodies. With AG it is possible to understand the functioning of the work community from different angles and learn new acceptive attitudes towards the others, which increases equality within the work communities. Practising AG as a facilitator helps to get into the position of another, hence cultivating empathy. The non-classification power of the AG helps in seeing others as equal.

RQ3. What influence, if any, did the researchers have on how the Framework and Guides were used and the designs of AEL for democracy that emerged in the trials?

Most of the university teachers and dance and movement therapists knew the researcher-facilitator(s) and their previous work. Some of them expressed that they came to the project because of their interest in us and our ways of working. The roles of teacher-researcher-facilitators were immersed in the process as we worked in all of these roles simultaneously. We also took the freedom to apply the Framework and Guides in a creative way, which made the processes of their implementation genuinely co-created through collaborative thinking, doing, and developing with participants and colleagues.

RQ4. As the RQ4 is “What evidence-based conclusions for revision and refinement of the Prototype Framework and Guides emerge from the experience of using the Prototypes and addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?” we decided to answer this question in the section 6, which summarises learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guides from RQ's 1-3 and some additions directly from the research material that could not fit under the previous RQ's.

4. Limitations

Approaching research as *reach-searching* (Jääskeläinen 2023) alongside post-qualitative research methodologies, which emphasise flexibility, reflexivity, and non-traditional ways of knowing, applied in analysing the data, offers significant advantages in exploring complex, nuanced phenomena such as democracy-as-becoming. However, certain limitations to this type of research design can be recognised.

Methodologically, post-qualitative research is not governed by fixed protocols or standardised procedures, which can make it difficult to replicate studies or compare findings across different

settings and contexts. The emphasis on flexibility and subjectivity means each study takes a unique approach, making it harder to generalise findings. This lack of generalisability can be seen as a limitation if researchers or stakeholders seek broader applicability. Additionally, the exploratory nature of post-qualitative research can make it resource- and time-intensive in both data gathering and analysis. Integrating more traditional qualitative methods – in this case, content analysis – into the fluid, emergent nature of post-qualitative data (e.g., creative and narrative forms) can also be challenging. However, the qualitative research's goal is not usually replicability or generalisation as it recognises the complexity of human societies and the researcher's subjective involvement in the research process (Schreier, 2012, 24–27, van Manen, 2016). Instead, the purpose is to increase understanding of the complexities of democracy-as-becoming by focusing on the multitude of experiences regarding the same phenomenon.

Because our professional learning case was limited only to the trials of the team researchers (Pauliina Jääskeläinen and Joonas Vola) and one guest facilitator Mar Pérezts, the insights are limited to these collective, autoethnographical experiences and their reflections. The rest of the insights came from collaborative discussions and co-learning about the AELD in Adult, Professional and Organisational Learning contexts. Initially, there were interested teachers to try out the AELD in other professional learning contexts also, but the timeframes of the project prevented their participation (the ethical approval had not arrived before their cases started and therefore, they had to be left out of our research).

Finally, post-qualitative methods, by their very nature, challenge traditional research paradigms, leading to resistance from those who prioritize quantitative or fixed qualitative approaches. This resistance can make it challenging to gain broader acceptance and support for such research. These limitations underscore the complexities of using post-qualitative methods, suggesting that they are best suited for exploring nuanced, context-dependent phenomena rather than seeking broad, generalisable conclusions.

5. Relevance of Context

Alex Arteaga's background in Arts and philosophy influenced the way he could engage in the ideas of our project. Mar Pérezts' expertise in organisation studies, philosophy, and dance as well as their co-facilitation of one workshop gave us additional ideas on how to connect theoretical and practical dimensions of AELD. Dance and Movement Therapists as experts in body movement-based methods were able to rapidly and profoundly explore the meanings of the AG and gave meaningful feedback on the AELD prototypes from the perspective of their experiences on going to different contexts with body movement-based methods. The students in the course on Work Counselling as Embodied Dialogue evaluated the Adult, Professional and Organisational Learning Guide from the perspective of how they imagined the embodied methods could work in the work counselling context. Some of them had professional experience of work counselling and they all gained experience during the course while guiding embodied sessions to the peer students. The context of HE, where the workshops for

teachers were held, enabled theoretical discussions and findings, which were evoked by the embodied exercises and reflections on the Prototype Framework and Guides. For other matters, see Case 5.

6. Learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guides

We included references to Individual and collective learning, Organisational learning, and Epistemic transformation to help further development and categorization in the cross-case analysis. Results are categorized here by how they can contribute to the democratic values and principles defined in the Prototype Framework (AECED 2025) because the aim of the project is to find out, how these could be advanced in the educational settings via embodied and aesthetic methods.

Results related to the AELD values

Freedom

Based on the data, practising the reciprocal AG creates feelings of freedom, which can have a positive effect on the courage to express oneself through speech, body movement, and arts-based methods (individual and collective learning). Because of its non-judgmental emphasis, the AG also creates freedom for others to express themselves (individual and collective learning). The AG helps release the internalised pressures of trying to overly please, fit in or do as someone else expects (individual and collective learning). When the AG is experienced as reciprocal and mutual, it can become like a symbiosis, where one can trust to be looked at acceptive way and therefore, dare to move and express oneself freely (individual and collective learning). This can lead to the release of creative powers (see Jääskeläinen and Helin, 2021, p. 5) and create more safe atmospheres (Jääskeläinen, 2023, pp. 33–34) for the expressions of democratic freedom and use of AELD methods (individual and collective learning, organisational learning). The meanings and practical implications of the AG as an action creating freedom in educational settings should be added to the Framework and Guides.

Equality/equity

With AG it is possible to understand the functioning of the (work) community from different angles and learn new acceptive attitudes towards different others, which can feed equality and equity (organisational learning). The non-classification power of the AG helps in seeing others as equal (individual and collective learning, organisational learning). There is curiosity in the AG and it is an interest towards experiencing the other with the whole body, which can be an opposing attitude compared to the judgmental and hierarchical way of looking at the others (individual and collective learning, organisational learning). Teachers might be in an unequal position in regard to the time and energy resources to develop their teaching with AELD (organisational learning). The meanings and practical implications of the AG as an action creating equality/equity in educational settings should be added to the Framework and Guides.

Responsiveness

Looking at each other and self through the AG gives a sensation of being open to the possibilities, which is a specific body mode (individual and collective learning). Arteaga describes how this “aesthetic thinking” mode feels: “It feels in the body as relaxing, slowing down, suspension of interdiction, allowing things to emerge. In this mode, action is suspended and the focus is on opening oneself to become receptive, which feels like a sensation of going back and down. The body is attentive in a way that there is minimal tension, which is required for attention. Most of all it is a we-situation and it cannot be done alone. It is like being attentive to the collectiveness of the place, where the boundaries of one’s body and also their identity are softened. It is a sense of commonality, an empathetic situation where openness and circulation of, and between people are implied” (individual and collective learning). The proposal is that this shift of the body mode is needed to become responsive in a way which opens up the whole body and its senses to be in the intersubjective relations in a holistic way (individual and collective learning).

From this responsive body mode, it is possible to evaluate one’s insights, opinions and embodied reflection if they would offer something to serve the collective process at hand (individual and collective learning). The AG is important for the responsiveness of the teacher/facilitator because they are in the key position to create possibilities for others to practice AG (individual and collective learning, OL). The AG helps the teacher/facilitator to recognise one’s prejudices and assumptions and to take the differences of the others into account while planning the AELD implementation and methods one would use. Practising AG as a facilitator helps to get into the position of another (empathy), which is essential for responsive pedagogies (individual and collective learning, OL). The meanings and practical implications of the AG as a responsive attitude in educational settings should be added to the Framework and Guides. There could also be descriptions of how it feels to get into a more responsive mode (see Arteaga’s description above), hence, an explanation of what it means as an embodied experience.

Results related to the principles of democracy-as-becoming in AELD

Relational well-being

The AG was experienced as a healing practice (see also Lindsay et al., 2018) and can therefore contribute to relational well-being. Several participants expressed that it is the most difficult to aim AG towards oneself (individual and collective learning). The practising of AG is also fragile and relational: Even only one judgmental look can cause a feeling of unsafety (individual and collective learning). Therefore, the collective agreement and responsibility of AG is needed to maximize its nurturing benefits (individual and collective learning, OL). The capability to learn to draw one’s boundaries while sharing one’s personal sensations, emotions and thoughts is an important thing to consider in the AELD (individual and collective learning) (see Jääskeläinen et al., 2023). The meanings and practical implications of the AG for relational well-being in educational settings should be added to the Framework and Guides.

Transforming dialogue

The AG gives permission to oneself to be what one is at the moment thereby helping to engage in transformative dialogues with others (individual and collective learning, OL). The AG needs to be practised and repeated, it cannot be “adopted” at once (individual and collective learning). According to some students, the AG increased towards the end of the course when the understanding of its meaning as a concept and embodied practice deepened (individual and collective learning). Some students started to practise the AG also in contexts other than the classroom and noticed that the more familiar the relationships are, the more difficult it is to change patterns of thinking (individual and collective learning). This shows, how the AG can become a transformative practice for democracy also in wider society and extending beyond the institutional setting (organisational learning). The meanings and practical implications of the AG in creating space for transforming dialogue in educational settings should be added to the Framework and Guides.

Holistic learning

The AG contributes to holistic learning by enabling one to see the other as a whole body and through one’s whole body (individual and collective learning). Practising the AG is a reciprocal, collective experience, which enables a feeling of connectedness and flow (individual and collective learning). Internalizing the AG does not happen immediately but needs practice (individual and collective learning). The AG can be taught and learned: The students (in the course work counselling as embodied dialogue) learned to recognise AG as an embodied action of others and in themselves (individual and collective learning, OL). Instructions on how to teach the AG as part of holistic learning should be added to the Guides. The theory of the AG can contribute to the theoretical development of holistic learning in the Framework as an example of the reversibility of body movements (Jääskeläinen 2023).

It matters in which kind of voice the instructions are given. Soft and calm speaking voice and other purposefully used or unintended sounds are part of creating a safe enough space for embodied methods. For example, the calm and soft tone of the facilitator and the use of music can relax (individual and collective learning). Arts-based methods create a rupture in the current pedagogical tradition possibly enabling transformation through the alteration in the common, bringing also the common practices under study (individual and collective learning). In the Guides, there could be examples of how to use voice, music and sounds as part of holistic learning.

It needs to be evaluated if the methods are suitable for the work community they are intended. The embodied analysis of the group and its participants should be done beforehand and estimate if there are any physical or other characteristic hindrances to the methods. One should not assume the capability or willingness to do body movement-based exercises or reflect the emotions either (organisational learning). Instructions on how to evaluate groups and individuals’ capacities for embodied methods should be added to Guides.

Especially in academic publications about the AELD, there should be conceptual clarity on ontological understanding of the human being and related key concepts. For example, do we want to talk about aiming attention to the bodily sensations or like Arteaga puts it: Intensifying

awareness and reflective attentiveness (epistemic transformation)? Are we facilitating collective care of the learning process through embodied and aesthetic methods or like Arteaga: the possibilities of the aesthetic practices in the emergence of the “common self”? Are we reflecting the body movements that are happening in us (emotions, sensations, thoughts, kinaesthetic movements) or like Arteaga, changing our bodily disposition (epistemic transformation)? Therefore, more specific definitions of what we mean for example by embodied reflection should be discussed in the Framework.

To engage in holistic learning through embodied and aesthetic methods, it is important to repeat constantly that there is no right or wrong way to follow the instructions (individual and collective learning). This helps release the inner, judgmental tensions and shame that can be evoked especially in the exercises, where the whole body and its movements are used as a reflective medium. Even though this is already in the Guide Part 1, it could be added that this matter should be repeated constantly while using embodied methods.

The concern of possible trauma responses that might be evoked through embodied activities came into discussions. Also, the worries that the reflection of the emotions and other bodily responses would go “too deep” or therapeutical, were present (individual and collective learning, organisational learning). These matters should be taken into account in AELD to guarantee enough safe feelings for teachers and facilitators to use embodied and aesthetic methods as part of holistic learning for democracy. It would be useful to reflect these concerns with the knowledge and example exercises that address the healing power of embodied methods in trauma treatment (see e. g. Ogden, 2006) in the Framework.

Based on research data, the partial and holistic ways of including body awareness can be theorised as follows: *The holistic, responsive body awareness* includes the ability to a) sense, name and empathize with one’s own and others’ feelings in the body, b) open up to sense and observe the movements of the other with the whole body and the AG, c) use this knowledge to act purposefully to advance the goals of the collective situation. *Partial body awareness* includes parts of the holistic, responsive body awareness (epistemic transformation). This theorisation can be further developed in the AELD Pedagogical Framework.

Power sharing

There are tensions between the AG and power sharing as a facilitator, as facilitators are always more responsible for the learning situation than the participants. This brings a critical aspect to the practice of the AG (individual and collective learning) which should be acknowledged in the Framework and Guides. The possibilities of non-verbal power-sharing via bodily expressions could be further theorised and included in the Framework and Guides. It would be necessary to change the modalities of sense-making to understand the unity and collective responsibility of the learning process. This would require stepping back from one’s already-knowing self to a position of openness, where the space for learning something new in a new way opens up (individual and collective learning) (see e.g. van Manen, 2016). This should be discussed in the Framework.

7. Ethical Reflection and Gender Dimension

The research process was designed and carried out according to the code of conduct for research integrity and ethical guidelines for good research practices. The research plan underwent an ethical review by the research ethics committee of the ULA.

PAR for Case 5 and Case 6 sought to promote an inclusive, participatory learning environment that is open, inviting and engaging to all. A particular challenge for this type of research was the ethical considerations that arise from deeply engaging with participants' lived experiences via ABE methods. Thus, special attention was paid to creating a safe space for learning encounters via emphasising principles of democracy-as-becoming and practises such as the AG.

While gender as a theoretical and analytical approach was not specifically highlighted in the original research design, the focus on AEL necessitated identifying and incorporating a gender perspective. Furthermore, the Finnish research team includes a specialist in gender research. The research team draws from an approach to gender which recognises that gender is not a singular, static concept but a fluid and relational experience that shifts across different contexts and is shaped by the intersecting forces of power, history, and social positioning. This approach also allows for an exploration of how gender interacts with other social categories such as race, class, sexuality, and ability in complex, situated ways. Ensuring relevance involves remaining attuned to these intersections, capturing the nuances of lived experiences, and allowing space for gender and other identities to be expressed in ways that reflect their complexity and multiplicity within the data.

In practice, gender dimension was considered in the materials and processes in PAR, e.g. the course contents, tools, and the online platform, which were all designed to be gender sensitive. We actively encouraged and supported the participation of all genders in course, learning, and workshop activities. Gender stereotypes in examples and case studies used in PAR, if emergent, were critically addressed, discussed, studied and problematised respecting the safe learning space of each group or individual. The inclusive language was promoted. For gender pronunciation, the Finnish language only has a gender-neutral/non-binary third-person expression (hän). In expressions such as different professions, wherein gendered language has a history, non-gendered versions were used.

Data on participant gender was not systematically collected across all the PAR phases and trial courses. This somewhat limits the ability to systematically analyse gender as a variable or gender-specific question, but our approach rather emphasises the embodied lived experiences in their complexity, not only, or even primarily, gender. When collected, the self-definition of gender was emphasised. For example, most of the participant teachers, although not all, identified as women. A couple of them as men and one as a non-binary. This gender division might be due to the consideration of body, movement, emotions, and sensations as representing culturally feminine aspects and knowledge, therefore not being attractive for those who wish to identify with culturally respected more masculine skills and knowledge, related with rationality and objective reasoning (Lennon & Fischer, 2025). Thus, for the future

development of AELD, it is crucial to consider the gendered cultural practices and valuations. AELD should not become a model that is seen as predominantly feminine or attractive to women exclusively.

During the analysis, gender-related observations were made, and gendered practices – and their interrelations to other social categories and practices – were identified when applicable. For example, in the course "Work counselling as embodied dialogue", there were discussions and comments, which pointed out how the reflection of emotions is considered a feminine practice.

The ethical reflection in this research underscores the importance of adopting an intersectional approach to gender that does not treat it as a static or singular concept but as a dynamic, relational force shaped by various intersecting identities. The research highlights the necessity of creating a space for critical reflection on power structures, including how gendered practices manifest and are internalized by individuals. By providing opportunities for participants to engage with these issues, the research fosters a deeper understanding of gender and its intersections with other social categories, contributing to a more holistic and nuanced approach to gender in educational contexts and society more broadly.

Our research approach, where the researcher is embedded in the data production and research is considered a reciprocal and interactive creation between all who are involved requires good and critical self-reflection skills from the researchers to be able to create knowledge, which includes sufficiently the diversity of perspectives. Because our epistemological understanding includes the view, that research is always situational (Haraway 1988), done from *somebody's* perspective, the constant movement of ethical reflection is needed to evaluate how the different voices are presented in data analysis. This reflective movement is needed especially when embodied research methods are used to protect the vulnerabilities, which might emerge because these methods can get into more intimate levels than some more traditional ways of research (see Jääskeläinen 2023, 34).

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Germany Case Report

Case 7

Phase/Educational Setting:

Higher Education & Adult, Professional
and Organisational Learning

VEN-Approach:

Visual

1. Case Description

Participants: The study was conducted in a face-to-face, three seminar course setting with bachelor's and master's students (a total of 51 participants) from the Faculty of Education at UMR, Germany. Although the setting is HE, the topic refers to professional and organisational learning. The courses refer to organisational education consultancy toward organisational democracy, held each semester in Master (MA7 seminar) and Bachelor (BA11 seminar) courses.

Location: The research was conducted in three face-to-face MA and BA seminars at UMR in Germany.

Purpose — Relevance to Democracy-as-Becoming: As students in both BA and MA are already engaged in education and social work through internships, volunteer experiences, and jobs in the professional field, we see them as future professionals in education (Weber 2020). To connect with their reality at daily work and study life, we started our PAR journey with an image- and experience-based approach. Identifying democracy challenges in their workplaces and organisations, using a four-step approach, they developed their analysis of democracy problems into solutions, transformational strategies, and methods to achieve this transformation.

Connecting to the Methodological Framework (AECED, 2023), Case 7 refers to the layer of individual and collective learning. Although the organisational contexts are addressed regarding the problems of democracy (Dewey 1927), we systematically analyse the layers of individual and collective learning. This case addresses **RQ 1**, which refers to the resonance of students' experiences with frameworks and guides. As the Framework and Guides did not sufficiently refer to the core methodical approach of PLC trialled in German Case 7, the Framework and Guides needed further development. This was addressed in real work-life settings, where democracy-as-becoming is or can become a lived practice and an everyday ethic (Dewey 1969). As in many cases (organisational) democracy is a 'task before us' (Dewey 1991), students trained themselves in an empowering mode, providing resources, developing in small groups PLC-based transformational methods for democratisation, trialling them collaboratively with their peers, describing their methods in templates and producing like this together the step by step growing "Students' Method Book for democracy-as-becoming." The second **RQ 2** is addressed as we analyse students' individual and collective growth. As the

Framework and Guides insufficiently refer to the PLC, we invited students to use them based on their free choices. The researchers did not take influence here but evaluated the Framework and Guides' acceptability in the groups (**RQ 3**). This case addresses **RQ 4**, too. Based on the research, evidence-based conclusions for revision and refinement of the Framework and Guides can be formulated based on the experience of using and especially further developing the prototypes.

The **four dimensions of democracy** were explored through the PAR phases.

Relational well-being—Students were introduced to common methodologies for connecting democracy with self, others, and the planet.

Responsive pedagogies—This research developed and employed inclusive and interactive teaching methods that bridged students' academic studies with their future professions. Additionally, students had the opportunity to develop their own methods.

Transformative dialogue— The seminar settings encouraged both individual and group reflection through the use of the Pattern Language of Commoning cards (PLCs) in each session, as well as by incorporating PLCs and an image folder for peer interviews. This created a space where discussions were more open to Otto Scharmer's (2007) different levels of listening. Furthermore, the PAR process itself opened a democratic space for dialogue through the 19 methods tested. This dimension of democracy was the most relevant one that students highlighted in their experiences of the PAR process.

Power sharing—Students were empowered to take active roles in the democratic transformation process within their professional domains and in their small groups.

Research Activities and Methods: The research activities took place over three semesters in seminar courses, integrated methods using PLCs. The PLC card deck draws on the concept of "patterns," as defined by architect Christopher Alexander (1999). In his work, patterns are tools that support flexible and adaptable solutions to problems, and they describe successful problem-solving practices that arise in similar contexts. They are an interplay between context, problem, and solution, and are especially relevant in experience-based organisational and societal learning.

In this research, the patterns in the PLC card deck are not just abstract ideas, but concrete practices that can be applied to real-world scenarios. The deck helps shift attention from individual concerns to collective engagement, encouraging deep reflection and re-orienting participants' thinking. The goal is to support individuals in becoming co-creators of systems, helping them to explore collective imaginaries of transformation and articulate the changes happening within those systems.

The PLCs used at the German case researchers (Case7-10) contained 33 action pattern cards. These practice patterns have been condensed by Silke Helfrich from over 400 interviews worldwide – they can be described as solutions and practice patterns of success that are helpful and suitable in a variety of problem situations in order to better master the challenges of successful communication, cooperation and joint problem solving (Helfrich & Bollier 2020),

and is designed to address critical practices for building democratic and inclusive communities.

The seminars followed a structured process, beginning with an introduction to the project and familiarisation with the Framework and the Guides. Working in small groups, students critically discussed democracy-related issues in their respective fields, actively engaged in problem-solving using the provided Framework and Guides, and designed their own pedagogical AELD methods for real-life scenarios aimed at democratisation. Each group then compiled their methods and reflections into a 'Student Development Method Book,' which contributed to the project's resources. The final phase involved both individual and collective reflections on their learning experiences in the context of democracy. The following structured activities were implemented across three iterations:

- **Problem Identification Paper** – Small groups produced one-page papers identifying democracy-related issues within their professional fields.
- **Solution Proposal Paper** – Each group developed methods to address these democratic challenges.
- **Method Presentation and Intervention**—Groups designed pedagogical interventions for real-life democracy issues and implemented these solutions in a seminar setting. In this stage, students trialled their methods with other seminar participants.
- **Students' Developed Methods Book** – Participants documented their methods in structured templates provided by the research team, contributing to the overall Framework and Guides. They also reflect on learnings, democratization process, potentials for further process design,
- **Interviews**—Students conducted duo and trio peer interviews, reflecting on their individual and collective learning experiences for democracy. They used PLCs and image folders to facilitate these reflections. The research team provided guiding interview sheets, but students independently organized, conducted, and recorded the interviews.

Researchers: Susanne Maria Weber, Lea Spahn, Kardelen Dilara Cazgir, and Veronika Pinzger were involved in case trialling, data collection, and data analysis. In addition, Dirk Netter, Helena Wolter (MA student research intern), and Canan Yalvac (BA student research intern) joined the data analysis discussions.

Time Frame: The following overview shows the 6 PAR phases applied (see Table 1).

Table 1: PAR Phases – Case 7

PAR cycle	6 PAR Phases					
	Introduction	Familiarisation	Collaborative reflection	Planning	Action	Analysis & Synthesis
<i>1st Iteration – MA7</i>	<p>20.10.2023 (90 mins) - 16 participants</p>	<p>27.10.2023 (90 mins) - 16 participants</p> <p>3.11.2023 (90 mins) – 16 participants</p> <p>10.11.2023 (90 mins) – 16 participants</p> <p>17.11.2023 (90 mins) 16 participants</p>	<p>17.11.2023 (90 mins) - 16 participants</p>	<p>24.11.2023 (90 mins) - 16 participants</p> <p>During the semester student consultation for planning their interventions – 4 hour per week/ total 14 weeks</p>	<p>From 1.12.2023 till 26.02.2024 (90 mins per week/ 8 weeks in total) – 16 participants</p>	<p>02.02.2024 (90 mins interview) - 10 participants</p> <p>09.02.2024 (90 mins interview) – 16 participants</p>
<i>2nd Iteration – BA11</i>	<p>18.04.2024 (90 mins) - 14 participants</p>	<p>25.04.2024 (90 mins) - 14 participants</p>	<p>02.05.2024 (90 mins) - 14 participants</p>	<p>16.05.2024 (90 mins) - 14 participants</p> <p>During the semester student consultation for planning their interventions – 4 hour per week/ total 14 weeks</p>	<p>From 23.05.2024 till 26.06.2024 (90 mins) - 14 participants</p>	<p>07.07.2024 (90 mins interview) - 8 participants</p>
<i>3rd Iteration – MA7</i>	<p>24.10.2024 (90 mins) - 21 participants</p>	<p>31.10.2024 (90 mins) - 21 participants</p>	<p>07.11.2024 90 mins) - 21 participants</p>	<p>31.10.2024 (90 mins) - 21 participants</p> <p>During the semester student consultation for planning their interventions – 4 hour per week/ total 14 weeks</p>	<p>07.11.2024-06.02.2025 (14 weeks in total, 90 mins per week) 21 participants</p>	<p>13.02.2025 (90 mins interview) 16 participants</p> <p>14.02.2025 (90 mins interview) 2 participants</p> <p>19.02.2025 (90 mins interview) 2 participants</p>

2. Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis

Data Types and Sources

Types of Data: Mixed-method, including visual data, qualitative data, and quantitative data.

Source of Data: Photos of the case trialling without any personal identifiers; PLCs and image-based semi-structured in-depth peer interviews (with participants using self-chosen nicknames for anonymity, transcribed audio recordings)—student reflections at the end of each trial; students' written reflections via anonymous sheets at the end of each session; evaluation form for the Framework and Guides—open-ended questions and Likert scale questionnaires to facilitate students in the second and third trials; student-developed methods; researchers' written notes.

Research Methodologies and Methods: Within the PAR process of Case 7, we organise the setting according to our trans-epistemic design approach (Weber 2014; Keller & Weber 2020). By this, 19 methods were developed (see *Table 2*) and trialled by the participants at the level of products and processes. The seminar's second layer of system building as a social community was addressed. At the third level of the trans epistemic design approach, we intended to raise consciousness for and as democracy-as-becoming. As mentioned above, in our PAR context, this research adopts a trans-epistemic design approach (Weber 2014a; Keller & Weber 2020). As a research methodology and for data analysis, we use metaphor analysis connected to a discourse analytical research perspective (Karl 2006). From a Foucauldian perspective, following Bosancic (2014: 91), subjectivation is to be understood here as a practice of positioning the self and others. This analytical perspective allows us to analyse both systematical positioning in discourses and participants' meaning-making (Weber 2014b).

Data Analysis Process: Our methodological process of data analysis is structured as follows:

- **Transcription:** Converting spoken data into text.
- **Listening & Cleaning:** Reviewing, refining, and revising the material.

Following the listening and cleaning phase, team meetings focused on qualitative data analysis, discussions and pattern identification. The findings from the interviews were then framed analytically within this report.

- **Discourse-Oriented Metaphor Analysis on positionalities:** image-based, pattern card-based, spoken language (peer-interview based)
- **Core Passage Analysis (within interview / across interviews):** identifies maximum and minimum contrast areas
- **Memoing to the Shared Memoing Matrix:** This adds abstraction for deeper analysis
- **Iterative Review:** refines focus on patterns of meaning-making and metaphors across cases

- **Outcome and Implications:** Layered insights into learning and transformation and Extracting insights to refine the Framework and Guides.

Theoretical background: Our PAR approach intended to see students as future professionals (Weber, 2020) and partners in the research process. We want to establish the university seminar as a heterotopic space in the Foucauldian sense (Foucault, 1981). As the PLC is consistently connected to onto-epistemic transformation toward Commoning, we try to establish this quality of an epistemic shift toward 'democracy-as-becoming' in HE teaching and learning. This means minimising the hierarchy in HE as much as possible. As in German, we differentiate between the usual formal ("Sie") and informal or personal ("Du") ways of addressing each other; we try to establish a rather more egalitarian quality of communication. Collet-Sabé and Ball (2022, 2024) refer to this alternative mode as an alternative 'episteme' of education. Against a modern individualistic onto-epistemology of enclosure and institutionalised education, they suggest equal, place-based, contextual education, which is based on diversity and follows the profound logic of the common good. As the main goal formulated here is self-education, it is less about teaching and more about learning. The main focus is to create new ways of being, living, and learning, which closely connects to democratisation.

Helfrich (2014), as well as Helfrich & Bollier (2019) and Bollier & Helfrich (2019), claim an onto-epistemic shift in the field of education, asking for a fundamental change toward a threefold notion of democracy. The PLC is a transformational methodology (Helfrich & Petzold, 2021) that supports the transformation of awareness, communication, perspectivity, and the gaze from the ego toward the whole. It also connects to care aesthetics (Leddy, 2025), which refers to transforming subjectivation toward an ethical relationship with the material world. In this sense, care ethics and aesthetic experience are fundamental to the relationality between ourselves and the world, emphasising the interdependent nature of our existence and the importance of self-care. We connect to Prinz (2014) and the social praxis of seeing. We engage with Otto Scharmer's (2007) approach to social grammar of emergence in social praxis, as it emphasises the micro-practice of emergence regarding our gestures of paying attention, the inner (institutionalised) place, where students and professionals operate from, the way of seeing of the world (which ranges between a projected mental image up to a co-evolving ecosystem). It addresses the knowledge coming into existence – which might be opinionated judging – or co-intuitive collective action. The emerging social space might refer to one-dimensional, spaceless mental images or to a four-dimensional space, which is about connecting to the source and the co-evolving ecosystem. The emerging social time might range between disembodied boredom and presence in everyday practices. The collective social body might follow a linear complexity – as in hierarchies – or connect to an embodied, deep emergence of emergent complexity. Epistemes coming into existence might focus on the individual or refer to trans-intersubjectivity and social sculpting in the making. The Self might be habitually centred on EGO or shift toward an 'I-in-now/us' perspective. In this epistemology of becoming, belonging does not primarily refer to psychological aspects but is to be understood in a political sense (Yuval-Davis, 2011).

3. Research Findings

Since Case 7 focused on individual and collective learning, we will address the question of subjectivation within conditioned institutionalised settings. In our iterative research approach, we first trialled a weekly course format, followed by an intense weekend format in the second iteration, before returning to a weekly approach in the third iteration. While each of these iterations had specific features, they shared a profound commonality in their onto-epistemological and institutionalised conditionedness. Due to space constraints, we are unable to share our analytical insights regarding the core metaphors of democracy-as-becoming and students' image- and interview-based conceptualisations of their experience of a lived democracy in the course (MA7, WiSe 2023/24). The analysed patterns can be differentiated into individual or collective process patterns, as well as patterns of space and patterns of practice. Moreover, we identified patterns of externally conditioned transformation and the pattern of de-institutionalisation within institutional settings.

While in the first course we focused on analysing the experience of democracy-as-becoming within the course, in the second iteration, we addressed the experience and patterns of connectivity to the PLC card deck. The second iteration of the seminar, conducted in a BA setting as an intensive course (BA11, summer 2024), centres on the students' experience and interpretation of the PLC. Due to space constraints, we are unable to explain the research results in detail here. However, what we can observe is that the meaning-making process of students is central to creating meaningful interventions and contributions to democracy-as-becoming. We are confident that this deeper level of qualitative research will be essential to creating valuable material for the Framework and Guides. Therefore, we see the need to incorporate such qualitative analytical perspectives on meaning-making into the pedagogical material to be developed later. In the following, we will focus more on the evaluative questions formulated in the Methodological Framework (AECED, 2023).

RQ1. Regarding process: a) How do participants experience being introduced to and working with the Prototype Framework and Guides? b) In what ways is AELD co-created and facilitated through ABE methods?

The VEN approach, especially in the HE setting, was a new experience for students. Although various pedagogical methods are taught at the Faculty of Education at UMR, where we conducted our PAR, VEN introduced an unfamiliar learning process. Once participants became familiar with the Framework and Guides, it was still challenging to understand how it may support their work; they had to do something that was not often expected of them. Problem specification may have been a familiar process, but responding to the problem with their method encouraged them to create in each iteration. They proposed a method combining PLCs at this stage, which they trialled in the seminar.

In the **first iteration** of the seminar, the research team observed that participants were more likely to feel this process as they had to fulfil the seminar requirement, as one student expressed during the reflection interviews: "...just do it.". However, after the interview process and the final seminar session of the first iteration, they felt proud and satisfied with the

concrete outcome, the “Student’s Developed Book,” though having a direct, tangible product was a relatively unconventional learning process for UMR.

In the **second iteration** of the seminary, students got the “Student’s Developed Book” developed by other participants at the beginning. Then, they realised other methods, starting by identifying a problem in their fields, relating it to democracy, and finally developing methods using the PLC. The research team observed that this prior experience gave new participants a sense of "security" when navigating VEN methods. The students were more motivated to engage, and the previous knowledge and the concrete book made it easier for them to understand the processes.

In the **third iteration** of the seminar, new participants were introduced to insights from the previous two iterations and additional methods included in the book. As we integrated working with a textbook, it was easier for students to develop the methods and to co-create specific approaches for democracy-as-becoming. Many reflections indicated that accessing text materials and using the PLC became easier as methods were applied. The confrontation and practical implementation of the theory made the complexity more tangible. This statement was repeated in many reflection sheets; for example, one of the students’ answers: “It sounds more complicated than it is, and then it becomes clearer in the process.”

By integrating PLCs into method development and practical applications in the seminars, students learned about the tools and how to apply them. At the end of the courses, students reflected, stating that 'commoning cards were a great help' and 'offered new perspectives and set a framework.' They were surprised by the number of innovative ideas and solutions that emerged from the discussions, which not only increased their interest but also made the process enjoyable.

Students also recognised the broad applicability of these methods beyond the seminar setting. Many indicated that they could use the tools 'everywhere,' specifically highlighting educational institutions such as schools, universities, and programmes for children and young people. Additionally, several students emphasised the methods' potential for use in corporate consulting, further demonstrating their versatility across different contexts.

This case study demonstrated that, by the final iteration, students were able to connect education for democracy with their respective fields and recognised that these methods could be adapted to other settings. They learned how to intervene and apply AELD methods in meaningful and practical ways.

Time constraints were a significant challenge for students. Alongside this seminar, they were enrolled in other courses, managing parallel workloads as dictated by the curriculum. Unlike traditional seminars, which typically involve reading assignments and final exams, this course required a different approach to learning. Students had to engage in both individual and collaborative group work, necessitating additional time and effort outside of class. As active learners and co-creators of the course, students were responsible for identifying specific problems in their field, developing innovative methods, engaging with PLCs independently, and trialling their approaches in seminar settings. Additionally, they were required to

document the methods they developed using templates provided by the research team, ensuring these methods could be applied in future contexts. Through this process, they also reflected on democracy-as-becoming. This approach represented a departure from traditional learning methods, posing a significant challenge in terms of time and effort.

RQ2. Regarding the transformational change in participants: In what ways do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, lead to individual and collective growth in regard to

- feelings for democracy,
- aesthetic awareness and qualities (such as empathic, ethical, and spiritual sensibilities),
- collaborative, reflexive and critical capabilities,
- openness to newly ‘seeing’ the other,
- willingness to move towards more reflexive and critical modes of awareness and knowing that reconnect with the body as a source of learning,
- capacity to challenge social injustices and engage creatively with conflict and antagonisms
- any other aspects that will be developed in and through the PAR process.

This research aligned with one of the AECED Project’s main arguments, that democracy-as-becoming is a relational and lived experience. Students’ reflections on their learning experiences illustrate all four principles of democracy-as-becoming: *power sharing, transformative dialogue, holistic learning, and relational well-being.*

Transformative dialogue was the most relevant dimension of democracy that students emphasized most in their experiences. According to peer interviews, students in the reflection phase described trialling PLC as “the creation of a way of life,” “taking us by the hand, like an adult,” and even metaphorically as a “stairway to heaven”—a difficult ascent, but with a beautiful destination. This suggests that PLCs function as a path facilitator, guiding students through a new way of learning and engaging with democracy. One student stated, “The path to democracy is very rocky and exhausting, but with PLC, it can become a little easier to walk the path.” These reflections highlight how PLCs foster ongoing dialogue, opening up spaces for students to engage in democratic learning as a continuous, evolving process.

Students also experienced power-sharing using PLCs, as reflected in their descriptions of the process as “oil for the machine,” indicating a smooth and functional collaboration. They expressed a sense of ownership and shared responsibility by stating that PLCs gave them the “feeling that we are part of it” and helped build a “common goal and value.” One powerful metaphor used by students was “paddle together,” illustrating their perception of democracy as a collective effort that requires shared agency in decision-making and action.

Students’ engagement with AELD also resonated with the principle of holistic learning, as they perceived their democratic journey not only as an intellectual process but as an emotional and experiential one. The concept of “working as feel-good time” and viewing informality itself as

a democratic experience suggests that they saw learning democracy as more than structured discourse—it was an embodied, communal, and evolving practice.

The theme of relational well-being surfaced in reflections on the importance of teamwork, connection, and collective experiences of learning and co-creation. Students acknowledged that democracy-as-becoming “needs a team, because one can never do it alone” and that “we fight for it and try to get it out there.” They described PLCs as “a campfire for decelerated thinking” and a “vision of well-being,” suggesting that these spaces offer a supportive, informal, and reflective environment where relational bonds are strengthened. Moreover, the metaphor “Democracy is like a marathon—it is a lengthy process, but you run together” encapsulates the collective nature of democratic engagement.

Overall, these reflections reinforce the idea that democracy-as-becoming is not just a theoretical framework but a lived, relational experience that unfolds dynamically through student engagement in PLC.

Considering the relationship between the three dimensions of transformation and the principles of democracy in the context of the AECED project, this case research found relational patterns of appropriation that facilitate the transformation of institutionalized positionality. The observed patterns, which will be explained below, include:

- 1) Process Pattern: Individual and collective
- 2) Space Pattern
- 3) Practice Pattern
- 4) Externally Conditioned Transformation
- 5) Deinstitutionalising in Institutional Settings

As a **process pattern**, democracy-as-becoming is imagined as a collective process. Key aspects of democracy as a process of becoming within the context of this research are:

- The ability to contribute more actively
- Freedom of speech
- Expanding one’s horizon
- Developing personal competencies
- Building trust
- Solving problems collaboratively

As one student reflected, “...the different groups somehow felt like a whole in the end” (Ulrike, 455f), demonstrating the transformative power of collective participation.

As a **space pattern**, it is found that atmospheric space enables democracy-as-becoming. The concept of atmospheric space emerged as a crucial enabler for democracy. One student shared, “We were well able to meet in the middle and then discuss the topics” (Gr. 2, Lea, 41f), highlighting the importance of shared spaces for dialogue and collaboration. In the HE setting,

an unusual space allows for practice and experimentation, encouraging students to “just try it out and explore” (Uli, Gr. 5, 479). This iterative approach supports the democratic process by enabling personal growth and mutual understanding.

Externally conditioned transformation is another key finding. In this context, students were challenged to manage the unexpected and deal with limitations imposed on the democratic process. This involved:

- Navigating uncertainty and newness as challenges,
- Experimenting and trialling as modes of appropriation,
- Overcoming time constraints,
- Adapting to external framing conditions as limitations,
- Recognizing the “fit” or “non-match” with their own working conditions.

The last dimension of the key research finding is **de-institutionalizing in institutional settings**. A central question raised in this research is: How can we de-institutionalize in institutional settings? One student expressed the tension between autonomy and institutional framing: “So connected and one connected to the others and act together somehow” (Gr. 2, Tom, 47f). This suggests a balance between autonomy and external institutional expectations.

The findings point toward the potential of **experimental practices** as a forced enabler for democracy-as-becoming, where participants are often “thrown into” situations that challenge both their personal boundaries and institutional frameworks.

As a result, we came up with a summary that students:

- felt challenged by leaving the known institutionalized (& ritualized) procedures behind,
- were irritated by the experience approach taken,
- positioned themselves differently in the uncertainty of doing something “new”,
- demonstrated their positionedness (subject positions) in normalised alienated subjectivities.

RQ3: What influence, if any, did the researchers have on how the Framework and Guides were used and the designs of AEL for democracy that emerged in the trials?

PAR research is an iterative process aimed at transforming educational social practices toward responsive pedagogies, aligned with the concept of democracy-as-becoming in the AECED Project. For the research team, it was essential to continue working in cycles—three iterations—within the PAR research framework to trial the Prototype Pedagogical Framework and Guides, gain a deeper understanding of phase-specific challenges and opportunities for transformation, and effectively address the **RQ1-4**.

In the first seminar, we focused on the imaginaries and metaphors of democracy-as-becoming. The second analysis referred to the imaginaries and metaphors connected to the PLC itself. In

the third round, we connected to the four dimensions of democracy-as-becoming. Due to time constraints, we are unable to include this analysis in the case analysis report.

The researchers designed the seminar to support the trialling of the Framework and Guides and further method development by the case participants, accompanying them in active co-creation processes for learning and experiencing the four dimensions of democracy.

Time constraints were a critical factor for the Research Team. Conducting three seminar courses across three semesters while trialling the Framework and Guides in three iterations was challenging. Each iteration spanned an entire 14-week semester, with considerable time dedicated to seminar preparation and additional consultation hours spent planning with students each semester. During semester breaks, we discussed what worked well and what needed adjustment based on the previous iteration. Nevertheless, these three iterations yielded valuable data. As a result, we plan to propose a syllabus for Education for Democracy in Higher Education and share the methods developed by students over the course of the three semesters for integrating the Framework and Guides.

Trust issues were also crucial in implementing AELD in HE settings. Traditional teaching and learning methods often create hierarchical structures that instil fear in HE, as students feel graded, assessed, and observed. Implementing AELD at this educational stage introduced new learning approaches and opened democratic spaces for self-reflection, reflection on others, and different ways of living.

Building trust within this research setting was essential. Therefore, the design, redesign, and expansion of PAR to include new spaces for dialogue were critical considerations. Students were invited to share meals from the beginning of the iteration process to foster trust. However, the timing of these opportunities was also crucial. In the first iteration, we invited students for dinner at the end of the seminar. Students suggested that a collective dinner should be the starting point of the seminar, so the research team adapted this for the third iteration. We began with a welcome dinner on the evening of the first session. This informal gathering allowed students and the research team to exchange ideas, discuss the project, and become familiar with one another. Primarily, it supported trust-building through a ritual of togetherness. This ritual made a significant difference, as it surprised students. They realised that something unusual had happened: connecting informality to the institutional setting. As a result, the researchers evaluated the third iteration as the most successful in terms of both individual and collective transformation.

The findings from Case 7 research showed a dynamic and holistic transformation process for students in terms of self-re-imagining and their relationship with the institution. The experience-based PLCs and the creation of collective guides and interventions offer an alternative way of teaching and learning that challenges institutionalised norms while still engaging with them in a critical, reflective way. Ultimately, it encourages negotiation between the individual agency of students, collective responsibility, and institutional structures, raising important questions about the possibility and limits of transformation within the institutionalised educational system for democracy.

RQ4: What evidence-based conclusions for revision and refinement of the Prototype Framework and Guides emerge from the experience of using the Prototypes and addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

Students' active participation in trialling and developing additional methods for the Prototype Framework and Guides, with a focus on visual, embodied, and narrative facilitation, provides valuable insights into key elements and attitudes that should be incorporated into the Prototype Framework and Guides. This question is addressed in Section 6, which summarises the learnings for the Pedagogical Framework and Guides.

4. Limitations

As the traditional education system in Europe—and beyond—does not fully support aesthetic and embodied methods in HE or across educational phases in general, this case research, through three iterations, identified several limitations related to:

1. **Emotional and physical constraints** (e.g., being hypervisible, feeling discomfort, and experiencing irritation when trialling VEN methods).
2. **Practical limitations** (e.g., time constraints and the lack of clear instructions on how to develop/use VEN methods).
3. **Cognitive challenges** (e.g., understanding the Framework and Guides and adapting to VEN methods).

The seminar activities involved embodied experiences during the trialling of student-developed methods in the classroom, including the visibility and movement of bodies, with a particular emphasis on hypervisibility. One notable reaction among students was irritation, reflecting their struggle to adapt to this new approach. However, this discomfort is part of the learning process and signals their initial phase of adjustment. Similarly, PLCs, as an aesthetic approach, represented a novel method within the learning environment. Engaging with the PLCs required time from students, and time was often a constraint. They needed time to engage with the cards, physically interact with them, feel the design of the text, and explore how to use them. Since the PLCs lacked instructions, students had to discover and experiment with them independently.

Overall, the absence of prior experience with aesthetic and embodied methods in the learning environment meant that participants had to first explore, experience, engage, physically move, interact, and navigate moments of irritation before fully immersing themselves in the process. Although this case study was conducted within one semester, time constraints proved to be a significant limitation in each iteration. This suggests that with even less time, achieving the transformation we aimed for in this project, along with case-specific targets, would have been even more challenging. However, once students engaged, both individual and collective transformation occurred, leading to deeper learning processes related to democracy and the application of AELD methods in various settings.

5. Relevance of Context

In Germany, young people can pursue a profession through academic study and vocational education programs called “Ausbildung”. These programs combine theoretical learning with hands-on practical experience, allowing students to earn money while they train. In contrast, academic education is a more protracted and costly path, typically chosen by those aiming to become professionals in specialised fields.

While current political debates on democratic backlash at the discourse level in Germany have not yet led to institutional changes in HE settings, our research in the student city of Marburg highlights a strong tradition of student political participation. UMR's environment is characterised by student activism, political diversity, and a more participatory academic culture.

In German academia, the professor-student relationship has historically followed a mentorship model. Professors do not primarily see themselves as traditional teachers but as mentors who guide students toward independent learning. This approach is deeply rooted in the Humboldtian academic tradition, which favours seminar-style discussions over classroom-based instruction. The aim is to encourage critical reflection and debate *inter pares*—among equals—though the extent of its application varies across disciplines.

Being critical is a key academic value in the social sciences and humanities. In the Faculty of Education, where our research was conducted, the curriculum emphasises specialization and professionalization, supported by internships. From the undergraduate level, students are expected to engage actively throughout the semester by submitting reflection papers, working in small groups, giving presentations, and completing assignments beyond final exams and assessments. Additionally, students must complete study tasks outside of class hours. This model fosters active learning and professional development, creating a demanding weekly schedule while encouraging innovation in pedagogical approaches. This general picture we present has had its pros and cons in our case study:

- **New Learning Processes:** Due to their structured and intensive academic schedules, students have limited social time. The AECED project introduces them to novel pedagogical experiences, such as democracy discussions, art-based aesthetic and embodied methods, and collaborative critical reflection. Engaging with the Framework and Guide, planning interventions, and integrating new pedagogical methods represent a significant shift for them.
- **Students as Active Agents:** Students do not perceive themselves as passive learners but as active participants in HE. Their involvement in group work and self-directed learning aligns well with recognizing them as future professionals. This intervention facilitates a *multiplicator effect*, where individual and collective learning processes contribute to democracy-as-becoming towards more democratic societies in the long term.

6. Learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guides

To improve the Pedagogical Framework and Guides, the following key learnings have been identified through participant reflections and researcher insights:

- Having learning nuggets/stations/boxes
- Self-assessment tools
- Differentiation between various professional fields (e.g., social work vs. adult education)
- Basic information on organisational and institutional change
- Theory-practice integration through testing
- Open spaces for reflection opportunities
- Use as inspiration in conflict situations
- Create learning situations

For the refined Framework and Guides, the following considerations should be made: (a) increase user engagement, (b) improve the organization of the practical guide, (c) ensure greater conciseness, (d) include support materials, (e) clarify the purpose and target group for the implications.

Learnings from the AECED Researchers under the Following Categories:

1. Accessible and Inclusive Content
 - Use of inclusive language
 - Clear, simple instructions
 - Flexibility to adjust methods
2. Consider the Audience
 - Fit for different settings and subjects
 - Adaptation for local contexts
 - Engage the senses
3. Setting Conditions Clearly
 - Time and space needs/room arrangements
 - Addressing resistance
 - Broad subject connections
4. Focusing on Dialogue and Discussions
 - More discussions on the relevance of our methods, rather than focusing on technical aspects
 - Encouraging democratic engagement
5. Linking to Real Learning Goals
 - Curriculum-connected

- Inviting deeper content discussions and dialogue

In addition to the insights gained from the research process, the methods developed tested and systematically documented by the students (see *Table 2*), across all three iterations can be integrated into Guide 2 as a key outcome of the research.

Table 2: Student-developed methods

Developed methods during the PAR		
1st iteration – MA7	2nd iteration - BA11	3rd iteration - MA7
The PLC TEAM Barometer		PLCs-based Kick-Off OD Workshop
PLCs-based Appreciative Inquiry	PLCs-World café	PLCs-based Project Goal Development and Contracting
PLCs-based Peer-Counselling	PLCs-marble run	PLCs-based process architecture for organisational change
PLCs-based Gordian Knot	PLCs-Children's compass: Democracy and values in Kindergarden	PLCs-based project planning
PLCs-based Opinion line		PLCs-based process management
PLCs-based Non-violent Communication		PLCs based Team development
		PLCs-based Mapping of Organisational Knowledge
		PLCs-based Coaching for organisational change

Conclusions on Research and) Implications for Framework and Guides:

Case 7 refers to individual and collective learning. It shows that the seminars offer a transformational space for students, but they need to overcome the conditionedness of the HE setting. This is not only an organisational problem by far. Collet-Sabé and Ball (2022; 2024) address it for the school in the same way it applies to the university. The democratisation at the level of seminars still seems to be a matter of building trust. So how might democratic self-organisation work in an alienated and pressured learning setting? How would heterarchy and democracy-as-becoming enter into a whole life history of institutional socialisation of functioning and following the decisions of powerful others? Still, the university is a relatively hierarchical contextual embedding where democratisation is conditioned. Not only time, but also space is a constraint, which turns into embodied fear and brings about a subjectivation of subalternity. Against the dispositive of organisational becoming, which follows the dispositive of newness as an act oriented toward externally defined rules (Weber 2013), we search for alternatives and ask whether the university can become a heterotopic space. Moore (2018) speaks about care as commoning and refers to Massimo De Angelis, illustrating “how commoning can manifest as forms of resistance inside factories, schools and other institutions dominated by capital”. Although German universities are not directly affected by economisation and privatisation, as in other countries, “practices of teach-outs and mutual

reliance” can be examples of commoning “in the service of reclaiming HE as a common good”. (...) “Thinking about commoning as care in this way moves away from the idea of a self-defined commons resource and towards acts of care that operate horizontally across a range of institutions”. In this, Moore (2018) would argue for commons-based HE “towards an emancipatory but ever-evolving horizon”. He understands the commons “as a situated practice of care positioned towards a commons horizon”.

7. Ethical Reflection and Gender Dimension

The Pedagogical Framework and Guides should explicitly address diversity and inclusion for moderators, facilitators, and multipliers. It is essential to consider how these practices can effectively integrate democratic values, ensuring that all participants feel represented and heard. In particular, the guides must acknowledge the intersectional experiences of individuals, including those shaped by gender, ethnicity, age, and migration background. By doing so, the research materials can foster more inclusive and equitable learning environments.

Moreover, integrating reflections on the openness, irritation, and discomfort caused by VEN methods could support the users of the project sources. These methods often challenged participants to step outside their comfort zones, which can provoke discomfort and resistance. Acknowledging and addressing this discomfort is a key part of the learning process. It is important to recognise that these experiences are part of an evolving process – within self and others- and that discomfort is not necessarily a negative outcome but an opportunity for *becoming*.

For those implementing VEN methods, it is crucial to ensure that they are prepared to navigate and mitigate potential discomfort. This requires awareness of the challenges students may face, as well as strategies to create a supportive and inclusive environment that facilitates engagement. Presenting participants' interaction with VEN approaches as an evolving process, where discomfort gives way to deeper understanding and transformation, can guide practitioners in supporting students more effectively throughout their journey.

Ultimately, refining these materials to reflect these ethical and gender-conscious approaches will ensure a more inclusive, supportive, and democratic learning environment. Practitioners and facilitators will be better equipped to guide students through the complexities of these methods, fostering both personal and collective growth in line with democratic values.

In the design and execution of this research, the German team placed a strong emphasis on intersectionality, both within the research team and among the student participants. The research team itself was diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, and migration backgrounds. The team comprised a professor, two doctoral researchers, a master's student researcher, and a bachelor's student intern, all of whom were women. The researchers brought diverse migration experiences, including international study migration, first-generation migration, and second-generation migration, with the exception of the professor.

The participant group reflected similar diversity, encompassing students of various gender identities, ethnicities, and age groups. The majority of participants were women, including individuals from migration backgrounds and working professionals returning to HE. This diversity enriched the research process, ensuring multiple perspectives were represented and informing the data collection and analysis.

Since the summer of 2024, the data analysis process has been participatory, with regular meetings involving all researchers to ensure shared input and collective decision-making. This inclusive approach has ensured that different voices, experiences, and perspectives are central to the analysis.

From data collection through to analysis, the research has been guided by ethical principles of inclusivity, equity, and (self)reflexivity. These principles have been crucial in identifying and mitigating potential biases, particularly those relating to power dynamics within the research team and among participants. By prioritising these ethical standards, the analysis strives to ensure that findings are not only accurate but also represent the diverse and complex realities of the participants.

Germany Case Report

Case 8

Phase/Educational Setting:

Higher Education & Adult, Professional
and Organisational Learning

VEN-Approach:

Visual

1. Case Description

Participants: In Case 8, we apply a three-layer approach of participation:

- **The first-layer participants** - Participants of “Images & Practices of Organization” have been assigned to the further education MA Professional Program in an Austrian University of Applied Sciences (UAS), collaborating in PAR groups to analyse and transform their organizations. The settings range between schools, social work organizations of different kinds, representatives of a ministry of education, and especially institutions of social inclusion like social psychiatry or an institution for disabled people.
- **The second-layer participants** - The cooperating and participating stakeholders were professionals, multipliers, and CEOs involved in social inclusion and transformation from two case organizations: an innovative social psychiatry institution and a traditionally oriented disability care institution. These teams engaged in PAR processes, conducted interviews, and introduced the pattern lab methodology during the January 2024 workshop in this UAS.
- **Third-layer participants**—Members of trial organizations where the pattern lab's results were introduced, and the pattern lab was reproduced and trialed out once more.

Location: This research was conducted as a hybrid intervention and research setting. From October 2023 till January 2024, it followed a monthly to bi-weekly digital format. At the end of January 2024, a two-day co-present workshop was held in St. Pölten, Austria, where the course participants met and the two pattern labs with organisational stakeholders were realised.

Purpose – Relevance to Democracy-as-Becoming: Case 8 focused on the research question of how AELD can support the professionalisation of practitioners/professionals and institutional openings from an organisational learning perspective in the educational field toward organisational democracy (Göhlich & Weber, 2011; Göhlich et al. 2018).

Case 8 explored the potential of the PLCs for team development, organisational analysis, and organisational transformation towards democracy-as-becoming. Referencing the AECED Methodological Framework (2023: 8), Case 8 focused on three levels of transformation in

educational cultures: (1) Individual and Collective Professionalisation and (2) Organisational/Institutional Transformation.

In Case 8, holistic AEL was approached through the PLCs, a card deck, in relation to the AECED project. We referred to the second dimension of transformative dialogue, as the PLCs support such dialogue in individual, collective, and organisational settings. Participants engaged in transformative dialogue by sharing power with colleagues from their organizations to drive organisational change. In this case, both power-sharing and relational well-being were fostered through PLCs. Using the PLC we related to a threefold notion of democracy. This threefold notion of democracy connects to 1) social togetherness, 2) peer governance, and 3) care economy. Here, we refer to the work of Silke Helfrich and David Bollier (Helfrich & Bollier, 2019; Bollier & Helfrich, 2019).

Research Activities and Methods: Case 8 used the PLC framework (Bollier & Helfrich, 2019; Helfrich & Bollier, 2019) and applied it in both research and intervention to explore its potential for supporting the transformation of educational and social organisations towards organisational democracy. As the Framework and Guides contained little content on commoning and the PLC, student professionals had to experiment with approaches to using the PLCs in the context of organisational learning as democracy-as-becoming.

The trial involved PLCs-based peer interviews, PLCs-based peer interviews with an organisational representative and up to three organisation members, and the potential of a PLC-based participatory Future Lab (PLC-F-LAB) for organisational democracy-as-becoming. These Labs were explored during the training weekend and later introduced and trialed in the organisations involved.

