

**EARLY YEARS AND  
PRIMARY EDUCATION**

***PRACTICE COMPANION***



**Leading authors**

Claudia Neves

Monika Pažur

**Contributing authors**

Marta Abelha

Pedro Abrantes

Ana Patrícia Almeida

Juliana Oliveira

**Editors**

Pauliina Jääskeläinen

Pilvikki Lantela

Philippa Mulbery

**Contributing researchers**

Marta Abelha

Pedro Abrantes

Katarina Aladrović Slovaček

Ana Patrícia Almeida

Vlatka Domović

Maja Drvodelić

Claudia Neves

Juliana Oliveira

Monika Pažur

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Early years and primary education practice companion

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## **Accessibility and use with read-aloud tools**

This document is designed to support use with read-aloud tools and assistive technologies. The text is organised in a clear, numbered structure and presented in a logical reading order to support audio reading. Images and diagrams include alternative text where they carry meaning.

For enhanced navigation, an accessible Word version is also available on request.

All diagrams and tables in this document are accompanied by short explanatory text to support accessibility for readers using screen readers or read-aloud tools.

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The following tools provide practical resources to help educators, school leaders, and community partners bring Aesthetic and Embodied Learning for Democracy (AELD) to life in Early Years and primary settings.

While the main body of the guide introduces the values, principles, sensibilities, and pedagogical orientations that shape AELD, the tools translate these foundations into practical tools for everyday practice. They are designed to be flexible, modular, and adaptable to different contexts, curricula, and teaching traditions.

Each tool focuses on a different dimension of implementation:

- educator's democratic stance and the relational dispositions that support children's participation
- organisational and cultural conditions that make AELD sustainable in schools and learning communities
- inclusion-focused tools that support every child having equitable access
- practical pathways, micro-practices, and activity invitations that educators can use immediately

Additional tools provide templates, planning supports, and ways to involve families and community partners.

The tools are meant to be used as:

- stand-alone tools, when educators want something quick and actionable
- deepening resources, when teams want to align practice with values and principles
- professional development materials, supporting workshops, coaching, and reflective dialogue

They do not prescribe a programme. Instead, they offer multiple pathways for creating democratic, participatory, aesthetic, and embodied learning environments that honour children's diverse ways of being and becoming. Use the tools in the order that fits your intentions and your context. Pick one tool, explore it with children, and see what becomes possible.

Each tool supports a specific aspect of the Early Years and Primary Guide — from stance and environment to practical pathways, inclusion, family collaboration, and professional learning — so educators can move seamlessly between conceptual understanding and practical implementation.

## START HERE: HOW TO NAVIGATE THE TOOLS

These resources offer practical tools to help you bring AELD into everyday practice. You can read them in order, or enter wherever your current questions or needs take you.

### **Educator stance and sensibilities toolkit**

Use when you want to reflect on your presence, attunement, listening, and responsiveness. This tool supports professional preparation and team dialogue.

### **Conditions for AELD implementation**

Use when planning the relational, spatial, organisational, and temporal conditions that create safety for exploration and participation — for both children and educators.

### **Inclusion, accessibility and equity toolkit**

Use when you need adaptations, multimodal pathways, or strategies to support participation and belonging for individuals with diverse developmental, emotional, and sensory needs.

### **Practical pathways: Activities and micro-practices**

Use when designing everyday learning experiences. Includes quick invitations, deep practices, micro-routines, rituals, and templates for creating AELD sessions.

### **Families and communities toolkit**

Use when planning communication with families, welcoming diverse communities, or collaborating with cultural partners. Supports sensitive, multimodal, and relational approaches.

### **Templates, reflection and leadership tools**

Use when planning or documenting learning, supporting educator reflection, or developing whole-school approaches to AELD.

## HOW THE TOOLS CONNECT TO THE GUIDE

Each resource and tool corresponds to a major component of the AELD Guide — stance, environments, inclusion, practices, families, and leadership — so you can move smoothly between conceptual understanding and concrete implementation.

# 1. EDUCATOR STANCE AND SENSIBILITIES TOOLKIT

AELD depends not only on what educators do but on how they stand, perceive, and respond within the learning community. This tool supports educators in recognising the attitudes, sensitivities, and relational gestures that make democratic life possible in Early Years and Primary Education.

It is not a list of competencies, but a reflective guide to the dispositions that nurture democratic sensibility in children.

**Use this tool when you want to reflect on your stance, prepare yourself for AELD practice, or open conversations with colleagues about presence, listening, and responsiveness.**

## THE ATTENTIVE LISTENER

Listening with the whole body: eyes, posture, silence, presence.

You are practising this stance when you:

- slow the pace to allow children to finish emerging ideas;
- tune into gestures, emotions, rhythms, and atmosphere;
- listen without rushing to evaluate or correct.

Why it matters:

Children learn that their voices — verbal or non-verbal — are valued.



## THE CO-LEARNER

Learning with children not only prepares them to learn but also prepares them to teach.

You are practising this stance when you:

- follow a child's idea into exploration;
- share curiosity, wonder, and uncertainty;
- show that your thinking can change as well.

Why it matters:

Democracy becomes a shared inquiry, not a one-directional transfer.



## THE DESIGNER OF MULTIMODAL INVITATIONS

Creating many pathways into participation.

You are practising this stance when you:

- offer drawing, movement, object-play, drama, sound, or building;
- use visuals or gestures to welcome multilingual children;
- adjust invitations based on sensory or emotional needs.

Why it matters:

Equity becomes visible in how the environment welcomes children.

## THE HOLDER OF SPACE

Cultivating emotional and relational safety.

You are practising this stance when you:

- normalise uncertainty and hesitation;
- protect vulnerable moments (whispers, tears, conflict);
- sustain rituals of belonging and relational care.

Why it matters:

Relational well-being is the ground on which democracy grows.



## THE PRACTITIONER OF THE RECIPROCAL ACCEPTIVE GAZE

A soft, curious, non-judgmental way of seeing — modelled and taught.

You are practising this stance when you:

- look at children with openness and care.
- support them to look at peers the same way.
- notice tension or exclusion before it escalates.

Why it matters:

Children learn that they help create the safety they benefit from.

## THE RESPONSIVE FACILITATOR

Adjusting pace, tone, and direction based on what emerges.

