

The Integration of the Arts in Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland

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ABSTRACT

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This research examines the educational system in Finland and how it involves and implements the arts in early childhood education and care (ECEC). The study explores the understanding and practice of art integration from ECEC teachers' perspectives and experiences. In addition to these perceptions, a series of observations were made to support this understanding.

This qualitative study involved observations in two daycare centers in a rural and urban municipality and semi-structured interviews with five Finnish ECEC teachers. Three teachers were interviewed in the rural setting along with observations, and in the urban setting two teachers were interviewed followed with observations in one ECEC center. The data was analyzed according to thematic analysis with an inductive approach.

The findings suggest that art integration is a common practice and mostly recognized by the ECEC teachers, but from a lack of knowledge with the arts proved to result in a challenge with the integrational aspects. However, arts integration did result in the learning and development in young children and a start for subject mixture.

This study intends to show how the role and impact of the arts in the field of education, specifically in ECEC, would lead into the teaching of the arts and other disciplines through interdisciplinary learning methods for children as they grow and develop. This work observes a small area in art integration as it is conducted in the country of Finland, but this research could possibly inspire other curricula in other countries.

Keywords: art integration, arts, early childhood education and care, thematic analysis

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1 INTRODUCTION

The range of literature and studies that correspond with the integration of the arts in teacher education is sparse, this idea has indicated that more research is needed when regarding the perceptions of teachers in art integration (Hand, 2019; May & Robinson, 2016). Specifically with the integration of the arts it has been recognized that there are not enough studies and that there is a lack of the arts for pre-kindergarten children and young children throughout daily activities (Hardy, 2011).

Throughout international education, the push of academics is assessed and measured differently in a few contexts. Specifically in the international context “the school performance of both students and teachers is measured, and education is thus based on the idea that both (more or less) must aim to perform their role as well as possible” (Lanas, 2017, p. 561). Educational systems in the United States, England, Sweden, Australia, and Chile for example, have struggled with the quality and improvement in education due to competitive means, standardized teaching, and the closure of troubled schools were used as possible solutions in the education system (Sahlberg, Gardner, & Robinson, 2021). These ideas of academic achievement and the competition of performance in education deeply correlates with an act from the United States in 2001: the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). It was one of the primary goals with academic achievement and performance to raise the proficiency in mathematics and reading which would be assessed through standardized examinations (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). With a predominant emphasis on these subjects, there is less of a focus on other fields such as humanities and essentially the arts. In arts education, while there has been a loss in skilled art educators, in addition there is this indicator of budget restrictions which has affected the jobs of these teachers and the implementation of the arts (Hardy, 2011; Spearman, 2000).

When regarding the arts, these practices have the possibility to grant students creative expression and freedom to develop their own choices and to

practice autonomy and agency. Ideas and content from various disciplines can be explored through various learning methods (i.e. kinesthetic, visual, auditory, etc.) and should not be limited to textbooks and standardized examinations. During the creative process of the arts, such as visual arts for example, there is the factor of artmaking. In various activities one must construct, build, write, sculpt, paint, sew, practice, or compose every part together in order to create. One may begin to form emotional attachments during this process, especially within the arts since it may reflect on one's emotions, feelings, and sense of identity. Huotilainen, Rankanen, Grothe, Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, and Mäkelä have stated that this practice, especially within educational settings, sets notions for social interaction, which also allows emotion to continue its presence (ibid., 2018, p. 2). Arts education has also been proven to enhance and improve the areas of basic skills, the process of learning, and leads to children's cognitive development and academic progress (Mikow-Porto, 1998). In ECEC these basic skills are especially fundamental in the foundation of early education as children prepare for primary schooling.

The general associations and perceptions of the arts may have specific connotations with who can engage themselves within the arts. At times, society and the academic world create this barrier between artists and those that do not practice creative or artistic ventures. This idea is not necessarily true as the arts may be presented in various forms that do not require a professional or claimed artist to partake in said activity. Hargreaves depicts the idea of how famous creators are generally associated with creativity, but the fields in science, history, and politics can also include creativity (Hargreaves, 2010, p. 1).