Researchers: Susanne Maria Weber was fully involved in the case process. Research interns and student assistants, Canan Yalvac and Vero Pinzger, supported the proofreading of the AI-transcribed research material and prepared metaphor matrices. Team members Juli Brunner and Dirk Netter were involved in writing metaphor matrices and conducting qualitative data analysis.

Time Frame:

- **Introduction:** October 2023 (online seminar)
- **Familiarisation:** October-November 2023 (online seminar)
- **Collaborative reflection:** November 2023 (online seminar)
- **Planning:** November-January 2024 (online seminar)
- **Action:** January 2024 (co-present workshop in UAS)
- **Reflection:** January-February 2024 (co-present workshop in UAS and in the participants' organizations)

2. Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis

Data Types and Sources

Types of Data: Qualitative methods.

Sources of Data:

- Recorded and transcribed PLCs-based interviews of a) project teams, b) organisational hosts; c) organisational members (with participants chosen nicknames for anonymity).
- Student's evaluation of PLCs-based interviews integrated into PowerPoint presentations.
- PLC-F-Lab – Brown Papers of the Pattern Language System Sculpting Process based on Otto Scharmer's (Scharmer 2007) approach of System Sculpting (a creative sculpting approach based on four questions to organisational reflexivity and imagination).
- Student's written reflections on PLC-F-Lab.

Research Methodologies and Methods: Using our PAR approach and design research methodologies, we analyse and support becoming modes at the individual, collective and organisational levels (Weber, 2014). We worked with a systematically participatory and iterative approach to co-creating case design, intervention, and research (Weber, 2014). The material's data analysis was iterative throughout the process, and the data was analysed and focused on the formulated RQs. We used a longitudinal approach for the PLCs-based team-development interviews (Brake, 2016).

Discourse- and dispositive analytical approaches, which refer to the deep rationalities in organising (Deleuze, 2005; Weber & Heidelmann, 2022) and discursive social sense-making and subjectification in discursive embeddings, supported the intervention design and data analysis. From a Foucauldian (1981) perspective and following Bosancic (2014: 91), subjectivation must be understood here as a practice of positioning the self and others. This allowed us to analyse both systematical positioning in (organisational) discourses and participants' internal meaning-making.

Data Analysis Process: We have had main interview-based material groups, one of which referred to the team-development process of the student-professional co-researchers. In this, we had one peer interview at the beginning and one at the end, which allowed a longitudinal analysis (Brake, 2016). The second material group refers to the two organisations' organisational analysis. As the material groups were different, the process did slightly differ.

In the data analysis process, a multi-step approach was taken: 1) digital transcription and researcher-based refinement and correction; 2) listening and condensing core meaning passages in the metaphor matrix, which contains the core content of the relevant interview material; 3) co-analysis in the researcher group based on core passages throughout the whole interview; 4) taking research notes during this collective analysis and interpretation process; 5) condensation of core metaphors, and 6) maximum/minimum contrast approach to the two organisational cases. Regarding team development, we reflected on the longitudinal analysis and the process of PLCs-based team development and team reflection. Since the beginning

of the PAR phase, researchers engaged with memoing, and revisited memos during the data analysis phase, collectively reflected in the data analysis meetings.

Theoretical Background: Commoning is understood as a process and a way in which “the ‘great transformation’ can succeed” (Bollier & Helfrich, 2019; Helfrich & Bollier, 2019: 97). The PLC supports carefully identified patterns, which, following the architect Christopher Alexander (1999), represent the future of theory and are valuable for generating a living world. Patterns are understood as tools that support liveliness. They are flexible and applicable in any setting, describing practices of successful problem-solving that consistently emerge in comparable contexts. They intervene in interplays of context, problem, and solution. Against a disciplinary or normalising dispositive, it is grounded in imagination as dispositive of newness (Weber 2022). As an onto-ethical and epistemological approach, it is about aesthetic internalising. As Collet-Sabé and Ball (2022; 2024) suggest a self-educational approach in community-embeddings, the PLC is meant to be the methodology of collective transformation (Euler 2016). The PLC can be a powerful approach to reorient the gaze and to reinvent our lives. It can contribute to reimagining ourselves and to the collective transformation of democracy-as-becoming. Therefore, it could make a significant contribution to the Framework and Guides.

Referring to the academic work of Collet-Sabé and Ball (2022, 2024), we analysed and reflected on the potential of self-transforming processes and organisational transformation based on the episteme of commoning. This perspective connects to Dewey's approach of democracy as experience, democracy as a task before us (1991) and the ethical dimensions of it (1969). Based on Castoriadis (1975) theorising society (and organisations) as an ‘imaginary’ institution, we connect not only to the visual but also to the imagination and the emerging collective imaginaries. Based on Knorr-Cetinas’ (1999) approach to the discourse and from an organisational education research and intervention perspective (Göhlich et al., 2018), we intended to intervene in collective imaginaries and (organisational) orders of the gaze (Weber & Wieners, 2018; Weber, 2023). Based on our trans-epistemic design research approach, we are interested in the three layers of transformation: a) transformation at the level of products and processes, b) system building, and c) consciousness (Weber, 2014).

In the St. Pölten case, we test the above intervention methods:

a) **products and processes level:** The PLC primarily, with its eupraxia perspective, focuses on the connection between positive images and positive actions (Cooperrider, 1999). PLC, in this sense, can be understood as an epistemic boundary object (Weber, 2022), which allows “change at the speed of imagination” (Watkins et al., 2011).

b) We support **system building** as we invited organisational members who have been interviewed before to the PLC-F-Lab. We are interconnecting between further education and organisational change.

c) The third layer of **consciousness** (Scharmer, 2007), we are interested in the individual, collective and organisational imaginaries shifting from hierarchies into democracy-as-becoming in commoning organisations (Fournier, 2019).

3. Research Findings

In the following section, we will introduce the rich data analysis based on: a) team development interviews, b) organisational host interviews, c) organisational members interviews as well as d) Future-Lab based participant reflections.

RQ1. Regarding process: a) How do participants experience being introduced to and working with the Prototype Framework and Guides? b) In what ways is AELD co-created and facilitated through ABE methods?

Hybrid settings offer specific challenges, which need to be considered in addition to the general issues across the educational settings. The first part of this course of further education was done in a virtual setting, and the second half was done in a present setting, which brings specific requirements. The project and the Framework and Guides were introduced at the beginning of the course, and students were asked to familiarise themselves with the materials provided so they could work with them later in the co-present weekend seminar. Student professionals are introduced to the PLC, too. They received a PLC card deck right at the beginning of the course. They explored the use of the different PLC-based interviewing settings over the semester.

Regarding *PLC-based team development*, different orientational patterns were analysed from the PLC-based peer interviewing at the beginning and end of the process. For the PLCs-based team interviewing, different orientational patterns apply in the perspectives of peer interviewees: We identified an implementation-oriented pattern connecting to past experiences, one relating to the method and another referring primarily to the task. Some referred to a heartfelt and reflexive intention to live democracy and organisational democracy as the micro-practice of everyday life. Here, AEL would pave the way for this to happen.

Others instead referred sceptically to their experiences: they problematised the likelihood of egalitarian relationships being lived, especially in institutional settings. They did not question the instrument of PLC or the possibility of being successful as a team but were especially critical regarding institutional power dynamics. Based on past experiences, power-sharing is not believed in.

A third relational pattern connects to the medium of the PLC and sees it as an instrument of renewal. Playfulness, lightness, carefulness, and a dialogical approach to organisational change and team development are highlighted here. This perspective connects to relational well-being. How will commonality be lived in the team process? The method and its usability support mutual understanding and cooperation in this orientational pattern.

A fourth relational pattern to be identified refers to the collective task to be followed in the next semester. Here, the orientation toward the plan and the collective orientation toward the plan are core regarding how participants relate to the PLCs. Transformative dialogue would then be a means to reach the goal. The participants' PLCs-based interviews address the potential of diversity, as they 'bring' their organisation into the process.

Apart from the PLCs-based interviews with the **organisational host** and the **organisational members**, the PLC-F-Lab is experienced as a productive methodology. Participants are very much interested in the question of how organisations might open their underlying rationalities and patterns. They are curious to learn how openings can happen and how openings can be supported by a consulting approach based on the PLC. Also, student professionals were interested in learning how organisations transform themselves and how this might work even for ministries or very hierarchical organisations they work in. It becomes clear that they suffer from this alienated and hierarchical working style. These topics are still missed in the Framework; they are asked to be strengthened in the practical Adult, Professional and Organisational Learning Guide.

RQ2. Regarding the transformational change in participants: In what ways do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, lead to individual and collective growth in regard to

- feelings for democracy,
- aesthetic awareness and qualities (such as empathic, ethical, and spiritual sensibilities),
- collaborative, reflexive and critical capabilities,
- openness to newly 'seeing' the other,
- willingness to move towards more reflexive and critical modes of awareness and knowing that reconnect with the body as a source of learning,
- capacity to challenge social injustices and engage creatively with conflict and antagonisms
- any other aspects that will be developed in and through the PAR process.

Participants evaluated the PLC-F-LAB process as very interesting. They reflected on the two maximum-contrast comparative case experiences in the PLC-F-LAB. One organisation is very inclusive, solidarity-based, and follows common principles as a co-productive organisation. The other is hierarchical and traditional as it rather excludes so-called 'disabled' people than including them into society. This contrasting and exemplified approach to the learning and transformation environment is experienced as valuable and helpful.

In the **traditionally hierarchical organisation**, which 'takes care' of so-called disabled people, participants perceive quite a willingness to open up and even the need to search for exchange, strive for cultural change and transform: The CEO of this organisation wants to establish rituals of togetherness, wished the employees 'to be seen' (C8, Org2, Org. Int. 226-231) – and intends to refer to the PLC 'somehow'. He selects the PLC card "self-organisation as equals" and reflects on leadership and the employees as experts when considering their organisational development and change. His way of searching for new imaginaries still connects to the old patterns. Wanting to open toward democratisation, there is still some insecurity how to do this and not a clear imaginary: He says, that he needs to put a question mark regarding alternative organisational structures – and still is quite fascinated by the PLC envisioning alternative patterns of organising (C8, Org2, Org. Int.288-315). Searching for ways to address the ones at the 'border of our societies' who need 'respect for being different' and 'respect for being

diverse' (C8, Org2, 302-311), he addresses power relations and rationalities of exclusion and even extinction. This collective imaginary contrasts with relational well-being, inclusion and belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011).

The **PLC-F-Lab** seems to offer a pathway toward searching for alternative imaginaries: "It was actually a relatively short session, (...) and yet I had the feeling that it was great because it simply stimulated something and opened up something in people's minds" (C8, C2, PeerFin1)³. Another person comments: "If you take people out of their everyday lives and offer them some kind of different setting, then the mind immediately opens up, and you can, I think that has shown me that again" (C8, C2, PeerFin1)⁴. In the interview with an organisational leader, the person comments with the metaphor of learning to swim: "That was also my experiential knowledge because I experienced it in that area and we simply tried it out back then and that I simply showed that (...) I only learn to swim when I'm already in the water (...), that it only works for me that way, that it works sustainably" (C8, Org.Int.; Org1)⁵.

This first impulse of the PLC-F-Lab supports this endeavour and is perceived as something to build on. Student-professionals are very interested in using a potential future Guide that integrates the challenges and opportunities of organisational change and goes beyond professional learning.

Participants bringing in their organisations as transformation cases are happy to find and invite motivated CEOs and colleagues to participate. Arguing that many colleagues equally see the need for organisational change is motivating to follow up on this endeavour. In this experience, participants feel a process of individual and collective growth. As all the participating organisational members wish to leave behind this hierarchical, strict, excluding way of organising, system building can occur as a collective experience. Participants of the program and the invited organisational cases strive for a democracy-as-becoming approach to organising. Some invited members commented in the PLCs-based interviews, which were realised before the PLC-F-Lab, that they do not yet have a clear vision or do not know how to leave their hierarchical structures in the institutionalised field of so-called 'disabled people' behind. Against a stigmatising, deficit-oriented view, they wish to strengthen themselves into a resource-oriented organisation. This gives them the motivation to move on.

Against the still existing hierarchical traditional institution for so-called 'disabled people', the **second organisation** is an **egalitarian organisation is the counter-imaginary**, the alternative dispositive (Deleuze, 2005), the heterotopic space (Adler & Weber, 2018), which already seems to apply the episteme of commoning, suggested by Collet-Sabé and Ball (2022; 2024). The civil society psychiatry inclusion organisation is highly interested in organising reflection spaces. It wishes to take more time to talk and sit together to enable creativity and use transformative methods. They want to unleash the potential in all the other organisations in

³ „das war ja eigentlich eine relativ kurze Session, (...) und trotzdem habe ich das Gefühl gehabt, das war super, weil es einfach was angeregt hat und was aufgemacht hat, also in den, in den Köpfen der Leute.“ (abschließendes Peer Interview, Case 1)

⁴ "Wenn man die Leute rausnimmt, dass ihr im Alltag und ihnen quasi irgend ein anderes Setting anbietet, dann geht sofort der Mind auf, und man kann ja, das finde ich, das hat für mich das wieder so gezeigt." (abschließendes Peer Interview, Case 1)

⁵ "Das war auch mein Erfahrungswissen, weil ich das in dem Bereich erlebt habe und wir das auch damals einfach ausprobiert haben und dass ich einfach dann so gezeigt hat, dass (...) ich auch immer erst also Schwimmen lerne, wenn ich schon im Wasser bin(...), dass das also für mich nur so funktioniert, also nämlich nachhaltig funktioniert" (Organisationsinterview, Case 1)

the field and especially want to support self-organisation and involve inhabitants in the healing process of other inhabitants. They empower ex-patients in a very special way: In their “Ex-In” approach, they do not only invite former ‘patients’ into the socio-psychiatry settings as volunteers or supporters. Instead, they offer them equal pay as professionals, like trained experts, based on their experience and expertise. In this sense, this inclusive organisation is participatory and egalitarian and creates resources for supporting clients in an empowering way. This organisation is orienting its practice to experimentation and co-creation.

Other **participants** were delighted to have had the opportunity to do the PLC-based interviewing. The very interested and engaged interviewers perceived the PLC-F-Lab as an opportunity to overcome fear – the fear of opening oneself to others and showing and talking about what moves everyone. The wish was to repeat the PLC-F-Lab as an experience to cooperate, re-imagine, and co-create future imaginaries and solutions. The experience of being a peer group facilitating the lab process was perceived as particularly valuable. The need to overcome (one's own and others') resistance is especially helpful for opening up and integrating oneself and others into such collaborative processes.

While some saw an experimental process happening, others found this space not too challenging. One person thinks that his LAB group of the hierarchical organisation still could have been much more creative. This person feels that his organisation did not play out the imaginary and design options they might have had.

RQ3: What influence, if any, did the researchers have on how the Framework and Guides were used and the designs of AEL for democracy that emerged in the trials?

Researcher Susanne Maria Weber introduced the Prototype Framework and Guides in the online session and students were asked to familiarize themselves with the Framework and Guides. As time was critical and the course's hybrid design made integrating content and process management difficult, students self-organised regarding the Frameworks and Guides. They needed to familiarise themselves, especially with the PLCs, which are complex and not always intuitively understood. Student Professionals trialled the PLC regarding team development, team reflection, organisational host interviews and organisational analysis interviews. PLC-F-Lab format, contributing to individual and collective learning and organisational transformation.

RQ 4: What evidence-based conclusions for revision and refinement of the Prototype Framework and Guides emerge from the experience of using the Prototypes and addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

As the Framework and Guides were less referring to commoning and the PLC, they were not sufficiently informative to support student professional application of the PLC approach. Regarding the course, participants commented that they would wish to have more explanations in the Zoom meetings and more time to find the organisations and organise the groups at an earlier stage. The organisations should be defined at an early stage, and the process should start. Through this, they can better prepare their PLCs-based peer

interviewing, PLCs-based organisational interviewing, and PLCs-F-LAB-interventions. They also mention that they would rather dive deeper into one method than explore many methods.

As we have explored the potential of the new and innovative PLC approach, it will be helpful to analyse and develop the Guide's potential. The PLC approach might be added as content and methodology to the Higher Education & Adult, Professional, and Organisational Learning Guides. As we learned, stakeholders need more introduction to the PLC; the German team will also prepare a handbook on common interventions for democracy-as-becoming in the German language.

Furthermore, based on the findings, it is essential to strengthen our perspective on the meaning-making of the stakeholders involved. We understand the design phase as an iterative and co-creational process with students and stakeholders. We need a co-creational approach that follows a co-creational and iterative PAR methodology.

The participants' interest in connecting and involving their organisations in the process was excellent, as it allowed them to stay as close as possible to real-world learning – and in a Deweyan sense, to learn in an embryonic society – and an experience-based approach related to their real problems (Dewey 1969; 1991). Moreover, such intensely reflexive groups should be supported in co-creating. From an emergence approach, we need to be in resonance with the process and opportunities arising there. We may need to adjust over time, too. Processes should never be schematic.

4. Limitations

In the data analysis process, as the material was recorded in Austria, people spoke with a strong Austrian accent, which was challenging for an AI-based transcription. Even the researcher-based refinement and correction of data needed some effort. For language reasons, this case was the most difficult to prepare in advance for data analysis. It took a lot of time to prepare all the material.

Time was another limitation for the continuity in the iteration and engagement of the participants. Due to the time limit, this case is based on only one cycle. Also, student professionals were engaged in their jobs during the day. Therefore, online sessions in the evening were challenging, and the continuity of participation of student professionals could not always be guaranteed. This posed a challenge to work on the topics planned and introduced thoroughly. Moreover, the two organisational transformation teams worked quite differently. While one group self-organised very well, the other was more inconsistent, and not all members stayed active. This is why the data set was not equally complete in both groups. Nevertheless, there was enough material to show the significant interest, and success clearly, and wish to follow up to work with such approaches.

As in the case of the PLCs, applications, methods, and specific approaches to using them are not well known. So far, there are no tutorials or handbooks on how to use PLCs. As it is a new transformation methodology, professionals are unsure how to apply it. As case 9 shows,

practitioners have, until now, often somewhat hesitated to use them right from the beginning. As the PLCs prove to be a helpful methodology to support democracy-as-becoming, it will be necessary to introduce it more intensely.

As mentioned in the beginning, the PLC still needs more introduction and explanation and a trial phase, which is somewhat challenging in an online setting. The time frame, in general, was short, especially regarding the winter and holiday seasons involved when people were on vacation and the organisations were not available for interviews. Student professionals had full access to their self-created material and interpreted their organisation-related material in preparing the PLC-F-Lab.

5. Relevance of Context

As noted earlier, student-professionals were an exceptionally busy group of stakeholders. Despite this, they were highly motivated to transform their organisations, connect with key individuals, and bring them into the in-person labs. In this regard, they proved to be an ideal group for trialling the PLCs in terms of individual, collective, and organisational learning. Additionally, they possessed a strong capacity for data analysis. Unfortunately, time constraints hindered a deeper level of involvement.

The uniqueness of this case lies in the research design and the participants. Instead of evaluating country- or locality-specific cultural contexts, the focus was placed on educational and organisational cultures. The professional development system in Germany and Austria is specifically tailored for those seeking professional development rather than pursuing degree programmes. Consequently, the participants were driven by a strong desire for professionalisation. This case sits at the intersection of HE and Adult, Professional and Organisational learning. Since the Case 8 explored individual, collective, and organisational transformation, it is considered as adult/professional and organisational learning.

Also, participants invited colleagues from their institutions to the in-person labs (PLC-F-Lab) to further endeavours for organisational transformation. This intervention underscores the dual role of participants: (1) professionals as learners—trailing and implementing AELD within the module, and (2) professionals as multipliers—driving organisational change towards democracy. When considering the cross-case analysis as a next step alongside other HE or Adult, Professional, and Organisational learning cases, this single iteration offers valuable insights based on a distinct research design and action approach.

6. Learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guides

First, the material generated in Case 8 refers to the methods that may be added to the professional and organisational learning Guide. These methods are: 1) PLCs-based Peer-Team-Development Interviewing; 2) PLCs-based Peer-Team-Reflection Interviewing; 3) PLCs-

based Organisational leaders Interviews; 4) PLCs-based Organisational Interviews; 5) Patterns of the PLC-F-Lab.

We should work on the Framework and Guides to integrate the commoning perspective accordingly and still more systematically. Here, we can use Helfrich's (2014) systematisation of the "operating system" of the episteme of Commoning. This operating system refers to a different image of humanity – as social beings able to cooperate instead of individual utility maximisers (*homo oeconomicus*). Against a dividing conceptualisation of 'either-or,' the concept of interrelational applies, which sees the one existing through the other. The carriers of change are not necessarily regarded as influential stakeholders, lobbies, or institutionalised politics but as communities and their networks. Here, solutions are rather regarded to come from the margins. While profit logic refers to economic growth, efficiency, and timesaving, commons logic refers to using the common good for complementarity and time expenditure. Against the core question 'What can be sold?' the commoning perspective reflects on 'what is needed for living?'

Regarding the governance-related aspects, decision-making processes are addressed: against hierarchical, top-down, regulation, and adjustment approaches, a horizontal, bottom-up, self-organisation, and monitoring approach is prioritised. Regarding decision principles, it is not the majority that rules, but the consensus principle applies.

Regarding social relations, power relations do not relate to centralisation or monopolisation, but the tendency of decentralisation and autonomy is relevant. Against a practice of domination and enforcement at someone else's expense or competition, in the rationality of commoning, cooperation dominates.

Regarding knowledge production, against an 'economised' situation, cooperative, peer-to-peer rationality is intended to live, which supports different knowledge systems and free technologies. The rationality of preservation, reproduction, and proliferation applies, and for society, commoning means the unfolding of each individual as a prerequisite for the unfolding of the others and vice versa.

Accordingly, Collet-Sabé and Ball (2022) address the challenge of co-producing and commoning a different educational episteme. They promote a relational onto-epistemology against an individualistic one. They suggest commons education against an enclosed one. It would follow the type of education of an open activity rather than a closed one. Then, education's central dimension would be relational instead of institutional. The point of departure should be equal relations instead of a disciplinary and hierarchical approach. Regarding space, a place education would be preferred to a non-place education. It would be contextual, diverse, and oriented towards the profound logic of the common good. Its primary goals would follow the rationale of self-formation in relation to oneself, others, the community, and the environment. It would focus on creating new ways of being, living, learning, etc. The main goal of such an educational approach and rationality would be to learn how to live together instead of learning individually (Collet-Sabé and Ball, 2022).

An educational approach promoting democracy-as-becoming perfectly fits in here. Moreover, from this onto-epistemic approach, democracy-as-becoming can be understood as a pattern of emergence, which can be observed as a 'social reality in flight,' as Otto Scharmer (2007:366-367) puts it. He suggests relating to the deep structures of 'the gesture of paying attention' and 'the inner place from where we operate' and how we 'see the world.' It also refers to the 'knowledge coming into existence' and the 'social space' emerging in the communicational rationality in place. Accordingly, **social time** is a relevant dimension, and the 'collective social body' is the conception of internal or external causation. As we have seen already with the claim of Collet-Sabé and Ball (2022), democracy-as-becoming is a question of the 'epistemes coming into existence' and the 'Self' 'becoming' in these epistemic organisational settings. In this sense, the Framework and Guides might refer deeper to the contextual embeddings of enablement and assets to be put in place and practice. The institutional settings in this understanding go beyond a context; they instead would be seen as a conditional space, producing atmospheres and feelings of belonging, exclusion, or inclusion (Scharmer, 2007: 366-367).

As professional learning might always remain limited to the classroom setting, adding more systematic organisational learning to the existing Framework and Guides might make sense.

Conclusions on Research and Implications for Framework and Guides:

As shown here very shortly, Case 8 contrasts two organisational rationalities – with this, two onto-epistemic positionings, which are the one of exclusion and the one of inclusion. The traditional organisation shown here briefly has been searching for its future path and an alternative imaginary, which is still bound to the traditional collective imaginary and reproductive practice lived day by day (Castoriadis 1975). Connecting to the contrasting, heterotopic imaginaries of inclusion, diversity and liveliness, such organisations may re-imagine their potential future and 'becoming'. The PLC card deck is a design (research) methodology, that offers and supports creative approaches to research and modes of becoming (Weber 2014).

In this sense, Framework and Guides would need to support reconnecting to the alternative 'heterotopic practices' of constituting alternative, inclusive, life-centred organisations – in a democracy-as-becoming approach. They would need to establish an 'archaeological' (Foucault 1981) attitude - and carve out alternative dispositives of creating the new (Weber 2013). Against an 'epistemology of extinction' - as Collet-Sabé and Ball (2024) put it, education as a common(ing) activity in local social infrastructure could be an 'escape' to be imagined first. While Collet-Sabé and Ball (2024) suggest escaping from schools' extinction ethics, a locally grounded inclusive organisational practice of inclusion (as shown in the second case of a diversity-oriented, inclusive civil society organization) can help us re-imagining ourselves and our institutions. By re-imagining, we (re-)connect to the onto-epistemological roots of ourselves (self and others) and our institutions. As a methodology of heterotopic relations, narrations and aesthetics, the PLC card deck might contribute to shifts and transitions from de-communication to re-communication (Jeong 2018) and a 'change at the speed of imagination' (Watkins et al 2011).

This imagined re-communication might establish an organisational model of Peer Governance, which builds on heterarchy, establishes decision-making by consensus, supports solidarity financing and shares knowledge generously. It envisions being transparent in the trust space and aligning with diversity. It claims to keep commons and commerce apart and to anchor the relationality of having. It suggests observing rule compliance commons internally and interposing enclosures and appropriations. It surrounds commons with semi-permeable membranes. Rule violations impose graduated sanctions: This alternative organising model enables equal footing in and through organisational structures (Helfrich & Petzold 2021).

7. Ethical Reflection and Gender Dimension

In this case research, participants were informed about the project before the start of the seminar and were given the option not to take part in data provision. They signed a consent form and were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. All data were pseudonymised before the data analysis process. The stakeholder group was structured differently in the two cases but was balanced in terms of participants from the organisations.

A personal style of language was used in the PAR process. The informal 'du' form, which reflects a low-hierarchy approach, was used throughout the course and integrated into the semi-structured peer interview guides in German. Although participants were not asked for identifiers such as gender, age, or ethnicity, the researcher observed a diverse group during the trials.

As a research approach, the team examines gender from an intersectional perspective rather than focusing on perceived or assigned gender. In particular, it addresses power dynamics. This approach is based on the active role of participants in the data collection process and their interventions to transform their institutions.

Furthermore, the data analysis team included not only the lead professor of the case study but also PhD students, MA students, and undergraduate interns. The team mainly consisted of female researchers, some of whom had migration experiences. Since the summer of 2024, the data analysis has been participatory, with regular meetings ensuring the involvement of all researchers. From data collection to analysis, the process has been guided by ethical principles of inclusivity, equity, and (self-) reflexivity to mitigate any power-related biases.

Germany Case Report

Case 9

Phase/Educational Setting: Adult, Professional and Organisational Learning

VEN-Approach: Visual

1. Case Description

Participants: In this case, we worked with the German Commons-Institute (CI) and the German practitioner field of commoning (professionals, counsellors, educators, and activists in the field) who can be regarded as knowledge agents and consultants with their experience and perspective ‘outside’ the routines of educational institutions and organisations.

Location: We use a hybrid setting. The workshop we organised took place in Marburg, and we invited participants from all over Germany, including one German-speaking Italian participant.

Purpose—Relevance to Democracy-as-Becoming: Case 9 refers to the Adult, Professional, and Organisational Learning phase. It addresses a relatively informal or nonformal educational setting. Connecting to Dewey’s (1969; 1991) threefold notion of democracy, commoning refers to a) social togetherness, b) peer governance, and c) care-economy as a threefold notion of democracy-as-becoming.

The field of commoning connects to self-organised education within the commoning movement and can also be seen as a thought-leading context that supports reimagining educational institutions (Collet-Sabé & Ball, 2023). The PLC, a visually and text-based card deck used in our trials, was developed within this community of practice. We collaborate with multipliers in this field. While the PLC is a newly developed methodology, it is not yet widely institutionalised. Around 500 PLC card decks had been distributed by early 2024. To understand its usage and application, we conducted an online survey followed by online meetings, leading to a trial workshop in October 2024. For these trials, we sought experts already using PLCs in educational settings. Since the cards do not include an instruction guide, it was necessary to investigate how PLCs are applied in practice. As a newly developed transformation methodology for individual, collective, organisational, and epistemic learning, PLCs currently have a small but growing user base. In preparation for refining the Framework and Guides, we have organised expert exchanges on transforming educational processes towards commoning. We explore commoning as both a strategy and a practice for democracy-as-becoming. Within the AECED Methodological Framework (AECED, 2023), this case

primarily addresses epistemic transformation rather than just individual and collective learning, or organisational transformation.

The PLC supports carefully found patterns, which, following the architect Christopher Alexander (1999), are seen as the future of theory and essential for generating a dynamic and sustainable world. Patterns function as tools that foster liveliness—they are adaptable and applicable across various contexts. They describe effective problem-solving practices that consistently emerge in comparable situations, intervening in the interplay of context, problem, and solution. Unlike disciplinary or normalising frameworks, PLCs are rooted in imagination as a means of fostering new possibilities (Weber, 2022). As an onto-ethical and epistemological approach, they involve an aesthetic process of internalisation. As Collet-Sabé and Ball (2023; 2024) suggest a self-educational approach in community embeddings, the PLC is meant to be the methodology of collective transformation (Euler 2016). The PLC can be a powerful approach to reorienting the gaze and reinventing our lives. It can contribute to re-imagining ourselves and to collectively transform democracy-as-becoming. Therefore, it might contribute a lot to the Framework and Guides.

The field of commoning and commoning practitioners already practices the threefold notion of democracy, and as the PLC is an educational approach to transgress toward a democratic collective practice, the dimension addressed here goes beyond individual and collective or organisational learning but refers to epistemic transformation. We ask how the methodologies and methods of commoning practitioners contribute to the Framework and Guides and how a threefold understanding of democracy-as-becoming encompassing social togetherness, political self-governance, and care economy can be integrated here. In this case, therefore, we addressed **RQ1** – how participants experience being introduced to and working with Framework and Guide as well as the PLC. We referred to **RQ2** in the sense that we analysed the experience of the facilitators and worked on individual and collective growth. Finally, we refer to RQ 4 on the evidence-based conclusions.

Research Activities and Methods: We conducted an online survey that analysed and collected the existing practices of PLCs to learn the spectrum of application, the spectrum of method combination, and the contexts of application. In the survey, we asked for the conditions and success strategies of collective learning and organisational change and the potential the PLCs brings to organisational democratisation, societal change, and epistemic transformation. Based on the online survey, we conducted meetings with the field to apply the PAR approach. Based on the feedback from the field, we realised a co-present workshop to co-create applications and options for the methodical use of the PLCs. Moreover, we conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with the practitioners we collaborated with in the workshop.

Researchers: Dirk Netter, Julia Petzold, and Susanne Maria Weber prepared the online survey. We collaborated with our partners from CI. We invited members of the AECED research team to support a pretest and give feedback on the quality of the survey instrument and the ethical aspects of the research involved. During the online meeting and the workshop phase,

Kardelen Cazgir and three students collaborated with Helena Wolter and Canan Yalvac as student interns and with Veronika Pinzger as student assistant.

Time Frame: This case only has one iteration regarding trialling Framework and Guides. We prepared the online survey from October 2023 and conducted it between April and May 2024. In June, July, August, and September 2024, we held online meetings with practitioners to provide feedback on the survey results and prepare the practitioner's workshop in October 2024 to be held on-site. In the mailings for the online survey and meetings, we introduced the AECED project and provided additional information like a project poster. Framework and Guides were sent to participants in preparation for the workshop held in October 2024.

We introduced Framework and Guides during the workshop and handed printed versions to participants, who prepared to read and comment on them on the last day. On the first day of the workshop, we collected relevant methods, which were trialled on the second day. After every method was experienced, we reflected on the potential and usability of the methods involved. We collected the methods to be integrated into the Guides and into a commoning handbook, which will be developed based on the action of the practice field. We worked on establishing a commoning professional network and continue identifying existing practices and PLC methods or create some to strengthen their relevance/applicability for the pedagogical Guides. In the interviews with the professionals involved, we had the chance to reflect further and analyse the potential of the explored methods and practices.

2. Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis

Data Types and Sources

Types of Data: Mixed-method, including visual data, qualitative data, and quantitative data.

Source of Data: Visual data (brown paper documentation and written feedback on the guides, PLCs-based interview guides); transcribed audio recordings of semi-structured interviews with participants, who used self-chosen nicknames for anonymity; researchers' memory protocols; researchers' participant observation; and a fully anonymised online survey.

Research Methodologies and Methods: The online questionnaire included various questions that allowed us to map this practice field. In the sections of the online survey, we were interested in how professionals became aware of the pattern language, how long they had been working with the cards, and in which contexts they worked. We were interested in the most important concerns and goals when working with the cards and in the experiences, practitioners had had in their work with the cards. We asked for the effects they perceived and the obstacles and limitations they encountered in their work with the cards. We also asked about their specific problems and challenges when using the cards. We were interested in the use of the cards, the method combinations applied, and the topics related to the sample cards they were interested in.

Data Analysis Process: We used a multi-method approach, integrating all relevant sources and data within the appropriate research questions. Data analysis was conducted in data-analysis sessions in the research team as well as intense data analysis sessions over several days.

We used SPSS to analyse and present the quantitative survey data. The Online Workshops were collectively reflected in the research group. The Co-present workshop focused on aesthetic reflexivity in collective reflection, and we used autoethnographic reflexivity and collective autoethnographic resonance (Chang, 2013) as analysis methods. We used a printed questionnaire to evaluate the document quality of the Framework and Guides in different dimensions. Our qualitative data analysis was based on an individually prepared written metaphor-matrix offering a first 'formulating interpretation' of the course of the interview. In a second step, researchers analysed together in the research group in the mode of an intersubjective interpretation. We analysed core passages of the transcribed interviews and reflected on the relevance of the rationalities applied in practice. Since the beginning of the PAR phase, researchers engaged with memoing, and revisited memos during the data analysis phase, then transferred their memos (containing no personal identifiers) to the Shared Memoing Matrix at the end of the data analysis phase.

Theoretical Background: As democracy-as-becoming focuses on ontological and epistemic transformation, we refer to a discourse analytical frame of reference (Foucault, 1981). As the communing community intends to contribute to democratising social togetherness, peer-economy and care-economy, communing is about onto-epistemic transformation. We connect to the work of Silke Helfrich and David Bollier (2019), who have built the theoretical framework for the PLC and who connect to a process theoretical approach. Our analytical research perspective refers to a Foucauldian dispositive analysis (Bührmann & Schneider, 2008). Foucault's concept of the dispositive is helpful insofar it is directed toward the organising pattern of a discourse. As communing intends to transform and democratise our societies at the deep level of onto-epistemic transformation, the PLC addresses this dispositive in its approach of democracy-as-becoming.

Silja Graupes's (2021) title, "Change is always as a last resort change in habits of thought," leads to arguing "for a new biodiversity of cognition in the face of today's crisis." As Euler (2019) sees the 'Commons as a social form that allows for degrowth and sustainability, he envisions a "Commons-creating Society" (Euler, 2016). As mentioned above, the community of practice of communing sees the 'great transformation' in a threefold notion of democratisation: social togetherness, peer governance, care economy.

As the commoning field is grounded in social movements, we argue with Della Porta (2020) that this field fights for the democratisation of all societal spheres and connects to utopian practices in everyday life (Cooper, 2014). As re-imagining against the dominant discourses and re-designing Social Innovation (Moulaert et al., 2019), imaginaries are core in the commoning world. We connect to Castoriadis' (1975) "Society as imaginary institution", which differentiates between reproductional and radically new or innovative imaginaries (Weber & Heidelmann, 2022; DeCock, 2017). As already mentioned, beyond a merely social, political or economic

approach, Bollier and Helfrich (2019) argue for a threefold notion of democracy-as-becoming. Moreover, the episteme of commoning is discussed as an approach to de-institutionalisation in educational institutions (Ball & Collet-Sabé, 2022; Collet & Ball, 2023; Collet-Sabé & Ball, 2024). Such onto-epistemic approaches connect to the visual at the level of inner subjectifying imaginaries, to methods in use, and methods of 'Imagisation' – an art of creative management (Morgan, 1993). In this sense, the PLC card deck can be understood as the connection between 'Positive Image' and 'Positive Action' (Cooperrider, 1999) – and in this sense as a eupraxia or "affirmative basis of organising".

3. Research Findings

Analysing the data of the quantitative survey and the qualitative research with common practitioners' shows a congruent picture of the field and the use of the PLCs. From both research approaches, we can see that the field is relatively small and still relatively homogeneous and can, in this sense, be regarded as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1998) not only for democracy but also for democratisation-as-becoming. While the online-survey data are fully anonymised, the qualitative interviews have been pseudonymised.

As the PLC is a new methodology, to be integrated still more intensely to the framework and guides of the AECED project, the research project needed to learn more about the present users and their expertise of using the card deck. In this context, from a PAR approach it explicitly was about learning from the field and involving the relevant experts into our process of collecting knowledge which might further contribute to framework and guides.

Our online survey (N = 67) was conducted between April 9 and May 20 2024. While 67 practitioners participated in the quantitative study, 53 questionnaires were completed. We used statistical analysis, SPSS, and content analysis of the written comments collected through the online survey. According to the survey results, most professionals got acquainted with the card deck only during the last two or three years. A strong institutional connection for them was the Commons-Institute, and the CI summer schools provided there. Most professionals worked in self-organised, educational, or political contexts. Accordingly, the PLC card deck was used as a training and learning tool in educational settings or for reflexivity, development, and growth of individuals and groups. Further, the cards were used for co-creating common futures. Practitioners saw the voicing quality of the card deck, helping to articulate perceptions and experiences. Most saw the cards as helping to shift the attentional structure from the self to the whole and saw them as a tool for individual and collective reflexivity. They saw the activating quality of the PLC insofar as people turn into co-creators rather than passive participants. Additionally, the card deck was perceived as an instrument for knowledge transmission. Most professionals participating in the survey agreed with this function of the card deck. Half the participants saw the card deck's democratising function and the PLC's conflict-resolving quality. Participants saw the orienting quality toward collective visions and values and, apart from this, mentioned inspiration and playful learning, articulation and dialogue, relational pattern recognition, transformation of consciousness, and empowerment.

Nevertheless, some of the online survey respondents saw the PLC card deck and the commoning approach it follows as ‘too complex’. Comments mentioned that it seems “unattractive to deal with the cards and/or the subject area for some people.” One person commented “I could not describe the added value that comes from collectively working with the patterns.” Another person mentioned that the aesthetics are specific, and the terminology may be too complex for people without prior knowledge of the commoning paradigm. Participants of the survey saw the preconditions, prerequisites, and limits of disability and mention the format and layout of the cards. They argued that changes in content are needed, and that adaptation should be made regarding the card deck. They referred to the style of language and the aesthetic presentation. They commented on problems of use and primarily reflected on the needs of specific target groups, contexts, and forms of presentation.

The integration of the PLC with other methods in the online survey was mentioned regarding “Performing arts (pantomime), Contact improvisation, Charades, etc.”, and Constellation work. Professionals used visual methods and integrated them into “Flip charts, card queries, others.” They used them for lectures and visualisations on the paradigm shift. The practitioners were especially interested in using the cards in the context of personal development and motivational practices to invite people to experiment with them. Professionals were interested in experiences of success and stories of change through the use of the sample cards (empty/blank cards for designing one's own patterns). They wanted to use the card deck for mediation and counselling and see their potential for community processes. They saw their connectivity to social and cooperative discourses. They mentioned their digital preparation (gamification or online configurator) and related to their potential to link even with classic start-up tools (e.g., Ownership Canvas, Commons Canvas, etc.). Respondents referred to specific contexts and their use in the digital space. They connected to care economies and to commoning and the more-than-human world.

As we connected the qualitative interviewing to the online questionnaire, we matched the questions formulated in the interviews, realised before and after the practitioner's workshop in October 2024. Here, we were also interested in how professionals became aware of the pattern language, how long they have worked with the cards, and in which contexts. We were interested in the most important concerns and goals when working with the cards and the experiences practitioners had in their work with the cards. We asked for the effects they perceive and the obstacles and limitations they encountered in their work with the cards. We also asked about their problems and challenges when using the cards. We were interested in the use of the cards, the method and integration applied, and the topics related to the sample cards they were currently interested in. In the qualitative approach, we referred to the relevance of the card deck to democracy, organisational development, learning, and the three dimensions of democracy: social togetherness, peer governance, and care economy.

As mentioned above, the nine interviews with practitioners were conducted before and after the practitioner workshop. After this, in November and December 2024, MA Students in a research training course conducted 11 more interviews. As this material (11 interviews) still is in preparation, these interviews cannot be considered for the present report. Our qualitative

empirical research included the card- and text-based patterns of metaphors, how practitioners related to them, and what they saw in the PLC. We extended the data analysis to these impulses, which can also be valuable contributions to the Framework and Guides.

Most practitioners appreciated the card deck as a transformational tool for democracy-as-becoming. They saw a lot of potential in the card deck. The way they referred to it differed in the spectrum between a rather emotional or a rational way of thinking and speaking. The way the PLC card deck connected to people's minds and bodies was also regarded and felt differently. While some practitioners saw it as an approach to articulate emotions, others referred to abstraction as becoming possible using the cards. The practitioners used different metaphors to express their inner imagination and deep connection to the PLC. Some interviewees used the image metaphor of 'doors', which the PLC card deck can open. Others related to the 'bridging' quality of the PLC, as well as the image and metaphor of the 'bridge'. One interviewed person used the image of the 'compass' (C9, Luna, 152) – and the 'placeholder' which would represent and embody something to be learned (C9, Luna, 253)

A different set of metaphors is addressed when listening or envisioning the images of the PLC being imagined as an 'ecosystem', a 'wood of terms', or a 'wood of patterns'. Such relational and systemic metaphors and images were to be found in the images of the 'neuronal web' as well. Such images of deep meaning contrast to rather practical images, referring to the functionality of the card deck. In this sense, some practitioners would instead refer to the practical quality: the PLC can 'transform change spaces'. Such a conceptualisation of 'revolutionary ruptures' is contrasted by metaphors of 'small steps' (C9, Luna, 389).

Another metaphor referred to 'visibility happening', to 'bring the complex and diffuse happenings to clearance'. Other metaphors used referred to their support function and the "assistance at the limit of the "speakable" (C9, Peter, 641). On these metaphors, the PLC becomes a transcending quality to express imaginaries and, by expressing them, make them palpable, addressable, and workable. Against such a connection to the unconscious seen in the PLC card deck, other metaphors referred to 'information flows' as a metaphor for the card deck. Supporting information flows was regarded to contribute to solving social problems.

Other narrations referred to 'continuity', and others to 'revival and awakening'. Other metaphors in use referred to social processes, relations, and contact as a quality they bring about, while others connected to a technical solution, which may solve social problems. While some practitioners related to the PLCs as a 'medium,' others connected to it as a 'socially lived practice.' While some participants instead referred to the 'selective' use of the PLC, others saw them as a "wholistically unfolding virus" (C9, Agira, 640). While some saw them as 'too highly concentrated', others regarded them as an 'excellent empowerment tool'.

We refer to these metaphors in depth as we see them as a core potential for the Framework and Guides, which so far are somewhat academic, wordy, abstract, and less sensual and attractive than they could be. In the following, we will explicitly connect to the general research questions formulated in the AECED Methodological Framework (2023, p.21).

RQ1. Regarding process: a) How do participants experience being introduced to and working with the Prototype Framework and Guides? b) In what ways is AELD co-created and facilitated through ABE methods?

While reflecting on the Framework and Guides, different voices revealed they were overwhelmed by the volume of concepts introduced in the Framework and the Guides. On the one side, they complained about the vastness and richness of the text; on the other, they wished for more clarity and detail. Especially within the method templates, the participants missed the connection between the method and the AELD concepts. This reflection can be linked to other observations within the field, such that the commoning field is very aware of inclusivity (inclusivity matters). The commoning community does not want to be challenged by the text only but is motivated to engage with it in a multimodal and interactive way. The concerns commoners expressed can be seen as 'seeing' the other. They mentioned barriers they encounter, that also other commoners could or would encounter. Such experiences show the present limitations to further engage with framework and guides and the specific topics outlined there. For some members, the connection between commoning and democracy was not transparent enough; therefore. ABE methods for democracy-as-becoming and the inner connection to commoning needs to be made more visible.

In summary, there was an active wish for more structure and systematisation, the integration of digital instruments, and more categories to understand the usability of the methods for practitioners. Are these methods for beginners or professionals? Can they be classified by the categories given within the Framework? The volume of text was not appealing, especially for this group of professionals.

RQ2. Regarding the transformational change in participants: In what ways do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, lead to individual and collective growth in regard to

- feelings for democracy,
- aesthetic awareness and qualities (such as empathic, ethical, and spiritual sensibilities),
- collaborative, reflexive and critical capabilities,
- openness to newly 'seeing' the other,
- willingness to move towards more reflexive and critical modes of awareness and knowing that reconnect with the body as a source of learning,
- capacity to challenge social injustices and engage creatively with conflict and antagonisms
- any other aspects that will be developed in and through the PAR process.

The context of commoning practitioners is particularly attuned to power dynamics and the potential for participation. It is a highly reflexive community of practice that fosters an intricate democratic practice as part of everyday life. As experts in democracy-as-becoming, they can, in fact, guide the project in building upon the lived experience of democracy-as-becoming, which is reflected in the PLC card deck. The field of commoning experts is already highly conscious of integral perspectives on human beings, aesthetic modes of becoming,

collaborative approaches, and critical thinking. They demonstrate a strong commitment to building a democratic society and institutions while also possessing the capacity to challenge social injustice.

RQ3: What influence, if any, did the researchers have on how the Framework and Guides were used and the designs of AEL for democracy that emerged in the trials?

We, as researchers, were present in the commoning case and co-created alongside commoning community professionals. We did not urge professionals to use the materials; rather, the process was about co-creation and extending beyond the existing resources. We observed that the current material was perceived as highly text-driven, abstract, academic, and less engaging in this context. Participants preferred to develop their own tools and approaches, exploring them as contributions to the Framework and Guides through a co-creation process. The trials were highly successful, resulting in numerous approaches and methods that were developed and trialled, all of which can be incorporated into the Guides or contribute to the planned handbook on PLC interventions.

RQ 4: What evidence-based conclusions for revision and refinement of the Prototype Framework and Guides emerge from the experience of using the Prototypes and addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

Based on the explorations made in this case, participants wished to strengthen the relevance of commoning and the PLC for the Framework and Guides. They felt the specific contribution of PLC for learning democracy-as-becoming is still missing, and they wished to see this more represented in the material provided to any educational setting.

Regarding the analytical perspective of onto-epistemic transformation, the practice of the PLC directly connects to what Ball & Collet-Sabé (2022:12) call the 'episteme of commoning'. Against approaches of enclosed education, which are disciplinary and hierarchically bound, they suggest the approach of a commoning education, which is based on open activity, relational practice, place-based, diversity-oriented, and oriented toward the common good. The authors primarily refer to the goal of self-formation with oneself, others, the community, and the environment. The focus is on new ways of being, living and learning. Such practices are already cultivated in the field of solidararian and social agriculture, social innovation projects, alternative schools, co-living spaces etc.

Table 1. ~TC~

Dimension	Education as the commoning activity of the care of the self	Modern school institutions
<i>Onto-epistemology</i>	Relational onto-epistemology	Individualistic onto-epistemology
<i>Type of education</i>	Common education Open activity	Enclosed education Closed activity
<i>Main dimension of education</i>	Relation	Institution
<i>Point of depart</i>	Equal relation	Disciplinary and hierarchical
<i>Space</i>	Place education	Non-place education
<i>Context</i>	Contextual education	Decontextualised education
<i>Tenet</i>	Diversity	Normalisation
<i>Deep logic</i>	Common good	Market – bureaucracy logics
<i>Main Goals</i>	Self-formation with one-self, the others, the community, and the environment Creation of new ways of being and living, learning, etc. Main goal: how to live together	Individualisation Evaluation of the past content Main goal: what to learn individually

Source: *Own elaboration.*

Table 1: Collet-Sabé & Ball 2023, p.906

In this sense, we can see that the practice field of commoning puts this academic work of Ball and Collet-Sabé (2022:12) and Collet-Sabé and Ball (2023, 2024) in practice and refers to an episteme of commoning, which realises the three-fold notion of democracy-as-becoming.

4. Limitations

This report presents only partial results from the data gathered, and the analysis will continue, leading to scientific publications. We acknowledge the limitation of the quantitative survey, as it was only able to reach a specific number of participants. The same applies to the practitioner workshops, both online and in person. Nevertheless, we recognise the significance of our findings, as we have engaged with a highly innovative field of social and even epistemic innovation, which aims to democratise in three ways – social togetherness, peer governance, and the care economy (Weber, 2022).

5. Relevance of Context

The field we refer to here represents a unique contribution, as it encompasses a global social movement. The commons movement is difficult to quantify but has already been institutionalised into an International Commons Association and into Commons Institutes in various countries. The academic Commons Association holds annual conferences, which demonstrate a level of institutionalisation of the topic. Both academic discourse and EU funding schemes have already responded to the Commons discourse.

In our specific project, we focus on the setting of PLC card deck (professional) users, who step outside formal educational settings and gather practical knowledge from the field of social movements (commons community/commonsverse). We can integrate concrete experiences of proven methods into the Guides. This will allow us to facilitate knowledge transfer from non-formal to formal educational settings and organisational transformation contexts in general.

Moreover, we recognise the potential of the threefold notion of democracy, which allows us to think beyond traditional and formal educational settings like schools. In the debates provided by educational philosophers and policy consultants, we identify the potential of a threefold approach to democratisation (social togetherness, peer governance, and care economy).

Nevertheless, even some practitioners in the commoning field tend not to see a strong connection between commoning and democracy-as-becoming. In the interviews we conducted and the reflections gathered, they problematise the fact that democratic institutions do not function in line with the rationality of commoning. The existing institutions are regarded as dysfunctional in many ways. Although commoning can clearly be understood as an approach to democracy-as-becoming, even in this field, democracy is sometimes viewed as a specific area of society rather than as a cultural democracy and collective practice.

6. Learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guides

Commoning practitioners are not used to materials like the Framework and Guides and, therefore, do not easily relate to the academic and abstract terminology. Thus, there are some recommendations to make the Framework and Guides more accessible.

Practitioners wish for a more systematic formatting of Framework and Guides. Some feel it is not detailed enough, and others think it is too much to read. Depending on the background of people, whether in an academic or practitioner setting of commoning, people need different ways of presentation. Some of them mention being 'beaten to death' by the complexity of the content. Others wish to have digital components and make the connection between democracy and commoning stronger. It is essential to connect the PLC approach to a "feeling" of democracy more clearly. Participants feel that the text is not necessarily needed to try out the methods. They are interested in learning how to proceed and apply or try a method. They suggest categories like "introductory methods" or structuring like "thematic contexts" or "general concepts" (body, stories, transformation, etc.). There should not be too many categories and perspectives to help the reader. Short descriptions would be appreciated.

In the following, we reflect on how our research outcomes might become helpful for the Framework and Guides and, at the same time, lead to preparing a practitioner handbook on commoning education. As we can see, the field of commoning practitioners is still relatively small, but the practice involved here can contribute a lot to Framework and Guides. We can expect a lot from the transformational method of PLC, as it strongly connects to the individual, collective, organisational, and epistemic levels of AELD. The expertise and experience of PLC of commoning experts will be highly relevant for intervention and learning designs.

As Framework and Guides do not yet contain enough material regarding the PLC, it was needed to go deeper into the fields of expertise, which already exist and which need to be taken into account. The following results will contribute primarily to the PLC user experience first and then take these results into consideration for the Framework and Guides.

Individual and collective learning

As we have seen, practitioners saw conditions of success for using the pattern cards. In general, we need to comment that the current pattern card deck is in the redesign phase and will look quite different after this phase. It will be much more colourful and have an art-based design. This is why some of the criteria mentioned here might be given anyway soon. It will still make sense to refer to the criteria outlined for the Framework and Guides. The new PLC design will contribute to Framework and Guides.

Practitioners referred to the format and layout of the cards as relevant criteria. The format should not be too small and should be easy to read for group work larger than table size. Double-sidedness can be kept, but it should be a decent size for individual study. Practitioners suggested an edition in classic quartet/playing card format and larger posters.

As a second point, practitioners referred to content change requirements and other adaptations of the card deck. They commented that most new users don't know what it is for. They suggested an introductory card that should be shorter than the existing instructions. Other persons mentioned that the connection patterns might be more evident. Other comments referred to a more flexible set.

Moreover, they referred to the style of language and aesthetic presentation of the PLC. They commented that titles should be taken care of, and terms should be in the native language rather than in English. Terms should be as self-evident as possible, and simple language should be used.

Practitioners mention the need to clarify the use a bit more. As the cards are understood as instructions and less as patterns, referring more to the pattern language might be helpful. Others have mentioned the prerequisites for teaching, suggesting an introduction to the book and the pattern method. According to this, it is vital to support the appropriation of learners. This also means connecting and adapting to “cultural bubbles.” Beyond individual associations and ways of understanding, it is crucial to connect to the core of the content of the card deck.

Others mentioned specific target groups, contexts, and forms of presentation. They highlighted the importance of connectivity in different contexts. They also mentioned their use as an instrument of self-reflexivity. They referred to different age groups. How would young people relate to the PLC card deck? Practitioners assumed that young people would refer to a more intuitive perception. The PLC would need to be used in practical everyday interpersonal situations. Every pattern might need a symbol, visual patterns to be recognized, and maybe even sound. Some practitioners referred to the effect(s) to be achieved. It might be helpful to create effects and to use combinations of methods like performing arts (pantomime), contact improvisation, Charades, or Constellation work. The PLC would be useful in an integral approach with visual methods or other approaches.

Organisational learning

These recommendations can also be relevant for organisational learning. The above-mentioned metaphors like ‘door’ or ‘bridge’, „compass” (C9, Luna,152) or

peacekeeper/placeholder for 'embodying something to be learned' connect to qualities. By these metaphors, practitioners imagine paths toward organisational transformation in different mental models. As the term "method" comes from the Greek "methodos" (the path), they can pave the way to democracy-as-becoming at the organisational and institutional level. As we have seen with Collet-Sabés and Balls' approach (2022) on the episteme of commoning, the collective imaginary of schooling can go beyond the school of our present modernity (2024).

Metaphors might be an excellent approach to use in the Framework and Guides, and they will be used in the handbook on PLC interventions. They will contribute to transforming spaces holistically – and do one small step after another including to transform mindsets, practices, power hierarchies etc. Any of the abovementioned metaphors can become relevant and fruitful for a change "at the speed of imagination" (Watkins, Mohr, & Kelly, 2011).

Epistemic transformation

As mentioned in the methodological framework, the PLC refers to not only individual and collective learning but also to epistemic transformation. This nicely connects to Collet-Sabés and Ball's work (2023) and as well to Otto Scharmer's approach of presencing – sensing the present. In Scharmer's social grammar of emergence, we find the relevant dimensions of "catching social reality in flight" (Scharmer 2007). The 10 pertinent different categories might be helpful to structure relevant topics to be addressed like 1) (Shifting) gesture of paying attention; 2) The inner place of operating; 3) The seeing of the world; 4) The Knowledge; 5) The Social Space; 6) The Social Time; 7) The collective Social Body; 8) The primary causal mechanism; 9) The Episteme; 10) The Self. In these 10 dimensions, Scharmer's transitional U process suggests transformation from downloading to seeing, sensing and presencing, crystallising, prototyping, and performing. Scharmer's approach, which is an educational reflexivity, re-imagination, and design approach, excellently fits the AECED research.

For Framework and Guides and the handbook on PLCs Interventions, we might focus on the senses, on the interrelatedness between micro and macro change- on social change as the change of social practice. We might refer to the trans-epistemic design approach for the transformation of the three layers of products and processes, system building, and consciousness. In general, the aesthetic and embodied learning approach for democracy-as-becoming closely relates to the practices of democracy understood as cultural and threefold democracy. For the Framework and Guides, the threefold notion of democracy would be a relevant perspective – integrating social togetherness, peer governance, and the care economy.

