CONNECTING WITH DEMOCRACY IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

A practice companion for secondary education

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Title and licence

Connecting with democracy in secondary education: A practice companion for secondary education

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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 ensure accessibility for readers using screen readers or read-aloud tools.

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1. Introduction

The Practice Companion presents practical, illustrative activities and explanations showing how key concepts in aesthetic and embodied learning for democracy (AELD) can be shaped and developed in secondary education. It comprises five parts:

1. A trilogy on sensing, modelling, and nurturing democratic values
2. Enacting and exploring democratic principles through AELD
3. Democratic sensibility as lived experience
4. Responsive pedagogy in practice
5. Understanding and implementing the acceptive gaze in practice

Each part is linked to the section in the Secondary Education Guide "Connecting with democracy in secondary education: A Guide to aesthetic and embodied learning for democracy" that covers the same idea. The activities in the Practice Companion were developed through:

- trials with teachers, students, and principals in secondary schools in Latvia and the UK
- post-trial discussions with educators and stakeholders (education and culture experts, and a psychologist)
- sharing and testing creative AELD ideas in workshops at international conferences
- collaboration with AECED colleagues from Finland, Germany, Croatia, and Portugal
- adaptation of Catalyst Cards on democratic principles developed prior to AECED

The Practice Companion is written from a practitioner's perspective, showing how educators can apply the ideas and approaches in their work with both themselves and students. To illustrate the breadth and potential of AELD, we intentionally cover a wide range of secondary education contexts (lessons, project work, discussions, group work and whole-class dialogue), spaces (classrooms, the canteen/café, and the library), shared information areas (noticeboards, displays, and classroom walls), and extracurricular groups (sports teams, clubs, rehearsals, and student council). Throughout, practitioners are invited to use multimodal AELD methods such as drama sketch, collage, reflective writing, and photo-sketching, mindful/sensory exercises (embodied mapping), tableau (when students create a still picture, without talking, to express a concept) and storytelling.

The parts are structured around a logic of gradual development. For example:
- "A Trilogy on Sensing, Modelling and Nurturing Democratic Values" begins by inviting practitioners to try the activities themselves and notice how sensory and embodied experience can deepen understanding alongside reflective thinking. Readers are guided to explore democratic values more deeply through what they hear, see, touch, smell, and taste.
- The next part moves to a deeper level by inviting practitioners to translate abstract democratic values into tangible compositions made from everyday objects, using imagination. Through creating and interpreting these compositions, understanding becomes richer while also supporting democratic ethos and relationships. We finish with specific AELD-based micro-practices for nurturing democratic values across various secondary school settings.

In the Practice Companion, each part supports practitioners in understanding what a concept or method is, why it matters, how to put it into practice, and what participants gain. Activities are presented with clear purposes and practical steps, so teachers can apply them confidently across different classrooms, groups, and school spaces.

2. Trilogy on sensing, modelling, and nurturing democratic values

This part brings together two elements to illustrate the practical implementation of the ideas introduced in Section 3, "Democratic Values in Secondary Education" in "Connecting with democracy in secondary education: A Guide to aesthetic and embodied learning for democracy". This trilogy is designed to:

1. Invite participants to notice how our senses and embodied responses can serve as complementary sources of insight — in this case, for sensing democratic values and deepening our understanding of them.
2. Support participants to nurture democratic values through embodied and aesthetic everyday practices — using movement, sensory attention, creative expression, and reflection to build democratic habits across contexts.

While focused on secondary education, all three parts of this trilogy can be used as practical material for deepening understanding, feeling, and enacting democratic values across a range of contexts, including higher education (with university students) and adult, professional, and organisational learning (e.g., with teachers, youth workers, trainers, public-sector staff, NGO practitioners, and workplace teams).

Sensing democratic values

Aim of this part: To explore three key democratic values – freedom, equality & equity, and responsiveness by pairing cognitive insight with bodily sensations (hearing, sight, touch, smell, and taste), highlighting the role of embodied experience in learning and deepening participants' understanding of these values.

Participants: Secondary-level students, teachers, or mixed student–teacher groups.

Activity length: 45–60 minutes, depending on the number of participants.

Materials: Democratic value cards (see page 8).

Space: A standard classroom with a computer–projector setup and internet access.

Phase 1: Exploring democratic values
We invite participants to explore and deepen their understanding of democratic values — cognitively, emotionally, and bodily — using the three value cards based on section 3, "Democratic values in secondary education" of the Guide.

Responsiveness
Responsiveness means noticing what's going on for others — their mood, body language, and needs — and adjusting how you act. It also means noticing your own reactions (stress, irritation, discomfort) and pausing so you can respond with care. This helps dialogue, teamwork, disagreement, and repair.

Equality and equity
Equality means everyone matters and deserves respect.
Equity means not everyone needs the same thing — so we adjust support, time, and options so each student can take part in ways that work for them.

Freedom
Freedom means having space to be yourself at school: to share ideas, ask questions, and make choices. It also means respecting shared boundaries so everyone feels safe and included.

Participants work in pairs using the democratic value cards (see page 8). They read and discuss each card, responding to three guiding questions:

- What does this value mean to me?
- Can you share an everyday example of this value at school, at home, or with friends?
- What might happen if this value were missing in a community?

This discussion helps students understand, feel, and notice the values in practice — and connect them to their own experiences.

Phase 2: Experiencing democratic values through the senses

In this phase, participants are invited to broaden their attention by engaging both sensory and reflective awareness. They attend to each sense in turn, noticing how what they hear, see, touch, smell, and taste shapes their thoughts, emotions, and bodily responses.

With the exception of vision, we recommend exploring the other senses with eyes closed to reduce visual distractions from surrounding people and objects. This helps participants focus on bodily responses and notice the associations each sensation evokes in relation to democratic values or the lack of them, which can sharpen a critical perspective through contrast.

After each embodied sensory reflection, participants are invited to share which democratic value the experience brings to mind — and why.

Participants are often surprised by how differently the same sound resonates across the group, and by how connecting sensation to democratic values deepens their understanding of meaning.

