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Theoretical and Methodological Toolkit

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Executive Summary

The Theoretical and Methodological Toolkit establishes ALPHABETICA's shared standards for excellence, impact, and implementation, translating the project's research design into a coherent handbook for partners and stakeholders. It combines rigorous conceptual foundations with practical guidance for twelve pilots operating across eight European countries and for multi-stakeholder Living Labs that connect practice to policy. The programme pursues two overarching aims: to widen equitable access to arts-based education for children and young people aged 3–18, especially those at heightened risk of educational poverty or social exclusion, and to generate credible, transferable evidence on both instrumental and transformative outcomes that can inform policy and professional practice beyond project sites.

ALPHABETICA's architecture is intentionally mixed-methods and participatory. A cross-national survey of approximately 4,000 respondents captures attitudes towards, and experiences of, the arts across formal, non-formal, and informal learning spaces, engaging learners, families, educators, civil-society organisations, and policymakers. Purpose-built pilots then operationalise Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) in diverse local settings (classrooms, libraries, youth centres, and cultural venues) co-creating activities that are evaluated through ex-ante, real-time, ex-post, and follow-up stages. Living Labs convene multi-actor coalitions to translate emergent evidence into focused prototypes, public events, and policy notes. This three-axis design supports comparability while respecting contextual diversity.

The conceptual compass aligns five mutually reinforcing strands: arts-based education, positioning creative practice as a legitimate route to learning and human development; YPAR, which recognises children and young people as co-researchers and co-designers with real decision rights; pedagogies of care, which make dignity, safety, curiosity, and joy core conditions for participation; pedagogies of past-present-imagined futures, linking memory-work to prospective imagination and civic agency; and more-than-human approaches that situate learning within places, materials, and ecological relations. The framework is operationalised as principles, facilitation routines, and indicators so that fidelity, reliability, and quality can be monitored and strengthened.

The consolidated state of the evidence warrants careful optimism. When the arts are tightly integrated with disciplinary concepts, studies report consistent small-to-moderate gains in mathematics, science, vocabulary, and narrative skills, with pronounced benefits for learners who struggle in conventional academic terms. Transformative outcomes (self-concept, agency, identity, creativity, and social belonging) are supported by stronger and more consistent evidence across contexts. Recurring mechanisms include socially scaffolded learning within caring micro-communities; embodied, multimodal engagement with ideas; narrative and identity work that legitimises young people's voices; structured opportunities for public authorship; and adequate intensity and duration. Design implications follow: modest, well-structured sequences can support conceptual retention; more substantial, well-supported programmes are needed to shift dispositions, identities, and trajectories.

Evaluation follows a layered approach. A process spine documents, in every session, participation quality, care practices, place-responsiveness, and futures orientation, using low-inference observation and short reflective prompts co-owned by youth and adults. Outcome

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indicators are selected with participants and anchored in constructs defined operationally: agency, belonging, communicative competence, wellbeing, civic engagement. A cross-synthesis aggregates patterns across pilots, making explicit where convergences, complementarities, or divergences appear and why. All routines align with Open Science obligations and a FAIR-compliant Data Management Plan, with privacy preserved through proportional minimisation, pseudonymisation, and staged consent for visual artefacts.

Ethics and safeguarding are integrated throughout. Working with minors and with participants who may be in vulnerable circumstances, the project adopts a prevention-first stance: staged consent and assent; default privacy in images; clear opt-out lanes; child-friendly complaints mechanisms; unambiguous escalation routes; cultural-linguistic accessibility; and attention to researcher and teacher positionality. These safeguards are balanced by a positive, rights-based position: participation is a right, arts learning is integral to a just education, and co-created publicness can be empowering when consented and well facilitated.

For implementation, the Toolkit privileges practical routines over prescriptions. Session plans keep a stable rhythm (welcome, noticing, making, sharing, documenting) while leaving creative latitude. Small, repeatable moves do the heavy lifting: warm feedback protocols; two-minute drawings and quick sound sketches; gallery walks that cultivate audience awareness; noticing prompts that invite transfer; and rotating roles that distribute responsibility and make power-sharing visible. Seven method fiches are provided for immediate adaptation, and a self-assessment instrument (blending a Theory of Change canvas, participatory SWOT, and a light monthly dashboard) sustains iterative improvement.

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List of Abbreviations

ABE - Arts-Based Education

YPAR - Youth Participatory Action Research

ToC - Theory of Change

RIAs - Research and Innovation Actions

YADB - Youth Advisory and Design Board

SEL - Social-emotional learning

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Introduction

A dedicated methodological and theoretical toolkit is presented as integral to ALPHABETICA's objectives, with guidance on its consortium-wide application. Research and Innovation Actions (RIAs) demand not only scientific quality but also credible pathways from knowledge production to societal uptake. In the domain of arts-based education, this requirement has an added urgency: despite decades of practice and promising studies, the international evidence base remains fragmented across disciplines and geographies, methodological approaches are uneven, and the arts are frequently treated as optional enrichment rather than as a core component of a just education (Bachar & Glaubman, 2006; Gadsden, 2008; Marshall & D'Adamo, 2011; Sanz-Camarero et al, 2025; Winner, 2013). Against this background, ALPHABETICA's investment in a common toolkit serves three linked aims.

First, the toolkit establishes a shared language. Arts-based practice names a family of approaches where artistic processes and artefacts are not peripheral 'add-ons' but primary vehicles for learning, development and meaning-making (Atkinson, 2007; Gadsden, 2008). Within this family, related terms (such as arts integration, arts infusion, creative education, arts-informed research) have acquired overlapping and sometimes competing meanings in different literatures. The present document fixes working definitions for the consortium and, where appropriate, indicates near synonyms, boundary conditions and typical implementation contexts. This reduces ambiguity when teams plan and report activities, while still leaving room for local idioms and cultural specificity (OECD, 2025).

Second, the toolkit provides a portable architecture for implementation. ALPHABETICA operates in eight countries and across formal, non-formal and informal settings; pilots vary in scale, tempo, participants and art forms. A detailed 'one-size-fits-all' protocol would be counterproductive; it would inhibit responsiveness and creativity. Instead, the architecture offered here is modular and principled. It identifies what should be common – ethical safeguards, YPAR governance, evaluation spine, documentation standards – and what should remain open to co-design – topics, media, roles, publicness, rhythms, aesthetics. This balance enhances comparability without sacrificing contextual fit (European Commission, 2024; UNESCO, 2025).

Third, the toolkit organises the project's commitments into evaluable propositions. It states not only what will be done but why, spelling out assumptions about how change happens and what it would look like in practice. For example, the project contends that agency grows when children and young people experience real decision spaces with visible consequences, that belonging is fostered by predictable routines and warm feedback, and that transfer of approach, rather than decontextualised 'skills transfer', is the more realistic and useful way to conceptualise how repertoires move across settings (Gadsden, 2008; Winner et al, 2013). This toolkit rests on the assumption that these claims can be observed, documented, and debated.

The document is structured to support this threefold purpose. After an overview of guiding principles (which translate the project's conceptual strands into practice), the section on YPAR governance offers decision-rights templates, age-sensitive co-design tools and participation indicators. The theoretical framework then condenses findings from the Scoping Review into a usable map, highlighting convergences in mechanisms while acknowledging theoretical plurality. A subsequent section synthesises the project's Systematic Review of arts-based interventions,

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clarifying what kinds of outcomes are consistently observed, for whom, in which conditions, and why.

To move from principled design to practical delivery, the toolkit provides detailed fiches for seven methods aligned with ALPHABETICA's objectives. These fiches are not scripts; they are structured invitations to enact the project's values in context. The self-assessment instrument that follows brings coherence across the diverse work by means of a Theory of Change canvas, a SWOT matrix and a simple dashboard. Finally, the ethics, safeguarding and data section sets out how to operationalise an 'ethics by design' stance in pilots and Living Labs, how to protect privacy in multimodal data and how to comply with open science obligations.

An adequate account requires acknowledging, at a high level, the project's theory of change. ALPHABETICA begins from an equity imperative: the right to quality education includes the right to experiences and practices through which children and young people can imagine and create, build confidence and voice, connect across difference and take part in cultural life. Where these experiences are scarce or unevenly distributed, educational poverty compounds other forms of deprivation (Council of Europe Development Bank, 2017). The project hypothesises that carefully designed ABE, implemented through YPAR in caring, place-responsive and future-oriented ways, can contribute to reducing educational poverty by generating accessible, dignified spaces of learning; by leading to observable improvements in participation, belonging, communicative competence and agency; and by growing capacities that travel into other life domains. Because the project also treats young people as civic actors, (Domínguez & Cammarota, 2022; Doucet et al, 2022) the Living Labs provide opportunities to carry this learning into public dialogues and policy spaces in which youth are co-authors.

This toolkit is a living document. As pilots progress and Living Labs convene, the consortium will add to the corpus of evidence. The toolkit will evolve in response, keeping faith with the project's commitments while remaining open to surprise and revision. Teams are invited to annotate margins, propose additions, and capture stories of practice that best illustrate how principles travel and are transformed. The measure of success is not rigid compliance but the emergence of a shared craft: principled, ethical, contextually intelligent arts-based education that can be credibly recommended to educators and policy-makers beyond the project's lifetime (OECD, 2025).