You are practising this stance when you:

- slow down when emotions rise;
- extend an activity when deep engagement is visible;
- let a child's idea shift the flow.

Why it matters:

Responsiveness models how democratic communities adapt.



## WHAT THESE STANCES LOOK LIKE IN DAILY PRACTICE

Educators embody the stances above when they:

- create predictable rhythms with room for improvisation;
- use warm gestures, proximity, and tone to co-regulate;
- facilitate conflict with softness, not speed;
- honour children's ideas without over-directing;
- support children to regulate their bodies and emotions;
- invite children to take responsibility for group well-being.

These small gestures accumulate into a democratic atmosphere.

### ***REFLECTION PROMPTS***

***EACH REFLECTION IS A PROMPT FOR PROFESSIONAL REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION***

#### **Attentive Listening:**

When did I stop and truly listen today? What changed when I did?

#### **Co-Learning:**

Did I allow a child's idea to redirect our path? What emerged?

#### **Multimodal Design:**

Who participated easily? Who needed a different doorway in?

#### **Holding Space:**

When did I protect vulnerability? Do I know when I missed a cue?

#### **Acceptive Gaze:**

How did I model soft seeing? How did children practise it with others?

#### **Responsiveness:**

Did I keep pace with the children, or follow the timetable's rhythm?

## **FOR TEAM REFLECTION**

Educator teams can use these guiding questions:

- What do we collectively pay attention to in children?
- What stances come naturally to us? Which needs development?
- How do we support one another to practise responsiveness and care?
- How does our team model democratic relations in front of children?

AELD grows stronger when adults model the same democratic processes they hope children will develop.

### **IN SUMMARY**

The educator's stance is a democratic act.

Children learn how:

- to see
- to listen
- to care
- to imagine
- to participate

by observing how adults do these things with them and with one another.

The next tool — Conditions for Implementation — describes the organisational supports that sustain these stances.



## 2. CONDITIONS FOR AELD IMPLEMENTATION

AELD grows in environments where adults work collaboratively, routines support care and participation, and the organisational culture gives educators the freedom to design responsive, relational, and imaginative experiences. The conditions below help schools create the soil in which democratic sensibility can flourish.

Use this tool when you are planning the relational, spatial, organisational, and temporal conditions that support AELD. It helps teams create environments where educators and children feel safe to explore and participate.

## ORGANISATIONAL CONDITIONS

Condition	What it means in practice
Time for preparation and reflection	Educators have protected time for planning, noticing, documenting, discussing children's expressions, and adapting activities responsively.
Flexible scheduling	Daily rhythms allow moments of slowness, return, lingering, and extension when children are deeply engaged.
Safe emotional climate for staff	Educators feel respected, supported, and able to express uncertainty or vulnerability; they model these relational qualities for children.
Shared pedagogical understanding	Staff have a shared language about values, principles, and aims, reducing contradictions between adults.
Leadership that values relational practice	Managers legitimise time spent on dialogue, reflection, observation, and collaborative planning.
Documentation as a shared tool	Photos, drawings, transcriptions, and observations are used to reflect on children's learning—not to evaluate them.

Organisational conditions include protected time for preparation and reflection, flexible scheduling, a safe emotional climate for staff, shared pedagogical understanding, leadership that values relational practice, and documentation used for reflection rather than evaluation.

## ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

AELD depends on spaces that invite participation, expression, and belonging.

Condition	In practice
Flexible, open materials	Moveable resources, fabrics, natural objects, drawing tools, and symbolic materials that invite multimodal play.
Spaces for movement and stillness	Areas to move freely and areas to retreat or regulate emotions, supporting all children's needs.
Ritual spaces	Circles, meeting corners, or storytelling areas that hold shared routines and democratic encounters.
Displays that honour all children's work	Children's creations displayed non-judgmentally, showing that their contributions matter.
Acoustic and sensory care	Attention to noise levels, lighting, visual overload, and sensory-friendly options.

Environmental conditions include flexible open materials, spaces for movement and stillness, ritual spaces (circles/meeting corners), displays that honour children's work, and acoustic and sensory care.

## RELATIONAL CONDITIONS

These affordances support equity, inclusion, agency, and emotional regulation.

Condition	In practice
Consistent adult presence	Children know who is caring for them and can trust their relational rhythms.
Collaborative staff culture	Educators co-plan, co-observe, share dilemmas, and support one another's stance.
Reciprocal acceptive gaze	Adults model and teach a soft, respectful way of seeing others; children learn to practise it.
Family relationships	Families feel welcomed and see themselves as partners, not visitors.
Community collaboration	Libraries, cultural centres, and local organisations contribute to shared learning.

Relational conditions include consistent adult presence, collaborative staff culture, reciprocal acceptive gaze, strong family relationships, and community collaboration.

## PEDAGOGICAL CONDITIONS

These conditions support that democratic principles guide daily interactions.

Condition	In practice
Shared responsibility for participation	Adults and children co-create agreements, routines, and rituals.
Commitment to multimodality	Teachers consistently offer non-verbal and sensory-rich modes of expression.
Responsiveness to emergence	Plans can shift when children's needs, emotions, or ideas require something different.
Conflict as learning	Moments of tension are handled with care, slowness, and dialogue — not punishment.
Emotional and aesthetic presence	Educators pay attention to atmosphere, feeling, rhythm, and story.

Pedagogical conditions include shared responsibility for participation, commitment to multimodality, responsiveness to emergence, treating conflict as learning, and maintaining emotional and aesthetic presence.

## CONDITIONS THAT SUPPORT EDUCATORS THEMSELVES

Educators cannot offer democratic presence if their own well-being is compromised. Teacher well-being translates directly into relational quality with children.

Support condition	Examples
Professional well-being	Reasonable workload, emotional support, mentoring, protected breaks.
Professional autonomy	Trust to adapt activities and respond to children creatively.
Professional learning opportunities	Time for training, peer discussions, and developing aesthetic–embodied practice.
Recognition of emotional labour	Appreciation of the care work educators perform daily.

Support for educators includes professional well-being, professional autonomy, professional learning opportunities, and recognition of emotional labour.

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR LEADERSHIP AND TEAMS**

- What conditions in our setting already support AELD, and which need strengthening?
- Where do we create flexibility for time, rhythm, and responsive practice?
- Do our environments invite participation for all children?
- How do we support educator well-being and collaboration?
- How do leadership structures reinforce values of freedom, equity, and responsiveness?