Recommendations for sensory sequence

- Hearing: Short soundscapes – music from different genres and instruments (e.g., Il Silenzio), as well as natural sounds (e.g., jungle, ocean, rain) and everyday human-made sounds (e.g., marching, talking, laughing).
- Vision: Video recordings of group activity (e.g., the farewell ceremony for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, directed by Sadeck Waff).
- Touch: Materials with a range of textures (e.g., silk, velcro strips, sponge).
- Smell: Carefully selected scents, with allergies and sensitivities in mind (e.g., coffee, rose, bread).
- Taste: Carefully chosen food items that are broadly acceptable to all participants (including dietary requirements where possible). You can read about how democratic values were sensed through hearing, vision, touch, smell, and taste in the AECED blog post, "Sensing Democracy through a Multi-Scape Journey." (https://aeced.org/blog/sensing-democracy-through-a-multi-scape-journey/).
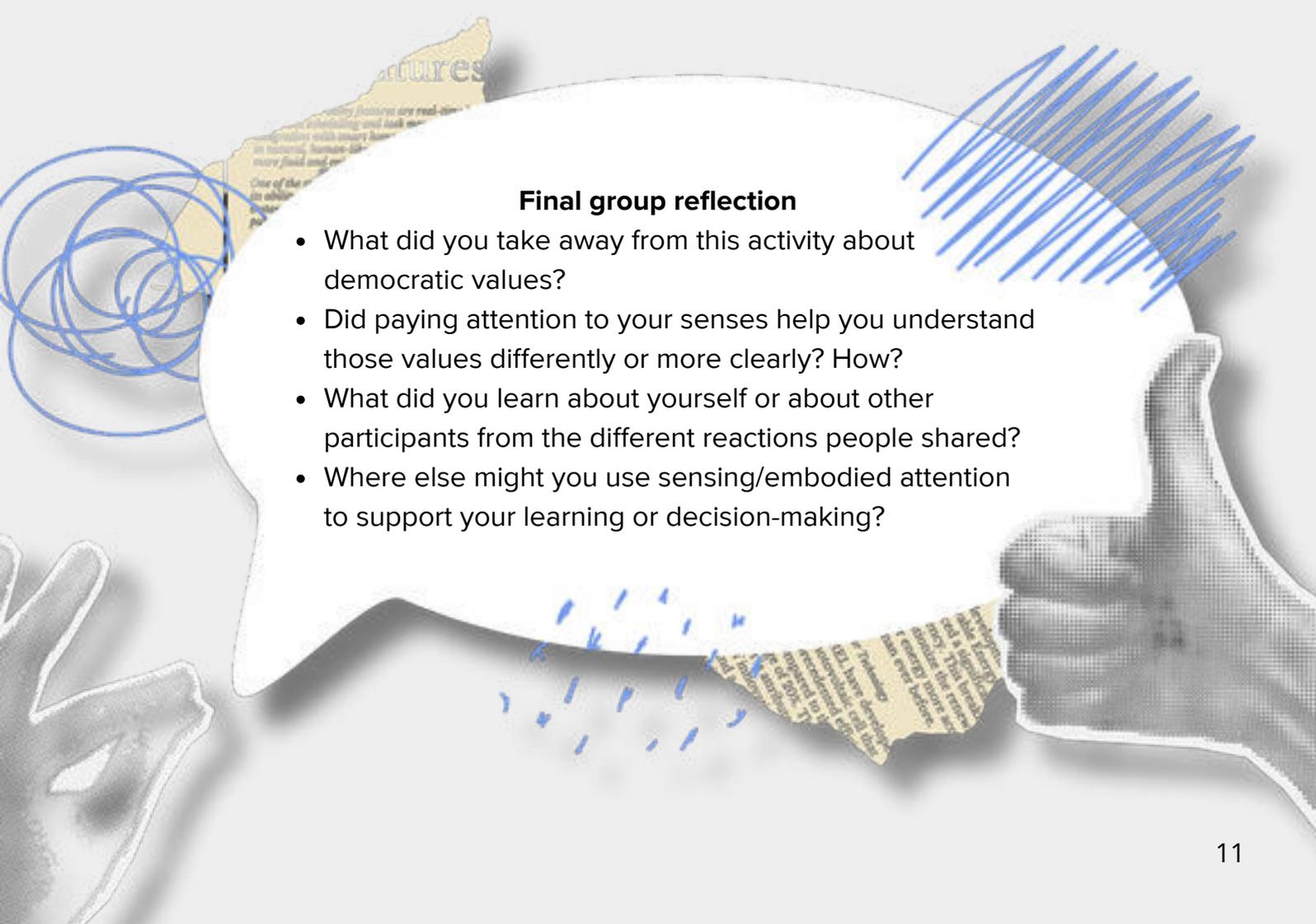
Final group reflection

- What did you take away from this activity about democratic values?
- Did paying attention to your senses help you understand those values differently or more clearly? How?
- What did you learn about yourself or about other participants from the different reactions people shared?
- Where else might you use sensing/embodied attention to support your learning or decision-making?

Modelling democratic values

Aim of this part: To help participants express and co-construct democratic values through creative, embodied collaboration, using collage (combined with movement and/or sound where relevant) and collective guessing, and to experience democracy as something we practise and continually become.

Participants: Secondary-level students, teachers, or mixed student–teacher groups.

Activity length: 45–60 minutes, depending on the number of participants.

Materials: A mixed selection of materials: paper/card and cut-outs, glue, tape and scissors, pens/markers, clay, fabric scraps and yarn/ribbon, buttons/beads.

Space: A standard classroom with a computer–projector setup and internet access, with enough room for pair work and short presentations.

Phase 1: Creation of compositions on democratic values

Participants may first, with their partner, choose which democratic value they would like to materialise in a composition. Drawing on their imagination and understanding of the chosen value, they create a collage or model using the provided materials.

This process calls for mutual listening, perspective-taking, and openness to one another's ideas. It also involves sharing power – taking turns to lead and follow as needed – and in doing so, participants experience democracy-as becoming.

Pairs should work quietly so that others do not know in advance which democratic value is being depicted.

Phase 2: Exhibition of the compositions

One pair at a time presents their work to the group and invites others to guess which democratic value is being visualised, along with a brief explanation of their reasoning. The presenting pair then reveals the value they intended to express and briefly explains their choices. This stage is not only engaging; it also helps cultivate constructive dialogue and respectful communication – for example, how to respond when a guess differs from the creators' intention without offending or discouraging others from taking part. This is a place where democratic values are enacted in practice – everyone has the freedom to express themselves, participate meaningfully, and be noticed and responded to responsively and with respect (see the Democratic Value Cards on page 8).

Phase 3: Pair reflection

Partners take turns responding. For each question, the speaker answers, then the partner briefly summarises what they heard (then swap roles).

Pair reflection

- Did we both think we were expressing the same value?
- How did we work together – what helped us listen, share power, and co-create?
- What did we learn from others' interpretations, especially when they differed from our intention?

Optional whole-group close: Each pair shares one sentence: "One thing we learned was…"

Nurturing democratic values

Aim of this part: To nurture democratic values in everyday learning through small, repeatable AELD micro-practices that use aesthetic and embodied ways of engaging, making freedom, equality/equity, and responsiveness felt and practised across classroom and wider school contexts.

Participants: Secondary-level students, teachers, or mixed student–teacher groups.

Activity length: Flexible; micro-practices can be used as brief routines or combined into a longer sequence, depending on the learning context (e.g., a lesson, project work, the library, the canteen/café, extracurricular activities, or meetings).

Materials: Dependent on the chosen AELD modality and setting, ranging from simple collage/craft materials (paper/card, cut-outs, glue/tape, scissors, pens/markers, clay, fabric scraps, yarn/ribbon, buttons/beads) to, where relevant, basic tools for sound, movement, or writing (e.g., a phone/speaker for audio, notebooks, or open space).

Space: Any classroom or learning space (including corridors, outdoor areas, or extracurricular settings) with enough room for individual, pair, and small group participation.

Nurturing freedom: Micro-practice

AELD method: Reflective writing

Context: In discussions or project work, some students often hold back (fearing judgement or giving the "wrong" answer), while a few voices dominate.

Why this method: Reflective writing creates a private space for reflection, reduces social pressure, and supports authentic, responsible self-expression.
How it is done: Invite students to write a short response to: "What do I really think about this – and why?" They write briefly the sentence starters: I think… / I feel … (in my body/emotionally) / I need… (to express myself responsibly in this group).

Each student then chooses how to contribute: share with a partner / share with the group / keep it private (or anonymous, if possible).