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Overview and Principles

The overview that follows translates ALPHABETICA's conceptual strands into a set of interdependent principles for design, facilitation and evaluation. The intent is practical: practitioners need a compass that makes sense across ages and settings, and evaluators need observable traces that can be triangulated without reducing the richness of arts-based work (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2015). The five strands (arts-based education (ABE), Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), pedagogies of care, past-present-imagined futures, and more-than-human approaches) are not merely descriptive. Together they form an actionable stance that shapes choices about topics, facilitation moves, roles, artefacts, documentation and publicness.

Arts-based education (ABE). ABE treats artistic practices and creative processes as primary vehicles for learning. It recognises that making, performing and curating generate forms of understanding that are not fully capturable by decontextualised tests (Atkinson, 2007). In the context of ALPHABETICA, ABE is a legitimate way to approach disciplinary concepts (for example through dance and drama for physical forces, collage and drawing for ecological cycles, spoken word for citizenship and history), to work with identity and memory, and to build social imagination. ABE is therefore both instrumental and intrinsic: it may improve academic outcomes when well designed, but, even when it does not, it still matters as a practice of human flourishing (Gadsden, 2008; Rolling, 2010).

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). In YPAR, children and young people are not research subjects; they are co-researchers and decision-makers. They formulate questions that matter to them, co-design methods, collect and interpret data, and act on findings (Doucet et al, 2022). Within ALPHABETICA, the YPAR cycle is woven into studio routines: participants set intentions, document process and choices; co-analyse artefacts and experiences; decide what to share and with whom; and assess whether chosen actions produced the desired changes. This power-sharing is not symbolic (Domínguez & Cammarota, 2022). A participation register in each pilot documents who decided what, when, and on what basis, and how youth views were considered when adults retained responsibility (for example, on safeguarding or resource constraints).

Pedagogies of care, love and enchantment. Learning is relational. Many participants in ALPHABETICA will have experienced exclusion, instability or stigma. Pedagogies of care, therefore, are not sentimental extras; they are core to ethical and effective practice. In concrete terms, facilitators enact care through predictable structures that lower anxiety; routines that welcome and close; warm feedback that is descriptive and forward-looking; invitations that validate multiple ways of knowing; and attention to energy, rest and embodiment. 'Enchantment'

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names moments of absorbed attention, wonder and joy that can reset expectations about what learning can feel like (Beer et al, 2020). These moments are deliberately cultivated through well-chosen exemplars, aesthetically inviting materials and spaces, and the permission to take creative risks without fear of ridicule.

Pedagogies of past-present-imagined futures. Participants' possibilities are shaped by their histories and their present realities. Poverty of resources can become poverty of hope when futures feel closed (Mansfield et al, 2024). ABE can open that horizon by legitimising imaginative work about possible worlds and by connecting it to action (Carroll, 2018). In practice, this means deliberately weaving memory-work (photographs, family artefacts, places that matter) with present concerns and prospective planning (storyboards for changes participants want to see, youth-authored messages to decision-makers). This strand merges with YPAR's action orientation and with Living Labs' policy dialogues.

More-than-human approaches. Learning happens with and through places, materials and non-human others. More-than-human perspectives invite participants to attend to ecologies and to the agency of materials (paper, pigments, clay, found objects, soundscapes among others) (Ylirisku et al, 2024). Place-responsive prompts (such as walking maps, sound maps, textures and colours of a neighbourhood) create ways of knowing that exceed text and that can be particularly enabling for multilingual classes or for learners with limited confidence in the language of schooling.

From strands to principles. This toolkit proposes five interdependent principles that translate the conceptual frame into daily practice (Durlak, 2011; Marshall & D'Adamo, 2011; Shaw, 2020; Schneider, & Rohmann, 2021). The first is *youth co-agency and ethical power-sharing*. This principle is enacted through roles (co-designer, co-researcher, facilitator, curator, advocate, data-care lead), rotating responsibilities, shared authorship, and visible decision points. The second is *care as design*, which insists that climate moves (welcomes, transitions, warm feedback) are not afterthoughts but part of planning and evaluation. The third is *place and materials responsiveness*, foregrounding site-specificity and the agency of materials. The fourth is *futures literacy*, creating deliberate connections between memory-work and prospective imagination and action. The fifth is *transfer of approach*, the idea that what travels from studio to other contexts are repertoires (choice, critique, noticing, collaborative problem solving, audience dialogue) rather than decontextualised 'skills'.

Each principle is accompanied by observable indicators that can be tracked without exhausting practitioners or participants. For co-agency, indicators include the number and quality of youth decision points and the distribution of talk and tasks. For care, they include evidence of predictable routines, warm feedback and attentiveness to energy and embodied needs. For place-responsiveness, indicators include use of site-specific prompts, attention to materials, and the presence of more-than-human themes. For futures orientation, they include explicit connections

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between memory-work and prospective steps, and the presence of youth-authored proposals. For transfer, indicators include explicit 'noticing' of where approaches might matter beyond the studio and documented instances of reuse (Beer et al, 2020; Cramer et al, 2018; Durlak, 2011; Fienberg et al, 2025; Meltzer & Schwencke, 2019).

Routines and micro-practices. The repertoire of small moves below is presented as narrative guidance rather than as a checklist. Begin sessions with a brief welcome that names the intentions for the time together and acknowledges the people and the place. Invite a short 'noticing' activity (for example, something seen or heard on the way to the session, a texture or sound in the room) to attune attention and create aesthetic readiness. Introduce exemplars with a focus on how choices create effects, not on reproducing a look. Co-create success criteria that include process qualities (risk-taking, collaboration, audience care) as well as features of the artefact. Alternate making with short pauses for reflection and sharing; in larger groups, a quick pair exchange can create safety for quieter voices. Use warm feedback protocols that ask, 'What stood out? What could be explored next? What question do you have?' Conclude with a closing circle or a quiet minute that lets participants name an insight or an intention; document these to support continuity across sessions (Bertling & Hodge, 2025; Meltzer & Schwencke, 2019; Schneider & Rohmann, 2021).

Documentation and audience dialogue. Because arts-based work often culminates in artefacts or performances, the way publicness is handled is ethically significant. The default in ALPHABETICA is privacy; public sharing is opt-in at staged points. Roles (greeter, explainer, listener, note-taker) can be rotated to distribute visibility and responsibility. Captions are co-written, balancing evocation and context. Audience responses are captured on cards that invite a concrete 'one thing I will do differently' prompt; (Barton & Fanshawe, 2024; Durlak et al 2011; Edwards et al, 2020; Joronen et al, 2008) these become data that can feed into Living Labs.

Transfer of approach. At the end of a cycle or a term, invite participants to harvest 'transfer narratives': short accounts of where a repertoire travelled/collaboration used in a different class, noticing that changed how someone moved through a park, warm feedback used in a sports or family context, a gallery-walk protocol adapted to a science laboratory (Barton & Fanshawe, 2024; Beer et al, 2020; Durlak et al 2011; Joronen et al, 2008). These narratives are a central part of the project's claim about how ABE contributes to lifelong learning.

Finally, the overview underscores the stance that underwrites everything else: dignity. Much of ALPHABETICA's work will take place in communities where formal institutions have not always kept faith with young people or their families. The quality of our attention to stories, languages, cultural repertoires and places communicates whether we think participants matter. ABE at its best helps communities recognise themselves as authors and co-authors of their worlds

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(Atkinson, 2007). The principles in this section aim to make that possibility concrete in the constraints and opportunities of everyday practice.

YPAR Governance and Co-design

This section operationalises ALPHABETICA's commitment to YPAR by specifying governance structures, decision rights and age-sensitive co-design tools. It emphasises that participation is substantive and auditable, that young people's choices have real consequences and that power-sharing is matched by responsibilities, reciprocity and safeguards (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Domínguez, & Cammarota, 2022; Doucet et al 2022; Kindon el al, 2007; Mirra & Morrell, 2015; Ozer, 2017; Wright, 2015).

Governance architecture. Each pilot establishes three bodies that together make decision pathways transparent. A Youth Advisory and Design Board (YADB) is the forum where young people set agendas, co-design activities, review consent and publicness options and shape dissemination formats. A Pilot Steering Group convenes educators, artists, community partners and youth representatives to align resources, time and institutional constraints with the project's values. An Ethics and Safeguarding Panel, often overlapping with institutional ethics structures, reviews consent materials, risk registers, escalation protocols and data plans, and is consulted whenever a significant ethical question arises. Minutes or short participation registers record decisions, who took them and how youth views were considered.

Decision rights and reciprocity. Not all decisions can be delegated, but many can. Youth can determine topics, aesthetics, publicness levels (within safeguarding constraints), formats for sharing and audience dialogue roles. Adults retain responsibility for legal compliance, safety and certain resource allocations; where adults decide, they state reasons and revisit them when youth propose alternatives that are feasible and safe. Reciprocity is planned: youth contributions are recognised (e.g., certificates; authorship on outputs; small stipends where local rules allow); adults receive professional learning; partners contribute venues or materials; public bodies commit to a response window for youth policy briefs.

Age-sensitive co-design tools. Co-design must fit developmental profiles without becoming patronising. In early childhood (approximately 3-6 years), facilitation prioritises play, embodiment and non-verbal expression; decisions are framed as choices among concrete options with visual supports; time is short and predictable; familiar adults are present; and the right to pass is actively rehearsed. In middle childhood (7-12 years), facilitators scaffold collaborative inquiry and metacognition: questions are co-generated; simple roles (timekeeper, materials lead, curator) are

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rotated; and short critique protocols are rehearsed. In adolescence (13-18 years), autonomy, identity and sociopolitical development come to the fore: youth co-chair meetings, run segments of sessions, manage public dialogues and negotiate with stakeholders. In all phases, plurilingual resources and multiple modes (drawing, sound, movement, digital media) are available so that language is not a gatekeeper.