These questions help teams assess readiness and plan next steps.

### **IN SUMMARY**

Educators' vulnerability is recognised as part of democratic practice; AELD requires conditions where teachers feel safe to try, adapt, pause, and reflect without fear of judgement or blame.

AELD implementation is a collective endeavour. It requires:

- coordinated adults
- flexible rhythms
- emotionally safe spaces
- supportive leadership
- material environments that welcome expression
- and professional cultures grounded in care and collaboration

When these conditions are present, children experience democracy as something deeply felt — not delivered.

The next tool offers practical pathways for inclusion, focusing on how educators can adapt everyday practice so that all children can participate meaningfully.

## 3. INCLUSION, ACCESSIBILITY AND EQUITY TOOLKIT

### **Ensuring every child can participate, belong, and be recognised.**

AELD is inherently inclusive because it recognises that children express themselves through different languages, rhythms, and sensory profiles. This toolkit helps educators design democratic environments where all children — regardless of gender identity, language background, neurodiversity, sensory needs, or emotional needs — have multiple pathways to participation. Inclusion here is not an “add-on”. It is the practical expression of equality and equity and a daily enactment of responsiveness.

Please use this tool to support all children to participate meaningfully. It offers adaptations, multimodal pathways, and strategies to support belonging across diverse needs and contexts.

### CORE PRINCIPLES FOR INCLUSION IN AELD

**Every child has a way in.** Multimodal expression (gesture, sound, drawing, building, movement, silence) supports that no child is excluded because they cannot — or do not wish to — speak.

**Difference is relational wealth.** Variations in language, culture, sensory profile, or gender expression expand the group’s imagination, not limit it.

**Participation is co-created.** Adults design supportive conditions, and children co-shape how participation looks through reciprocal care, patience, and the acceptive gaze.

**Inclusion is felt before it is understood.** Children sense safety, belonging, and recognition in tone, posture, rhythm, proximity, and materials — long before they verbalise these needs.

## TOOLKIT FOR MULTIMODAL ACCESSIBILITY

AELD widens participation by ensuring that children who are quiet, multilingual, non-verbal, shy, or who communicate through sensory–motor channels can still contribute fully.

### Simple inclusive practices

- offer multiple invitations: draw, build, move, point, act, use objects, use rhythm
- use visual anchors: pictograms, gesture prompts, story objects, colour codes
- accept non-verbal responses as valid contributions
- provide choice of proximity: floor, table, standing, close to or away from the group
- include repetition and predictable rituals to support comfort and understanding

### Reflection prompt

Who participates comfortably? Who participates only when the mode changes? Who is present but unseen?

## TOOLKIT FOR GENDER-INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

Early Years spaces may subtly communicate gender norms. AELD supports freedom, belonging, and diverse identities through relational, material, and language practices.

### Simple inclusive practices

- offer all materials to all children — avoid “girls’ activities” or “boys’ tasks”.
- use gender-neutral language when possible (“friends,” “children,” “everyone”).
- include stories featuring diverse families, roles, bodies, and identities.
- watch for patterns of exclusion (e.g., boys dominating space; girls withdrawing).
- normalise emotional expression for all genders (“It’s okay to feel upset”).

### Reflection prompt

Whose expressions, interests, or vulnerabilities are we unconsciously steering?

## TOOLKIT FOR MULTILINGUAL CHILDREN

Multilingualism is not a barrier but a resource that enriches transforming dialogue.

### Simple inclusive practices

- Use gestures, images, objects, rhythm, and role-play to support comprehension.
- Invite children to mix languages during play, story, or drawing.
- Learn and use key words from children's home languages (greetings, emotions).
- Pair multilingual children with peers for meaning-making, not translation duty.
- Use objects or movement to anchor abstract ideas.

### Reflection prompt

Whose home language is visible? Whose is silent yet present?

## TOOLKIT FOR NEURODIVERSITY-INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

AELD aligns naturally with neurodiversity-affirming education because it values multiple ways of sensing, processing, and expressing.

### Simple inclusive practices

- Provide quiet corners, sensory tools, and movement breaks.
- Allow children to participate through parallel play, peripheral observation, or joining in later.
- Keep verbal instructions brief; pair them with visuals, rhythm, or demonstration.
- Honour children's stimming, pacing, or regulating behaviours as communication.
- Offer predictable rituals and transitions supported by gesture or song.

### Reflection prompt

Do our expectations privilege one sensory or communicative style over others?



## TOOLKIT FOR SENSORY AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS

Children participate more fully when their bodies feel regulated and safe.

### Simple inclusive practices

- Offer multiple seating options (cushions, stools, floor mats).
- Reduce sensory overload (sound, visual clutter, harsh lighting).
- Allow movement while listening — rocking, doodling, fidgeting, leaning.
- Normalise pausing, taking space, or stepping out when emotions heighten.
- Build a culture where feelings are named, validated, and held gently.

### Reflection prompt

What sensory or emotional conditions helped or hindered participation today?

## TOOLKIT FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION AND PREVENTING EXCLUSION

Democracy collapses when exclusion becomes normalised, so we watch for early signs (who gets interrupted, overlooked, or imitated). AELD prevents this by cultivating an atmosphere of belonging, mutual care, and soft seeing.

### Simple inclusive practices

- Use cooperative tasks rather than competitive ones.
- Teach and model the reciprocal acceptive gaze.
- Slow down conflicts; let children tell their side with support to regulate first.
- Notice subtle exclusions: ignoring, taking up space, withholding objects, eye-rolling.
- Celebrate differences in play styles, bodies, rhythms, and interests.

### Reflection prompt

Who gets interrupted? Who gets imitated?

Who gets overlooked? Why?



## MICRO-PRACTICES FOR EVERYDAY INCLUSION (1–3 MINUTES)

- “Show your feeling with colour or gesture” (non-verbal entry point).
- “Choose your way to join: draw, move, watch, or speak”.
- “Everyone make space for one more” (bodily inclusion cue).
- “What did you notice someone else doing today that helped the group?”
- “Let’s redo this moment more softly” (teaches perspective-taking).
- “Thank you for telling us in the way that works for you.”

These micro-practices foster an inclusive climate without disrupting the flow.