What participants gain: Clearer personal viewpoints, more balanced participation, and practice in expressing themselves responsibly.

As a final step, students are invited to finish the sentence: "One way I can practise freedom responsibly in learning is…"

Nurturing equity and equality: Micro-practice

AELD method: Photography (or photo-sketching — using photos to quickly document a space or situation, observe patterns, and support discussion and improvement)

Context: In the canteen/café (or library), inclusion and exclusion often show up in small, everyday ways — who has a place to sit, who gets approached, whose noise level is tolerated, who feels comfortable taking up space, or who quietly withdraws. These patterns shape students' sense of belonging and affect their willingness to participate elsewhere. To address this, the activity can be framed as a social innovation photo challenge: pairs identify equity-supporting and equity-limiting features of the space and then propose one small, feasible change to improve equity in the canteen/library. The class selects one proposal to trial and review.

Why this method: Photography helps students notice equity in the environment without focusing on individuals. It offers a low-pressure way to explore what makes participation easier or harder by attending to spaces, objects, layouts, and routines — making equity visible and discussable.

How it is done:
- A shared agreement is established: no identifiable faces are photographed; the focus stays on spaces, objects, signs, and viewpoints.
- In pairs, students submit two images (or sketches): one suggesting belonging/access and one suggesting a barrier. For each barrier, they offer a micro-change that favours equity and equality in that spot.
- Captions are added using sentence starters:
    I notice...
    This feels inclusive / excluding because...
    A small change could be... (avoid blame and do not name individuals).
- Proposals are shared in a brief whole-class discussion, then the class votes using simple criteria: feasible / fair / improves access for more students / low cost.
- The selected idea is piloted for one week and reviewed. Where appropriate, it can be taken forward with relevant stakeholders (e.g., student council, librarian, canteen supervisor, form tutor, or leadership team).

What participants gain: Greater awareness of how everyday conditions shape equity and equality, a shared language for discussing inclusion without personalising blame, and practical ideas for small, realistic improvements in common school spaces.

For a closing takeaway, students complete the sentence: "One small change that would make this space more equitable is..."

Nurturing responsiveness: Micro-practice

AELD method: Mindful/sensory exercise (embodied mapping)

Context: Shared information spaces (noticeboards, displays, directional signs, classroom walls) are often organised for adult convenience or visual neatness. This can unintentionally exclude some students (with different heights, mobility, or visual needs), reduce access, and increase misunderstandings.

Why this method: This practice is mindful and sensory because it begins with direct embodied perception: students notice and use their own eye level as first-hand data. It becomes a form of embodied mapping when each student places a magnetic dot on a shared vertical metallic strip beside the board at their eye level. As these dots accumulate, they create a visible map of how the students actually engage with the noticeboard. Staff then respond to this map by adjusting the environment (e.g., creating one or two reading bands and posting notices in duplicate), making responsiveness concrete: recognising differences in the group and adapting practice accordingly, rather than expecting students to fit a single standard.

How it is done:
- A brief agreement is set: the goal is access, no one is singled out, and students' embodied experience counts as data.
- Students from different grades place a small magnetic dot (or sticker) on a vertical strip beside the noticeboard at their own eye level.
- Staff and students observe the pattern and identify the main "reading band" (and a second, lower band if a clear cluster appears).
- From then on, each notice is posted in two copies, one in each band, so that information remains accessible, including for younger students and those who use wheelchairs. Students may reposition notices within the bands to improve readability.

What participants gain: A lived experience of responsiveness as attentiveness and adjustment; improved access to information; fewer avoidable errors; and a stronger sense of being noticed and responded to.

The democratic value of responsiveness is particularly clear here, set against a contrast vignette (a less responsive approach): staff set the noticeboard to a single standard height for neat alignment. Notices are laminated and posted in a single band, with a "Do not move notices" label. No student input is gathered. The board looks tidy, but access is uneven; some students stop reading it, and errors in information increase.

Participants reflect on the experience by completing the sentence: "One place in our school where a small adjustment could make access more responsive is…"

Thus, across the trilogy, democratic values move from being felt (sensing), to being shaped and shared (modelling), to being lived as habits in real contexts (nurturing).

3. Enacting democratic principles through AELD

This part shows how democratic principles can be enacted in everyday secondary school practice through aesthetic and embodied learning methods. It complements Section 4, "Democratic Principles in Secondary Education," in "Connecting with democracy in secondary education: A Guide to aesthetic and embodied learning for democracy" by offering practical, implementable approaches – with explanations to support teachers in applying them – for enacting Power-sharing, holistic learning, transformative dialogue, and relational well-being across a range of contexts.

The part is divided into two:
➜ In the first, each democratic principle is given attention in turn.
➜ In the second, users of this Practice Companion are invited to consider and try out three approaches to exploring democratic principles: drawing, collage creation and activities with cards displaying the democratic principles.

The democratic principles, in turn

Putting power-sharing into practice

AELD method: Sound/rhythm (shared beat with rotating leadership)

Context: In extracurricular groups (sports teams, clubs, rehearsals, student council), participation and influence can become uneven: a few students set the pace and direction, while others adapt, withdraw, or are overlooked.

Why this method: A shared rhythm makes equity tangible and embodied. Rotating leadership and collective following create a simple structure in which influence moves around the group: each person leads, each person is followed, and the group learns to adjust so everyone can stay included.

How it is done:
- A brief Power-sharing Charter can be agreed at the outset, for example: "Everyone gets a turn to lead; we follow each person respectfully; we make room for different tempos and styles; if we slip, we reset and try again".
- Students stand or sit in a circle. One student/teacher starts a simple beat (clap/tap).
- Leadership rotates: each student introduces a small change (tempo/pattern/pause); the group follows.
- A neutral reset signal (e.g., a raised hand) can indicate "pause and restart fairly". When used, the group stops, takes a breath, and resumes from the last turn. The reset is useful if the group laughs, talks over someone's turn, or if anyone is left behind or drops out of the rhythm.
- An optional role, such as a Participation Spotter, can note patterns for the reflection (without naming or blaming). For example: "I noticed we followed some turns quickly, but we slowed down and included everyone more after the reset."

What participants gain: A lived experience of shared influence, greater sensitivity to whose lead is being followed, and practical habits for distributing leadership (turn-taking, following, and repair).

As a final step, students are invited to finish the sentence: "One way we can share power more fairly in this group is…"

Putting holistic learning into practice

AELD method: Tableau (when students create a still picture, without talking, to express a concept)

Context (challenge): In lessons or project work, learning can become overly verbal and "answer-driven". Some students find it difficult to express their thinking in words, and embodied, imaginative ways of making meaning are often left unused.

Why this method: A tableau supports holistic learning by engaging the body, emotions, imagination, and cognition. It allows students to explore meaning through embodied expression before putting ideas into words, and it makes space for multiple interpretations.

How it is done:
- The teacher selects a lesson focus (concept/theme/problem/text) and offers one lens: main idea/tension, cause and effect, or two perspectives.
- In pairs, students create a silent still image with their bodies (standing or seated) to represent the focus.
- Each pair shows its tableau to the other pair for a few seconds. The observing pair responds only with "I notice…" statements.
- The pair of creators adds one sentence (spoken or written): "We wanted to show…"

What participants gain: A fuller, multimodal grasp of the learning content; increased confidence to express understanding beyond words; and practice in connecting bodily experience, imagination, and reflection.

