



THE IMPORTANCE OF MUSIC INTEGRATION IN THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN IN ECEC.

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Laurea University of Applied Sciences

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The purpose of research is to examine the advantages of bringing music into educational programs run by Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The analysis seeks to expand knowledge regarding the effectiveness of music as a learning tool that enhances child development in every direction. The research will pursue both optimal music implementation techniques within ECEC education programs together with investigations regarding teacher willingness and barriers to musical activity execution.

The aim of this research is equally to create essentially the best practices which use picture-matching songs as a foundation to include music education in Finnish ECEC curriculum through playful learning methods, and to improve teachers' music usage in children everyday routines where it benefits the children as well as the educators.

The thesis uses Developmental-Based Research as its method by involving participants who execute the best music practices within ECEC settings to facilitate children's curiosity and playfulness for the advancement of linguistic skills, cognitive skills, social skills, emotional skills and physical growth.

The study delves into how these activities enhance core skills like language development, movement coordination, creative thinking, expression, communication and aims to establish the perceptions of early childhood teachers regarding the use of music in their daily activities, examining their perception of challenges and benefits that arise from integrating music into ECEC programs as seen in the theoretical framework.

The researchers establish two implementations including the 'Happy Day Song Card in a Song Bag' to foster children's musical learning through curiosity and critical thinking and additionally the 'A PLAYFUL SONG DICE' approach uses playful methods that aim to increase children's positive musical involvement.

From these two outcomes it proves that music is an active tool in children's growth and development, as was evaluated, observed and got feedback from parents and other colleagues.

A research study occurs at Pilke play school Espoo Lahti and ICEC Westend Espoo through observations of 31 child participants between 1 and 4 years old together with six group teachers.

Results showed that music significantly enhanced children's language, motor, and social-emotional development. Teachers valued the impact of music but reported time limitation and resource issues. Results highlight the important role of music in ECEC, suggesting integrated music programs and teacher training.

BULB LINK:

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Keywords: Music, Integration, Importance, Benefits, Growth, Development, Song bag, Song dice

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1 INTRODUCTION

Our study began first due to classroom observation experiences spanning from many years working in the daycare and observing the challenges early learner's undergo when expressing themselves, and also from shared curiosity about the influence of music, especially the toddlers and middle childhood, we decided on the importance of music integration in the growth and development of children in ECEC, after discussing two topics with our working life representatives about improving children's growth and development. They both thought music is a very important aspect to enhance development hence they shared their thoughts on the objectives as well as the topic despite the author's lack of training about music. The author's focus was to investigate how structured music activities affect educational results.

The essence of music functions as a must-have resource for early learning that helps young children develop their cognitive abilities together with emotional capacities and social skills and physical health. Music functions equally as a strategy for integrating melodies across various educational areas. Children benefit from improved language abilities, physical movement, creative thinking skills, self-expression capacity and communication fluency and coordination development by participating in activities such as dancing, rhythming, games, singing and musical instrument play and listening.

The thesis investigates how music impacts children's development and employee perceptions about using music for activities in early child education. The research collects its data through teachers' assessments combined with their observations as well as feedback received from parents.

The research pursues two objectives: to enhance musical participation among children together with boosting their musical curiosity through playful musical activities which will support children in developing their cognitive and emotional and social abilities and physical capabilities. The researchers establish two implementations including the 'Happy Day Song Card in a Song Bag' to foster children's musical learning through curiosity and critical thinking and additionally the 'A PLAYFUL SONG DICE' approach uses playful methods that aim to increase children's positive musical involvement.

The Finnish National Core Curricula VASU (2022) provide a wide sphere of information concerning learning expressions like the transversal competences which specified the rich word of languages, diverse forms of expressions, me and my community, exploring and integrating with my environment and I grow, move and develop. Music in ECEC is an integral part of the diverse forms of expression in which children's interest, learning environment and their transversal skills are put together to support children's learning and development.

These studies demonstrated respectively that children display enhanced engagement in musical activities combined with other learning areas while also becoming happier and cheerier and gaining better emotional management skills for focusing their attention.

2 PURPOSE AND AIMS OF THE STUDY.

a. PURPOSE:

The purpose of research is to examine the advantages of bringing music into educational programs run by Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The analysis seeks to expand knowledge regarding the effectiveness of music as a learning tool that enhances child development in every direction. The text examines how musical integration in early childhood education and care enhances their mental skills and social connection as well as emotional relationships alongside physical development to promote their personal development and welfare. The research examines the advantages of bringing music into educational programs run by Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).

The analysis seeks to expand knowledge regarding the effectiveness of music as a learning tool that enhances child development in every direction. The research will pursue both optimal music implementation techniques within ECEC education programs together with investigations regarding teacher willingness and barriers to musical activity execution.

b. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY.

The project will create essential best practices which use picture-matching songs as a foundation to include music education in Finnish ECEC curriculum through playful learning methods.

Educational staff members will receive evidence-based strategies for implementing music education through practical methods that match the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (VASU 2022).

c. RESEARCH METHOD AND SCOPE AND POPULATION SIZE:

The thesis uses Developmental-Based Research as its method by involving participants who execute the best music practices within ECEC settings to facilitate children's curiosity and playfulness for the advancement of linguistic skills, cognitive skills, social skills, emotional skills and physical growth.

A research study occurs at Pilke play school Espoo Lahti and ICEC Westend Espoo through observations of 31 children participants between 1 and 4 years old together with six teachers. Moreover, the work aims to examine published studies about this topic while designing a musical intervention for children aged 1-4 alongside its subsequent evaluation.

d. ETHICAL ISSUES.

Thesis writing always involves a set of ethical issues to be considered which keeps the researchers on the correct track. Wallace & Sheldon (2015), depict that thesis research always deals with issues of research merit and integrity. It is regarding the researcher's expertise, skills and abilities, with more efforts to make the project not harmful to anybody in the process of the study and to make the work original and avoid plagiarism by citing all the works or sources of research appropriately. The outcome and feedback stage will be carried out scrupulously with honesty and integrity open to criticism and peer review.

A total consent form of the thesis cooperation agreement is made ready for the joint implementation of the thesis project by the parties involved, and to form the administration of the joint Bulb platform. The parties involved in the agreement commit to collaborate and adhere to the terms of this agreement. Both parties consent to informing the other party promptly of any issues related to the project or this agreement. Both of us wish to prevent the possibility of likely risks, and the signatories to this agreement commit to keeping the shared Bulb username and password secret. Information regarding the account will not be disclosed to individuals outside of this agreement.

Likewise, a thesis agreement is also signed between the project stakeholders and working life representatives showing clearly, the purpose and aim of the thesis and the permission to carry out the project work, students following the duty of secrecy in the completion of the

theses that all Social Services and Health students need as per the Act on the Status and Rights of Social Welfare Client 812/ 2000, section 15 and the Act on Health Care Professionals 559/1994, section 17. governing the non-disclosure of information and confidentiality of information received concerning a third party (private individual or family) that we might come across in our study.