### IN SUMMARY

Inclusion in AELD is not separate from democracy — it is democracy.

Through multimodal invitations, sensory-sensitive environments, reciprocal care, and attention to difference, children experience:

- equitable participation
- recognition
- belonging
- safety
- agency
- and the understanding that everyone contributes to a shared world

The next tool shifts attention to practical pathways for action, offering ready-to-use invitations, deep practices, and micro-practices that enact AELD in everyday settings.

## 4. PRACTICAL PATHWAYS: ACTIVITIES AND MICRO-PRACTICES

### **Ready-to-use invitations for cultivating aesthetic and embodied democratic learning.**

AELD becomes real for children through everyday practices, carefully designed invitations, and rhythms that welcome participation, imagination, and relational connection. The tools in this section can be used flexibly — as standalone moments, as part of a thematic project, or woven into existing curricular frameworks. They do not aim to create a programme. Instead, they offer pathways that educators can adapt to their groups, contexts, timing, and pedagogical traditions.

Use this tool when you need concrete ideas for everyday practice — quick invitations, deep engagement pathways, micro-practices, rituals, and ways to design AELD sessions.

### **A DEVELOPMENTAL NOTE ON PRIMARY YEARS (6–10)**

Within the primary years, developmental differences between younger (6–7) and older (8–10) children shape how democratic practices unfold.

Younger children benefit from highly concrete, rhythmic, and sensory invitations, while older children increasingly engage in symbolic reasoning, collaborative problem-solving, and reflective dialogue.

The practices proposed in this Guide can be adapted in scale, pacing, and autonomy level to reflect these shifts. Small changes — such as offering older children more voice in planning or inviting younger children to explore through materials — to support that democratic learning remains attuned to each developmental stage.

## HOW TO USE THESE TOOLS

Choose a pathway depending on your context:

### **Quick-start invitations**

Small rituals (10–15 minutes) to weave democratic sensibility into daily life through care, attention, and turn-taking.

### **Deep practices**

Longer embodied/artistic journeys (30–60+ minutes) for creating, negotiating, problem-solving, or caring together.

### **Everyday AELD (micro-practices)**

Tiny moments (1–3 minutes) that shift classroom culture: gestures of noticing, silence, shared responsibility, or reflection.



## QUICK-START INVITATIONS (10–15 MINUTES)

Action title	AELD value	Sensibility	Mode
Emotion Circle with Objects	Responsiveness and Care	Attentiveness + Ethical Holding	Gesture + Voice
Mini-Council with Tokens	Participation and Co-Agency	Relationality + Commoning	Decision + Dialogue
Sound-Drawing Stories	Freedom and Voice	Imagination + Embodiment	Drawing + Sound

Quick-start invitations include Emotion Circle with Objects (responsiveness and care), Mini-Council with Tokens (participation and co-agency), and Sound-Drawing Stories (freedom and voice).

### EXAMPLE

**Duration:** 10–15 minutes

**Invitation:** Children draw while listening to a short story told through sounds (no words). Afterwards, they “translate” their drawing into gestures.

#### **Why? (Democratic meaning)**

- Every child expresses differently (embodied equality)
- Children co-interpret meaning together → shared agency

#### **Educator stance prompt for reflection:**

What story did children interpret that I didn’t expect? Can I let their versions lead?

## DEEP PRACTICES (30–60+ MINUTES)

Practice	Value focus	Key sensibility	Modes
Collective World-building	Participation + solidarity	Imagination + commoning	Drama + building
Fairness in motion	Equality + reputation	Embodiment + ethical holding	Dance + negotiation
Community art “We care for”	Solidarity + care	Relationality + responsiveness	Art + stewardship

Deep practices include Collective World-building (participation and solidarity), Fairness in Motion (equality and reputation), and Community Art “We care for” (solidarity and care).

### EXAMPLE DEEP PRACTICE: COLLECTIVE WORLD-BUILDING (IMAGINATIVE CITY/NATURE)

**Duration:** 45–90 minutes

**Invitation:** Children build an imaginary place using recycled materials, then negotiate rules, care roles, and shared resources.

#### Democratic meaning (interpretive focus)

- rules are co-created and revisable
- care roles rotate → responsibility is shared
- imagination is a political possibility because it lets children rehearse other ways of living together

#### Educator stance prompt for reflection:

Where can I step back so they can negotiate without me? What happens if I don't solve the conflict?

## ROUTINES THAT BUILD DEMOCRATIC ATMOSPHERE

Recurring rituals that structure participatory life.

### Opening circle

- greeting ritual
- gesture check-in
- space for any child to bring a “moment” into the circle
- setting an intention (“What do we want to be today as a group?”)

### Closing reflection

Ask:

- “What did we notice today?”
- “Whose idea changed our path?”
- “What helped us feel together?”

### Rotating roles

Roles such as caretaker of materials, circle opener, storyteller, helper, and peace-bringer. Roles rotate weekly, not as rewards.

### Conflict pause

A ritualised pause:

“Let’s stop. Breathe. Notice”.

Then, children express the conflict through gestures, drawings, or words.

Solutions arise collaboratively.



## TEMPLATE: DESIGNING AN AELD SESSION

### Step 1 — Choose a focus

Fairness, belonging, emotions, imagination, collaboration, space-sharing.

### Step 2 — Select modalities

Drawing, movement, building, storytelling, objects, sound.

### Step 3 — Plan invitations, not instructions

- “How might we...?”
- “What could this become?”
- “What do you notice?”

### Step 4 — Make space for emergence

If children shift the path → follow it.

If rhythm slows → slow down.

If emotions rise → pause and hold the space.

### Step 5 — Close with reflection

Use gesture, colour, or “What helped us today?”



## EVERYDAY ABE: MICRO-PRACTICES (1–3 MINUTES)

Note: Templates for these activities are available for download at the end of this companion guide.

Micro-practice	Democratic value	Sensibility
Noticing gestures ("I saw you help...")	Responsiveness	Attentiveness
Breathing pause together	Equality (shared tempo)	Temporal justice
Silent voting with bodies	Participation	Embodiment
Friendship pebbles/jar	Solidarity	Ethical holding

Everyday micro-practices include noticing gestures, breathing pauses together, silent voting with bodies, and friendship pebbles or jars, linking democratic values to short embodied routines.