For a closing takeaway, students complete the sentence: "One thing I understood more fully because we used our bodies was…"

Putting transforming dialogue into practice

AELD method: Movement/drama (short dialogue sketch + replay)

Context: During group work or class discussion, a real disagreement or misunderstanding arises: voices rise, someone is interrupted, some students withdraw, or the group gets stuck repeating the same points. The teacher pauses the activity and uses the moment to help the whole class practise shifting dialogue towards understanding.

Why this method: A short drama sketch turns a real interaction into a short, shared scene that the class can examine safely. Replaying the same moment helps learners practise small changes in language and embodied communication (tone, pace, posture, distance) that move the interaction towards listening, curiosity, and the restoration of understanding, transforming a stuck exchange into a more constructive one.

How it is done:
- The teacher pauses the activity and frames the purpose: "Let's take a short moment to practise how to move a stuck conversation forward". The focus is on what happens in the interaction, not on blaming individuals.
- The teacher briefly describes what is happening in neutral, observable terms (e.g., "Some of you are being interrupted", "You're repeating the same points", "Some voices are getting louder") and restates it as a simple, anonymised scenario for the sketch (e.g., "One student feels unheard; another feels criticised"), without naming anyone or retelling personal details.
- The teacher invites three volunteers (or selects a confident trio): two students act out the scene, and one student serves as the designated observer. The observer uses the Language Notice Card and the Body & Tone Notice Card.

Language notice card
Listen for:
- interruptions or overlap
- repeated points (looping)
- "always/never" language
- blaming phrasing ("you made me...")
- curiosity moves ("can you say more...?")
- paraphrasing ("so you mean...")
- impact statements ("when X happened, I felt...")
- restart phrases ("let me try that again...")

Body and tone notice card
Notice:
- voice (volume, speed, tone)
- pace (rushing vs pausing)
- posture (open/closed, leaning in/away)
- gestures (pointing, stillness, restlessness – hands and feet moving a lot)
- facial expression (tension/softening)
- eye contact (avoiding/staring)
- distance and positioning (turning away, stepping closer, giving space)
- signs of stress or shutdown (silence, freezing, unease)

- The two actors play a brief "stuck" version of the dialogue.
- The observer shares a few non-judgemental observations, starting with "I noticed…", and draws on the cards (language and body/tone).
- The teacher then invites two or three additional "I noticed…" observations from the rest of the class (still descriptive, not blaming or naming).
- The sketch is replayed. This time, the actors try one or two transforming strategies, for example:

    a. pausing before responding (one breath or a count to three)
    b. paraphrasing ("So you mean…")
    c. asking a genuine question ("Can you say more about what matters to you here?")
    d. naming impact without blame ("When I was interrupted, I lost my thread")
    e. using a restart phrase ("Let me try that again more clearly/respectfully…")

    Alongside the words, they also adjust one embodied element (e.g., soften posture, uncross arms, lower voice, slow pace, orient towards the other person, give space).

- The observer (and then the class) names what changed and what helped the dialogue move forward.

What participants gain: Students practise transforming dialogue in a concrete way: exchanging and exploring different views with mutual respect, listening to multiple viewpoints, and offering constructive critique without blame. They learn how small shifts in language and embodied communication can open space beyond narrow positions, build mutual understanding, identify areas of agreement, and move the group towards shared next steps in the task.

Before inviting the class to return to the original task and try one agreed strategy in the real discussion or group work, the teacher asks everyone to summarise what they learned from the drama sketch by answering: "What helped the dialogue move forward, and what can we try next time we get stuck?".

Putting relational well-being into practice

AELD method: Storytelling (micro-stories + attentive witnessing)

Context: In many classes, social cohesion is uneven: some students feel involved and recognised, while others participate cautiously or feel unnoticed. Relational well-being depends on shared habits of inclusion and how the group responds to individuality.

Why this method: Relational well-being grows through experiences of being heard, recognised, and included – and it also becomes clearer when we reflect on moments of exclusion. Storytelling offers a structured way to bring these experiences into view without turning them into accusations: students can describe situations (real, school-wide, or fictional) while the group practises respectful listening and focuses on actions and conditions rather than blaming individuals. The purpose is not the story itself, but the relational practice it creates: strengthening connectedness and involvement, valuing individuality, and identifying small changes that support belonging.

How it is done:

- The teacher sets a brief agreement: sharing is voluntary; no names; the focus is on actions/conditions and what can be improved, not on judging people; listening is respectful.

- Students choose one prompt (distance options):

  a. Real (no names): "A moment when I felt included or excluded in a group…"
  b. School-wide: "Something that makes it easier – or harder for people to feel they belong at school is…"
  c. Fictional: "A short story about a student who feels excluded, and what changes to help them belong…"

- Students prepare a micro-story using the structure:

  a. What happened? (one concrete moment)
  b. What did it feel like? (emotion or bodily feeling)
  c. What contributed to it? (the action/gesture/word)
  d. What could help? (one small, realistic change – a word, action, or class routine that would make inclusion more likely next time)

- Sharing stories happens in pairs (not the whole class). The listener responds with attentive witnessing using one of the following sentence starters:

  a. "What I heard as important was…" or
  b. "I noticed…" (no advice, no evaluation)

- Each pair writes one practical belonging action (anonymous if preferred) and adds it to a shared board.

- With the teacher's support, students group the suggested actions into themes and choose two or three inclusive "know-how" strategies they want to adopt and practise in upcoming lessons and group work.

What participants gain: A lived experience of relational well-being in practice: students feel what it is like to be heard respectfully without judgement, and they become more sensitive to how inclusion and exclusion affect participation. They practise naming difficult moments in a safe, structured way and listening without judging or "fixing". Together, they identify two or three concrete actions that help more people feel included and able to take part.

At the final step, the class completes (and records): "Two or three ways we will strengthen relational well-being in our class are..."

Three approaches to exploring democratic values and principles

Drawing

Drawing as a conversation can bring meaningful exploration of the principles and values of democracy. This activity can help students explore their lived relationships and experiences, as well as those of others. This can include social, historical, political, or character elements in a story, etc. The words below can be explored in the context of different subject disciplines.

Freedom – Equality – Equity – Responsiveness
Power-sharing – Transforming Dialogue – Holistic Learning
Relational Well-being

(The yellow catalyst cards can also be used for this activity - click the link here)

Time: 45–60 minutes

Materials: Paper, pens, coloured pencils, crayons, pastels.

Prompt Questions: Each democratic value and principle can have a prompt question, e.g:
- What does [insert value or principle] mean to you?
- When did you experience [insert value or principle]?
- What does [insert value or principle] feel like in school or in friendships?
- How could [insert value or principle] be different, and how can you be part of making a change? What would that feel and look like?

A more specific question could include:
- When or where did you feel you were able to make a decision in school or in friendships?
- When did you last feel your opinion was heard, and what did that feel and look like?

Activity: This drawing/doodling activity is designed for students to work in pairs or small groups, with a maximum of 4 per group.

- Groups decide which value or principle they will explore, who will draw, and whether they will take turns or have only one person's role.
- As the students discuss their thoughts, those not drawing can contribute ideas. Specific colours, shapes, symbols, lines, and images might come to mind. The drawing will then be a negotiated and co-created visual conversation.
- It is important to remind students that this is not about technical mastery but the process of collaboration and exploration. It can be neat, structured, or abstract, and 'messy!' The idea is that they are not precious about the drawing outcome, but about the process of expressing ideas differently.