When defining early childhood education and care, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has stated that in Finland this accounts for children from ages 0-6 years, before children enter primary school (OECD, 2016). Since the focus of this research is conducted in Finland, the targeted group of this study will focus on early childhood educators that work with this age group [0-6-year-olds] in ECEC centers. Data will be collected through a series of qualitative interviews to collect information on the teachers'

experiences and their teaching background with the arts and art integration. The interview questions will concentrate on the teachers' knowledge and understanding of art integration in ECEC, whether they perform this practice in their lessons, and their thoughts on the integration of the arts. Examples of the interview questions include: *Have you heard of the term art integration, and what do you know about it? Do you integrate the arts in your class and how so? How often do your lessons become interdisciplinary? What makes art integration beneficial or challenging?*

This thesis aims to examine and understand how art integration is defined and if it is implemented by early childhood educators in Finland. The choice of analyzing early childhood education is due to the question of the future of ECEC in regard to its shaping of children's development and wellbeing. This study intends to show how art integration is implemented in the foundations of ECEC in the Finnish system and it is hoped that this study could inspire other systems globally.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter digs into the surrounding literature and sources which break down the realms of this research conversation. Art integration has the potential of being a broad topic, but in theory it can involve subjects in academics, interdisciplinary teaching methods, and the relation to the educational context or curriculum. This then leads to the cultural context of this study in the educational system of Finland and the aspects of ECEC. Lastly, this theoretical review will examine the educational content of the arts by defining essential terms in the arts and examining arts-based activities in relation to the learning process. The aim is to clarify factors of art integration and what it entails.

2.1 Academics in education

The typical constructs of the academic curriculum generally connect to subjects such as mathematics, science, history, and other technological related fields. Specifically reading, writing, and mathematics are assessed and emphasized as basic academics in K-12 grade levels (Mikow-Porto, 1998). As Mikow-Porto (1998) explains that these fields are seen as necessary skills which are needed for academic success.

When considering art integration within academics, there is this component of an interdisciplinary practice between these methods by mixing the arts with subjects. Interdisciplinary teaching has been described as a collaborative practice of learning within multiple disciplines which is mostly learner-driven (Park & Son, 2010). However, this term of an interdisciplinary teaching approach may be used more as a general form of connecting subjects together. Timmerman defines the overarching term of mixing disciplines and activities which ties with the overall curriculum as cross-curricular (ibid., 2017, p. 2). This approach of art integration correlates with interdisciplinary teaching methods since it connects disciplines together and broadens the spectrum for academic practices, but also

for abstract or emotional practices. In traditional education, academic achievement has been praised with high value and importance for student success. Along with the standard core curriculum (which concerns mathematics, history, sciences, etc.) it is commonly separated from humanities, foreign languages, the arts, physical education, amongst other disciplines. However, the incorporation of the arts in academic and educational settings has a possibility to achieve improvement in academic performance (Mikow-Porto, 1998; Moskowitz, 2003; Johnson & Memmott, 2006; Hardy, 2011; Hand, 2019).

In comparison to traditional education and core subjects, there is this value of teacher and student performance when engaging with the mandatory content. Lanas (2017) mentions this same idea of performance assessment that measures both the teachers and students' performance across various international contexts (ibid., 2017, p. 561). This is especially apparent in the context from the United States when evaluating performance, following a controlled and set curriculum, and furthermore the aspects of learning or teaching are carried through basic qualities which may not go beyond the basic function (Baines, 2010; Zeichner, 2010).