Conclusions on Research and Implications for Framework and Guides:

Reflecting on the conclusions of this case analysis, we see the concern of making use of the "methodos" – the path toward social togetherness, peer governance, and care economy. As we can see, commoning offers an enlarged understanding of democracy-as-becoming, which further connects to Dewey's notion of democracy (Weber, 2022).

We connected to the PLC based on the expertise and experience of a commoning expert group, which can be understood as a 'community of practice', as Lave and Wenger (1998) put

it. Also, the common context of the Commons Institute is a community of learning, meaning, and identity. It follows relatively homogenous conceptualisations regarding its values and collective imaginaries of practice. Commoning here is understood as a process and way “how the ‘great transformation’ can succeed” (Helfrich & Bollier, 2019: 97).

Unlike other approaches, which only refer to social togetherness or peer-governance, this approach addresses the economic sphere as well. Thus, inequality is not only addressed as a question of recognition but also as a question of material conditions and inequalities. Iris Marion Young (1990) claims that justice needs to go beyond recognition. It needs to integrate impartiality, inequality, exclusion, domination and (cultural) oppression. Such forms are connected to concepts of distributional justice. By assuming a homogeneous public, the problems of democracy cannot be solved. In line with this argument, commoning goes beyond traditional approaches to democracy. It is understood as a practice of “cultivating and caring for the relationships that exist around the production of shared resources” (Moore, 2018:16). So obviously, in this sense, commoning is about sharing and care.

The PLC supports carefully found patterns, which, following the architect Christopher Alexander (1999), are the future of theory and helpful for generating a living world. Patterns are understood as tools supporting liveliness. They are flexible and applicable in any setting. They describe practices of successful problem solving, which will always appear in comparable contexts. They intervene in interplays of context, problem, and solution. In the third section of the PLC card deck, the “Care-economy” has 10 patterns found. To contribute and spread resources, to pool, cap and divide them, or to pool, cap & reallocate, to adapt and innovate creatively, to use convivial tools – like the PLC. Also, trade would happen with price sovereignty in the rationality of commoning. As the well-known example of the Venezuelan CECOSOLA meta-cooperative shows, it is possible to go beyond market rationalities and serve 100.000 people and families even in a state that is in ruins. CECOSOLA won the Alternative Nobel prize, which is the Right Livelihood Award. They use the patterns mentioned above to generate and use together to create cash-independent security and collectively share the production risk. They use the pattern to rely on community-supported infrastructures and recognise work activity and care equally. In this sense, Dewey’s (1969) ethics of democracy applies fundamentally.

Commoning as a community of practice seems to have one pattern that most of the interviewed experts liked best: it was the pattern “to share voluntarily” – here, we see the difference between creativity and imagination (DeCock, 2017).

As we have been analysing the mental models, metaphors and imaginaries of the commoners, we reflect on this “cutting edge” practice of democracy-as-becoming. It offers an alternative dispositive of a “Free, Fair and Alive” existence (Bollier & Helfrich, 2019; Helfrich & Bollier, 2019). Against a disciplinary or normalising dispositive, it is grounded in imagination as a dispositive of newness (Weber 2022). As an onto-ethical and epistemological approach, it is about aesthetic internalising. As Collet-Sabé and Ball (2022; 2024) suggest a self-educational approach in community-embeddings, the PLC is meant to be the methodology of collective transformation (Euler, 2016). As it is set to be redesigned soon, there is a greater opportunity

to broaden and deepen its impact in the field. The PLC can serve as a powerful approach to reorienting perspectives and reinventing our lives. It has the potential to contribute to re-imagining ourselves and collectively transforming democracy-as-becoming. Therefore, it could make a significant contribution to the Framework and Guides.

7. Ethical Reflection and Gender Dimension

As explained in the case completion report, we received ethics approval in September 2023 from the Ethics Commission of UMR. We have been assured by the university's technical assistance department that all data is securely stored within the university's cloud drive. As outlined in previous reports, this file is exclusively accessible to project staff who are authorised to view it. At the outset of the research, survey responses were collected anonymously. No personal information was gathered during the online workshops, and no images, video recordings, or participant observation notes were made.

Participants signed a consent form for the use of images, videos, feedback, and semi-structured interview recordings during the in-person workshop. The form explicitly states that participants may withdraw at any time and request the removal of the information they have provided. Additionally, ethnographic field notes were taken for participant observations during the workshops, and participants were informed about this process beforehand. Experts' materials are only stored after they have returned signed consent forms. In terms of personal identification, the research team pseudonymised/ anonymised all data.

Regarding gender and intersectionality, we observe a reasonably balanced gender representation in the quantitative survey (19 female, 21 male, 3 diverse) and in the PLC workshop, where participation was also well-balanced. However, the gender dimension was not simply considered in terms of participant ratio; it was treated as an important factor from an intersectional perspective. This approach, which we have maintained since the case design, has continued throughout the data analysis process. To preserve the balance of power and ensure the inclusion of diverse voices, we planned student-led interviews in the final stage of the research.

Since the summer of 2024, the data analysis process has been participatory, with regular meetings involving all researchers to ensure shared input and collective decision-making. This inclusive approach has ensured that different voices, experiences, and perspectives are central to the analysis.

From data collection through to analysis, the research has been guided by ethical principles of inclusivity, equity, and (self)reflexivity. These principles have been crucial in identifying and mitigating potential biases, particularly those relating to power dynamics within the research team and among participants. By prioritising these ethical standards, the analysis strives to ensure that findings are not only accurate but also represent the diverse and complex realities of the participants.

Germany Case Report

Case 10

Phase/Educational Setting: Higher Education & Adult, Professional and Organisational Learning

VEN-Approach: Embodied

1. Case Description

Participants: This research includes participants from 2 educational phases: The first and third cycles in HE and the second cycle in Adult, Professional and Organisational Learning. The first cycle took place at the Institute of Sport and Motology at UMR, involving 12 participants from Lea Spahn's *Perception and Creation* seminar. The second cycle included members of the Network of Culture Researchers (*KulturForscher!* Network) – experts, multipliers, and facilitators (or those in training) in arts education. The third cycle took place at the Institute of Sport and Motology at UMR, involving 20 participants in Lea Spahn's *Dance Intensive – From Idea to Performance* seminar.

Location: This research was conducted in a hybrid format. In the online setting, virtual creative collaborative spaces provided by PWC were used for the second cycle, alongside online meetings for reflections (second cycle) and online interviews (third cycle). The HE seminar (first cycle) and the *Blokseminar* (third cycle) took place in in-person classroom settings. The dance performance was realised in a public art collective space.

Purpose—Relevance to Democracy-as-Becoming: Case 10 addressed the AECED RQs before exploring case-specific questions: How can the practices and attitudes of arts education facilitators contribute to the Framework and Guides through aesthetic transformation towards democracy-as-becoming? How do their own experiences in interprofessional contexts enrich the development of the Framework and Guides?

In the first cycle, feedback from the workshop provided valuable insights and critically highlighted the necessity of connecting aesthetic approaches and learning for democracy, enabling students to develop a deep understanding through experience. In the second cycle, aesthetic transformation and learning for democracy were reflected in peer interviews. This workshop was documented through participant observation. Due to the collaboration partner's inability to continue the online series, the third cycle was integrated into the PAR process with HE students, who collectively developed a performance on democracy and polarisation using aesthetic and embodied methods, specifically dance performance. In this phase, we conducted interviews on the experience of aesthetic, embodied, and participatory learning environments.

Overall, the purpose of the planned trial was to:

- broaden the focus on aesthetic experience in the field of arts education towards democracy-as-becoming and transform arts-educational cultures of practice towards democratisation.
- explore virtual spaces as sites of embodied educational practices and their specific aesthetic potential
- gather feedback from participants on the pedagogical Framework and Guides for practice based on their professional and organisational habitus and experiences for learning for democracy.

For all these purposes, the dimensions of aesthetic and embodied holistic learning, relational well-being, transformative dialogue, and power-sharing were central.

Research Activities and Methods: The research activities were carried out in three cycles. The first cycle involved a preparatory exploratory workshop using methods from the Framework and practical Guides in HE and Adult, Professional, and Organisational Learning, with HE students from January to February 2024. This cycle was designed as an experimental intervention, focusing solely on the introduction, familiarisation, and collective reflection phases of the Framework and Guides. In January 2024, students were introduced to the AECED Project, case design, and the Framework and Guides during an in-person seminar. Following the seminar, they received the Framework and Guides and engaged with them until the next workshop. In February 2024, students collectively reflected on the Framework and Guides in an in-person seminar.

In the second iteration, in April 2024, a virtual space workshop was conducted to present the Framework and Guides to participants of the Cultural Education Network – experts, disseminators, and facilitators in arts education. Before the workshop, participants received the Framework and Guides for the introduction phase. During the workshop, Lea Spahn gave a presentation introducing the AECED Project, case design, and the Framework and Guides. In the familiarisation phase, participants took part in group discussion sessions and a virtual plenary session for collective reflection on the Framework and Guides. After the workshop, a planning phase for action took place. In May 2024, participants were invited to trial and adapt the Guides to their educational and facilitation practices within their institutions, reflecting on their actions throughout the month.

In the third cycle, from April to July 2024, a group of HE students in teacher training were involved in the trialling process. The seminar took place over two days in April and two days in July. During the in-person seminar in April, students were introduced to the AECED Project, case design, previous cycles, and the Framework and Guides. They also familiarised themselves with the Framework and Guides and collectively reflected on them.

There were regular seminar meetings between April and July 2024; however, this period primarily served as a planning phase. At the end of the seminar, students developed a dance

performance on democracy and polarisation, which they performed on the weekend following the seminar's conclusion.

The research intern involved in the case research conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants in July and September 2024. These interviews provided specific insights for the Framework and Guides, particularly concerning the facilitation process and the transformative power of aesthetic facilitation. *Table 1* shows all methods used in the three cycles.

Table 1: Trialed methods during the PAR

Trialed methods during the PAR		
1 st cycle	2 nd cycle	3 rd cycle
Collective mind mapping, developing embodied scenes of togetherness	Virtual workshop: sensing democracy and body sculptures, peer-interviews	Democracy and Polarisation: <i>Dance Performance</i>

Researchers: Lea Spahn led the case research. M.A. student Helena Wolter, as an intern, contributed by participating in the events and by conducting observations during the course, interviewing, memoing, and data analysis. B.A. student research intern Canan Yalvac was also involved in memoing and data analysis.

Time Frame:

The **PAR Design** was adapted to three cycles and will be introduced shortly in the following.

Cycle 1

- **Introduction, Familiarisation, Planning:** January 2024 - Framework and Guides Introduction online and provided material to engage with them.
- **Action and Collective Reflection:** January 2024 - presence preparatory workshop of trialling embodied methods on futures and embodied reflection with participants
- **Reflection:** February 2024 - collecting experiences from participants and analysing feedback from the workshop.

Cycle 2

- **Introduction:** April 24, 2024 - Framework and Guides to the participants (“KulturForscher!” network and interested guests) in a virtual workshop space hosted by the PWC foundation and in collaboration with working group arts education on aesthetic transformation and learning for democracy.
- **Familiarisation:** April 24, 2024 - with the adapted Framework and Guides in an explorative embodied practice in the virtual space.

- **Action:** On April 24, 2024, conduct a workshop that includes a virtual embodied introduction and exploration of the Frameworks and Guides, interprofessional reflection groups, feedback collection, and discussion of possible applications in their field.
- **Collaborative reflection:** during the online workshop in online peer exchange.
- **Planning:** April 24, 2024 - of inquiries into the participant's professional practice and organisational structures regarding responsive pedagogies and organisational learning for democracy-as-becoming.
- **Reflection:** April 24, 2024 - feedback from the workshop format and reflection on experiences from participants within their professional settings for (1) the phase of re-designing the Framework and Guides and (2) the framing of aesthetic and embodied practices in groups and their potential for transformative change.

Cycle 3

- **Introduction and Familiarisation:** April 2024 - HE courses in a block seminar format, students in teacher training were introduced to the Framework and Guides and provided the material to engage with them.
- **Planning:** April- June 2024—Students discussed how AELD would be trialled in the course, and intervention through dance with public performance was planned.
- **Action:** July 2024—The students facilitated the subjective experiences, which turned into a collective public performance.
- **Reflection:** July and September 2024 - group reflection and interviews with participants after the course.

2. Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis

Data Types and Sources

Types of Data: Mixed-method, including visual data and qualitative data

Source of Data: Digitalised mind maps, written field notes (from participant observation), pseudonymised written personal writing exercises of students, video recording of the workshop (with the consent form obtained from the participants), visual materials collected by the participants, and transcribed pseudonymised interviews (without personal data).

Research Methodologies and Methods: The research methodology applied draws on embodied and aesthetic approaches that engage participants through their lived bodies. We understand embodied reflection as a method that considers embodied sensations, feelings, and resonances as integral to situations and thematic inquiries. Using Social Presencing Theater (SPT) (Dutra Gonçalves & Hayashi, 2021) as an awareness-based and embodied method for social field transformation, we conceptualise imagination as an embodied approach to social change. Moreover, we refer to post-digital embodiment as a means of fostering collective resonance and corporeality.

Data Analysis Process: As Lea Spahn is currently on maternity leave, the research findings have been compiled from the memos and analysis carried out so far to support the learning process for further developing the Framework and Guides.

Memoing enabled space to reflect issues of positionality and intersectionality and enabled the documentation of minute learnings specific to participatory research designs. It is also a shared tool for all participating researchers to create transparency about their doings and learnings regarding the RQs and unexpected areas of focus like spatial arrangements and moments of body shame. Memos have been written and transferred to the Shared Memoing Matrix, the common research space of the project.

Theoretical Background: The theoretical background connects to the queer phenomenology of Sara Ahmed (2010: 235). In her perspective, “to be oriented in a certain way is how certain things come to be significant, come to be objects for me. [...] What matters is itself an effect of proximities: we are touched by what comes near, just as what comes near is affected by directions we have already taken. [...] Orientations shape how the world coheres around me. [...] Orientations also matter in the second sense of being about physical or corporeal substance. Orientations shape the corporeal substance of bodies and whatever occupies space”.

Especially regarding embodied and aesthetic facilitation in HE, it becomes apparent that every participant arrives with already-established sensations, opinions and knowledge. They will find their way of expression, and this can be shared if spaces of exploration are introduced sensitively. Following Puig de la Bellacasa (2017, p.67), caring is understood “as a transformative ethos rather than a normative ethics.” Responsiveness is related to response-ability, which refers to the complex embeddings of organizations and institutions in collective imaginaries, discursive strategies, and design practices. Such relationalities can be mapped in ‘relational ecologies of a situation’ (Clarke, Friese & Washburn, 2018, p.104) involving artifacts, practices, and discourses (Spahn, 2022). In our setting, the facilitation included the close observation of everyday situations, taking photos of things/arrangements/situations that symbolise democracy, and developing a movement score based on a creative writing task. Democracy-as-becoming thus encompasses a multispecies/transcorporeal perspective. The formation of (other) subjectivities (Braidotti, 2013; Neimanis, 2017), as well as a feminist diffraction perspective, denote the critical and difference-attentive modes of consciousness and thought (Geerts & van der Tuin, 2016). The approach focuses on both individual and collective learning, connecting to organisational settings. From an organisational education research perspective, we seek responsive transformation. By this, we refer to ethical epistemologies established at the managerial level.

Embodied transformation connects to imaginaries and possible futures (Neimanis et al., 2015). Using the term ‘imergy’, Hito Steyerl (2021) refers to the connectedness of images and energy in analysing power relations. Consequently, we ask for the emergence of new imaginaries of collectives and their organising, which may issue a ‘departure’ towards democracy-as-becoming in post-anthropocene futures (Gibson et al., 2015).

The need for collective decentering leads us to the question: How can new imaginaries as 'sense-making fields' emerge that issue other practices and ways of organising the eco-social-political world? And how can they support developing "an ethics of place" (Gibson et al., 2015, vii)? Which ethics lead the ways of organising this co-worlding of species and materialities in their interconnected and interdependent practices towards a relational organisational ecology of care? (Bärtsch et al., 2017). The notion of trans corporeality (Alaimo, 2008) supports a transgression of patterns of imperial organizing in our anthropocentric age. Transcorporeal ethics conceptualise ownership and responsibility, too.

Subjectively experienced bodies (Alloa et al., 2019) are regarded as the "point zero of our orientation in and toward the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). As embodied, „situated, dependent and vulnerable" subjects (Landweer & Marcinski, 2016, p.9), we need to seek responsivity (Waldenfels, 2016) by and in our bodies. In this sense, bodies must be understood as sensual actors in social situations. As Dutra Gonçalves and Hayashi (2021, p. 35) put it, „[we] claim that by living in a body, we are embodied, and that wisdom lives in a holistic knowing that includes embodied intelligence. We argue that to address the complex challenges of our times, we must cultivate embodied and perceptual capacities and a language for our embodied experience(s).

In this sense, the body can become the starting point of critique. Empowerment and power-sharing can be built in spaces of shared experience between bodies (Spahn, 2020; 2022). The aesthetic pattern cards (APC) of SPT (Dutra Gonçalves & Hayashi, 2021) combine mindfulness, embodiment, and social systems thinking. SPT as a social art form, "was designed to make visible deeper social patterns that support the cultivation of healthy social fields, sparking creative action in teams, organisations, and communities". (Dutra Gonçalves & Hayashi, 2021, p.38). Acknowledging our embodied experience of living in a body starts from the learning, that usually we do not recognize how much leverage and power for transformation lies in our very ordinary embodied presence".(Dutra Gonçalves & Hayashi, 2021, p.37). In this sense, it is about "investigating the intersections between individuals and systems—between the personal and the collective." (Dutra Gonçalves & Hayashi, 2021, p.54).

In moments of reflexive feeling, openings can emerge, showing symbolic orders' historicity and contingency (Spahn & Will, 2022, p.253). Seeing bodies are a source of knowledge and a potential for experimenting with futures and future design supports a concept of democracy-as-becoming as becoming aware of powerful, effective, long-lasting and hidden societal rationalities, which "shape how we move, what we notice, what we want and feel" (Wehrle, 2016, p.252).

3. Research Findings

RQ1. Regarding process: a) How do participants experience being introduced to and working with the Prototype Framework and Guides? b) In what ways is AELD co-created and facilitated through ABE methods?

Reflecting on Lea Spahn's own teaching and facilitation in the HE courses on developing a dance performance on "democracy and polarisation," a student's statement highlighted the facilitator's role and responsibility in creating an appreciative atmosphere. The student commented in the final interview:

„... as far as the atmosphere in the course is concerned, as far as access to herself is concerned, which is also, earlier we talked about closeness, distance, as far as her behaviour towards us is concerned, that she gives you the feeling that you are being seen, but she is not overbearing in any situation, she always pays attention to how you are doing, although that is something that is very physical, that is very intimate, where people can feel shame and she is aware of that, and if it happens that she has said something somewhere that makes people feel offended, then she actually always says, "ey, I'm sorry, ...", and talks, "using communication somehow in the group as something that simply breaks down boundaries and creates community and that's really totally awesome ... You never felt judged, she never conveyed that anyone could do anything better or worse and that is somehow very, very nice." (C10, i2, 218-226). Lea Spahn analysed the setting, and clarified, what this means. 1) Being in touch with oneself 2) Having a good sense of distance and closeness 3) Making the participants feel seen 4) Conveying the feeling there is no right or wrong, no one better or worse in aesthetic practices 5) Paying attention to how participants are doing; especially having an awareness of the challenges of intimacy, physical closeness, feelings of insecurity and shame 6) Being authentic with own mistakes and able to apologize to the group 7) Creating a space where communication can be used to create a sense of community in the group. All these points brought up by participants were important for an atmosphere for aesthetic and embodied learning. One participant commented that "everything stands and falls" (C10, i2, 217-218) with the facilitator (which, in German, is a way to say it all depends on the facilitator). "No one ever felt judged. She never gave the impression that anyone was better or worse at something" (C10, i2, 230-231). The original tones or quotes from students were so concrete and vivid that including them in the Framework and Guides would be highly valuable. This is why they are presented in a detailed way in the Learnings for Framework and Guides section.

The **atmosphere of acceptance** was core for participants, as it encouraged them to take risks and feel proud of their achievements. This acceptance allowed students not to compare themselves but to perceive themselves as valuable contributors to a larger process, creating something unique. Voluntariness was emphasised as a foundational element of this learning process. Democracy-as-becoming is an emergent process that creates opportunities for togetherness and shared spaces. The students' statements also highlighted the importance of a sense of ownership: Participants took pride in the "created" performance. Most did not recognise the didactic structure involved in working towards it, but they felt empowered by their ability to contribute creatively. The results show that it is not the methods themselves that matter, but how participants are guided to feel seen and taken seriously, to be able to participate, and – often, towards the end of a process – to show or share their work. Embodied representations were described as a way of expressing a clear stance, to take a position and to "move a lot" (C10, i2, 143-146), which means to create a change in the outside world. Students commented on their experience referring to sensing/feeling the body. For them it

was about lying on the ground at the beginning of class and “melting into the floor,” something the group did every week. It seemed impossible, and it irritated some participants, but they stated that they did not quite know what it is, that it did, but that it did “something” (C10, i4, 64) to them, that something happened. Democracy-as-becoming was experienced by students – “you could also get involved, so every performance was completely different and everyone was able to contribute for themselves” (...). Students commented that they “definitely experienced democracy in that there was a diversity of everything.” (C10, i2, 123-126). This experience meant bringing oneself into a process and co-creating – seeing that one’s part is accepted and valued.

Challenges for participants referred to aesthetic processes in general. An anchoring example refers to “always coming up against new limits and also with creative work in general, also aesthetic approaches, and I’m always throwing myself into new challenges, so to speak” (C10, i3, 16-20). The participant marked how aesthetic and embodied approaches triggered something and challenged them. The participant also spoke about moments of “crisis” (C10, i3, 21). Personal challenges or moments of crisis are part of aesthetic and embodied approaches. Participants were encountered with their own limits and felt disoriented at points. Disorientation as a moment of insecurity and of doubts is referred to in anchoring example (.....) “and I think there’s also the possibility, I think it also creates more openness if you approach it through the body and allow it.” (C10, i4, 195-200). As aesthetic/embodied processes are open-ended and demand moments of not-knowing, the question arises of how we can give participants trust to enter this “not knowing” or uncertainty, which is central to these processes. Should we articulate in advance: ‘This is not about knowing what should come out in the end; this is about trusting that the doing itself will guide you’? And what does that mean concerning democracy-as-becoming? The becoming is weighty here. Participants appreciated opportunities to deal with feelings and the future. The open process design, supported by the aesthetic pattern cards, created space for exploration and unexpected insights. For some participants, it was difficult to articulate their feelings. They wanted to learn how to move on—and still, there were many ways to do it—without a right or wrong.

Embodied transformation situations were perceived as intimate, vulnerable, and endangered. Do such situations and constellations fit into the university? Personal growth will always be needed, as it is about becoming to be seen. The patterns of democracy-as-becoming were felt as quite personal—how can people be safe and maintain openness? Participants thought that images can dive deep. Intense courses build strong communities, and the group size always will be relevant for the group process emerging.

Some participants felt that they should be protected from others’ gaze in movement and embodied exercises. Still, people commented that relational well-being was much better in these courses than in others—people were more relaxed, were able to act better, interpret better, and could identify or play better with different ideas.

RQ2. Regarding the transformational change in participants: In what ways do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, lead to individual and collective growth in regard to

- feelings for democracy,
- aesthetic awareness and qualities (such as empathic, ethical, and spiritual sensibilities),
- collaborative, reflexive and critical capabilities,
- openness to newly 'seeing' the other,
- willingness to move towards more reflexive and critical modes of awareness and knowing that reconnect with the body as a source of learning,
- capacity to challenge social injustices and engage creatively with conflict and antagonisms
- any other aspects that will be developed in and through the PAR process.

Beginning with a reflection on their personal relationship to democracy, student participants produced creative writings. Sitting in a large circle, the AECED project was introduced, and students reflected in small groups on the following questions: "What does it mean for you to live in a democracy? What does it mean to act democratically? What, beyond election periods, characterises democratic practice? How do I participate in a democratic political system? How does it feel to be democratically involved? What critique do you have of the democracy you are currently experiencing?"

As students engaged in these discussions, they began to explore democracy not only as a system of governance but also as a lived experience. This shift in perspective became even more apparent as they attempted to translate abstract ideas into tangible expressions.

"The themes were democracy and polarisation. And then we tried to transform that into this physical principle. And then, when we had this physical principle, I thought it was suddenly very much about the relationship between people. And then I thought, okay, maybe that's actually the core of us and maybe democracy is much more about people and how we deal with it and ultimately how we deal with ourselves. So that it all somehow affects us as a society" (C10, i4, 153-159)

In lively exchange, most groups began their reflection with democracy as a political system. The presentations revealed a lack of understanding that democratic practices are embedded in all our social interactions and organisations. So, how do we connect to an embodied experience and understanding that students might relate to democracy-as-becoming? One student commented that she liked this approach because democracy became "personal." Democracy-as-becoming fostered an understanding of democracy as a practice that is always tied to an experience (as opposed to simply viewing it as an act, such as elections). Another excerpt from the student's writing exercise referred to democracy as having the opportunity to contribute to important decisions, where our opinions matter and can make a difference. Democracy also meant that we must learn to navigate different views. Another student, in their memo, understood democracy as a collective endeavour within a networked setting of acceptance. In this vision equality, participation, and democracy suggested everyone's freedom. Another perspective referred to one's practice of going to the course, listening, asking, and doing something. Being political, then, is about getting involved. As well, educational institutions are invited to educate political and democratic citizenship "- (...) "so that every schoolchild knows how to emancipate themselves politically in the future."

Democracy was regarded as an “active participation” in “decisions, in group processes and political processes”. As democracy can and must be improved, “meaning co-determination it is up to everyone to revive democracy”.

In this research, **togetherness also became essential**: All participants spoke about the importance of trusting the group and others. They mentioned not knowing many of the other participants well. The challenge was in throwing oneself into the process and trusting others to do the same. This was often linked to feelings of comparing oneself to others who had more experience or who were perceived as more advanced. A quote reflects this well: “And then I realised that so much of the process for me was about finding trust and then I also noticed how the group opened and how we didn't just do some dance things but also talked a lot and then also noticed that the group also told personal stories. And I thought that somehow, well that did something to me, that I thought, okay, this is a very trusting group and it's actually a place where you can explore yourself” (C19, i4, 39-45). Speaking about how gaining trust into the group allowed them to realise the potential that “**this is a place where you can explore yourself**”.

Moreover, **being seen anew** was also a critical quality. As one student pondered: “This was the very first time that I simply wasn't nervous at all, even though everyone was watching me in a habitat, in an environment where I was not assigned to anything. And somehow, I really enjoyed the fact that there was so much irritation. And I think that was what I actually wanted to show a little bit. And what I really notice is that the more I do things that differ from what people think of me, what I do, the more people make themselves look outside their own radius.” (C10, i2, 100-109). This quote addresses personal transformation through participation, highlighting different dimensions of shifting perspectives: noticing that others may see you differently, recognising yourself in a new situation, and seeing how others perceive you in a new light.

Shame became relevant when students perceived the seminar and its activities as childish or overly playful, seeking an aesthetically pleasing solution. The silence, as well as the often-voiceless music we used, irritated the students. The approach of allowing the body to find an expression was unfamiliar to them. When observing groups, they needed to be encouraged to move together rather than talk things through. It was about trusting the body and learning to appreciate the movements possible in that moment. One student commented that she learned to appreciate the very simple movement that was almost “everyday-like” — she had been striving for more complex movements but realised the beauty of the simple movements that emerged (and were staged in the end).

Another relevant theme was **touch**. The moment of shame was more about the insecurity of touching one's own or another person's body intimately (a gesture typically associated with intimate or sexual contact). Bodywork requires open communication about the dos and don'ts, the ‘yes's and ‘no's. The insecurity of being in contact with another person also became apparent when we did not address the seminar's purpose of trialling the world of democracy-as-becoming. It was about listening with the body — to atmospheres, to the participants'

bodies, to the resonances in the room, and to the power dynamics between participants and the (social) surrounding/organisational logic.

Students found the openness to interpreting their embodied movements relieving. However, they still faced the challenge of determining their topic, deciding what to present on stage, and whether to open up or not. The overarching theme of democracy-as-becoming helped them build trust, and the consistency of having the same group throughout the course further contributed to this trust. Nevertheless, participants found it challenging to determine their role within the group—whether to wait, lean back, or take the lead.

Students saw potential for embodied transformation in their professional fields but recognised structural problems within institutional settings, such as the constraints of time, limitations of professional duties, and more. Creativity was often perceived as something that could not be realised within the educational settings they work in. While they appreciated the approach for sports and dance, they were still hesitant about how younger students in school settings might open up to the process and to one another.

Intensive seminars were seen as far more effective than weekly courses, but implementing such approaches in schools was considered difficult. In general, we can conclude that trust-building and openings require time. While students appreciated the approach, they still recognised the limitations imposed by the rationality and institutionalised practices of schools. They criticised schools for being too conventional and conservative, arguing that schools should support personal development and individual experience and perception.

RQ3: What influence, if any, did the researchers have on how the Framework and Guides were used and the designs of AEL for democracy that emerged in the trials?

Lea Spahn's academic, practical, and teaching experience in embodied methods was crucial in applying the Framework and Guides and trialling pedagogical methods. Drawing on her expertise, she initially experimented with introduction, familiarisation, and collective reflection in a HE setting with seminar participants and their students. Subsequently, based on the initial feedback, an online workshop was conducted with participants from the Cultural Education Network, which was the primary focus of the original case study plan.

During these phases, technical constraints limited the effective use of the Framework and Guides. Additionally, the inability to continue collaboration with the partner organization posed a challenge. In response, Lea Spahn re-designed the case study, incorporating flexibility and further developing the PAR iterations. Based on her expertise, she integrated the HE setting into the case study, leveraging her background in dance education to support students in action planning around themes of democracy and polarisation.

This case highlights the significant influence of researchers on how the Framework and Guides are applied. Lea Spahn's expertise shaped the research design, guided methodological adaptations, and informed the pedagogical strategies. Her ability to modify the study in response to challenges demonstrates how researchers' decisions and experiences impact the implementation and evolution of the Framework and Guides. Surely, it helps to be an experienced teacher in embodiment to make use of the approaches enacted.

RQ4: What evidence-based conclusions for revision and refinement of the Prototype Framework and Guides emerge from the experience of using the Prototypes and addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

Students' resonance with embodied and aesthetic facilitation can provide insights into essential elements and attitudes to address and incorporate into the Prototype Framework and Guides. The following quotes highlight the relevance of a tutorial, teaching, and facilitation practice that is ethical, mindful in its approach to embodied methods, and respectful of the diversity of experiences and knowledge.

4. Limitations

Trialling the Prototype Framework and Guides through the VEN approach was, to some extent, challenging, especially in HE settings where traditional learning opportunities often lack aesthetic and embodied approaches, not only in this faculty but across Europe. However, in this case study, many participants were already familiar with VEN approaches in learning within this faculty. This familiarity provided some opportunities to trial the Framework and Guides with experienced participants during the first and third iterations. Even if they had previous experiences, in the HE setting, students expressed their concerns about being visible, irritation for hypervisibility and being exposed to others.

The second iteration involved experts, diffusion agents, and facilitators in arts education. It was an easier group to work with, as they had prior experience with VEN approaches in their field. However, conducting the research as an online workshop introduced significant technical challenges in this iteration. Case 10 was originally planned to organise an online workshop with practitioners in the second iteration, which took place as scheduled. However, the planned intervention did not proceed as expected due to technical issues during the workshop, requiring a redesign of the case research.

As the second cycle was conducted in a virtual space with professionals, this research found that time was critical for volunteers participating in the project. Another key observation was closely related to time constraints and technical issues: In the online research workshop there always was the risk of running into technical problems. Due to the technical problems, there was the difficulty of maintaining focus. Experiencing embodied research as a living experience in an online setting was difficult, as technical problems were a clear limitation. During the online workshop, it was observed that all participants were engaged in other works, too; it was visible on the screen. This shows that time as well as engagement issues are crucial for projects like this and must be considered.

Case 10 required interventions with several different groups of participants involved throughout the process due to a lack of continuation with the external partner as originally planned. By involving more participants over a more extended period in the trialling phase, implementing the Framework and Guides with more participants in later stages will be more

meaningful for this research. The current research material offers great opportunities for textual embedding of original quotes into the Frameworks and Guides.

5. Relevance of Context

This research involved participants from HE students in teacher training and cultural researchers from KulturForscher! Network—experts in arts education, multipliers, and facilitators in art education.

In Germany, young people pursue careers through academic study or vocational training programmes like *Ausbildung*, which combine theory with hands-on experience, allowing them to earn while they train. Academic education, by contrast, is a longer and more costly route, typically for specialised professions.

While debates on democratic backlash in Germany have not led to institutional changes in HE, our research in Marburg highlights a strong tradition of student political engagement. UMR fosters activism, political diversity, and a participatory academic culture.

German academia follows a mentorship model, where professors act as guides rather than traditional teachers. Rooted in the Humboldtian tradition, this approach favours seminar discussions over lectures, promoting critical thinking and debate among equals, though its application varies by discipline.

Critical thinking is central to the social sciences and humanities. As part of this research, courses in UMR's Institute of Sport and Motology's "Cultural Education in Schools" module explored embodied activities, which posed challenges in engaging with the Prototype Framework and Guides.

Students see themselves as active participants in HE. Their involvement in group work and self-directed learning reinforces their role as future professionals. This intervention fosters a multiplier effect, where individual and collective learning contribute to democracy-as-becoming, supporting the long-term development of more democratic societies.

Another participant group for Adult, Professional, and Learning comprised cultural researchers from the KulturForscher! Network—experts in arts education, multipliers, and facilitators. This group was highly receptive to the project materials and people already familiar with aesthetic and embodied methods, as similar approaches align with their work and interests. Additionally, the network itself fosters open dialogue among experts and serves as a peer-learning space for art education.

6. Learning for Pedagogical Framework and Guides

The Pedagogical Framework and Guides should include additional instructions for adaptation to online settings and may offer users some tips in boxes based on this experience. In this research, communication became difficult for technical reasons in the online workshop. The

Prototype Framework and Guides had been provided beforehand but could not be sufficiently integrated into the online setting. In the follow-up workshop, participants reflected on the Framework and Guides, commenting that they would need more practical methods, including for online settings.

To improve clarity and provide a more motivating style, the original quotes included could support a more active, engaging, and personal tone in the texts. The anchoring examples for example for **creating a sense of community** might nicely support the Framework and Guides: “And with the dance course, I noticed once again about [the facilitator] that she accepted everything we did as good or right or in such a way that there was room for it (.)” (i4).

The empirical material demonstrates the potential of such ‘vignettes’ to be incorporated into the Framework and Guides. These examples serve as valuable didactical and metaphorical material, conveying the essence of the experience immediately: “And also this, we were a group, and somehow, everyone somehow worked together. (...) And everyone somehow had a common project and a sense of community, I thought. Something came out of it, quite independently of the result, but it was somehow this connection that I noticed. (...) So this cohesion of the group somehow. And this, in the end, became something because everyone somehow worked on it and was somehow for each other. (...) Um, yes, and everyone also contributed their part. (..)” (i4, 308-315).

Similarly, the atmosphere of acceptance and the topics provided could form introductory sections for parts of the Framework and Guides. A participant shared: “Yes, that everyone can dance and everyone can move, and yes, you can somehow just dare a little, that you can simply dare and I think you should dare to move because you can simply find a greater, so really a blatant approach to yourself, I have realised that you can simply find a great satisfaction somehow, (.) and I personally, for example, although I see so many great dancers in our class, (.) my performance, which others would say wasn't as great as the others, is still nothing for me to compare, but where I simply say, “I'm still kind of proud of it and I did it and it's kind of beautiful” (i2).

Reflecting on the emergent process of creating opportunities for togetherness and shared spaces, and the importance of a sense of ownership, it becomes clear that the learning for the Framework and Guides should focus on guiding participants into a feeling of being seen, taken seriously, and empowered to participate. They should be able to share or show their work: “it is not about the methods themselves but how the participants are guided into a feeling of being seen and taken seriously, of being able to participate and – oftentimes toward the end of a process – to show or share their work.”.

Refinement of the Framework and Guides should include critical discussions on embodied experience. Sensing/feeling the body turns to be something beautiful. As well a section like the following might add to the didactical quality of the Frameworks and Guides: “I actually found very beautiful, somehow, I noticed that I could feel my body in a way and also somehow that it was much more about this feeling. How does the body feel? ... that it was not about this outside perspective” (i4). Democracy-as-becoming then is about getting involved: “so every

performance was completely different and that everyone was able to contribute for themselves, although, outside of a solo or something like that, there was still so much of their own and so much that was personal in group work. I definitely experienced democracy in that there was a diversity of everything.” (i2, 123-126). The potential to bring yourself into a process and to co-create – to see that your part is accepted and valued.

Becoming – b-e-c-o-m-i-n-g then spells **B**eing – **E**mergence – **C**reative – **O**therness - **M**aking - **I**ntuitive – **N**urturing – **G**utful.

Conclusions on Research and Implications for Framework and Guides

Embodied transformation is about internalising democracy-as-becoming. In constrats to institutionalised settings, where motivation often gets lost and alienation takes place, even though this context is the university, too, transgressive learning toward collective transformation is possible. With embodied transformation, HE seems to become de-institutionalised from within. Instead of being in an onto-epistemology of norm, enclosure and limitation, students are enabled to reinvent their Self and their collective social body. Embodied transformation then refers to individual and collective learning, and organisational transformation. A HE seminar then can become a heterotopic space, where a practice of embodiment, care and ethics takes place (Bärtsch et al., 2017). In performances on democracy-as-becoming, we see and observe a radically imaginary practice in action (Castoriadis, 1975). Embodied transformation is both visible to others and palpable to the self. In Democracy-as-becoming MOVES (DAB-MOVES), the dispositive of imagination (Weber, 2022) manifests and transforms what Scharmer (2008) addresses as the ‘collective social body’: “In the end, perhaps its more about humans themself and about relationship, and maybe that has more of an impact on it than one might think” (i4, 150-151).

7. Ethical Reflection and Gender Dimension

In this research, gender was not treated as the sex ratio of participants but was instead approached from an intersectional perspective in a broader sense. Following a feminist intersectional approach, principles of self-reflection on the researchers' positionality and feminist moderation in workshops and course sessions were applied from the outset of the case research and design process. The diverse needs of the groups were also considered to ensure that everyone's needs were met. Gender was a relevant analytical dimension for intersectional analysis.

In arts education, a significant proportion of facilitators are female, bringing a gendered dynamic into the field that must be reflected upon as part of educational processes and participant identifications. As education is a highly gendered sector, with a large number of women present across Europe, this research also created a space to examine the gendered dynamics of AELD experimentation.

Throughout the data collection process, participants were assured of the protection of personal data and were informed from the outset about how their data would be used, aiming to build trust and minimise concerns. At the start of the research, participants received a written document titled *Informed Consent*. Since the study was designed as ethnographic research, researchers kept observation notes during some seminar and workshop sessions. Participants were informed of this in advance and were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

In the third cycle of the case research, a video of participants' performances was created and publicly uploaded to the AECED project's YouTube channel, as well as shared on other social media platforms. To ensure informed participation, all featured participants signed a consent form agreeing to be included in the video. According to this form, they can withdraw their permission at any time by contacting the case research leader, Lea Spahn. If they choose to do so, the video will be removed from the internet.

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Latvia Case Report

Case 11

Phase/Educational Setting:

Secondary Education

VEN-Approach:

Visual, Embodied and Narrative

1. Case Description

Participants: The target audience of Case 11 was students in the Secondary Education phase. However, the research was conducted from multiple perspectives, including the primary group – comprising the principal, three teachers and 17 students of Grade 10 in Iteration 1, 16 of whom continued in Grade 11 during Iteration 2 at Daugavpils State Gymnasium (DSG); four RTU AECED researchers; complementary groups – students and teachers from two other project schools – Jūrmala State Gymnasium (JSG) and Riga Secondary School Nr. 22 (RSS 22); and four stakeholders – two from National Culture Centre of Latvia, one from the National Centre for Education of Latvia, and one from the Institute of Lifelong Learning and Culture Vitae.

Location: PAR was conducted in two iterations, with each phase carried out either in person at RTU or DSG or online via Zoom, depending on the specific needs of each PAR phase. Although the primary group of Case 11 was associated with DSG students, complementary data from other AECED project schools (JSG and RSS 22) were also considered to provide a more comprehensive and integrative understanding of the research question.

Purpose – Relevance to Democracy-as-Becoming: Case 11 explored the impact of aesthetic and embodied learning for democracy (AELD) on students' openness to newly 'seeing' the other within a responsive pedagogical environment. This environment was intentionally designed to align with the core principles of democracy-as-becoming: power-sharing, holistic learning, relational well-being, and transforming dialogue. Thus, Case 11 contributed to the realisation of democracy-as-becoming by demonstrating how AELD fosters openness, empathy, and meaningful dialogue—key aspects of a democratic and inclusive educational experience.

Research Activities and Methods: Although Case 11 focused on the impact of AELD, implemented through drama sketch and collage creation, on students' openness to newly 'seeing' the other' (ONSO), all PAR phases involving their teachers played a crucial role, as the teachers first learned, prepared, and then facilitated these AELD learning activities for their students. Therefore, the teachers' participation in both iterations is also considered.

Time Frame:

Iteration 1

- The PAR phase **Introduction** was organised by the RTU team as an intensive AECED training programme for teachers, principals from the three project schools, and stakeholders. Its purpose was to introduce and familiarise participants with key concepts from the Prototype Pedagogical Framework and Guides, including AELD, responsive pedagogies, and the principles of democracy-as-becoming. The introduction phase concluded with participants' **written reflections** via Google Forms on their new AELD experience.
- In the phase of **Familiarisation**, teachers and principals read and analyzed the Prototype Pedagogical Framework and Guides documents both individually and in groups at their schools, identifying challenging issues and developing recommendations for refinement.
- In the PAR phase of **Collaborative Reflection**, Zoom meetings (one per school) were held with RTU researchers – Karine Oganisjana and Rolands Ozols, where teachers and principals shared feedback and suggestions for improving the Prototype Pedagogical Framework and Guides. Each meeting was **audio recorded for further transcription and analysis** to address **RQ 4**, which focused on identifying necessary changes to enhance the Prototype Pedagogical Framework and Guides, making them more modern and user-friendly.
- The **Planning** phase was carried out through collaboration between principals, teachers, and RTU researchers, as well as through individual consultations (20 minutes per teacher) with Karine Oganisjana to prepare for the AELD trials with students. These sessions aimed to finalise and enhance the AELD activities developed by the teachers based on the three models for embedding drama sketch and collage creation to address democracy-related problem situations across study subjects. These three models were:
 - The model of embedding ABEL (arts-based and embodied learning) into a task
 - The model of embedding ABEL into the pedagogical process for creative self-discovery and discovery of others
 - The embedding of ABEL into the 5E instructional model (see pages 168-182 of the Prototype Pedagogical Guides, Deliverable 3.2.)
- Students joined AELD in the PAR phase **Action**. Since they were minors (under 18), they first underwent an Introduction phase, during which their teachers and school principal introduced them and their parents to the AECED project. To confirm their willingness to participate, both students and their parents signed the Informed Consent Forms. During this phase, students tested three models from the Prototype Guides to address democracy-related issues across study subjects, integrating cognitive, affective, and embodied learning. Data collection methods in this phase included:
 - **Observation** of the AELD activities by Karine Oganisjana and Rolands Ozols.
 - **Students' and teachers' written reflections** on the AELD experience, were submitted via Google Forms.

- **Post-trial discussions** between RTU researchers and teachers regarding their own and their students' AELD learning experience. **Audio recordings of these discussions were prepared** for transcription and further analysis.
- Analysis and Synthesis phase involved:
- **Qualitative content analysis (QCA)** of the students' and teachers' reflections using open coding to develop categories.
- **Thematic analysis** of the transcripts from the post-trial discussions.

Iteration 2

In Iteration 2, the research focus shifted from embedding AELD to address democracy-related problem situations across study subjects to emphasizing embodiment practices and tackling problem situations related to democracy and civic participation. While Iteration 1 followed a standardized approach across all Latvian cases (11–13), Iteration 2 was adapted to the specific needs of each case. Therefore, in Case 11, which focused on exploring the impact of AELD on students' openness to newly 'seeing' the other, six **students' post-Iteration 2 interviews** were conducted exclusively at DSG, with no student interviews taking place at JSG or RSS 22.

- The PAR **Introduction and Familiarisation** phases were conducted as part of an embodiment seminar for project schoolteachers, principals, and stakeholders by RTU researchers in collaboration with Anna Steina, a psychologist from the Institute of Lifelong Learning and Culture VITA. The **audio recordings** of these exercises provided valuable data, demonstrating how embodiment can foster a democratic ethos and relationships within a group.
- **Collaborative Reflection and Planning** were carried out autonomously by DSG, without the intervention from RTU researchers, as the educators felt more self-confident in Iteration 2.
- In the **Action** phase, participants engaged in embodiment activities and democracy-related problem-solving using drama sketch and collage creation as AELD in mixed student-teacher groups, where both acted as equal partners. Data collected in this phase included:
 - Students' and teachers' **post-Trial 2 written reflections** via Google Forms,
 - **Audio recordings of post-trial discussions** with teachers,
 - **Audio recordings of the Zoom interviews** conducted with six students and four educators of DSG, held the day after the second trial.
- The PAR **Analysis and Synthesis** phase focused on:
 - **Thematic analysis** of the **transcripts from audio recordings** of the embodiment seminar, discussions and interviews,
 - **QCA of the students' and teachers' reflections**,
 - **Triangulation** of results from Iterations 1 and 2 to develop a comprehensive and integrative answer to the research question.

Researchers: All three Latvian Cases (11–13) were conducted in two iterations by the RTU research group. Karine Oganisjana led the case research, participated in the observation of

both trials, and carried out data collection and analysis. Rolands Ozols coordinated with project schools, took part in the observation of both trials, and assisted with data collection and analysis. Natalja Lace organised the infrastructure for the intensive AECED training programmes for principals and teachers at RTU and contributed to data analysis. Konstantins Kozlovskis provided technical support and assisted with data organisation and analysis. The stakeholders—Aija Tuna and Sabīne Ozola (National Culture Centre of Latvia), Sandra Falka (National Centre for Education of Latvia), and Anna Šteina (Institute of Lifelong Learning and Culture Vitae)—contributed to discussions on the Prototype Pedagogical Framework and Guides and shared their expertise during two intensive AECED training programmes for principals and teachers.

Time Frame:

- **Iteration 1:** Introduction (15-16 February 2024), Familiarisation (19 February – 19 March 2024), Collaborative reflection (22 March 2024), Planning (25 March – 5 April 2024), Action (23 April 2024), Analysis & Synthesis (29 April – 1 July 2024).
- **Iteration 2:** Introduction and Familiarisation (23 August 2024), Collaborative Reflection and Planning (2 – 6 September 2024), Action (19 – 20 September 2024), Analysis & Synthesis (23 September – 30 December 2024).

2. Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis

Data Types and Sources

Types of Data: Qualitative data

Sources of Data: Since the target group in Case 11 consisted of secondary school students, the case was primarily based on their feedback regarding the impact of AELD activities on themselves and their peers (insiders' subjective view), as expressed through written reflections and interviews. It also incorporated teachers' impressions shared during post-trial discussions (insiders' more objective view) and observations from RTU researchers (outsiders' perspective). The data sources were assigned codes in brackets next to their names, as these codes will be used in the thematic analysis results to indicate the source of corresponding quotations.

- **Audio recordings of student interviews (SI – Students' Interviews):** Six post-trial-2 interviews with DSG students were recorded, transcribed, and pseudonymised using labels such as “Student 1,” “Student 2,” etc.
- **Student post-trial written reflections (SWR – Students' Written Reflections):** Fully anonymised post-trial-1 and post-trial-2 reflections were collected via Google Forms from DSG students (17 in Iteration 1, 16 in Iteration 2), JSG students (13 in Iteration 1), and RSS 22 students (14 in Iteration 1, 10 in Iteration 2). Students created and reused self-generated codes to allow RTU researchers to track changes across both trials. Although the primary focus in Case 11 was on DSG students, data from JSG and RSS 22 students were included for a more comprehensive analysis.

- **Audio recordings of post-trial discussions with educators (EPTD – Educators’ Post-Trial Discussions):** Post-trial-1 and post-trial-2 conversations with the DSG principal and three teachers were recorded, transcribed, and pseudonymised using labels such as “Teacher 1,” “Teacher 2,” etc. Additionally, post-trial-1 and post-trial-2 conversations with JSG principal and four teachers with identical pseudonymisation of the data.
- **Unstructured holistic observations (HO – Holistic Observation):** Notes were taken to capture participants’ emotions, speech, and ideas, alongside descriptions of the overall ethos and relationships. Special attention was given to identifying conditions that foster responsive pedagogies and democracy-as-becoming principles, particularly within activities using drama sketch and collage creation as aesthetic and embodied learning methods for democracy.

Research Methodologies and Methods:

Case 11 aimed to address **2** (AECED, 2023, p. 21): “How do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, foster individual and collective growth in students’ openness to newly ‘seeing’ the other?”

RQ 2 was explored through an analysis of the data set described above, which was collected during six phases of PAR (AECED, 2023, p.26). Different aspects of data collection and analysis were documented in a Shared Memoing Matrix throughout the PAR phases – Introduction, Familiarisation, Collaborative Reflection, Planning, Action, and Analysis & Synthesis. Memoing not only ensured transparency across project cases but also provided deeper insights into four key dimensions – Descriptive, Reflective, Conceptual, and Theoretical – by addressing structured questions in designated templates. This process required a thorough analysis of the questions, grounded in the PAR methodology. Keywords extracted from this analysis offered valuable insight into the ethos shaping the PAR process. For instance, at the Reflective dimension of memoing during the Action phase of Case 11, several keywords emerged, including: “Emotional engagement, Self-discovery, Overcoming differences, Perspective-taking, Cognitive Flexibility, Dialogic and relational disposition, Ethical sensibility, Transformative engagement, Inclusive learning environment, Relational well-being, Openness to otherness, Collective Meaning-Making, Empathetic Engagement”.

These keywords highlight the open, democratic atmosphere in which the Action phase with students took place, fostering qualities essential for developing openness to newly ‘seeing’ the other."

RQ 2 was explored through a thematic analysis of discussion and interview transcripts, triangulated with the results of a Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) of student post-trial written reflections, with findings further validated through holistic observations.

Data Analysis Methods:

- Literature review to develop the Openness to Newly ‘Seeing’ the Other Framework (ONSO), outlining its components and subcomponents.

- Thematic analysis of pseudonymised transcripts from post-trial discussions with educators (**EPTD**) and six student interviews (**SI**) (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) of anonymised student post-trial reflections (**SWR**), applying open coding to identify categories (Mayring, 2014) related to AELD vs. traditional learning, self-discovery, discovery about classmates, group dynamics, emotional experiences, and AELD's perceived value, with frequency tables generated for analysis.
- Triangulation of thematic analysis findings, QCA category alignment with the ONSO Framework, and RTU researchers' trial observations, integrating methodological, theoretical, and data source perspectives (Carter et al., 2014).

Data Analysis Process: A six-step approach was applied to the data analysis:

Step 1: Development of a theory-based ONSO Framework which encompasses six key dimensions: 1) Mental processes fostering reflective thinking for openness; 2) Sensory and emotional experiences cultivating openness; 3) Interactive dynamics promoting engagement with others; 4) Self-awareness of the impact of identity, emotions and biases on interactions; 5) Moral principles supporting inclusive just interactions; 6) Active engagement driving personal and collective transformation. The ONSO Framework (see *Table 1* in Step 4) is a structured table that presents the components and subcomponents corresponding to the six key dimensions of openness to newly 'seeing' the other.

Step 2: Thematic analysis of discussion and interview transcripts.

Step 3: Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) of students' post-trial written reflections, applying open coding for category development and generating frequency tables.

Step 4: Alignment of the QCA categories with the ONSO Framework, aligning student reflections on AELD experiences – including differences from traditional learning, self-discoveries, group dynamics, emotional experiences, and views on AELD's value – with relevant ONSO subcomponents. Category frequencies from the QCA were aggregated across all student reflections, revealing the integrative effect of AELD on students' openness to newly 'seeing' the other as shown in *Table 1*. This quantitative perspective complements the thematic analysis, providing a richer interpretation of students' AELD experiences.

Step 5: Triangulation (methodological, theoretical, and data source) of the results of thematic analysis and of the alignment of QCA categories with the ONSO Framework (Carter et al., 2014).

Step 6: Interpretation of triangulation results, supplemented by RTU researchers' trial observations.

Table 1: Alignment of Categories Developed in QCA of Students' Written Reflections with ONSO Framework

ONSO Framework			Mapping of the QCA Categories of Students' Written Reflections to the ONSO Framework																
			Iteration 1										Iteration 2						
Dim.	ONSO Components	ONSO Subcomponents	Sum of freq	Ref. Q.1 AEL differences	Ref. Q.2 self-discovey	Ref. Q.3 peer discovery	Ref. Q.4: ABE L discovey	Ref. Q.5: Experiencing democracy	Ref. Q.6: Emotions	Ref. Q.7: Differences	Ref. Q.8: Observtaclae	Ref. Q.9: Liked	Ref. Q.10: Worth	Ref. Q.7. Feelings safe	Ref. Q.8 Your feelings	Ref. Q.9 Peer feelings	Ref. Q.10 Problem-solving		
				Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq		
1.	Cognitive Flexibility	Perspective-taking	372	271			27	40	24	46	59	64	11						
		Tolerance for ambiguity		7	7														
		Aesthetic reflexivity		73	37	5	15	16											
		Recognition of knowledge limits		21	15	6													
2.	Aesthetic and Embodied Awareness	Aesthetic sensitivity	387	25	10	15													
		Empathic identification		135				34	6	31	16	37	11						
		Embodied knowing		48		24				8							6	10	
		Affective virtues		179		14	13		34	47	8	12	36			15			
3.	Dialogic and Relational Disposition	Mutual listening	408	202	11	14	13	21		6	34	40	36	27					
		Relational well-being		165	22	14	18		5	45	31	12			10	1	7		
		Power-sharing		27					27										
		Interpersonal adaptability		14	14														
4.	Reflexive Self-Awareness	Self-orientated awareness	300	11			4				5			2					
		Other-orientated awareness		58		14	5		12				27						
		Critical reflexivity		139					12	19	16	35	44	13					
		Emotional reflexivity		92	10	9	5	7				16	16	18	2	6	3		
5.	Ethical and Democratic Sensibility	Openness to otherness	309	88	28	14	5	12					27	2					
		Collective agency		182	17					11	70	53	26				5		
		Valuing equality		17	17														
		Love as integrative power		22	22														
6.	Transformative Engagement	Generative Interaction	80	17	17														
		Embracing vulnerability		31	10		3			18									
		Collaborative inquiry		32	8						22				2				

Theoretical Background: The theoretical foundation of this research is grounded in the AECED project, which suggests that AEL methods within a responsive pedagogical environment enable participants to experience democracy as a process of becoming (AECED, n.d). The study explores ONSO, recognising that cognitive rigidity and a lack of understanding or appreciation for others can undermine democracy. To investigate AEL’s impact on ONSO, a framework was developed using six dimensions from the “Data Analysis Process” subchapter. ONSO is defined as the cognitive, emotional, and relational capacity to move beyond preconceptions and stereotypes by engaging with difference through recognising, understanding, and valuing others' perspectives via empathetic, dialogical, and embodied interactions.