### EXAMPLE MICRO: BREATHING PAUSE TOGETHER

**Duration:** 60–90 seconds

**Meaning:** Tempo is equity: every child gets space to arrive.

**Educator stance prompt for reflection:**

Whose rhythm am I following?

## EVERYDAY ABE ACTIVITY CARDS

### Purpose

Short, embodied practices that can be woven into daily routines — not scheduled as lessons.

### Tools included (examples)

Card	What it invites	Value practiced
Story builders	Build a narrative together	Imagination + cooperation
Choice cards	Vote + negotiate choices	Participation + shared agency
Feelings circle	Name feelings through words, gestures, or drawing	Responsiveness + care
Emotion flashcards	Explore emotions creatively	Expression + listening
Acts of kindness flashcards	Small caring action + reflect	Solidarity + responsibility

Activity cards include Story Builders, Choice Cards, Feelings Circle, Emotion Flashcards, and Acts of Kindness Flashcards, each inviting a specific form of participation and care.

### Educator stance prompt for reflection:

Choose cards based on the children's moment, not your plan.  
Let practice emerge from what children bring.

**TABLE: MAPPING PRACTICES TO AELD PRINCIPLES**

Practice	Power sharing	Transforming dialogue	Holistic learning	Relational well-being
Story object circle	✓	✓	✓	✓
Feeling map	✓	✓	✓	✓
Build the centre		(non-verbal)	✓	✓
Movement democracy	✓		✓	✓
Shared problem, shared solutions	✓	✓	✓	✓
Conflict pause	✓	✓	✓	✓

The table links example practices (e.g., story object circle, feeling map, movement democracy, shared problem–shared solutions, conflict pause) to AELD’s four democratic principles: power-sharing, transforming dialogue, holistic learning, and relational well-being.

## IN SUMMARY

This tool offers multiple entry points into AELD:

- micro-practices for climate
- short invitations for imagination
- deep practices for perspective-taking and collaboration
- rituals for democratic rhythm
- templates for planning

Taken together, they help educators create daily experiences where children practise agency, attentiveness, empathy, creativity, and care — the heart of democratic sensibility.

The next tool extends democratic practice beyond the classroom by focusing on light-touch ways to engage families and friends as partners in belonging.

## 5. FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES TOOLKIT

### **Democracy grows when relationships extend beyond the classroom.**

AELD recognises that children's democratic growth is deeply influenced by the relationships they experience across home, school, and community. When families, educators, and community partners share values of attentiveness, care, curiosity, and respect, children experience democracy as a coherent way of living rather than an isolated school project. This tool provides simple, accessible ways to welcome families, build trust, and create shared learning experiences that extend aesthetic and embodied democratic practices across contexts.

Use this tool when planning how to welcome, communicate with, and collaborate with families and community partners. It supports culturally sensitive and multimodal approaches to connection.

### PRINCIPLES FOR FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN AELD

**Partnership, not outreach:** Families are not recipients of information — they are co-authors of the learning environment.

**Reciprocity, not one-directionality:** Families contribute cultural knowledge, stories, languages, and ways of seeing the world. Educators contribute pedagogical and relational expertise. Both matter.

**Accessibility and multimodality:** Make communication available in simple language, through gestures and visuals, and in multiple languages to welcome diverse families.

**Respect for differences:** Families hold varied beliefs, rhythms, cultural practices, and emotional styles. AELD values this diversity as a resource for democratic imagination.

**Shared responsibility for relational well-being:** Everyone contributes to creating a climate where children feel safe, recognised, and supported — not only educators.

## WELCOMING FAMILIES INTO AELD

These low-effort, high-impact practices strengthen trust and communication.

### Warm invitations

- Short videos or photos documenting children’s learning (not for assessment, but for connection).
- Welcome boards with children’s drawings or gestures about what they are exploring.
- Multi-language greetings at the entrance.

### Simple shared rituals

- “Story from home” week: families send a story object, song, recipe, or tale; children reinterpret it through drawing, movement, or play.
- “Friday Feeling Map”: families add a small note or symbol about how the week felt for their child.

### Open-door moments

- Short, informal invitations: “Join us for the first 10 minutes of opening circle,” or “Help us set up the story corner.”
- Families do not need skills — just presence.

### Home–school AELD echoes

Aesthetic and embodied practices continue naturally at home, such as:

- telling stories during meals
- drawing moments of the day
- using gestures to show emotions
- taking a “soft eyes” moment together

## SUPPORTING COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

### Use multimodal communication

- visual newsletters (photos, symbols, minimal text)
- short audio messages
- gesture-based or colour-coded updates
- translations or keywords in home languages

### Focus on meaning, not performance

Show process, not polished products:

- “How the class worked together,”
- “What the children noticed,”
- “How conflicts were navigated”.

### Highlight relational learning

Families appreciate understanding how:

- children are learning to collaborate
- they express emotions
- they engage with peers
- their agency is growing

This deepens trust and shared purpose.

## FAMILIES AS CULTURAL PARTNERS

AELD invites families to contribute cultural, linguistic, and imaginative resources.

### Simple ways to involve families

- A family brings an object from home → the class builds a collective story around it.
- Parents share a lullaby, movement game, or seasonal tradition → children reinterpret it artistically.
- Families contribute materials (fabrics, natural objects, photos) → used in aesthetic invitations.

### Key approach:

Invite families in ways that honour their time, rhythms and comfort rather than by pressuring them to participate.

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Local libraries, cultural centres, artists, parks, museums, and civic spaces enrich AELD contexts.

### Examples of community collaboration

- A walk to a local square to notice shapes, textures, sounds → children map these back at school.
- A local storyteller or artist facilitates a movement or drawing session.
- A museum offers child-friendly materials for collaborative installations.
- Community gardens become spaces for democratic participation (planning, caring, co-creating).

The key is relational continuity — not one-off events.

## INCLUSION CONSIDERATIONS IN FAMILY AND COMMUNITY WORK

### Make all families feel seen

- Use non-judgmental language.
- Avoid assumptions about gender roles, family structures, or cultural practices.
- Offer flexible ways of participating: online, in writing, in person, or through children.

### Remove barriers

- Provide childcare during events where possible.
- Hold gatherings at varied times.
- Include visual communication that supports multilingual families.

### Honour different comfort levels

Some families prefer privacy; others enjoy engagement.