In Finland and in relation to the practices of ECEC, the prospect of traditional education is not commonly implemented, rather the use of play is practiced (Sahlberg, Gardner, & Robinson, 2021; Sahlberg & Doyle, 2019). When observing the National Core Curriculum for ECEC from the Finnish National Agency for Education (2022) in Finland the practices of mathematical thinking, environmental education, technology education, media education, physical education, health and safety, ethical thinking, communication and languages, the arts, and culture are the educational practices that are implemented for young children (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022). Instead of enforcing reading, writing, and mathematics as academic subjects and skills which assess children's readiness for primary school (Sahlberg, Gardner, & Robinson, 2021). However, in this context of ECEC, an academic topic such as mathematics is demonstrated through "illustrative and playful activities" which allow children to "observe shapes, use their bodies, or working with different devices and

images” (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022). Therefore, young children are essentially introduced to the beginning of academics through age-appropriate activities that break down basic skills or thinking which are related to academic subjects.

2.2 The Finnish context and ECEC in Finland

Throughout various countries such as France, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States, the emphasis of academic success and school readiness have been part of the educational systems traditions (Bennett, 2005). However, many European and Nordic countries value a holistic approach for children’s development instead of the focus on academic content (Bennett, 2005). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) declares that Nordic countries, like Finland, emphasize wellbeing, autonomy, and independence so that children can thrive in society, and for ECEC centers to collaborate with parents. The “best interests and needs” of children are acknowledged according to the Early Childhood and Care Act as of 2022, which grants all children the right to education and care.

One of the primary goals of ECEC in Finland is to provide a basic foundation which would grant equal access for a successful future (Salminen, 2017). The National Core Curriculum (2022) for ECEC states that their values incorporate the intrinsic value of childhood, growth as a human being, rights of the child, equity, equality, and diversity, diversity of families, and healthy and sustainable ways of living. Sahlberg, Gardner, and Robinson (2021) state that these traits of wellbeing, children’s rights, and the involvement of children in their own education are not commonly emphasized across international education.

In relation to the context of the arts, these practices in the arts and art integration in general are executed through high quality programs in Finland and Canada (Robinson, 2013). The practice of arts education in Finland “accounts for

80 percent of the teaching time, counting both specialized and integrated arts, because art is integrated into all subjects” (Robinson, 2013, p. 193). Art integration was also observed and recognized as a beneficial component for teachers in Finland with a curriculum that supports the arts as told by the narratives of general classroom teachers within the primary levels (Hand, 2019).

There are some concerns related to the practice of art integration in schools which examine the challenges of executing this approach. For example, a study concerning the integration of art and science questioned Finnish science teachers' distribution of art integration in their lessons which resulted in irregular sessions that integrate the arts (Turkka, Haatainen, & Aksela, 2017). The authors, Turkka, Haatainen, and Aksela (2017), concluded that teachers could be more comfortable with art integration in their own lessons if there was more training designated for teachers to incorporate the arts or another discipline in their lessons. Other factors may be related to budget and support from educational leaders. At the moment, it appears that art integration still relies on teacher performance and if teachers have the correct training and knowledge so that this integration of the arts can be practiced.

As it was defined earlier in the introduction chapter, ECEC incorporates its services for children from 0-6 years of age in Finland (OECD, 2016). Understanding the values and the general system of this educational context is important in the sense of knowing how the system operates and what it contains. The following text will report on a few of the basic structures and features of ECEC.

According to the Finnish National Agency for Education (2024) or Opetushallitus (OPH) as it is called in Finnish, ECEC participation is not a mandatory amenity/service, but it depends on the parents' decision if they want to enroll their child either in ECEC centers, family day care, clubs, private care or if they will care for their child at home. It is also stated from OPH that the arrangement of service is held responsible by the municipalities and the amount of payment is based on family income. The OECD (2016) has clarified that children are entitled to either early childhood educational development

programs (for 0–3-year-olds) or pre-primary educational programs (for 3–6-year-olds).