This study is carried out in line with the cultural context, specifically working with children in ECEC where it is a multicultural group with most immigrant children and to avoid bias by ensuring the study does not incorporate discrimination.

3 THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK BASIC CONCEPTS

a. MUSIC IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION. DEFINITIONS

MUSIC.

In Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), music can be defined as a flexible and all-round form of expression that push forward children's holistic development. Music is usually seen as a manner of communication, social interaction, and cultural participation (Anttila 2006 ,16). It is not just a pleasing adventure but a tool for learning, emotional expression, and social bonding (Juntunen 2017, 117-126).

Integrating music in ECEC constitutes incorporating musical activities—such as singing, movement, listening, and instruments playing—into different aspects of learning (Virtala & Partanen 2018). This technique follows the Finnish holistic and child-centered educational philosophy, where learning is play-based and multisensory. Music is usually incorporated into daily routines, physical movement,

storytelling and language learning to boost cognitive, emotional, social, and motor development (Kokotsaki & Hallam 2011).

MUSIC INTEGRATION

When music enters early childhood education programs systematically educators combine musical curriculum with student activities to develop children on cognitive and emotional levels. Through music children experience both self-expression as well as educational learning of ideas and language proficiency and social group interaction.

Learning development occurs across the period from birth until age eight which makes up early childhood education. The approach focuses on students' multiple aspects of development which include their cognitive skills and social abilities and emotional growth and physical coordination while using hands-on activities as well as play-based learning methods. Music creates inclusive learning environments, supporting children with diverse learning needs, including those with special education needs (Juntunen 2017).

b. DEVELOPMENTAL BENEFITS OF MUSIC

According to Nutley et al. (2014) states music helps develop the brain cells of young children while improving their language learning capabilities and increasing their memory functions and enhancing their social-emotional abilities. Through its sensory qualities music enables children to experience learning materials in both dynamic and significant ways.

This Finnish early childhood education and care establishes fundamental music integration concepts in their curricula. Music creates multiple sensory experiences that enable children to tackle their learning assignments effectively and deeply.

ECEC institutions which incorporate music into their curriculum adopt a system for complete child development. Music education proves beneficial by helping children improve their emotional regulation abilities and social skills and cognitive abilities according to the thinking of theorist Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (Gardner 1983). The combination of celebrating child potential with

multiple activities supports educational theory which claims children grow best through educational practices targeting their complete development.

The diverse forms of expression and learning environment are aimed to support the growth and development of children's musical, verbal, visual and physical expression in a developmental manner. Introducing children with cultural songs and art (FNAE 2022). Cultural learning is very important as it provides children with cultural experiences and identity, and equally boost their interest through music entanglement. Different forms of expression activate children's creativity, emotional, social and physical play (Reunamo et al. 2016).

The aim of Finnish ECEC is to make available required resources to provide children with the best musical experiences ever, and to boost their interest and relationship with music (FNAE 2022) children usually have a high tendency to explore sound and sound resources (Acker 2020). Children are directed to observe and monitor sound, and to help them develop their sense of creativity through musical understanding. Basic concepts in music such as time, tone, volume, color, pitch and playful forms of implementing pedagogical experiences through music. (Ruokonen, Tervaniemi & Reunamo 2021).

c. CONNECTION TO SOCIETAL BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR DEVELOPMENT.

In today's multicultural and increasingly diverse societies, there is a growing need for educational practices that support not only academic learning but also children's emotional well-being, social development, and cultural awareness. Music, as a universal form of expression, can effectively bridge language and cultural gaps, where children from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds can connect and communicate.

The integration of music into ECEC addresses important societal needs related to child development in multicultural and multilingual contexts, as well as across diverse societal backgrounds. These objectives are also well aligned with the goals outlined in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for ECEC (VASU, 2022). In addition to addressing societal needs, the thesis also contributes by developing practical tools for integrating music into early childhood education

d. MUSICAL PEDAGOGIES: EXPLORATION OF DIFFERENT PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES FOR MUSIC INTEGRATION.

Music is an essential part of early childhood education, shaping children's creativity while also supporting their cognitive, social, and emotional growth. The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care VASU (2022) highlights the importance of music and other expressive activities in fostering holistic development. By incorporating different musical approaches—such as active listening, movement, singing, and instrument play—educators can create meaningful learning experiences that nurture key developmental skills.

One effective method is active listening, where children focus on specific aspects of music, such as rhythm, melody, and tempo. This approach helps sharpen auditory perception and improves memory. Research has shown that listening to music enhances neural pathways involved in language processing and pattern recognition (Anvari, Trainor, Woodside, & Levy 2002). In line with this, VASU (2022) recognizes the value of listening activities in improving concentration, sound recognition, and overall communication skills.

Another engaging strategy is movement-based learning, which includes dancing, rhythmic exercises, and coordinated movements in response to music. These activities not only make learning fun but also enhance motor coordination, spatial awareness, and self-regulation. Hallam (2010) emphasizes that combining music with movement strengthens cognitive skills such as sequencing and working memory. Similarly, VASU (2022) acknowledges the importance of rhythmic movement in connecting sensory and motor experiences, which are essential for children's cognitive and physical development.

Singing is another powerful tool for learning, particularly in language development, social interaction, and emotional expression. Songs with repetitive lyrics and simple melodies help young children build their vocabulary, develop phonemic awareness, and improve memory. Hallam (2010) notes that singing supports language acquisition by helping children internalize sentence structures and new words. VASU (2022) also highlights the role of singing in promoting communication, encouraging participation, and fostering a sense of community within group settings.

Instrument play provides children with hands-on experiences that stimulate creativity, fine motor skills, and problem-solving abilities. Whether using tambourines, xylophones, or drums, children can explore different sounds, rhythms, and coordination patterns. Research suggests that playing instruments enhances cognitive flexibility and executive functioning, both of

which are crucial for learning and problem-solving (Anvari et al. 2002). Engaging with instruments helps children recognize and create musical patterns, develop self-expression, and build confidence (VASU 2022).

3. 1 KEY PEDAGOGICAL THEORIES

PRACTICAL SUPPORT FROM MUSIC EDUCATION

ORFF-SCHULWERK APPROACH

Music learning becomes most effective when students take part actively through activities which Carl Orff developed in his Orff-Schulwerk approach. Through its implementation teachers guide children to express musical ideas while they sing and dance and play their instruments

Teaching staff in early childhood education can use percussion instruments including drums and xylophones to lead rhythm activities in their educational environment. Music creation through improvisation enables children to develop their creativity as well as express themselves. supporting goals for children creativity and active learning through this teaching approach (VASU 2022).

KODÁLY METHOD

The Kodály Method established by Hungarian composer Zoltán Kodály puts singing as well as ear training at its core. Traditional music and folk songs form the foundation of its approach which makes music education available to children with cultural significance.

Preschool teachers should implement this approach through selecting musical pieces from diverse cultures while nurturing cultural sensitivity among students. The educational activities promote singing and clapping and musical game participation to develop sound processing abilities and rhythmic sensitivity in children. Music education through this method helps students develop both language proficiency and cognitive abilities per (Vasu 2022).