Participation quality indicators. The consortium uses a small set of indicators to monitor participation quality without turning practice into an audit exercise. These include the number and scope of youth co-decisions in a cycle; evidence of parity in talk and task distribution; the presence of youth-led segments in public events; youth authorship on outputs; and youth perceptions of fairness, safety and influence, captured through short reflective prompts. Where indicators fall short, teams are expected to adjust design choices accordingly.

Roles and rotation. Participants can try different roles over time: co-designer (proposes content, methods and aesthetic approaches); co-researcher (conducts observations or interviews, helps with coding); facilitator (opens or closes sessions, runs a protocol); curator (selects and captions pieces for exhibitions); advocate (crafts messages and speaks in public); documentarian (photographs, audio-records, maintains the process log); data-care lead (checks consent status before sharing). Rotations are planned so that quieter or less confident participants have low-risk opportunities to take visible roles with support.

Agreements and repair. Power-sharing is formalised in a simple, youth-readable agreement that sets expectations for how decisions are made, how disagreements are handled and how harm is addressed. Repair protocols avoid punitive framings: where harm occurs, a facilitated conversation acknowledges what happened, what matters to those affected and what will be done to make things better, within clear boundaries for safety.

Co-analysis and sense-making. YPAR is not only about generating artefacts and actions; it is also about building the capacity to notice, interpret and make warranted claims. Co-analysis sessions put youth and adults side by side to look at patterns in artefacts, diaries, observation notes and audience responses. Sticky-note clustering, storyboarding, rapid categorisation and visual mapping help make analytic work visible and debatable. Claims are checked against disconfirming instances and, where possible, are triangulated across sources (for example, an improvement in participation patterns is supported by sociograms, diaries and observation notes).

Publicness and policy. Youth decide whether, what and how to share publicly; when they do, they are supported to frame narratives that avoid deficit framings and that articulate concrete proposals. Living Lab sessions allocate time for youth to meet decision-makers on dignified terms, with rehearsed turn-taking and clear follow-up windows. Where proposals cannot be adopted, decision-makers are asked to state reasons and to propose alternatives. Youth-authored policy

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briefs include a context section anchored in their own evidence, feasible recommendations and timelines.

Sustainability. Building capacity beyond the project requires attention to adult learning and to institutional conditions. Teacher-artist partnerships are supported with short, focused professional learning on facilitation routines, care practices, YPAR cycles and evaluation basics. School leadership and community partners are engaged early to plan timetables, spaces and public events. Monitoring dashboards provide a lightweight way to track progress and risks. By the end of each cycle, teams harvest design principles that have local traction so that practice can continue in adapted forms after the project closes (Kornbluh, 2023).

The essence of YPAR governance and co-design, then, is the pursuit of a fair distribution of voice, labour and authorship across generations, within ethical boundaries. It is about building the confidence and competence to inquire, create, deliberate and act together in the public interest.

Theoretical Framework: Concepts, Mechanisms and Debates

The theoretical map is a set of productive lenses deliberately layered to support design, facilitation and evaluation that are principled, ethical and contextually responsive (Durlak et al., 2011; Winner et al, 2013). This section provides a synthesis of the theoretical and conceptual framework that informs ALPHABETICA's practice. It is not an exhaustive literature review, but it integrates the strongest threads surfaced by the project's scoping review into a map that is directly useful for design, facilitation and evaluation.

Pluralism with pattern. Arts-based education is theorised across multiple traditions, each with its preferred vocabulary and canonical references (Atkinson, 2007; Gadsden, 2008; Marshall & D'Adamo, 2011; Rolling, 2010; Sanz-Camarero, 2025; Shaw, 2020; Winner et al, 2013). This plurality is a strength; it allows practice to be read from multiple angles. At the same time, the scoping review reveals recurrent patterns in how change is thought to happen in and through ABE. The synthesis below highlights those patterns without erasing differences.

Social-emotional learning (SEL). In SEL-oriented accounts, ABE is valued for its contribution to self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making (Durlak et al., 2011). The arts create safe, structured opportunities to experience and regulate emotion, to practise empathy and perspective-taking, to communicate across difference and to collaborate towards shared goals (Hannigan et al, 2019; Ylirisku et al, 2024). Programmes

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grounded in SEL evidence often report improvements in classroom climate, engagement and prosocial behaviour (Estrada et al, 2023; Gadsden, 2008; Bachar & Glaubman, 2006). For ALPHABETICA, the implication is straightforward: embed reflection and feedback routines within artistic cycles; track belonging and agency alongside artefact quality.

Constructivist and experiential learning. Constructivist accounts emphasise that understanding is built through active engagement with ideas and materials, through cycles of doing and reflecting and through social interaction (Carrol, 2018). ABE affords concrete, embodied ways of working with abstraction: building, composing, performing and curating are forms of thinking. Exposure to exemplars, timely questioning and opportunities to revise are central to growth. The design implication is to plan iterative cycles and to make process visible (Fleming, 2020; Gadsden, 2008; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013).

Critical and sociocultural traditions. Critical pedagogy frames ABE as a site where power relations can be examined and reimagined; sociocultural perspectives emphasise learning as participation in communities of practice. In these traditions, the legitimacy of youth cultural forms (such as hip hop, street art, spoken word, digital remix) is a central issue. ABE becomes a means to surface and work with lived experience, to connect personal narratives to structural conditions, and to rehearse civic action (Durlak et al., 2011; Hartle et al, 2015; Winner, 2013). For ALPHABETICA this resonates with the YPAR stance and with Living Lab policy dialogues.

Capabilities approach. A capabilities lens treats education as the expansion of real freedoms: what people are able to be and to do (Gadsden, 2008; Marshall & D'Adamo 2011). ABE expands capabilities by opening spaces for expression and recognition, by building confidence and voice, and by cultivating civic imagination. The corollary is that evaluation should attend not only to proximal outcomes (a drawing, a performance, a test) but also to the expansion of options that participants perceive for themselves (Bachar, 2006; Fleming et al, 2020; Hannigan et al, 2019).

Creativity and creative processes. Creativity theories distinguish between process and product and between everyday and exceptional creativity (Domínguez & Cammarota, 2022; López, 2016; Ylirisku et al., 2024). In classrooms and community contexts, the aim is not to produce prodigies but to cultivate creative dispositions: curiosity, persistence, tolerance for ambiguity, risk-taking, and the ability to iterate and to take feedback (Marshall & D'Adamo 2011; Sanz-Camarero, 2025). ABE classes that normalise 'works in progress' and provide feedback designed to help the next move are more likely to foster these dispositions (Winner, 2013).

Care-centred pedagogies. Recent syntheses draw attention to the affective and relational dimensions of teaching and learning, especially in contexts marked by adversity (Barton & Fanshawe, 2024; Douglas, 2017; Durlak et al 2011). Care-heavy approaches in ABE stabilise participation and enable risk-taking by providing predictable routines, naming and valuing care

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work, and creating spaces for rest and sensory regulation (Hannigan et al, 2019). For ALPHABETICA, this is integral to quality.

Past-present-imagined futures. The experience of time matters for education. For participants experiencing precarity or systemic marginalisation, future horizons can narrow (Mak et al, 2020). ABE can act as a counter-force by legitimising imaginative work about the future and by linking it to concrete planning and civic voice. Projects that culminate in public artefacts or proposals for change provide a narrative arc in which past and present can be reinterpreted as resources for a different future (Barton et al, 2024; Call-Cummings et al, 2020; Douglas, 2017).

More-than-human perspectives. Posthuman and ecological perspectives urge attention to places and materials as co-agents in learning. In practice, this might mean integrating site-specific inquiry (soundscapes, walking interviews, mapping) and attending to the affordances of materials (clay, pigments, found objects, digital tools) in how they invite or constrain movements, gestures and meanings (Ylirisku, 2024).

Mechanisms of change. Across traditions, several mechanisms recur: socially scaffolded learning within caring micro-communities; embodied, multimodal engagement that recruits memory systems more effectively than text alone; narrative and identity work that legitimises youth voices and creates agentic identities (e.g., as historian, artist, designer); opportunities for public authorship and audience dialogue that crystallise learning and strengthen confidence; and sufficient intensity and duration to allow dispositions to shift (Durlak, 2011; Gadsden, 2008; Winner, 2013; Ylirisku, 2024). This constellation of mechanisms underwrites ALPHABETICA's design choices: routines, power-sharing, artefact analysis, public events with audience dialogue rehearsed, and follow-up to capture transfer.

Equity and inclusion as design, not only outcome. The scoping review cautions that equity is too often treated as an outcome variable rather than as a design principle (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). ALPHABETICA takes equity as foundational: the toolkit specifies design moves (plurilingual resources, rotating roles, audience dialogue rehearsals, accessible public events, options for anonymity) that redistribute participation and recognition. Evaluation attends explicitly to participation patterns by subgroup, to youth perceptions of fairness and to the distribution of visible roles in public events.