The ONSO Framework includes six components and 23 subcomponents:

- **Cognitive Flexibility** facilitates openness through reflective thinking. Subcomponents – Perspective-taking, Tolerance for Ambiguity, Aesthetic Reflexivity and Recognition of Knowledge Limits (Woods, 2021; Vives & FeldmanHall, 2018; Docherty, 2006; Kompridis, 2006; Selman, 2007; Dewey, 1933; Rosa, 2024; Dallmayr, 2015),
- **Aesthetic and Embodied Awareness** fosters openness through sensory and emotional experiences. Subcomponents – Aesthetic Sensitivity, Empathic Identification, Embodied

Knowing, Affective Virtues (Woods et al., 2023; Chacón et al., 2024; Woods, 2019; Krznaric, 2014; Dewey, 1934),

- **Dialogic and Relational Disposition** facilitates openness through interactive and relational engagement. Subcomponents – Mutual Listening, Relational Well-Being, Power-Sharing, Interpersonal Adaptability (Woods et al., 2023; Freire, 2005; Rosa, 2024; Dallmayr, 2015; White, 2015; McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013; Dewey, 1916),
- **Reflexive Self-Awareness** involves self-examination and awareness of identity and emotions in interactions. Subcomponents – Self-Orientated Awareness, Other-Orientated Awareness, Critical Reflexivity, Emotional Reflexivity (Woods, 2021; Woods et al., 2020; Dallmayr, 2017; Ng, 2019; Dewey, 1933),
- **Ethical and Democratic Sensibility** upholds moral principles and collective responsibility for just interactions. Subcomponents – Openness to Otherness, Collective Agency, Valuing Equality, Love as Integrative Power (Woods, 2021; Woods, 2019; Woods, 2005; Freire, 2005; Dewey, 1916; Docherty, 2006; Scanlon, 1998; Selman, 2007),
- **Transformative Engagement** involves active participation and willingness to undergo personal and collective transformation. Subcomponents – Generative Interaction, Embracing Vulnerability, and Collaborative inquiry (Woods et al., 2023; Brown, 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014; Woods, 2016; Docherty, 2006; Freire, 2005; Dewey, 1933).

The ONSO Framework ensures internal consistency by aligning cognitive, emotional, and relational components to foster openness. Progressing from cognitive flexibility to transformative engagement, it balances reflection with interaction, providing a reliable basis for qualitative research. It was used for thematic analysis of discussions and interviews and to triangulate these findings with QCA of students' written reflections.

3. Research Findings

The research findings in Case 11 addressed:

RQ 2: How do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, foster individual and collective growth in students' openness to newly 'seeing' the other?

Thematic analysis of pseudonymised transcripts from audio recordings of post-trial discussions with educators (EPTD) and student interviews (SI) revealed emerging themes that aligned with all ONSO components and subcomponents. This suggests that through drama sketch and collage creation, used as aesthetic and embodied learning methods for democracy, students recognised changes in themselves and their classmates that correspond to the six dimensions of openness to newly 'seeing' the other depicted on the ONSO Framework (see Table 1). Also, teachers indicated similar transformations in their students.

To illustrate these conclusions, relevant quotations from both students and teachers are provided below.

Students' Perceptions of AELD's Impact on Themselves and Their Classmates:

Cognitive Flexibility was fostered through AELD by encouraging students to appreciate diverse perspectives and embrace ambiguity. This theme emerged through various aspects, including Perspective-Taking, Tolerance for Ambiguity, Aesthetic Reflexivity, and Recognition of Knowledge Limits.

- **Perspective-Taking:** One student stated, *"I was impressed by my classmates' being so creative and clever. For example, my classmate A offered a solution that I could never have come up with."* (SI1). This reflection demonstrates cognitive flexibility in recognising the value of different perspectives. It also illustrates an appreciation of diverse thought processes, fostering empathy and reducing bias.
- **Aesthetic Reflexivity:** Another student mentioned in their interview, *"I like that first an idea comes to mind, then you improvise, letting and trusting your body decide how to move freely and express your emotions."* (SI2). This illustrates aesthetic reflexivity through embodied reflection, enhancing emotional awareness and cognitive flexibility by integrating physical and emotional experiences.

These reflections highlighted how AELD promoted Cognitive Flexibility by fostering reflective and creative thinking in an open-minded learning environment.

Aesthetic and Embodied Awareness emerged as a key theme, highlighting the integrative role of sensory and emotional experiences in fostering openness. This was reflected through Aesthetic Sensitivity, Empathic Identification, Embodied Knowing, and Affective Virtues.

- **Aesthetic Sensitivity:** One student shared, *"I liked the feeling of freedom, as there could not be correct or incorrect answers. I could trust myself and decide on my own what I felt and how I thought about this or that aspect without being criticized."* (SI2) This reflection illustrates aesthetic sensitivity by showing how freedom from judgment fostered emotional resonance and creative thinking, enhancing cognitive and emotional openness.
- **Empathic Identification:** Another student noted, *"We needed to immerse in the roles of a little kid, a teenager, an adult, a pensioner, and try to guess and improvise how each of them feels democracy."* (SI3) This demonstrates empathic identification by emotionally resonating with diverse roles, enhancing relational understanding and inclusive engagement.
- **Embodied Knowing:** A student reflected, *"I moved, and the thoughts that came to mind were different from the ones that could have struck me in regular studies without moving."* (SI4) This illustrates embodied knowing by highlighting how physical movement influenced cognitive creativity, showcasing a dynamic integration of body and mind.

These experiences showed that AELD's focus on sensory and emotional engagement helped students connect empathetically, enhance self-awareness, and develop a nuanced understanding of diverse perspectives, fostering openness to new experiences.

Dialogic and Relational Disposition played an important role in promoting relational openness through Mutual Listening, Relational Well-Being, Power-Sharing, and Interpersonal Adaptability.

- **Mutual Listening:** One student stated, *“We heard each other’s points of view to shape some summative idea.”* (SI2) This shows mutual listening by emphasizing collective understanding through dialogue, fostering relational empathy and cognitive openness.
- **Power-Sharing:** Another student noted, *“I noticed, especially during the creation of our group’s collage, that I gave space to my teammates to lead when I saw their ideas were more valuable than mine. I took the lead when inspiration struck me, and others liked my ideas. Surprisingly, we didn’t quarrel at all.”* (SI3) This illustrates power-sharing by empowering students to participate without coercion, enhancing their ownership of voices.
- **Interpersonal Adaptability:** A student reflected, *“Perhaps the discovery that I can work also with those peers whom I do not usually work with and whom even I did not like. During the project, I worked not only with my friends but also with some new colleagues.”* (SI2) This shows interpersonal adaptability by demonstrating a willingness to collaborate with new peers, highlighting social flexibility and relational openness.

These reflections showed how AELD’s collaborative nature promoted Dialogic and Relational Disposition by encouraging empathetic dialogue, social adaptability, and democratic engagement.

Reflexive Self-Awareness emerged as a theme demonstrating how AELD facilitated self-examination, emotional regulation, and relational awareness. This was reflected through Self-Oriented Awareness, Other-Oriented Awareness, Critical Reflexivity, and Emotional Reflexivity.

- **Self-Oriented Awareness:** One student shared, *“I am a shy person. But not to harm the joint work, I pulled myself together, overcame stress, and performed.”* (SI1) This reflection illustrates self-oriented awareness by acknowledging shyness and actively managing emotional states. It demonstrates self-regulation and an empathetic commitment to the group, fostering collaborative engagement.
- **Other-Oriented Awareness:** Another student observed, *“I saw that absolutely all the students participated and not only the best ones.”* (SI4) This statement reflects other-oriented awareness by recognizing inclusive participation and demonstrating relational empathy. It shows an outward focus on peers’ experiences, enhancing cognitive openness and empathy.

These reflections highlighted how AELD’s emphasis on reflexive self-awareness enabled students to examine their identities, emotions, and biases, fostering self-awareness and empathy, both essential for openness to newly ‘seeing’ the other.

Ethical and Democratic Sensibility emerged as a pivotal component, promoting moral principles, social responsibility, and inclusive engagement. This was reflected through Openness to Otherness, Collective Agency, Valuing Equality, and Love as Integrative Power.

- **Collective Agency:** A student stated, *“Yesterday, we worked together in a drama sketch that opened perspectives on freedom across the 20th and 21st centuries, fostering shared responsibility and a deeper understanding of diverse experiences.”* (SI3) This illustrates collective agency by showing democratic participation and shared responsibility, promoting relational empathy and ethical engagement.
- **Love as Integrative Power:** Another student admitted, *“If before I did not even pay attention to that boy, now I would be happy to work with him as I know I can trust him. He is reliable.”* (SI2) This demonstrates love as an integrative power by reflecting growth in trust and emotional connection. It shows relational empathy and reinforces a caring community dynamic.

These reflections demonstrated that AELD’s democratic and ethical framework cultivated respect for diversity, social responsibility, and empathy, fostering openness to newly ‘seeing’ the other.

Transformative Engagement highlighted the power of co-creative learning, emphasising Generative Interaction, Embracing Vulnerability, and Collaborative Inquiry.

- **Generative Interaction:** One student stated, *“This experience gave us the opportunity to engage in collaborative discussions beyond the usual structured lessons. Through shared dialogue and creative interactions, we developed a deeper connection and co-created new insights together.”* (SI4) This illustrates generative interaction by showing collective knowledge creation and relational engagement, emphasising dialogic learning and cognitive openness.
- **Collaborative Inquiry:** A student reflected, *“We had to co-think, discuss, and make sense of all together.”* (SI2) This illustrates collaborative inquiry by emphasising the co-creation of knowledge and collective sense-making, enhancing group cohesion and empathetic dialogue.

These experiences demonstrated that AELD’s transformative engagement promoted active participation, collective inquiry, and co-creation of knowledge, fostering openness to newly ‘seeing’ the other through transformative learning experiences.

The balanced alignment of themes across all six ONSO components illustrated the integrative impact of AELD on fostering openness to newly ‘seeing’ the other. By combining cognitive, emotional, relational, and ethical engagement, AELD promoted an inclusive and democratic learning environment, enhancing students’ openness, empathy, and social responsibility.

This interpretation is grounded in students’ own insights into how AELD influenced both their personal development and that of their classmates.

Teachers’ and Principals’ Perceptions of AELD’s Impact on Students:

Additionally, the thematic analysis of post-trial discussions with educators revealed themes related to openness to newly ‘seeing’ the other, which emerged in their students because of

drama sketch and collage creation used to address democracy-related problem situations. The following three quotations briefly illustrate this perspective.

- **Openness to otherness:** In the DSG post-trial discussion, a teacher stated, *“It’s not just about students finding this learning method enjoyable; it’s about recognising that art liberates the mind and soul and that embodied experiences foster a more open perception and acceptance of others, regardless of their differences.”* (DSG EPTD) The teacher highlights the role of AELD in fostering openness by emphasising the development of empathetic perception and the acceptance of diverse perspectives.
- **Interpersonal Adaptability:** A teacher reflected on how the students adapted to new social dynamics and diverse interactions during the first AELD trial, *“Today, students collaborated with classmates they had previously seldom or never worked with, or even tended to avoid. This required them to engage cognitively, manage their emotions, and communicate effectively with new peers. Such interactions can contribute to a more inclusive and harmonious classroom environment.”* (DSG EPTD)
- **Embracing Vulnerability:** During the post-trial discussion with teachers in JSG during Iteration 1, one teacher reflected on how students acknowledged and embraced their emotions, imperfections, and uncertainties, allowing them to connect more authentically with others and foster personal growth. The teacher recalled, *‘I remember Student A saying, “Oh my God! It was so scary! I was sitting there, playing my role in the courtroom, and everyone was staring at me. My hands grew sweaty from fear and excitement, my throat became scratchy, my head felt light and fuzzy, and my heart pounded wildly.”’* (JSG EPTD).

The alignment of categories developed in the QCA of students’ post-trial-1 and post-trial-2 written reflections with the ONSO Framework:

While thematic analysis provided qualitative insights into the impact of AELD on students’ openness to newly ‘seeing’ the other, a more comprehensive understanding was achieved by integrating a quantitative perspective. This was done through the alignment of categories developed in the QCA of students’ written reflections with the ONSO Framework, linking them to its components and subcomponents (see *Table 1*). The ONSO subcomponents with the highest occurrence frequencies are listed below:

- **Relational Well-being** (N=232; subcomponent of Dialogic and Relational Disposition) indicating that students experienced connection, trust, and mutual understanding through meaningful interactions that fostered support, appreciation, and engagement (Woods, 2021; White, 2015; McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013). This aligns with the view that there is a **reciprocal relationship** between psychological well-being and openness, where enhanced well-being through **supportive relational dynamics** increases **cognitive flexibility** and **openness to new experiences** (Joshnloo, 2022).
- **Collaborative Inquiry** (N=204; subcomponent of Transformative Engagement), reflecting that AELD activities using drama sketch and collage creation actively engaged students in collective investigation of shared questions or challenges. This approach fostered a culture of openness and mutual respect, encouraging students to move beyond personal

perspectives, embrace diverse viewpoints, and co-create knowledge to deepen their understanding of democracy-related problem situations (Kemmis et al., 2014; Woods et al., 2023; Freire, 2005; Dewey, 1933; Rosa, 2024).

- **Openness to Otherness** (N=201; subcomponent of Ethical and Democratic Sensibility), demonstrating that the responsive pedagogical environment utilizing AELD methods led students to respect diverse points of view and engage with, understand, and appreciate each other and their teachers. This process fostered empathy and challenged preconceived biases (Freire, 2005; Woods, 2021; Dewey, 1916; Selman, 2007).

The next group of ONSO subcomponents emerged from the alignment of the QCA categories with the ONSO Framework, showing moderate frequencies ranging from 85 to 135. Despite the lower frequencies, also these subcomponents demonstrate a notable impact of AELD on students' openness to newly 'seeing' the other:

- **Collective Agency** (N=135; subcomponent of Ethical and Democratic Sensibility), reflecting students' ability to act cohesively toward shared goals through collaborative decision-making and shared responsibility (Woods, 2005).
- **Generative Interaction** (N=131; subcomponent of Transformative Engagement), illustrating how students-built connections that foster shared learning and mutual growth through creative and aesthetic experiences (Woods et al., 2023).
- **Aesthetic Sensitivity** (N=128; subcomponent of Aesthetic and Embodied Awareness), indicating students' enhanced ability to perceive, appreciate, and respond to aesthetic elements in art and human interactions by attuning to sensory, emotional, and intellectual details (Dewey, 1934; Chacón et al., 2024; Kompridis, 2006).
- **Mutual Listening** (N=117; subcomponent of Dialogic and Relational Disposition), showing that students engaged in active and reciprocal listening without rushing to counter-argue, empathetically engaging with each other's perspectives to foster deeper understanding, connection, and relational openness (Woods et al., 2023; Freire, 2005; Dallmayr, 2015; Rosa, 2024).
- **Tolerance for Ambiguity** (N=115; subcomponent of Cognitive Flexibility), reflecting students' ability to embrace uncertainty and complexity of challenging situations, which opened them to understanding and engaging with peers and teachers (Vives & FeldmanHall, 2018; Docherty, 2006).
- **Empathic Identification** (N=106; subcomponent of Aesthetic and Embodied Awareness), demonstrating that through AEL activities, students mentally and emotionally adopted others' perspectives, fostering emotional resonance and leading to shared emotional connection (Krznicaric, 2014; Dewey, 1934; Rosa, 2024; Woods, 2019).
- **Embodied Knowing** (N=93; subcomponent of Aesthetic and Embodied Awareness), illustrating students' perception of gaining knowledge through bodily interactions within the learning environment, integrating sensory, emotional, physical, and cognitive experiences (Woods et al., 2023; Woods, 2019; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Dewey, 1934; Rosa, 2024).

- **Critical Reflexivity** (N=85; subcomponent of Reflexive Self-Awareness), highlighting how AEL encouraged students to continuously examine their own assumptions, beliefs, and biases to understand their influence on perceptions, actions, and interactions (Ng, 2019; Freire, 2005; Dewey, 1933).

Triangulation of the results of thematic analysis, QCA category alignment with the ONSO framework, and holistic observation:

Conclusion: Triangulation of thematic analysis, QCA category alignment with the ONSO framework, and holistic observation provided a well-rounded understanding of how drama sketch and collage creation fostered students' openness to newly 'seeing' the other.

- The thematic analysis highlighted AELD's role in enhancing cognitive flexibility, emotional engagement, relational empathy, and ethical sensitivity, shaping an inclusive and democratic learning environment.
- QCA alignment revealed high frequencies of Relational Well-being (N=232), Collaborative Inquiry (N=204), and Openness to Otherness (N=201), underscoring the significance of supportive relationships, collective meaning-making, and empathetic engagement.
- Holistic observations reinforced these findings, capturing a democratic ethos rooted in power-sharing, relational well-being, holistic learning, and transformative dialogue within AELD practices.

Together, these insights demonstrate AELD's transformative impact on students' cognitive, emotional, relational, and ethical development, fostering openness through inclusive, empathetic, and participatory learning experiences.

4. Limitations

The use of video recordings was restricted due to students being minors (under 18), limiting the full analysis of drama sketch and collage creation processes. While audio recordings were planned as an alternative, they proved ineffective in the school hall setting due to background noise and distant voices. To address this, holistic observation and post-trial discussions with teachers were used. Audio recordings were only utilised when participants were seated, with devices placed nearby to ensure clarity.

DSG's location 240 km from Riga limited the RTU team to two visits for AELD observations and data collection. To maximise outcomes, DSG teachers organised intensive activities, leading to physical and emotional fatigue, as noted in reflections. While students and teachers found the blend of embodied learning, cognitive engagement, and emotional processing both engaging and demanding, the RTU team mitigated this by fostering a positive and supportive environment.

As the study focused primarily on drama sketch and collage creation, the findings are limited to these AELD methods and their impact on students' openness to newly 'seeing' the other.

Students experienced these methods differently – collage creation was seen as less stressful, allowing time for reflection, while improvisation demanded immediate, authentic responses, which some found challenging or stressful in front of others.

RTU researchers' presence initially influenced students' behaviour, but they soon adapted and resumed natural participation. To minimise distractions, researchers positioned themselves at the far ends of the school halls.

The study examined AELD's immediate impact on students' openness, highlighting its transformative potential. To ensure long-term effects, DSG agreed to hold a 'Democracy Day' each semester, integrating AELD across disciplines, extracurriculars, and civic education. Regular short embodiment exercises and reflections will further reinforce a democratic ethos in the school.

The study, based on students from three Latvian schools, prioritises contextual depth over broad generalisation. Validity is ensured through the theory-based ONSO framework, while collaborative data analysis by the RTU team enhances reliability and minimises researcher bias.

5. Relevance of Context

After regaining independence in 1991, Latvia faced the challenge of rebuilding democracy and civic engagement after decades of Soviet authoritarianism, which had suppressed critical thinking, open debate, and political participation (Sarma, 1998; Medne et al., 2024). Education reform became a priority, replacing Soviet-era indoctrination with civic education grounded in democratic principles, human rights, and active citizenship. With limited resources, NGOs partnered with the Ministry of Education to develop new civic education curricula (Sarma, 1998).

A major pedagogical shift replaced rote learning with active learning, incorporating role-plays, debates, and collaborative projects to develop democratic skills like critical thinking and decision-making (Sarma, 1998). Latvia's EU accession in 2004 further reinforced these efforts, embedding pluralism, human rights, and active citizenship as core educational values.

Recognising the need for teacher re-education, Latvia launched professional development programmes in 1994, reaching over 2,000 educators. However, deeply ingrained Soviet-era teaching habits remained a challenge (Cekse et al., 2010). Additionally, student reflections within the AECED project indicated a perceived correlation between teacher age and democratic disposition—with older teachers exhibiting lower democratic sensibility, flexibility, and openness to newly 'seeing' the other. Latvia formally acknowledged civic education as essential for social cohesion, yet national reports from the 2010s revealed that Latvian youth lagged European averages in civic knowledge and participation skills (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, 2011).

Authorities and educators increasingly emphasise student engagement, critical dialogue, and collaboration as fundamental to both quality education and a healthy democracy. This is reflected in national initiatives such as:

- "Demokrātijā!", which promotes democratic values in school life (European Movement in Latvia, 2020).
- Skola2030, which integrates civic participation as a transversal skill, fostering responsible and active citizens who contribute to democratic processes and societal development (LAPAS, 2022).

The approaches developed within the AECED project can serve as a valuable complement, helping to further address these challenges and enhance democratic education practices by immersing students in holistic learning using aesthetic and embodied methods. This enables students to experience democracy-as-becoming, fostering democratic ethos in both lessons and extracurricular activities to address real-world civic challenges.

Consultations with stakeholders, including the National Culture Centre of Latvia, the National Centre for Education, and the Institute of Lifelong Learning and Culture Vitae, highlighted a demand for innovative teaching models to embed AELD into diverse learning contexts.

As a result, three Prototype Pedagogical Guide models were developed and tested in Iteration 1 across three Latvian schools, aiming to integrate democracy and civic participation into various subjects. Since most schooling time is dedicated to subject content and transversal skill development, AELD was designed to be seamlessly embedded into the curriculum.

Student feedback was generally positive, with most recognising changes in themselves, their classmates, and teachers. They concluded that regular AELD practise could contribute to enhancing democratic sensibility and openness, making it a valuable addition to the educational process.

This context created a meaningful foundation for examining how AELD encourages openness to diverse perspectives, cultivates democratic dispositions, and integrates pedagogical innovations within local educational frameworks.

6. Learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guides

The findings from this study provide valuable insights for enhancing the AELD Pedagogical Framework and Guides, particularly in fostering students' ONSO. These learnings are organised across three levels of transformation (AECED, 2023, p.8) –individual and collective learning, organisational learning, and epistemic transformation – with a focused emphasis on the role of embodiment in shaping educational experiences and outcomes.

Individual and Collective Learning

AELD significantly impacted individual and collective learning by integrating cognitive, emotional, and embodied experiences, fostering a holistic approach to openness and

democratic engagement. Students developed perspective-taking, empathic identification, and emotional reflexivity through aesthetic and embodied activities, such as drama sketches and collage creation, which encouraged them to experience and express ideas physically and emotionally, rather than merely cognitively.

The embodied nature of AELD enabled students to emotionally resonate with diverse perspectives and physically engage with complex democratic concepts, leading to deeper relational empathy and emotional awareness. For example, students demonstrated cognitive flexibility by improvising during drama sketches, which allowed them to adapt to new roles and viewpoints through embodied expression. This integration of body, emotion, and thought fostered a more inclusive and empathetic learning environment.

To strengthen this transformative effect, the Pedagogical Framework and Guides should include guided embodied reflections, such as movement-based debriefings or sensory exploration activities, that help students process emotional and cognitive experiences holistically. Additionally, group embodiment exercises should be used to build collective emotional intelligence and relational well-being, emphasizing embodied empathy and shared emotional experiences that enhance collective learning and democratic dispositions. The models for embedding AELD models in disciplinary and extracurricular contexts should be provided with more comprehensive illustrations of how they enable students to engage with democracy as a lived process, deepening their openness to newly 'seeing' the other.

Organisational Learning

The introduction of AELD required schools to adapt to a paradigm shift from traditional cognitive-centric learning to embodied, experiential pedagogies. This necessitated organisational learning, where schools transitioned from hierarchical teaching models to more participatory and co-creative learning cultures. Initially, teachers and students were unfamiliar with embodied learning, leading to challenges in emotional regulation and role adaptability. However, as they experienced the integrative benefits of cognitive-emotional-embodied learning, they became more open to collaborative decision-making and power-sharing.

To support this organisational transformation, the Pedagogical Framework and Guides should offer models for integrating embodied pedagogies, equipping teachers with strategies to facilitate and manage emotional and sensory experiences in the classroom. This includes training in movement facilitation, embodied communication, and experiential reflection techniques to build teachers' confidence and competence in guiding embodied learning. Additionally, fostering organisational emotional intelligence through collective reflection practices, such as staff movement workshops and emotional debriefings, will strengthen relational well-being and support a school-wide culture of emotional safety and inclusivity.

Epistemic Transformation

AELD facilitated a profound epistemic transformation by challenging traditional cognitive-focused ways of knowing and introducing embodied epistemologies that integrate sensory, emotional, and cognitive experiences. This epistemic shift enabled students to engage with complex democratic concepts not just intellectually but also through bodily sensations,

emotional resonance, and aesthetic reflexivity. For instance, students' embodied interactions during drama sketches and collage creation enabled them to feel, sense, and emotionally experience democratic values, fostering embodied empathy and ethical sensibility.

To deepen this epistemic transformation, the Pedagogical Framework and Guides should incorporate multimodal experiences that engage all senses, such as soundscapes (on freedom, democracy, or cultural identity), promoting collective creativity and democratic dialogue, tactile explorations, and movement improvisations to bridge cognitive and sensory learning. Emphasizing aesthetic sensitivity and embodied knowing will help students develop a more nuanced understanding of democracy, empathy, and ethical engagement. Moreover, shifting from standardised assessments to narrative-based evaluations that capture embodied learning experiences, emotional growth, and relational engagement will provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' transformative learning journeys.

The learnings from this study underscore the transformative potential of AELD in fostering individual and collective learning, organisational change, and epistemic transformation through embodied, emotional, and cognitive integration. By integrating guided embodied reflections, professional development in embodied pedagogies, and multimodal sensory experiences, the Pedagogical Framework and Guides can more effectively cultivate openness to newly 'seeing' the other, democratic dispositions, and inclusive learning environments. These insights contribute to the ongoing development of the AECED Project's Methodological Framework, supporting educational transformation towards more empathetic, democratic, and resilient communities.

7. Ethical Reflection and Gender Dimension

The final versions of the AELD Pedagogical Framework and Guides must navigate important ethical considerations to foster an inclusive and democratic learning environment. Central to this is ensuring gender sensitivity, accessibility, intersectionality, and positionality in both design and implementation.

Gender Sensitivity and Inclusivity

The AELD Pedagogical Framework and Guides must actively challenge gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles that may unconsciously influence students' participation and engagement in AELD activities. Drama sketches and embodied exercises, for instance, may evoke traditional narratives, so it is crucial to design gender-sensitive roles and diverse character representations. All students should be encouraged to explore a wide range of emotional expressions and social roles, irrespective of gender identity. To achieve this:

- Gender-sensitive facilitation should be prioritised, ensuring equal participation and leadership opportunities for all genders during collaborative tasks and group discussions.
- Embodied activities should be crafted to allow freedom of movement without reinforcing gendered stereotypes (avoiding activities that might unintentionally emphasise physical strength or traditional feminine/masculine expressions).

- Reflective debriefings should explicitly invite students to reflect on gender norms, biases, and power dynamics, fostering critical reflexivity and cognitive flexibility.

Our experience during the trials revealed that the creation and performance of drama sketches fostered not only openness to newly ‘seeing’ the other but also encouraged gender fluidity. Students confidently navigated different gender expressions and identities, seamlessly taking on roles of varying genders, ages, or social statuses. This demonstrated their empathy and flexibility in gender expression, free from societal expectations of masculinity or femininity. Their willingness to explore and embody different identities, supported by positive and accepting reactions from peers and teachers, reflected the democratic ethos cultivated within the classroom.

Accessibility and Inclusion

To ensure equitable participation for all students, including those with diverse abilities and socio-cultural backgrounds, the AELD Framework must prioritise accessibility and inclusion by:

- Designing multi-sensory learning activities that accommodate different learning styles and abilities (tactile explorations, soundscapes, and embodied journaling).
- Ensuring physical accessibility in movement-based activities, providing alternatives for students with mobility challenges (seated movement, gesture-based expression).
- Creating a safe and supportive environment for emotional expression, considering neurodiversity and mental health differences. This includes using emotion mapping and embodied reflections in non-intrusive, flexible ways that honour individual comfort levels.
- Integrating cultural sensitivity by valuing diverse cultural expressions, perspectives, and experiences, ensuring that activities are relevant and respectful of students' cultural contexts.

Intersectionality and Positionality

The AELD Pedagogical Framework and Guides should recognise that students' perceptions and interactions are influenced by overlapping factors such as gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, language, and disability. Incorporating activities like role-playing, perspective-taking exercises, and collaborative storytelling can foster empathy and inclusivity, enhancing students' openness to diverse perspectives.

- Critical Reflexivity should be encouraged, prompting students and teachers to examine how their social positions and cultural backgrounds shape their perspectives, interactions, and experiences.
- Facilitators must practise positionality awareness by reflecting on how their own identities and biases influence the learning environment and power dynamics within the classroom.
- Using embodied dialogue and perspective-taking activities, students can explore intersectional identities, fostering openness to otherness, relational empathy, and collective agency.

Ethical Facilitation and Emotional Safety

AELD activities are emotionally immersive and vulnerable experiences, necessitating ethical facilitation practices to ensure emotional safety and well-being. For that, it is essential to:

- Establish clear boundaries and consent-based participation to respect students' comfort levels, particularly during activities involving physical movement, touch, or emotional expression.
- Integrate trauma-informed approaches by providing flexible participation options and debriefings that acknowledge emotional responses without coercion or pressure.
- Facilitate emotional regulation strategies (grounding exercises, sensory reflections) to help students manage emotional experiences safely and effectively.
- Foster a culture of trust and empathy by modelling respectful communication and active listening, reinforcing relational well-being and dialogic and relational disposition.

Gender Dimension in Analysis and Evaluation

Gender sensitivity in the analysis and evaluation of AELD activities was achieved through multiple strategies, ensuring an equitable and inclusive approach:

- Through holistic observation, we analysed gender dynamics within group interactions, particularly focusing on power-sharing and collective agency activities. This allowed us to identify and address gender-specific participation patterns, ensuring balanced involvement and promoting equitable collective agency among all gender groups.
- By reflecting on and discussing with teachers how gender norms influenced emotional expressions, relational dynamics, and embodied learning experiences, we identified patterns that informed pedagogical adjustments. For example, we observed that boys were more hesitant to express vulnerability, while girls displayed more collaborative communication. In response, we incorporated role reversals in drama sketches and rotating leadership roles to challenge stereotypes and promote equitable emotional expression. These gender-sensitive strategies enhanced relational well-being and collective emotional intelligence, supporting a democratic and inclusive learning environment, and using this insight to inform future pedagogical adjustments.
- A gender-balanced research team, comprising two female and two male researchers, ensured diverse perspectives in data interpretation and analysis. This balance enhanced reflexivity and minimised potential biases related to gendered interpretations of emotional expressions and relational dynamics. Additionally, such diversity contributed to building trusting relationships with participants, allowing individuals to express themselves more authentically.

Latvia Case Report

Case 12

Phase/Educational Setting: Adult, Professional and Organisational Learning

VEN-Approach: Visual, Embodied and Narrative

1. Case Description

Participants: The target audience of Case 12 was teachers in the Secondary Education phase. However, the research was conducted from multiple perspectives, including the primary group – the principal and four teachers and 13 students of Grade 10 at JSG in Iteration 1 and the principal and 14 teachers in Iteration 2; four RTU AECED researchers; complementary groups – students and teachers from the two other project schools – DSG and RSS 22; four stakeholders – two from National Culture Centre of Latvia, one from the National Centre for Education of Latvia, and one from the Institute of Lifelong Learning and Culture Vitae.

Location: PAR was conducted in two iterations, with each phase carried out either in person at RTU or JSG or online via Zoom, depending on the specific needs of each PAR phase. Although the principal group of Case 12 is associated with JSG teachers, complementary data from other AECED Project schools (JSG and RSS 22) were also considered to provide a more comprehensive and integrative understanding of the research question.

Purpose – Relevance to Democracy-as-Becoming: The purpose of Case 12 was to gather research-based evidence to refine and develop launch-ready versions of the Pedagogical Framework and Guides, while specifically exploring the impact of AELD on teachers' ONSO within a responsive pedagogical environment. This environment was intentionally designed to align with the core principles of democracy-as-becoming: power-sharing, holistic learning, relational well-being, and transforming dialogue. Thus, Case 12 directly contributed to understanding how AELD supports the realisation of democracy-as-becoming by fostering a culture of openness, collaboration, and transformation in educational settings.

Research Activities and Methods: Case 12 focused on the impact of AELD, implemented through drama sketch and collage creation, on teachers' ONSO as they developed and implemented new teaching and learning activities for their students.

Iteration 1:

- The PAR phase **Introduction** was organised by the RTU team as an intensive AECED training programme for teachers, principals from the three project schools, and stakeholders. Its purpose was to introduce and familiarise participants with key concepts

from the Prototype Pedagogical Framework (PPF) and Guides (PPG), including AELD, responsive pedagogies, and the principles of democracy-as-becoming. The introduction phase concluded with participants' **written reflections** via Google Forms on their new AELD experience.

- In the phase of **Familiarisation**, teachers and principals read and analysed the PPF and PPG documents both individually and in groups at their schools, identifying challenging issues and developing recommendations for refinement.
- In the PAR phase of **Collaborative Reflection**, Zoom meetings (one per school) were held with RTU researchers – Karine Oganisjana and Rolands Ozols, where teachers and principals shared feedback and suggestions for improving the Prototype Pedagogical Framework (PPF) and Guides (PPG). Each meeting was **audio recorded for further transcription and analysis** to address **RQ4**, which focused on identifying necessary changes to enhance the PPF and PPG, making them more modern and user-friendly.
- The **Planning** phase was carried out through collaboration between principals, teachers, and RTU researchers, as well as through individual consultations (20 minutes per teacher) with Karine Oganisjana to prepare for the AELD trials with students. These sessions aimed to finalise and enhance the AELD activities developed by the teachers based on the three models for embedding drama sketch and collage creation to address democracy-related problem situations across study subjects. These three models were:
 - The model of embedding ABEL (arts-based and embodied learning) into a task
 - The model of embedding ABEL into the pedagogical process for creative self-discovery and discovery of others
 - The embedding of ABEL into the 5E instructional model (see pages 168-182 of the PPG, Deliverable 3.2.).
- Students joined AELD in the PAR phase **Action**. Since they were minors (under 18), they first underwent an Introduction phase, during which their teachers and school principal introduced them and their parents to the AECED Project. To confirm their willingness to participate, both students and their parents signed the Informed Consent Forms. During this phase, students tested three models from the Prototype Guides to address democracy-related issues across study subjects, integrating cognitive, affective, and embodied learning. Data collection methods in this phase included:
 - **Observation** of the AELD activities by Karine Oganisjana and Rolands Ozols.
 - **Students' and teachers' written reflections** on the AELD experience, were submitted via Google Forms.
 - **Post-trial discussions** between RTU researchers and teachers regarding their own and their students' AELD learning experience. **Audio recordings of these discussions were prepared** for transcription and further analysis.
- Analysis and Synthesis phase involved:
 - **Qualitative content analysis (QCA)** of the students' and teachers' reflections using open coding to develop categories.
 - **Thematic analysis** of the transcripts from the post-trial discussions.

Iteration 2: In Iteration 2, the research focus shifted from embedding AELD to address democracy-related problem situations across study subjects to emphasising embodiment practices and tackling problem situations related to democracy and civic participation. While Iteration 1 followed a standardized approach across all Latvian cases (11–13), Iteration 2 was adapted to the specific needs of each case. Therefore, in Case 12, which explored the impact of AELD on teachers' ONSO, only the JSG principal, the four teachers from Iteration 1, and ten additional teachers participated in Iteration 2, this time without students. They engaged in drama sketch and collage creation as part of embodiment activities organised by the core JSG educators' group for their colleagues.

- The PAR **Introduction and Familiarisation** phases were conducted as part of an embodiment seminar for project schoolteachers, principals, and stakeholders by RTU researchers in collaboration with Anna Steina, a psychologist from the Institute of Lifelong Learning and Culture VITA. The **audio recordings** of these exercises provided valuable data, demonstrating how embodiment can foster a democratic ethos and relationships within a group.
- **Collaborative Reflection and Planning** were carried out autonomously by JSG, without the intervention from RTU researchers, as the educators felt more self-confident in Iteration 2.
- In the **Action** phase, the JSG principal and 14 teachers engaged in embodiment activities and democracy-related problem-solving using drama sketch and collage creation as AELD. Data collected in this phase included:
 - Teachers' **post-Trial 2 written reflections** via Google Forms,
 - **Audio recordings of post-trial discussions** with teachers.
- The PAR **Analysis and Synthesis** phase focused on:
 - **Thematic analysis** of the **transcripts from audio recordings** of the embodiment seminar and discussions,
 - **QCA of the teachers' reflections**,
 - **Triangulation** of results from Iterations 1 and 2 to develop a comprehensive and integrative answer to the research question.

Researchers: All three Latvian Cases (11–13) were conducted in two iterations by the RTU research group. Karine Oganisjana led the case research, participated in the observation of both trials, and carried out data collection and analysis. Rolands Ozols coordinated with project schools, took part in the observation of both trials, and assisted with data collection and analysis. Natalja Lace organised the infrastructure for the intensive AECED training programmes for principals and teachers at RTU and contributed to data analysis. Konstantins Kozlovskis provided technical support and assisted with data organisation and analysis. The stakeholders—Aija Tuna and Sabīne Ozola (National Culture Centre of Latvia), Sandra Falka (National Centre for Education of Latvia), and Anna Šteina (Institute of Lifelong Learning and Culture Vitae)—contributed to discussions on the Prototype Pedagogical Framework and Guides and shared their expertise during two intensive AECED training programmes for principals and teachers.

Time Frame:

Iteration 1 – Introduction (15-16 February 2024), Familiarisation (19 February – 19 March 2024), Collaborative reflection (21 March 2024), Planning (25 March – 5 April 2024), Action (15 April 2024), Analysis & Synthesis (29 April – 1 July 2024).

Iteration 2 – Introduction and Familiarisation (23 August 2024), Collaborative Reflection and Planning (2 – 6 September 2024), Action (25 October 2024), Analysis & Synthesis (28 October – 30 December 2024).

2. Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis

Data Types and Sources

Types of Data: Qualitative data.

Sources of Data: Since Case 12 focused on secondary school teachers, the analysis was primarily based on their feedback regarding the impact of AELD activities on themselves, as expressed through written reflections, discussions, and interviews (insiders' subjective perspectives). Additionally, students' interviews provided insights into changes they observed in their teachers, complemented by RTU researchers' observations (outsiders' perspectives).

To ensure clarity in the thematic analysis, data sources are assigned codes in brackets next to their names, which were used to indicate the source of corresponding quotations in the results.

- **Audio recordings of post-trial discussions with educators (EPTD – Educators' Post-Trial Discussions):** Conversations with the JSG and DSG educators were recorded, transcribed, and pseudonymised using labels such as “Teacher 1,” “Teacher 2,” etc.
- **Written post-trial reflections from educators (EWR – Educators' Written Reflections):** Fully anonymised post-trial 1 and post-trial 2 reflections were collected via Google Forms from teachers and principals. Participants included: JSG - five educators in Iteration 1 and 15 in Iteration 2, DSG – four educators in both iterations, RSS 22 – five educators in Iteration 1 and 10 in Iteration 2. Although the primary focus in Case 12 was on JSG principal and teachers, also data from DSG and RSS 22 educators were included for a more comprehensive analysis. Educators created and reused self-generated codes to allow RTU researchers to track changes across both trials.
- **Unstructured holistic observations (HO – Holistic Observation):** Notes were taken to capture participants' emotions, speech, and ideas, alongside descriptions of the overall ethos and relationships. Special attention was given to identifying conditions that foster responsive pedagogies and democracy-as-becoming principles, particularly within activities using drama sketch and collage creation as aesthetic and embodied learning methods for democracy.
- **Audio recordings of three Zoom meetings between RTU researchers and educators of each project school (ZM – Zoom Meetings):** These meetings took place after educators had read and analysed the Prototype Pedagogical Framework and Guide aiming to identify

challenges and formulate recommendations for improvement. Transcripts were pseudonymised using labels such as 'Teacher 1,' 'Teacher 2,' etc.

- **Audio recordings of four post-trial-2 Zoom interviews with DSG educators (EI – Educators’ Interviews):** The transcripts were pseudonymised using labels such as 'Teacher 1,' 'Teacher 2,' etc. The interview aimed to gather feedback from the DSG principal and teachers on the revised Prototype Pedagogical Guide, specifically regarding models for embedding aesthetic and embodied methods in learning activities to address democracy-related problem situations. The results of these interviews were used to answer **RQ4**.
- **Audio recording of the pre-Iteration-2 Embodiment Seminar organised by RTU researchers and Psychologist Anna Steina on 23 August 2024 (ES – embodiment Seminar):** The transcripts were pseudonymised using labels such as 'Teacher 1,' 'Teacher 2,' etc.

Research Methodologies and Methods: Case 12 addresses **RQ1-4** through an analysis of the qualitative data, gathered across six phases of PAR within the AECED Project (AECED, 2023, p. 26). Project school principals and teachers actively participated in all PAR phases, contributing their holistic analysis of the Prototype Pedagogical Framework and Guides.

Through drama sketching and collage creation, educators not only facilitated aesthetic and embodied learning for their students but also critically reflected on their own emotions, experiences, and embodied practices. Various aspects of data collection and analysis were systematically documented in a Shared Memoing Matrix throughout the PAR phases—Introduction, Familiarisation, Collaborative Reflection, Planning, Action, and Analysis & Synthesis.

Memoing ensured transparency across project cases while offering deeper insights into four key dimensions—Descriptive, Reflective, Conceptual, and Theoretical—by addressing structured questions in designated templates. This process required a rigorous and grounded analysis, firmly embedded in PAR methodology.

Keywords extracted from this analysis provided insight into the ethos shaping the PAR process. For instance, at the Descriptive Dimension level during the Planning phase of Case 12, the following keywords emerged: “Co-working, Co-creating, Co-thinking, Excitement, Doubts, Multi-Level Collaboration for Self-Confidence, Combined Group and Individual Consultations for Teachers, Detailed Planning of the Organisation of AELD Activities, Looking Forward to Embodiment Activities with Students, Feeling More Experienced, Less Stressed, Uncertainty, Feeling of Freedom.” These keywords alone provide valuable insight into the democratic atmosphere in which the Planning phase unfolded when educators collaborated closely with each other and RTU researchers.

These keywords offer valuable insight into the democratic atmosphere of the Planning phase, where educators collaborated closely with one another and RTU researchers, fostering a sense of freedom, building self-confidence, and embracing diverse perspectives.

Data Analysis Process:

- Literature review to develop a ONSO Framework including its components and subcomponents.
- Thematic analysis of pseudonymised transcripts of audio recordings from three Zoom meetings with educators (**ZM**), post-trial discussions with JSG and DSG educators (**EPTD**), the pre-Iteration-2 Embodiment Seminar (**ES**) and the four post-trial-2 Zoom interviews with DSG educators (**EI**) (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) of teacher anonymised post-trial written reflections (**EWR**) applying open coding to identify categories (Mayring, 2014) related to differences between AELD and traditional learning, self-discoveries, group dynamics, emotional experiences, and perceptions of AELD's value. Frequency tables were generated as part of the analysis.
- Triangulation (methodological, theoretical, and data source) of the results of thematic analysis, the alignment of QCA categories with the ONSO Framework and supplemented by RTU researchers' trial observations (Carter et al., 2014).

Theoretical Background: This research is rooted in the AECED Project, which asserts that AEL methods, when applied within a responsive pedagogical environment, enable participants to experience democracy as an evolving process (AECED, n.d.). To address **RQ2**, the Framework for ONSO was developed. Since this theoretical base is already covered in Case 11, a shortened version is presented in Case 12.

ONSO refers to the cognitive, emotional, and relational capacity to move beyond preconceptions and stereotypes by engaging with differences through empathetic, dialogical, and embodied interactions.

ONSO Framework Components and Subcomponents (see *Table 1*)

1. **Cognitive Flexibility** – Enhances openness through reflective thinking. *Subcomponents:* Perspective-Taking, Tolerance for Ambiguity, Aesthetic Reflexivity, Recognition of Knowledge Limits (Woods, 2021; Vives & FeldmanHall, 2018; Docherty, 2006).
2. **Aesthetic and Embodied Awareness** – Fosters openness through sensory and emotional experiences. *Subcomponents:* Aesthetic Sensitivity, Empathic Identification, Embodied Knowing, Affective Virtues (Woods et al., 2023; Chacón et al., 2024).
3. **Dialogic and Relational Disposition** – Encourages openness through interactive and relational engagement. *Subcomponents:* Mutual Listening, Relational Well-Being, Power-Sharing, Interpersonal Adaptability (Freire, 2005; Dallmayr, 2015).
4. **Reflexive Self-Awareness** – Involves self-examination and awareness of identity and emotions in interactions. *Subcomponents:* Self-Oriented Awareness, Other-Oriented Awareness, Critical Reflexivity, Emotional Reflexivity (Dallmayr, 2017; Ng, 2019).

5. **Ethical and Democratic Sensibility** – Upholds moral principles and collective responsibility for just interactions. *Subcomponents:* Openness to Otherness, Collective Agency, Valuing Equality, Love as Integrative Power (Freire, 2005; Dewey, 1916).
6. **Transformative Engagement** – Promotes active participation and a willingness to undergo personal and collective transformation. *Subcomponents:* Generative Interaction, Embracing Vulnerability, and Collaborative Inquiry (Brown, 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014).

3. Research Findings

Case 12 explored **RQ1-4**.

RQ1. Regarding process: b) In what ways is AELD co-created and facilitated through ABE methods?

Key conclusions: AELD was co-created and facilitated in the Latvian cases in three phases:

Acquiring the Fundamentals of Three Models in the AECED Intensive Programme:

- The model of embedding ABEL (arts-based and embodied learning) into a task
- The model of embedding ABEL into the pedagogical process for creative self-discovery and discovery of others
- The embedding of ABEL into the 5E instructional model (see pages 168-182 of the Prototype Pedagogical Guides, Deliverable 3.2.) from the Pedagogical Guide.

Each model was analysed and demonstrated how drama sketch and collage creation can be incorporated into learning activities to address democracy-related problem situations. This training was conducted during the AECED Intensive Programme on February 15–16, where RTU researchers provided illustrative examples to project principals, teachers, and stakeholders.

Additionally, a thematic analysis was conducted on the pseudonymised transcripts of three Zoom meetings (ZM) held on March 20, 21, and 22, 2024, between RTU researchers and educators from each project school. These discussions followed the PAR Familiarisation phase (February 19 – March 19, 2024) and aimed to identify challenges and collaboratively develop solutions.

Co-creation of AELD activities through Drama Sketch and Collage Creation:

- Initial AELD activity drafts were created individually by each educator after familiarising themselves with the Pedagogical Framework and Guide. They were then refined through collaborative thinking, integration, and co-creation, combining the intellectual and emotional strengths of principals and teachers.
- Educators then shared their visions of the trials with RTU researchers during the Zoom meetings (**ZM**) mentioned above.

- The AELD activities were finalised before implementation through individual consultations (20 minutes per project teacher) with Karine Oganisjana. These consultations were not audio recorded.

Co-Facilitation of AELD: Testing and Post-Trial Analysis

- In Iteration 1, the focus was on embedding drama sketches and collage creation into democracy-related problem situations that emerged across various study subjects. A thematic analysis was conducted on the pseudonymised transcripts of post-trial discussions with JSG and DSG educators (**EPTD**).
- In Iteration 2, the focus shifted to co-creating embodiment activities and civic participation-related situations. A thematic analysis was conducted on the pseudonymised transcripts from the August 23 Embodiment Seminar (**ES**).

Conclusion: AELD was co-created and facilitated through three phases: acquiring ABEL models in the AECED Intensive Programme, collaboratively designing activities through drama sketches and collage creation, and testing them in two iterations focused on democracy-related problem-solving and embodiment. Thematic analysis of discussions and post-trial reflections ensured continuous refinement and integration into pedagogical practice.

RQ2. Regarding the transformational change in participants: In what ways do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, lead to individual and collective growth in regard to teachers' openness to newly 'seeing' the other?

RQ2 was explored through six phases:

Step 1: Development of the ONSO Framework, a theory-based model encompassing six key dimensions: Reflective mental processes fostering openness, Sensory and emotional experiences cultivating openness, Interactive dynamics promoting engagement with others, Self-awareness of identity, emotions, and biases, Moral principles supporting inclusive, just interactions, Active engagement driving personal and collective transformation. The ONSO Framework (see *Table 1* in Step 4) presents these dimensions along with their corresponding components and subcomponents.

Step 2: Thematic analysis of pseudonymised transcripts from post-trial discussions with JSG and DSG educators (**EPTD**), the pre-Iteration-2 Embodiment Seminar (**ES**), and four post-trial-2 Zoom interviews with DSG educators (**EI**).

Step 3: Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) of teacher anonymised post-trial written reflections (**EWR** – Educators' Written Reflections), applying open coding to identify categories related to differences between AELD and traditional learning, self-discoveries, group dynamics, emotional experiences, and perceptions of AELD's value. Frequency tables were generated as part of the analysis (Mayring, 2014).

Step 4: Aligning QCA categories with the ONSO Framework, linking them to relevant subcomponents. Aggregated category frequencies from QCA (*Table 1*) highlight AELD's

integrative effect on teachers' ONSO. This quantitative perspective complements the thematic analysis, enriching the interpretation of teachers' AELD experiences.

Table 1: Alignment of Categories Developed in QCA of Teacher Written Reflections with ONSO Framework

ONSO Framework			Iteration 1: JSG, DSG & RSS 22													Iteration 2: DSG & RSS 22				Iteration 2: JSG				
			Ref. Q.1 AEL differ	Ref. Q.2 self-discovery	Ref. Q.3 peers discovery	Ref. Q.4: Experiencing democracy	Ref. Q.5: Emotions	Ref. Q.6: Differences	Ref. Q.7: Obstacles	Ref. Q.8: Liked	Ref. Q.9: Using guide	Ref. Q.10: Emotions	Ref. Q.11: Impact K&R	Ref. Q.12: achievements	Ref. Q.13: Further lessons	Ref. Q1 AELD elaboration	Ref. Q3 Holistic Learning	Ref. Q5 AELF effect	Ref. Q6 Drama problem solving	Ref. Q3 Empathy	Ref. Q5 Openness	Ref. Q6 AELD internal reflection	Ref. Q7 AELD social justice	Ref. Q8 AELD undert. Democ
Dim.	ONSO Component	ONSO Subcomponents	Sum of freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	
1.	Cognitive Flexibility	Perspective-taking	66							4	9			3		6	6	8	20		10			
		Tolerance for ambiguity	63								12	4		4	3		6	4	16		14			
		Aesthetic reflexivity	36									5				7	12			12				
		Recognition of knowledge limits	68				4					20			7	11		3	4	9		5	5	
2.	Aesthetic and Embodied Awareness	Aesthetic sensitivity	11													6							5	
		Empathic identification	40									4		7			8	11			10			
		Embodied knowing	54	1								4	3	2		6	12	4	7	6	9			
		Affective virtues	37			8									3				8	4		5		
3.	Dialogic and Relational Disposition	Mutual listening	71			14							12		7		6	6	8	4		9	5	
		Relational well-being	57			6	3			3		17					9	6			4	4	5	
		Power-sharing	38				14								3		6	4		11				
		Interpersonal adaptability	72			8						4	8		7		6	8	16			10	5	
4.	Reflexive Self-Awareness	Self-orientated awareness	74	7		2						17			8		7			13	10	5	5	
		Other-orientated awareness	66			8	3							6	7		6		4	13		14	5	
		Critical reflexivity	98	7		2	4				4	14			8	7	5	3	6	4	9	10	10	5
		Emotional reflexivity	21	7								4						6				4		
5.	Ethical and Democratic Sensibility	Openness to otherness	100			8				8		7		6	11	5	6	6	8	20		10	5	
		Collective agency	50			8						9	3	6	12				8	4				
		Valuing equality	27			8									6				8				5	
		Love as integrative power	24			8						4				4			8					
6.	Transformative Engagement	Generative interaction	59			14				4		9		6	7			8	11					
		Embracing vulnerability	11				4								2								5	
		Collaborative inquiry	19										3							4				

Step 5: Triangulation (methodological, theoretical, and data source) of the results of thematic analysis and the alignment of QCA categories with the ONSO Framework (Carter et al., 2014).

Step 6: Interpretation of triangulation results, supplemented by RTU researchers' trial observations.

A thematic analysis of pseudonymised transcripts from post-trial discussions with educators (EPTD) and four post-trial-2 Zoom interviews with DSG educators (EI – Educators' Interviews), audio recording of the pre-Iteration-2 Embodiment Seminar (ES) revealed several emerging themes aligned with all ONSO components and subcomponents. Each theme highlights aspects of teachers' ONSO, demonstrating how AELD activities fostered reflection, relational engagement, ethical sensibility, cognitive adaptability, transformative participation, and embodied awareness. For illustration, a quotation linked to one ONSO Framework component and subcomponent, as identified through thematic analysis, is provided below.

Reflexive Self-Awareness

- **Self-Oriented Awareness:** A teacher reflected on the emotional impact of personal moods on interactions, sharing, *"...it's actually very common that you come in, and you are either upset, happy, or angry... and that makes you react to the event exactly in line with whatever feeling you have."* (JSG EPTD - post-trial discussions with educators) This highlighted the awareness of emotions and their role in shaping responses to others.

Dialogic and Relational Disposition

- **Power-Sharing:** A teacher reflected, "In our movement exercise, we experienced that leadership is not about control but shared influence, as we switched between leading and

following. The leader guides with care, while the follower remains engaged, and through this exchange, both adapt, listen, and shape the interaction together. Just like in a democracy, true power lies not in dominance but in connection, mutual respect, and the ability to step into both roles.” (ES - Embodiment Seminar) This statement was shared after the embodiment exercises, highlighting their role in fostering power-sharing and mutual leadership.

Ethical and Democratic Sensibility

- **Love as integrative power:** A teacher shared, “Sometimes, you just feel completely in sync with others, even without saying a word. It’s like you just understand each other on a deeper level, and that connection brings everyone closer together.” (JSG EPTD - post-trial discussions with educators) This statement highlights the role of care, empathy, and genuine concern in fostering solidarity.

Cognitive Flexibility

- **Perspective-Taking:** One teacher highlighted the impact of role-switching, explaining, *“During yesterday’s aesthetic and embodied experience, we engaged in role-switching exercises that allowed us to step into others’ perspectives. Given the traditionally authoritative nature of our profession, this practice was insightful in challenging our assumptions and biases, fostering a more empathetic and nuanced understanding.”* (DSG EI - Educators’ Interviews) This reflection demonstrated how stepping into different roles led to a broader, more empathetic viewpoint.

Transformative Engagement

- **Embracing Vulnerability:** A teacher reflected on an improvisation exercise, stating, *“It was not easy at all. It was difficult to step forward and play the role. Only by going through such an experience and feeling these emotions was I truly in my students’ shoes... Now I can understand how they feel.”* (JSG EPTD - post-trial discussions with educators) This highlighted the transformative power of stepping outside one’s comfort zone, fostering greater empathy and connection with students.

Aesthetic and Embodied Awareness

- **Embodied Knowing:** Gaining knowledge through the body’s interactions with the world—and realizing that the body itself knows and understands – was a thought-provoking insight for teachers after participating in exercises led by the psychologist. They emphasised, “Movement enhances blood circulation. Trust your body to adapt instinctively – it has its own innate ability to know and respond. I’ll give commands like ‘up’ and ‘down,’ and your body will react instantly. The key is to respond impulsively, learning to trust your body’s natural decision-making without overthinking.” (ES - Embodiment Seminar).