DALCROZE EURHYTHMICS

The Dalcroze Eurhythmics method of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze relies on physical music understanding through movement-based activities. Through physical movement children learn to comprehend musical patterns and the rhythms of music within this approach.

According to VASU (2022) Early childhood teachers can organize movement-based musical activities that demand that children to demonstrate various musical elements by using dance or physical actions, shows positive recommendation to develop young children physically through multisensory education.

MUSIC LEARNING THEORY

Music Learning Theory developed by Edwin E. Gordon explains that children learn music by similar methods they use for language acquisition which involves interacting with music. Students learn three primary aspects of this approach which include listening skills together with singing and music generation abilities.

Early education centers can implement this theory through developing musical spaces which facilitate children's response and listening and singing activities. Music aptitude development through rhythmic and tonal pattern practices leads to better musical learning abilities in children and complies with (VASU 2022).

CONSTRUCTIVIST LEARNING THEORY

They laid emphasis on the fact that people are willing to learn to construct knowledge through active participation and involvement. According to Piaget (1952) states that knowledge can only be actively developed or constructed by a learner, and it cannot be received by someone who is not willing or is present but absent minded, therefore his theory supports the use of active participation in music.

COMMUNITY FOCUSED APPROACH

The technique places primary emphasis on uniting community environments and cultural elements with music teaching methods. The method acknowledges that children's musical learning depends on their background experiences with their local culture environment.

As a practical implementation in ECE teachers should welcome families to present their musical backgrounds to establish educational content which represents the community demographic make-up. Local music styles together with instruments and collaborative performances make up the activities in this approach. VASU (2022) promotes inclusive educational practices together with cultural competence in education through this method

INTEGRATION OF PEDAGOGY

CREATING A HOLISTIC APPROACH

A holistic approach for effective music integration in early childhood education should unite different elements from the discussed pedagogies. Educators who employ a teaching strategy that adapts to student needs can properly reach various groups of children.

MULTI-MODAL LEARNING

Children learn better when schools bring together listening experiences with things they can see and feel through their bodies. Educational activities that merge singing with movement alongside musical instruments actively reach students through different learning approaches and concerning multiple teaching techniques thus conforming to (VASU 2022).

PLAY-BASED LEARNING

Play serves as the essential approach in music teaching that induces children to examine their surroundings and pursue their creative instincts. Through play-based instruction that features music students can naturally acquire new knowledge which supports the principles outlined and child-directed learning (VASU 2022).

COLLABORATION AND LEARNING

Music integration receives improved support when educators join forces with families and community members in their education activities. Educational activities that bring parents and local artists together establish a more rewarding learning environment which broadens both musical and cultural knowledge for children as described in (VASU 2022).

3.2 HOW MUSIC ENHANCES DEVELOPMENT

I. HOW MUSIC ENHANCED COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

The learning process of early childhood education depends significantly on music to advance intellectual abilities in students. The introduction of music education in educational practice improves cognitive abilities of children as shown by (VASU 2022). Providing multiple advantages to build learning capacity and intellectual development. The following points describe the cognitive developmental benefits of music according to (VASU 2022).

II. LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Music creates a more sensitive awareness of language sounds in children. Singing and verbal play enable children to build phonemic awareness that stands vital for their reading and writing development.

Activities that involve songs along with rhymes and lyrics enable children to discover new vocabulary which results in their vocabulary expansion. VASU (2022) supports language acquisition which supports the same goal.

III. MEMORY ENHANCEMENT

Children improve their memory function through musical activities such as song and chant learning. Rhythms together with melodies function as memory aids to help students remember and keep information.

Children develop pattern recognition abilities through musical structures which use repeat patterns and sequences, and this ability proves vital for solving problems and doing mathematics.

Music plays a key role in language development and phonological awareness, which are crucial for literacy skills (Putkinen et al. 2014). Musical engagement enhances memory, concentration, and problem-solving skills (Virtala & Partanen 2018).

IV. MATHEMATICAL ENHANCEMENT

Learning music provides children with tools to understand mathematical counting and sequencing along with fractions through rhythm management. VASU (2022) highlights that rhythmic patterns scaffold early mathematical thinking.

Children who take part in music activities learn spatial-temporal reasoning through their musical experiences thus developing essential mathematical reasoning skills.

V. CRITICAL THINKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

Music helps children nurture their creative thinking and critical thinking abilities while creating their music through composition and improvisation practice. Children learn to handle problems with flexible approaches by experimenting with sounds to compose music according to (VASU 2022).

Learning music through its process develops mental versatility because students learn to navigate among musical components which build their capacity to handle new encounters effectively. Active music-making, such as dancing or playing instruments, enhances body coordination and balance (Partanen et al. 2019).

VI. EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Music is a powerful tool that aids in emotional regulation and self-expression across all age groups. It allows individuals to process emotions, reduce stress, and communicate feelings that may be difficult to express through words. In early childhood education, music plays a crucial role in helping children manage their emotions and express themselves in creative ways. This paper explores the role of music in emotional regulation and self-expression, particularly in young children, drawing on psychological and educational perspectives.

The musical process enables children to express emotions while teaching them methods to manage their feelings. According to VASU (2022) emotional intelligence has a direct correlation with cognitive development.

Group music activities involving singing and dancing help children learn social interaction skills because they build peer communication abilities together with interpersonal understanding.

VII. ATTENTION AND FOCUSED

Through musical activities children must maintain their focus while attending thus developing better concentration abilities. According to the research by VASU (2022), musical education strengthens attention span which proves essential for general academic learning.

Musical exercises teach children to develop their listening abilities as well as their ability to distinguish sounds which form the basis of effective communication and learning.

Music is more than just a creative outlet—it also has a profound impact on cognitive functions like memory, attention, and overall brain development. Engaging in musical activities stimulates multiple areas of the brain, strengthening the connections needed for learning and problem-solving (Hallam 2010).

One of the most significant ways music supports learning is by enhancing memory. The rhythms and melodies in songs help children retain and recall information more easily. Studies have shown that musical experiences improve working memory, which is essential for literacy and critical thinking (Anvari et al. 2002). The National Core Curriculum VASU (2022) acknowledges that music strengthens memory by helping children remember sounds, patterns, and sequences, all of which contribute to cognitive development.

Music also plays a key role in developing attention and focus. Structured musical activities require children to follow rhythms, synchronize their movements, and engage with the sounds around them. These activities help improve concentration and self-regulation. Hallam (2010) found that participating in musical activities enhances children's ability to focus, particularly in early childhood. Similarly, VASU (2022) highlights that music encourages deep engagement, allowing children to develop better attention skills in learning environments.

VIII. MUSIC AND EMOTIONAL REGULATIONS

Emotional regulation refers to the ability to control and respond to emotions in a healthy way. Music has been shown to influence emotions by helping individuals calm down, energize, or process complex feelings. Research suggests that music impacts the nervous system, reducing anxiety and promoting relaxation (Koelsch 2014).