AELD respects both without pressure.

## **REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS AND LEADERS**

- How do we show families that their ways of knowing are valued here?
- Which families are present – and who is not? Why?
- How do we model reciprocal acceptance in our relationships with families?
- How do we share children’s learning in ways that emphasise process and relational growth?
- How do community partners contribute to our collective imagination?

### **IN SUMMARY**

**Working with families and communities is not an extra task in AELD — it is part of democracy itself.**

When relationships extend across home, school, and community:

- children experience continuity of care
- multiple cultural worlds enrich the classroom
- families feel recognised and engaged
- educators receive meaningful insights into children’s lives
- democratic sensibility expands beyond school walls

Children learn that democracy is co-created — in families, in classrooms, and across communities.

The next tool focuses on transitions and continuity, supporting children, families, and educators as democratic relationships move across settings.

## 6. TEMPLATES, REFLECTION, LEADERSHIP AND TRANSITION TOOLS

### **Simple tools for planning, noticing, documenting, and reflecting in AELD.**

These templates help educators design AELD experiences, observe children's democratic sensibility, and reflect individually or as a team.

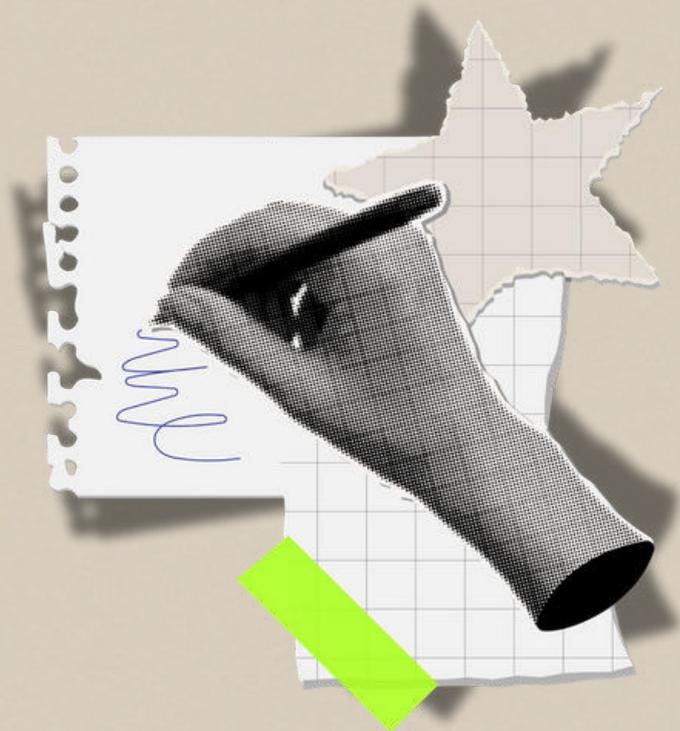
They are intentionally short, open, and flexible, supporting autonomy and reducing paperwork.

Use them weekly, occasionally, or during collaborative meetings — whichever works best for your practice.

**Use this tool when planning, documenting, or reflecting on practice, or when supporting whole-school implementation and professional learning.**



# EDUCATOR PLANNING TOOLS



# AELD SESSION PLANNING TEMPLATE

## 1. Purpose

What democratic experience do I want to support today?

- Belonging
- Fairness
- Collaboration
- Expression
- Perspective-taking
- Conflict resolution
- Emotional awareness
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Modalities I will offer

- Drawing
- Movement
- Building
- Story
- Objects
- Sound
- Play
- Silence/reflection
- Choice between modes

## 3. Invitations (not instructions)

Open-ended questions or prompts:

- “What do you notice?”
- “What could this become?”
- “Show it in your way”.
- “Where does your idea want to go next?”

## 4. Environment setup

- Materials available
- Space for movement
- Quiet area
- Inclusive options (gestures, visuals, sensory tools)

## 5. Anticipated moments to slow down or extend

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## 6. Closure / Reflection

Choose one:

- Gesture reflection
- Colour choice
- “What helped us today?”
- Appreciation circle

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## FLEXIBLE LEARNING SEQUENCE PLANNER

Use this planner to track how learning activities unfold and adapt in response to children's interests, needs, and contributions. Each section invites educators to document both the planned flow and co-created or emergent directions.

Theme or Guiding Question:

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Age Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Duration: \_\_\_\_\_ days / weeks

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## QUICK DOCUMENTATION TEMPLATE (1 MINUTE)

**For capturing democratic moments without long notes.**

Child(ren) involved:

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What happened?

A small story, gesture, or moment:

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**What democratic sensibility appeared?**

- Fairness
- Empathy
- Taking space / giving space
- Care
- Agency
- Collaboration
- Perspective-taking
- Emotional awareness

**What made it possible?**

- Environment
- Invitation
- Child's idea
- Educator stance
- Group dynamic

**What is a possible next step?**

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# OBSERVATION AND REFLECTION TOOLS



## OBSERVATION TOOL: SIGNS OF DEMOCRATIC SENSIBILITY

### A checklist for noticing subtle behaviours.

#### Children show democratic sensibility when they...

##### Belong and care

- offer help spontaneously
- make space for a peer
- invite others into play
- comfort someone upset

##### Fairness and inclusion

- notice exclusion (“That’s not fair”)
- negotiate turns
- propose ways to include others

##### Perspective-taking

- imagine how a character feels
- understand another child’s viewpoint
- reinterpret conflict through story or play

##### Responsiveness and agency

- follow a peer’s idea
- adjust their behaviour to the group’s needs
- initiate a play/story that others join

##### Expression and multimodality

- express through gesture, drawing, movement
- choose their mode of participation
- show complex ideas in non-verbal forms

This tool helps educators notice growth without scoring or evaluating children.

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## TEAM REFLECTION TEMPLATE

### 1. What democratic moments stood out this week?

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### 2. What helped them happen?

- Environment
- Stances
- Invitations
- Timing
- Collaboration
- Family contributions

### 3. Where did we see challenges?

- Exclusion
- Dominant voices
- Emotional dysregulation
- Lack of engagement
- Confusion or frustration

### Notes:

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### 4. What might we adjust next week?

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### 5. What do we want to learn more about as a team?

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## REFLECTION CARDS FOR DAILY USE

Print and cut these cards. Each card contains one prompt for reflection.