The alignment of categories developed in the QCA of teacher post-trial-1 and post-trial-2 fully anonymised written reflections with the ONSO Framework. While thematic analysis provided qualitative insights into the impact of AELD on teacher’s ONSO, a more comprehensive understanding was achieved by integrating a quantitative perspective. This

was done through the alignment of categories developed in the QCA of students' written reflections with the ONSO Framework, linking them to its components and subcomponents (see *Table 1*). The ONSO subcomponents with the highest frequencies are listed below:

- **Openness to Otherness** (N=100, subcomponent of Ethical and Democratic Sensibility) reflects teachers' respect for diverse worldviews and their willingness to engage with, understand, and appreciate colleagues or students different from themselves. This openness fosters empathy and challenges preconceived biases (Freire, 2005; Woods, 2021; Dewey, 1916; Selman, 2007).
- **Critical Reflexivity** (N=98; subcomponent of Reflexive Self-Awareness) highlights how AELD encouraged teachers to continuously examine their own assumptions, beliefs, and biases to understand their influence on perceptions, actions, and interactions (Ng, 2019; Freire, 2005; Dewey, 1933).
- **Self-orientated awareness** (N=74; subcomponent of Reflexive Self-Awareness) refers to how AELD activities helped teachers recognise their own internal narratives, emotions, thoughts, behaviours, and physical sensations. It also underscores how these factors influenced their perceptions and how their backgrounds shaped their responses (Woods et al., 2020).
- **Interpersonal adaptability** (N=72; subcomponent of Dialogic and Relational Disposition) indicates that teachers demonstrated flexibility in modifying their behaviour and communication in response to changing AELD learning contexts, fostering effective collaboration and harmonious relationships (Woods, 2021; Selman, 2007).
- **Mutual listening** (N=71; subcomponent of Dialogic and Relational Disposition) refers to teachers' capacity to listen attentively and empathetically in AELD without rushing to counter-argue. This active, reciprocal process fosters deeper understanding, connection, and relational openness (Woods et al., 2023; Freire, 2005; Dallmayr, 2015; Rosa, 2024).
- **Recognition of knowledge limits** (N=68; subcomponent of Cognitive Flexibility) highlights instances in AELD activities where teachers acknowledged that their knowledge is not complete (Dewey, 1933; Rosa, 2024; Dallmayr, 2015). Recognising knowledge limits enhances ONSO by fostering intellectual humility—the awareness that our perspectives are incomplete and that others may have insights we lack. This reduces bias and assumptions, encourages curiosity, promotes empathy, supports growth and learning, and makes individuals more eager to learn from others rather than assuming they already have all the answers.
- **Perspective-taking** (N=66; subcomponent of Cognitive Flexibility) reflects teachers' ability to understand issues from others' viewpoints (perspective), recognising their thoughts, feelings, and experiences during AELD activities. This skill fosters deeper and more meaningful connections with others (Selman, 2007; Woods, 2021).
- **Other-orientated awareness** (N=66; subcomponent of Reflexive Self-Awareness) reflects teachers' ability to recognise, understand, and prioritise the thoughts, feelings, and needs of others. It involves shifting focus from oneself to others, fostering concern and compassion without necessarily internalising their emotions (Dallmayr, 2017; Woods, 2021).

- **Tolerance for ambiguity** (N=63; subcomponent of Cognitive Flexibility) demonstrates teachers' ability to embrace uncertainty and navigate complex challenges encountered during AELD activities. This openness fosters deeper understanding and engagement with both colleagues and students (Vives & FeldmanHall, 2018; Docherty, 2006).

Although the remaining subcomponents appeared with lower frequencies, they were still identified during the alignment of QCA categories with the ONSO Framework. This alignment revealed connections to Generative interaction, Relational well-being, Embodied knowing, Collective agency, Empathic identification, Power-sharing, Affective virtues, Aesthetic reflexivity, Valuing equality, love as integrative power, Emotional reflexivity, Collaborative inquiry, Embracing vulnerability, and Aesthetic sensitivity. Despite their lower occurrence, their presence indicates the diverse ways in which AELD influenced educators' ONSO

The observation was conducted to assess whether learning activities employing aesthetic and embodied methods were conducted within a responsive pedagogical environment that adhered to democracy-as-becoming principles. The findings indicated that teachers successfully fostered a democratic ethos characterized by mutual acceptance and support among participants. This environment featured shared power dynamics, with roles of leading and following being interchanged, and promoted holistic learning that engaged cognitive abilities, emotions, and physicality, all contributing to positive transformative dialogue.

Conclusion

The findings confirmed that AELD fosters ONSO by enhancing self-awareness, relational engagement, ethical sensibility, cognitive flexibility, and embodied understanding. Thematic analysis highlighted educators' increased self-reflection, perspective-taking, and adaptability, while QCA alignment with the ONSO Framework reinforced these insights, showing strong links to openness to otherness, critical reflexivity, and mutual listening. Despite lower frequencies, all subcomponents contributed to diverse pathways of transformative learning. Observations confirmed that educators created a democratic, responsive learning environment characterized by shared leadership and holistic engagement. Overall, AELD proves to be an effective approach to cultivating democratic sensibility and inclusive education.

RQ3. What influence, if any, did the researchers have on how the Framework and Guides were used and the designs of AEL for democracy that emerged in the trials?

The RTU researchers' impact was most notable during the Introduction, Familiarisation, and Planning phases of Iteration 1, when educators needed to grasp and apply AECED key concepts.

- QCA of teachers' anonymised reflections highlighted RTU support in understanding the Prototype Pedagogical Framework and Guide, facilitated through comprehensive pre-Iteration 1 training, including explanations, illustrative examples, Q&A sessions, and hands-on exercises.

- Individualised and group Zoom support, fostering co-thinking, co-creating, and self-confidence among educators.
- Post-trial round table discussions provided a space for emotional exchange, reflection on new pedagogical experiences, and structured synthesis of insights.

Conclusion: RTU researchers played a crucial role in guiding educators through the initial phases of Iteration 1, supporting their understanding and application of AECED concepts through training, individualised consultations, and post-trial discussions, which fostered co-creation, confidence, and pedagogical refinement.

RQ4. What evidence-based conclusions for revision and refinement of the Prototype Framework and Guides emerge from the experience of using the Prototypes and addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

To revise and refine the Prototype Pedagogical Framework and Guide based on the findings when addressing the RQ 1, RQ 2, and RQ3, the following is to be undertaken:

- Enhance the accessibility of the Guide, it's essential to simplify its language, aligning it more closely with the terminology teachers use in their daily practice. The prevalence of scientific terms can make the text difficult to comprehend, creating tension as readers frequently consult the glossary, if definitions are available, to grasp the content. The final versions of the Framework and Guide should be comprehensible to the target audience without external assistance, considering that the AECED team won't be present to provide support.
- Enhance coherence and readability, the theoretical section of the Guide (Part 1) should be condensed and refined in language, structure, and interconnections. This will enable readers to perceive a seamless flow of interconnected ideas, akin to the narrative continuity found in fairy tales, rather than encountering disjointed segments resembling puzzle pieces.
- Enhance the practical section of the Guide, it's recommended to integrate concise textual content with illustrative examples presented in various formats, such as videos, infographics, and podcasts. These materials can be made accessible through QR codes or internet links, integrating multimedia elements and transforming passive learning into active engagement, making learning activities more interactive and impactful.
- Ensure Teacher Representation – the launch-ready versions should balance both student and teacher perspectives, avoiding an overemphasis on students that leaves teachers feeling underrepresented. Some educators noted that while reading the materials, they primarily saw students' roles but not their own.
- Ensure embodiment exercises, accompanied by explanations on how they can help establish a democratic ethos and foster relationships among participants. These exercises should be versatile for application in various contexts.
- Offer strategies that utilise arts-based and embodied learning methods to address issues related to civic participation.

- Provide the Models for Embedding AELD Across Study Subjects. This approach enables students to experience democracy as an evolving process and recognise democracy-related topics that may emerge unexpectedly within various subjects.
- Include a list of abbreviations at the beginning of the document. This will allow readers to easily reference and understand abbreviated terms throughout the text.

Conclusion

The refinement of the Prototype Pedagogical Framework and Guide should focus on simplifying language, improving coherence and readability, enhancing practical applicability through multimedia resources, ensuring teacher representation, integrating embodiment exercises, providing arts-based strategies for civic participation, embedding AELD across subjects, and including a list of abbreviations for clarity.

4. Limitations

The age of secondary school students (minors under 18) restricted the use of video recordings, limiting the analysis of drama sketch and collage creation processes. Audio recordings, planned as an alternative, proved ineffective due to background noise, student movement, and low-volume voices in the school hall setting. To address this, holistic observation was used to capture the AELD context and participants' behaviours comprehensively, alongside post-trial round table discussions with teachers.

All audio recordings included in the research were conducted while participants were seated, with recording devices placed nearby to ensure clarity. Organising an in-person meeting of the RTU research team at JSG in Iteration 1 required restructuring the school's schedule to accommodate a day of AELD activities with the principal, four teachers, and 13 grade 10 students who were interested in exploring a new type of learning, while their classmates continued with conventional lessons. To maximise the effect of this meeting, the JSG staff opted for intensive activities. However, this approach resulted in physical and emotional fatigue, as reflected in student and teacher feedback. Some found the combination of embodied learning, cognitive engagement, and emotional processing to be both stimulating and unusually demanding. In Iteration 2, this challenge was minimised as the AELD activities were conducted during the students' autumn holidays. This allowed the principal, along with 14 teachers (including 10 new participants), and the RTU team to work under much more favourable conditions, ensuring a more relaxed and productive environment.

As the study primarily focused on drama sketch and collage creation, the research findings are specific to these AELD methods and their impact on students' ONSO. Notably, students experienced these methods differently. While some found collage creation less stressful due to its reflective and deliberate nature, others found improvisation more challenging, as it required spontaneous and authentic responses in front of peers, which some students perceived as stressful or demanding.

The study examined the immediate impact of AELD on participants' ONSO, revealing its transformative potential. To be sure that this effect will be long-term, the JSG, DSG and RSS

22 principals, teachers and students agreed to implement a “Democracy Day” once per semester, featuring AELD activities across mono-, multi-, and cross-disciplinary learning contexts, as well as extracurricular activities and civic education projects. Additionally, regular short embodiment exercises will be integrated to cultivate and maintain a consistent democratic ethos within the school.

The findings are based on a sample of 30 teachers from three Latvian schools, which may limit the generalisability of the results to the broader teacher population, even though the schools were in different regions of RSS 22, DSG, and JSG. However, qualitative research prioritises contextual depth and rich insights instead of generalisations. To ensure validity, the study is grounded in a theory-based ONSO framework, providing a structured and consistent approach to data interpretation. To enhance reliability, data analysis was conducted collaboratively by the RTU research team, allowing for cross-validation of findings and minimising individual researcher bias.

5. Relevance of Context

Following Latvia’s independence in 1991, educators faced the challenge of transitioning from Soviet-era authoritarian pedagogy to democratic, student-centered teaching (Sarma, 1998; Medne et al., 2024). The education system, once rooted in rote memorization and ideological indoctrination, needed a new foundation based on civic education, human rights, and active citizenship. However, this shift required not only curriculum changes but also a transformation in teaching practices.

Recognising the critical role of educators, professional development programmes were introduced in 1994, reaching over 2,000 teachers. These aimed to equip teachers with democratic pedagogical approaches, moving away from rigid, teacher-centered instruction toward interactive, participatory methods (Cekse et al., 2010). Despite these efforts, deep-seated Soviet-era habits persisted, making it difficult for some educators to fully embrace democratic teaching. Reflections from the AECED Project also indicated that older teachers were less flexible and open to shifting perspectives, impacting their ability to foster democratic engagement in classrooms.

To strengthen teachers’ engagement with democratic education, national initiatives have emphasised active learning and civic participation:

- "DemokrātiJĀ!" encourages teachers to integrate democratic values into school life (European Movement in Latvia, 2020).
- Skola2030 positions civic participation as a transversal skill, providing educators with strategies to cultivate responsible, engaged citizens (LAPAS, 2022).

The AECED Project complements these efforts by introducing AELD as a transformative approach. Through creative, experiential methods, educators can move beyond theoretical discussions of democracy and actively model democracy-as-becoming principles in their pedagogical practice.

Consultations with our stakeholders, including the National Culture Centre of Latvia, the National Centre for Education, and the Institute of Lifelong Learning and Culture Vitae, highlighted the need for innovative teaching models to support educators in integrating AELD across subjects.

To address this, three models previously developed for Prototype Pedagogical Guide for Secondary Education were tested in Iteration 1 across three Latvian schools. The models are:

- The model of embedding ABEL (arts-based and embodied learning) into a task
- The model of embedding ABEL into the pedagogical process for creative self-discovery and discovery of others
- The embedding of ABEL into the 5E instructional model (see pages 168-182 of the PPG, Deliverable 3.2.).

These models enabled teachers to integrate drama sketch and collage creation into learning Latvian and Literature, Mathematics and IT and Programming in JSG, Biology, Social Studies and Latvian Language and Literature in DSG, and foreign languages and Latvian in RSS 22, ensuring alignment with existing curricula. Given that most classroom time is devoted to developing transversal competencies (civic participation is one of them) through subject content, the models were designed for seamless integration rather than as standalone additions.

Teacher feedback was positive and thought-provoking. They recognised the transformative potential of AELD, noting changes not only in their students but also in themselves. Educators emphasised that regular AELD practice, both in subject learning and extracurricular activities, can enhance democratic engagement and openness, reinforcing its value as an integral part of the educational experience. A key innovation was the introduction of embodied learning, which now requires gradual integration into educational practices at both small and large scales.

6. Learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guides

Based on the evidence gathered, several key insights have emerged for enhancing the Pedagogical Framework and Guides within the AECED Project, focusing on individual and collective learning, organisational learning, and epistemic transformation.

Individual and Collective Learning

AELD has been instrumental in promoting self-awareness and interpersonal adaptability among educators. Teachers have reported increased recognition of their internal narratives and emotions, which led to more empathetic and effective interactions with students and colleagues. To support this development, the Pedagogical Framework and Guide should incorporate simplified language and relatable terminology, aligning with teachers' everyday experiences. Additionally, integrating multimedia elements—such as videos, infographics, and podcasts—can transform passive learning into active engagement, allowing educators to not

only understand but also feel the context of the material. This approach acknowledges that learning is both a cognitive and embodied experience, enhancing the overall educational process.

Organisational Learning

The implementation of AELD activities in three Latvian schools underscored the significance of shared leadership and mutual support within educational institutions. School principals played a pivotal role, actively participating alongside teachers and students in all processes. This collaborative engagement fostered a unique ethos of mutual acceptance and shared power dynamics, reinforcing the principles of democracy-as-becoming and democratic learning.

To support organisational learning, the Pedagogical Framework and Guide should provide tools that promote self-awareness, peer collaboration, and institutional growth through AELD, including:

- Guided Reflection Templates for Educators – structured to facilitate personal reflection, collaborative learning, organisational development, and professional growth, culminating in actionable next steps.
- School-wide embodiment rituals – designed to cultivate trust, communication, and openness among educators and students, ensuring that embodiment and arts-based learning become integrated institutional practices, rather than isolated classroom activities.

These approaches ensure that educators will not see only students in the Pedagogical Framework and Guides as reflected by one of the project teachers but also themselves and the entire education institution.

Epistemic Transformation

AELD has facilitated a shift in educators' understanding of knowledge, emphasising the importance of recognising the limits of one's own knowledge and valuing diverse perspectives. This intellectual humility encourages continuous learning and critical reflexivity, essential components of epistemic transformation. To nurture this transformation, the PPF and PPG should present interconnected ideas that flow seamlessly, enabling readers to grasp complex concepts without feeling overwhelmed. Incorporating a list of abbreviations and simplifying theoretical sections can aid in this comprehension, making the guides more accessible. By fostering an environment where educators are open to new perspectives and aware of their own biases, the guides can contribute to a more inclusive and democratic educational setting.

In conclusion, refining the PPF and PPG with these insights can enhance individual and collective learning, support organisational development, and promote epistemic transformation, thereby advancing the goals of the AECED Project in fostering democratic education through AELD.

7. Ethical Reflection and Gender Dimension

Gender Sensitivity in Cognitive, Emotional, and Embodied Learning

- Cognitive learning: Teachers should critically assess gender biases in democratic education, ensuring that materials, case studies, and discussion prompts represent diverse gender identities and perspectives. Encouraging critical thinking around gender norms and power dynamics enables both students and teachers to develop a more inclusive understanding of democracy.
- Emotional learning: Emotional engagement in AELD, particularly through drama sketch, collage creation, storytelling, and collaborative discussions, should be facilitated in ways that validate different emotional expressions across genders. Encouraging all participants – teachers and students to express vulnerability, empathy, and assertiveness equally helps challenge traditional gendered emotional norms.
- Embodied learning: Embodied activities, such as drama sketches, movement exercises, and aesthetic creation, must be gender-inclusive and adaptable to ensure physical and psychological comfort. Teachers should avoid reinforcing stereotypical gender roles in embodied scenarios and instead encourage diverse, fluid participation, where all learners can explore different identities and perspectives beyond societal expectations.

Intersectionality and Inclusive Democratic Learning

- AELD should actively integrate intersectional perspectives, recognising that gender intersects with race, socio-economic status, disability, and cultural identity, influencing how both teachers and students experience democratic engagement.
- Learning activities should provide diverse, non-stereotypical representations of gender and identity in democratic contexts, allowing students and teachers to critically reflect on their own biases and privileges.
- Co-creation of learning experiences between teachers and students ensures that all voices, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, are heard and included.

Accessibility and Ethical Participation in Embodied Learning

- Embodied learning requires physical engagement, but not all students or teachers may feel comfortable with certain movements, expressions, or interactions due to personal, cultural, or physical factors. Alternative participation methods, such as using verbal descriptions, visual storytelling, or individualised adaptations, should always be available.
- Consent and agency are fundamental in embodied exercises. Teachers should ensure that both they and their students have the choice to opt in or out of specific activities without pressure or judgment.
- A trauma-sensitive approach should be integrated into all AELD activities, recognising that bodily experiences can evoke personal histories and emotional responses. Creating

emotionally safe spaces where participants can process and discuss their experiences is essential for ethical embodied learning.

Positionality and Teacher Reflexivity

- Teachers should continuously reflect on their own positionality, how their gender, cultural background, and social identity shape their teaching approaches and interactions with students.
- Ongoing professional development in gender-sensitive embodied pedagogy should be part of the AELD framework, equipping teachers with the skills to facilitate embodied, emotional, and cognitive learning in inclusive ways.
- Encouraging open dialogue between teachers and students about gender, power dynamics, and embodiment fosters a co-constructed, democratic learning environment.

Incorporating Gender into AELD Analysis

Integrating a gender perspective into the data analysis and evaluation of AELD activities was achieved through multiple strategies, ensuring an equitable and inclusive approach:

- Conducting data analysis through a gender lens, identifying disparities in participation, engagement, and self-expression among teachers and students. In the Case 12 target school - at JSG and the other two project schools, the gender disparity was evident with only two male teachers out of 15 at Jurmala and three male teachers out of 30 across the three schools. This gender disparity in teaching staff might have impacted both students' and teachers' experiences, potentially influencing engagement, participation, and self-expression within the learning environment. Therefore, we considered how the underrepresentation of male teachers affected gendered dynamics in the classroom.
- The research team balance and reflexivity: The research team comprised two female and two male researchers, ensuring a balanced gender perspective in data interpretation and analysis. This balance enhanced reflexivity and minimised potential biases related to gendered interpretations of emotional expressions and relational dynamics. It also contributed to building trusting relationships with participants, allowing both boys and girls to express themselves more authentically.
- Gender-sensitive reflection tools – storytelling by JSG teachers in Iteration 2, allowed teachers to share personal funny stories about their experiences with gender in education either as male or female educators and how they addressed gender-related challenges in the classroom. By sharing stories, teachers can gain new perspectives on gender from their peers, deepening their collective awareness and fostering empathy.

Latvia Case Report

Case 13

Phase/Educational Setting:

Intergenerational Learning

VEN-Approach:

Visual, Embodied and Narrative

1. Case Description

Participants: The target audience of Case 13 was teachers in the Secondary Education phase. However, the research was conducted from multiple perspectives, including the primary group – the principal and four teachers and 13 students of Grade 10 at JSG in Iteration 1 and the principal and 14 teachers in Iteration 2; four RTU AECED researchers; complementary groups – students and teachers from the two other project schools – DSG and RSS 22; four stakeholders – two from National Culture Centre of Latvia, one from the National Centre for Education of Latvia, and one from the Institute of Lifelong Learning and Culture Vitae.

Location: PAR was conducted in two iterations, with each phase carried out either in person at RTU or RSS 22 or online via Zoom, depending on the specific needs of each PAR phase. Although the primary group of Case 13 is associated with RSS 22 students and teachers, complementary data from other AECED project schools (JSG and RSS 22) were also considered to provide a more comprehensive and integrative understanding of the research question.

Purpose – Relevance to Democracy-as-Becoming: Case 13 explored the impact of AELD on students' and teachers' ONSO from each other's perspectives within their intergenerational learning in a responsive pedagogical environment. This environment was intentionally designed to align with the core principles of democracy-as-becoming: power-sharing, holistic learning, relational well-being, and transforming dialogue. Thus, Case 13 contributed to the realisation of democracy-as-becoming by demonstrating how AELD fosters teachers' and students' reciprocal openness, empathy, and meaningful dialogue – key aspects of a democratic and inclusive educational experience.

Research Activities and Methods: Case 13 focused on the impact of AELD, implemented through drama sketch and collage creation, on students' and teachers' ONSO from each other's perspectives in intergenerational learning.

Iteration 1:

- The PAR phase **Introduction** was organised by the RTU team as an intensive AECED training programme for teachers, principals from the three project schools, and stakeholders. Its purpose was to introduce and familiarise participants with key concepts from the Prototype Pedagogical Framework and Guides, including AELD, responsive

pedagogies, and the principles of democracy-as-becoming. The introduction phase concluded with participants' **written reflections** via Google Forms on their new AELD experience.

- In the phase of **Familiarisation**, teachers and principals read and analysed the PPF and PPG documents both individually and in groups at their schools, identifying challenging issues and developing recommendations for refinement.
- In the PAR phase of **Collaborative Reflection**, Zoom meetings (one per school) were held with RTU researchers – Karine Oganisjana and Rolands Ozols, where teachers and principals shared feedback and suggestions for improving the Prototype Pedagogical Framework and Guides. Each meeting was **audio recorded for further transcription and analysis** to address **RQ4**, which focused on identifying necessary changes to enhance the Prototype Framework and Guides, making them more modern and user-friendly.
- The **Planning** phase was carried out through collaboration between principals, teachers, and RTU researchers, as well as through individual consultations (20 minutes per teacher) with Karine Oganisjana to prepare for the AELD trials with students. These sessions aimed to finalise and enhance the AELD activities developed by the teachers based on the three models for embedding drama sketch and collage creation to address democracy-related problem situations across study subjects. These three models were:
 - The model of embedding ABEL (arts-based and embodied learning) into a task
 - The model of embedding ABEL into the pedagogical process for creative self-discovery and discovery of others
 - The embedding of ABEL into the 5E instructional model (see pages 168-182 of the PPG, Deliverable 3.2.)
- Students joined AELD in the PAR phase **Action**. Since they were minors (under 18), they first underwent an Introduction phase, during which their teachers and school principal introduced them and their parents to the AECED project. To confirm their willingness to participate, both students and their parents signed the Informed Consent Forms. During this phase, students tested three models from the Prototype Guides to address democracy-related issues across study subjects, integrating cognitive, affective, and embodied learning. Data collection methods in this phase included:
 - **Observation** of the AELD activities by Karine Oganisjana and Rolands Ozols.
 - **Students' and teachers' written reflections** on the AELD experience, submitted via Google Forms.
 - **Post-trial discussions** between RTU researchers and teachers regarding their own and their students' AELD learning experience. **Audio recordings of these discussions were prepared** for transcription and further analysis.
- Analysis and Synthesis phase involved:
 - **Qualitative content analysis (QCA)** of the students' and teachers' reflections using open coding to develop categories.
 - **Thematic analysis** of the transcripts from the post-trial discussions.

Iteration 2: In Iteration 2, the research focus shifted from embedding AELD to address democracy-related problem situations across study subjects to emphasising embodiment practices and tackling problem situations related to democracy and civic participation. While Iteration 1 followed a standardized approach across all Latvian cases (11–13), Iteration 2 was adapted to the specific needs of each case. Therefore, in Case 13, which explored the impact of AELD on students’ and teachers’ ONSO from each other’s perspectives within intergenerational learning, only the data related to “Students about teachers” and “Teachers about students” perspectives were selected, systemised and analysed from the broader dataset. At RSS 22, Iteration 2 involved 10 students, 10 teachers and the school principal, all participating as equals in mixed student-teacher groups. They engaged in embodied activities, using drama sketch and collage creation to address democracy- and civic-participation-related situations. At the end of the second trial, a talk “Bridging Perspectives” was held, in which teachers and students reflected mutually on their experiences of co-learning and co-creating with one another.

- The PAR **Introduction and Familiarisation** phases were conducted as part of an embodiment seminar for project schoolteachers, principals, and stakeholders by RTU researchers in collaboration with Anna Steina, a psychologist from the Institute of Lifelong Learning and Culture VITA. The **audio recordings** of these exercises provided valuable data, demonstrating how embodiment can foster a democratic ethos and relationships within a group.
- **Collaborative Reflection and Planning** were carried out autonomously by RSS 22 project team, without the intervention from RTU researchers, as the educators felt more self-confident in Iteration 2.
- In the **Action** phase, participants engaged in embodiment activities and democracy-related problem-solving using drama sketch and collage creation as AELD in mixed student-teacher groups. Data collected in this phase included:
 - Students’ and teachers’ **post-Trial 2 written reflections** via Google Forms,
 - **Audio recording** of the post-trial talk “Bridging Perspectives” featuring **mutual reflections** between teachers and students.
- The PAR **Analysis and Synthesis** phase focused on:
 - **Thematic analysis** of the **transcripts from audio recordings** of the embodiment seminar and discussions,
 - **QCA of the students’ and teachers’ reflections**,
 - **Triangulation** of results from Iterations 1 and 2 to develop a comprehensive and integrative answer to the research question.

Researchers: All three Latvian Cases (11–13) were conducted in two iterations by the RTU research group. Karine Oganisjana led the case research, participated in the observation of both trials, and carried out data collection and analysis. Rolands Ozols coordinated with project schools, took part in the observation of both trials, and assisted with data collection and analysis. Natalja Lace organised the infrastructure for the intensive AECED training programmes for principals and teachers at RTU and contributed to data analysis. Konstantins

Kozlovskis provided technical support and assisted with data organisation and analysis. The stakeholders—Aija Tuna and Sabīne Ozola (National Culture Centre of Latvia), Sandra Falka (National Centre for Education of Latvia), and Anna Šteina (Institute of Lifelong Learning and Culture Vitae)—contributed to discussions on the Prototype Pedagogical Framework and Guides and shared their expertise during two intensive AECED training programmes for principals and teachers.

Time Frame:

Iteration 1 – Introduction (15-16 February 2024), Familiarisation (19 February – 19 March 2024), Collaborative reflection (20 March 2024), Planning (25 March – 5 April 2024), Action (10 April 2024), Analysis & Synthesis (29 April – 1 July 2024).

Iteration 2 – Introduction and Familiarisation (23 August 2024), Collaborative Reflection and Planning (2 – 6 September 2024), Action (2 October 2024), Analysis & Synthesis (3 October – 30 December 2024).

2. Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis

Data Types and Sources

Types of Data: Qualitative data.

Sources of data: The data sources were assigned codes in brackets next to their names, as these codes were used in the thematic analysis results to indicate the source of corresponding quotations. Since Case 13 focused on mutual intergenerational learning between students and teachers, only text fragments from discussions, interviews and responses to reflection questions related to the perspectives of “Students about Teachers” or “Teachers about students” were considered in the analysis.

Written post-trial reflections from educators (EWR – Educators’ Written Reflections): Fully anonymised post-trial 1 and post-trial 2 reflections were collected via Google Forms from teachers and principals. Participants included: JSG - five educators in Iteration 1 and 15 in Iteration 2, DSG – four educators in both iterations, RSS 22 – five educators in Iteration 1 and 10 in Iteration 2. Although the primary focus in Case 12 was on JSG principal and teachers, also data from DSG and RSS 22 educators were included for a more comprehensive analysis. Educators created and reused self-generated codes to allow RTU researchers to track changes across both trials.

Student post-trial written reflections (SWR – Students’ Written Reflections): Fully anonymised post-trial 1 and post-trial 2 reflections were collected via Google Forms from RSS 22 students (14 in Iteration 1, 10 in Iteration 2), DSG students (17 in Iteration 1, 16 in Iteration 2) and JSG students (13 in Iteration 1). Also, students created and reused self-generated codes to allow RTU researchers to track changes across both trials.

Audio recordings of post-trial discussions with educators (EPTD – Educators’ Post-Trial Discussions): Post-trial-1 and post-trial-2 conversations with the DSG and JSG principals and

teachers were recorded, transcribed, and pseudonymised using labels such as “Teacher 1,” “Teacher 2,” etc.

Unstructured holistic observations (HO – Holistic Observation): Notes were taken to capture participants’ emotions, speech, and ideas, alongside descriptions of the overall ethos and relationships. Special attention was given to identifying conditions that foster responsive pedagogies and democracy-as-becoming principles, particularly within activities using drama sketch and collage creation as aesthetic and embodied learning methods for democracy.

Audio recordings of student interviews (SI – Students’ Interviews): Six post-trial-2 interviews with DSG students were recorded, transcribed, and pseudonymised using labels such as “Student 1,” “Student 2,” etc.

Audio recording of the post-trial talk “Bridging Perspectives” featuring mutual reflections between teachers and students (BP – Bridging Perspectives): The transcripts of the finalising reciprocal oral reflections on the joint AELD experience between the RSS 22 student and teacher groups were pseudonymised using labels such as “Student group 1”, “Student group 2”, “Student group 3” and “Teacher group 1”, “Teacher group 2” and “Teacher group 3”.

Research Methodologies and Methods: Case 13 aimed to answer **RQ2**: *“How do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, foster individual and collective growth in students’ and teachers’ openness to newly ‘seeing’ the other in their intergenerational learning?”* (See Deliverable 4.1, p. 21). Using PAR, teachers and students became active co-researchers (Kemmis et al., 2014; Bryman, 2012). **RQ2** was investigated by analyzing the collected data from six phases of PAR (AECED, 2023, p.26). Key aspects of data collection and analysis were recorded in a Shared Memoing Matrix throughout the Introduction, Familiarisation, Collaborative Reflection, Planning, Action, and Analysis & Synthesis phases.

Memoing not only ensured transparency across project cases but also provided deeper insights into four key dimensions – Descriptive, Reflective, Conceptual, and Theoretical – by addressing structured questions in designated templates. This process required a thorough analysis of the questions, grounded in the PAR methodology. Keywords extracted from this analysis provided valuable insight into the ethos shaping the PAR process. For instance, some of the keywords that emerged at the Reflective dimension of memoing during the Action phase of Case 13, were: “Holistic Learning Experience (Mind, Emotions, Body), Emotional Engagement, Self-Discovery, Overcoming Differences, Perspective-Taking, Cognitive Flexibility, Aesthetic and Embodied Awareness, Reflexive Self-Awareness, Transformative Engagement, Holistic Observations, Relational Well-being, Openness to Otherness, Collective Meaning-Making, Empathetic Engagement”. These keywords reflect the open and democratic environment of the Action phase with students and teachers, nurturing qualities essential for fostering ONSO.

The research question was examined through thematic analysis of pseudonymised discussion, interview, and talk transcripts, triangulated with Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) of student and teacher anonymised post-trial written reflections, and further validated through holistic observations.

Data Analysis Methods:

- Literature review to develop ONSO, outlining its components and subcomponents.
- Thematic analysis of pseudonymised transcripts from post-trial discussions with educators (**EPTD**), six student interviews (**SI**), and post-trial talk “Bridging Perspectives” featuring mutual reflections between teachers and students (**BP**) (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) of anonymised post-trial reflection from students (**SWR**) and educators (**EWR**), applying open coding to identify categories (Mayring, 2014) related to AELD vs. traditional learning, students’ and educators’ mutual discoveries, group dynamics, emotional experiences, and AELD’s perceived value, with frequency tables generated for analysis.
- Triangulation of thematic analysis findings, QCA category alignment with the ONSO Framework, and RTU researchers’ trial observations, integrating methodological, theoretical, and data source perspectives (Carter et al., 2014).

Data Analysis Process:

Step 1: Development of a theory-based ONSO Framework encompassing six dimensions: 1) mental processes that foster reflective thinking for openness; 2) sensory and emotional experiences that cultivate openness; 3) interactive dynamics that promote engagement with others; 4) self-awareness of how identity, emotions, and biases influence interactions; moral principles that support inclusive and just interactions; and 6) active engagement that drives personal and collective transformation. The ONSO Framework (see the next subchapter “Theoretical background”) presents a table detailing six components aligned with these dimensions and their subcomponents.

Step 2: Thematic analysis of discussion and interview transcripts, focusing on segments where students shared experiences of working with teachers or, conversely, where teachers reflected on their impressions of students. ONSO subcomponents were used as predefined themes to guide this analysis.

Step 3: QCA of students’ written reflections on their experiences with teachers and teachers’ reflections on their students during AEL for democracy (AELD) activities, resulting in category frequency tables.

Step 4: Alignment of categories developed in QCA of students’ and teachers’ reflections on intergenerational AELD learning experiences, capturing differences from traditional learning, each-other-discoveries, group dynamics, emotional experiences, and perceptions of AELD’s value with the ONSO Framework, linking to relevant ONSO subcomponents.

This alignment was conducted from two perspectives: Teachers about Students and Students about Teachers. To achieve this, we focused exclusively on post-Iteration 1 and post-Iteration 2 written reflections, where:

- Teachers shared insights on how students engaged in holistic learning through drama sketch and collage creation during AELD activities.

- Students reflected on how their teachers adapted and responded within the new pedagogical environment during these trials.

As a result, 23 reflection questions were identified as appropriate for the Teachers about Students perspective, while only five were considered suitable for the Students about Teachers perspective. The QCA category frequencies were aggregated to assess how often ONSO subcomponents and components were integratively linked, reflecting the impact of AELD on teachers and students from each other’s perspectives, as shown in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Alignment of Qualitative Content Analysis Categories with ONSO Framework

ONSO Framework			Aggregated Absolute Frequencies of QCA Categories Aligned with the ONSO Framework from Teacher and Student Reflections on Collaboration in AELD Trials			
Dim.	ONSO component	ONSO subcomponent	Teachers about Students		Students about Teachers	
1.	Cognitive Flexibility	Perspective-taking	215	80	43	28
		Tolerance for ambiguity		50		7
		Aesthetic reflexivity		38		0
		Recognition of knowledge limits		47		8
2.	Aesthetic and Embodied Awareness	Aesthetic sensitivity	251	39	121	35
		Empathic identification		71		29
		Embodied knowing		92		0
		Affective virtues		49		57
3.	Dialogic and Relational Disposition	Mutual listening	387	105	159	19
		Relational well-being		118		62
		Power-sharing		64		22
		Interpersonal adaptability		100		56
4.	Reflexive Self-Awareness	Self-orientated awareness	296	63	60	3
		Other-orientated awareness		110		57
		Critical reflexivity		106		0
		Emotional reflexivity		17		0
5.	Ethical and Democratic Sensibility	Openness to otherness	297	108	145	44
		Collective agency		111		19
		Valuing equality		41		32
		Love as integrative power		37		50
6.	Transformative Engagement	Generative Interaction	183	122	41	34
		Embracing vulnerability		19		5
		Collaborative inquiry		42		2

At first glance, it appears that both teachers and students similarly recognised Dialogic and Relational Disposition as the most defining characteristic of each other, followed by Ethical and Democratic Sensibility, during the AELD activities.

However, a comparative analysis based solely on absolute frequencies would be insufficient due to several key disparities: the number of teachers differed from the number of students in the study; the number of reflection questions varied between teachers ($N=23$) and students ($N=5$); the structure of the ONSO components was uneven—five components (*Cognitive Flexibility, Aesthetic and Embodied Awareness, Dialogic and Relational Disposition, Reflexive Self-Awareness, and Ethical and Democratic Sensibility*) contained four subcomponents each, while *Transformative Engagement* had only three.

To ensure a fair comparison, we analysed the Teachers about Students and Students about Teachers perspectives using the normalised percentage distribution of ONSO components, which will be examined in the Research Findings section (see *Table 2*).

Step 5: Triangulation of thematic analysis and QCA mapping results using methodological, theoretical, and data source triangulations (Carter et al., 2014).

Step 6: Interpretation of triangulation results, supplemented by RTU researchers' trial observations.

Theoretical Background: The theoretical foundation of this research is grounded in the importance of intergenerational collaboration between students and teachers, transforming traditional hierarchical dynamics into democratic dialogues that promote mutual openness. This approach aligns with Dewey's (1916) perspective that education should enable the sharing of cultures and active participation in community life. Freire (2005) further emphasises that an oppression-free, responsive teacher-student dialogue is crucial for mutual respect and shared knowledge, thereby aligning the educational process with democratic ideals. Such open classroom climates, where learners can express, explore, and debate various perspectives, are positively associated with supporting human rights, increasing civic knowledge, enhancing political self-efficacy, and boosting political participation (Knowles et al., 2018). To foster an open classroom climate, both teachers and students must cultivate openness not only to new ways of 'seeing' the other but also to each other. ONSO is defined as the cognitive, emotional, and relational capacity to move beyond preconceptions and stereotypes by engaging with difference through recognising, understanding, and valuing others' perspectives via empathetic, dialogical, and embodied interactions.

The ONSO Framework, developed based on theoretical foundations, comprises six components and 23 subcomponents:

- **Cognitive Flexibility** facilitates openness through reflective thinking. Subcomponents – Perspective-taking, Tolerance for Ambiguity, Aesthetic Reflexivity and Recognition of Knowledge Limits (Woods, 2021; Vives & FeldmanHall, 2018; Docherty, 2006; Kompridis, 2006; Selman, 2007; Dewey, 1933; Rosa, 2024; Dallmayr, 2015),
- **Aesthetic and Embodied Awareness** fosters openness through sensory and emotional experiences. Subcomponents – Aesthetic Sensitivity, Empathic Identification, Embodied Knowing, Affective Virtues (Woods et al., 2023; Chacón et al., 2024; Woods, 2019; Krznaric, 2014; Dewey, 1934),
- **Dialogic and Relational Disposition** facilitates openness through interactive and relational engagement. Subcomponents – Mutual Listening, Relational Well-Being, Power-Sharing, Interpersonal Adaptability (Woods et al., 2023; Freire, 2005; Rosa, 2024; Dallmayr, 2015; White, 2015; McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013; Dewey, 1916),
- **Reflexive Self-Awareness** involves self-examination and awareness of identity and emotions in interactions. Subcomponents – Self-Orientated Awareness, Other-Orientated

Awareness, Critical Reflexivity, Emotional Reflexivity (Woods, 2021; Woods et al., 2020; Dallmayr, 2017; Ng, 2019; Dewey, 1933),

- **Ethical and Democratic Sensibility** upholds moral principles and collective responsibility for just interactions. Subcomponents – Openness to Otherness, Collective Agency, Valuing Equality, Love as Integrative Power (Woods, 2021; Woods, 2019; Woods, 2005; Freire, 2005; Dewey, 1916; Docherty, 2006; Scanlon, 1998; Selman, 2007),
- **Transformative Engagement** involves active participation and willingness to undergo personal and collective transformation. Subcomponents – Generative Interaction, Embracing Vulnerability, Collaborative inquiry (Woods et al., 2023; Brown, 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014; Woods, 2016; Docherty, 2006; Freire, 2005; Dewey, 1933).

The ONSO Framework ensures internal consistency by aligning cognitive, emotional, and relational components to foster openness. Progressing from cognitive flexibility to transformative engagement, it balances reflection with interaction, providing a reliable basis for qualitative research. It was used for thematic analysis of discussions and interviews and to triangulate these findings with QCA of students' written reflections.

3. Research Findings

Case 13 examined the **RQ2**. “*In what ways do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, lead to individual and collective growth in regard to teachers’ and students’ openness to newly ‘seeing’ the other from each other’s perspectives?*” Therefore, for Case 13, we focused exclusively on mutual perceptions between teachers and students – specifically, teachers' views of students and students' views of teachers.

Thematic analysis of pseudonymised transcripts from post-trial discussions with DSG and JSG educators (**EPTD**), six post-trial-2 interviews with DJG students (**SI**) and post-trial talk “Bridging Perspectives” (**BP**) with RSS 22 students and educators revealed emerging themes aligned with all ONSO components and subcomponents. Each theme highlights aspects of teachers’ and students’ ONSO, illustrating how AELD activities influenced their perceptions of each other’s qualities. This approach offers a comprehensive perspective on intergenerational learning, encompassing mutual learning dynamics: learning from each other, about, toward, with and for each other. For illustration, a quotation linked to one ONSO Framework component and subcomponent, as identified through thematic analysis, is provided below.

Dialogic and Relational Disposition

- **Interpersonal Adaptability:** A teacher reflected on how the students adapted to new social dynamics and diverse interactions during the first AELD trial, “*Today, students collaborated with classmates they had previously seldom or never worked with, or even tended to avoid. This required them to engage cognitively, manage their emotions, and communicate effectively with new peers. Such interactions can contribute to a more inclusive and harmonious classroom environment.*” (DSG **EPTD**)

Ethical and Democratic Sensibility

- **Openness to otherness:** A student group in the post-2nd-trial collective talk reflected on their teachers' openness to new relational dynamics with the words, "*We were surprised that teachers could laugh and be open, and we could co-create something significant*" (RSS 22 **BP**) recognising teachers as co-creators rather than authority figures during the joint participation in AELD activities as equal co-learners.

Aesthetic and Embodied Awareness

- **Empathic Identification:** A teacher shared that, students mentally and emotionally adopted another's perspective, fostering understanding and emotional resonance with their experiences "*When the girls switched roles at the last moment, I could truly see things from each character's perspective. I felt what they were experiencing, which deepened my understanding of their viewpoints. Observing their willingness to embrace each other's roles and emotions highlighted their capacity for empathy. It was a powerful reminder of how stepping into someone else's shoes can profoundly enhance our connection to others' experiences.*" (JSG **EPTD**)

Cognitive Flexibility

- **Tolerance for ambiguity:** In one of the post-trial discussions with DSG teachers, one participant emphasised that AELD fosters adaptability to uncertainty and reduces fear of failure, stating, "*In this learning format, we have developed a greater tolerance for ambiguity, allowing us to navigate uncertainty and engage in open-ended exploration. By embracing natural emotional and embodied responses, both teachers and students have become more comfortable experimenting, making mistakes, and learning without rigid expectations.*" (DSG **EPTD**)

Reflexive Self-Awareness

- **Other-orientated awareness:** During the post-trial discussion at RSS 22, students expressed a heartfelt wish to their teachers, inspired by their shared AELD experiences during Iteration 2: "*We wish you to feel comfortable by our side... so that everything is cool with you... like today.*" (RSS 22 **BP**). This sentiment reflects the students' appreciation for their teachers' ability to understand and prioritise their thoughts, feelings, and needs. Moreover, it underscores their desire for these positive AELD-caused changes to become a consistent aspect of their educational experience.

Transformative Engagement

- **Embracing Vulnerability:** During the post-trial discussion with teachers in JSG during Iteration 1, one teacher reflected on how students acknowledged and embraced their emotions, imperfections, and uncertainties, allowing them to connect more authentically with others and foster personal growth. The teacher recalled, '*I remember Student A saying, "Oh my God! It was so scary! I was sitting there, playing my role in the courtroom, and*

everyone was staring at me. My hands grew sweaty from fear and excitement, my throat became scratchy, my head felt light and fuzzy, and my heart pounded wildly.” (JSG EPTD)

These brief illustrations from the thematic analysis highlight how AELD fostered mutual openness between students and teachers, transforming traditional hierarchical relationships into co-creative, democratic dialogues. Through reciprocal reflections, participants exhibited enhanced dialogic engagement, ethical awareness, cognitive flexibility, and embodied understanding, all of which contributed to their ability to ‘see’ the other from new perspectives. To further substantiate the findings, we now present the results of mapping qualitative content analysis (QCA) categories to the ONSO Framework.

The alignment of QCA categories with the ONSO Framework enabled a quantitative comparison of *Teachers about Students* and *Students about Teachers* perspectives based on the normalised percentage distribution of ONSO components (see *Table 2*).

Table 2: Normalised percentage distribution of ONSO components for

ONSO Components	Teachers about Students		Students about Teachers	
	Absolute Normalized Component Frequency	%	Absolute Normalized Component Frequency	%
Cognitive Flexibility	53,75	13	10,75	7
Aesthetic and Embodied Awareness	62,75	15	30,25	21
Dialogic and Relational Disposition	96,75	23	39,75	27
Reflexive Self-Awareness	74	18	15	10
Ethical and Democratic Sensibility	74,25	18	36,25	25
Transformative Engagement	61	14	13,7	9

Table 2 illustrates that Dialogic and Relational Disposition was the most prominently observed component of ONSO from both perspectives—*Teachers about Students* (23%) and *Students about Teachers* (27%). This indicates that AELD activities enhanced interactive processes and relational dynamics, fostering openness through meaningful teacher-student engagement. This integrative effect resulted from the combined influence of Mutual Listening (Woods et al., 2023; Freire, 2005; Dallmayr, 2015; Rosa, 2024), Relational Well-being (Woods, 2021; White, 2015; McCubbin & McCubbin, 2013), Power-sharing (Woods et al., 2023; Woods, 2021; Dewey, 1916; Freire, 2005; White, 2015), and Interpersonal Adaptability (Woods, 2021; Selman, 2007).

From the teachers’ perspective, students in AELD activities demonstrated equal success in their commitment to fairness, justice, and shared responsibility (Ethical and Democratic Sensibility, 18%) and their ability to critically reflect on their biases and positionality (Reflexive Self-Awareness, 18%). This outcome resulted from a summative effect of multiple aspects of ONSO, including Openness to otherness (Freire, 2005; Woods, 2021; Dewey, 1916; Selman, 2007), Collective agency (Woods, 2005), Valuing equality (Scanlon, 1998; Freire, 2005; Dewey, 1916; Docherty, 2006), Love as integrative power (Woods, 2019), Self-orientated awareness (Woods et al., 2020), Other-orientated awareness (Dallmayr, 2017; Woods, 2021),

Critical reflexivity (Ng, 2019; Freire, 2005; Dewey, 1933), and Emotional reflexivity (Woods et al., 2023).

Additionally, students identified their teachers' Ethical and Democratic Sensibility (25%) as the second most explicit aspect of ONSO. This reciprocal recognition of Ethical and Democratic Sensibility suggests that AELD activities not only fostered students' commitment to justice and shared responsibility but also led them to see these qualities in their teachers. The fact that students ranked this as the second most explicit openness aspect highlights how teachers modeled democratic values, reinforcing a co-learning environment where both educators and students actively shaped ethical and democratic dispositions through mutual influence and shared experiences.

Even the ONSO components with lower frequencies were present throughout the AELD process, indicating that the learning environment fostered a comprehensive ONSO. The presence of Cognitive Flexibility, Aesthetic and Embodied Awareness, Reflexive Self-Awareness, and Transformative Engagement, despite their lower percentages, demonstrates that AELD activities provided opportunities for students and teachers to engage with multiple dimensions of openness, noticed by each other. This suggests that the AELD environment not only supported the most explicitly observed aspects of relational and ethical openness but also created conditions where adaptability, embodied understanding, self-reflection, and transformative learning could take root, reinforcing its holistic impact on intergenerational learning.

The observation aimed to determine whether learning activities incorporating drama sketch and collage creation were implemented within a responsive pedagogical environment aligned with democracy-as-becoming principles. The findings revealed that teachers effectively cultivated a democratic ethos marked by mutual acceptance and support among participants. This environment encouraged shared power dynamics, where leadership and followership roles were fluidly exchanged, fostering a holistic learning experience that integrated cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement. As a result, transformative dialogue and deeper interactions were actively promoted

Conclusion

The findings from both the *Teachers about Students* and *Students about Teachers* perspectives demonstrate that AELD fosters a responsive pedagogical environment that transforms traditional hierarchical relationships into collaborative, intergenerational learning experiences. By engaging cognitively, emotionally, and physically, both teachers and students developed an ONSO, facilitated through dialogic interactions, ethical engagement, and embodied understanding.

The reciprocal nature of learning in AELD is evident in how both groups perceived the importance of relational openness, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. Teachers primarily recognised students' engagement in democratic dialogue, self-reflection, and ethical agency, while students valued teachers' attunement to emotional and sensory nuances, their adaptability, and their willingness to engage in transformative learning. Despite some

variations in the emphasis of ONSO components, both perspectives underscore the role of AELD in bridging generational divides, encouraging co-creative meaning-making, and fostering a democratic ethos in the classroom.

Holistic observations further corroborate these findings, revealing that AELD nurtures an inclusive educational culture characterized by mutual acceptance, shared leadership, and engagement across cognitive, emotional, and physical dimensions. These converging lines of evidence highlight AELD's potential to enhance teachers' and students' capacity to perceive, appreciate, and integrate diverse perspectives, ultimately promoting a more inclusive, empathetic, and democratic learning environment.

4. Limitations

Due to the age of secondary school students (minors under 18), video recordings were not permitted, restricting the analysis of drama sketch and collage creation processes. Audio recordings were considered as an alternative but were ineffective because of background noise, student movement, and distant voices in the school hall. To compensate, holistic observation and post-trial discussions with teachers were used. Audio recordings that were included in the research were made only when participants were seated, with recording devices positioned close by for better sound quality.

Organising in-person meetings of the RTU research team at RSS 22 required adjusting the school's schedule to facilitate a day of AELD activities. In Iteration 1, this involved the principal, four teachers, and 14 grade-10 students, while Iteration 2 included the principal, 10 teachers, and 10 students. To maximise the impact of these meetings, the RSS 22 staff opted for an intensive agenda. However, this resulted in physical and emotional fatigue, as noted in student and teacher feedback. Some participants found the combination of embodied learning, cognitive engagement, and emotional processing both stimulating and unusually demanding. The study's focus on drama sketch and collage creation limits the findings to these specific AELD methods and their influence on students' ONSO. Students' experiences varied between the two methods: some found collage creation less stressful due to its reflective and deliberate pace, while improvisation posed greater challenges for others, requiring spontaneous and authentic responses in front of peers, which some students found demanding or anxiety-inducing.

The study investigated the immediate impact of AELD on students' ONSO, highlighting its transformative potential. To ensure a lasting influence on ONSO, the RSS 22 principal, teachers, and students agreed to hold a "Democracy Day" once per semester, featuring AELD activities integrated across mono-, multi-, and cross-disciplinary learning contexts, as well as in extracurricular activities and civic participation projects. Furthermore, short embodiment exercises will be regularly implemented to nurture and sustain a democratic ethos within the school environment.

The findings are based on a sample of 30 teachers and 44 students from three Latvian schools, which may limit the generalisability of the results to broader contexts of reciprocal

intergenerational learning between teachers and students, even though the schools were situated in different regions of Latvia – Riga (RSS 22), Daugavpils (DSG), and Jurmala (JSG). However, qualitative research emphasises contextual depth and rich insights rather than broad generalisations. To ensure validity, the study is anchored in a theory-based ONSO framework, providing a structured and consistent approach to data interpretation. To enhance reliability, data analysis was conducted collaboratively by the RTU research team, enabling cross-validation of findings and reducing individual researcher bias.

5. Relevance of Context

The study, conducted in three Latvian schools, played a key role in shaping the implementation and reception of the AELD pedagogical framework and its impact on students' and teachers' ONSO within the context of reciprocal intergenerational learning. Latvia's transition from a post-Soviet state to a European Union member has profoundly influenced cultural narratives surrounding democracy, civic participation, openness, and education. The education system, once rooted in rote memorization and ideological indoctrination, needed a new foundation based on civic education, human rights, and active citizenship. However, this shift required not only curriculum changes but also a transformation in teaching practices. However, this transformation demanded more than curriculum reforms—it necessitated a reconfiguration of teaching practices. Deeply ingrained Soviet-era habits persisted, reinforcing rigid teacher-student dynamics in which teachers were seen as unquestionable knowledge transmitters and students as passive recipients. Reflections from the AECED project further indicated that older teachers often exhibited less flexibility and openness to shifting perspectives, limiting their ability to foster democratic engagement in classrooms.

To strengthen teachers' engagement with democratic education and reshape teacher-student relationships, national initiatives have emphasised active learning and civic participation

- *DemokrātiJĀ!* encourages teachers to integrate democratic values into school life (European Movement in Latvia, 2020).
- *Skola2030* positions civic participation as a transversal skill, equipping educators with strategies to cultivate responsible, engaged citizens (LAPAS, 2022).

These national priorities align with AELD's approach of experiencing democracy as a lived process, reinforcing the relevance of the AECED project's principles. While cognitive and emotional learning are gradually being incorporated into the education system, embodied learning remains an unfamiliar and challenging concept for both teachers and students. This approach not only allows students but also teachers to experience democracy-as-becoming across various educational contexts, including both academic subjects and extracurricular activities.

Our research revealed that AELD transforms traditional hierarchical relationships into collaborative, intergenerational learning experiences. The reciprocal nature of learning in AELD is evident in how both groups perceived the importance of relational openness, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. Teachers primarily recognised students' engagement in

democratic dialogue, self-reflection, and ethical agency, while students valued their teachers' responsiveness to emotional and sensory nuances, adaptability, and willingness to engage in transformative learning. They observed changes not only in themselves but also in each other, highlighting how regular AELD practice could enhance democratic engagement, openness, and strengthen teacher-student relationships. Their reflections underscored AELD's value as an integral part of the educational experience.

6. Learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guides

The findings provide evidence-based insights for refining the Pedagogical Framework and Guides to foster ONSO through AELD. By integrating multi-modal, participatory, and intergenerational learning experiences, AELD transforms traditional power dynamics, enabling students and teachers to engage in reciprocal meaning-making that is dialogic, sensory, and relational. Drama sketches and collage creation proved particularly effective in enhancing perspective-taking, emotional attunement, and co-creative engagement, underscoring the need for institutional structures that support flexible, non-hierarchical learning cultures.

Individual and Collective Learning

AELD encourages co-creative learning, where both students and teachers actively engage in shared knowledge-building through dialogic interaction and embodied practices. Learning extends beyond cognition to include affective and sensory experiences, fostering relational depth, empathy, and reflexivity.

Key Implications:

- Prioritise participatory and creative pedagogies (e.g., role-switching, collaborative artistic expression) to cultivate mutual openness and perspective-taking.
- Facilitate structured reflection to encourage self-examination, emotional awareness, and dialogic engagement.
- Promote shared leadership in classrooms, where students and teachers co-design learning experiences as equal contributors.

Organisational Learning

To institutionalise intergenerational learning, schools must embed aesthetic and embodied methodologies into professional development, classroom practice, and school-wide reflection processes. Drama and visual storytelling foster relational well-being, adaptability, and shared agency, demonstrating that learning environments must be structured to support co-creation and multimodal inquiry.

Key Implications:

- Institutionalise intergenerational co-creation through shared artistic spaces for equal collaboration between students and teachers.

- Integrate visual and performative pedagogies (e.g., storytelling, reflective theater, collage-creation) to enhance dialogic engagement.
- Establish cross-generational reflection spaces where artistic inquiry explores identity, power, and ethics.
- Reframe classrooms as flexible, dialogic spaces where teachers and students co-lead and co-create learning.
- Embed aesthetic reflection in organisational learning, using visual documentation and performative dialogues to value experiential knowledge.

Epistemic Transformation

AELD fosters epistemic openness by moving beyond traditional cognitive models toward relational, sensory, and performative ways of knowing. Through drama sketch and collage creation, both students and teachers engaged in co-creative meaning-making, where learning became experiential, emotional, and dialogic rather than hierarchical.

Key implication for the Pedagogical Framework:

- Recognise embodied, emotional, and artistic expressions as legitimate ways of knowing and learning alongside traditional cognitive models.
- Develop learning activities that bridge epistemic divides – e.g., integrating performance-based learning, storytelling, and multimodal reflections into curricula.
- Reframe assessment practices to include reflective, process-oriented, and co-created evaluations rather than solely outcome-based metrics.

7. Ethical Reflection and Gender Dimension

The AELD Pedagogical Framework and Guides must be built on a strong ethical foundation that ensures equity, inclusivity, and accessibility in aesthetic and embodied learning. Since AELD integrates cognitive, emotional, and embodied learning, ethical considerations are crucial in fostering an educational environment where both teachers and students feel safe, valued, and empowered. In this context, particular attention must be given to gender sensitivity, intersectional perspectives, accessibility, and positionality, as these factors significantly influence how democratic engagement and openness are experienced in embodied learning.

Gender Sensitivity in Cognitive, Emotional, and Embodied Learning

- Cognitive learning: Teachers should critically assess gender biases in democratic education, ensuring that materials, case studies, and discussion prompts represent diverse gender identities and perspectives. Encouraging critical thinking around gender norms and power dynamics enables both students and teachers to develop a more inclusive understanding of democracy.

- Emotional learning: Emotional engagement in AELD, particularly through drama sketch, collage creation, storytelling, and collaborative discussions, should be facilitated in ways that validate different emotional expressions across genders. Encouraging all participants – teachers and students to express vulnerability, empathy, and assertiveness equally helps challenge traditional gendered emotional norms.
- Embodied learning: Embodied activities, such as drama sketches, movement exercises, and aesthetic creation, must be gender-inclusive and adaptable to ensure physical and psychological comfort. Teachers should avoid reinforcing stereotypical gender roles in embodied scenarios and instead encourage diverse, fluid participation, where all learners can explore different identities and perspectives beyond societal expectations.