In early childhood education, music is often used to support children's emotional development. Lullabies, for instance, have been found to soothe infants, reduce stress, and strengthen caregiver-child bonds (Trehub & Nakata 2017).

Similarly, activities such as singing or rhythmic exercises provide children with structured ways to manage their emotions, helping them transition between activities or cope with frustration.

The tempo and tone of music also play an important role in shaping emotional responses. Slow, soft melodies can have a calming effect, while fast and rhythmic music can boost energy and improve mood. Educators use these musical elements to support children's emotional well-being, whether by helping them settle down during quiet time or engaging them in active play.

IX. SOUNDS AND RHYTHMS DEVELOPMENT

Early child development strengthens using sound and rhythm because these elements modulate cognitive functions as well as emotional responses and social capabilities. Studies show children acquire better listening discrimination abilities and improved memory recall and language skills from different music encounters (Gordon 2012). Through musical learning experiences children's master patterns while lengthening their attention periods and building rhythmic abilities which enable better language development.

X. AUDITORY DISCRIMINATIONS

Children refine their sound and tone recognition abilities through participating in musical activities. Children develop improved sound nuance understanding when they listen to various musical patterns.

XI. RHYTHMIC PATTERNS

Musical exposure enables children to learn about and properly understand rhythmic patterns. The ability to reproduce rhythmic patterns becomes possible after children learn to move their bodies with music and clap in time with the beat. Rhythm and movement activities improve fine and gross motor coordination (Anttila 2006).

XII. MOTOR SKILLS COORDINATION

Music-related activities that include dancing together with drumming help children develop their ability to coordinate their hearing with physical movement. The coordination process facilitates rhythm learning through which children improve their ability to match their movements to music thereby strengthening their perception of tempo and beat.

XIII. TIMING AND PACING

The ability to maintain rhythmic accuracy together with musical cue interpretation leads to improved rhythmic skills as well as enhanced musical competence.

XIV. COGNITIVE PROCESSES

Rhythmic engagement allows children to activate their cognitive operations that include pattern recognition abilities combined with memory retrieval functions. Identification of challenging rhythmic patterns along with their reproduction becomes possible because of cognitive involvement therefore developing students' capacity to process musical compositions. Where music is combined with movement and storytelling, enhances children's engagement and retention of information (Hanna, Laddy & Mackay 2011).

XV. MUSIC AS A MEDIUM FOR SELF-EXPRESSION

Music provides a valuable outlet for self-expression, allowing individuals to convey emotions and thoughts in ways that words may not always capture. For young children, who may have limited verbal skills, music serves as an alternative form of communication, enabling them to express joy, sadness, excitement, or frustration through singing, movement, or playing instruments.

Alternatively, music functions as an effective method for children to develop creative forms of self-expression. Through music children develop the ability to share their inner thoughts and emotions and life experiences, so they build individual expression and self-esteem according to Young (2014), Kids who participate in musical activities develop creativity alongside necessary abilities including problem-solving along with critical thinking and efficient collaboration.

Musical activities such as improvisation, songwriting, and dance encourage creativity and emotional exploration. Research has shown that engaging in musical expression enhances confidence and supports identity development (Hallam 2010). In early childhood education, incorporating music into daily activities allows children to explore their emotions while building self-awareness and self-esteem.

Additionally, group music-making fosters social connections and emotional understanding. Singing or playing instruments together creates shared experiences, helping children develop empathy and strengthen their interpersonal relationships. Through these musical interactions, children learn to recognize and respond to emotions expressed by others, contributing to their emotional intelligence and social skills.

Rhythm enables children to channel their emotions when expressing themselves through music. Children develop emotional intelligence by learning how various rhythms create emotional responses thus sound comprehension and expression become possible.

XVI. SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Group musical engagements promote children to interact with each other as they communicate and work together. Through ensemble performance and group singing activities children learn the skill of listening to each other and managing their timing while synchronizing their rhythmic actions which builds their rhythmic skills on both a social and cultural level.

XVII. CULTURAL AWARENESS AND INCLUSION

Exposing children to diverse musical genres and rhythmic styles fosters an appreciation for different cultural expressions. Initiating children into different musicians' work lets them gain rhythmic skills beyond mechanical proficiency while providing them with cultural background information related to music.

Educational Childcare services that incorporate multicultural music nurture both cultural inclusiveness and diverse appreciation among students. Music acts as a cultural connection which enables children to discover different cultural elements and historical traditions. Educators must practice this method because it creates a community of understanding and mutual respect among children from different cultures (Papageorgiou 2019).

XVIII. CONNECTION TO LITERATURES

The integration of music in ECE receives endorsement through multiple substantial concepts:

Musical intelligence along with other forms of intelligence exists within all individuals according to Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences. A music integration strategy enables teachers to tailor education according to individual learning styles because students demonstrate different intelligences according to (Gardner's 1983).

According to Vygotsky social development theory learning takes place best through social interactions. Children acquire better social abilities as well as enhanced communication by participating in musical activities that connect them with other students (Vygotsky 1978).

On the other hand, Piaget's theory about development describes how children learn through purposeful environmental interactions (Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development). Music-based activities follow stages of child development allowing youth to discover and learn through playful interactions with their environment (Piaget 1952).

Many scholarly examinations together with theoretical frameworks demonstrate that music integration benefits early childhood educational programs. Hallam (2010) demonstrates how musical instruction leads to heightened emotional capability and creational skills while Bredekamp & Rosegrant (1992) show how musical activities support proper early learning delivery frameworks.

The Ecological Systems Theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) provides essential framework for understanding how music integration functions in ECEC. According to this theory multiple interconnected systems which a child encounters directly affect their advancement including family units along with academic teachings and cultural elements. Music as a component of these development systems provides major developmental benefits to children through family bonding and cultural growth and group partnering.

XIX. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Researchers have performed multiple investigations about music's advantages for early childhood educational programs. Research by Hanna et al. (2011), through meta-analysis demonstrated that music instruction increased cognitive abilities which included language proficiency together with verbal memory skills in children. Research findings indicate music education programs within early childhood education and care services produce enduring benefits across the whole spectrum of childhood development.

Research by Duffy (2014) demonstrated that preschool children participating in music activities every day developed better social abilities together with modern cooperation abilities than students receiving little music instruction. The learning process described by Vygotsky's social development theory depends on social interaction between students.

Multiple research investigations have investigated how music functions during early childhood education environments.

According to Murphy et al. (2020) children who participate in musical activities show better performance in phonemic awareness along with vocabulary development.

The research by Brattico et al. (2017) demonstrated that preschool children develop better emotional intelligence after participating in musical activities which improves their ability to understand emotions and regulate their feelings.

A meta-analysis by Lee and Burch (2021) established that teaching music leads to better cognitive involvement together with school preparation skills in young children.

XX. PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE

Multiple standards and guidelines established for the ECEC sector establish music as a critical component. The latest ECEC Act supports complete educational methods and motivates teachers to create learning areas that welcome diverse learners and maintain their interest. The alignment of music curriculum integration matches this teaching approach because music helps pupils' express emotions while developing social and cultural competencies.