Students can respond to one question or multiple questions, depending on the length of the lesson and depth of exploration.

Allow time for reflective discussions, where a couple of groups share, or for a wider group discussion. Suggested questions could include:

- What did groups choose and why?
- What was their response, and how did they express their ideas?
- What have they learnt about democratic values and principles?
- What have they learnt about their democratic agency and how it could be different?

Collage creation

Collage creation is another way that can facilitate meaningful exploration of the principles and values of democracy. Ideas on how the activity might be conducted are offered here.

Time: 45–60 minutes

Materials: You will need large pieces of paper and access to a variety of colours and textures; for example, arts and crafts materials, stationery items such as paper clips, paper, pens, sticky notes, stickers, buttons, ribbon, crafting materials, artefacts, and natural materials, with no glue.

Collage activities can be created individually or collaboratively with small groups.

The idea of using no glue is that students create arrangements of materials that support meaning-making and can be adapted and changed.

Collage can be used to explore ideas related to democratic values and principles or related to what students are learning within a course and subject discipline. The activity leaves a very open approach by using one word as the prompt, for example, equality, health, social media, etc. Underlying the activity is a responsive approach that can support knowledge creation, revision, and deepening, as well as the development of democratic principles in the classroom.

Set-up and Introduction: 5–10 mins

Provide the students with the word prompt and the materials. Decide whether you will give them autonomy to work individually or in small groups (no more than 4).

Allow students to organise and work with the collage. Explain to students that this is about the process rather than an artistic outcome.

Allow 20 minutes for creating the collage.

Following the collage process, allow time (5–10 minutes) to share, reflect and discuss as a whole class.

To develop students' meaning-making, keep questions open. Below are some possible prompt questions.

Prompt question examples:
- Why have students selected a colour, items or a collage material?
- How have they organised these and why?
- What do these mean to them?
- How do shapes, forms, colours, etc. link to their ideas?
- How does the collage relate to what they already know?
- What have they learnt that is new?
- How have they, in groups, made decisions?
- Did they all agree, or not?
- How did they navigate any differences?
- Did they have equal parts to play in the group?

After reflection, you could ask the students whether they wish to adapt anything in their collages based on their reflections or what they learnt from the discussion. Allow 10 minutes, then time for further reflection.

Catalyst cards

The workshop described below invites exploration of the democratic principles in the Guide, with a focus on Power-sharing and collaborative decision-making in everyday educational practice. The cards, activities, and accompanying booklet were developed and used in follow-up work on the idea of holistic democracy before the AECED project. They address the four democratic principles (also referred to as dimensions of democracy) and contrast them with principles that typically shape more hierarchical ways of organising decisions and roles. Each card focuses on one characteristic of a principle: for example, card 23 highlights a feature of Power-sharing ("Everyone has the opportunity to have a say in decisions").

Time: 60–120 mins

Materials: Booklet (click here to see) Catalyst Cards, (click here to see) Paper, Pens, Pencils.

This is one way a workshop can be organised:

1. In groups, reflect on Power-sharing — how decisions, roles, and responsibilities are shared in learning situations — using the booklet that supports the Catalyst Cards.

2. A "Diamond Nine activity" (p. 19 of the booklet): Participants sit in groups or pairs. Using a shared set of Catalyst Cards, participants explore, sort, and arrange them, spreading and organising them across a table and standing up and moving around as they feel they want to. Each participant selects the nine cards they believe are the most important practices to consider in developing greater Power-sharing amongst staff and students. Using the Diamond Nine diagram, participants each rank their selected cards from most important to least important practice, with the most important at the top and the least important at the bottom. Participants share their diagram with their partner/other group members, discuss their selections and rankings, and explain the reasons for these.

3. A "Where are we now?" activity (p. 21 of the booklet): With their partner/other group members, participants sort all the cards they selected, spreading them around the table to further consider and compare them. They divide the cards into three piles:
  • the maintain pile (cards that represent current policy and practice in their department/school/district, which need to be maintained)
  • the change pile (cards that represent current policy and practice in their department/school/district, which need to change)
  • the nurture pile (cards that represent desired policy and practice in their department/school/district, which need to be nurtured and grown)

4. In the final part of the workshop, each group moves from reflection to action by developing a shared plan to foster more collaboration and Power-sharing in their setting (which may be their classroom, learning group, other learning space, or school). Participants draw an imaginative plan for change, guided by cards that indicate what needs to be maintained, changed, and nurtured.

5. Participants then reflect on which of the four democratic principles this exercise shows are most important to support and develop in their context.

4. Democratic sensibility as lived experience

This part, linked to Section 5, "Democratic Sensibility in Secondary Education," in The "Connecting with democracy in secondary education: A Guide to aesthetic and embodied learning for democracy", offers practical, implementable approaches and explains how teachers can help students develop democratic sensibility. It is not enough for students to know what democratic sensibility is or to describe its key elements – having a feel for democracy; being attentive to, appreciating, nurturing, and responding to the senses and feelings that support democratic relations. Democratic sensibility needs to be lived: felt emotionally and bodily as well as understood cognitively, so that students can develop a sensed understanding of what it means to act and relate to others democratically. This part, therefore, proposes a pathway to nurture democratic sensibility.

AELD methods: movement/drama combined with mindful/sensory exercise.

Context: In adolescence, difference and belonging are highly charged. Students may dismiss, stereotype, or distance themselves from peers who are "not like us" (e.g., people with disabilities, health conditions, gender expression, or social status). This activity creates a safe embodied entry point for noticing how quickly assumptions form – and how they can change through lived experience.

Why these methods: (movement/drama + mindful/sensory exercise).

Democratic sensibility is a "feel for democracy": the ability to notice what is happening in oneself and between people, to value what one becomes aware of, and to respond in ways that support more democratic relations. This activity uses two AELD pedagogical methods because they help students develop that sensibility through lived experience.

Movement/drama is used to create a brief, concrete experience that helps students feel what an abstract idea means. Rather than discussing differences and inclusion in general terms, students take part in a short, embodied task that makes them aware of effort, dependence, frustration, and vulnerability. This lived experience makes it easier to notice how quickly people can be judged as "less capable" based on surface assumptions – and how those assumptions can shift towards respect, inclusion, and recognition of equal participation.

Mindful/sensory exercise supports a key democratic-sensibility skill: noticing. Students are guided to attend to their emotions, bodily responses, and the room's atmosphere as the experience unfolds. This helps them become more aware of how reactions such as nervous laughter, discomfort, awe, or silence shape relationships and participation. Practising this kind of attentive noticing makes students more able to respond thoughtfully and sensitively to differences and to connect with others in more democratic ways.

How it is done

1. The teacher makes an intriguing proposal for an unusual challenge with a calm, curious tone:

 "Today I'd like you to try something different. For a short moment, you'll try a few ordinary actions without using your arms. This isn't a joke or a competition – it's an experiment in noticing."

A brief agreement is set: students can stop at any time; no mocking; those who prefer not to do it can take an observer role.

2. Students are invited to hold their arms close to their sides (or gently behind their back without tying). The teacher keeps this short and simple to avoid strain. This introduces the embodied constraint they will work with in the next steps.