The OPH (2024) calls attention to the disposition of groups which are arranged by children's ages and the ratios which must align within an appropriate number of group sizes according to the number of staff available. This is an especially important aspect for both the wellbeing of children and teachers. When concerning the status of classroom ratios, the OECD (2016) lists the staff-child ratio as: 1:3 under 3 years of age, 1:8 at 3 years old and over, and 1:13 for pre-primary education. The quality of education and care can be reflected heavily on the children if improper distributions or a lack of staff occurs in these programs. Large group sizes call for the need for proper support and detail for the needs of the children. OPH (2024) reports that evaluation is done at systematic levels from national and local levels, with a focus on the organization of activities and pedagogical practices. Around once a year the evaluation of a child's plan is scheduled with parents as a method of examining the future development to support ECEC. Along with this idea of wellbeing, the OECD (2016) has reported that 10 hours is the maximum time limit reserved for 0–6-year-old children in ECEC programs.

When studying the values of the Finnish education system regarding ECEC, OPH states the mission as:

“Early childhood is a phase of intense development and learning. The mission of ECEC is to promote children's holistic growth, development and learning in collaboration with their guardians. Learning through play is essential. Understanding the importance and pedagogical possibilities of play for the child in the promotion of wellbeing and learning is essential for ECEC” (Finnish National Agency for education, n.d.).

To summarize, there is an emphasis of ECEC's role on children's development and learning, play, pedagogical opportunities, and wellbeing. The values in this mission evaluate the educational context in the scope of holistic thinking and not so much in terms of academic achievement or success. As for

the national core curriculum for ECEC (2022), OPH has also provided a list of values that are stated in the curriculum:

“Intrinsic value of childhood, growth as a human being, rights of the child, equity, equality, and diversity, diversity of families, and a healthy and sustainable way of living” (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022).

The national core curriculum for ECEC had its most recent renewal from March 2022, which is the source that will be referred to when examining its functions and later on with its inclusion of the arts. In the curriculum (2022) it states that every child has the right to ECEC instruction, but also this right with human values in relation to wellbeing, acknowledged as a person, and with this right to good and quality care. There is of course an emphasis from the curriculum for pedagogical aspects and learning or developmental prospects, but in addition, there are other intrinsic values and the perspectives of play and other forms of expression.

As for the arts, they are included and mentioned in the ECEC national core curriculum, and it is stated as part of an aim in pedagogical activities which incorporates children’s engagement in “play, physical activity, arts, and cultural heritage and enable positive learning experiences” (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022, p. 13). This mention of the arts is placed in the third point out of ten goals which are listed as part of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. The arts are stated a few times throughout the curriculum (2022), but it is also worded in more specific terms of what the arts include such as musical expression, visual expression, crafts expression, and verbal and bodily expression.

There are a few examples that are reported in the national core curriculum which support the values and goals in ECEC. One example specifically includes a format of art integration. The curriculum describes the goal of mathematical thinking and states “In order to strengthen children’s geometric thinking, opportunities for building, arts and crafts and clay modelling are arranged for

them” (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022, p. 46). This is a clear example of the integration of the arts since there is a learning goal of geometry which is further enhanced with visual arts, crafting, and working with clay.

2.3 Defining art integration and practices in the arts

The role of art integration in various early childhood settings can depend on many factors, but it ultimately relies on educational leaders and teachers' ability to incorporate this teaching practice. Within the arts, this may include several variations which can include storytelling/literature, drawing, painting, music, acting, and sculpture (Reif & Grant, 2010).

Defining Key Terms

There are several terms that must be addressed as the word “art” or the “arts” may appear similar, however, both words branch out in different contexts that may either list skills in broader or more specific terms. It is also important to point out these terms in this section, while they may correlate to the field of art in general, they all serve a role in the educational context as well. These terms do not necessarily work towards defining art, but are supportive aspects in the creative process, educational development and learning, and in the human experience.

The Arts

Upon the first observation when examining the word “arts” it may appear confusing to the viewer based on the plural appearance and the added ‘s’ at the end of the word art. Hence the word art exists as an entirely independent meaning from the arts, while both are connected to one another they are not the exact same. However, this text will not attempt to define art as this has been stated throughout various studies and literature as a subjective term and it is also not the main factor of this research. The arts when regarding art, is more of a term that describes the various branches or individual disciplines that can connect and

contribute to art, creativity, and expression. This term is more distinct with “a wide range of diverse skills and activities” which commonly includes “music, dance, theater, and visual arts” (Mikow-Porto, 1998, p. 3).