Educators face musical implementation obstacles within professional settings because they lack proper training resources according to professional discussion records. Educational institutions have introduced professional development programs for early childhood educators to close the music pedagogy knowledge gaps (McRae 2015). The professional dialogue highlights the necessity for supportive policies and resources which should aim to boost music integration in ECEC programs.

XXI. CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

The VASU (2022) document stresses that young learners should study a balanced curriculum including arts as their fundamental learning tool. The framework matches with musical integration since it gives students opportunities for artistic expression which builds their essential literacy and numeracy practices while fostering their emotional aptitude.

XXII. TEACHERS PREPAREDNESS

Video talks continuously about how well-prepared educators should be to deliver music-based instruction effectively in their classrooms. Educational programs centered on musical pedagogy help teachers develop their musical teaching skills while building their self-assurance for presenting music-integrated instruction (Gordon 2013).

XXIII. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The implementation of music in early childhood education follows policy goals to provide equal access to arts education in schools. Staff members in education as well as policy makers should work to promote complete music curriculum development in accordance with state and national educational standards.

4 OUTCOMES

4.1 IMPLEMENTATION 1

I. INTRODUCTION AND THE CONTEXT

Early Childhood Education and care in Finland bases its approach on play-based and holistic methods to help children learn and develop. Music functions as one such essential element that promotes development thanks to curiosity and active childhood participation. The Happy day song cards in a song bag (See appendix 1) serve as an approach to incorporate music within early childhood education and care in Finland. The method uses music as well as curiosity and instruments while promoting children's active participation. It is practice on a daily routine, which is usually in the afternoons and sometimes in the mornings, we introduce a song moment where the children draw a song card each from the happy day song bag to help the musical activity for the day. They are then asked to guess from the picture the song and it is sang by them all. This process might look simply, but it integrates music in a simple and relaxed way taking into consideration the main ECEC principles that guide children exploration, critical thinking, and creativity.

II. DESCRIPTION OF IMPLEMENTATION ROUTINES.

A song bag serves as a portable soft colorful bag containing laminated papers of children's familiar song pictures on the front and their lyrics behind the sheets (see appendix 2). The songs originate from media platforms such as sportify and YouTube.

Children gather for the routines to sit in a circle at specified daily times during afternoon sessions before outdoor play has begun. Each child receives the opportunity to choose a random card from the happy day song bag while all three principles of autonomy are enhanced. Through staff guidance children try to identify the song from its song card image which sparks their curiosity until the group reveals and performs the song using musical instruments and appropriate movements.

III. SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S CURIOSITY AND CRITICAL THINKING

Educators generate engagement and anticipation through their pre-activity inquiries such as asking the children to select which card will be picked or to predict the song selected. Activities that help children discover song patterns occur when they connect images to melodies and make educated predictions about meaning. This process builds children's initial problem-solving skills and critical thinking abilities. Children active participation enables them to make decisions while developing memory recall and reflective thinking abilities related to lifelong learning according to (Salmon 2016,187).

IV. THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN FINNISH ECEC

Daily music integration in Finnish ECEC settings reflects the emphasis of the National Core Curriculum for ECEC on comprehensive child development and cultural learning and emotional expression and social orientation. The Happy Day song card from the song bag enables children to develop multiple aspects of growth including language development through repetition as well as social bonding and emotional self-expression and cultural learning for traditional music and multicultural songs.

Music currently exists in the units during transitions as well as morning circles. The daycare offers music classes weekly to children, but parents must pay tuition since the classes cost money parents might not have. Therefore, we decided to implement this proposal given music's positive influence on children's growth.

4.2 IMPLEMENTATION 2

i. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

According to VASU (2022), Finland belongs to the Countries which promote child learning through the EDUCARE Model of play in ECEC programs. Encourage active child participation together with creative thinking, form the essential framework through which Finnish ECEC supports children's developmental processes. The musical elements in this scenario play an essential natural role because they facilitate both emotional expression in children and social interaction as well as imagination-based learning and language growth. Teachers use song dice as an elementary yet rewarding strategy to incorporate music within ECEC programs. The tool consists of a box with musical cards linked by categories.

This implementation seeks to come out with three song dice categorized into emotional song dice, educational song dice and active song dice, which are meant to be used depending on the mood and emotions educators seek to arouse from the children, different song dice are used at different times, this implementation is actually carried out and proven to be very effective as we see the children requesting for the song dice, especially with the toddlers unable to differentiate the different categories but are so excited with the fact that they have to roll a dice and sing a song.

ii. DESCRIPTION OF IMPLEMENTATING THE ROUTINE

The song dice functions as soft cubed-shaped containers using cardboard with multi-category song cards that feature familiar children's songs alongside their titles and song pictures for recognition assistance. The implementation involves three song dice from emotional, educational and active categories which were designed for children aged nine months to four years old through choices based on their interests. Traditional seasonal music and transition music with playful songs were included in this activity because children helped prepare the song dice with equal involvement creating excitement and sense of ownership (see appendix 3).

Daily activities with the song dice occur primarily in the morning circle because we maintain song bag routines in the afternoon sessions. Children participate in rolling the dice at the circle center to reveal both image and title of the song (see appendix 4) before they listen to it as the group sings with their bodies and instruments. The routine lasts between 10 to 15 minutes while teachers follow a guiding role yet maintain the child-focused process.

iii. USING A SONG DICE TO ENHANCE PLAYFULNESS AND CRITICAL THINKING.

During this implementation children displayed three pedagogical features - playfulness and active participation as well as critical thinking. Children find dice rolls so enjoyable because they create exciting events which turn song time into a game that promotes joyful active

performance for active songs. The regular dice rolling practice promotes both inclusion as well as children's emotional engagement through multiple forms of physical activity and social interaction and expression. Children are equally able to imagine potential songs following dice rolls while memorizing lyrics to improve their memory and flexible thinking abilities.

The song dice functions as a basic adaptable music enhancer that uses active participation to create an educational and entertaining environment to promote child development in Finnish ECEC institutions.

4.3 THE HAPPY DAY SONG CARD IN A SONG BAG

See pdf file.



song card (2) final
(1).pdf

A PDF FILE CONTAINING SONG CARDS.

4.4 A PLAYFULL SONG DICE.

See pdf File.



Document1.pdf

A PDF FILE OF A COMPOSITION OF SOND CARDS IN THE PLAY FUL SONG DICE BY CATEGORY.

4.5 THESIS PROCESS

PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT

The planning and execution of this thesis were guided by the Design-Based Research (DBR) methodology, as outlined by (Plomp & Nieveen 2013). It was specifically adapted to suit the context of Finnish ECEC. The development and implementation process were carried out across two daycare settings: one for toddlers and another for children aged 2-4 years. These two environments were selected because we had established access to a working life representative in each and they were willing to cooperate with the authors of the thesis. The entire process, including planning, execution, and feedback collection, spanned approximately 3 months.