Intersectionality and Inclusive Democratic Learning

- AELD should actively integrate intersectional perspectives, recognising that gender intersects with race, socio-economic status, disability, and cultural identity, influencing how both teachers and students experience democratic engagement.
- Learning activities should provide diverse, non-stereotypical representations of gender and identity in democratic contexts, allowing students and teachers to critically reflect on their own biases and privileges.
- Co-creation of learning experiences between teachers and students ensures that all voices, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, are heard and included.

Accessibility and Ethical Participation in Embodied Learning

- Embodied learning requires physical engagement, but not all students or teachers may feel comfortable with certain movements, expressions, or interactions due to personal, cultural, or physical factors. Alternative participation methods, such as using verbal descriptions, visual storytelling, or individualised adaptations, should always be available.
- Consent and agency are fundamental in embodied exercises. Teachers should ensure that both they and their students have the choice to opt in or out of specific activities without pressure or judgment.
- A trauma-sensitive approach should be integrated into all AELD activities, recognising that bodily experiences can evoke personal histories and emotional responses. Creating emotionally safe spaces where participants can process and discuss their experiences is essential for ethical embodied learning.

Positionality and Teacher and Student Reflexivity

- Both teachers and students should have the opportunity to continuously reflect on their own positionality and how their gender, cultural background, and social identity shape their teaching approaches and interactions with students.
- Encouraging open dialogue between teachers and students about gender, power dynamics, and embodiment fosters a co-constructed, democratic learning environment.

Incorporating Gender into AELD Analysis

Gender sensitivity in the analysis and evaluation of AELD activities was achieved through multiple strategies, ensuring an equitable and inclusive approach:

- Conducting data analysis through a gender lens, identifying disparities in participation, engagement, and self-expression among teachers and students. In Case 12, in Jurmala State Gymnasium and the other two project schools, the gender disparity was evident with only two male teachers out of 15 at Jurmala and three male teachers out of 30 across the three schools. This imbalance in the teaching staff may have influenced both students' and teachers' experiences, potentially affecting engagement, participation, and self-expression within the learning environment. The data analysis also took into account the gender disparity among students, with 26 female and 18 male students. Therefore, we considered how the underrepresentation of male teachers and students impacted the gendered dynamics within the schools.
- The research team balance and reflexivity. The research team comprised two female and two male researchers, ensuring a balanced gender perspective in data interpretation and analysis. This balance enhanced reflexivity and minimised potential biases related to gendered interpretations of emotional expressions and relational dynamics. It also contributed to building trusting relationships with participants, allowing both boys and girls to express themselves more authentically.
- Through holistic observation. We analysed gender dynamics within teachers-students mixed group interactions when learning together in Iteration 2, particularly with a particular focus on power-sharing and collective agency activities. This approach allowed us to identify and address gender-specific participation patterns.

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Portugal Case Report

Case 14 and 15

Phase/Educational Setting:

Early years and Primary Education

VEN-Approach:

Visual and Narrative

1. Case Description

The Portuguese team developed an online course that brought together four groups of teachers/educators (Cases 14 to 17): two groups from early years and primary education and two groups from vocational/professional and adult education. **This report will analyse the data from two cases (Case 14 and 15) focused on the early years and primary education phase involving schoolteachers and educators.**

Participants: Information about the project was disseminated through stakeholders and local, regional, and national partners to recruit participants. Institutional contacts were leveraged to email various formal and non-formal education institutions, encouraging them to share the course opportunity with potentially interested educators. A total of 101 teachers and educators expressed interest in participating in the online course. Of these, 40 were selected based on specific criteria: academic qualifications and background, level of education (20 from pre-school and primary education, and 20 from professional education), and national distribution to ensure broad representation. Ultimately, 34 educators confirmed their participation in the course.

By the end of the course, 12 teachers and educators (aged between 43 and 65) representing the two cases from early years and primary education completed all the proposed activities. Meanwhile, 11 participants dropped out either at the beginning or during the process. Among the final participants, 10 were from the primary school stage (9 women and 1 man), while 2 were from pre-school (early years), both of whom were women.

Location: The course took place on the UAb Moodle platform, entirely in eLearning mode, which provides greater flexibility in the management of time and space. With a total duration of 50 hours (15 hours online and 35 hours autonomous work).

Purpose – Relevance to Democracy-as-Becoming: Participants of the online course were involved as **co-researchers** by actively integrating research into their teaching practices and collaborating with the broader project team. Within the PAR framework, participants were able to design, implement, and evaluate pedagogical interventions. They documented how their students responded to different aesthetic and embodied learning strategies and adjusted their approaches based on the findings. In doing so, participants also designed and collected

qualitative and/or quantitative data (e.g., observations, student work, reflective journals, surveys) in compliance with the project's ethical guidelines.

The online course for teachers and educators within the democracy-as-becoming framework fostered critical engagement, participatory learning, and transformative practices. It enhanced democratic education by:

- equipping educators with theoretical and practical skills to teach democratic values,
- encouraging collaboration and co-research through an online community,
- promoting reflective teaching that strengthens collective pedagogy,
- expanding access to professional development by overcoming physical constraints,
- supporting PAR to reshape teaching as an interactive, knowledge-negotiation process.

The **online course was** designed to integrate ***power sharing, transforming dialogue, holistic learning, and relational well-being*** by embedding participatory, reflective, and embodied practices.

The integration of **power-sharing** in the online course emphasized inclusive participation, autonomy, and collaborative decision-making. This was achieved through:

- encouraging mutual respect and active engagement,
- decentralizing authority by allowing participants to co-design activities and lead discussions,
- facilitating peer-led forums and group projects to promote shared decision-making,
- creating co-learning spaces where participants shape content and discussions,
- applying participatory research, enabling educators to integrate concepts into their contexts and contribute insights for collective reflection.

Regarding **transforming dialogue**, the online course was focused on encouraging open exchange of views to enhance mutual understanding applying:

- structured dialogue to explore diverse perspectives,
- spaces where educators can critically reflect on their biases, assumptions, and embodied experiences,
- discussion prompts that challenge participants to rethink and question their own positions on educational equity and democracy.

As to **holistic learning** the main goal was to engage cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, and embodied awareness of the participants in the development of their activities in their educational settings. This was achieved by:

- encouraging and exploring arts-based learning (e.g., storytelling, movement exercises, photography projects) in the course activities,
- after the analysis of the course activities, it was concluded that it is important to redesign the course by introducing design hands-on inquiry activities, such as creating digital collages or role-playing exercises, to connect democratic learning to real-life teaching and

promote more embodied reflection through guided movement or sensory-based activities that deepen engagement.

As to the dimension of **relational well-being**, the aim was to foster feelings of belonging, connectedness, and community. The online course was designed to:

- establish community-building activities (e.g., virtual storytelling sessions, digital world cafés).
- encourage collaborative projects with local communities to connect learning with real-world social impact,
- all the activities had spaces for independent thinking, where educators and teachers could explore their values while engaging in collaborative reflection.

Research Activities and Methods: The Portuguese team's case studies (Case 14-17) were developed through an 8-week online course conducted between April and June 2024. Designed for teachers and educators, the course aimed to equip participants with the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct independent research and actively contribute to the project as co-researchers. The course was structured around six themes aligned with 6 PAR phases: introduction, familiarisation, collaborative reflection, planning, action, and final reflection.

Based on the fundamentals of PAR methodology, the two cases for early years and primary education developed by the Portuguese team included the activities, methods and processes that will be explained in relation to the research objectives.

The activities employed a **participatory, iterative, and reflective process** involving the testing, co-creation, and revision of the Prototype Framework and Guide. The methods used, such as online forum discussions, surveys, interviews, and co-creation, ensured that the research objectives - understanding the participants' experiences, refining the Framework for real-world application, and assessing its impact on democratic values - were effectively achieved.

Introduction to the Prototype Framework and Guide

The participants were introduced to the Prototype Framework and Guide through collaborative online discussions and individual reflections. These activities provided an overview of the theoretical foundations, key concepts, and proposed pedagogical strategies of AELD. Participants engaged in interactive discussions and co-creation activities to explore how the framework could be adapted to their own educational settings. This helped to identify initial barriers and opportunities for application.

Co-creation and facilitation of AELD through ABE Methods

The case trials focused on the co-creation process where participants used Aesthetic-Based Education methods to facilitate embodied engagement and aesthetic reflection. Participants collaboratively designed lesson plans and activities using AELD principles, incorporating embodied and sensory experiences. They also reflected on how to integrate these methods with participatory learning and democratic values in their teaching practices.

Data collection and feedback

Qualitative data was collected through surveys, interviews, and reflective essays to capture participants' experiences, challenges, and feedback about the Prototype Framework and Guide. Participants provided insights into the practical application of AELD and ABE methods, with an emphasis on understanding the gap between theory and practice. Feedback also addressed the effectiveness of co-creation processes, and the facilitation strategies used.

Reflection and iterative revision

Based on the feedback collected, the researchers analysed the responses to identify common themes, challenges, and suggested revisions. An iterative revision process was carried out, focusing on refining the Guide to enhance clarity, accessibility, and practical implementation. This included developing more visual and interactive resources, providing additional implementation strategies, and addressing institutional constraints.

Final assessment and synthesis

The final assessment involved synthesizing participant feedback and engagement data to evaluate the effectiveness of the Prototype Framework and Guide in promoting democratic education and embodied learning. Questionnaires were also administered to gather information on the structure, content and impact of the online course, so that improvements could be made. The research team used the feedback to refine the Framework and Guide, ensuring that it addressed individual, collective, and epistemic transformation. This helped to finalise recommendations for enhancing the Framework and Guide's impact and scalability in diverse educational contexts.

Researchers: Case 14 and 15 were conducted in the moodle platform by Cláudia Neves and Juliana Oliveira who worked closely with the participants in the online course. Cláudia Neves and Juliana Oliveira were involved in all the cases activities. Ana Patrícia Almeida, Marta Abelha and Pedro Abrantes actively participated in the course design, the process case design and in the data analysis.

Time Frame:

- **Introduction:** Duration of the PAR phase from 22nd to 28th of April 2024.
- **Familiarisation:** Duration of the PAR phase from 29th of April to 5th of May 2024.
- **Collaborative reflection:** Duration of the PAR phase from 6th to 8th of May 2024.
- **Planning:** Duration of the PAR phase from 13th to 17th of May 2024.
- **Action:** Duration of the PAR phase from 17th to 24th of May 2024.
- **Analysis & synthesis:** Duration of the PAR phase from 3rd to 9th of June 2024.

2. Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis

Data Types and Sources

Types of Data: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods.

Sources of Data: Twelve surveys and questionnaires (post online course) using Google Forms; interviews by email after the course (to allow flexibility - participants could respond at their convenience, allowing them to take time to answer without the pressure of a real-time conversation and more considered answers); discussion Forums to analyse ideas about the themes, participation levels, and the quality of peer-to-peer interaction; twelve assignment submissions – to evaluate the depth and breadth of student submissions for assignments, such as proposals for AELD activities and individual written reflections. All personal data was pseudonymised and/or anonymised.

Research Methodologies and Methods: The research findings for these case studies were drawn using a qualitative content analysis approach (Schreier, 2012), combining thematic analysis and grounded theory principles (Charmaz, 2006). These methods were chosen to ensure a rich, in-depth understanding of how participants engaged with the framework, how AELD was co-created through ABE methods, and what transformational effects emerged in relation to democratic learning. The chosen methods—qualitative content analysis, thematic analysis, grounded theory elements, and triangulation—were deliberately selected to ensure a rigorous, data-driven approach to understanding participant experiences. These methods collectively supported evidence-based recommendations for refining the Prototype Framework and Guide, ensuring that revisions were responsive to participant needs, grounded in real-world challenges, and aligned with the goal of fostering embodied democratic learning.

Qualitative Content Analysis:

Interviews by email: Enabled in-depth thematic analysis by identifying recurring themes and patterns.

Discussion forums: Analysed engagement levels, quality of interaction, and emerging themes.

Assignment submissions: Evaluated the depth and breadth of proposals for the AELD activities. Individual written reflections were analysed using narrative analysis to understand participants' perspectives.

Quantitative and Mixed-Methods Analysis:

Surveys and questionnaires (Post-Course, Google Forms): This method collects structured data on participants' experiences, engagement levels, and learning outcomes. It includes Likert scale questions, open-ended reflections, and demographic data for statistical and qualitative comparison.

Data Analysis Process:

Data handling and processing: The data collected in this study was handled and processed through a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the results.

Quantitative Data Analysis: Closed-ended survey questions were systematically analysed using descriptive statistics to identify general trends and patterns. This statistical analysis

provided a quantitative overview of participants' responses, helping to quantify attitudes, perceptions, and engagement levels.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Open-ended survey responses, email interviews, forum discussions, and assignment submissions were analysed through thematic coding. This approach allowed for the identification of patterns, emerging themes, and challenges faced by participants. Additionally, discourse analysis was applied specifically to forum contributions to examine the nature of peer-to-peer interactions and engagement dynamics. This method helped to understand how dialogue and communication contributed to the learning process. To enhance the **collaborative and reflective nature of the analysis**, the **Shared Memoing Matrix** was utilised throughout the qualitative data analysis phase. This Matrix facilitated the **co-construction of knowledge** by allowing researchers and participants to systematically document insights, reflections, and interpretive shifts. By integrating diverse perspectives and capturing evolving thoughts, the Matrix played a crucial role in maintaining **transparency and accountability** during the analytical process.

Content Evaluation: Written reflections and proposals related to AELD activities were evaluated using rubric-based content analysis. This method assessed the depth of reflection, level of innovation, and potential for educational application, providing insights into the quality and relevance of the proposed activities.

Data integration and comparison:

The study employed a rigorous approach to data integration and comparison to ensure the reliability and validity of findings. This process involved combining insights from various data sources and methodologies to create a comprehensive understanding of the research outcomes.

Triangulation Approach: To enhance the robustness of the analysis, data from multiple sources—including surveys, interviews, forum discussions, and assignment submissions—were cross-compared. This triangulation process helped validate the findings by ensuring consistency and convergence of evidence from different perspectives. It reinforced the credibility of the conclusions drawn by integrating diverse viewpoints and data types.

Mixed-Methods Analysis: The integration of quantitative and qualitative data provided a well-rounded analysis. Quantitative data, derived primarily from closed-ended survey questions, revealed participation trends and statistical patterns. In contrast, qualitative data, obtained from open-ended responses, interviews, and discussions, offered contextual insights and deeper reflections. This mixed-methods approach allowed for a nuanced interpretation of both numerical and experiential aspects of the study.

Pattern and theme identification:

Throughout the analysis, recurrent themes and patterns emerged across the collected data. These themes were systematically synthesised to highlight significant learning experiences and challenges. Identifying these patterns provided a cohesive narrative of how values and attentional structures shaped participants' engagement and reflections.

Theoretical background:

Participatory Action Research & Transformative Learning - References: Kemmis & McTaggart (2005); Reason & Bradbury (2008)

Guiding question: How did teachers/educators apply and refine Aesthetic and Embodied Learning (AEL) in their educational settings?

PAR positions educators as co-researchers engaged in planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Teachers designed and tested AEL activities, using their experiences as data. Discussion forums tracked how participants problematized and refined AEL practices, while pre- and post-course reflections highlighted pedagogical shifts.

Transformative Learning – Identifying Moments of Perspective Shift - References: Mezirow (1991); Kegan (2009); Taylor & Cranton (2012)

Guiding question: Did teachers/educators experience pedagogical shifts?

Course elements (forums, assignments, surveys) were designed to trigger critical reflection. Transformative learning was identified when teachers shifted from traditional, teacher-centred approaches to participatory, student-led ones. Surveys and reflective writing traced changes in beliefs and captured transformative moments, while forum interactions highlighted peer-driven critical reflection.

Embodied and Aesthetic Learning - References: Shusterman (2008); Fuchs & De Jaegher (2009)

Guiding question: How did teachers/educators' sensory and emotional experiences shape learning?

Learning is connected to sensory, emotional, and bodily experiences. Cognitive shifts occurred when teachers recognized that democracy and education go beyond discussion to include collective movement, listening, and feeling.

Democracy-as-Becoming & Power-Sharing - References: Biesta (2011); Rancière (1991)

Guiding question: Did teachers/educators shift towards more democratic, student-centred teaching and learning?

The course promoted democracy as an ongoing, relational process, distributing power among participants. Assignments were evaluated for power-sharing practices, with a shift towards democratic pedagogy seen when teachers moved from structured activities to open-ended, student-driven explorations.

Digital Learning Ecologies & Connectivism - References: Siemens (2005); Garrison, Anderson & Archer (2000)

Guiding question: How did online collaboration influence learning?

Digital theories informed how virtual interactions shaped knowledge co-construction. Engagement analytics examined active forums and how real-world application sharing increased participation.

3. Research Findings

Below we will present key results of the case studies associated with the project's research questions.

RQ1. Regarding process: a) How do participants experience being introduced to and working with the Prototype Framework and Guides?

a) Participants generally found the introduction to the Prototype Framework and Guide engaging, particularly those familiar with democratic pedagogical approaches. While they understood the main concepts, some expressed doubts about the practical implementation of the ideas. The document effectively clarified theoretical aspects; however, participants recommended adding practical examples and enhancing visual presentation to improve comprehension and real-world application. This feedback suggests that participants were actively engaged, as demonstrated by their efforts to propose improvements.

b) In what ways is AELD co-created and facilitated through ABE methods? The case trials demonstrated that AELD is co-created and facilitated through ABE methods in several keyways:

- **Embodied Participation:** Participants reported that AELD engaged both the intellect and the body, incorporating movement, expression, and awareness. This embodied approach fostered a deeper, more immersive connection with the content, making learning personally meaningful.
- **Collaborative Learning Environment:** Interactive components, including online discussions and forums, promoted active reflection and collective meaning-making. These interactions shaped participants' understanding of AELD and reinforced its co-creative nature.
- **Democratic and Inclusive Learning:** The methods emphasised a student-centred approach that values affective, emotional, aesthetic, and ethical experiences. Participants noted the importance of shifting from traditional educational models towards relational and inclusive learning practices.
- **Multimodal Engagement:** The learning process integrated videos, discussions, and aesthetic practices, highlighting that knowledge is constructed through diverse sensory and cognitive experiences.
- **Reflection and Praxis:** Participants frequently reflected on conventional educational structures, advocating for practices that align with ABE principles. This continuous reflection and iterative refinement were central to the co-creation of AELD.

These findings suggest that AELD, co-created through ABE methods, represents a holistic, embodied, and democratic approach to education. Its strength lies in engaging learners beyond cognitive understanding, involving them emotionally and physically. However, for broader practical viability, the framework should continue evolving through participant feedback, maintaining a balance between theoretical robustness and practical applicability.

RQ2. Regarding the transformational change in participants: In what ways do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, lead to individual and collective growth in regard to

- feelings for democracy,
- aesthetic awareness and qualities (such as empathic, ethical, and spiritual sensibilities),
- collaborative, reflexive and critical capabilities,
- openness to newly 'seeing' the other,
- willingness to move towards more reflexive and critical modes of awareness and knowing that reconnect with the body as a source of learning,
- capacity to challenge social injustices and engage creatively with conflict and antagonisms
- any other aspects that will be developed in and through the PAR process.

The **Prototype Framework and Guide**, by facilitating the **co-creative design of the AELD using Aesthetic and Bodily Engagement pedagogies**, contribute to **individual and collective growth** in relation to **feelings of democracy** in several transformational ways:

- Deepening emotional and embodied engagement with democratic values - Unlike traditional approaches to democratic education, which often focus on cognitive and conceptual learning, the Prototype Framework and Guide encourage embodied and affective participation. By engaging participants through movement, artistic expression, and bodily awareness, ABE pedagogies connect democratic principles with lived, felt experiences. This fosters a visceral understanding of values such as equality, inclusion, and dialogue—moving democracy beyond an abstract concept to a personally meaningful practice.

Example from Case 14: In a project where students co-created a performance on social justice, participants reported feeling more connected to democratic principles such as inclusion and fairness. By embodying these values through artistic expression, they moved beyond intellectual understanding to emotional resonance with democratic ideals.

Example from Case 15: A dance workshop encouraged students to explore concepts of power and dialogue through movement. Participants reflected on how they physically experienced inclusion and exclusion, deepening their empathy and understanding of social dynamics.

- Shifting mindsets from passive to active democratic engagement - The process of co-creating learning experiences challenges participants to move from passive reception of democratic ideals to active involvement in shaping their learning environments. By engaging in discussions, collaborative projects, and artistic co-creation, participants develop a stronger sense of agency, recognizing that democracy is not merely a system of governance but an ongoing relational practice that requires their active participation and contribution.

Example from Case 14: Participants were actively involved in decision-making processes when designing artistic interventions for community spaces. This shifted their perception from being passive recipients of education to active contributors in shaping democratic environments.

Example from Case 15: Students participated in a collaborative mural project, where they negotiated artistic choices and reflected on group dynamics, reinforcing their sense of agency and collective responsibility.

- **Strengthening Collective and Relational Aspects of Democracy** - The co-creative process itself models democratic principles by fostering collective decision-making, shared reflection, and mutual respect. As participants engage in dialogue, negotiation, and collaborative meaning-making, they experience democracy as a practice of shared power, rather than just a theoretical ideal. This contributes to collective democratic growth, reinforcing a sense of interdependence and social responsibility.

Example from Case 14: The collaborative nature of the project led to a shared ownership of the final artistic output, fostering a sense of collective achievement and mutual respect. Participants noted that working together on a democratic theme created stronger relational bonds and a sense of shared purpose.

Example from Case 15: Through co-creative storytelling workshops, participants practiced listening to diverse perspectives and negotiating collective narratives, reinforcing the idea that democracy thrives on dialogue and inclusiveness.

- **Developing Empathy and Perspective-Taking** - A key outcome of AELD is the cultivation of empathy. Through aesthetic and embodied experiences, participants are encouraged to step into different perspectives, whether through movement-based exercises, storytelling, or reflective artistic practices. These activities foster emotional connections to others' experiences, helping participants develop a deeper sensitivity to issues of inclusion, equity, and social justice—central values in a democratic society.

Example from Case 14: During a role-playing activity, students embodied different community roles, helping them understand diverse perspectives and empathize with challenges faced by others. This exercise significantly impacted their ability to relate to marginalised voices.

Example from Case 15: Using dance as a medium to explore social hierarchies, students were encouraged to experience both dominance and vulnerability, promoting empathy and critical awareness of power dynamics.

- **Fostering Critical Reflection and Democratic Praxis** - Participants' engagement with the Framework and Guide also promotes critical reflection on their own assumptions, biases, and positionalities. By experiencing and embodying democratic learning, they are encouraged to question traditional educational hierarchies and consider alternative, more inclusive ways of learning and engaging with others. This aligns with Freirean (2005) notions of praxis, where action and reflection inform one another in a cycle of continuous democratic transformation.

Example from Case 14: After creating visual representations of social justice themes, participants engaged in reflective dialogues where they critically examined their own biases and assumptions. This process encouraged them to connect theory with practice, linking democratic principles to real-world contexts.

Example from Case 15: In a collective choreography task, students reflected on how their movements represented social inclusion or exclusion, fostering a critical understanding of group interactions and the impact of individual actions on collective experiences.

- **Enhancing Commitment to Democratic Learning Communities** Finally, the sustained engagement with the AELD through the ABE pedagogies helps participants develop a long-term commitment to democratic ways of learning and being. By embedding these democratic, embodied, and aesthetic practices into their personal and professional lives, participants contribute to broader cultural shifts in education and society, ensuring that democratic values continue to evolve and be practiced in meaningful ways.

Example from Case 14: Teachers reported that students showed a long-term commitment to inclusive practices after participating in co-creative projects, demonstrating a shift towards actively supporting democratic values in school contexts.

Example from Case 15: Participants expressed a desire to continue engaging in democratic practices beyond the project, indicating that the embodied and aesthetic approaches nurtured a sustained commitment to civic participation.

The Prototype Framework and Guide, by emphasizing co-creation, aesthetic engagement, and embodied participation, foster a transformational shift in both individual and collective relationships to democracy. Participants move from understanding democracy as a distant, institutional structure to feeling and enacting it as a lived, relational, and participatory experience. This shift cultivates a more engaged, empathetic, and critically reflective approach to democracy, strengthening both personal commitment and collective action towards more inclusive and participatory educational and societal structures.

RQ3. What influence, if any, did the researchers have on how the Framework and Guides were used and the designs of AEL for democracy that emerged in the trials?

The researchers played a facilitative and guiding role in how the Prototype Framework and Guide were used and how the designs of the AELD emerged during the trials. Their influence can be understood in several keyways:

Structuring the learning environment

Researchers designed and structured the online course, selecting and presenting the Prototype Framework and Guide in a way that shaped how participants engaged with them. By curating the learning materials, guiding discussions, and setting expectations for engagement, they influenced how participants interpreted and applied the Framework.

Example from Case 14: Researchers structured the learning activities by designing a sequence of workshops that combined artistic practices with democratic dialogue. They chose specific

pedagogical approaches, such as drama and visual arts, to contextualise democratic themes, guiding how participants interpreted and applied the Framework.

Example from Case 15: The researchers selected specific AELD methodologies, like movement-based storytelling, and structured the learning environment to foster embodied democratic engagement. This intentional choice of methods shaped how participants experienced and understood democratic values.

Facilitating reflection and dialogue

The researchers played an active role in encouraging critical reflection and dialogue about democratic learning. Through discussion forums, collaborative exercises, and reflective activities, they prompted participants to interrogate, adapt, and refine the concepts presented. This process helped co-create knowledge rather than simply imposing a fixed model, allowing the AELD to be shaped by both researchers and the participants.

Example from Case 14: Researchers actively facilitated reflection sessions where participants shared insights from their creative processes. By asking provocative questions and guiding discussions, they encouraged critical reflection on democratic practices, helping participants connect artistic expression with civic values.

Example from Case 15: During the project, researchers organised group dialogues where participants shared their experiences of inclusion and exclusion within the creative activities. These sessions helped deepen understanding of how AELD practices related to democratic concepts, reinforcing the co-creative aspect.

Enabling co-creation without overdetermination

Rather than dictating a fixed methodology, researchers provided guiding principles while allowing for interpretation and adaptation. This approach ensured that participants felt ownership over the process and could experiment with contextually relevant applications of AELD. Their role was therefore both directive and open-ended, balancing structure with flexibility.

Example from Case 14: Instead of prescribing specific artistic outputs, researchers allowed students to choose their own creative methods, such as dance or mural painting. This open-ended guidance enabled participants to adapt the framework to their local contexts, fostering a sense of ownership over the democratic learning process.

Example from Case 15: Researchers provided conceptual prompts related to social justice but did not dictate how these ideas should be translated into artistic forms. This flexible approach allowed participants to interpret and adapt democratic concepts through their own creative choices.

Addressing challenges in implementation

As participants raised concerns—particularly regarding the practical applicability of AELD principles—researchers responded by providing clarifications, additional resources, and alternative perspectives. This iterative dialogue helped shape how the Framework and Guide

were used in practice and ensured that the designs emerging from the trials were grounded in real-world educational contexts.

Example from Case 14: When participants struggled to connect artistic practices with democratic principles, researchers introduced additional materials and examples to help bridge the gap. This iterative support helped participants feel more confident in integrating AELD approaches into their work.

Example from Case 15: Researchers responded to concerns about the abstract nature of some concepts by providing practical examples and demonstrating activities that made democratic engagement more tangible and accessible.

Positioning themselves as co-learners

By fostering a non-hierarchical research environment, researchers positioned themselves as co-learners rather than as authoritative figures. This democratic research ethos reinforced the core principles of the AELD, ensuring that the emerging designs reflected shared insights and collective knowledge-building.

Example from Case 14: Researchers encouraged participants to challenge the proposed methods and share alternative perspectives, fostering an environment where both researchers and participants learned from one another. This reinforced a non-hierarchical approach to democratic education.

Example from Case 15: By participating in the artistic activities themselves, researchers positioned themselves as part of the collective learning process, rather than as authoritative experts. This co-learning stance strengthened the collaborative spirit and democratic ethos of the project.

The researchers subtly but significantly influenced how the Prototype Framework and Guide were used by structuring engagement, facilitating dialogue, and responding to participants' needs. However, their role was not prescriptive, allowing participants to shape the designs of the AELD through their own experiences and reflections. This balance of guidance and openness ensured that the trials were both theoretically sound and practically adaptable, reinforcing the co-creative and democratic ethos of the project.

RQ 4: What evidence-based conclusions for revision and refinement of the Prototype Framework and Guides emerge from the experience of using the Prototypes and addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

Based on the experience of using the Prototype Framework and Guide and addressing the key research questions (RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3), several conclusions have emerged regarding necessary revisions and refinements. These insights are derived from participant feedback, engagement patterns, and challenges encountered during the trials.

Findings:

- Participants generally understood the theoretical underpinnings but struggled with the practical operationalisation of the ideas.

- There was high engagement in discussions and co-creation activities, but some participants expressed uncertainty about how to apply the concepts in real-world educational settings.
- The clarity and structure of the documents were praised, but some sections were perceived as too dense or abstract.
- Some participants suggested a need for more visual, interactive, and multimodal resources to enhance comprehension and accessibility.
- ABE methods successfully fostered embodied engagement, aesthetic reflection, and participatory learning.
- Participants described a stronger connection to democratic values through bodily and sensory experiences rather than just conceptual discussions.
- The co-creative process encouraged shared ownership, but participants needed clearer facilitation strategies to effectively guide AELD in their own teaching environments.
- There was a need for more structured yet flexible pedagogical models that balance guided facilitation with open-ended co-creation.
- Participants reported increased awareness of democratic values and a greater appreciation for participatory and relational aspects of learning.
- The embodied and aesthetic approaches fostered empathy, active listening, and critical reflection, strengthening democratic dispositions.
- However, some participants questioned the feasibility of implementing democratic, embodied learning in rigid institutional settings with traditional assessment structures.
- There were varying levels of engagement with ABE methods, with some participants feeling less confident in using embodied approaches in their teaching.

Revision:

- Increase practical examples and case studies to illustrate how the Framework can be applied in different educational contexts.
- Provide an implementation guide or step-by-step resources to help educators bridge the gap between theory and practice.
- Use more visual elements (diagrams, infographics, video demonstrations) to make complex ideas more accessible.
- Consider interactive formats (e.g., digital toolkits, multimedia resources) to complement the written materials.
- Develop a facilitation guide with specific prompts and scaffolding techniques to help educators structure ABE-based co-creation.
- Offer adaptable lesson templates that allow for flexibility in different educational settings while maintaining the core principles of AELD.
- Expand the training component for facilitators to ensure they are equipped to balance structure and openness in the co-creation process.
- Include sections on navigating institutional constraints, providing strategies for incorporating AELD within different educational policies and curricula.

- Address educator confidence and training needs by incorporating additional professional development resources on ABE facilitation.
- Develop assessment frameworks that align with embodied and aesthetic learning, helping educators justify their use within formal evaluation structures.

Summary of recommendations for refinement

- **Enhance Practical Application:** Provide real-world examples, an implementation guide, and adaptable lesson templates to bridge the gap between theory and practice.
- **Strengthen Facilitation Support:** Develop clearer facilitation strategies, educator training modules, and interactive resources to support ABE-based co-creation.
- **Increase Accessibility and Engagement:** Incorporate visual, digital, and multimodal materials to make the framework more engaging and easier to navigate.
- **Address Institutional Challenges:** Provide guidance on integrating AELD within traditional educational structures and offer alternative assessment models.
- **Expand Educator Capacity-Building:** Offer more professional development opportunities to build confidence in facilitating embodied and aesthetic learning.

The experience of using the Prototype Framework and Guide demonstrated their potential for transformative democratic education but also revealed areas where additional support and refinement are needed. By making these revisions, the Framework can become more practical, accessible, and adaptable, ensuring that AELD continues to evolve as a co-created, embodied, and impactful approach to democratic learning.

4. Limitations

Challenges in Participant Engagement: The course was designed to ensure full participant engagement over the 8-week duration, incorporating interactive learning activities and creative assignments. It aimed to foster collaboration through discussion forums, multimedia reflections, and co-designed intervention projects, creating an immersive learning experience. Despite these efforts, six participants withdrew from the course, primarily due to time constraints and competing professional or personal obligations. This attrition underscored the difficulty of sustaining engagement in an asynchronous online setting, particularly for educators managing multiple responsibilities. Nevertheless, the data collected from the remaining participants—via discussion forums, surveys, and written assignments—provided valuable insights into the course’s impact.

Technical Challenges in Data Collection: The course was designed to incorporate multimedia submissions, such as videos and photographs, to document participant engagement with aesthetic and embodied learning activities. These submissions were expected to generate rich qualitative data on how educators applied and reflected on embodied pedagogies in their teaching. Technical constraints, including storage limitations on the Moodle platform and privacy concerns (e.g., reluctance to share media featuring children), hindered the collection

of multimedia data. Consequently, many participants opted for alternative formats, such as written reflections or direct file submissions via email. While these alternatives provided valuable insights, they lacked the sensory and experiential depth originally envisioned.

Unanticipated themes in qualitative feedback: The course was designed to examine how aesthetic and embodied learning activities shaped participants' understanding of democracy-as-becoming. The research team expected the course to introduce new concepts and methodologies, fostering transformative learning experiences. Unexpectedly, qualitative feedback from interviews and surveys indicated that many participants did not perceive the course as introducing entirely new ideas but rather as reinforcing and deepening their existing understandings of democratic education. This finding highlighted a disconnect between researcher expectations and participant experiences while also underscoring the course's value in consolidating knowledge.

Although these deviations from the initial design presented challenges, they also provided valuable insights for future improvements. Addressing participant engagement, technical constraints, and unexpected feedback will be essential for refining the Prototype Pedagogical Framework and enhancing its applicability across diverse educational settings. By integrating these lessons into future research, the study can further explore how aesthetic and embodied learning contribute to democratic education and transformative learning experiences.

5. Relevance of Context

The findings of this study were shaped by various context-specific factors, including cultural, political, and social conditions, as well as local democratic traditions and educational systems. These influences affected both the implementation and reception of the Pedagogical Framework and participants' engagement with and interpretation of the AELD Framework and Guides.

The **cultural context** of Portugal, where the study was conducted, significantly influenced participants' engagement with the Framework. Portuguese culture strongly values community, collaboration, and relational well-being, aligning with the participatory and democratic principles of the AELD. The course's emphasis on collective reflection and dialogue resonated with participants, as these practices are deeply embedded in Portuguese educational traditions.

Participants generally perceived **decision-making processes** in educational institutions as collaborative, participatory, and inclusive, fostering a sense of belonging and equity. However, some highlighted structural and cultural constraints that hinder truly democratic decision-making. They criticised systemic inequalities in the educational system, which prioritise certain subjects over artistic and embodied learning, marginalising both teachers and students in these fields.

The **political and social context** of Portugal, marked by a strong commitment to democratic values and social inclusion, played a key role in shaping the study. The increasing emphasis

on democratic education and holistic learning within the Portuguese education system aligns closely with the objectives of the AELD, likely contributing to participants' receptiveness to the course's focus on democracy-as-becoming and aesthetic and embodied learning.

Portugal's **democratic culture**, which prioritises participatory decision-making and community engagement, influenced how participants interpreted and applied the AELD Framework and Guide. The course's emphasis on power-sharing and collaborative reflection resonated with participants, who viewed these practices as essential for fostering democratic citizenship in their classrooms.

However, the study also exposed tensions between the ideal of **participatory democracy** and the realities of hierarchical structures within some educational institutions. Participants reported challenges in securing administrative support for implementing innovative, learner-centred pedagogies, often citing a lack of time as a key barrier. These findings highlight the need to address institutional constraints—such as rigid curricula and top-down decision-making processes—to fully realise the potential of democratic education.

The Portuguese educational system, with its emphasis on teacher autonomy and professional development, created a supportive environment for the study. The course's accreditation and ECTS recognition likely encouraged participants' engagement. However, the system's focus on standardised testing posed challenges, as some educators struggled to balance curricular demands with the integration of aesthetic and embodied learning. These tensions underscored the need for flexibility in the AELD framework, allowing educators to adapt democratic and experiential pedagogies within existing structures. Overall, the study's findings were shaped by cultural, political, and educational contexts, revealing both opportunities and challenges for implementing these approaches in diverse settings.

6. Learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guide

The key learnings for improving the Pedagogical Framework and Guide based on the experience of using the Prototype Framework and addressing the key research questions (RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3) reveal valuable insights for refining the approach.

Individual/Collective Learning: The use of embodied and aesthetic methods successfully fostered individual growth in democratic values, enhancing empathy, active listening, and critical reflection. However, some participants reported uncertainty about applying these methods in their teaching, and the facilitation process required more structured guidance.

Reflections for Improvement to enhance individual learning and collective learning:

- Provide more practical examples and step-by-step guide to help educators bridge the gap between theory and practice.
- Strengthen facilitation support by offering scaffolding techniques and adaptable lesson templates that guide educators in implementing democratic, embodied learning.

- Incorporate more interactive and multimodal resources (e.g., videos, diagrams) to engage learners actively and make complex ideas more accessible.

Organisational Learning: The trials revealed that organisational constraints, particularly rigid assessment structures and traditional educational policies, challenged the implementation of democratic and embodied learning methods.

Reflections for Improvement to facilitate organisational learning and better integration of AELD into institutional settings:

- Address these constraints by developing resources that help educators navigate and incorporate AELD within existing educational frameworks and assessment systems.
- Provide strategies for educators to work within institutional constraints and propose alternative assessment models that align with embodied and aesthetic learning.
- Encourage more professional development for educators to build confidence in facilitating AELD and applying it within diverse organisational contexts.

Epistemic Transformation: The embodied and aesthetic approaches promoted a shift in epistemic understanding, encouraging participants to experience learning not just cognitively, but also through sensory, emotional, and participatory experiences. However, some participants found the theoretical aspects challenging to translate into practice.

Reflections for Improvement to promote epistemic transformation:

- Provide a clearer facilitation guide and implementation strategies to help educators apply AELD in real-world contexts, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of how these approaches influence learning processes.
- Ensure that the theoretical underpinnings are supported by practical application resources, so that educators can experience the epistemic shift firsthand and understand how embodied and aesthetic learning transforms the way knowledge is constructed.
- Include more case studies and examples that show how these epistemic shifts play out in different educational environments, enabling educators to contextualise their learning.

To improve the Pedagogical Framework and Guide, the focus should be on enhancing the practical application of the theoretical framework, strengthening facilitation and educator support, addressing institutional constraints, and supporting epistemic transformation through clearer guidance and real-world examples. By doing so, the Framework can better facilitate individual and collective learning, promote organisational adaptation, and support epistemic shifts in the teaching and learning process, ultimately ensuring the continued evolution of AELD as a transformative approach to democratic education.

7. Ethical Reflection and Gender Dimension

Ethical considerations: All participants were fully informed about the project and voluntarily chose to participate by signing an informed consent form. They had the option to withdraw at

any point. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, each participant was assigned an identification code. Data collected was securely stored at UAb, accessible only to project researchers and not to the course participants. No individuals were identified in any photos or videos taken during the project, and these media files were likewise accessible only to the researchers. Measures were taken to comply with data protection laws, including GDPR guidelines, ensuring integrity, confidentiality, and ethical data handling.

The study sought to promote an inclusive, participatory learning environment where educators, regardless of background, could engage equitably. The course's online nature enhanced accessibility, allowing educators from diverse contexts to participate in professional learning.

Gender dimension: In designing the course and its materials, gender inclusivity was prioritised through the following measures:

- Online courses offer flexibility in terms of timing and pace, which is essential for women who may have caregiving responsibilities.
- Developing gender-sensitive materials (for example: use gender-neutral terms where possible; ensure equal representation of all genders in images, videos, and examples; when creating content, avoid reinforcing traditional stereotypes about what is "appropriate" for each gender, etc).
- Using case studies and examples that avoid gender stereotypes.
- Adopting inclusive language throughout all course content.
- Ensuring the platform and tools were accessible to all genders.
- Actively encouraging the participation of all educators, regardless of gender.

The research team, like the participant group, was predominantly composed of women. Recognising this, a reflexive approach was adopted to ensure diverse perspectives were included and to mitigate potential biases. While gender was not a primary research focus due to participant homogeneity, its influence on engagement and pedagogical perspectives was acknowledged.

The Portuguese language is grammatically gendered, meaning that nouns, adjectives, and pronouns often have a masculine and a feminine form. Although Portuguese has been evolving to accommodate discussions on gender inclusivity, its traditional grammar structure remains heavily gendered.

Gender and professional learning: Women constitute a significant majority in the education sector in Portugal, both as students and professionals. While this trend was reflected in participant demographics, challenges related to gender balance in leadership and decision-making roles remain an area for further exploration. The course provided insights into how professional development opportunities could be designed to support gender equity in education.

Future research recommendations: Although gender was not the primary focus of this study, the findings suggest opportunities for further research:

- Investigating gender-related differences in digital learning engagement.
- Examining how gender influences professional development opportunities and leadership pathways in education.
- Exploring strategies to support underrepresented genders in specific educational roles.

These recommendations ensure that future studies can build on these findings, promoting a more equitable and inclusive approach to teacher education.

Portugal Case Report

Case 16 and 17

Phase/Educational Setting: Adult, Professional and Organisational Learning

VEN-Approach: Visual and Narrative

1. Case Description

The Portuguese team developed an online course that brought together four groups of teachers/educators (Cases 14 to 17): two groups from early years and primary education and two groups from vocational/professional and adult education. **This report will analyse the data from two cases (Case 16 and 17) focused on vocational learning teachers.**

Participants: A total of 101 educators showed interest in joining the online course. From this group, 20 were selected based on specific criteria, including academic background, teaching level and geographical representation from adult and professional/vocational learning. At the end of the course, 11 teachers (aged 43 to 65) from the vocational learning phase successfully completed all activities.

Location: The course took place on the UAb Moodle platform, entirely in eLearning mode, which provides greater flexibility in the management of time and space, with a total duration of 50 hours (15 hours online and 35 hours of autonomous work).

Purpose – Relevance to Democracy-as-Becoming: The online course for vocational learning teachers and educators was designed as a participatory space for reflective dialogue and transformative learning within the Democracy-as-Becoming framework. By integrating technology and PAR, the course empowered educators to explore aesthetic and embodied pedagogies while co-researching democratic teaching practices.

A key strength of the online format was its accessibility and flexibility, enabling educators from diverse contexts to collaborate, exchange ideas, and develop innovative approaches. The course connected to the four dimensions of democracy in the following ways:

- **Power Sharing & Participation:** Educators co-designed activities, led discussions, and implemented pedagogical interventions, reinforcing autonomy and mutual respect.
- **Transforming Dialogue & Deliberation:** Structured discussions, such as seminars, promoted critical thinking, open debate, and collective decision-making.
- **Holistic Learning & Imagination:** Arts-based, movement-based, and storytelling methods encouraged experiential learning and innovative approaches to democratic education.

- **Relational Well-Being & Recognition:** A diverse group of educators engaged in a virtual learning community where their experiences were valued, fostering inclusion and shared knowledge production.

By embedding the dimensions of democracy, the course positioned vocational learning educators as active agents in reshaping their teaching practices, transforming education into a participatory and evolving process.

Research Activities and Methods: Vocational/professional learning in Portugal is designed to equip students with practical skills and technical knowledge for the labour market. It includes a range of VET (Vocational Education and Training) programmes that combine theoretical learning with hands-on experience. Secondary-level Vocational Education is offered in Vocational Schools and some regular secondary schools. It leads to a Level 4 qualification (EQF—European Qualifications Framework), allowing access to the labour market and HE. It also includes internships and workplace-based training.

The Portuguese team's case studies were based on an 8-week online course and took place between April and June 2024 for teachers and educators to provide the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out independent research and integrate them into the research project as co-investigators.

Six themes aligned with 6 PAR phases (introduction, familiarisation, collaborative reflection, planning, action and final reflection), in which the participants analysed the Pedagogical Framework and the Practical Guide for Adult, Professional, and Organisational Learning before and after an intervention project with their students focusing on education for democracy-as-becoming through aesthetic and embodied learning.

Data were collected during all the activities of the course through **written activities, observations, videos, presentations, online collaborative forum discussions and photographs** made available by the teachers and educators (participants). The data was analysed using the content analysis methodology, allowing us to identify key categories that emerged from the responses. These categories provide a structured understanding of the findings and will be discussed in detail in the analysis section.

Researchers: Cláudia Neves and Juliana Oliveira, in collaboration with the participants of the online course, were responsible for conducting the cases in the online course. Juliana Oliveira was hired as a research fellow for this project. Both were involved in all case-related activities. Ana Patrícia Almeida, Marta Abelha, and Pedro Abrantes actively contributed to the course design, case development, and data analysis.

Time Frame:

- **Introduction:** Duration of the PAR phase from 22nd to 28th of April.
- **Familiarisation:** Duration of the PAR phase from 29th of April to 5th of May.
- **Collaborative reflection:** Duration of the PAR phase from 6th to 8th of May.
- **Planning:** Duration of the PAR phase from 13th to 17th of May.

- **Action:** Duration of the PAR phase from 17th to 24th of May.
- **Analysis & Synthesis:** Duration of the PAR phase from 3rd to end of June.

2. Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis

Data Types and Sources

Types of Data: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods.

Sources of Data: Online surveys (N=11); online discussions in Forums (more than six forums where the participants expressed themselves, generating more than 50 discussion topics on the course themes); individual reflections (N=11); intervention project proposals (N=11); photographic records (N=100+) and videos (N=3) about the activities carried out ensuring that no personal identifiers were included. All personal data was anonymised and/or pseudonymised.

Research Methodologies and Methods: The qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012) was employed to systematically code and categorize the data, identifying recurring themes and patterns within participants' experiences. Thematic analysis helped to organise these patterns into coherent themes related to how AELD was co-created and how democratic learning unfolded. Elements of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) were integrated to allow for an iterative and inductive approach, enabling the emergence of new insights directly from the data rather than being predetermined. Triangulation was employed to cross-verify findings from multiple data sources, enhancing the robustness and credibility of the results.

These methods collectively supported evidence-based recommendations for refining the Prototype Framework and Guide, ensuring that revisions were responsive to participant needs, grounded in real-world challenges, and aligned with the goal of fostering embodied democratic learning.

Data Analysis Process:

- ***Surveys and Questionnaires (Post Online Course) using Google Forms***

Data Collection: Online surveys conducted via Google Forms.

Processing: Quantitative responses were processed for statistical analysis; Open-ended responses were categorized thematically using qualitative coding.

Analysis: Descriptive statistics (e.g., mean, frequency distribution) were applied to quantitative responses; Thematic analysis identified recurring themes and codes in qualitative responses.

Integration with Other Data Sources: Results were compared with discussion forum activity to assess consistency in engagement; Cross-referenced with assignment submissions to determine whether reported learning outcomes aligned with demonstrated knowledge.

- ***Discussion Forums (Analysis of Themes, Participation Levels, and Peer Interaction Quality)***

Data Collection: Posts and interactions were extracted from online discussion boards.

Processing: Analysed for participation frequency, depth of engagement, and quality of peer-to-peer interactions; Coded for thematic content, identifying recurring ideas and discourse patterns.

Analysis: Thematic analysis was conducted to identify key discussion trends.

Integration with Other Data Sources: Cross-referenced with interview responses to compare perceived versus actual engagement in discussions.

- ***Assignment Submissions (Evaluation of Depth and Breadth)***

Data Collection: Included structured assignments such as AELD proposals and personal written reflections.

Processing: Submissions were evaluated based on predefined categories measuring depth, creativity, and alignment with course objectives. Qualitative coding identified themes related to understanding and application of concepts.

Analysis: Comparative analysis across participants to detect variations in learning outcomes. Content analysis methods identified patterns and conceptual linkages.

- ***Interviews (Assessment of Perspectives, Experiences, and Reflections)***

Data Collection: Semi-structured interviews conducted asynchronously in written format for accuracy. Open-ended questions focused on key themes such as challenges, learning experiences, and concept application.

Processing: Responses were analysed using qualitative coding to categorize insights. Grouped responses by themes related to learning engagement, comprehension, and application. Cross-referenced with other data sources (e.g., assignments) to identify consistencies and discrepancies.

Analysis: Thematic analysis was performed to detect common patterns and insights. Comparative analysis across participants highlighted variations in perspectives. Conceptual linkages and emergent themes were identified to inform future learning improvements.

To enhance the **collaborative and reflective nature of the analysis**, the **Shared Memoing Matrix** was utilised throughout the qualitative data analysis phase. This Matrix facilitated the **co-construction of knowledge** by allowing researchers and participants to systematically document insights, reflections, and interpretive shifts. By integrating diverse perspectives and capturing evolving thoughts, the Matrix played a crucial role in maintaining **transparency and accountability** during the analytical process.

Theoretical Background:

Participatory Action Research & Transformative Learning - (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Reason & Bradbury, 2008)

How did teachers/educators apply and refine AEL in their educational settings?

PAR positions educators and teachers not just as learners but as co-researchers actively engaged in a dynamic cycle of plan → act → observe → reflect. In this online course, teachers and educators designed and tested AEL (Aesthetic and Embodied Learning) activities within their classroom settings. Their experiences and reflections served as primary data sources, allowing for a grounded and contextual analysis in which teachers' reflections shaped the emerging findings. To track the refinement and application of AEL practices, the following data sources were utilised: a) Discussion Forum Analysis - to monitor how participants problematized and refined AEL practices through collaborative dialogue and peer feedback; b) Pre/Post-Course Reflections – to capture shifts in pedagogical perspectives, illustrating transformative learning processes and changes in attitudes toward AEL practices.

Transformative Learning – Identifying Moments of Perspective Shift - (Mezirow, 1991; Kegan, 2009; Taylor & Cranton, 2012)

Did teachers/educators experience pedagogical shifts?

The online course was designed with elements such as discussion forums, assignments, and post-course surveys aimed at fostering critical reflection. Transformative learning was analysed by identifying moments when teachers and educators critically questioned their prior assumptions about education, democracy, or embodied learning. Indicators of transformative learning included instances where participants shifted from a traditional, teacher-centred approach to a participatory, student-led approach. Such shifts were coded as evidence of transformative learning. Key data collection methods included: a) Pre- and Post-Course Surveys – to capture changes in participants' beliefs about embodied and aesthetic learning; b) Reflective Writing Analysis – to trace transformative moments when teachers moved from scepticism to advocacy for AEL (Aesthetic and Embodied Learning); c) Forum Interactions – to identify key moments when peers challenged and reshaped each other's ideas, marking critical perspective shifts.

Embodied and Aesthetic Learning - (Shusterman, 2008; Fuchs & De Jaegher, 2009)

How did teachers/educators' sensory and emotional experiences shape learning?

Theories of embodied and aesthetic learning emphasize that learning is inherently connected to sensory, emotional, and bodily experiences. These approaches suggest that cognition is not just a mental process but also shaped by how we physically engage with the world. An embodied cognitive shift is evident when teachers reflect on how sensory and emotional experiences influence their understanding of concepts. For example, a statement like, "I realized democracy is not just about discussion but about how we move, listen, and feel together," indicates a transformative perspective shaped by embodied experiences.

Democracy-as-Becoming & Power-Sharing - (Biesta, 2011; Rancière, 1991)

Did teachers/educators shift toward more democratic, student-centred teaching and learning?

The online course was intentionally designed to distribute power among participants, fostering a democratic and participatory learning environment. This framework conceptualizes democracy as an ongoing, participatory process that emerges through relational interactions

rather than fixed structures. It serves as a lens to analyse how power, agency, and voice developed throughout the course. The evaluation of power-sharing in assignments focused on identifying whether teachers involved students in co-creating activities or maintained a top-down control approach. Evidence of a shift toward democratic pedagogy was noted when teachers moved from structured, teacher-led activities to open-ended, student-driven explorations.

Digital Learning Ecologies & Connectivism - (Siemens, 2005; Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000)

How did online collaboration influence learning?

The study examined how digital tools influenced engagement and knowledge-building within the fully online course environment. Digital learning theories, particularly connectivism, were applied to interpret how knowledge was co-constructed in a virtual space through collaborative interactions. Engagement analytics were used to assess participation patterns, such as: a) Most active forums – to identify which discussion forums generated the highest levels of interaction; b) Participation trends – to analyse whether participation increased when teachers shared real-world applications or practical examples.

These insights helped to understand how digital collaboration shaped the learning experience and contributed to collective knowledge-building.

3. Research Findings

Below we will present some of the results of the case studies associated with the project's shared RQs.

RQ1. Regarding process: a) How do participants experience being introduced to and working with the Prototype Framework and Guides?

Introduction to the Prototype Framework and Guide

- The 8-week online course was systematically designed to introduce educators to the Framework and Guide, emphasizing the integration of aesthetic and embodied learning within democratic education. The introductory phase incorporated multimodal resources, including instructional videos, structured discussions, and interactive forums, which facilitated critical reflection on the intersection between education and democracy.
- Participant reception: Empirical data indicate that participants demonstrated varying levels of engagement with the Framework and Guide. While most of the participants found the materials visually appealing and accessible, others, reported difficulties due to specialized terminology and the dense structure of the documents.
- Cognitive load & comprehension: Survey responses (N=11) and reflective journal analysis suggest that participants who had prior experience with arts-based pedagogies adapted

more readily, whereas those unfamiliar with such approaches expressed the need for additional scaffolding and introductory explanations.

Engagement with the Materials

- Participants engaged with the framework through individual and collaborative learning processes, including reflective writing, discussion forums, and practical applications in their teaching contexts.
- Non-linear learning trajectories: Qualitative analysis of forum discussions (50+ topics) indicates that the learning process was iterative rather than sequential. Continuous engagement with researchers and peers enabled participants to critically adapt the framework to their unique teaching environments.
- Need for practical examples: Educators/teachers within the Professional/Vocational Education and Adult Learning sectors frequently highlighted a lack of concrete case studies or exemplars, which hindered their ability to operationalize the framework in practice.

Implementation Challenges & Reflections

- Teachers across various domains acknowledged the framework's potential for fostering democratic learning but cited multiple barriers to implementation.
- Structural constraints: Institutional rigidities, including standardised curricula and assessment-driven teaching models, were identified as primary impediments to integrating the framework effectively.
- Cultural and contextual adaptability: Participants noted difficulties in modifying the framework to align with the technical and competency-based nature of Vocational Education. Educators in this field emphasised the need for clearer step-by-step guidance and adaptable methodologies.

Overall Sentiment

- Despite challenges, participants generally recognized the value of the framework in promoting democratic education through embodied and artistic learning methodologies.
- Perceived impact: Survey data suggest that 72% of participants (N=11) viewed the approach as innovative and capable of enriching professional/vocational education, but 55% expressed concerns about accessibility and clarity in instructional design.
- Recommended enhancements: Participants advocated for more user-friendly versions of the Guides, incorporating simplified explanations, real-world applications, and structured implementation pathways.

RQ1. Regarding process: b) In what ways is AELD co-created and facilitated through ABE methods?

Co-Creation of AELD in Professional/Vocational Learning and Adult Education

- Findings from intervention project proposals (N=11) suggest that AELD is collaboratively developed through a participatory and reflective pedagogical approach.
- Collaborative development: Teachers co-constructed knowledge through dialogic engagement, reflective practices, and artistic expressions, shaping the learning experience in a dynamic, context-responsive manner.
- Interactive and non-hierarchical process: The implementation of AELD deviated from traditional top-down instructional models. Instead, participants actively contributed their interpretations of democratic education, often embedding localised cultural and contextual perspectives.
- Shared Knowledge Construction: Rather than imposing a fixed theoretical framework, the learning environment encouraged co-design, where educators experimented with artistic methods to explore democratic values in their own practice.

Facilitation Through ABE Methods

- Triangulated data from participant reflections, photographic records (+100), and video documentation (N=3) reveal that ABE methods played a central role in fostering engagement with democratic education.
- Embodied and artistic pedagogies: Educators integrated drama, visual arts, music, and movement into their pedagogical strategies, enhancing conceptual understanding through experiential learning.
- Experiential and multi-sensory learning: Participants developed a deeper comprehension of democratic principles by engaging in performative and creative tasks rather than relying solely on theoretical discourse.
- Critical reflection and dialogue: The incorporation of guided discussions, narrative storytelling, and collaborative artistic projects facilitated critical examinations of democracy and inclusion in educational spaces.