Transfer: an alternative framing. Debates about 'transfer of skills' often falter because they imagine skills as detached entities. A socio-cultural perspective suggests reframing transfer as the movement of approaches and repertoires across contexts (Carrol, 2018). This is coherent with evidence that retention of disciplinary content is enhanced when learning is multimodal and emotionally meaningful, and that dispositions such as noticing, collaboration and audience

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awareness can become part of a learner's identity and travel with them (Gadsden, 2008; Leavy, 2015). ALPHABETICA therefore tracks 'transfer narratives' as valued outcomes.

Arts-based Methods, Instruments and Evidence

This section provides arts-based methods and allied instruments that the consortium can adopt and adapt, anchored in the strongest available evidence. It distinguishes between (a) methods for learning and participation; (b) instruments for documentation and evaluation; and (c) routines that help teams connect practice to Living Lab dialogues and policy briefs (Archibald, 2022; Barone, & Eisner, 2012; Burnaford et al, 2007; Leavy, 2015; Moreno et al, 2023; Moula, 2022).

An evidence-informed stance. The systematic review indicates moderate evidence that arts integration, when tightly coupled to disciplinary concepts and delivered with adequate quality, supports content learning, particularly in mathematics and science and in vocabulary and narrative skills, and that these effects can be stronger for learners who face disadvantage (Burnaford et al, 2007; Estrada et al, 2023; Samya, 2025). It also shows consistent evidence of gains in creativity, agency and social-emotional outcomes, with mechanisms that include multimodality, embodiment, identity work and the creation of caring micro-communities. The quality and 'dose' of programmes matter: short, well-structured sequences can improve content retention, while longer, higher-intensity interventions are more likely to shift dispositions and aspirations (Andersen et al., 2019; Egaña-del Sol, 2023).

Methods for learning and participation. The consortium prioritises methods that (i) afford multimodal engagement; (ii) invite identity work and public authorship; (iii) can be implemented with low or no cost; (iv) travel across ages; and (v) embed ethical choices about publicness. Four families of methods are highlighted here, each with variations (Schneider & Rohmann, 2021; Mansfield et al., 2024)

Visual and material methods. Drawing, collage, mapping, zines and comics are powerful because they invite planning, layering, juxtaposition and revision. Quick drawing routines consolidate content learning by recruiting semantic-visual-motor encoding; comics and zines allow sequential narrative and perspective-taking. Mapping (of places, relationships, flows) helps represent complexity and invites decisions about what to show and what to hide. Material exploration (for example pigments, clay, found objects) foregrounds the agency of materials and embodied knowledge (Hardiman et al., 2014; Graham & Brouillette, 2016).

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Movement, drama and performance. Movement translates abstraction into felt experience; drama and role-play enable perspective-taking and the rehearsal of alternative futures; spoken word and music create publicness that can be profoundly validating for youth whose voices have been marginalised (Bautista et al, 2016; Bertling & Hodge, 2025; Douglas, 2017; Lee et al, 2015; Mansfield et al, 2024; Moula et al 2022). Carefully designed performance cycles culminate in structured audience dialogue so that publicness becomes a site of learning for both performers and audiences (Andersen et al., 2019; Egaña-del Sol, 2023;).

Photography, sound and digital media. Participatory photography (Photovoice) and sound capture (sound maps, audio diaries) provide accessible ways to document lived realities and to initiate civic conversations (Bertling et al, 2025; Bertling & Hodge, 2025; Gilbert, 2023). Digital media – stop-motion, digital collage, data visualization – extend these affordances and create possibilities for hybrid online/offline exhibitions (Duan, 2025; Mansfield et al., 2024; Schneider & Rohmann, 2021). Ethical image use and privacy-preserving practices are built in from the outset.

Plurilingual, translanguaging studios. In multilingual settings, studios that deliberately combine home and school languages with arts modalities expand expressive repertoires and confidence. Translanguaging is treated as a resource; tasks might involve collecting words or phrases from different languages, composing visual or sonic collages, and curating a gallery that legitimises multiple linguistic identities (Hardiman et al., 2014; Graham & Brouillette, 2016).

Instruments for documentation and evaluation. ALPHABETICA adopts a small set of flexible instruments that can be used across methods and settings. Researcher and participant diaries (brief, structured prompts) capture intentions, decisions, feelings and 'transfer narratives'. Low-inference observation notes focus on descriptive indicators (participation breadth and depth; climate moves; youth-led moments) rather than judgement (Archibald, 2022). Artefact analysis rubrics attend to purpose, coherence across modes, risk-taking, audience care and reflection on transfer (Blaisdell et al, 2019). Short pulse checks on belonging, agency and energy keep attention on climate without survey fatigue. Sociograms or participation heatmaps, developed with youth, make distribution patterns visible and discussable (Egaña-del Sol, 2023; Andersen et al., 2019). For content learning in integrated units, brief curriculum-aligned checks and delayed post-tests can be used sparingly to monitor retention.

Living Lab and policy routines. To support the flow of practice knowledge into policy dialogue, the toolkit provides a youth policy brief proposal that includes a context section anchored in youth evidence, three to five feasible recommendations, resource implications, responsible actors and a timeline with quick wins and medium-term steps. Public events include a structured audience dialogue with roles and a capture grid ('What resonated? What will you do differently? Who else should see this?'). Living Lab cycles use a set of canvases (problem framing, stakeholder mapping, prototyping, test and iterate) to keep track of choices and assumptions (Shaw, 2020).

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Quality, equity and ethics as threads. Whatever method is chosen, quality is inseparable from equity and ethics. Quality is evidenced not only by the sophistication of artefacts but also by participation patterns, documented care practices, opportunities for youth authorship and the learning embodied in audience dialogues (Leavy, 2015). Equity is evidenced by inclusion of quieter voices, by plurilingual resources and by the distribution of visible roles (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). Ethics is evidenced by staged consent, privacy-by-design in images and the presence of opt-out lanes without penalty (Kilu, 2025).

Implementation at different ages. In early childhood, short, sensory-rich tasks with predictable rhythms are key; publicness remains within familiar circles unless families opt in to wider sharing (Blaisdell et al, 2019; Gilbert, 2023). In middle childhood, scaffolded collaboration, simple roles and visible process help learners move from doing to reflecting; public events can be small-scale exhibitions with rehearsed audience dialogue (Blaisdell, 2019). In adolescence, autonomy and public authorship come to the fore; youth lead segments, manage audience dialogue and craft policy messages. Across ages, facilitators model curiosity, vulnerability and respect (Egaña-del Sol, 2023; Andersen et al., 2019).

The section that follows sets out concise overviews for seven ready-to-use methods, after which a self-assessment instrument is provided to keep design and evaluation tethered to the project's theory of change.

Ready-to-Use Tools

This section presents a set of ready-to-use method fiches and a lightweight self-assessment instrument designed to support principled, ethical and context-responsive delivery across pilots and Living Labs. The fiches are proposals rather than prescriptions: they are offered to researchers, participants (including children, young people and families) and stakeholders such as educators, cultural partners and policy actors, and are intended to be adapted, combined and sequenced to fit local aims, capacities and constraints. Each fiche sets out a clear purpose, facilitation steps, age-appropriate adaptations and ethics prompts (consent, staged publicness, privacy-preserving image practices), alongside light evaluative traces (for example, short diaries, low-inference observation notes, artefact analysis criteria and pulse checks) so that learning remains evidence-informed without becoming burdensome. The accompanying Theory-of-Change-led self-assessment (with SWOT and a monthly dashboard) helps teams keep design, facilitation and evaluation aligned while iterating responsibly. Readers are invited to treat

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the tools as modular building blocks that can be tailored and woven into existing repertoires, always with dignity, safety and co-agency at the forefront.

Self-portrait and "Otherness" Portrait

This studio sequence invites participants to explore self and other through paired visual narratives. The emphasis is on perspective-taking and on the ethics of looking, rather than on idealised self-representation (Carroll, 2018; Leavy, 2015). The opening conversation asks what makes an image feel respectful and what kinds of images participants would prefer not to have made about them. This quickly establishes a culture of consent and dignified curiosity. Participants then create two panels. In the 'self' panel, they select symbols, colours and textures that they feel represent aspects of identity they want to foreground at this moment (identities change; this is one story among many). In the 'otherness' panel, they work in pairs to make an image that narrates a shared experience from the other person's point of view; the pair co-writes a caption explaining how consent and interpretation were handled. The facilitation challenges are to keep the task anchored in relational ethics, to prevent stereotyping and to help participants move beyond clichés into layered representation (Amjad & Jami,2020). The debrief returns to the opening questions: what did we learn about looking, consent and dignity? What design choices helped? Where did we feel uncomfortable and how did we address it? The evaluative traces include diary prompts on perspective-taking, short belonging pulses, and an artefact analysis focusing on audience care and coherence of image-text relation. Publicness is opt-in; where groups choose to share, rehearsed audience dialogues centre on how images can open conversations without fixing identities. The method adapts across ages: early childhood uses tactile materials and adult scribing of children's words; middle childhood introduces simple critique protocols; adolescence invites layered symbolism and public authorship with consent checks at every threshold (Anderson, & Haney, 2021).