3. Students try two or three everyday actions without using their hands, for example:

> a.   write their name
> b.   open a zip or bag
> c.   take out a pen
> d.   pick up a dropped object
> e.   put on a jumper/hoodie sleeve (optional)

The teacher encourages quiet focus so students can actually feel what happens rather than perform for others.

4. The teacher lets the emotions surface and notices what is already happening (nervous laughter, frustration, embarrassment) and normalises it: "If you're laughing, that's all right – it's often what we do when something feels awkward. Just notice it."

5. The teacher stops the action and invites a short internal check-in:

Before any explanation, the teacher stops the action: "Pause where you are and leave it unfinished. Don't push through yet – just notice what you're feeling."

Students do a quick internal check:

    a. emotion: frustration / embarrassment / irritation / anxiety / shame / discouragement

    b. body: held breath; tense shoulders/neck/jaw; tight chest or throat; warm/flushed face; restless energy; stomach tightness; increased heart rate

Students are invited to share what they noticed – either in pairs or anonymously (e.g., on slips of paper) to keep the process safe.

6. The teacher says something surprising like: "Most of us are thinking: 'This is so hard.' Keep that feeling in mind. Now I want you to meet someone." Dim the lights slightly (if possible). The teacher asks for quiet attention: "Watch closely – not just what she does, but what it does to your assumptions."

7. The teacher plays the video excerpt of Vitória Bueno, a Brazilian ballerina with no arms, dancing and doing everyday tasks.[2]

[2] Watch the YouTube video featuring Vitória Bueno here.

This is the emotional "turn": students often move from strain and frustration to awe, admiration, humility, and sometimes discomfort at their own assumptions.

The teacher does not interpret it yet – she allows the silence to do the work.

8. When the video ends, the teacher waits a few seconds. Then: "Notice what shifted in you." Students name one of: surprise / admiration / shame / respect / curiosity / disbelief (again, one word is enough). The teacher invites a simple takeaway: "Give today's lesson a name based on what you've truly understood." Students offer short titles (e.g., "Dignity", "Strength", "Access", "Assumptions", "Belonging", "Willpower"). The teacher accepts them without ranking.

9. After the video ends, the teacher keeps a full minute of silence so students can sit with what they felt and noticed, digesting their emotional and embodied experience through Vitória's case. Each student then writes an anonymous response (on a slip of paper) to two questions:

a.   "What shifted in me after feeling the task in my body and watching Vitória?"

b.   "Will this learning episode change anything in my attitude towards people who are different from the majority? If so, what?"

Students place their notes in a box.

10. The teacher reads a selection of notes aloud without adding interpretation. The class then identifies recurring themes by answering the question: "What patterns do we hear in our reflections?"

The teacher records key phrases in students' own words and invites them to articulate how their ways of noticing and responding to others might change in everyday life.

What participants gain:

- Students experience, in their own bodies, how limitation can feel – and how easy it is to make quick, wrong conclusions about what a person can or cannot do.
- They recognise how often such conclusions (in school and beyond) lead people to distance themselves from, underestimate, or exclude those who are seen as "different" – including people with disabilities, health conditions, lower social or financial status, or other forms of difference.
- By witnessing Vitória's capability and agency, students are prompted to revise those assumptions and to see difference not as "less", but as part of human life – with potential, skills, and contributions that can enrich shared work and society.
- They practise democratic sensibility in action: noticing their own reactions, reading the atmosphere in the room, and becoming more ready to respond with respect and inclusion rather than judgement or avoidance.

To move from thought to action, students can be invited to develop an Inclusion mini-project at school or in the local community. Working in small groups, they identify one barrier to participation in a local space (e.g., the school, a youth club, a sports area, or an online school platform), propose one small, realistic improvement, and decide how to test whether it helps. They can use these guiding questions:

- Where is participation harder than it looks for some people?
- What barrier is causing it (space, routines, communication, attitudes)?
- What small change could reduce the barrier?
- Who should be involved or consulted?
- How will we know it helped?

5. Responsive pedagogy in practice

This part provides illustrative and explanatory materials to help teachers build a responsive pedagogical environment in which students can experience a democratic spirit in everyday learning. It focuses on how to notice, interpret, and respond to what is happening in the room – emotionally, relationally, and contextually. This helps keep participation safe, inclusive, and meaningful, and democracy can be lived through the learning process rather than discussed only as a topic. This part relates to Section 6, "Responsive Pedagogy in Secondary Education," in the "Connecting with democracy in secondary education: A Guide to aesthetic and embodied learning for democracy".

Teacher toolkit for responsive pedagogy

For clarity, we use the activity "Making Our School a Bullying-Free Place" as an illustrative example, with key teacher instructions highlighted in bold.

The teacher's aim: To keep the learning space safe and meaningful by noticing what is emerging, adjusting in real time, and protecting respectful, equitable participation.

Context: Bullying is a common, often hidden reality in secondary schools that affects targets of bullying, bystanders and those who bully. Because it is tied to status, belonging, fear, and shame, discussions can quickly become emotionally charged – students may laugh nervously, withdraw, become defensive, or recognise something personal. This activity helps students identify what bullying looks like, understand its harms, and explore how a community can respond, without exposing them to real incidents or individuals. In groups, students take roles (student using bullying behaviour, target of bullying, bystander), with lower-exposure options (pressure voice, impact voice, choice voice). In classroom use, adult responses are discussed rather than performed; in wider school projects, school staff can take part directly (e.g., class teachers, tutors, counsellors, or the student support team), rather than students acting adult roles. This framing highlights bullying as a relational and systemic dynamic, not the fault of one "bad" individual.

AELD methods used:
Drama sketch (with role options): explores bullying as lived interaction (tone, power, exclusion, intervention) and lets students rehearse safer responses.

Collage: supports non-verbal meaning-making and reduces pressure to share personal experiences; it helps surface what matters (harm, dignity, belonging, repair).

Responsive pedagogy: what teachers do before, during, and after

The guidance below is written as "teacher moves" that support AELD. The intention is to make the activity implementable without turning it into a performance, an exposure, or a moralising exercise.

Before the activity

The purpose is to establish safety, clarity, and choice before emotions rise. Work on bullying needs clear boundaries so students can engage seriously without fear of being targeted, exposed, or forced to disclose personal experiences.

1. The teacher should frame the purpose, explaining why "we are doing this". This helps students understand that the focus is on learning and community responsibility, not gossip or confession. There should be clarity that the class will explore bullying as a phenomenon and design a response programme, without identifying real individuals or incidents.

2. The teacher should establish a brief shared agreement on "how we will work". A short agreement protects dignity and maintains a democratic, respectful atmosphere, looking at others and oneself with an acceptive gaze.

- No naming real people or "who did what".
- Focus on behaviours and patterns, not individuals.
- No mocking or entertainment.
- Students choose what they share and may step back from a role if needed.

3. The teacher should offer participation options with different levels of exposure – from low-exposure roles (observer/narrator) to more active roles (performer), so everyone can take part safely. Choice reduces fear and supports inclusion, especially for students who feel vulnerable.

- Offer roles such as observer/director/narrator instead of acting.
- Encourage scenarios to be fictionalised or generalised ("a situation like…").
- Provide written/visual alternatives to speaking.