The arts can easily be confused with visual arts (drawing, painting, sculpture, etc.) and while these forms of media are part of the arts, there are more disciplines of content that are involved. Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines the arts as “painting, sculpture, music, theater, literature, etc., considered as a group of activities done by people with skill and imagination.” In terms of education, this definition can interpret multiple outcomes when considering which types of disciplines that schools and teachers should work with. Although in ECEC, this range of the arts is not separated since there are no subject specific classrooms (i.e., fibers classroom, language classroom, painting studio, etc.), these classes are typically organized for students once they get to the secondary levels of education.

Art Education and Arts Education

In the field of art education this area specifically concerns visual art and media. It refers to the teaching, observations, and execution on the fundamentals of art, aesthetics, art criticism, art history, engaging with various art forms, etc. Whereas, in arts education this shares similar components with art education, although it is broader since it contains the teachings of all the arts.

According to the National Core Curriculum for early childhood education and care in Finland, arts education is described as “spontaneous and planned activities” which supports children’s expression and creative processes through the means of experimenting, exploring, and practicing (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022). The approaches to arts education may differentiate according to age group and grade levels throughout the field of education. However, this can occur with any subject, not only in arts education. Although since there are so many factors and disciplines in this content area it can still be said that it involves more than the finished product of a song, drawing, dance

routine, etc. The process of learning, experimentation, and feeling are all part of the vast involvement when engaging in the arts.

Art Integration

One definition of art integration as described by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts “is an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form. Students engage in a creative process which connects an art form and another subject area and meet evolving objects in both disciplines” (Silverstein & Layne, 2010, p. 1). Another perspective of art integration can be defined as “a situation when children are engaged with the arts while being taught a subject for the purpose of improving their academic achievement” (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala, 2016, p. 43). These statements of art integration point out the main process which ultimately focuses on the arts as a means to either help or work with other content areas or subjects. For example, studies have shown that arts-based pedagogical practices support kinesthetic, auditory, visual, but also literacy skills which has promoted significant academic improvements for English Language Learners (ELLs) (Greenfader & Brouillette, 2013). Not only does the arts support children academically or cognitively, but research has identified other factors as social development, emotional wellbeing, and psychological development (Philips et al., 2010; Baum, 2017; Reynolds & Valerio, 2017).

In terms of core curriculum or core academic subjects, this usually involves mathematics, science, history, and literacy, as described by Bautista, Tan, Ponnusamy, and Yau (2016); from art integration studies, there has been a priority with how certain arts can be integrated with the core subjects (Bautista, Tan, Ponnusamy, & Yau, 2016). For art integration, the issue of including the arts in school curriculums continues to be a main concern. This is due to the heavy emphasis of academic studies regarding core subjects and possibly standardized testing. Especially considering NCLB from the United States in 2001, the arts and humanities have had a considerable decrease in instruction, predominantly in dance and theater (Gara, Brouillette, & Farkas, 2018). However, despite the

limitations for the arts during the era of this legislative act Gara, Brouillette, and Farkas (2018) have pointed out that it has “opened the way for grassroots efforts to revivify arts education in our public schools” (ibid., 2018, p. 273). This has caused an increase in the advocacy of the arts or art education as there are more programs available which incorporate these disciplines. Such as the Young Audiences of Houston which “facilitated the creation of the city’s Arts Access Initiative” or Boston Public Schools’ Arts Expansion Initiative which is “coordinated by the nonprofit organization EdVestors” and “Ingenuity helped design the Chicago Public Schools’ Creative Schools Initiative” are a few examples of partnerships with arts-based programs in school communities (Bowen & Kisida, 2017, p. 9). In Finland the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care (NCGECEC) states holistic art practices and objectives which daycares can follow (Rusanen & Ruokonen, 2011).