Visual Narratives of Identity in Culturally Diverse Settings

This method curates image-text sequences as zines or comics to narrate personal and communal identities (Bautista et al, 2016; Graham & Brouillette, 2016; Hardiman et al., 2014; Kilu et al, 2025). The opening invites participants to bring words and images from their languages and cultures that they wish to see recognized in school or community spaces. Short mini-lessons on sequence, panel composition and the expressive use of line, colour and negative space equip participants with a repertoire of choices. To avoid tokenism, the prompt asks for a narrative that moves across past, present and imagined futures, however small: a memory that matters,

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something about now, and a wish or plan for the future. The studio rhythm alternates making with pair- and small-group sharing, using a warm feedback protocol that invites a next move. A gallery walk rehearses audience dialogue, with roles rotated so that everyone has an accessible way to participate. Publicness is staged: the first share may be within the class; an opt-in second share can be with families; a third, fully opt-in share can be public or online, using privacy-preserving choices where desired. Evaluation focuses on communicative competence across modes, on evidence of risk-taking and on transfer narratives (for example, a learner who used storyboarding to plan a science presentation) (Archibald, 2022). For multilingual classes, translanguaging is legitimised and caption space accommodates multiple languages without requiring translation into the dominant language unless participants choose it (Anderson & Chung, 2011). The method integrates easily with humanities curricula and with Living Lab dialogues on inclusion and cultural life.

Photovoice – Photography as a Participatory Pedagogic Tool

Photovoice invites participants to document strengths, concerns and ideas for change in their communities, using cameras or smartphones (Carroll, 2018; Gilbert, 2023; Herrick et al, 2022; Leavy, 2015). The ethical spine is rigorous: consent menus, privacy-preserving capture (angles, cropping), and a rule that identifiable faces of non-participants are not shared publicly without consent. After a short introduction to framing, light and sequence, participants co-design prompts that matter (e.g., ‘places of care’, ‘barriers to belonging’, ‘what we wish decision-makers could see’). Photographs are printed or displayed digitally and discussed using a dialogic protocol, before being curated into an exhibition with clear calls to action. A youth-authored policy note distils two or three changes that are feasible in the short term and names responsible actors. Public dialogues are rehearsed and include explicit capture of audience commitments. Evaluation attends to participation patterns (who is behind and in front of the camera), to evidence of agency (youth-led choices, public roles) and to transfer narratives (e.g., using photography to document a science inquiry).

Boxes of Art – Parents and Infants Making Together

Boxes of Art are low-cost kits that enable parents/carers and infants/toddlers to make together at home or in community spaces (Armstrong & Ross, 2021; Graham & Brouillette, 2016; Hanningan et al, 2019; Hardiman et al., 2014). Kits include safe, tactile materials (textured papers, large crayons, non-toxic paints, clay), prompts designed to elicit shared attention and turn-taking, and an invitation to ‘caption’ the experience in any language, with adult scribing where needed. The

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method foregrounds attachment, early expression and the recognition of family cultural repertoires, countering deficit framings of families in poverty. Group sessions model safe set-up, playful co-making and warm feedback focused on noticing the infant's choices and the adult's responsive moves. Short reflective prompts invite adults to name moments of shared attention and joy and to note small changes over time. Publicness is within a trusted circle unless families opt in to wider sharing. Where exhibitions are co-created, consent is revisited and images that reveal faces are used only with explicit, opt-in permission. The method can feed into pilots and Living Labs that address access to family-friendly cultural spaces and programming.

Hybrid Language – Artistic Expression for Multilingual Vocabulary

Hybrid Language studios integrate translanguaging with arts modalities to expand expressive repertoires in multilingual settings (Anderson, 2012; Anderson & Chung, 2011; Brouillette et al, 2015; Carroll, 2018; Leavy, 2015). A typical cycle begins with a theme (for example, 'water', 'journeys', 'care'), followed by a 'word harvest' in all the languages present, including sign languages and home dialects. Participants then compose visual and sonic collages that juxtapose words, images and sounds. Mini-lessons on typography, colour and rhythm provide tools for clarity and emphasis. Plurilingual captions accompany artefacts; learners choose whether to provide translations. The evaluative focus is on communicative purpose and audience care, not on conformity to a single linguistic norm. Transfer narratives often include increased confidence in speaking in class and the use of multilingual resources in other subjects. Publicness is planned in conversation with families to avoid exposure risks for those with insecure status. Policy dialogues in Living Labs can focus on language access and on the design of cultural institutions that welcome plurilingual families.

Artistic Drawing as a Mnemonic Device

This method consolidates content learning by adopting short, repeated drawing routines that recruit semantic–visual–motor encoding (Fleming, 2020; Graham & Brouillette, 2016; Hardiman et al., 2014). After a content input-text, participants produce a two-minute drawing that captures the essence, sequence or structure of the idea; the goal is not aesthetic polish but explanatory clarity. Sessions may include panel comics for processes, annotated diagrams for systems, and speculative storyboards for imagined futures in science or citizenship. Warm feedback focuses on how well the drawing communicates and on what next move would deepen clarity. Over time, learners develop a personal repertoire of visual strategies for understanding and remembering. Evaluation includes delayed post-tests on content, but with restraint; more important are transfer

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narratives (e.g., a student using quick sketches when revising for exams) and evidence of confidence in explaining ideas to others. The method integrates easily with movement or drama (embodied modelling of processes) and with digital tools (stop-motion sequences).

Policy Report – Youth-informed Evidence for Decision-makers

This fiche provides a template and a facilitation sequence to translate pilot evidence into concise, actionable briefs aligned with local and European Union's policy processes. The sequence begins with a co-analysis session where youth and adults cluster findings from artefacts, diaries, observation notes and audience dialogues. Drafting teams then use the template to produce a two- to four-page brief: title; context (what matters here, with youth evidence); proposal (three to five actions, with resource implications and responsible actors); equity lens (who benefits, who might be left out and mitigations); timeline (quick wins within one to three months; medium-term within six to twelve months); and a contact and co-design offer. A rehearsal session prepares youth spokespeople for meetings with decision-makers; a follow-up plan logs responses and agreed next steps. The facilitation ethos is invitational rather than adversarial; the goal is to model the kind of democratic dialogue the project seeks to nourish (Bachar & Glaubman, 2006; Carroll, 2018; Doucet et al, 2022; Gadsden, 2008; Marshall & D'Adamo, 2011; Leavy, 2015; Shaw, 2020). Evaluation looks at youth authorship, decision-maker engagement and subsequent changes in local practice or policy.

Self-Assessment Tool: Applying Theory of Change

The self-assessment instrument helps teams keep design, facilitation and evaluation bound to ALPHABETICA's theory of change while remaining open to iteration. It combines three elements: a Theory of Change (ToC) canvas, a participatory SWOT matrix and a light monthly dashboard. Together, these create a rhythm of reflection that is evidence-based and proportionate to capacity (Archibald, 2022; Carroll, 2018; Fleming et al 2020; Gadsden, 2008; Kilu, 2025; Marshall & D'Adamo, 2011; Rolling, 2010; Sanz-Camarero et al, 2025; Schneider & Rohmann, 2021).

Theory of Change canvas. The canvas prompts teams to articulate inputs (people, spaces, materials, partnerships), activities (studios, exhibitions, audience dialogues, Living Lab sprints), short-term changes (e.g., increased participation breadth and depth; visible care routines; youth decision points), medium-term outcomes (e.g., strengthened agency, belonging, communicative competence; transfer narratives), and longer-term contributions (e.g., sustained practices in schools and community venues; youth presence in civic fora; changes in local policies that widen access to arts). Crucially, the ToC requires teams to state assumptions (e.g., 'Warm feedback will

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lower fear of failure and increase risk-taking') and risks (e.g., 'Public events can produce dignity risks if not rehearsed'). At mid-course and ex-post, the canvas is revisited with evidence attached to each pathway.

SWOT matrix. At three points (ex-ante, mid-course and ex-post/follow-up) teams complete a SWOT matrix. Strengths and weaknesses focus on design and facilitation (what we do well; where practice falls short of our principles). Opportunities and threats focus on context (institutional support, partnerships, community assets; policy windows; funding constraints; staff turnover; competing demands). The aim is to generate one or two concrete adjustments and commitments in each quadrant. Where possible, youth and adults complete separate matrices and then compare; divergences are themselves useful data.

Dashboard. A lightweight dashboard keeps attention on a small set of indicators without overwhelming teams. Monthly, pilots record participation breadth and depth (by subgroups relevant to the context), the number and scope of youth co-decisions, evidence of care routines, the number of documented 'transfer narratives', the number and quality of public touchpoints (exhibitions, dialogues), and policy touchpoints (meetings, briefs submitted, responses). Colour coding (green/amber/red) prompts discussion rather than judgement; when a cell is red, a short inquiry asks why and what will be tried next month.

Patterns, not perfection. The intent of the self-assessment is to surface patterns that inform wise action, not to chase an idealised standard. A cycle might begin with uneven participation and heavy adult facilitation; the dashboard shows this; the SWOT names it; the team adjusts routines and roles; mid-course, youth take visible roles; by the end, the participation register shows a fairer distribution. Alternatively, a team might discover that public events are too ambitious for the calendar and that smaller, more frequent sharings with rehearsed dialogue yield better learning and lower risk. The point is learning-in-practice, documented in ways that are useful to others.

Cross-synthesis. At project level, the dashboards and ToC reviews feed into a cross-synthesis that looks for convergences (what seems to work across contexts), complementarities (different pieces of a larger story) and divergences (productive tensions). This is the basis for credible, practice-informed recommendations for teacher learning, cultural partners and policy actors.