### **Card 1 — Soft eyes**

Where can I look more softly today — at a child, a moment, or myself?

### **Card 2 — Follow the child**

What emerges if I let a child's idea redirect our plan?

### **Card 3 — Many ways in**

Who needs a different doorway into participation today?

### **Card 4 — Slow the pace**

Where can slowing down let something meaningful appear?

Print and cut these cards. Each card contains one prompt for reflection.

### **Card 5 – Notice quiet voices**

Who communicates through subtle gesture, posture, or gaze?

### **Card 6 – Honouring emotions**

How will I validate feelings before expecting explanations?

### **Card 7 – Reciprocity**

How will I encourage children to practise the acceptive gaze with one another?

### **Card 8 – Return**

What can we revisit today with fresh eyes?

These cards strengthen educator stance through small, daily reminders.

**Print and cut these cards. Each card contains one prompt.**

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE TOOLKIT

### Purpose

To support educator reflexivity and co-learning, making democratic growth visible in teachers — not only in children.

### Tools included

Tool	What it supports
Reflective practice cards	Real-time stance prompts for reflection
Flexible sequence planner	Designing adaptively
Guided discovery cards	Listening-through-questioning
Co-documentation templates	Shared interpretation of learning

The Reflective Practice Toolkit includes practice cards, a flexible sequence planner, guided discovery cards, and co-documentation templates to support educator reflexivity and co-learning.

### Educator stance:

Reflection is shared, not private. Teachers learn democracy by documenting, wondering, and questioning together.

### How to use

- Use in weekly planning or peer sessions.
- Keep cards near your facilitator space.
- Use co-documentation as evidence of democratic practice, not performance.

### **Educator journal**

A two-column journal template: Observation → Interpretation.

Encourages noticing small democratic moments (sharing, waiting, helping).

### **Dialogue wall**

Shared board for children and educators to post drawings or notes on “what changed today”.

### **Self and peer reflection cards**

Simple icons representing AELD sensibilities; used for peer observation or child feedback (e.g., “Did we listen? Did we include everyone?”).

### **Reflective poster (Child-friendly)**

Visual chart: ☀ = “I felt part of it”; ☁ = “I felt left out”; 🌈 = “I helped someone”. Children place stickers or drawings weekly.

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE TOOLKIT FOR EDUCATORS EMBEDDING REFLEXIVITY IN DAILY WORK

This guide offers three adaptable and printable activities to help Early Years and primary educators reflect on their practice, document meaningful learning moments, and engage in professional dialogue. These tools foster democratic, values-based teaching through shared observation, co-inquiry, and critical reflection.

### Notes for Use

- These activities can be done individually, in pairs, or as a team.
- They work best when integrated into existing planning or review routines.
- Add icons, drawings, or sticky notes to keep things visual and playful.
- You can collect these reflections into a shared Professional Learning Journal or folder.

**Let these tools support a culture where educators reflect with one another and with children — as co-learners committed to responsive, inclusive practice.**

# REFLECTIVE PRACTICE TOOLKIT FOR EDUCATORS EMBEDDING REFLEXIVITY IN DAILY WORK

## REFLECTION ACTIVITY 1

### Reflect, Notice, Adjust – Personal Reflection Prompts

#### **Purpose:**

To create space for solo educator reflection after a learning experience.

#### **Tips:**

Use this after a session, activity, or week.

Keep this card in your planning folder or stick it beside your weekly planner.

#### **Age-specific reflection prompts:**

Early Years:

- Did I leave room for non-verbal expression or emotional shifts?
- How did I respond to spontaneous play or sensory interests?

Primary Education:

- How did I support children to articulate their values?
- Did I scaffold peer dialogue or support re-planning together?

**REFLECTIVE PRACTICE TOOLKIT FOR EDUCATORS  
EMBEDDING REFLEXIVITY IN DAILY WORK**

**REFLECTION CARD**

- What surprised me today?
- What values or competences did I see in children's actions?
- What might I try differently next time?

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## REFLECTION ACTIVITY 2

### Peer Dialogue Circle – Team-Based Reflection

**Purpose:**

To deepen understanding and expand perspectives through shared storytelling.

**Activity Structure:**

Bring a Moment: Share a short anecdote, child quote, or photo.

Three Perspectives Discussion:

- What do we see?
- What value or learning might be emerging?
- What could this suggest for our practice?

**Dialogue guide:**

- Describe the moment briefly.
- What value might be visible?
- How does this connect to our learning goals or community agreements?

Use this format during staff meetings, planning sessions, or study groups.

### REFLECTION ACTIVITY 3

#### Pedagogical Snapshots – Shared Documentation Wall

##### Purpose

To make AELD learning visible through brief shared snapshots, supporting team reflection and small next-step experiments.

##### When to use

After a session or a week (10 minutes). Revisit monthly to notice patterns.

##### Materials

Wall/board (or Padlet), sticky notes/cards, marker.

Optional: photo/quote/drawing.

##### How it works (10 minutes)

1) Post a snapshot (2 minutes each)

Write one short note:

- Context: where/when/who
- Moment: what happened (observable)
- Trace: a quote/gesture/drawing/photo

2) Add meaning (3 minutes)

Choose one lens and write one sentence:

- Participation (who joined/withdrew?)
- Power-sharing (where did decisions shift?)
- Care & belonging (who was included/left out?)
- Dialogue (how did the difference show up?)

Sentence starter: “This might be about...” / “A democratic possibility is...”

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE TOOLKIT FOR EDUCATORS EMBEDDING REFLEXIVITY IN DAILY WORK

3) Add a micro-move (3 minutes)

Write: “Next time, I will try...” (one small change to invitation, space, grouping, timing, or language)

4) Quick team noticing (2 minutes)

Name: one pattern, one surprise, one question to carry.

### **Age-specific prompts**

#### **Early Years**

- Did I allow non-verbal participation and emotional shifts?
- How did I respond to spontaneous play or sensory interests?

#### **Primary Education**

- How did I support children in articulating their values?
- Did I scaffold peer dialogue or support re-planning together?

# FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PLANNING TOOLS



Family briefs include acts-of-kindness flashcards, kindness detectives, and a home-school journal, helping families participate lightly and extend care across home, school, and community.