2.4 The influences on learning with the arts

The practice of art integration exists daily in everyday teaching in the classroom. Some ECEC educators may not be aware that their own teaching practice involves the integration of the arts. Since there is an abundant variation of techniques which include the arts in various subjects - it could be recognized as something such as singing the “A-B-C” song with children. This song alone has different ways of involving expression and learning. Children can learn the basics of linguistic expressions with letters and by pronouncing the letter (but in song-format). They can visualize the letters if there are letters present and they can also visualize how the letters are physically sung from the movement of the teacher’s mouth. This is all achieved through the expression of singing, and with a melodic format that can help children to learn the alphabet.

Young children point to the surrounding world around them and recognize items and people and overall message through artistic mediums (Johnson, 2008, p. 74). There is an element that digs deeper than the basics of visualization that

children can discover when they express themselves through the arts. Johnson (2008) mentions the realms of verbal and visual literacy which can be displayed by messages of communication either through phonetics, words, talking or visual depictions when being able to talk about artistic matters. Both modes of verbal and visual literacy involve opportunities for children to learn and to incorporate developmental skills. Although the area of visual literacy is more involved with visual art education and verbal literacy can lead to language and linguistic properties. In Johnson's (2008) article there are suggestions to promote visual and verbal expression for young children, specifically preschool and first grade children. In the integrated approach of the arts, there is a suggestion that leads into art integration specifically. This was explained in the 17th and 18th points that connect the arts with other subject matter and learning methods. One example stated in a practical matter such as visiting a pet store and for children to create their own pet store through the use of materials: paper shapes, markers, buttons, glue, etc. (Johnson, 2008, p. 77). In this example children can use their observations from the pet store and work with materials that help them learn about interior prospects and by using geometrical shapes. This is just one of various examples that can be demonstrated when integrated the rich-world variations of the arts with young children.

The traditional classroom environment creates an emphasis on the teacher as the central and main subject of knowledge. All of the students' desks are typically facing towards this center of information: the teacher. Therefore, this particular arrangement of a class environment can dictate that the teacher is the prime (or only) source for learning. Educators should instead become a facilitator for students as they grow and develop, so that they may be able to think critically and creatively as innovative learners. Within the arts in particular, there are no specific rules to follow. There are multiple examples, strategies, and techniques, but for children or anyone who engages in creative practices can decide for themselves how they want to express their own ideas. As stated from the Ten Pillars of a Good Childhood for children's rights that "creative expression through music, dance, drama, and the other arts" and "creative play and physical

activity” are two pillars that recognize learning that is not limited to cognitive studies (Reynolds & Valerio, 2017, p. 133). It is important to think about the ethical factors and basic rights for children as “the Ten Pillars reawaken stakeholders to pay attention to the world’s youngest residents in relation to basic human needs, without which education efforts extended to young children are in vain” (Reynolds & Valerio, 2017, p. 133).

The implementation of the arts for young children and in preschool education promotes children to respond to the surrounding world and when observing the arts in society, they [the children] “can understand how art is related to cultural endeavors of the past and the present” (Nikoltsos, 2000, p. 7). During early childhood, children are exposed to various elements and properties of life. Besides the cultural context, the arts can go beyond artistic experiences, but to support the learning of skills. As Nikoltsos (2000) states that “children will develop their subjects and symbols beyond the typical “house”, “flower”, “tree”, and they will learn new techniques beyond crayon or marker drawing” (Nikoltsos, 2000, p. 10).

When concluding these points of academics, Finnish ECEC, and learning with the arts, it is clear that within the Finnish education system for young children that there is no emphasis for traditional academic enforcement. Rather there is a holistic approach that supports children’s growth, wellbeing, and care. Along with a curriculum that involves the arts and encourages children’s learning when working with creative activities and methods.

3 RESEARCH AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Denny and Weckesser state that qualitative research is “not fixed or calculable, but continues until saturation is reached” (ibid., 2022, p. 1166). Meaning that there is no specific limit to the research and the researcher themselves can explore the information and continue their contributions to the revolving knowledge. In this study, the findings will connect to the fields of education, ECEC, and the arts. However, this data is only a small sample of information that contributes to the continuous discussions of art integration.