Care for the process. Finally, the self-assessment includes pauses for gratitude and celebration. Arts-based work can be demanding; naming what went well and who made it possible sustains the human fabric that the project relies on. The process is thus both evaluative and caring, consistent with the project's commitments (Ylirisku et al, 2024).

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Ethics, Safeguarding and Data

Safeguarding and data care sit at the heart of ALPHABETICA's design because the project involves minors (3-18), many of whom will participate in contexts marked by vulnerability, precarity or recent mobility (European Commission 2021; OCDE, 2025). The consortium therefore adopts an 'ethics by design' approach that threads through recruitment, consent and assent, facilitation, documentation, publicness, data management and dissemination. This section synthesizes requirements and good practices into a workable protocol that can be adapted across countries and settings while maintaining a common standard (ALLEA,2023; European Commission, 2025; European Commission, 2024; European Commission 2021; European Parliament & Council, 2016; OCDE, 2025; UNESCO, 2025).

Foundational commitments. The project upholds the rights of the child, the dignity and autonomy of participants and their families, and the principle of proportionality: risks must be minimised without foreclosing legitimate opportunities for expression and authorship. Decisions are guided by the best interests of the child, interpreted with attention to voice and context. Researchers and practitioners attend to their positionality and potential conflicts of interest, seek supervision when in doubt, and document rationales for ethically significant decisions (ALLEA,2023; UNESCO, 2025).

Recruitment and inclusion. Recruitment processes are transparent about aims, activities, risks and benefits, about what kinds of data will be generated and about how decisions regarding publicness will be made with participants. Materials are available in languages that families can understand, with alternatives for those with limited literacy (audio or video explanations) (ALLEA,2023). Inclusion is a design criterion: where possible, activities are brought to community spaces that reduce barriers to participation; roles are differentiated to accommodate comfort levels; timing takes into account care responsibilities (UNESCO, 2025); and facilitators are attentive to logistical factors such as transport and meals.

Consent, assent and staged publicness. At the outset, parents/guardians and young people receive clear information about the activities and about the project's approach to privacy and publicness. Assent conversations with children are age-appropriate and emphasise that the right to pass is real and respected. Before any public sharing, a mid-project consent check is undertaken to confirm preferences; options range from no public sharing, to sharing within a closed cohort or school community, to public exhibitions or performances, to online dissemination. Participants can choose pseudonyms or collective signatures, and they can withdraw consent for specific artefacts. Because visual data create specific risks, default practices favour privacy-preserving choices (cropping, silhouettes, back-of-head images, face-obscuring composition)

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unless participants opt in to identifiable sharing (ALLEA, 2023; European Parliament & Council, 2016).

Safeguarding and risk management. Each pilot maintains a risk register that is reviewed at least termly. Typical risks include dignity risks associated with publicness, privacy risks related to images or location data, retraumatisation when sensitive topics arise, disappointment if events are cancelled, and ordinary risks associated with materials and venues. For each risk, mitigation measures are specified (for example, rehearsing audience dialogue, default privacy choices, clear opt-out lanes, content warnings and alternative activities, backup dates, and venue-specific safety checks). An escalation protocol sets out who is contacted when disclosures occur, how records are kept and who is responsible for follow-up, in compliance with national frameworks and institutional guidance (ALLEA, 2023; European Parliament & Council, 2016; UNESCO, 2025).

Data minimisation, protection and FAIR sharing. The project adheres to the principle of data minimisation: only data that are necessary for the project's purposes are collected, and personally identifying information is kept separate from research data. Identifiers are stored in encrypted key files accessible only to designated data-care leads; research data are pseudonymised at the earliest opportunity. Shareable datasets are curated to FAIR standards (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable): they are accompanied by clear documentation (codebooks, methods, consent conditions, versioning), deposited in trusted repositories that provide persistent identifiers, and released under appropriate licences (typically CC BY for datasets, CC BY-NC for media where needed), balancing openness with privacy and intellectual property. Where datasets include children's voices or images, consent conditions are encoded in metadata and repository access levels (ALLEA, 2023).

Working with multimodal data. Because ABE generates images, audio and video as well as text, the data plan addresses format, storage, editing and sharing for each modality. Visual data are treated with particular care: facilitators plan for privacy-preserving capture (angles, cropping), maintain raw files in secure storage, and use export formats that support anonymisation. When third-party images appear (bystanders in a public space), consent is sought where feasible; otherwise, images are edited to obscure faces or replaced with drawings or maps that capture the same insight without creating risk. Audio data are transcribed with attention to accent and language varieties, preserving dignity in representation (ALLEA, 2023; European Parliament & Council, 2016; UNESCO, 2025).

Researcher and facilitator wellbeing. Ethical practice includes care for the adults who facilitate. De-briefs are built into programmes so that facilitators can process challenging moments; supervision is available; and teams plan for rotation of roles to avoid burnout. Documentation includes reflexive notes on positionality and decision points that had ethical significance (ALLEA, 2023; European Commission, 2025; European Commission, 2024).

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Public communication and media. Where journalists or external communicators are involved, the default is to prioritise participants' learning and dignity over publicity. Youth decide what to share and who will speak on their behalf; statements avoid deficit framings; images avoid stereotype and tokenism; quotations are checked for accuracy; and social media are moderated with clear house rules and a commitment to repair when harm occurs.

Ethics in Living Labs. Living Labs bring multiple actors into dialogue in real-world settings and may involve accelerated cycles of prototyping and public testing. The same safeguarding and data care principles apply. Planning explicitly builds in time to rehearse audience dialogues, to test prototypes in small cohorts before public unveiling and to revisit consent for any public display that includes youth artefacts or images. Policy dialogues are structured to allocate substantial time to youth voices and to allow for questioning and pushback in ways that are safe and dignified (European Commission, 2025; European Commission, 2024).

Documentation and audit trails. Each pilot maintains a minimal but complete set of documents: participant information sheets and consent/assent records; a participation register recording key decisions and who took them; a risk register and escalation log; a data map showing where different kinds of data are stored and who has access; and a record of public events, including consent checks and debrief notes. These artefacts support learning and provide assurance that commitments are enacted (ALLEA, 2023; European Parliament & Council, 2016).

An invitation to ethical imagination. Finally, the section invites ethical imagination: sensitivity to context, willingness to ask, 'Who might be harmed by this choice? Who benefits? Whose voice is missing?', and the positioning to change course when evidence or participants' preferences point elsewhere.

Data Management Plan – Operational Details

This section operationalises the Data Management Plan (DMP) by specifying roles, storage architecture, file-naming and versioning, consent metadata, and repository workflows. The aim is to make compliance straightforward and to reduce cognitive load for teams while upholding high standards of privacy and open science (ALLEA, 2023; European Parliament & Council, 2016; European Commission, 2024; European Commission, 2025).

Roles. Each pilot designates a Data-Care Lead responsible for consent tracking, pseudonymisation, secure storage and repository deposits; a Deputy acts as back-up.

Storage architecture. Raw data (including identifiable media) are stored on encrypted institutional drives with role-based access; working data (pseudonymised) sit in shared project

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spaces with restricted permissions; dissemination assets are kept in a ‘public’ folder with consent status encoded in filenames and metadata. No data are stored on personal devices except transiently during capture, with immediate transfer and deletion procedures in place.

Consent metadata. Consent/assent records are digitised and linked to artefacts via unique participant IDs and artefact IDs. A consent summary sheet at cohort level indicates permissions at a glance; before any sharing, the Data-Care Lead cross-checks artefacts against the sheet. Where consent is withdrawn, artefacts are moved to an ‘archived – no share’ folder with access limited to the Lead.

Repositories and licences. Shareable datasets are deposited in trusted institutional or domain repositories that provide persistent identifiers. Datasets include a data dictionary, methods, limitations, consent conditions and recommended citation. Embargoes can be used when necessary to allow time for publication or to protect participants’ interests.

Checks and audits. Each term, pilots complete a short data audit: storage locations; consent linkages; number of public assets; repository deposits; issues encountered; and actions planned. The audit feeds into project-level learning and support.

Risk and Mitigation Catalogue

Arts-based, participatory work with children and young people invites specific risks that must be anticipated and mitigated without curtailing legitimate opportunities for expression and authorship. This catalogue lists common risks grouped by domain and offers proportionate mitigations. It is descriptive, not exhaustive, and should be adapted locally (ALLEA, 2023; European Commission, 2021; European Commission, 2024; UNESCO, 2025).

Dignity and representation. Risks include stereotyping, misrepresentation and unwanted exposure. Mitigations: consent as process; privacy-by-design in images; youth editorial control over captions; rehearsal of audience dialogues; and opt-out lanes without penalty.

Emotional safety and retraumatisation. Arts processes can surface difficult memories. Mitigations: content warnings; alternative activities; presence of trusted adults; clear referral pathways; and post-session debriefs.

Participation inequity. Dominant voices can crowd out quieter ones. Mitigations: structured turn-taking; small-group shares before public conversations; rotating roles; explicit monitoring of talk and task distribution.

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Data privacy. Leakage of identifiable media. Mitigations: consent metadata linked to artefacts; default to non-identifiable sharing; secure storage and restricted permissions; staff training.

Logistics and reliability. Cancellations, transport barriers, materials shortages. Mitigations: contingency planning; accessible venues; micro-budgets for transport and snacks; advance materials checklists; and realistic timelines.