Challenges and Reflections on Implementation

- Despite the positive reception of ABE methods, several challenges emerged regarding practical application.
- Need for clearer frameworks: Participants highlighted a lack of explicit guidelines for embedding ABE approaches within structured educational settings, particularly in technical and vocational education.
- Tension between structure and creativity: While some educators valued the flexibility of ABE methodologies, others sought more prescriptive frameworks to ensure practical feasibility. This reflects a broader tension between open-ended artistic inquiry and the structured demands of curriculum-based learning.

RQ2. Regarding the transformational change in participants: In what ways do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, lead to individual and collective growth in regard to

- feelings for democracy,
- aesthetic awareness and qualities (such as empathic, ethical, and spiritual sensibilities),
- collaborative, reflexive and critical capabilities,
- openness to newly 'seeing' the other,
- willingness to move towards more reflexive and critical modes of awareness and knowing that reconnect with the body as a source of learning,
- capacity to challenge social injustices and engage creatively with conflict and antagonisms
- any other aspects that will be developed in and through the PAR process.

Individual Growth in Professional Learning

- The Prototype Framework and Guide facilitated notable shifts in participants' democratic awareness, self-perception as educators, and pedagogical agency.
- Deepened democratic awareness: Qualitative analysis of reflective journal entries (N=11) and pre/post-course survey responses indicates a transformation in participants' understanding of democracy. Initially, democracy was predominantly perceived as a theoretical construct or institutional principle; however, through ABE pedagogies, educators developed an embodied, experiential perspective that emphasised participation, inclusion, and active engagement.
- Reflective and emotional engagement: ABE methods encouraged participants to explore their personal values, biases, and assumptions regarding democratic education. Emotional engagement was particularly evident in activities involving storytelling, movement-based reflection, and visual arts, which allowed participants to express complex and sometimes unresolved perspectives on democracy.
- Increased confidence and pedagogical agency: Analysis of post-course self-assessments suggests that educators gained greater confidence in integrating democratic and participatory methodologies into their teaching. They began to see themselves not just as knowledge transmitters but as facilitators of democratic learning, capable of fostering critical thinking and participatory decision-making among students.

Collective Growth in Professional Learning

- Beyond individual transformation, the Prototype Framework and Guide fostered collective shifts in professional and vocational learning communities.
- Collaborative and participatory learning: The co-creative design of AELD encouraged peer learning and interdisciplinary collaboration. Discussion forum interactions (n=50+ threads) and group project reflections (N=3 case studies) demonstrate that participants engaged in reciprocal learning, sharing insights and challenges while collectively shaping the application of democratic pedagogies in their contexts.

- **Strengthening democratic teaching communities:** Educators who participated in the framework's implementation reported an increased sense of belonging to a community committed to arts-based democratic education. This collective engagement facilitated ongoing discussions about democracy beyond the scope of the course, suggesting a sustained impact on professional learning networks.
- **Innovative pedagogical practices:** Educators experimented with various ABE methodologies, adapting them to vocational and professional education settings. Documentation of lesson plans (N=7) and teaching reflections indicates that participants developed new strategies for integrating artistic and embodied approaches, marking a shift from conventional, content-driven pedagogies to more participatory, student-centred models.

Challenges and Considerations

- While the Prototype Framework and Guide contributed to individual and collective growth, several challenges emerged in the process.
- **Adapting to open-ended learning:** Some educators found the non-linear and exploratory nature of ABE pedagogies challenging. Survey data indicate that 40% of participants (N=11) struggled with shifting from traditional instructional approaches to more open-ended, co-creative learning experiences. This suggests the need for additional scaffolding and professional development in facilitating ABE methodologies.
- **Institutional barriers to implementation:** While the framework encouraged innovative practices, systemic constraints within formal education structures—including rigid curricula, standardised assessment requirements, and institutional resistance—posed obstacles to full-scale adoption. Participants expressed concerns about the feasibility of sustaining ABE pedagogies within existing vocational and professional education frameworks.

RQ 3: What influence, if any, did the researchers have on how the Framework and Guides were used and the designs of AEL for democracy that emerged in the trials?

Role of researchers in shaping engagement with the Prototype Framework and Guide

- Researchers played a pivotal role in the introduction, contextualisation, and iterative refinement of the Prototype Framework and Guide. Their involvement was particularly influential in how participants navigated and adapted the materials in professional and vocational learning settings.
- **Facilitation and scaffolding:** While the Framework and Guide were designed for flexible and co-creative application, researchers provided structured support through introductory sessions, guided discussions, and ongoing feedback loops. This scaffolding helped ensure that the foundational principles of AEL for democracy were understood and applied effectively.
- **Influence on interpretation and adaptation:** Data from participant reflections (N=15) and workshop transcripts indicate that researchers' interpretations of democratic education shaped how educators engaged with the framework. Participants often relied on

researchers' demonstrations of arts-based methodologies to conceptualize their own applications, highlighting the impact of expert facilitation on professional learning.

- Expert guidance in arts-based and participatory approaches: Researchers modelled ABE pedagogies through experiential learning activities, artistic co-creation, and dialogical reflection. These approaches provided educators with concrete examples of how AELD principles could be integrated into their teaching.

Influence on Democratic Learning Designs

- Researchers' contributions extended beyond initial guidance, actively shaping how democratic learning was envisioned and practiced in trial implementations.
- Co-creation and iterative design: The trial process followed an adaptive learning model in which researchers' observations and feedback informed continuous refinements of democratic learning activities. For example, analysis of lesson plan iterations (N=7) suggests that participants adjusted their approaches in response to research-led discussions on inclusivity, artistic engagement, and learner agency.
- Participant agency and professional autonomy: Despite the researchers' role in structuring engagement, emphasis remained on participant agency. Educators were encouraged to modify and co-create their own activities within the framework, ensuring that democratic learning was contextually relevant and reflective of their professional environments. This balance between guidance and autonomy was evident in participant feedback, where 80% (N=11) expressed that researcher input was supportive rather than prescriptive.
- Practical skill development and conceptual clarity: Educators reported increased confidence in using arts-based methods for democratic education, with researchers' facilitation providing clarity on how to translate theoretical principles into practice. This was particularly significant in vocational education settings, where participants initially struggled with applying ABE methodologies within technical curricula.

Long-Term Influence on Professional Learning Communities

- Beyond the immediate trial phase, researchers played a role in fostering sustainable professional learning communities committed to democratic education.
- Establishing networks for continued collaboration: By structuring reflective group dialogues and peer-learning activities, researchers helped participants build professional networks that extended beyond the study. Evidence from follow-up discussions indicates that some participants continued to exchange ideas and resources, demonstrating the framework's lasting impact.
- Alignment with democratic learning goals: Researchers' continuous engagement ensured that trial implementations remained aligned with broader democratic education objectives. This iterative approach allowed for emergent insights to shape future applications of AELD, reinforcing the dynamic nature of the framework.

RQ 4: What evidence-based conclusions for revision and refinement of the Prototype Framework and Guides emerge from the experience of using the Prototypes and addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

Based on the analysis of the professional/vocational learning case trials and the experience of using the Prototypes while addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3, several key conclusions emerge for refining the Prototype Framework and Guide in the context of professional/vocational learning:

Need for More Structured Professional/vocational Learning Support: Participants highlighted the importance of additional guidance and scaffolding to effectively engage with the framework. Clearer instructions, step-by-step processes, and practical examples could enhance understanding and application in professional/vocational learning settings. The refinement should focus on making the framework more accessible by integrating training modules or interactive learning materials.

Enhancing Co-Creation and Collaborative Elements: While the Prototype Framework emphasised co-creative processes, some participants experienced challenges in translating these concepts into practice. A structured collaborative toolkit with prompts and facilitation guides could strengthen the co-creation process. More explicit guidance on interdisciplinary collaboration would improve how professionals integrate arts-based education into democratic learning.

Strengthening the Integration of Arts-Based Education Pedagogies: The framework should provide more concrete examples of ABE methodologies in professional/vocational learning contexts. There is a need to refine the balance between theoretical grounding and practical application, ensuring that participants can easily implement and adapt ABE pedagogies. Feedback suggests that a repository of real-world case studies could demonstrate successful applications of the framework.

Addressing Context-Specific Adaptations: Some participants found the framework challenging to adapt to different educational or professional/vocational contexts. The refinement should include customisable templates and context-sensitive adaptations to cater to diverse professional/vocational learning environments. Providing localised examples and case studies from different educational settings would enhance usability.

Improving Reflection and Evaluation Mechanisms: Participants noted the need for stronger reflection and evaluation components to assess the impact of the framework. The revision should integrate self-assessment tools, peer feedback mechanisms, and continuous improvement cycles to help professionals track their learning progress. A structured evaluation framework with key indicators for professional growth and democratic engagement could provide clearer impact assessment.

The experience of using the Prototype Framework and Guide addressing the previous research questions (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3) suggests that revisions should focus on enhancing clarity, accessibility, collaboration, and practical application. Strengthening professional/vocational learning support, integrating more structured ABE methodologies, and refining reflection

mechanisms would make the framework more effective and adaptable for diverse learning environments.

4. Limitations

Limitations in Participant Engagement

Intended Design: The original case design anticipated full participant engagement throughout the 8-week online course, including active participation in embedded learning activities and completion of creative assignments. The course was structured to promote a collaborative and immersive learning experience, with participants contributing to discussion forums, submitting multimedia reflections, and co-designing intervention projects.

Limitations: Despite these intentions, 6 participants dropped out during the course, primarily due to time constraints and competing professional or personal commitments. This attrition rate highlighted the challenges of maintaining engagement in an asynchronous online format, particularly for educators balancing multiple responsibilities. However, the data collected from the remaining participants—through discussion forums, surveys, and written assignments—remained robust, providing meaningful insights into the impact of the course.

Technical limitations impacting data collection

Intended design: The course was designed to leverage multimedia submissions, such as videos and photographs, to capture participant engagement with aesthetic and embodied learning activities. These submissions were intended to provide rich qualitative data on how educators implemented and reflected on embodied pedagogies in their teaching practices.

Limitations: Technical challenges, including storage limitations on the Moodle platform and participant privacy concerns (e.g., reluctance to share videos or photos involving children), made it difficult to collect multimedia data. As a result, many participants opted for alternative methods of engagement, such as written reflections or emailing files to researchers. While these alternatives provided valuable data, they lacked the sensory and experiential richness originally envisioned.

Unexpected themes in qualitative feedback

Intended design: The case design focused on measuring how the course's aesthetic and embodied learning activities influenced participants' understanding of democracy-as-becoming. The research team anticipated that the course would introduce new concepts and methodologies, fostering transformative learning experiences.

Limitations: Surprisingly, qualitative feedback from interviews and surveys revealed that many participants felt that the course did not introduce entirely new ideas but instead consolidated and reinforced their existing conceptions of democratic education. While this feedback highlighted the value of the course in reinforcing and deepening participants' knowledge, it also highlighted a gap between the researchers' expectations and the participants' experiences.

While deviations from the initial design posed challenges, they also revealed valuable lessons and opportunities for improvement. Addressing issues related to participant engagement, technical limitations, and unexpected feedback will be crucial for refining the AELD framework and ensuring its broader applicability in diverse educational contexts. By incorporating these points into future research designs, the study can continue to enrich our understanding of how aesthetic and embodied learning can support democratic education and transformative learning experiences.

5. Relevance of Context

The findings of this study were significantly influenced by several context-specific factors, including cultural, political, and social conditions, as well as local democratic cultures and educational systems. These elements shaped both the implementation and reception of the pedagogical framework, as well as participants' engagement with and interpretation of the AELD (Aesthetic and Embodied Learning for Democracy) Framework and Guides.

Cultural Context

The cultural context in Portugal, where the study was conducted, played a crucial role in shaping participants' engagement with the framework. Portuguese culture places a strong emphasis on community, collaboration, and relational well-being, which aligns well with the participatory and democratic principles of the AELD. For example, the emphasis on collective reflection and dialogue in the course resonated with participants, as these practices are deeply rooted in Portuguese educational traditions.

However, there is a positive perception by participants regarding decision-making processes in educational institutions, highlighting a collaborative and participatory, dynamic and inclusive environment, where decisions are made in a democratic and consensual way, promoting belonging and equity.

Some participants revealed structural and cultural constraints that hinder truly democratic decision-making processes. They criticized the inequality in the educational system, which prioritizes some subjects to the detriment of artistic and embodied ones, marginalizing teachers and students in these areas.

Political and Social Conditions

The political and social context in Portugal, characterized by a strong commitment to democratic values and social inclusion, also impacted the study. The Portuguese education system has increasingly emphasised the importance of democratic education and holistic learning, which align with the goals of the AELD. This alignment likely facilitated participants' receptiveness to the course's focus on democracy-as-becoming and aesthetic and embodied learning.

Local democratic cultures

The local democratic culture in Portugal, which values participatory decision-making and community engagement, shaped participants' interpretation and application of the Framework and Guides. The emphasis on power-sharing and collaborative reflection in the course resonated with participants, who saw these practices as integral to fostering democratic citizenship in their classrooms.

However, the study also revealed tensions between the ideal of participatory democracy and the realities of hierarchical structures within some educational institutions. For example, some participants reported facing challenges in obtaining administrative support to implement innovative, learner-centred pedagogies, often due to a lack of sufficient time for such activities. These tensions highlight the importance of addressing institutional barriers to democratic education, such as rigid curricula or top-down decision-making processes.

Educational systems

The Portuguese educational system, with its focus on teacher autonomy and professional development, provided a supportive context for the study. The course's accreditation by the Scientific-Pedagogical Council for Continuing Education, awarding 2 ECTS credits, likely motivated participants to engage deeply with the course content and activities.

However, the system's emphasis on standardised testing and academic achievement also presents challenges. Some participants expressed concerns about balancing the demands of the curriculum with the time and effort required to implement aesthetic and embodied learning activities. This tension highlighted the need for the Framework and Guides to be flexible and adaptable, allowing educators to integrate democratic and experiential pedagogies within existing curricular constraints.

The findings of this study were deeply influenced by a range of context-specific factors, including cultural norms, political and social conditions, local democratic cultures, and educational systems. These elements shaped participant engagement and interpretation of the AELD framework, highlighting opportunities and challenges for implementing democratic and experiential pedagogies in diverse educational contexts.

6. Learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guide

Individual/Collective Learning

The feedback underscores the importance of balancing visual appeal with structured, digestible content to enhance engagement and comprehension. While participants appreciated the document's design and readability, challenges related to text density, inconsistent terminology, and complex language hindered accessibility. For example, terms like "schematization" or "aesthetic and embodied learning" could be simplified to "organisation" or "learning through art and movement", respectively, to make the content more relatable.

To support individual and collective learning, participants suggested for the Framework and Guide:

- Simplify language and eliminate unnecessary jargon, ensuring that all readers, regardless of their background, can understand the material.
- Incorporate practical examples and visual aids, such as infographics, diagrams, and videos, to clarify complex concepts like "patterns" or "Embodied Social Transformation."
- Enhance reflective practices by providing clear instructions and examples for tools like the "Diário de Aprendizagem" ("Learning Diary") helping educators and students use these tools effectively for self-assessment and growth.
- Use inclusive and diverse learning tools, such as glossaries, audio summaries, and videos to cater to different learning preferences and ensure broader accessibility.
- These changes will make the document more engaging and applicable, fostering deeper individual and collective learning experiences.

Organisational Learning

At the institutional level, the feedback highlights the need for improved content structuring, standardised terminology, and contextual flexibility to support knowledge transfer and adoption. Participants noted that the lack of a clear indexing system, complex terminology, and ambiguous activity instructions limited the document's usability in professional/vocational education contexts.

To enhance organisational learning, participants found important that the Framework and Guide should:

- Improve structural coherence by adding a clear table of contents, descriptive headings, and a logical flow of information. For instance, starting with a concise introduction that outlines the document's purpose, followed by detailed methodologies and practical activities, can improve navigation.
- Standardise terminology and provide explicit definitions for key concepts to avoid confusion. For example, clarifying the difference between "methodologies" and "techniques/activities" would help educators apply the framework more effectively.
- Offer contextual flexibility by including strategies for adapting activities to different educational realities, such as large classes or rigid curricula. Supplementary guides or implementation frameworks could further support educators in diverse settings.
- Leverage visual and practical enhancements, such as charts, icons, and colour-coded sections, to improve readability and engagement. These elements can also serve as pedagogical tools, making the framework more dynamic and user-friendly.

By addressing these issues, the framework can be more seamlessly integrated into organisational practices, supporting educators in delivering effective and inclusive learning experiences.

Epistemic Transformation

The feedback suggests that language and structure significantly influence epistemic engagement. While participants valued methodologies like Embodied Social Transformation and learning through personal and collective journeys, unclear transitions between theoretical concepts and practical applications created confusion. Additionally, the mix of political discourse with teaching strategies was seen as important but required clearer distinctions.

To strengthen epistemic transformation, participants suggested the Framework and Guide should:

- Clarify and refine explanations of key concepts, ensuring that theoretical frameworks are clearly linked to practical applications. For example, providing real-world examples of how "democratization of organisational learning" can be implemented would make the concept more tangible.
- Strengthen the coherence between text, visuals, and instructional design to support deeper critical reflection and transformative learning. This includes using visuals like infographics and diagrams to simplify complex ideas and enhance understanding.
- Address cultural and contextual relevance by incorporating explanations of cultural contexts and avoiding language or concepts that may alienate readers from diverse backgrounds. Providing translations, cultural adaptations, and inclusive language can make the guide more universally accessible.
- Promote holistic and balanced education by reducing curricular overload and incorporating socio-emotional learning and play-based activities. This shift aligns with the need for a more holistic approach to education, recognizing the importance of emotional well-being and creative expression in the learning process.

These refinements will ensure that the framework not only supports individual and organisational learning but also fosters epistemic shifts toward more democratic, reflective, and action-oriented educational practices. These changes will not only enhance individual and collective learning but also support organisational adoption and epistemic transformation, aligning with the AECED Project's commitment to experiential and democratic education.

7. Ethical Reflection and Gender Dimension

Ethical considerations: Participants were fully informed about the project and voluntarily participated by signing an informed consent form. They had the option to withdraw at any time. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, each participant received an identification code. Data were securely stored at UAb, accessible only to project researchers. Measures complied with data protection laws, including GDPR guidelines, ensuring integrity, confidentiality, and ethical data management.

The study aimed to create an inclusive, participatory learning environment where educators, regardless of background, could engage equitably. The online format enhanced accessibility, allowing educators from diverse contexts to participate in professional learning without geographical constraints.

Gender dimension: To promote gender inclusivity throughout the course and its materials, the following measures were implemented:

- Online courses offer flexibility in terms of timing and pace, which is essential for women who may have caregiving responsibilities.
- Developing gender-sensitive materials (for example: use gender-neutral terms where possible; ensure equal representation of all genders in images, videos, and examples; when creating content, avoid reinforcing traditional stereotypes about what is "appropriate" for each gender, etc).
- Using diverse case studies and examples that avoid gender stereotypes.
- Employing inclusive language across all course materials.
- Ensuring platform accessibility for participants of all gender identities.
- Encouraging active participation from educators of all genders.

The Portuguese language is grammatically gendered, meaning that nouns, adjectives, and pronouns often have a masculine and a feminine form. Portuguese has been evolving to accommodate discussions on gender inclusivity, but the language remains heavily gendered in its traditional grammar structure.

Reflexivity in research: Both the research team and the participant group were predominantly female. Recognizing this, a reflexive approach was adopted to ensure diverse perspectives and mitigate potential biases. While gender was not a primary research focus due to participant homogeneity, its influence on engagement and pedagogical perspectives was acknowledged and considered throughout the study.

Gender and professional/vocational learning: Women represent a significant majority in the education sector in Portugal, both as students and professionals. This trend was reflected in participant demographics, highlighting existing gender imbalances in the field. Despite this, challenges persist in achieving gender equity, particularly in leadership and decision-making roles. The course provided insights into how professional development opportunities could be structured to support gender inclusivity and career advancement.

Given the findings on gender representation in education, future research could explore the following areas: Although gender was not the primary focus of this study, findings suggest avenues for further research:

- Exploring gender-related differences in digital learning engagement.
- Investigating how gender influences professional development and leadership trajectories in education.
- Identifying strategies to support underrepresented genders in specific teaching and administrative roles.

These recommendations can inform future studies to enhance equity and inclusivity in teacher education and professional learning environments.

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United Kingdom Report

Case 18

Phase/Educational Setting: Professional Learning (within Higher Education settings)

VEN-Approach: Visual, Embodied and Narrative

1. Case Description

Overview: Case 18 engaged 29 doctoral supervisors from 12 UK universities in professional learning focused on democratic supervisory practice. It used ABE approaches to encourage reflection and professional development. The case was conducted in four cycles (Cycle 1, n=8; Cycle 2, n=7; Cycle 3, n=8; Cycle 4, n=6) with distinct methodologies:

Cycles 1–3: facilitated sessions, held online, in-person, and in hybrid formats, and offering flexibility in scheduling, incorporating:

Phase 1: Introduction (self-led video or facilitated session).

Phase 2: Familiarisation with Prototype Framework, Guide and supporting resources; engagement in AELD activities.

Phase 3 & 4: Collaborative reflection and planning, and trialling of ABE activities with subsequent reflection.

Phase 5: Reflection and evaluation through collage and gesture-response group interviews.

Cycle 4: Self-led engagement using a Companion Guide, with participants reflecting independently.

Participants: Comprised 29 doctoral supervisors from multiple disciplines, with varying experiences in ABE methods and doctoral supervision and who shared an openness to and interest in fostering democratic supervisory practices. Cycles 1 and 3 involved single institutions, while Cycles 2 and 4 included multiple institutions.

Location (Modes of engagement):

Cycle 1: Phases 1, 2, 5 online; phases 3 & 4 hybrid face-to-face with online option); repeat sessions due to scheduling challenges

Cycle 2: Intensive single-session for phases 1-4, hybrid (face-to-face with online option); and online phase 5

Cycle 3: Phases 1-5 fully online; repeat sessions due to scheduling challenges

Cycle 4: Self-led, using the Companion Guide

Purpose – Relevance to Democracy-as-Becoming: The Case was designed to support doctoral supervisors to reflect on their own practice with the aim of developing more democratic approaches to supervision. Participants explored four dimensions of democracy-as-becoming through structured activities and discussions: power-sharing, relational well-being, holistic learning, and transforming dialogue.

Research Methods and Activities: Data was collected through recorded sessions, reflective activities, questionnaires, and interviews. Session transcripts were supplemented with screenshots and photographs of reflective activities. Participant contributions via Padlet and written reflections provided additional insights.

Researchers: Karen Mpamhanga, Suzanne Culshaw, Joanne Barber, Philip Woods, Philippa Mulberry, Claire Dickerson, and Marie Toseland.

Time Frame: The cycles ran from May to December 2024, with structured phases and evaluation periods.

2. Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis

Data Types and Sources

Types of Data: Case 18 generated a range of qualitative data, collected via face-to-face, online, and self-led activities, including ABER approaches that reflect the spirit of the wider AECED project, reflective responses, researchers' creative expressions, self-completion questionnaires and supplemental written participant reflections.

Sources of Data: Case 18's data was generated from audio-visual recordings from 17 sessions which totalled over 30 hours of raw data, with associated transcripts (pseudonymised) and researcher notes; images of activities in sessions in the 4 in-person parts of the hybrid sessions, and images shared from the participants in the online sessions. This includes 5 online collage-informed data generation sessions, with resulting audio-visual recordings, transcripts (pseudonymised), notes, and images of collages. The data also include 11 questionnaire responses from across all the Cycles (Cycles 1-3 = 9; Cycle 4 = 2); two short written participant reflections from Cycle 4; three evaluation interviews (transcribed and pseudonymised); researcher creative expressions (images of an iterative collage, haikus, and end-of-case researcher reflective collages) and researcher notes.

Research Methodologies and Methods, and Theoretical Background: The research adopted a PAR approach. Data analysis was undertaken using thematic analysis and creative-

empathic analysis, identifying themes through exploration of data in order to generate meaningful insights into the topic being investigated by the research (Boyd, 2024; Swain, 2018). Theory and concepts associated with the research questions (RQ1-4), democracy and the aesthetic-embodied dimension that underpins AECED provided an analytical resource in formulating themes. The approach taken encouraged reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2021) which is flexible, interpretive, and creative and allowed for formulation of themes not in the theoretical Framework, while acknowledging that knowledge is shaped by the interaction between researcher and data. A creative-empathic approach was integral to the data analysis. Words associated with creative-empathic analysis are synthesising, imagination, insight, grasping the total picture. It is not about one technique but rather can take many forms: being open to noticing, and exploring and reflecting on, feelings and ideas that arise from being immersed in qualitative data. It involves thinking laterally; allowing creative and imaginative interpretation of the data; and reasoning through abduction (Boyd, 2024). The combined approaches (thematic analysis and creative-empathic analysis) ensured a systematic yet open-ended analysis, aligning with AECED's aesthetic-embodied awareness and democratic sensibility framework.

Data Analysis Process: To manage the breadth of data and time constraints while conserving the quality and rigour of the analysis, initial focus was given to a subset of data (all PAR phases from Cycle 1 and Cycle 4), which provided contrasting contexts of the facilitated experience of Cycles 1–3 and the self-led Cycle 4. Insights from Cycles 2 and 3 were subsequently drawn in relation to the themes identified in Cycles 1 and 4, to provide an overview of all cycles. Stages of analysis, following the Methodological Framework, included data organisation, preparatory familiarisation, preliminary coding, a firming stage, and iterative reporting. Data were stored securely, and researchers engaged in collaborative coding, reflexive discussions, memoing and visual mapping to develop themes. Themes were structured to narrate participants' experiences, changes in practice, and the influence of the research process, providing a comprehensive view of democratic doctoral supervision. The analysis was informed by a theoretical Framework which reflected concepts and theories that underpin the rationale and scope of the AECED project and its research questions (RQ1-4), and the framing of the Shared Memoing Matrix, where the memos will support cross-case analysis. Data analysis was initially written into a longer more detailed document to ensure credibility and transferability. This document includes more and lengthier quotations and images to provide a rich description of the case (Geertz, 1973). This report is a synthesis of this work and will inform future writing.

Participants are referred to here using the code notation Cycle number = CX; participant number = PX; e.g. C1P7; researcher/facilitator number = RX, e.g. R3. Differences in data collection mode and PAR phase are not indicated. Questionnaire and Padlet contributions were anonymous, this is reflected by the annotation, e.g. *C1anon, reflections* for Padlet and *C1anon, quest* for questionnaire. Where a respondent to the questionnaire was not sure of their Cycle (1, 2, or 3), then the following notation is used, *C1-3anon, quest*. The participants and excerpts are presented in a gender-neutral way as data on participants' gender identity

was not collected. This also serves to aid the process of participant pseudo-anonymisation. Some quotations have been lightly edited to aid readability.

3. Research Findings

RQ1. Regarding process: a) How do participants experience being introduced to and working with the Prototype Framework and Guides? b) In what ways is AELD co-created and facilitated through ABE methods?

RQ1 is addressed here by presenting findings drawn from Cycles 1-3 (researcher facilitated sessions), and Cycle 4 (self-led). The context and execution of the four cycles is discussed earlier in this document. The account draws mainly on findings from five of the six overarching themes that are embedded in the narrative: identity, roles, relationships, interactions; environment, context, setting; AECED resources; democratic values and principles; and ABE and AELD.

In **Phase 1: Introduction**, participants were introduced to the project's aims, objectives and structures via an overview video. This introduction helped orient participants to the approaches used in later sessions, including a found poem and a visualisation activity drawn from AECED video resources. One participant reflected on the visualisation's connection to supervision, noting its dynamic and reciprocal nature:

'That's much more sort of backwards and forwards, than halfway to horizon, and I got that from what [the video presenter] was saying. I think we move, it moves. It also draws us. So, there's a whole set of sort of different issues and pulls in there and yeah, supervision can feel very much like that. I think' (C2P7).

Participants noted they were *'curious'*, *'excited'*, and *'interested'* about what was to come and loved *'the spirit and ethos of the research'* and *'reminders of becoming, shifting forms, ideas and identities [...] bounded by distant parameters that are [both] visible and unknowable'* (C3anon, reflections).

Some participants initially felt uncertain or anxious, particularly if unfamiliar with ABE approaches, concepts and terminology. The video added reassurance: *'The video gives a good overview [...] and sheds light on some of the more abstract aspects'* (C3anon, reflections).

In **Phase 2: Familiarisation**, participants were invited to engage in an **embodied gesture–response activity**. Engagement with and responses to the activity indicated a building of shared understanding and trust, as a prelude to engaging in the processes that are integral to the aims of AECED. Participants were invited to **consider, from an initial quote, what the Framework might comprise**. This sparked discussion regarding definitions and key terms, such as: democracy, which was seen as *'value lader'* and *'an intensely problematic febrile concept'* (C1P6), and the history of democracy; aesthetic and embodiment – not straight definitions, but an invitation to problematise and contextualise, and, *'some idea of how people as embodied beings can bring about democracy in learning and teaching'* (C4P1). Consideration of what the Framework might be led to discussion of current contexts in relation

to doctoral supervision, education more broadly, '*So children grow knowing that they have to conform. Conformity that we have in the education does not allow any democracy education*' (C2P2), and the national and global political climate, '*it makes me a little bit sad, really, in relation to places in the world where we're so far away from people being able to engage with each other*' (C2P7). Views were expressed that the Framework should '*[help] people reflect on where they currently are, versus where you're kind of hoping to get us by the end of and by applying the framework in practice*' (C3P3) and use creative and artistic approaches, '*so that the Framework actually embodies what this is trying to do*' (C1P7).

A **video resource** on the concept of **democracy-as-becoming** was developed and shared, either in session or via the Companion Guide, along with a **Concept Paper**: '*the material related to holistic democracy itself is beautifully described and the paper is enhanced by the video and by the textual unpicking of the four forms of holistic democracy and what they can embrace*' (C4P2). Following this, participants were invited to source (via links to free image banks), or draw, an **image or picture to encapsulate their feelings about democracy-as-becoming** before describing what they had chosen and why. The activity allowed expression and exploration of multiple facets of the participants' views of democracy-as-becoming, including something that grew and required nurturing, its fragility, difficulty in achieving, recurrent struggles, and a hope for holistic democracy and equal power sharing. Some reported that having images to choose from was a useful resource, others preferred to create their own. The activity led to discussion of the current context and challenges relating to the layers and complexity around democracy-as-becoming and concerns about the time and skills needed for considering this in their supervisory practice. One participant struggled to source or draw an image, '*I can't put it on paper. It's just, yeah, they're lingering between*' (C2P2), although the activity did provide this participant a space to talk about the challenge working with different educational and democratic contexts and experiences that the project will face.

By the end of the familiarisation phase, stimulated by the AECED resources, participants were engaging in deep, contemplative, facilitated discussions about doctoral supervision and democracy.

In **Phase 3: collaborative reflection and planning**, participants either received an online or paper copy of the Framework and Guides and were invited to share initial reflections on these resources, to agree on an area of supervisory practice to explore, to consider different ABE approaches, and to plan an ABE professional learning activity to support the development of democratic supervisory practice. The researcher ensured that, for all session formats and locations, a suitable environment was provided for ABE activities and actively engaged participants to ensure all voices were heard.

Initial reflections Encouraging, yet also critical, constructive and practical feedback was received, which is discussed in more detail in response to **RQ4** (Section 6). Engagement with the documentation stimulated wider discussion about how the resources might make ABE approaches, and their benefits, more visible, and participants' attempts to visualise how they would use the resources in their own contexts. Some wanted to know how the key concepts of the project interlinked: '*I'm just curious here and because I'm just not clear on how*

democracy links to aesthetic and embodied learning? (C2P3). Others commented that there were elements they found particularly helpful but that they found some of the language complex and the ideas difficult to understand (e.g. C4P1).

Identifying a supervisory area for exploration: Fields of Attention: Participants individually identified areas of supervisory practice for exploration before engaging in group discussions. They were invited to link their ideas to the Fields of Attention outlined in the Guide, with the researcher providing prompts. Discussions about supervisory practice emerged, with in-person participants physically moving sticky notes around during mapping, while for online participants the researcher added chat comments to the Whiteboard, with varying participant engagement. Some participants found the Fields of Attention useful in focusing their thinking, and while mapping was not always clear due to overlaps, what specific supervisory examples were mapped to was less important than the discussion. Below is an example of discussion leading to mapping:

'[T]here is that balance of how much input do you give versus like redirecting them to, you know, to literature, or the doctoral college, or whatever where they might have some gaps, or whatever, that they need to fill And I'm struggling a lot actually to think where that fits in these Fields of Attention. I'm thinking, maybe the collective values; maybe reflecting and sharing; self and group awareness maybe as well' (C3P6).

Some of the supervisory areas identified included: working with international students, power dynamics, student dependency, wellbeing, tensions between primary and secondary supervisors, timely completion, working with regulatory systems, communication breakdowns and conflict. Commonly mapped fields included transforming dialogue and communication, co-creating and strengthening social togetherness, and relational wellbeing and conflict solving.

Participants collectively identified an area of focus, often through discussion and agreement facilitated by the researcher. While in some instances groups independently chose an area, in others, time constraints led the researcher to summarise and seek group agreement. Decision-making was inclusive, with some participants conferring and checking against the Fields of Attention. Some valued the opportunity for reflection, e.g. *"it felt as though it was a real treat to spend time reflecting on our supervision"* (C1anon, reflections). In Cycle 4, decisions were made individually.

Thinking about different ABE approaches: Participants then explored ABE methods to examine their chosen topics, drawing on, and revisiting earlier discussions about their own experiences of ABE methods, as educators, supervisors, researchers and learners, and referencing some of the methods outlined in the Guide. Participants shared details of ABE activities that they had used, or that they knew about, and to classify them as being visual, embodied or narrative (VEN), either by placing cards within three hula hoops labelled visual, embodied and narrative, or by using a whiteboard to capture the discussion online. Participants valued this discussion, with one reflecting that it was inspiring to hear how others incorporated VEN approaches into their practice.

ABE discussions broadened into conversations about teaching, learning, and research. The researcher introduced additional methods from the Guide, including collage, movement, storytelling, and modelling. Participants identified various ABE approaches across the Cycles, including drawing, poetry, talking about paintings, modelling, freeze frames, dance, movement, Lego, Meccano, collage, sculpting, body sculptures, dance, posters, found objects, walking, mime, theatre, short stories, story completion, cards, photo elicitation and VR. To move toward a collective decision about which to use, in-person participants stood near their preferred method, while online participants marked their choice on the whiteboard. While most groups planned collectively, they trailed individually and reconvened to discuss, one decided to work collaboratively: *'because of the nature of this this thing [...] it's democratic'* (C3P6). If the group was split about ABE approach, the researcher facilitated discussions to reach a consensus. Material and situational constraints influenced ABE choices; in one instance, the researcher suggested collage self-portraits due to available materials, which the group accepted.

Planning the professional learning activity – completing the template: Using a template from the Guide, participants planned their ABE activities. In-person groups used printed templates, while an editable version was provided for online participants. Time constraints made the process feel rushed. In one session, participants negotiated ideas and ultimately settled on a plan to create three collages each. The time pressure led to the researcher asserting, *'So we've got a plan, I think, haven't we?'* (C1R1), prompting amusement when a participant commented, *"Democracy unravels so we need a strong leader"* (C1P6). In contrast, Cycle 4 participants had potentially more planning time; one valued the planning tools: *"I thought they were very helpful because they enabled you to see how you might translate the ideas into practise"* (C4P1).

In all **Phase 4: trialling** sessions, except Cycle 3 group 1, participants worked individually on their activity and came together for discussion. When in person, there was a quiet busyness in the rooms. In one Cycle 3 group cameras were off when engaged in the task.

Preceding discussions on ABE approaches from the Guide stimulated creative thinking. Some participants chose alternative methods such as knitting, found objects, or collages instead of their planned ABE activity. One participant opted for knitting and reflected on its connection to supervision. Another wrote their thoughts in the chat, while a third in a different cycle engaged in a collage activity that did not respond to the stimulus but felt personally relevant. Non-participation or alternative participation was accepted. The lead researchers mainly acted as timekeepers in Phase 4 facilitated sessions.

Table 1 provides an overview of the trialling activities.

Focus area	ABE method	Mode and Cycle	Collective/individual
Power in supervision	Collage self portrait	Hybrid, Cycle 1 (group 1)	Individual

Imbalance of power in supervision	Found objects; model making; knitting	Hybrid, Cycle 1 (group 2)	Individual
Power and voice in supervision	Found objects; poetry	Online, Cycle 3 (group 2)	Individual
Care for doctoral students	Found images; comic strip creation	Online, Cycle 3 (group 1)	Collective (individual)
Supervisor identity	Collage self portrait	Hybrid, Cycle 2	Individual
Supervisory feedback and student agency	Comic strip	Self-led, Cycle 4 (C4P1 shared their reflections)	Individual

Sharing and storytelling were integral to the trialling process. In the collaborative activity, discussion happened throughout, whereas in the others, sharing occurred at designated points. In these discussions, participants introduced their artefact and the meaning behind it, but also engaged, with others, in the co-construction of meaning.

Feedback at the end of the trialling session, or at the end of the project, emphasised that discussion was a key benefit of the approach. Reflections on how ABE approach engagement benefited their understanding of AELD, included:

'Reflection on the trialling (object) and the evaluation (collage) were particularly interesting - but in terms of developing my understanding, I valued other peoples' outputs and their discussion and the reflective discussion on those outputs more useful. [...] to see and hear what other people thought about AELD - this helped me develop my own understanding' (C3anon, quest.).

Other participants expressed similar sentiments, emphasising how ABE activities made abstract concepts more tangible; e.g. C3P5 noted that engaging in ABE helped move from theoretical understanding to embodied and emotional comprehension:

[...] it kind of brings a bit of the abstract things to the concrete as we go through the logical and emotional experience, [...] on paper, this code of conduct as supervisor, 100 rules that we should care for the students, we should inspire them. But what does it actually mean? [...] Sometimes when you record [a] particular episode of your life experience, and it speaks to you emotionally and [...] physically and intellectually, you actually understand it a bit better. [...] through [...] discussion. You know that you're not alone facing quite [as] many problems. And people are there with you, and [...] go through the same struggles. [...] when it is therapeutic they give you a little bit more [...] emotional support and create a [...] shared space [...] connecting with people. (C3P5).

By the end of PAR phase 4 in Cycles 1-3, participants had trialled and reflected on an ABE activity. Differences across groups and cycles were evident, influenced by factors such as researcher experience, participant familiarity, disciplinary backgrounds, supervisory

experience, and session format (online vs. hybrid). Participants taking part in Cycles 1-3 appreciated how the project enabled opportunities for collegiate discussions and collaboration, opportunities that were not so readily available for participants in Cycle 4, as one reflected: *'it would have been a different type of experience if you'd have been doing it with other people, and perhaps a better experience'*, further acknowledging: *'doing it together would have been really productive'* (C4P1).

The final PAR phase - **Phase 5: evaluation through collage and gesture response** - focused on evaluation and used collage and gesture response, an ABE approach outlined in the Guide. Participants in Cycles 1-3 engaged in small groups, guided by researchers who introduced a brief grounding activity before prompting them to express their learning, through the PAR phases, using available materials. While specific insights are explored in response to **RQ2**, this section examines the impact of engaging with the collage-making process.

Key themes from earlier phases re-emerged, including uncertainty about using ABE approaches, some participants said they felt their creations were childlike and simplistic in comparison with others'; researchers reassured them that the process was about expression, not judgment.

Another theme was flexibility and choice. While participants were given advance information on materials, some opted for different methods, such as found images, photos, or digital generation. These choices allowed them to work through their experiences in ways that resonated with them, both making visible and contributing to their ongoing learning. The activity provided space not only to create, but to discuss, which is another recurring theme. It was useful to see what others had done, and how they spoke about it, e.g.: *'I enjoyed the collage-based evaluation, seeing what other people produced and how they used objects to represent and convey things similarly or differently to me what really helpful'* (C1-3anon, quest.).

Participants were invited to share their creations, discuss meanings, and engage in dialogue, reminding participants about the different perspectives at play: *'now you've explained the thinking behind it, and there's a lesson in there, isn't there, about not taking something for granted, assuming that you know the answer before you know the full story'* (C1P2). The importance of dialogue with others, across the PAR phases and in democracy more generally was also discussed by C1P1:

'the whole process has been kind of bouncing off each other [...] I have had some interesting conversations [...] the creative approaches have definitely been a springboard to dialogue [...] And I think everyone has said today like, oh, I didn't see it that way, which like is that not the point right of, you know, any kind of democratic enterprise that you have a dialogue [...] we've shared thoughts back and forth. And that's been [a strength?] to me in a way, and, like you all holding space for that has been in different formats as well like online, in person [...]' (C1P1).

This approach opened up different spaces, different approaches and different thoughts: *'it's not very often that we are allowed the luxury of the time to sort of think, or work in this way,*

[...] it's been so valuable just stepping away from the normal routine and thinking in a slightly different way' (C1P2).

The activity also reminded participants about the power of ABE approaches, e.g. *'trailing and the collage-based activities helped me to understand the power of these approaches to give different insights into topics'* (C1anon, quest.) and, for more experienced participants, reinforced what they already believed: *'so this democratic approach has been, I think, quite significant in terms of, perhaps, helping me to articulate what I'm trying to achieve'* (C3P4).

Some participants reported that they either intended to, or had already engaged in further ABE approaches, including collage, within their professional practice. The PAR phases provided an opportunity for reflection – around supervisory practices, and democracy-as-becoming.

The influence of time and ABE approach use: These two sub-themes emerged in the familiarisation phase are briefly explored here in terms of their influence on the use of the AECED resources:

Time: This preliminary emergent theme arose from the findings (Mpamhanga et al, 2024). Adam's (2008) work on 'timescapes', describes several dimensions or ways of considering time, two of which, tempo and duration, are pertinent to the project and interrelated, as the duration of the sessions was one of the factors that determined the tempo, the speed or pace at which they were conducted. Tempo was particularly apparent in PAR phases 3 and 4 as the researcher encouraged the participants to make decisions and keep moving on from one activity to the next. Whilst some participants seemed aware of the need to hurry on occasion, they valued the opportunity to spend time together, to step outside of their usual routine and to have the space and time to think.

Using ABE approaches: All Case 18 participants took part in ABE activities during the PAR phases and entered into what were often enthusiastic and imaginative accounts of what they had done and thoughtful interpretations of the meaning. Some participants were critical, self-deprecatory, about their artistic and creative abilities and, on occasion, uncertain about taking part choosing instead something that was more comfortable for them. Familiarity with working in this way might be a feature for some. A participant in Cycle 4 noted that gaining experience with using an approach might contribute towards normalising its use. There were also discussions about whether 'art' was the most appropriate term or whether an alternative such as 'non-textual' or 'multi-modal' might be more helpful.

This overview of the PAR phases attends to evocativeness, one of the principles for validation of action research narratives proposed by Heikkinen et al (2007). Together with the exploration of the sub-themes, the narrative provides glimpses into what the doctoral supervisors brought to the process and the nature of their experience and success as they engaged with the AECED resources and used ABE pedagogies to design AELD to enable them to develop democratic supervision practices.

The focus here was on the participants' professional learning rather than the learning of their students. The process they engaged in was complex and multi-layered; participants brought

and shared their experience and knowledge as they worked together. This included the complex personal knowledge that Eraut (2004, p. 264) suggests *'includes not only personalized versions of public codified knowledge but also everyday knowledge of people and situations, know-how in the form of skills and practices, memories of episodes and events, self-knowledge, attitudes and emotions*. Participants in Cycles 1-3 shared experiences through anecdotes, learnings, and uncertainties, engaging in collaboration, consensus-building, co-creation, and reflection.

Some participants recounted prior experiences with ABE pedagogies, which helped to normalise and endorse these approaches for others. The account honours their voices through illustrative quotations, highlighting both individual and collective perspectives. Throughout, participants reflected on AECED resources and explored their understanding of democracy, particularly democracy-as-becoming, as conceptualised within the project and what that might look like within their supervisory teams.

In Cycles 1 to 3, researchers played a key role, bringing their own experience of doctoral supervision, interacting with the participants, guiding and supporting them through the process, and on occasion perhaps, moved from facilitator to co-participant as they contributed to the discussions. Within Cycle 4, engagement in the AECED project ended when the participant wished it to. The researchers are not party to exactly when that happened; it might have been on receipt of the bundle of material, or at a specific point when working through the Companion, when sending reflections, completing the questionnaire or engaging in an interview. We see snapshots of engagement through the data collection activities, and what reflections those participants chose to share.

Consideration of **RQ2** draws mainly on findings from the sixth overarching theme, new learning, which suggest that some participants have changed their perceptions, understanding and practice of democracy and democratic approaches to doctoral supervision through engaging in the project. Some findings suggest growth in regard to characteristics associated with democratic sensibility and provide tentative evidence of 'transformational change' in participants, a particular type of change, which is characterised by complexity and uncertainty (Anderson & Anderson, 2010).

RQ2. Regarding the transformational change in participants: In what ways do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, lead to individual and collective growth in regard to

- feelings for democracy,
- aesthetic awareness and qualities (such as empathic, ethical, and spiritual sensibilities),
- collaborative, reflexive and critical capabilities,
- openness to newly 'seeing' the other,
- willingness to move towards more reflexive and critical modes of awareness and knowing that reconnect with the body as a source of learning,
- capacity to challenge social injustices and engage creatively with conflict and antagonisms

- any other aspects that will be developed in and through the PAR process.

The findings are used here, first by providing examples of change more broadly using questionnaire responses and individual interviews, and second by exploring evidence for ‘transformational change’ using illustrative quotations and excerpts from data collected during the facilitated sessions. These findings have been identified in the context of Mezirow’s (2000, p. 19) understanding of transformation as ‘a movement through time of reformulating reified structures of meaning by reconstructing dominant narratives’, and Poutiatine’s (2009, p. 192) ‘foundational principles’ of transformation.

Some respondents experienced growth in relation to democratic sensibility characteristics, while others struggled to fully grasp democracy’s connections with supervision. One participant stated *‘the challenge has been relating it to the ideas of democracy that you’re that you’re also exploring. I’ve not really [...] understood where those connections are being made’* (C3P1).

Questionnaire responses indicated changes such as shifts in perception of supervisory style, increased awareness of creative and embodied learning approaches, and becoming *‘more reflective about democracy and what that might look like and feel like in practice’* and feeling encouraged *‘to embody my values as a teacher a little bit more (e.g. being more open, transparent, vulnerable etc.)’* (C3anon, quest.). Some participants reported a firmer understanding of democracy in the context of doctoral supervision and for aspects of democracy, such as being open-minded, or recognised imbalances in supervisory relationships, expressing commitment to addressing these issues.

Interviews and reflections provided further insights. One participant found reassurance in the project’s theoretical underpinnings, stating it helped them articulate *‘why I do what I do’* (C3P4), or to reflect critically on their practice:

‘I think I learned that I may believe I am attuned to democratic ways of working but they may be less democratic than I think. I believe that I am working in ways which allow everyone to fulfil their potential, but this may be based on a set of firm beliefs which I do not check out on a regular basis with students (C4P1).

Others reported a better grasp of democracy but struggled to see how to translate it into practice, while some suggested their changing perception of democracy extended beyond academia, impacting their broader interactions:

‘I have a better sense of the concept. And I have a better, I have a more nuanced, I think, perception of it, really, and how that applies in classroom, university context as well as more broadly in one’s interactions with other people, really’ (C1P5).

Findings from the PAR phases indicate tentative evidence of transformational change: *‘It’s not the type of project where you can look at inputs and outcomes and attribute something directly. It’s much more organic’* (C4P1). Findings suggest that some participants experienced change that involves transformation, ‘a movement towards a greater integrity of identity – a movement toward wholeness’ (Poutiatine, 2009, p. 193). Participant C1P5, for example,

emphasised the importance of the embodied nature of democracy, suggesting *'I think I'm much more aware about how ideas of, well, I can't say ideas of democracy, it's more like enacting democracy. Being in a democratic context and being democratic is actually the point of it'* (C1P5). They highlighted the relational aspect of democracy and its impact on education, stating, *'It's more about how you are with people in a room... You get it through doing it and being it, not being told about it'* (C1P5).

Some participants recognised the revelatory role both of the project (e.g. encouraging active reflection on things that were *'very sort of subliminal'* (C1P2) and of pedagogical approaches involving ABE (helping to *'surface my thinking'*, C1P5; *'ABE activities can challenge what you think you know and surface things which are useful to reflect on in order to develop understanding and practice'*, C4P1). For one supervisor, this led to realisation, and perspective change that student success involves both supervisor and student and that democracy is wider still *'through that connection and network and everything and other various stakeholders involved in the process as well, so that democracy is not just between us. It's wider as well'* (CP36).

The uncovering of the hidden, elicitation of the previously unacknowledged, as well as the introduction of the 'new' were all important contributors to the individual and collective growth in characteristics of democratic sensibility arising through the project.

Some participants found that ABE activities prompted thinking and conversations about managing conflict embedded within the more procedural aspects of their professional work, such as workload modelling, completion times, counted hours for supervision, and bureaucratic processes which were often at odds with democratic practices. Participants spoke of, for example, *'wrestling'* with the workload model (C1P6); the systems and structures that seem counter to relational aspirations (C2P7); *'creative'* and *'relational'* versus *'process'* and *'REF'*[Research Excellence Framework] (C1P4); and *'chaos'* versus *'clarity'* (C1P3).

One participant described using collage to process chaos and clarity in supervision, concluding, *'By piecing together some of the chaos, you can get a little bit of clarity [...] working with the student we got a bit of clarity and this morning's supervision went so much better'* (C1P3). Another noted that revisiting their collage reinforced the collaborative nature of supervision, emphasizing trust, respect, and motivation, using terms such as colourful, creative, open and refreshing to describe the process they had engaged in, and contrasting it with the *'black text on white paper, conversations about process and what next'* and *'thinking about the REF and what is required there is so the opposite'* (C1P4).

An experienced supervisor, while finding the project challenging, acknowledged the impact of identifying areas of tension and conflict, stating, *'I would think of power in a different way, 'power as potential for both me and the student'* (C1P6). They also admitted *'I had a crisis'* during the trialling, where they were shifting their view of their supervisory role significantly. This comment together with their subsequent commentary seems indicative of this type of change, in this example, a change in thinking that left the participant with uncertainty, a

dilemma, with things that still needed to be thought about, reflecting the ‘unfinished’ nature of democracy-as-becoming.

Transformation was also evident in reflections on supervisory growth. One participant saw a shift in their supervisory approach, describing themselves as ‘becoming’ a different kind of supervisor: *‘we did a collage [...] in that session towards the ending where we had to think of where we are and where we are hoping to be[...]. So, this is me now, but this is what I'm becoming basically’* (C2P3). Others noted a shift to seeing students as colleagues and providing them with more agency, allowing for more independent pathways. In a different reflection session, C3P3 focussed on a theme that recurred across the PAR phases in their mention of *‘different layers’*, noting that *‘it felt more uncertain, less levelled out, less consistent’*. The terminology seems softer than in other examples, where challenges were seen as intertwined with the relational, consideration of *‘my perspective’* and *‘of the other’*, their *‘students’ perspective or colleagues’*, who might not *‘see the whole picture’*. This interpretation hinting at transformation, and that the participant enjoyed the ABE approach, it *‘kind of felt quite expressive and quite creative’* (C3P3), drawing together the materials in the collage response, while recognisant that *‘at any moment it could unravel if it's not dealt with, or if it's not worked with compassionately or effectively it could not come together, it could not work’* (C3P3), which picks up comments in earlier PAR phases about the importance of nurturing and taking care.

Finally, findings suggest that the Prototype Framework and Guide, by facilitating co-creative design of AELD to support the development of democratic supervision practices through ABE pedagogies, have facilitated individual and collective growth in democratic sensibility characteristics. Participants acknowledged changes in their perceptions, understanding, and practice in relation to democracy and democratic approaches to supervision, with tentative evidence suggesting that for some, these changes involved transformation - ‘a very particular type of change’ (Poutiatine, 2009, p. 194).

RQ3: What influence, if any, did the researchers have on how the Framework and Guides were used and the designs of AEL for democracy that emerged in the trials?

It is difficult to disentangle the part played by the researchers who facilitated sessions in **Cycles 1-3**; they are integral to the process, inviting and encouraging engagement and providing support.

Structured session design: Researchers designed facilitated sessions to guide participants through the Prototype Framework and Guides, shaping participant engagement through structured activities and collective reflection spaces, such as Padlet. The aim of the shared learning was to foster discussion, to co-construct professional learning processes, and embed and embody key values and concepts, e.g. democracy-as-becoming. Participants’ experiences were shaped by both the materials themselves and the intentional design of these facilitated sessions.

Researcher facilitation: The lead researcher (R1) actively encouraged contributions while also participating in discussions, blending their role as researcher and practitioner. R1’s facilitation

style fostered shared understanding and mutual trust, with ideas emerging and evolving collaboratively. R1's role could be described as *member-facilitator*. Researchers provided 'light-touch guidance' (C1-3anon, quest.) on how to participate in the sessions and engage with materials, offering clarifications, introducing additional resources, and providing further explanations and perspectives when needed. Feedback indicated that this balanced, non-directive approach enabled session participants to 'participate fully' (C1-3anon, quest.), with further reflection that they "felt that they [researchers] weren't forceful, they were enablers, which was positive" (C1anon, quest.).

The non-hierarchical sessions intentionally modelled democracy-as-becoming values. Findings suggest that this seeking to embody democratic principles and values, provided both practical guidance and an immersive, lived experience of holistic democracy and AELD in action:

"The interesting thing is that you're, the process of administering this is very democratic actually. Usually it's not, you know, projects are very like the guidance is given by the principal investigator, and everything is like a monarchy. But yeah, so it's interesting actually, that you follow what you try to show us actually." (C1P8)

R1 was careful not to dominate participants' creative processes. This light-touch presence supported participants in taking ownership of their creative and reflective processes, positioning R1 more as enabler than instructor.

Facilitation tension: Session facilitation involved practical considerations, with time constraints a recurring concern. Planning and Trialling sessions were intensive and required careful pacing, the researcher encouraging participants to progress through stages — sometimes before they had reached a natural stopping point. In some cases, R1 had to actively 'move' participants on to the next activity, e.g. 'need a strong leader' (C1P6) quote above. Gentle steering is perhaps inevitable when facilitating collaborative workshops; however, the time pressures and need for structure ultimately shaped how participants engaged with the session, as well as how they designed and undertook their AELD activities. While some participants appreciated the structure, others felt activities like collage-making were rushed. Technical challenges also arose in online and hybrid sessions, such as ensuring all participants could see and hear the content consistently. R1 also encountered challenges when attempting to share video resources.

AELD activities: Researchers facilitated discussions about the design of AELD activities, offering insights, guidance, and reassurance while remaining mindful of the varying levels of familiarity participants had with ABE approaches. Researchers used positive affirmations, 'levelling' statements, and careful framing of the purpose and expectations of each activity:

'And I would imagine that some approaches might be more comfortable than others, right? [...] I know from my own experience, in this project over the year we've been running is that I certainly feel more comfortable doing some things than others. Some things I find more challenging than others. Some things feel very natural.' (C1R1)

This approach may have positively influenced both the design of and participants' willingness to engage with the AELD activities.

The researcher supported participants in identifying activities to explore the agreed aspect of supervisory practice. Some participants expressed clear preferences, while researchers offered more guidance and specific suggestions to others, potentially shaping the design of participants' AELD activities. Differences in researcher facilitation styles and session formats (face-to-face vs. online) affected participants' sense of presence, comfort, and engagement, potentially influencing their openness to creative approaches over time. Some participants interpreted the focus of the AELD activities in highly personal ways, reflecting individual priorities and sense-making processes, highlighting both the flexibility of the arts-based approach and the potential for participants to prioritise personally meaningful content over the initial research focus.