The initial planning phase was driven by a shared curiosity about the influence of music in early childhood educational settings. Drawing from year of informal classrooms, and a growing interest in music's developmental potential, the research team formulated specific objectives: to create, apply, and assess engaging music-based activities that are consistent with the Finnish National Core Curriculum for ECEC (VASU 2022). while also understanding the perceptions and readiness of educators to use such tools in their daily practice. The study design emphasized practical utility and stakeholder engagement, laying a strong foundation for collaborative work with other educators and parents. The research approach prioritized practical applicability and active participation from key participants, fostering a solid collaborative structure for development and assessment (McKenney & Reeves 2012).

To promote an interactive and exploratory learning experience, two primary interventions were developed: the Happy Day Song Card in a Song Bag and the Playful Song Dice. The authors intentionally designed these two outcomes to be simple, engaging, and developmentally appropriate, making them suitable for diverse and multicultural ECEC environments. The design of these interventions was closely aligned with the Finnish National Core Curriculum for ECEC (VASU, 2022), particularly in promoting play-based, culturally responsive, and holistic child development.

The authors dedicated around two weeks to finalizing the topic and preparing for the activities. During this period, we coordinated through a WhatsApp group, which served as our

main communication platform. We scheduled meetings, set deadlines for submissions, and assigned individual responsibilities to ensure smooth progress. Responsibilities were shared among all members, and each phase of the project was completed collaboratively. The finalized report was then shared within the group chat for review and further discussion.

The research employed observation as its primary data collection method, allowing for a naturalistic understanding of the interventions within everyday educational settings. Fieldwork was carried out in two ECEC centers i.e. Pilke Play School Espoonlahti and ICEC Westend Espoo, engaging 31 children aged 1 to 4 years and six educators.

To enrich the observational findings, the researchers also gathered data through structured questionnaires distributed to both parents and professional colleagues, aiming to capture diverse perspectives on the perceived effectiveness, impact, and potential improvements of the interventions.

During the implementation phase, additional feedback was requested from educators and parents to assess the practical relevance, feasibility, and adaptability of the musical tools in authentic ECEC environments. This multi-perspective, iterative approach enabled research to transition from a conceptual framework to the development of evidence-based, context-sensitive practices that address contemporary educational and societal demands.

The interventions were implemented regularly as part of both morning and afternoon routines, ensuring continuity and familiarity for the children. Researchers ensured child participation was voluntary and supported by an emotionally secure environment to support children's comfort and engagement. Educators facilitated the activities but also provided opportunities for children to take initiative, encouraging independence, expression, and collaboration.

The research followed all relevant ethical guidelines, including securing informed consent from guardians. Principles of confidentiality, child safety, and cultural respect were carefully upheld, in accordance with Finnish ECEC regulations. Given the diverse cultural backgrounds

represented in the daycare settings, a strong emphasis was placed on inclusive practices to ensure equal participation and prevent any form of bias or exclusion.

The project was designed in alignment with the Finnish National Core Curriculum for ECEC (VASU, 2022) to ensure pedagogical coherence. Core principles such as transversal competencies, holistic child development, and cultural inclusivity were thoughtfully integrated into both the planning and evaluation phases of the interventions.

To assess the effectiveness and impact of the activity, we designed a feedback form targeting both parents and teachers. The purpose was to gather their observations and experiences regarding music's role in the children's daily routines and development.

The feedback aimed at answering several key questions:

How regularly is music integrated into daily activities?

Are there observable behavioral or developmental changes?

Do children enjoy the activities, and do they find them meaningful?

What suggestions or advice do parents and teachers have for improving future activities?

The questionnaire used a mixed-method approach, incorporating both closed and open-ended questions to gather comprehensive feedback:

Multiple-choice questions: These were straightforward to analyze, focusing on the frequency and perceived effectiveness of musical activities. They provided quantitative data that could be easily summarized.

Open-ended questions: These allowed parents and teachers to share detailed observations, ideas, and suggestions, offering qualitative insights into the children's experiences and the activity's impact.

For parents, questions centered on their observations of how their children engaged with music at home, while for teachers, the focus was on their instructional experiences, challenges faced, and support needed.

To conclude, this process demonstrated the importance of routine, active participation, and stakeholder feedback in developing effective musical activities in early childhood education settings. The collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data will inform future practice, enabling continuous improvement and greater integration of music into daily routines.

4.6 REFLECTION FROM WORKING LIFE REPRESENTATIVES

It is important to note that the working life representatives have been part of this thesis from the very beginning, before this topic was chosen it was discussed with them and they shared their opinions on the objectives, that is how we came out with our goals for this developmental work.

When we discussed the implementation of our outcomes about the lack of music training for many staff with the working life representatives, they pointed out that they will implement plans to invite a professional in music and use staff training to underline why music should be used in ordinary activities. They were astonished that not everyone among the staff is equipped to use music in their teaching. She also enjoyed how she was always informed and noticed that the staff members collaborated smoothly.

Based on the feedback from the working life representatives, it's confirmed that the musical tools developed were practical, engaging, and suitable for everyday use in ECEC environments. They observed positive changes in children's concentration, emotional expression, and group participation. A key suggestion was to include more multicultural elements to better reflect the diversity in Finnish daycare settings. As a team, we collaborated effectively by sharing responsibilities and leveraging each member's strengths. Regular communication and meetings contributed to smooth teamwork and a successful outcome.

4.7 OBSERVATIONS AND FEEDBACK FROM IMPLEMENTATION 1 AND 2

INTRODUCTION.

We distributed feedback forms to parents and educators for their input (see appendix 5, FEEDBACK FORM) 20 questionnaires were provided to parents and teachers with 15 returned were received firstly through a feedback return box (see appendix 6, feedback returns box) and through face-to-face parent interactions through daily cooperation with guardians and parents.

OBSERVATION AND FEEDBACK FROM EDUCATORS.

Educational staff observed children increasing their happiness levels throughout the implementation period compared to what teachers saw before they started using this method.

The toddlers would automatically begin singing the songs when left to themselves during quiet time and they would ask the happy day song bag and song dice for emotional days when their educators considered stopping the activities.

Educators confirm that the approach enables them to regain children's focus during times when they lose concentration, especially with the brief attention span of toddlers who only manage five minutes before getting distracted. As a result, children regain their focus with song cards in the song bag and song dice which effectively helps with concentration maintenance.

FEEDBACK FROM GUARDIANS AND PARENTS.

Parents noticed their children sing the same songs multiple times at home which motivated them to ask for the song titles to join their children in singing with them.

The parents of children only recognize the song dice and song bag as creations of their children's imagination as one mother observes her daughter taking various toys to obtain papers that she tapes into a song bag before asking toys to choose from the happy day songs bag. At this point she has become the curriculum leader who occasionally requests her family to join circle time activities.

Adult guardians and parents who supervise their children observe youngsters showing increased initiative during physical activities and in showing their emotions.