4. The teacher should plan a neutral reset signal to pause and regroup if needed. A reset prevents escalation and shows that safety matters more than "getting through the plan." One simple option is a raised hand: when the teacher raises one hand, everyone pauses, takes a breath, and the activity restarts calmly and fairly.

5. The teacher should plan a gentle follow-up pathway if the topic feels personal for someone. This includes briefly stating where students can talk after the activity (e.g., a trusted adult at school) and reminding them that they can step out or choose a lower-exposure role at any time.

6. The teacher should use shared video episodes (if included) as a common reference point, so discussion does not depend on personal stories. To this end, the teacher should provide a brief content note in advance and offer an alternative (e.g., a short written summary or a key scene description) for students who prefer not to watch at home.

During the activity

The purpose is to notice what is emerging and adjust so learning remains safe and meaningful. Responsive pedagogy is most visible here: the teacher reads the room and adapts the pace, structure, and level of exposure.

1. The teacher should actively notice cues in the room and in students' participation. These signs often indicate rising risk, exclusion, or emotional overload.

   • Watch for nervous laughter turning sharp, silence/withdrawal, domination, escalating tone, confusion, visible discomfort, or one student becoming the "focus".

2. The teacher should adjust the exposure level to keep participation safe. This helps everyone participate safely and reduces pressure to share personal experiences.

   • Start with pair or small-group work; use whole-class sharing selectively.
   • Offer anonymous notes/questions when honesty is needed without personal exposure.
   • Invite students to shift roles (e.g., from performer to narrator/observer) if needed.

3. The teacher should keep drama work ethically grounded and non humiliating. Drama can deepen understanding, but only when it avoids stereotyping, ridicule, or personal targeting.

   • Remind students: portray behaviours and dynamics, not real classmates or real events.
   • If students start laughing or performing it "for fun," pause the scene and re-anchor the purpose: "We keep this respectful – bullying is not a joke."
   • Encourage scenes to include bystander choices and a pathway to adult help (without impersonating specific teachers), rather than focusing solely on the bully-target interaction.

4. The teacher should keep the activity centred on realistic actions students can take. The goal is to move from watching bullying to practising safe, doable responses as a group.

- Ask: "What could a bystander do right now?"
- Ask: "How could someone get adult help safely, and what would 'helpful' look like?"

Choose one realistic change and replay the scene with a "better ending" that still feels believable.

5. The teacher should use the reset signal whenever participation or dignity is at risk. Resetting prevents escalation and models shared responsibility for the learning space.

- Pause, breathe, and restart if someone is talked over, laughed at, singled out, or excluded.

After the activity
The purpose is to integrate learning into shared action without moralising or blaming. Students should leave with a clearer understanding and practical next steps – not shame, rumours, or emotional overload.

1. The teacher should debrief on two levels: content and process. This keeps learning both cognitive and relational.

- Content: What did we learn about bullying types, impacts, and roles?
- Process: What did we notice about the atmosphere, participation, and safety while we worked?

2. The teacher should support students to create a short anti-bullying response plan based on what the class identified and practised. A practical outcome supports agency and shared responsibility.

- Group the ideas into simple themes, such as: prevention, reporting, bystander action, adult help, support for targets, and accountability.
- Help students choose a small number of realistic actions to trial.

3. The teacher should end by reminding students how to maintain respectful behaviour after the lesson. This reduces risk after an emotionally charged topic.

- Briefly remind students whom they can talk to if the topic feels personal or difficult.
- Restate the boundary: no naming people, no gossip, and respectful behaviour outside the classroom.

4. The teacher should take a few minutes to reflect for next time. This helps build responsive practice over time.

- Who joined in easily, and who needed lower-exposure options?
- When did the mood shift, and what helped to steady the room?
- What will I change next time (pace, structure, roles, prompts, reset)?

Teacher self-training for responsive pedagogy

In classroom life, teachers constantly meet situations that cannot be handled by fixed methods: emotions surface, participation becomes uneven, uncertainty arises, and the wider context shapes who feels able to speak. Responsive pedagogy addresses this reality by treating teaching as a shared endeavour grounded in mutual responsibility, attentiveness, and reflective, in the-moment adjustment – conditions that help students experience democracy not only as a topic, but as a lived process of becoming more open to otherness, able to take peers' perspectives, and ready to co-create. To support teachers in practising this stance, the PowerPoint presentation "Teacher Self Training for Responsive Pedagogy" offers 10 "If – Then" sets: each slide begins with an IF context and three THEN response options. Teachers are invited to decide first, and then click to reveal feedback: the more appropriate option(s) appear with a green dot, while less appropriate options are marked with an orange dot and briefly explained to support reflection and reconsideration. Find the presentation by clicking here.
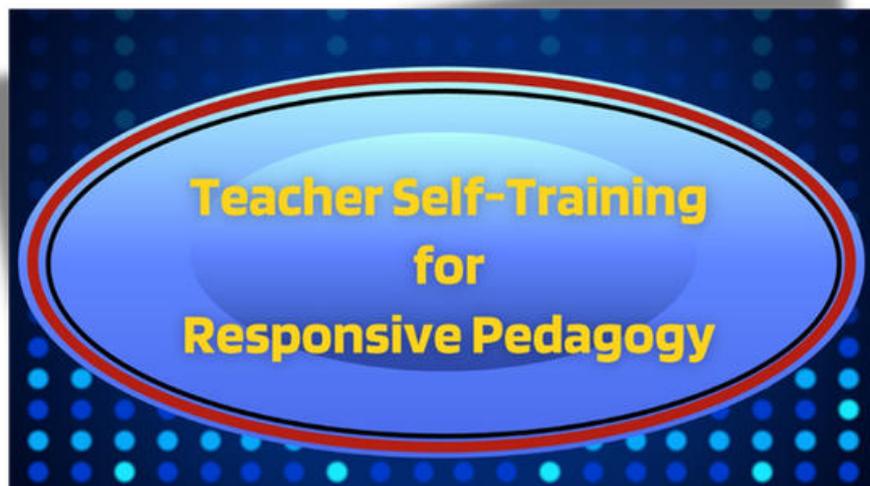
6. Understanding and implementing the acceptive gaze in practice

We offer three activities as a preparatory step to help students understand what the acceptive gaze is, why it matters, and how it works. To practise recognition before evaluation (acknowledging what is present before judging it), students often need to experience how quickly the mind produces labels and how easily those labels can be wrong. Across three connected activities, students learn to distinguish between first impressions and descriptive noticing and to delay judgement until more context becomes visible. Teachers are encouraged to try the activities themselves first, before offering them to students. This supports a classroom culture where students can be seen without being reduced to a label, and where communication remains open and respectful.

"Snack Attack" by Eduardo Verastegui. Watch Snack Attack by clicking here.

Preparatory activity for the acceptive gaze: Moving beyond labels

Activity 1: Guided three-phase viewing

Phase 1 invites students to take a first look and form first impressions. They watch the film Snack Attack from the beginning until the moment the boy starts eating the biscuits. There is no discussion at this stage. Students stay silent for a short moment and then write privately about their first impression, using one of the starters below:
- "My first impression is…"
- "Right now I think…"
- "The label that comes to mind is…"

This short first-impression writing makes quick judgement visible while keeping them contained so they do not spread through the group.