Participants in **Cycle 4** (self-led approach) engaged independently with the materials, supported by a specially developed Companion Guide, designed to mirror key aspects of the facilitated sessions while preserving participant autonomy. This additional resource guided participants through the structure followed within Cycles 1-3 while providing flexibility, encouraging adaptation of activities to participant needs. By providing choices, rather than prescribing pathways through the process, participants were afforded agency. The Companion Guide recreated, in written form, the role that the researcher had played within the facilitated sessions. Care was taken to create a warm and welcoming tone within the Companion Guide, to provide a sense of personability. From the perspective of usability, it was designed to be clean and easy to follow. Additional details were added to reflect the focus on democratic doctoral supervision practices.

The researcher directed participants, through the Companion Guide, to use the Prototype Framework, Guides and supporting resources and encouraged them to share reflections, but did not facilitate the process of their use. The reflections shared by C4P1 reveal that the Companion Guide played a central role in helping them navigate and make sense of the process, enabling them to more effectively use the resources.

4. Limitations

Time/scheduling posed a challenge, requiring flexibility to accommodate participants. One participant (Cycle 3) noted that cycles had been complicated to organise and had blended into one another for practical reasons. No facilitated cycle had all participants together at once, impacting group cohesion. To support rapport-building, activities were included, though the structure may have provided limited opportunities to build on ideas across phases. Some activities felt rushed due to time constraints. Cycle 2, delivered intensively in one day, lacked the reflection periods that Cycles 1 and 3 had, potentially affecting engagement. Hybrid sessions were developed to be inclusive, though experiences varied between in-person and online participants. Cycle 4 faced recruitment and resource-sharing challenges, limiting interaction and immersive engagement; and less overall engagement with data collection

activities and sharing of reflections. Additionally, ABE approaches depended on available resources, which varied across cycles, possibly constraining innovative design.

5. Relevance of Context

Democracy, higher education, and doctoral supervision: The UK has a long-established history of parliamentary tradition and democratic rights; yet satisfaction with democracy in the UK has been falling. Case 18 took place against a backdrop of political change, including the UK's 2024 General Election, which saw the Labour Party win a landslide victory over the Conservative Party, who had been in power for 14 years. The turnout, at 59.9%, was the second lowest in history, a possible contributing factor being '*a lack of understanding of the role of an individual citizen in a country's democratic politics*' (Banerjee, 2004) and highlighting the need for sustained democratic engagement beyond election seasons. HE plays a critical role in fostering democratic culture, with HE '*one of the few spheres left in democratic societies where students and others can learn the knowledge and skills of democratic citizenship*' (Giroux in Apple et al., 2022, p. 254). Data collection for Case 18 was ongoing during the parliamentary elections and passing comments and discussions about democratic processes were raised by participants in some of the data collection sessions.

Many uncertainties and pressures are affecting HE institutions, students and staff, including financial constraints and neoliberal influences prioritising market-driven values over academic ones (e.g. see Habib & Hastings, 2025; Brown & Hillman, 2023). Many Case 18 participants referenced workload pressures within their role as doctoral supervisors, institutional redundancies, and the challenge of balancing procedural requirements with meaningful supervisory engagement. Despite increased doctoral enrolments (HESA, 2024) and growing interest in supervisor development, opportunities for ongoing professional learning remain limited (Huet & Casanova, 2022). The UKCGE/RSVP (2024) survey identified that most supervisory training is procedural, with little focus on pedagogical or relational aspects. Case 18 participants echoed this, describing a lack of formal training and a desire to develop their practice beyond administrative guidelines.

Participant motivations and engagement: Case 18 participants joined seeking to enhance their supervisory practice, recognising the need for relational, reflective, and innovative approaches. Some saw it as a rare opportunity for professional development, noting: '*The only training we've ever had in being a supervisor is forms and processes, not practice*' (C1P1). Others valued the chance to think differently, exchange ideas, and learn from interdisciplinary perspectives: '*Seeing what other options were to better support our doctoral students*' (C3P3). The emphasis on creative, ABE methods was a key draw, with participants describing the project as '*a breath of fresh air*' (C2P7) and appreciating the ethos of democratic learning. Engagement was not only for personal development but also for supporting doctoral students, co-supervisors, and future supervisors: '*Not only for my own development as a doctoral supervisor but in working through and learning new pedagogies to support colleagues*' (C3anon, reflections). The focus in AECED on democratic approaches, which are underpinned

by principles of democracy-as-becoming, sit within a context where there are increasing calls for more holistic approaches to pedagogy that emphasise relationships, individual needs, equity and wellbeing, including, for example, compassionate pedagogy, relational pedagogy, and anti-oppressive pedagogy. By participating, supervisors aimed to cultivate more democratic doctoral pedagogies, contributing to ongoing discussions on fostering more democratic doctoral pedagogy within HE (Kandiko Howson et al., 2022). Recognising the constraints on supervisors' time, Case 18 was designed to provide flexible, meaningful engagement, equipping participants with resources and strategies that could be applied within their supervisory practice and beyond.

6. Learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guides

RQ4: What evidence-based conclusions for revision and refinement of the Prototype Framework and Guides emerge from the experience of using the Prototypes and addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

First, broader reflections will be discussed, followed by specific learnings, that have been drawn from the research evidence. The findings suggest barriers to use of the Framework and Guide include:

Lack of attraction to the project's aims: Lack of attraction to the project's aims will put off some potential users.

Unsupported engagement with the resources: The fact of limited data relating to the participants who worked independently (Cycle 4), in addition to specific participant reflections, suggests that self-led participants faced challenges working through the material by themselves, missing dialogue to '*spark understanding*', participate in '*new idea[s]*' on '*how one might use that in your practice*' and facilitate a better grasping of concepts (CP41)

Time: The context of working within UK universities (see Section 5) meant that participants had limited time and flexibility to engage with the Framework and Guides.

Specific recommendations

Theoretical and conceptual underpinning - Including the clarity and understanding of the theories and concepts: Participants were sometimes unsure of the meaning of concepts and sought clarification either from the facilitating researcher or gained further understanding through dialogue with other participants.

Ideas were complex and numerous.

Unclear sense of key concepts for some, e.g. meaning of democracy and its various historical and cultural contexts. The concept of 'commoning' was particularly difficult for participants.

Purpose and use of ABE approaches - Including understanding of art and of the nature of ABE and AELD, and views of artistic ability: Some participants expressed anxiety when sharing the artefacts they produced or felt they were not 'not good at art', sharing their artefacts with self-deprecating comments, nervous jokes, and apologies, suggesting that they may have felt a need to set expectations, or perhaps elicit reassurance from others in the group. During the facilitated sessions, researchers reassured participants, which perhaps encouraged them to participate. Whilst mostly participants did choose to participate in the ABE activities within their 'comfort zones'; critical questions are raised about how willingly self-led users of the framework and guides who identify as 'not good at art' would engage with these approaches, or, in some cases volunteer for facilitator-led sessions that used AELD.

Greater clarity regarding ABE as a methodology that contributes to knowledge.

Inclusion of a clear developmental pathway to provide experience in creative methodologies.

ABE methods listed should be inclusive with sufficient examples for non-able-bodied users.

Include opportunities to engage in ABE methods when introducing the documentation and resources, so people have a feel for them.

Language and terminology - Including readability, accessibility and inclusivity of the language

Many participants commented on the language of the Prototype Framework and Guides, including that it was difficult to read and take in the information. Participants discussed whether different terminology for arts-based activity might make these approaches more accessible.

Language was too academic, meaning it was difficult and time consuming to read. Concepts should be explained in simpler terms.

Clarify terminology (e.g. arts-based) and harmonise with the AECED project's aims (e.g. equity not equality).

Practical application - Including in self-directed use and use in practice

Examples and case studies were helpful and more should be provided.

Application to a range of disciplines and doctoral programmes should be outlined.

Suggested pathways through the framework would be helpful for self-led users to navigate their way through – such as the Companion Guide.

Further guidance on: How to talk to students about the benefits of AELD; What to do if something goes wrong e.g. when using ALED activities with students; How to get buy-in from others (i.e. the institution, other academics, students).

Acknowledge cultural differences and include cultural variations.

Layout and design - Including the spacing of text and use of models and plans

Improve clarity of introduction to the desired impact of the project; guidance on how to navigate the framework.

Visual elements were preferred over large bodies of text in understanding key concepts.

The Prototype Framework has too much content – participants did not have time to read it fully and found it ‘*overwhelming*’.

Glossary helped participants to understand common language terms in the project.

Additional resources - Including the use of videos and a booklet of key ideas

Video resource explaining the four dimensions of holistic democracy was helpful for participants – more video resources could be produced.

Booklet of key ideas, and key activities.

7. Ethical Reflection and Gender Dimension

Case 18 was designed to be accessible and engaging whatever the gender of potential participants. The researchers were responsive to participants’ needs (e.g. arranging sessions at convenient times, offering repeat sessions, responding to participants’ questions and preferences) so that they felt comfortable and accommodated. Throughout the research, gender stereotypes were avoided, inclusive language was used, questions about gender were not asked during recruitment or during the data collection period, and it was clear that participation was not dependent on gender. Therefore, the researchers made no assumptions about gender, and this has continued through data analysis. In data analysis, the researchers were working with pseudonymised transcripts, where notation has been used to reflect Participants and their Cycles (e.g. C2P1) and this has been carried into the presentation of findings. Care has been taken to remove identifying features that might make participants identifiable, both in terms of imagery, quotes, and contextual detail. The Case focused on professional learning and involved colleagues working across different universities. Participants were, therefore, peers, yet the researchers (which included a research student) were recognisant of their researcher role in the project, and also expectations that the participants might have in terms of understandings of education for democracy and arts-based and embodied approaches to research and learning. Participants included those who were known, and also unknown, to the researchers, and we acknowledged and were attentive to our insider status in some cases, and ongoing professional relationships in others (Floyd & Arthur, 2012). In terms of the development of the Framework and Guides, we note the importance of using inclusive language and providing diverse case study examples that will speak to different people.

United Kingdom Case Report

Case 19

Phase/Educational Setting:

Secondary Education

VEN-Approach:

Visual, Embodied and Narrative

1. Case Description

Overview

Case 19 involved two distinct case studies, each focused on secondary teachers and their engagement with the AECED resources and carried out by members of the **UK research team**: Suzanne Culshaw, Joanne Barber, Philippa Mulberry, Marie Toseland and Philip Woods. **The case studies sought to** explore different approaches to engaging with the AECED resources, with Case Study A focusing on a self-directed model and Case Study B offering a more immersive, researcher-supported experience. This case report focuses on case study B in which rich and detailed data were generated.

Case Study A (Self-Directed): In this case study, four secondary school teachers followed a self-directed pedagogical approach to engaging with the AECED resources. Contact with participants was entirely online and participants used a Companion Guide, designed to support participants through an introduction to the key themes and aid their use of the project's Pedagogical Framework and Guide to practice specific to the secondary school setting. This case study was intended to explore how secondary teachers would experience the Pedagogical Framework and Guide without direct facilitation from the researchers. The participants engaged in the process autonomously, with encouragement to note their reflections in a reflective space as they went through the stages. Data were to be collected from each participant after they had completed the stages via these reflections, which they were invited to share, and through an online questionnaire. However, by the conclusion of the data collection period, and following reminders from the research team about the deadline for data collection, none had submitted any data.

Case Study B (Immersive): This study involved a more immersive and collaborative approach, where one secondary teacher (the participant) worked closely with one researcher (R3). With ongoing guidance and close collaboration from the researcher, the participant worked through the stages of engagement with the AECED resources in depth through in-person and online sessions. The stages took place between October and December 2024: (1) introduction, (2) familiarisation with the Pedagogical Framework and Guide and associated resources, (3) planning for the AELD trial, (4) actioning the trial of AELD in the classroom, and (5) evaluation. Data were gathered through in-person and online interaction and conversations (which included questions and prompts by the researcher), as well as reflective activities and

fieldnotes. Sessions (both in-person and online) were audio-visually recorded. This case study was designed to gain an in-depth picture of the participant's experience, feelings and thinking in relation to the AECED resources, the trialling they designed and undertook, and what influence this had on them and their professional practice.

2. Brief Explanation of the Data Analysis

Data were generated through a discursive and co-creative approach, fostering open conversations and activities between participant and researcher. This flexible process encouraged the participant's exploration, use and evaluation of the Framework and Secondary Guide, as well as sharing feelings and reflections on planning and implementing AELD practice. Sessions had a general focus but no rigid structure, allowing discussions to flow dynamically. Researcher reflections indicate a sense of equality and responsiveness, with ideas emerging naturally.

Data Types and Sources

Types of Data: Case study B generated qualitative data.

Source of Data: Participant-researcher sessions (4 in total), guided by an agenda or topic agreed by participant and researcher, as well as questions posed by the researcher; structured reflective activities (3 in total), including arts-based & embodied methods of data generation during participant-researcher sessions and individually outside the sessions; outputs (14 in total) from the reflective activities in the participant-researcher sessions and outside those sessions, including collages and artefacts, such as drawings, by participant and researcher, researcher field notes and reflections which include researchers' creative expressions (5 in total) and autoethnography; audio-visual recordings of in-person and online participant-researcher sessions. All data gathered from participants were pseudonymised.

Research Methodologies and Method: Data analysis was undertaken using thematic analysis and creative-empathic analysis, identifying themes through exploration of data in order to generate meaningful insights into the topic of study (Boyd, 2024, Swain, 2018). Theory and concepts (see theoretical framework below) associated with the RQs, democracy and the aesthetic-embodied dimension that underpins AECED provided an analytical resource in formulating themes. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019, Byrne, 2022, Terry and Hayfield, 2020) was undertaken, which is flexible, interpretive and acknowledges that knowledge is shaped by the interaction between researcher and data.

A creative-empathic approach was integral to the data analysis. Words associated with this are synthesising, imagination, insight, grasping the total picture. It is not about one technique but rather can take many forms: it involves being open to noticing, and exploring and reflecting on, researchers' feelings and ideas that arise from being immersed in qualitative data. It involves thinking laterally; allowing creative and imaginative interpretation of the data (allowing for formulation of themes not in the theoretical framework); and reasoning through abduction (Boyd, 2024).

The combined approaches (thematic analysis and creative-empathic analysis) ensured a systematic yet open-ended analysis, aligning with AECED's aesthetic-embodied awareness and democratic sensibility framework.

Data Analysis Process: The process of data analysis followed the analysis stages outlined in the research grant application. The boundaries between stages were fluid, allowing for an iterative and dynamic approach. The key stages of analysis included:

Data organisation: All data were securely stored in a protected online space provided by the University of Hertfordshire. Only members of the UK AECED research team had access to this space.

Preparatory stage: Researchers familiarised themselves with the collected data before commencing analysis.

Preliminary stage: Data were examined with reference to the theoretical framework and RQs 1–4. An open, creative-empathic approach facilitated the generation of initial codes, themes, and explanatory concepts. Researchers worked both individually, engaging in memoing in a Shared Memoing Matrix, where the memos will support cross-case analysis, and creative reflections such as poetry and drawings, and collaboratively, through discussions on emerging patterns and narratives.

Firming stage: Themes and concepts were systematically reviewed, individually and collaboratively, to assess their alignment with the RQs. Their validity was considered using action research principles such as workability (how well the research fosters new practices and agency) and evocativeness (how far narratives engage readers emotionally and provoke critical reflection) (Heikkinen et al., 2007).

Reporting stage: Data analysis was written up in a lengthy and detailed document, characterised by thick description (Geertz, 1973) to ensure credibility and transferability, and by inclusion of numerous participant quotations, images and data excerpts to provide depth and nuance. This 'thick' writing up allowed the analysis to take an iterative approach which enabled refinement of narratives, concepts and conclusions. Findings were then synthesised into the case report presented here which will inform further analysis following up key themes and ideas.

Theoretical Background: Theoretical perspectives central to the project guided the analysis:

- Democracy-as-becoming, encompassing power-sharing, transforming dialogue, holistic learning and relational well-being (Woods, 2021).
- Aesthetic and embodied dimensions, including concepts such as aesthetic grounding, affective scaffolding and embodied reflexivity (Ludevig, 2015, Maiese, 2016, Payne, 2017, 2019, Woods et al., 2023).
- Pedagogies of aesthetic and embodied learning for democracy, featuring processes like surfacing, aesthetic reflexivity and subjectification (Biesta 2009, Sutherland 2012, Todd 2023).

- Democratic sensibility, an evolving concept informed by literature on empathic and ethical awareness, open listening and democratic values (Ferran, 2022, Kennedy, 2017, Rosa, 2024, Woods, 2016).

This structured yet flexible approach allowed for a comprehensive, reflective, and theoretically informed analysis of the data.

3. Research Findings

Case Study B is unique within the wider AECED project as it explored in-depth the experience of one participant as they engaged with the Prototype Framework and Guide. The participant in this immersive case is a seasoned teacher with over thirty years' experience in education. They currently work in a large, mainstream comprehensive school in England where, alongside delivering lessons, they hold a middle-leader position as the Head of a department and curriculum lead. They teach several subjects to students between year groups 7 and 11 (ages 11-16). Whilst they have taught 'content heavy, outcomes driven' subjects, they also teach non-examination assessment (NEA) subjects, which have a broader approach to student evaluation than examination. For the participant, engaging with the research was not a passive process but an active and thoughtful meditation on their professional experience, which allowed them to reflect and fully consider the current reality of their pedagogical practice.

Part A of this section provides an account of the reflective critique which the participant engaged in during the familiarisation stage and later stages. This is relevant to RQ1 concerning process. Part B provides an account of the participant's transformational change which occurred over the course of the stages. This is relevant to RQ2. Part C analyses the data from the point of view of RQ3, concerning researcher-influence on the process. The accounts are formed from multimodal data, visual, written and spoken created during interactions between researcher and participant. Data have been analysed across the stages, from the introduction and familiarisation stages to the evaluation stage. Quotes in this and later sections are by the participant, unless otherwise stated.

The participant's reflective critique

This section provides an account of the participant's formation of a reflective, professional critique as they engaged with the Prototype Framework and Guide. It gives insight into an important aspect of the process and deliberations they went through in order to be able to design and trial AELD within their setting. It helps in addressing **RQ1**. Regarding process: a) How do participants experience being introduced to and working with the Prototype Framework and Guides? b) In what ways is AELD co-created and facilitated through ABE methods?

During the familiarisation stage, the participant's engagement with the AECED materials allowed them to reaffirm their values relating to democracy and education, recognising both the difficulties and the importance of holding onto these principles in their professional

practice. The power of the resources for the participant in this instance may lie in validation rather than persuasion.

Throughout the stages of engagement, areas of critique were integral to the participant's reflections. These give a sense of the systemic constraints the participant perceives as barriers to democracy and to their ambition for a more democratic classroom:

(a) Systemic rigidity, management structures and their impact on professional autonomy, student learning and democratic values and principles

One of the predominant critiques that emerged from the participant's reflections was the lack of flexibility in the curriculum and the content of lessons. The participant noted that these increasingly dictate both content and pedagogy. They also drew attention to what they saw as the 'disconnect between' different subjects in the curriculum, which fails to help students to make connections adequately and which they perceived as a barrier to the democratic principle of holistic learning. Importantly for their process of understanding the AECED principles, they identify that they feel that values are, overall, excluded from the current national curriculum. The participant's critique positions responsiveness and autonomy as central to democratic classrooms, suggesting that the curriculum constraints curtail both student and teacher agency and underscores a wider concern: that the national curriculum prioritises standardisation over exploration, reinforcing a passive, transmission-based model of education at odds with democratic learning principles. Amongst their reflections, the participant argues that we (teachers) 'have all the accountability, but very little autonomy'.

As a middle leader within their school, the participant offered a nuanced critique of performance management structures, particularly in relation to how accountability frameworks constrain teacher autonomy. Their reflections suggest that rather than serving as a developmental tool, performance management functions primarily as a system of compliance, dictating professional priorities and pedagogical approaches in ways that limit educators' capacity for independent decision-making and innovation.

In the planning stage, the researcher introduced the participant to an additional resource in the form of a book entitled *Time to think* (Kline, 1993), in response to conversations which arose in the familiarisation stage. The researcher read aloud a passage from the book concerning an anecdote about a group of teenagers being asked when they thought that they last 'demonstrated some kind of leadership,' a question which none of them could answer. This section, the researcher commented afterwards, 'makes me tingle thinking about. I get quite upset about it, really'. The participant, who made notes on the tablecloth in front of them whilst listening, returned to this anecdote several times throughout the course of the case study, and borrowed the book from the researcher so that they could read more in their own time. Much like the experience of watching the 'Four dimensions of holistic democracy' video in the familiarisation stage, listening to this passage acted as a catalyst for the participant, allowing them to reflect upon and interpret their own experiences as a middle-leader. Their critique suggests that, while teachers are often technically given a choice in setting their targets, these choices exist within a rigid framework, ultimately reinforcing institutional

priorities over individual professional identities. Rather than questioning these constraints, teachers are expected to internalise and comply with them as part of their professional identity.

Another area of critique emerging from the participant's reflections concerns behaviour management practices within their educational setting and the impact they feel these have on democratic values and well-being. A central concern was the implementation of 'cold calling' and 'no hands-up' policies, which are intended to ensure equal student participation by 'calling' upon any student to answer questions, rather than soliciting responses only from those who put their 'hands up'. Some schools use these to check for students' understanding. Students are not permitted to volunteer answers to questions by putting their hand up; rather the teacher will select whom they want to answer.

Instrumental to the continuing refinement of the critique of their professional context was the participant's engagement with the Prototype Framework and Guide and its concepts, the book that the researcher read from in the planning stage (Kline, 1993) and the conversations with the researcher. The participant questioned the extent to which the current disciplinary and pedagogical strategies they employ align with democratic principles, particularly in relation to power sharing and transformational dialogue. Reflecting further, they described how they felt that such strategies actively discourage spontaneity, curiosity and exploratory thinking, particularly for younger students.

(b) Challenges to departing from the required norm and increasing teacher autonomy in the classroom

Integral to the participant's reflections is a critique of hierarchical school structures, in which teachers feel they must seek permission to deviate from the norm, even when exploring new approaches that might align with school-wide educational values. This is entangled with the surveillance culture, wherein members of school management drop into classrooms, unexpectedly, to observe lessons. These lesson observations by senior leaders serve as a means of monitoring compliance. Thinking about deviation from the rule by incorporating AELD activities into their lessons prompted the participant to consider how this would be perceived by the senior leadership team:

'... if senior leaders walked in and saw collage, or dare I say a drama script in a (yeah), particularly the college. They might get their head round about the drama script bit, I guess, but I don't know whether... And then they would come [to a student] and say 'so, tell me, what's your, what are you doing? What are you learning today? How's this link to the learning objective?' That's what scares. That's the scary bit of this project.' (planning)

Their comments suggest that certain types of pedagogy may be viewed with scepticism by senior leaders, particularly when they do not fit neatly within pre-defined learning objectives. The fear of being questioned or scrutinised thus discourages teachers from exercising professional judgement, ultimately reinforcing a culture of compliance rather than creativity. For the participant, to 'step outside of the scheme of work' and integrate democratic values, which the participant sees as 'something equally as important', would require both time and

‘courage’. The participant is attempting to translate (Bergdahl & Langmann, 2018) democratic principles to their own teaching context; but they feel that their ability to do so is restricted.

(c) The teacher the system wants and the teacher ‘I would like to be’

In the evaluation stage, the participant created a collage (Figure 1) that represented the teacher that they feel that they ‘have to be’ within the current education system in order to meet and accommodate its performativity agenda. Within this collage, the participant uses oblongs of green paper with words written on them to represent ‘the rigidity of stuff around the outside’ of their classroom, which they describe as ‘the non-democratic bits of school’. These are representative for the participant of ‘the kind of drivers behind the person I have to be’.

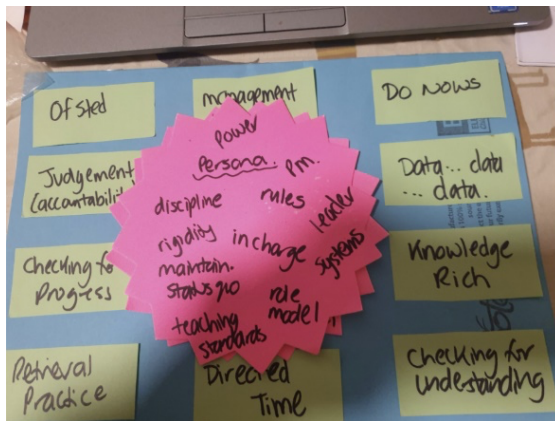


Figure 1: Participant's collage
– the teacher they have to be

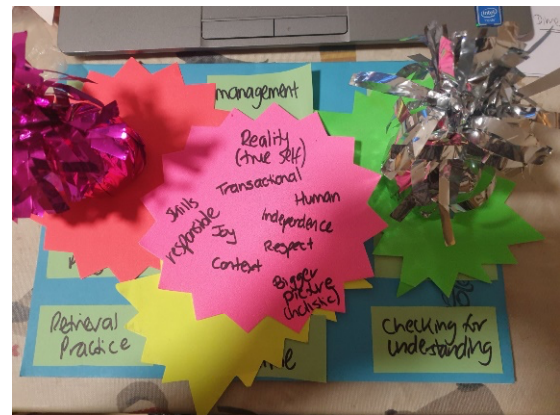


Figure 2: Participant's collage
– the teacher they want to be

In contrast, another collage (see Figure 2) represents ‘the teacher that I would like to be. And I think the teacher that this project has reminded me that I can be.’ In this collage, additional coloured stars and some objects wrapped in bright, metallic material have been added, which ‘should be hiding all the nonsense underneath.’ In this collage, their ‘reality (true self)’ is represented by words which relate to the four dimensions of holistic democracy, as well as ‘joy’, which the participant had previously spoken about in relation to democracy. The participant says:

‘I do think we're losing some joy [R3: Okay] [...] I think there should be joyful learning, joyful whatever. And I'm not sure, hand on heart, that my lessons are particularly joyful [laughs, perhaps self-deprecatingly?]. I might be joyful, but the process that they go through I don't think is.’

The participant highlights the structural barriers impacting teacher and student autonomy: the participant describes themselves as having a reduced capacity (freedom) to be responsive to the students’ emerging interests, to expand a subject laterally, and students have a reduced capacity to influence what they learn. The participant aligns this with the ‘process of being in the classroom ... becoming less democratic’, and also as the antithesis of ‘joy’. For the participant, a joyful classroom is a democratic one.

Concluding discussion on the participant's reflective professional critique

The participant's reflections reveal an active process of negotiating their professional identity within the constraints of a system that demands conformity. There are interlinking strands in the process of reflective critique – surfacing, values clarification, reframing, translation, subjectification. These led the participant to engage with their professional identity and how this identity feels in a constraining, performative-driven context. The affirmation that the 'project has reminded me' of the 'teacher that I can be' is integral to the participant making sense of how the Prototype Framework and Guide can be used and adapted in their educational setting. For this teacher, therefore, identity construction and awareness of identity regulation (Carroll, 2015, p 100) are essential features of responding to and exploring the possibilities of the Prototype Framework and Guide.

This professional critique is a vital part of the process through which the teacher goes in order to design and trial an AELD activity. To trial an activity, they feel they need to consider and make sense of where they are – and who they are – within the current system. Whilst the findings suggest that the participant has empathy with the project and its principles, they see clearly the barriers and challenges to applying them to their own context. Their attempt to negotiate these constraints and tensions (outlined more fully in Part B) is described in the final evaluation stage as a 'kind of constant battle between the rigidity and the need to be joyful'. To identify how they can incorporate AELD activities into their pedagogical practice, they must reflect upon and reckon with the structures that make this an act they perceive to carry 'risks' and to require 'courage' and 'bravery'. It is almost framed as a subversive act, one that the teacher must treat tactically – deciding whether to do this covertly and 'risk' being discovered by the SLT or confess and face the challenge of legitimising the approach and, potentially, having to abandon the attempt.

Their engagement with the AECED project highlights the difficulty of enacting democratic pedagogy in a system that prioritises performative outcomes over meaningful learning. While the participant's reflections indicate an existing alignment with the project's values, their engagement with the Prototype Framework and Guide appears to have provided a structured space for articulating and deepening this critique. Rather than introducing wholly new ideas, the Framework has acted as a lens through which they examine the systemic barriers to enacting these values in practice.

The responses and feelings that are shown and shared through the reflective professional critique reveal something about the process of engaging with the Pedagogical Framework and Guide and designing and trialling AELD. Based on our analysis, we suggest that the experience is one that the participant feels they are benefiting from and is felt to be positive. One final illustration of this, to conclude Part A, is their comment on Figure 2 above – the collage which shows the teacher they would like to be: 'this is kind of me being that sparkly, colourful person. That's what I'd like to be and [*was when we were doing collage*] and have been in the past' [emphasis added].

Account of the participant's transformational change

Part B covers the participant's transformational change across the stages of engagement. It helps in addressing **RQ2**. Regarding the transformational change in participants: In what ways do the Prototype Framework and Guides, by facilitating the co-creative design of AEL for democracy using ABE pedagogies, lead to individual and collective growth in regard to

- feelings for democracy,
- aesthetic awareness and qualities (such as empathic, ethical, and spiritual sensibilities),
- collaborative, reflexive and critical capabilities,
- openness to newly 'seeing' the other,
- willingness to move towards more reflexive and critical modes of awareness and knowing that reconnect with the body as a source of learning,
- capacity to challenge social injustices and engage creatively with conflict and antagonisms
- any other aspects that will be developed in and through the PAR process.

The central concern of RQ2 is the extent of growth in democratic sensibility. Transformation through the discourse challenged current practices and the participant was able to reimagine how they could navigate democracy-as-becoming through AELD within the current context and the practices that are expected to be followed within the school. Individual transformation of the teacher emerged through designing and then trialling AELD pedagogy, at first tentatively within classes and then a full lesson. Their focus was more specifically on transforming dialogue and power sharing, with their AELD lesson providing overlaps with all the four dimensions, including holistic learning and relational well-being. A number of themes are suggested as a result of the analysis of the participant's responses, feelings and deliberations, which describe a narrative of change that include various features such as uncertainty, feelings of critique and resonance, reflection, conceptual and practical exploration, indications of democratic sensibility and feelings of release and joy in the trial:

- a) **Uncertainty:** During the familiarisation stage, the participant displays some uncertainty - for example, about terms such as 'embodied', 'democracy-as-becoming'.
- b) **Feelings and aesthetics of misalignment:** In Part A, the participant's reflective critique was explained. Here, something of the emotion involved and the aesthetic expression of misalignment (through a co-created drawing) are highlighted. This builds on other arts-based and embodied reflective activities, such as the collages in figures 1 and 2 in Part A. Listening to the 'Four dimensions of holistic democracy' video resulted in the participant experiencing an affective sensory response, saying that they '*just feel cross*'. The emotion the video stirred was not with the project, as the project resonated with them, but with the educational field. The participant sighed and said '*it's that crossness of, actually, I'm probably more in tune with this than I am in the current situation I work in*'. The drawing in Figure 3 (overleaf) gives visual expression to a '*democratic classroom*', which forms the centre with '*bright colours*' on the inside; and surrounding it with '*darker colours*' outside the classroom. It was drawn by the researcher (R2) and co-created by both, evolving during

and in relation to the conversation between them. The participant questions if the rigid, less-democratic structure (on the outer edges of the drawing) and the democratic classroom (the inner part) can 'coexist'. In some ways, the contrast expressed by the drawing is that between the 'lifeworld' (the stuff of culture, values, meaning, expressions of need, desire and purpose, etc.) (the inner part) and the 'systemsworld' (the world of instrumentalities, rules, systems and so on) (Sergiovanni, 2004).

- c) **Nuanced understanding of power:** The performative role of the teacher was captured in the participant's commentary on what they saw as the teacher role in current times: they saw that role as the authority commanding their classroom from the front with expectations that students *'do what I say when I say in the way I say it... I'm going to actually dictate how you sit in my lesson. How you do this'*. There was a reflexive sense of the educator's power and control over their students, emerging through the idea of the teacher dictating how students sit, how they learn, what they learn and keeping students' gaze upon them. While the participant saw that as a teacher they had a certain amount of power, they also recognised the power of the hierarchical structure over them and the pressures of being observed by senior leaders.

Lack of autonomy is relative, they recognised: *'I'm not totally autonomous in the system I currently work in, their [students'] autonomy is even less'*. Seeing the others' (students') viewpoint in relation to their own leads them to question the lack of opportunities that give students a feel for democracy: *'Do they have power and autonomy? If they've never experienced that. How much do they have?'*

But giving students a chance of having some power can be scary and comes with responsibility:

'in the context of a classroom, if we are the one with power. It's very scary to let go of that power, isn't it? So, if we, if we can give some of that power back to the students. It's also about allowing them to make mistakes with it, and not misuse it as such, but and then not take full advantage of it in a positive kind of way'.

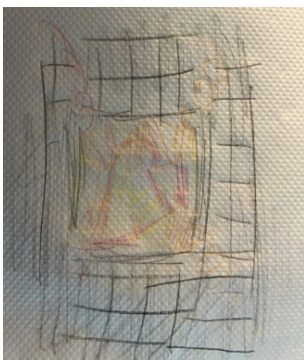


Figure 3: Drawing by researcher R3

- d) **Need for courage:** The participant, who valued the project and the possibility of trialling change, thought it would entail *'courage to step outside of the [usual, expected] scheme of work...'*. Being *'brave enough'* was something the participant felt they needed to muster in case of an impromptu visit from the senior team. The idea of being *'caught'* was reiterated through the participant's concern about being *'seen'* and expressed how it could lead to *'quite a hard conversation, either for me with the SLT or SLT and the students, I don't think students will question it because they'll just be this is something that we don't normally do. But this is exciting and interesting'*.

- (e) **Growing confidence:** In the planning stage, the participant reported that they understood the concepts a *'little bit better'* and that they were *'not as scared of the words'*, suggesting growing confidence.
- (f) **Opportunity for renewing professional skills:** As well as feelings of vulnerability that necessitated courage, there was a positive note in that the participant saw the potential and the opportunity for them to develop skills that have been 'buried' and less practised. They suggested that *'as teachers, we've forgotten some of those skills, we taught from the front for so long we've kind of forgotten, and we don't have to teach from the front anymore'*.
- (g) **Transforming dialogue:** Transforming dialogue was a particular focus for the participant that developed from the familiarisation stage and continued through the planning session. During the familiarisation stage, the participant felt that the teaching practices do not allow for students to engage with or encourage dialogue to transform. The lack of students' opportunity for transforming dialogue became a key focus of exploration. In exploring transforming dialogue, the participant questioned and challenged educational practices. They explained their educational context in relation to how opportunities for transforming dialogue are reduced. However, they also identified where there are opportunities for change towards nurturing democracy in the classroom.
- (h) **Reframing, and exploring different arts-based and embodied approaches:** The participant explored ways of aligning their sense of a democratic approach with transforming dialogue while remaining within and vigilant to the school policy strategies. This can be seen as a process of both reflection and reframing their thinking, that enables them to explore imaginatively different possibilities for practice. Before finalising the plan for the trial, they made tentative 'try-outs' in which they played around with different ways of using arts-based and embodied approaches with students. After much deliberation and discussions with the researcher, the participant gave (Health and Social Care) students (their key stage 4 NEA qualification class) a narrative task – though they said that it was *'a bit more than that'*. They gave them this task because the students *'were really struggling'* with the sensitive nature of the topic (Sexually Transmitted Infection) and how to think from another person's perspective. The lesson was the last lesson of the term, so the participant had already established a relationship with the students and taught a term's worth of the subject coursework (including public health, what health is, who is responsible for health as an open question - e.g. government). The students therefore came with some prior learning and knowledge to enable them to explore the related subject theme through the ABE activity. The participant gave the 15 students a one-word title (Health), a box of collage materials, paper cutters, images and a paper plate. The participant gave the students some 'stimuli' with the aim of getting the students to engage in thinking from someone else's perspective: *'what the character would say... rather than it becoming 3rd person, it worked, they really got into it..'*
- (i) **Democratic sensibility:** We suggest that the misalignment felt and expressed vividly by the participant is indicative of a personal democratic sensibility which the participant sees

as being excluded from the current practice of their professional identity. Hearing the words spoken within the 'Four dimensions of holistic democracy' video had a tangible resonance and offered the participant reassurance: *'I feel like these are the words that I need to hear'*. These words also offered a note of encouragement, resurfacing the participant's reconnection to their own values that resonated with the project:

'Those words are encouraging, and actually, it's a really gentle reminder that those things are important. And to keep pursuing and trying, and, you know, working with the students to get to a position where those things can happen'.

Indications of the participant's democratic sensibility are suggested in the themes of evaluation below (equality and power sharing). Their lack of autonomy and the pressure to conform appears at odds with their democratic sensibility; there is a feeling of being compromised. However, the possibility that they might be able to create some change even from this position and step beyond the current conditions took the participant towards further exploration of ideas that led to the trial.

(j) Themes of the evaluation stage:

Positive feelings by the participant. In the online evaluation session, the participant smiled and proudly held up to the screen a paper plate collage from the AELD activity. There appeared to be more animation in the participant as they spoke.

Freeing pedagogy. In freeing their pedagogy from the daily expectations of school policy and the constraints, there was a releasing of practices that had been concealed: *'I've got my children to be a little bit creative...it reminded me that this is how I used to teach pre-COVID when we would get the art box out... and we had time and space....I felt like we had time and space and actually we wrote a curriculum that built in this type of lesson, whereas I don't think we build that in anymore'*.

Equality and a change in classroom dynamics. The teacher's encounter with their design of AELD initiated a change in classroom dynamics. The teacher found their agency, their courage to relinquish the fear to set conditions for their democratic classroom. As they stepped into using AELD, the participant emerged from the usual socialisation of normative daily practice. The trial session encompassed a very different aesthetic-embodied dimension to the classroom with a sense of community and working together rather than a rigid hierarchy. In this sense, a democratic sensibility was able to be expressed and to create a connectedness between students and the teacher. No longer was the teacher positioned at the front of the class; they shifted their embodied presence to be located amongst the students. A connected relational feeling was gained through sitting with and being amongst the students, removing a division. In this affective experience bodies became freed from normalised, internalised habits. The participant emphasised the difference between *'talking at'* and *'talking with'* by nodding to impress their point: *'I enjoyed it because I didn't feel that I was in charge. I mean, obviously I was in charge, but it didn't feel, I wasn't standing at the front talking at them. I was very much sat down with them, talking with them.... I got the impression that they've not had this freedom, if that's the right word or opportunity for a long time'*. The participant re-stated, *'so I really enjoyed it, I really enjoyed it [the trial]*. The teacher's aesthetic-embodied awareness of power shifted and reflected how the other dimensions of democracy interplayed: *'You know, we talked about that relational well-being and the power sharing and like I said, I didn't, I mean, ultimately, I was in power, but I was in power without having to be powerful, if that makes sense'*. They appear to be experiencing, and enjoying, a feeling of *'basic equality'* with students that in democratic power sharing can exist alongside other hierarchical distinctions, such as a formal teacher-student relationship (Woods, 2024, p. 11).

Power sharing. The participant through power sharing gave the students the freedom and autonomy they had identified with and spoke about in the pre-trial sessions. We hypothesise that the teacher's democratic sensibility enabled them to let go of their control and power, affording the students opportunities to grow in their creative responses. In handing autonomy to the students, the teacher gave them opportunity to show initiative. The teacher explains that they didn't create their own collage alongside the students as they did not want to restrict students' thought process or visual expression. Otherwise, the students would possibly be hindered by preconceptions of what the teacher wanted: *'I didn't want them to feel that they had a standard that they had to hit. I didn't even kind of show them images that they could use. I didn't do any pre-learning as the word is called now or scaffolding or any of these other words that we use in teaching these days. I just said this is what you know, you've got the opportunity to do this. The word is health. You interpret that as you wish.'*

Joy. How the participant translated AELD and democracy-as-becoming had enabled them to create the time and space for a responsive pedagogy that brought to the classroom the experience of joy. The teachers' comments suggest joy being re-experienced not just as a teacher but joy for the students. An aesthetic-embodied qualitative experience of joy entered the classroom. The pedagogy had a transformative effect upon the classroom - how it was felt and sensed changed, creating an affective democratic atmosphere (Zembylas, 2022): *'I've been banging on about joy, haven't I, joy in the classroom? And I actually felt for about 50 minutes there was joy!'*

Dialogue. The participant reported that having left the students *'alone for sort of 15 or 20 minutes'*, they then engaged with the students in dialogue. Instead of using the strategies of *'cold-calling'* and *'no hands up'*, the participant conversed openly with students generating questions in response to the collages - for example: *'what's this mean and why have you done this? Tell me why this word is important'*. In this way the teacher provided the students opportunities to explore their ideas through visual materials, written words and discourse more freely. The teacher recounted how they had noticed that some of the students in a group *'really struggled'* with autonomy. Unused to the openness of the responsive pedagogical approach, students appear to have sought reassurance from the teacher by asking for an answer. To maintain the autonomy the teacher responded to the students by enabling them to make decisions rather than dictate what to do or give them prescriptive answers. The teacher gave students the single word of 'health,' giving students the freedom to interpret that term based upon prior coursework: *'do whatever you want I said it could be good health, bad health, mental health, physical health, whatever you want.'*

Creativity. In the teacher's openness to seeing their students, they noticed, with some surprise, a positive effect upon certain students' engagement. There is a suggestion here that the ABE approach enabled the range of students to engage in the lesson through aesthetic-embodied learning, so *'that even the kids that are slightly, for a better word, disengaged, which is probably a little bit unfair, were hugely creative!'* There is a sense that aesthetic-embodied dimensions democratised learning, opening accessibility for all to participate more creatively.

Experiential learning. Following making their evaluation collage, the participant referred back to the AELD lesson, seeing success in the breadth of learning the students experienced. Given the engagement of the students and the joyful classroom approach taken by the teacher, the conditions created enabled both the participant and their students to experience the aesthetic-embodied dimension of success. There is an indication from the evaluation stage that the participant succeeded in translating the Pedagogical Framework and Guide to develop a richer approach to students generating knowledge through experiential learning rather than transferred knowledge: *'you know, this, need to focus on the right answer. And...] this thing about having a knowledge rich curriculum, which actually is knowledge, but it's not rich because it's really narrow that you might be knowledge rich, but you're rich in such a narrow [way], which again, is why the lesson I did, their knowledge is suddenly really broad because they're not having to hit a specification or a success criteria... They've all met the success criteria, which I don't think they necessarily experience very often... I certainly experienced success in a way that I, I'd almost forgotten how to do it in that kind of free for all...do what you need to do.'*

Democracy-as-becoming. Democracy-as-becoming also transpired within the classroom through the ways the students worked together. The teacher was aware of the relationship between experience and opportunities for students to be able to practice democratic sensibilities themselves: 'it's not about whether we do, it is how able the students are at doing stuff like this and those skills of working together and negotiating and compromise. So, yeah, so they had some skills, but it also showed the groups and the individuals that have that kind of ability to think and say compromise and negotiate and work with others and those that clearly aren't used to....and again, I'm not sure that they either are able to do that with each other or hear that from other people. But they had that opportunity of kind of just being nice to each other and celebrating what each other had done as well'.

Concluding discussion on the account of the participant's transformational change

Transformational change is the focus of RQ2. From the analysis of data completed at this point, it is not possible to come to conclusions about all the aspects of potential change highlighted in RQ2. However, it is possible to suggest that the data analysis gives grounds for suggesting change is apparent in the participant in a number of ways.

There are indications of a degree of epistemic transformation, starting in the familiarisation stage where there were uncertainties about the potential challenges the participant anticipated, but also a creative engagement with ideas in the Pedagogical Framework and Guide that the participant finds resonates with them. In this resonant encounter between participant and Pedagogical Framework and Guide, the participant is changed.

There is a renewed sense by the participant of the kind of teacher they want to be. Feeding into this, amongst other reflections by the participant, is a stirring of an emotional reaction to democracy-as-becoming, expressed as feeling cross about the gap between democratic principles (the dimensions shared through the video) and the everyday reality of educational practice as the participant experiences it. There is a process of what could be termed identity construction (or reconstruction), a glimpse into which is given by participant-created collages in the evaluation stage (figures 1 and 2).

The participant reframes their thinking about possibilities for practice that may better accord with their democratic sensibilities. They find confidence to trial a different pedagogy, despite the felt risks and uncertainties and the concerns the participant has about the type and level of accountability they see as characterising the current education system. We might suggest therefore that there is a degree of affective transformation too.

Their trialling was experienced by the participant as bringing into the classroom practice an educationally better teacher-student relationship that incorporates a basic equality (alongside the formal teacher-student relationship). They felt that the trial fostered opportunities for creativity, transforming dialogue and positive collaborative working together (relational well-being), as well as a sense of joy.

From their account of change, it is possible to suggest that the participant creates in the trial an opportunity to give expression to a renewed sense of professional identity – the identity

they are drawn to, which contrasts with the professional identity they see that the education system and practices outside the classroom press them towards. What appears to emerge is an 'adaptive transformation' which highlights the mutuality of influence between participant and Pedagogical Framework, Guide and associated resources, where the person feels themselves open to change. In such an encounter, the feeling and exploration of resonance results in both the person experiencing change and the other part of that encounter (in this case the AELD resources) changing too (in terms of their significance and meaning for that person) (Rosa, 2020, pp. 34-36). The emergence is rooted in a thoughtful and aesthetic-embodied interpretation of ideas and values of AELD. Through their feelings, concerns and experiences, the participant translates these ideas and values and makes them meaningful for their circumstances and for their own professional self.

From our analysis, we suggest that it is helpful to see the reframing that has occurred as involving three interlinking movements. Our elaboration of these movements draws on Archer's (2000, pp. 289-291) 'moments' of the dialectic relationship between personal and social identity. The first movement is the influence of personal identity. The participant is invited to engage with the Pedagogical Framework, Guide and associated resources which involves their surfacing their own views and feelings, and exploring their own reflections, on democracy and aesthetic and embodied approaches to learning for democracy. The position they occupy is as an educator (a social role), but they also bring into the reflection and reframing their personal self. The views and priorities of the self are shaped by a variety of prior experiences (personal and professional).

The second influencing factor is that of evaluating their social identity as they engage with the Pedagogical Framework, Guide and associated resources. This social identity and its social role (that of teacher) become the subject of and resource for reflection and reframing. In light of those matters and values important to the participant's personal identity, the social identity and role are critically assessed. The reflection and reframing involve examining what challenges and opportunities are raised in embracing into the practice of the social role, the values and aims of AELD to which the personal self is committed.

Thirdly, there is a synthesis between personal and social identity. This involves deciding what to do in their social role – that is, in this case, *a part of their teacher role* in a particular setting and time (the trial) which they seek to reframe. It involves deciding how much of their personal self they invest into this newly reframed part of their social role, and deciding how much and in what ways the personal intention to reframe – guided by the personal values, concerns and ideas evoked by exploration of the AELD resources – can be accommodated in that reframed part. This synthesis of personal and social identity is manifest through the practising of the reframed role in the trial. The positive evaluation of the trial suggests that through this synthesis the participant could "see their self-worth" (p293) constituted by their role occupancy - that is, by the way in which that moment of role occupancy was reframed and created. This adaptive transformation – where the resources, the participant's response and reframed practice resonate with each other – we tentatively suggest, appears to be one which is 'a

movement towards a greater integrity of identity—a movement toward wholeness’ (Poutiatine, 2009, p. 193). The participant’s social identity as teacher is transformed by the synthesis.

The Role and Influence of the researcher

RQ3: What influence, if any, did the researchers have on how the Framework and Guides were used and the designs of AEL for democracy that emerged in the trials?

Case study B was designed to be an immersive and collaborative process involving one secondary teacher and one researcher (R3). The purpose of the case study was to explore in-depth one secondary teacher’s experience of engaging with the Framework and Secondary Guide and moving through the stages of introduction, familiarisation, planning an AELD trial, actioning the trial and evaluation. At the heart of the case is the participant-researcher dyad. The case study was conducted in a way that was responsive to the participant and maximised opportunities for reflection, generation of in-depth insights and discussion of the participant’s professional context and practice. It was conducted with the intent of creating sessions that provided for safe and supportive encounters that would enable dialogue and sharing between participant and researcher.

Researcher R3 noted down reflections on the extent to which the aspiration of a collaborative participant-researcher relationship in the case study was achieved:

‘As a dyad, our conversations flowed, seemingly effortlessly and dynamically. For me, it didn’t feel like there was a rigid delineation of roles (researcher-participant) and there wasn’t a rigid structure to the encounters, which can sometimes be the case when a researcher uses (refers to) an ‘interview schedule’. This allowed me to experience the encounters as non-hierarchical, there was a feeling of equality between us. The sessions were planned to the extent that there was a focus for each encounter, but there was a responsiveness – on my part, at least – and a sense of freedom within the conversations.’ (R3’s notes).

The encounters between participant and researcher ‘were experienced – by me – as aesthetic-embodied (even when online) and holistically democratic encounters. The democratic is important as it emphasises the nature of our interactions with each other; having recently watched the sessions and refreshed my memory about this, it seems clear to me that we were actually seeking to exemplify – perhaps not even consciously – the four dimensions of democracy-as-becoming. Aesthetic-embodied encounters in which democracy-as-becoming was ‘at play.’ (R3’s notes).

It was noted during the analysis by other researchers that in the sessions with the participant, R3 helps the participant with understanding of concepts and was responsive. R3 listened to the participant, and the semi-structured nature of the sessions allowed them to pick up and pursue what the participant was saying, mapping this onto the AECED concepts and drawing their critique into relation with the AECED concepts to facilitate further reflection and discussion. In this way, it modelled the sense of responsiveness that the teacher is missing. There are possibilities to go off on tangents to explore different ideas, whilst the researcher remains as a facilitator. The conversation was not unidirectional – the researcher shared their experiences and feelings, which often aligned with the participant’s. There was a solidarity

between them. The researcher gives the participant not only space but permission and validation.

Whilst a different power dynamic may have been introduced due to the researcher/participant dynamic, the relationship had an established level of trust. Early in the familiarisation stage, the researcher offered reassurance to the participant that their interaction was taking place within ‘a safe space. I just want to emphasise that this is a safe space’ (R3). Throughout all the sessions, the interaction between the researcher and participant was characterised by informal, conversational and responsive dialogue. Although they each listened to the other, often their speech overlaps, at times they finish each other's thoughts. Often, the researcher adds utterances which might serve to reassure or encourage the participant, such as ‘that’s interesting’.

The participant comments in the evaluation stage:

‘And it’s been really nice to use my brain. I mean, it has made me think and question lots, which again, I don’t, we’re not asked or expected to do a lot of that anymore. And again, it might be my setup, but you know, we are, we are given the book that says this is how you’re going to teach.... And where is that creativity for us gone, you know, because it’s not there for us... So that opportunity to meet in a very different way is really, it’s been really helpful, really useful and has brought it alive. Really it has brought the project alive’

4. Limitations

The limitations of Case study B include the following:

Case study B is the immersive case from which data are analysed and interpreted in this case report and comprised, by design, one teacher participant. The focus on one teacher participant allowed data to be generated on the reflections, feelings, professional context, deliberations and experience of the trialled AELD in the kind of detail and depth not possible in a case with a larger number of teacher participants. At the same time, we recognise that involving teacher participants with different backgrounds, educational experience and other variables would have enhanced the insights that the study could have generated.

If the study could have been longitudinal, this would have had benefits in learning about how the teacher participant might have built upon and extended their experienced in developing AELD.

Data from the participant’s students about how they experienced the trial AELD would have offered additional, valuable perspectives.

With regard to Case study A (the self-directed study), none of the four teachers who agreed to participate took the opportunity to contribute data.

5. Relevance of Context

The UK is a quasi-federal state consisting of four countries – England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland – each with distinct education systems. While the UK Government oversees

education in England through the Department for Education, the devolved governments manage schooling in the other three nations. Over time, HE policies have also diverged across the four countries (Atherton et al., 2024). The UK's parliamentary democracy has evolved over centuries, shaped by key historical moments such as the Glorious Revolution (1688) and the creation of the UK through the union of England and Scotland (1707). Each UK nation has a distinct democratic history, with parliaments dating back to the 13th century, though universal suffrage was only achieved in 1928. While the UK scores highly on global democracy indexes, public satisfaction with democracy has been declining, particularly among younger generations (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020; Foa et al., 2020). A 2025 poll found that while 73% of Gen Z respondents (13-27 years old) viewed democracy positively, 52% also agreed that a strong leader not bound by elections and parliament would improve governance (Channel 4 & Craft Research, 2025).

Despite the UK's democratic traditions, democratic education is inconsistently addressed in policy. Research suggests that secondary education in England provides limited guidance on promoting democratic engagement (Sant et al., 2024). Additionally, reforms since the late 1980s have introduced market-driven governance, reducing local authority control in favour of quasi-independent school trusts. These changes have created a high-accountability culture, often described as neoliberal, though there are nuances and spaces for alternative approaches (Ball, 2006; Wilkins, 2019; Woods & Roberts, 2018). The teaching profession faces increasing pressure, with many experiencing a crisis of morale (Towers et al., 2022). Of particular relevance to the AECED project, the state education system in England has deprioritised the arts, limiting opportunities for aesthetic and embodied learning (Tambling & Bacon, 2024). This broader context shapes the possibilities for democratic and arts-based education within the UK today.

6. Learnings for Pedagogical Framework and Guides

RQ4: What evidence-based conclusions for revision and refinement of the Prototype Framework and Guides emerge from the experience of using the Prototypes and addressing RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

Three implications for the Pedagogical Framework and Guide are highlighted from Case Study B:

Engagement of some educators is likely to involve reflections on their professional identity and possibly reconstructions of their identity. The value to practice of the Pedagogical Framework and Guide involves to some degree potential users working with their identity. Using and adapting the Pedagogical Framework and Guide is not simply about engaging with and learning processes and procedures for AELD. It involves – through surfacing, transforming and reframing, etc. - profound issues of values clarification and reflecting on who we feel ourselves to be as people and professionals.

The opportunity that the resources gave for engagement with concepts such as the four dimensions of holistic democracy proved helpful and fruitful and reinforces their value in the Pedagogical Framework and Guide.

Including other concepts helpful in our interpretation of the case study (such as democratic sensibility) may be useful additions to the Pedagogical Framework and Guide.

Encouraging use of and integrating the Pedagogical Framework and Guide into the current education system are challenging aims. The concerns and priorities of educational policy and practice (at least in some education jurisdictions) do not necessarily align with those of AELD.

Use of the Prototype Framework and Guide was facilitated in important ways by the researcher, who helped, for example, the participant to understand key concepts. There is a pressing need, especially for users who do not have support and assistance from facilitators or trainers, to: refine, simplify and make more accessible the language, concepts and ideas; include more practical examples; include clearer pathways to show how one can lead oneself through the Framework and Guides; provide additional resources in different formats (for example, the video was instrumental in this case) and offer links to other resources (in this case the book by Kline, 1999) proved very helpful.

7. Ethical Reflection and Gender Dimension

Ethical reflections: All data and documents relating to data analysis are stored securely on the UH One Drive, as per the Data Management Plan, and only accessible to the UK AECED project researchers. Transcripts were pseudonymised by removing names of the participant and researcher. Participant and researcher are identifiable in the stored audio-visual recordings, but can only be accessed by the UK research team. Care has been taken in writing up findings to remove features that might make the participant of Case Study B identifiable (through imagery, quotes, contextual detail). Consideration has been given to power dynamics - for instance, the researchers' power to interpret data and to decide themes. Guided by the participant's voice, diligence has been applied to maintain the integrity of the participant's voice by faithful representation of their words and experience and appropriate contextual information; and making clear where it is researchers who are making (tentative) suggestions about how the data may be interpreted (for example, through theory and concepts).

Gender dimension: Case 19 was designed to be accessible and engaging whatever the gender of potential participants. Researchers were accommodating to participants' needs. Throughout, gender stereotypes were avoided, inclusive language used, and it was clear that participation was not gender-dependent. Gender was not a primary research focus so questions about gender were not asked during recruitment nor data collection. Researchers made no assumptions about participant gender at any stage. The participant and data excerpts are presented in a gender-neutral way to avoid assumptions and to aid anonymisation. Data analysis was completed by a predominantly female research team; however inclusive and openly reflexive conversations were conducted amongst all researchers to integrate diverse perspectives. In terms of the development of the Pedagogical Framework and Guides, we note the importance of using inclusive language and providing diverse case study examples that will speak to different people.

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