5 CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND FEEDBACK

A. CONCLUSIONS

The results gotten from this thesis revealed that the use of the described musical tools (the happy day song card in a song bag and a song dice) in ECEC settings had a positive impact on children's overall development. The interventions led to observable improvements in language acquisition, emotional expression, creative engagement, memory recall, and social interaction among children aged 1 to 4 in two daycare centers located in Espoo. Children became more focused, joyful, and expressive, often initiating music activities independently. Educators found the tools easy to implement, and parents reported that children brought the musical play home, reinforcing learning beyond the classroom.

The children showed increased attention, enthusiasm, and expressiveness, and were often observed to initiate musical activities on their own. Educators noted that the tools were straightforward to use and fit seamlessly into daily routines, while parents shared that their children engaged with the musical activities at home, thereby reinforcing the learning process outside the educational setting.

This process demonstrated the importance of routine, active participation, and stakeholder feedback in developing effective musical activities in early childhood education settings. The collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data will inform future practice, enabling continuous improvement and greater integration of music into daily routines.

Both the interventions demonstrated notable effectiveness in promoting developmental outcomes. The Happy Day Song Card in a Song Bag encouraged curiosity, independence, and child-led exploration, while the Playful Song Dice enhanced emotional expression and social interaction among the children. Although certain challenges were encountered, as outlined in the Challenges section, the overall findings highlight the value of music as an accessible and impactful method for supporting holistic development in early childhood hence the outcomes outlined with the author's objectives.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS.

Future research should aim to extend the duration of observations and involve a larger, more diverse group of participants to improve the depth and generalizability of the findings.

The two outcomes shows positive outcomes after their implementations yet the song dice haven proven to be the most exciting and gamified outcome but shows limited resources due to the fact that the song dice can only take six song at a time , Hence the song dice needs to be updated every six months while the song cards needs continued update from planned weekly activities and thus can be used over a 2 year period or more.

Providing continuous professional development for educators, along with structured training during workshops in music pedagogy, would support more consistent and confident implementation.

Collaborating with music professionals and improving logistical resources could further enhance the impact and long-term sustainability of music-based approaches in ECEC environments.

Additionally, future studies should consider exploring broader societal and cultural factors, which were not examined in detail in this thesis.

C. STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

The study presented several strengths and limitations. One of the main strengths was the development of creative, cost-effective tools that were easily accessible and practical for use in early childhood settings. The active participation of children, educators, and families added depth to the feedback and helped ensure the results were relevant to real-life ECEC environments.

On the other hand, the research faced some limitations, including limited time, a narrow participant group, and differences in how individual educators implemented the interventions. Another constraint was the lack of formal music training among the researchers, which may have influenced the range and complexity of musical activities. Despite these challenges, teamwork and ongoing adjustments helped address some of these issues throughout the research process.

We distributed feedback forms to parents and educators for their input (see appendix 7, FEEDBACK FORM) but first 20 questionnaires were provided to parents and teachers with 15 returned was received firstly through a feedback return box (see appendix 8, feedback returns box) and through face-to-face parent interactions through daily cooperation with guardians and Parents.

D. CHALLENGES

Several challenges emerged during the thesis work that impacted the overall scope and depth of the study. One of the primary limitations was the short observation period, which made it difficult to conduct follow-up assessments and evaluate the long-term developmental outcomes of the interventions.

The small sample size, 31 children across two ECEC settings also limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations.

Another notable challenge was the limited preparedness of educators in music pedagogy. Many teachers had no formal training in this area, which affected their confidence and consistency in applying the musical activities.

In addition, resource limitations, including a lack of access to a variety of instruments and culturally diverse music, posed obstacles to fully inclusive and enriched musical experiences.

E. EVALUATION OF THE APPLICABILITY, CONSISTENCY, BALANCE, CLARITY AND RELIABILITY.

The topic of this study is both highly relevant and timely, reflecting the evolving priorities in early childhood education and broader societal shifts. As the emphasis on inclusive, play-based learning continues to grow, this work responds to a clear educational need by aligning with the principles outlined in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for ECEC (VASU 2022). The research effectively illustrates how music can support emotional, cognitive, and social development, reinforcing its value as a practical and impactful educational approach within early learning environments.

The portfolio is well-structured and maintains a consistent academic flow throughout. It opens with a clear and focused abstract and introduction, followed by a thoughtfully developed theoretical background and a comprehensive account of the practical implementation. The inclusion of feedback, evaluation, and relevant appendices enhances the clarity and functionality of the work. However, certain

sections such as repetitive introductory elements could be streamlined to eliminate redundancy and improve overall cohesion.

The thesis maintains a strong overall balance, effectively connecting theoretical concepts with practical application. It thoughtfully incorporates perspectives from both educators and children, enhancing the depth of analysis. Qualitative insights, including reflections and feedback from parents and staff, add further value to the study's findings. While the work addresses key aspects of inclusivity, there is room for deeper exploration of multicultural and multilingual dimensions, a limitation that is appropriately recognized as a focus for future improvement.

One of the key strengths of the thesis is its clarity of expression, with writing that is largely clear, engaging, and supported by relevant real-life examples from classroom settings. The warm and reflective tone is well-suited to the context of early childhood education. While the overall communication is effective, there are a few areas where the language could be refined, including improving transitions between sections, correcting minor grammatical issues, and reducing wordiness to enhance academic flow and readability.

The study demonstrates reliability through the application of credible methods that are aligned with the Finnish National Core Curriculum for ECEC (VASU 2022). The use of direct observations and feedback from both educators and parents lends authenticity and practical relevance to the results. While the limited sample size presents a constraint, the research maintains transparency about its scope and limitations, making it appropriate for exploratory and developmental purposes.