Policy engagement risks. Tokenistic consultations; confrontational interactions. Mitigations: rehearsed youth roles; facilitation that models democratic dialogue; agreements on follow-up; documentation of commitments; and multiple, smaller touchpoints rather than one high-stakes event.

Each pilot and Living Labs maintain a living risk register drawing on this catalogue and updates it as contexts shift.

Methodological Assurance and Compliance

This chapter consolidates the methodological pillar of the Toolkit, showing how principles translate into evidence that is credible, comparable, and proportionate. It first makes explicit what counts as trustworthy knowledge in the project (research questions, inclusion/exclusion criteria, critical appraisal routines, synthesis logic, and rules for warranted transfer) and then operationalises those standards through everyday monitoring and evaluation procedures (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Burnaford et al, 2007; Carroll, 2018; Leavy, 2015; Kindon et al, 2007; Mirra, 2015; Wright, 2015). The result is an architecture in which quality is auditable and improvement is actionable: teams know not only what to document, but also why, how, and to what standard, with traceability from field notes and artefacts through to cross-site synthesis.

It then links methods and measures to the outcomes that matter for the project (academic, creative, socio-emotional, identity/agency, and civic) clarifying which designs tend to produce which effects, under what conditions, and with what level of confidence (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Carroll, 2018; Leavy, 2015). These profiles do not prescribe; they inform professional judgement. By aligning domain-specific claims with the instruments described (low-inference observation, artefact analysis, pulse checks, and transfer narratives), they help teams select indicators that are meaningful, feasible, and comparable across contexts, while making assumptions explicit and routinising triangulation (Burnaford et al, 2007).

Finally, it ensures that rigour travels lawfully and ethically by detailing how standards and instruments are adapted with integrity to jurisdictional frameworks (consent/assent, image rights,

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safeguarding, data protection, repositories) and to local cultural-linguistic conditions (ALLEA, 2023; UNESCO, 2025). In this way, standards guide decisions, instruments make them practicable, profiles interpret what is found, and contextual guidance keeps the enterprise compliant, dignifying, and fit for purpose across ALPHABETICA's diverse settings.

Monitoring and Evaluation Instrument Walkthroughs

This section provides detailed walkthroughs for each instrument in the evaluation spine, with prompts and templates ready for local adaptation. The aim is to reduce overheads and to support principled, proportionate evidence collection aligned with ALPHABETICA's claims. Instruments are designed to be used *with* youth, not merely *on* youth; wherever feasible, they are co-owned by participants and facilitators (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Doucet et al, 2022).

Researcher and participant diaries. Diaries are short, structured and rhythmic. A typical participant diary uses three prompts at the end of a session: (1) 'One choice I made today and why it mattered'; (2) 'One thing I noticed about how we worked together'; (3) 'One place I might use today's approach elsewhere'. Younger children can draw; adults scribe their words. Researcher/facilitator diaries mirror these prompts and add notes on climate moves (welcome, noticing, warm feedback), on distribution of talk and tasks, and on ethical moments (consent checks, opt-outs, repairs) (Archibald, 2022; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Burnaford et at 2007). Once a month, diaries are sampled for a 30-minute co-analysis with youth, producing a short memo that logs themes and disconfirming cases.

Low-inference observation notes. Observers (peer facilitators, teacher–artist partners, youth in pairs) use a half-page template split into two columns: 'What I saw/heard' and 'Why it might matter'. The left column forbids evaluative adjectives; the right column allows tentative interpretation anchored in the project's indicators (co-decisions, care, place-responsiveness, futures orientation, transfer) (Archibald, 2022; Burnaford et al, 2007). After a session, a five-minute huddle identifies one pattern to carry forward.

Artefact analysis rubrics. The rubrics attend to purpose, coherence across modes (image, text, sound, movement), evidence of risk-taking, audience care (captions, accessibility, consent-aware display) and reflection on transfer (Archibald, 2022). Scoring is descriptive (emerging/establishing/strong) with space for comments oriented to 'the next move'. Youth co-author the criteria during early sessions; this increases ownership and aligns analysis with intent (Domínguez & Cammarota, 2022). For integrated science or humanities units, a strand for conceptual clarity is added.

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Pulse checks on belonging, agency and energy. A one-minute check at the end of selected sessions invites participants to mark where they are on three visual analogue lines (belonging, agency, energy). Comments are optional. Results are plotted over time on the dashboard; dips prompt curiosity and adjustment rather than judgement. In early childhood, a smiling/focused/tired icon set can be used; in multilingual settings, icons and gestures reduce reliance on written language (Bertling & Hodge, 2025).

Sociograms and participation heatmaps. With consent, sessions are periodically mapped: who spoke with whom, who took which roles, who received feedback from whom. The visualisation makes distribution patterns visible and discussable. A brief co-analysis asks: 'What surprised us? Who had less airtime? What might we change next time to open space?' Facilitators then adjust protocols (pair-shares before plenaries; rotated roles; explicit invitations to quieter participants) and check at the next mapping whether the pattern shifted (Barone, 2012).

Curriculum-aligned checks for integrated units. Where pilots include arts integration with disciplinary content, short curriculum-aligned checks are designed with teachers (e.g., two or three questions requiring explanation) and administered as pre-, post- and delayed post-tests. The aim is to monitor retention and conceptual clarity without distorting the studio ethos. Results are interpreted cautiously and triangulated with artefact analysis and transfer narratives (Bautista et al, 2016).

Audience dialogue capture. Public sharings use a one-page capture grid placed at exits or on clipboards with hosts: 'One thing that resonated'; 'One thing I will do differently'; 'One person/organisation that should see this and why'; 'A question I have for the artists/researchers'. Cards are photographed and filed with consent codes; a short memo summarises themes and concrete commitments (Leavy, 2015). Living Labs pick up these commitments and log follow-up.

Participation register. A slim table records key decisions, dates, who decided, the scope of the decision and any constraints. Examples: 'Theme for Cycle 2 chosen by YADB, with three options tested in week 1'; 'Publicness level: class-only sharing (YADB), reviewed at week 4'; 'Venue for exhibition: school hall (adults, due to safety capacity), with youth-designed layout'. The register turns power-sharing into something observable and improvable (Domínguez & Cammarota, 2022).

Data flow. A simple schematic links instruments to storage: diaries and observation notes are scanned or entered into a shared folder; artefact photos are named with consent codes; pulse checks and sociogram counts feed a lightweight spreadsheet that populates the monthly dashboard; audience dialogue memos and participation registers sit with the Living Lab documents. Quarterly, a small sample is audited by the Data-Care Lead (Barone, 2012; Leavy, 2015).

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By embedding these instruments into the rhythm of practice, the project avoids extractive evaluation and builds a habit of reflective documentation that strengthens both learning and accountability.

Methodological Notes and Evidence Standards

Because ALPHABETICA seeks to persuade beyond its immediate community, methodological credibility is essential. The intent is to provide clarity about inclusion criteria, search and selection procedures, appraisal tools, effect-size calculation where applicable, and synthesis logic, and to make transparent the limits of generalisation (ALLEA, 2023; Archibald, 2022).

Translating evidence into practice. The reviews informed the toolkit not by supplying recipes but by sharpening judgement. For example, if multiple studies report gains in science vocabulary and explanatory writing when drawing and comics are used to model processes, then it is reasonable to recommend short, repeated drawing routines as part of integrated science units. If studies show that public authorship and audience dialogue correlate with improvements in confidence and civic voice, then pilots build structured public events with rehearsed dialogue. If evidence suggests that intensity matters for shifts in dispositions, then timelines are planned accordingly and expectations are calibrated (Barone, 2012; Carroll, 2018).

On generalisability and limits. Even high-quality studies are context-bound. The consortium therefore treats generalisation as a matter of ‘warranted transfer’: identifying conditions under which an approach is likely to work and making those conditions visible. Documentation in pilots (participants, settings, facilitation moves, intensity, publicness decisions) creates the descriptive richness needed for others to judge transfer (Archibald, 2022; Burnaford et al, 2007; Leavy, 2015). The project also recognises publication bias and the relative scarcity of rigorous designs in some subdomains; claims are therefore carefully calibrated.

Ethics of evidence. Finally, evidence work itself has ethical dimensions: whose work is cited and whose is silenced; how youth and communities are represented; whether negative or null findings are reported; and whether practice knowledge is valued alongside academic knowledge. The consortium commits to ethical citation, to reporting that includes complexities and failures, and to valuing practitioner and youth knowledge as part of the evidence ecology.

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Extended Evidence Profiles by Outcome Domain

This section deepens the evidence synthesis by outcome domain (academic, creative, social-emotional, identity/agency and civic) linking design features to observed effects and making explicit the judgments that underwrite the toolkit's recommendations. The intention is not to rehearse every study but to provide a disciplined reading that clarifies where the consortium's confidence is higher or lower and what this means for pilots (Hardiman et al., 2014; Graham & Brouillette, 2016; Fleming et al, 2020; Gadsden, 2008).