The purpose of this study aims to briefly examine the National Core Curriculum in relation to Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland and how the integration of the arts is currently implemented in the curriculum. This is supported by the perceptions and experiences from Finnish ECEC educators. Since the educators involved in ECEC do not necessarily specialize in specific disciplines/subjects, the research questions are designed to allow dialogue that is open or fresh to the practices of art integration. ECEC teachers are not expected to have professional expertise or experience in the arts, so these research questions will explore how connected teachers are with art integration.

It is hoped that an understanding of art integration in Finland from the ECEC field will be achieved, but also how the practices actually incorporate the arts for children’s learning, development, and overall wellbeing. The research questions also aim to investigate the interdisciplinary nature of ECEC with subjects and if they connect or if this possibility of subject mixture is possible as young children progress in pre-primary education and beyond.

The research questions include the following:

1. How do Finnish ECEC teachers perceive the integration of the arts?

This question aims to gather the role of the arts in the teaching practice in Finland based on teachers' perceptions and what they know about art integration. It is important to understand what the current stance of art integrated education is amongst Finnish teachers and what they understand about it. The question of teachers' background in the arts and if they have had any training in relation to this matter can support their upbringing and current knowledge with art integration in mind. In addition, this study aims to understand the use of art(s) education in ECEC and how common or uncommon it is executed despite the reports from the curriculum.

2. How is art integration implemented and supported by Finnish ECEC teachers?

The Finnish curriculum has shown that it prioritizes and reflects on the implementation of the arts, languages, or craft matter in ECEC. However, from the point of view of ECEC teachers, it is important to examine how this integration is done in practice and if it is achieved. Especially in the sense that art integration works towards the learning development of another discipline involved with the enhancement of the arts. This question will explore this property in order to determine if the process of subject mixture is present or an emerging possibility.

4 METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research can include variations of interviews, observations, and textual analysis that requires the researcher to immerse oneself within the context of information that is expressed from lived experiences (Tracy, 2013, p. 3-4). This type of research is known mainly to study “the meaning of people’s lives” and to “represent the views and perspectives of the people [participants]” (Yin, 2016, p. 9). According to Yin (2016), qualitative research aligns with a worldview or a belief system which “holds about the ways of knowing what you know and how your research is intended to arrive at its findings and conclusions” (Yin, 2016, p. 15). These worldviews directly establish the position within ontological perspectives. The reflection of the methodological process in this study is carried from an interpretive perspective, and this is further discussed and identified within this research context in the analysis process in chapter 4.4.

4.1 Research Context

This work explores the practices of two ECEC centers settings, one in a rural location and one ECEC center in an urban environment in Finland. One of the municipalities is set in a rural location in Finland and has a population under 3,000 while the other municipality is in an urban location in Finland under 200,000. The choice of two opposite communities in this study was done specifically to take notice of the individual traits that may be done either similarly or differently when regarding art integration in these centers. Although this point of comparison is not the main focus, but rather an additional resource to understanding the Finnish educational system. In the arts, resources can play an important factor in order for the curricula to continue to exist. For both rural and urban settings, the components of support and additional resources can vary.

4.2 Research Participants/Subjects and Research Data

The research participants of this research were teachers who teach in a Finnish ECEC setting and this included a total of five teachers from two different municipalities. Some demographic information was collected based on the teachers' teaching experience and their connection with their current employment. However, some of this data is personal and cannot be reported in this text. A noticeable outcome of this information was that the ECEC teachers had a similar number of years of teaching and were all similar in age range.

The five ECEC teachers in this study will be listed according to their code names that conceal their true identity or given/family names. These code names are brief and identify which teachers represent their respective municipality. The codes ensure that the participants are not associated with gender and only present letters and numbers. Each code presents the letter 'T' which stands for teacher and the following letter is listed as 'U' as in urban or 'R' as in rural. In the following table this will list the participants in numerical order starting with the teachers who represent the urban environment and then the teachers who represent the rural environment.