## PLANNING TEMPLATE FOR FAMILY AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

### **What do we want to share with families this month?**

- Story circle
- Photo documentation
- A collective artwork
- A classroom ritual
- A theme (fairness, care, belonging)

### **How can families participate lightly?**

- Send an object
- Share a song or gesture
- Add a note to the “feeling map”
- Join a 10-minute opening circle
- Offer materials

### **Community partner possibilities**

- Library
- Museum
- Artist
- Park/garden
- Cultural centre
- Local storyteller

How will we honour diverse comfort levels?

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## FAMILY AND FRIENDS BRIEFS

### Purpose

Families are children's first communities of belonging. Small shared gestures can strengthen the link between home and school without creating pressure.

### Tools included

Tool	What it invites	Democratic meaning
Acts-of-kindness flashcards	Children choose a gesture to try at home	Care becomes shared across spaces
Kindness detectives	Notice caring actions in family or community	Attention becomes ethical practice
Home-school journal	Families share stories or drawings	Family voice enters classroom life

Family briefs include acts-of-kindness flashcards, kindness detectives, and a home-school journal, helping families participate lightly and extend care across home, school, and community.

### Family stance:

Briefs are playful invitations — not assignments to complete. Families participate in ways that fit their rhythms, languages, and cultures.

### How educators can use:

- Share one brief at a time; no deadlines or collection sheets.
- Display returned drawings/stories on a Family Reflections Wall.
- Honour many forms of contribution (photos, objects, oral stories, silence, gestures).

# LEADERSHIP TOOLS



## LEADERSHIP MEMO TEMPLATE

### **Purpose**

Innovative democratic practices need legitimacy. A memo helps schools publicly affirm that experimentation, responsiveness, and embodied learning are encouraged.

### **The memo includes**

- Purpose: Why AELD matters for children's well-being and citizenship
- Alignment: Links to national curricular goals
- Permission: Teachers are authorised to try responsive, relational practices
- Safe-to-try zones: Assemblies, projects, flexible time blocks

### **Leadership stance**

Legitimacy protects teacher vulnerability and creates space to try, adapt, and reflect. The memo is an ethical shield, not a command.

### **How schools can use**

- Leaders customise and circulate it annually.
- Teachers display it visibly in planning folders.
- Schools treat it as a living invitation to iterate together.

These memos can be adapted to local policy language.

# LEADERSHIP MEMO TEMPLATE

[School Name / Logo]

## Leadership memo

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Purpose:

This memo affirms our school's commitment to democratic learning and child participation. Aesthetic and embodied learning (AELD) supports children's development by engaging their bodies, emotions, and creativity, while cultivating values of fairness, care, and shared responsibility. These practices help our students grow into active, responsible, and caring citizens.

### Alignment

AELD practices are fully consistent with:

- National curriculum goals (e.g., personal and social development, citizenship education, creativity, critical thinking).
- Civic education frameworks (e.g., democratic participation, human rights education).
- Our school's mission and values highlight inclusivity, well-being, and preparing students for democratic life.

### Permission

Teachers and educators are encouraged and supported to integrate AELD practices into their classrooms. These practices are not “extras” but are recognised as meaningful contributions to both academic learning and democratic education. Educators may adapt, experiment, and innovate, knowing that their work in this area is valued by school leadership.

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## LEADERSHIP MEMO TEMPLATE

### Safe-to-try zones

To cultivate space for creativity and experimentation, the following areas are designated as safe-to-try zones for piloting AELD activities:

- Class projects (e.g., collaborative storytelling, murals, performances).
- School assemblies or council sessions where children’s voices are central.
- Flexible learning times (arts, citizenship, project work).
- Extracurricular or after-school programmes with family or community involvement.

Educators may also propose additional areas for safe experimentation:  
Which leadership will support?

### Why this matters

By legitimising and protecting AELD practices, we create a school climate where teachers feel confident to innovate, children experience democracy in daily life, families and communities see democratic learning as integral to education.

Signed:

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(School Leader’s name and role)

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# TRANSITION TOOLS



## TRANSITION KIT

### Purpose

Transitions can be exciting and uncertain. The Transition Kit helps children carry forward experiences, relationships, and creations so that democratic learning does not restart from zero when changing classes or phases.

### Tools included

Tool	What it invites	Democratic meaning
Home–school journal	Children + families exchanging drawings, stories, or small reflections	A two-way voice, not one-way reporting
How-to video for families and teachers	Simple guidance; sets expectations lightly	Clarity reduces pressure; dialogue becomes mutual
Co-documentation pack	Collaborative displays, reflection cards, photos, quotes	Memories become shared, not owned by teachers
Portfolio transfer template	Passing artefacts to the next teacher	Continuity recognises identity and belonging

Transition tools include a home–school journal, a short how-to guide for families and teachers, a co-documentation pack, and a portfolio transfer template to support continuity and belonging across transitions.

### Educator stance:

Use small rituals, not full programs. One journal page or one reflection card is enough to honour continuity.

### How to use:

- Choose one tool that fits your context; keep it light.
- Invite families early, explaining that the aim is confidence, not “extra work”.
- Pass documentation forward so new educators begin with children’s lived experience.

**PORTFOLIO TRANSFER TEMPLATE**  
**A TOOL FOR CONTINUITY BETWEEN EARLY YEARS AND**  
**PRIMARY EDUCATION**

**How to Use It**

Educators: fill in short notes about the child's participation, interests, and voice.

Families or friends: add one small note about the child at home.

Children: draw, write, or use symbols.

The portfolio is passed on to the next teacher so that the child's journey continues with recognition of their past experiences.

## **“About Me”**

**My Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**My Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**A drawing of me / or space for a photo**

**Things I like doing most:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Something I am really good at:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Something I want to learn more about:** \_\_\_\_\_

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# My learning and participation

Values I practised in school this year (circle or draw):

- Fairness
- Kindness
- Listening
- Helping others
- Taking part

My drawing about a time I felt part of the group:

Teacher's Note (strengths, participation, contributions):

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Family or friends note (something important to share with the next teacher):

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## YOUR NEXT STEP

**Tomorrow, try one of these:**

**Begin with a silent gesture of noticing (“I saw you helping”)**

**Rotate one shared role (timekeeper, storyteller, helper)**

**End with a 60-second reflection (“When did we work well together?”)**

**Democracy begins as a rhythm, not a lesson.**