Academic outcomes. Arts integration shows the most consistent academic gains when design is 'tight', that is, when the arts modality is not an embellishment but the principal means by which disciplinary ideas are encountered, rehearsed and made communicable. Drawing and comics in science and geography, drama in history and citizenship, and music for patterns and ratios in mathematics are recurrent examples (Hardiman et al., 2014; Graham & Brouillette, 2016; Meltzer & Schwencke 2019). Effects are typically small to moderate, which is consistent with expectations for educational interventions delivered in real-world settings. Two design features stand out: iterative cycles (make-reflect-revise) and attention to audience (even an in-class gallery walk can concentrate effort and clarify purpose) (Rolling, 2010; Carroll, 2018). In contexts of disadvantage, effects are sometimes larger, possibly because ABE recruits under-used strengths and offers alternative routes into content (Durlak et al., 2011; Egaña-del Sol, 2023). For ALPHABETICA this supports the use of short, repeated routines (e.g., two-minute drawings) alongside longer projects. It also cautions against generic claims: integration must be planned with curriculum and assessment in view, and dosing matters.

Creative outcomes. Gains in creativity – measured variously through divergent thinking tasks, creative behaviours and teacher/peer assessments – are among the most consistent in the literature (Hardiman et al., 2014; Graham & Brouillette, 2016). Mechanisms include normalised risk-taking, presence of feedback oriented to 'the next move', exposure to exemplars that broaden the space of possibilities, and the legitimation of multiple modes and languages (Bautista et al, 2016). The implication is to design studios where 'works in progress' are visible and valued, where cycles are long enough to allow revision and where audience dialogue helps learners articulate choices and intentions.

Social-emotional outcomes. Improvements in belonging, engagement, empathy and collaboration are widely reported (Doucet et al, 2022; Ylirisku et al, 2024). Programmes that name care as part of design (such as predictable routines, warm feedback, attention to energy and embodiment) tend to sustain participation and lower anxiety, especially for those with fragile relationships to schooling (Durlak et al., 2011; Egaña-del Sol, 2023). Youth who have experienced exclusion often report that ABE environments feel safer to try, to fail and to try again (Domínguez & Cammarota, 2022).

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Identity and agency. Identity work is central to many ABE programmes. When participants are positioned as artists, historians, designers or advocates, and when their choices have visible consequences (e.g., in public authorship), agency grows (Domínguez & Cammarota 2022; Doucet et al, 2022). Artefacts provide a material anchor for identity claims ('I made this; I can explain it') and an occasion for recognition by peers and adults. Youth leadership roles (such as facilitating a protocol, chairing a meeting, managing an audience dialogue) are particularly powerful (Hardiman et al., 2014; Graham & Brouillette, 2016). The design implication is to create visible decision points with real stakes and to document them in participation registers so that growth in agency can be traced and discussed.

Civic outcomes. Evidence on civic outcomes is thinner but promising (Durlak et al., 2011; Egaña-del Sol, 2023; Domínguez & Cammarota 2022; Doucet et al, 2022). Where programmes culminate in public events with rehearsed audience dialogue and in youth-authored briefs or proposals, participants report increased confidence in speaking to adults, better understanding of how institutions work and a sense that their voices can matter (Call-Cummings et al, 2020; Douglas, 2017). Effects are likely to be context-dependent and sensitive to the quality of adult response; when decision-makers show up, listen and follow up, the learning consolidates.

In sum, the profiles support the project's design stance: tight integration for content learning; generous cycles, exemplars and warm feedback for creativity; care as design for social-emotional outcomes; real decision spaces and public authorship for agency; and rehearsed policy dialogues for civic learning.

Country and Legal Variations: Working with Context

ALPHABETICA operates across multiple legal and cultural contexts. While the toolkit specifies common standards, implementation must be tuned to national and local frameworks governing consent, safeguarding, data protection and public events with minors. This section offers guidance for working with variation while protecting the core commitments (ALLEA, 2023; European Commission, 2024; European Commission, 2025).

Consent and image rights. Parental consent and child assent are required for participation; however, the age at which minors can consent to certain uses of data may vary. Teams should consult institutional ethics offices to align with national law. Where image rights are governed by specific provisions (e.g., restrictions on publishing minors' images), default to non-identifiable images unless explicit opt-in consent is documented; provide alternatives (drawings, silhouettes, audio-only artefacts) to avoid exclusion (ALLEA, 2023; European Parliament & Council, 2016; European Commission, 2024; European Commission, 2025; UNESCO, 2025).

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Data protection. All teams comply with GDPR and relevant national provisions. Some jurisdictions may require additional safeguards for sensitive data or for cross-border transfers. The DMP's storage architecture and consent metadata practices are designed to meet or exceed such requirements; local ethics approvals should reference these practices explicitly (European Parliament & Council, 2016).

Safeguarding and duty of care. Mandatory reporting duties for disclosures of harm vary. Each pilot's escalation protocol must align with local law and institutional policy, including named contacts and timelines. Training familiarises facilitators with signs of distress, with child-friendly ways to check understanding and with how to respond if a disclosure occurs (ALLEA, 2023; European Parliament & Council, 2016; European Commission, 2024; European Commission, 2025; UNESCO, 2025).

Public events and permits. Public exhibitions or performances involving minors may require venue-specific permissions or security measures. Early liaison with hosts and authorities prevents last-minute cancellations. A rehearsal of audience dialogue is recommended; where content includes sensitive themes, content warnings and alternative activities are provided (European Commission, 2024; European Commission, 2025; UNESCO, 2025).

Language access. In multilingual contexts, translation or interpretation for families may be necessary. Plurilingual resources and captions, combined with visual facilitation, can reduce reliance on formal translation while respecting linguistic rights (European Commission, 2024; European Commission, 2025; UNESCO, 2025).

The guiding maxim is 'adapt with integrity': protect the core values (dignity, care, co-agency, privacy and evidence quality) while adjusting procedures to remain lawful and culturally intelligent.

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Conclusion and Next Steps

This toolkit codifies ALPHABETICA's commitments into a usable architecture for action. It aligns theory with method, ethics with facilitation, and evaluation with learning, while remaining open to local idioms, materials and constraints. The point is not replication but faithful adaptation: enacting the principles (co-agency, care, place-responsiveness, futures orientation and transfer) through methods that fit people, places and time (OECD, 2025; UNESCO, 2025).

Over the project's life, three cycles of learning will refine the document. In the first cycle, pilots can use the fiches and instruments 'as written', logging friction points and local innovations. In the second, teams adapt with confidence, having seen where routines hold and where context demands change; cross-site exchanges and studio visits seed ideas. In the third, the consortium consolidates: design patterns with traction are written up as short practice notes; youth co-author a selection of briefs and public artefacts; Living Labs distil proposals that have both legitimacy and feasibility. At each stage, the self-assessment instrument (ToC, SWOT, dashboard) keeps attention on purpose and proportion.

Next steps are practical. Each pilot schedules an induction, books a studio practicum and sets dates for monthly inquiry groups. Youth Advisory and Design Boards (YADB) convene and agree decision rights, documentation routines and publicness menus. Data-Care Leads complete a storage and consent check and ensure that templates are in place. Where Living Labs are planned, convenors map stakeholders, draft a lightweight engagement plan with follow-up commitments and rehearse audience dialogue.

The consortium will maintain a shared repository of exemplars – session plans, artefacts (with consent), audience dialogue memos, youth briefs – and will curate quarterly cross-syntheses that highlight convergences and questions. Short 'field notes' will travel with these syntheses: vignettes that capture the texture of practice and the ethics of decision-making in moments that rarely make it into formal reports.

Beyond the project, the measure of success will be twofold. First, whether the practices seeded here persist, adapt and spread – whether schools, libraries, youth centres and cultural institutions adopt routines and roles that make co-agency and care ordinary. Second, whether the knowledge generated holds up under scrutiny – whether others can see what was done, why it was done that way, what changed for whom and how assumptions were tested. If both conditions are met, ALPHABETICA will have contributed something lasting: a craft vocabulary for a fairer, more imaginative public education.

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Glossary of Key Terms

(Working Definitions)

Arts-based education (ABE). Educational approaches in which artistic processes and artefacts are primary vehicles for learning, development and meaning-making, not peripheral enrichment (Atkinson, 2007).

Arts integration. The deliberate connection of arts processes to disciplinary content and skills in other subjects, so that learning goals in both the arts and the target subject are pursued and assessed (Burnaford et al, 2007).

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). Cyclical inquiry led with and by young people, involving question formulation, co-design of methods, data collection and interpretation, and action on findings (Wright, 2015)

Pedagogies of care. Facilitation that foregrounds dignity, safety, predictable routines, warm feedback and attention to energy and embodiment as integral to learning (Carrol, 2018).

Past-present-imagined futures. A stance that legitimises memory-work and prospective imagination and connects them to action in the present (Bautista et al, 2016).

More-than-human. Perspectives that attend to the agency of places, materials and non-human others in learning (Ylirisku et al, 2024).

Publicness. The degree to which artefacts and processes are shared beyond the immediate cohort; in ALPHABETICA, publicness is always opt-in and staged.

Audience dialogue. Structured conversation with viewers or listeners designed as a learning opportunity for both participants and audience, with rehearsed roles and consent-aware facilitation (Samya, 2025).

Transfer narratives. Short, concrete accounts by participants or adults of how an approach or repertoire travelled across contexts (Atkinson, 2007).

Participation register. A minimal record of who decided what, when, and on what basis, used to make power-sharing auditable and discussable (Barone & Eisner 2012).

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Acknowledgements

This toolkit is a living document. Please check the project repository for the most recent version and for locally adapted templates and exemplars. Where you adapt or extend the toolkit, we invite you to share back your versions so that the field can learn from situated practice.

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