Phase 2 invites students to take a second look for descriptive noticing (describing only what can be observed – actions, words, tone, timing, posture, distance – without judging or explaining why). Students continue watching until the woman takes her seat on the train. Afterwards, they work in pairs or small groups for 3–5 minutes and share only observable details, using starters:
- "I notice…"
- "I see…"
- "I observe…"

There is a rule here to follow: no "He is / She is" labels, and no guessing of motives. If a label appears, students rephrase it as an observation. For example, instead of "He is rude …" or guessing his motives, students should describe what they observe: "He reaches for the biscuits again without speaking."

This trains the acceptive gaze as attentive receiving by separating what is observed from what is assumed.

Phase 3 invites students to take a third look for recognition and reinterpretation. Recognition means identifying what is actually happening in the scene, based on what the film shows. Reinterpretation means revising the first impression in light of new information.

Students then work as a whole group for 5–8 minutes to reflect and revise, using starters:
- "Now I understand that…"
- "At first I thought…, but now I see…"
- "The key detail that changed my view was…"

To finalise the activity, students share one sentence about what they learned, concluding that first impressions can be wrong. Labelling people too quickly can harm relationships, so it helps to pause, notice, and revise our view when new context appears.

Activity 2: Student-led three-phase viewing (The Present)

The class watches The Present by the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg together. Afterwards, students work in pairs to identify the three phases: first impression, descriptive noticing, and recognition/re-interpretation. The purpose is to help students recognise the mechanism of the acceptive gaze for themselves rather than relying on teacher guidance. When students can name these phases independently, they deepen their understanding and build a stronger basis for applying the acceptive gaze not only in classroom learning and AELD work, but also in everyday life beyond school, supporting more respectful, democratic relationships.

The Present, Watch The Present by clicking here.

Activity 3: Mini acceptive gaze creative project

Students create a short film or a sequence of drawings that show the three phases in action: first impression, descriptive noticing, and recognition/re-interpretation. Creating the story helps students grasp the mechanism more deeply, because they must show how quick labels form and how they can change when more context appears – skills that support respectful, democratic relationships in and beyond school.

To keep the activity safe, students use fictional or blended situations ("a situation like…") rather than real classmates or identifiable events. No names and no personal disclosures are required. The teacher frames the task as learning, not entertainment or exposure.

Training for self and mutual acceptance

The preparatory activities show that first impressions can be wrong and that labels can close communication. This section builds on that understanding by practising the same mechanism in real interactions:

1. Pause to stop quick judgement.
2. Notice by describing what is present.
3. Respond with recognition by acknowledging before evaluating.

The practical activities that follow help teachers and students rehearse this stance in discussion, peer feedback, group work, and AELD tasks, so that recognition and mutual acceptance become a shared habit in classroom life and beyond.

We provide Acceptive Gaze key training sets for five channels of acceptance:

a. Teacher ➜ Self (self-acceptance)
b. Student ➜ Self (self-acceptance)
c. Teacher ➜ Students
d. Students ↔ Students
e. Students ➜ Teacher

a. Teacher ➜ Self (self-acceptance)

Teacher self-acceptance helps when they feel urgency, irritation, shame, uncertainty, or the impulse to control/correct.

Phase 1: Pause. The teacher pauses before acting: one slow exhale, soften shoulders/jaw, slow the pace.

Phase 2: Notice. The teacher describes their state without self judgement:
- "I notice I'm speeding up."
- "I notice tightness in my body."
- "I notice an impulse to control/correct."
- "I notice I'm feeling defensive."

Phase 3: Respond with recognition (toward self). The teacher acknowledges what is present and chooses one small next step:
- "This is a tense/uncertain moment; I can respond calmly."
- Then the teacher chooses one small move, for example, slowing down, asking one clarifying question, switching to pair work or a write-first step, allowing observation as a valid option, or naming uncertainty calmly.

There could also be an optional post-practice reflection for a minute: "What was my first inner judgement?" / "What did I notice instead?" / "What small move helped?"

b. Student → Self (self-acceptance)

Student self-acceptance helps when a student feels shame, fear of judgement, frustration, defensiveness, or wants to withdraw.

Phase 1: Pause. The student takes one breath and pauses before reacting (shutting down, arguing, giving up).

Phase 2: Notice. The student names what is happening without labelling themselves:
- "Right now I feel…"
- "I notice I want to hide/argue/quit."
- "My body feels…"

Phase 3: Respond with recognition (toward self). The student acknowledges the moment and takes one small step:
- "This is hard, but I can take one small step."
- Choose one option: observe first, write one line, ask one question, share in a pair, ask for clarification.

There could also be an optional post-practice reflection, "One thing I managed today was…"

c. Teacher → Students

The acceptance of students by the teachers helps when a student's behaviour triggers quick judgement, when participation becomes uneven, or when a student's idea is still forming and needs time to develop.

Phase 1: Pause. The teacher pauses before labelling ("lazy," "rude," "not trying") and keeps tone and pace calm.

Phase 2: Notice. The teacher describes what is observable (not who the student "is"):
- "I notice you've gone quiet."
- "I notice you're not joining in right now."
- "I notice the room got tense / the pace got fast."

Phase 3: Respond with recognition (acknowledge before evaluating). The teacher acknowledges the situation and offers a safe next step:
- Recognition: "This seems difficult/uncertain right now."
- Invitation: "Let's try this in pairs first," "Let's write for a moment before speaking," "Let's take 20 seconds," "You may observe," or "Sharing is optional."

There could also be an optional post-practice reflection: "What label did I almost use?" / "What did I describe instead?" / "Did my response widen participation?"

d. Students ↔ Students (peer practice)

The students' acceptance of the teacher helps during group work, discussions, disagreements, and especially AELD sharing/feedback, where students can feel exposed.

Phase 1: Pause. Students pause before reacting with ridicule, quick judgement, or interruption.

Phase 2: Notice. Students begin with description, not evaluation:
- "I notice…" / "I see…" / "I observe…"

If a label appears, students rephrase it as an observation.

Phase 3: Respond with recognition (acknowledge before evaluating). Students acknowledge the contribution and respond respectfully:
- "I hear/see what you're showing…"
- For AELD feedback: "I noticed…"/ "It made me think…" (before any judgement or advice).
- If a misunderstanding occurred: "At first I thought…, but now I see…"

There could also be an optional post-practice reflection: "One way we kept the space respectful today was…"

e. Students → Teacher

The teacher's acceptance helps when students disagree, feel misunderstood, feel tension, or need clarification — without escalating or shutting down.

Phase 1: Pause. Students pause before reacting with sarcasm, eye rolls, shutdowns, or hostile comments.

Phase 2: Notice. Students describe their experience rather than labelling the teacher:
- "I noticed I got confused when..."
- "I noticed the pace felt fast for me."
- "I noticed I stopped wanting to speak."

Phase 3: Respond with recognition (acknowledge before evaluating). Students first acknowledge what the teacher is trying to achieve, and then state their needs clearly:
- "I understand you want us to..., and I'm struggling with... "
- "I may be misunderstanding... can you clarify... ?"
- "Could we try it with more time, a short write-first step, or working in pairs?"

There could also be an optional post-practice reflection: "One sentence that kept communication open was..."

This section showed the acceptive gaze as a practical habit: Pause, Notice, Respond with recognition. Through film-based preparation and everyday routines across key relationships (self and others), teachers and students learn to slow down quick judgement, reduce labelling, and support safer, more democratic ways of being together in and beyond school.