6 APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. THE HAPPY DAY SONG CARD IN A SONG BAG

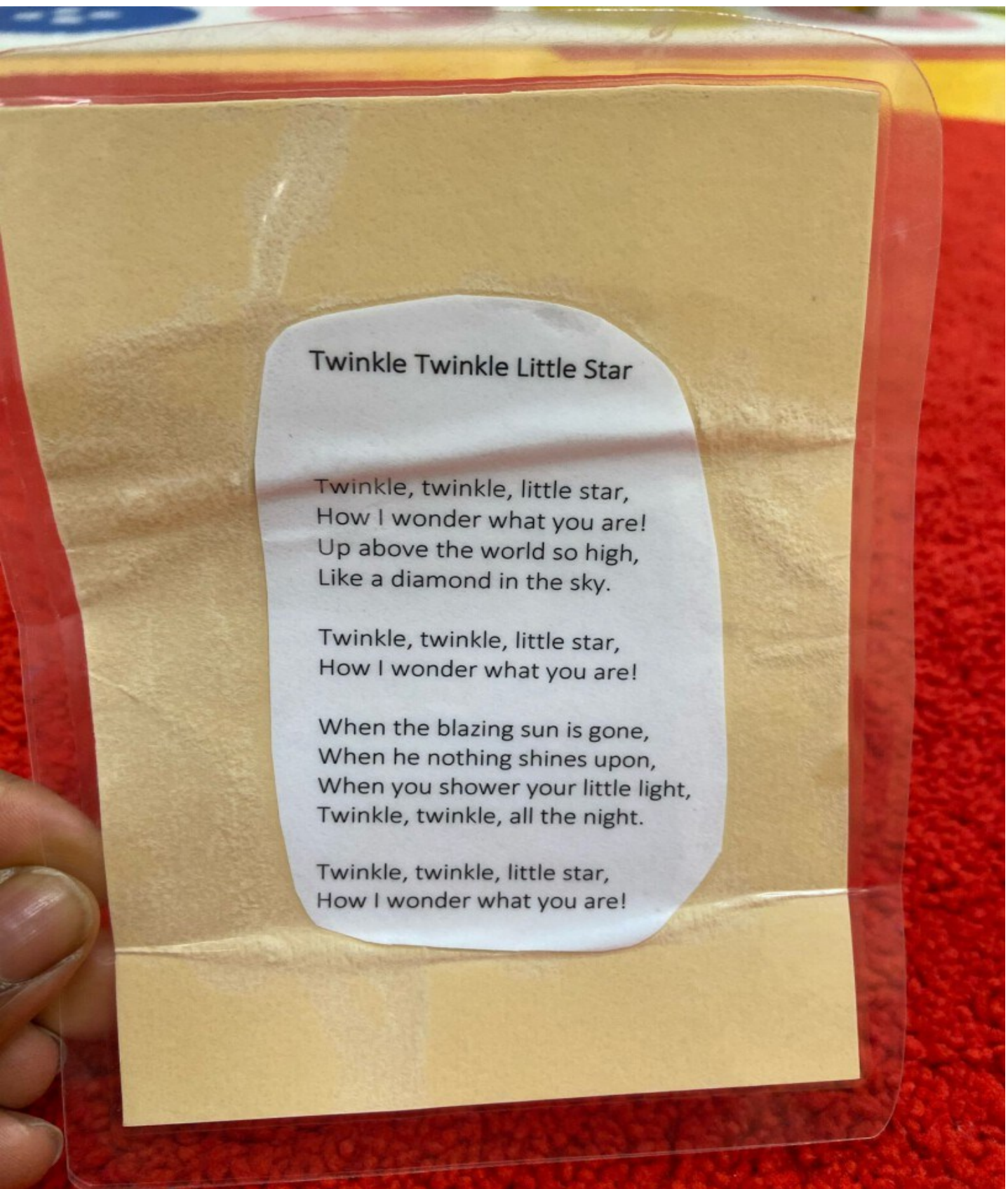




APPENDIX 2. THE FRONT AND BACK OF A SONG CARD.



Front of a song card



Twinkle Twinkle Little Star

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are!
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are!

When the blazing sun is gone,
When he nothing shines upon,
When you shower your little light,
Twinkle, twinkle, all the night.

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are!

Back of a song card.

APPENDIX 3. PREPARING THE SONG DICE WITH THE CHILDREN.



APPENDIX 4: ROLLING THE SONG DICE WITH THE CHILDREN.

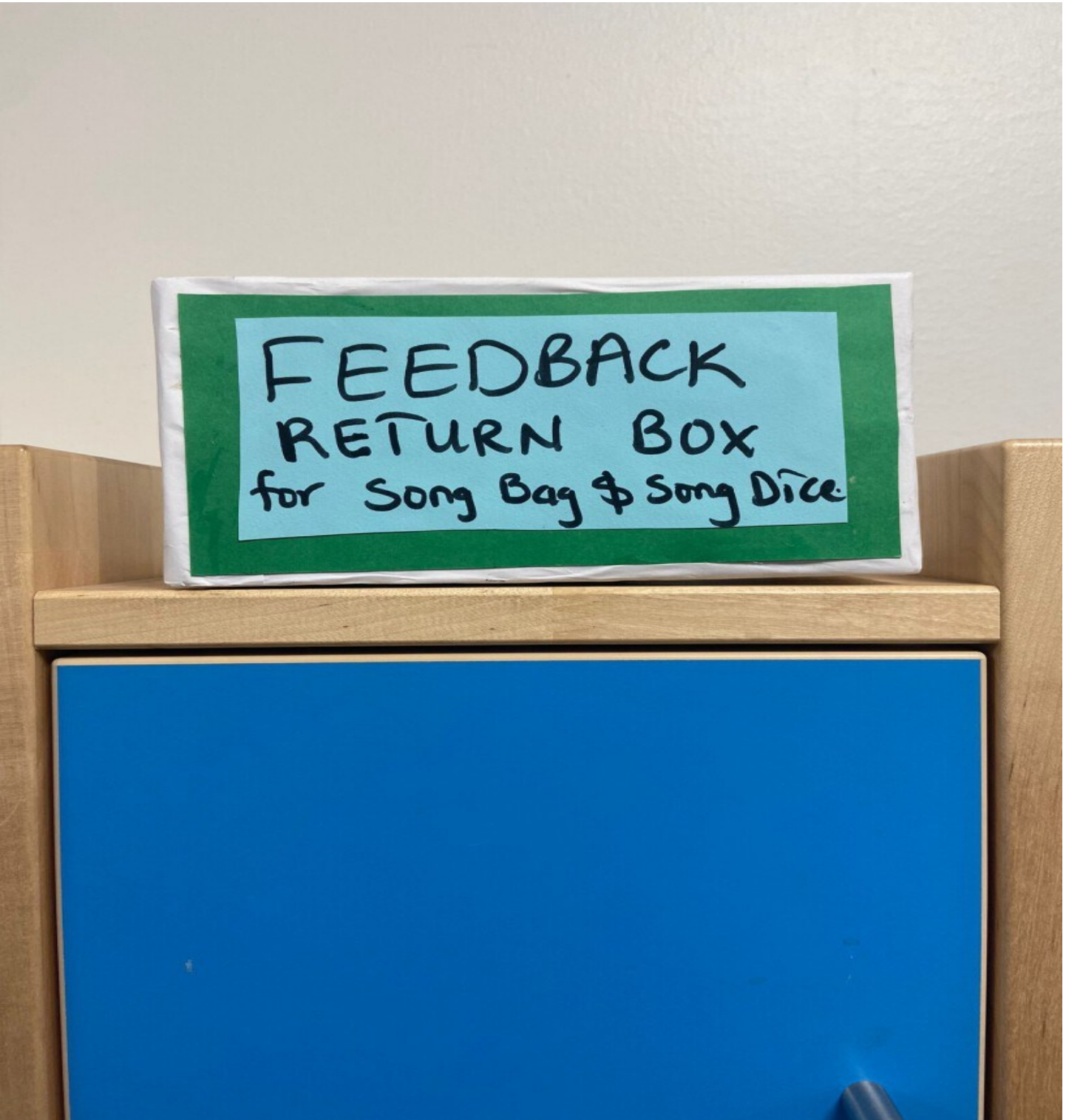


APPENDIX 5: FEEDBACK FORM.



Feedback form for prents.docx

APPENDIX 6. FEEDBACK RETURN BOX.



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Open AI. 2025. ChatGPT (or and other tools) has been used to edit the language of this text.