Table 1

List of Participants Involved and Their Code Names

| ECEC teacher code name: | Participant category: |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| TU1 | Participant 1 |
| TU2 | Participant 2 |
| TR1 | Participant 3 |
| TR2 | Participant 4 |
| TR3 | Participant 5 |

4.3 Data Collection

The main focus throughout this research is to understand the integration of the arts in the Finnish curriculum. With a qualitative design, this study works with

semi-structured interview questions (presented in appendix 1 and 2) which are known to be versatile and flexible and commonly implemented in qualitative research (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). In semi-structured interviews, the questions are generally open-ended which allow the participants to freely express their perspectives (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), 2008). Interviews were conducted individually with all five ECEC teachers by organizing one-on-one interview sessions with the ECEC teacher participant and the researcher. They were scheduled as a one-time occurring interview with a time and location that was comfortable for the participants (all which were held in their respective ECEC facility). The interviews were completed within three months' time and the participants were notified of the interviews in advance.

After receiving approval from the municipalities, a research proposal was sent to the respective director of the ECEC center to inform the facility and the potential participants of the study. Then with the director's approval, I received contact information in order to schedule interviews with the participants. This case was a bit more open when selecting participants in the rural municipality. Meaning that the teachers would sometimes have different schedules and I would be able to organize the interviews with whoever was available.

With the participants consent, the interview discussions were audio-recorded as a method of data collection. The questions were asked in English for two participants, but they were also translated into Finnish text for these participants. They received a hard copy of the questions in Finnish in case the content needs further clarification to reach the full and original meaning for the participants. This is due to the fact that all five participants did not have English as a first language. As for the other three participants, the interviews were conducted in Finnish as it was more comfortable to communicate in their native language. The questions were open-ended for the participants to voice their concerns and opinions on the matter. And they were worded in a way that would allow them to provide more details rather than a 'yes or no' format.

In qualitative research one method of collecting data can include ethnography (Tracy, 2013), but in this context the observational data is not set in

a long period of time. Observations can be conducted in a specific space or environment and involve allocated periods of time when observing participants (Agarwal, 2021). For the observational data, there were around 5-6 handwritten notes of recorded data. It was done in a passive sense which was mostly observational so that the researcher would not disturb the classroom procedures. Although, some questions were discussed with the teacher when the children would move to another activity/class. There were around 10 hours of observational data from both centers. Around 8 hours in the rural center and 2 hours in the urban center. The purpose of these observations was to ensure that the researcher has insight of the physical space and the dynamics of an ECEC center in order to obtain a greater understanding of the Finnish educational system. These observations were important to the study to ensure that the researcher could see the group procedures and how these acts demonstrate the experiences that ECEC teachers describe in the interview process.

Table 2

Code names of ECEC centers

| ECEC center code name | Location unit of ECEC center |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Center A | Rural municipality in Finland |
| Center B | Urban municipality in Finland |

The time spent in center A was significantly more than the time spent in center B, so the following text will report the initial observations based on specific categories. There were multiple groups in center A which were categorized by age levels in the mice group (0-3-year-olds), hedgehog group (3-4-year-olds), and the fox group (5-year-olds). As for center B, I was able to tour the whole ECEC center which was led by one of my participants. My role during these observations was passive as I did not engage with the children, but there were a few questions with some teachers if they were comfortable to converse in English.

4.4 Thematic Analysis

Since the interviews with the ECEC teachers were audio-recorded, they needed to be transcribed into written text in order to analyze the data. Due to this structure, the data was analyzed according to the thematic analysis method with an inductive approach since there are no prior theories that are followed in this study as the discovered themes were data-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis has two methods of organizing the development of themes either inductively or deductively. With an inductive approach, “the researcher works with the data in a bottom-up fashion by developing themes from what is already in the data as the starting point and continues to recognize the themes from there” (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, & Braun, 2017, p. 22). My research follows the inductive approach since I do not carry any expectations of specific themes that my data could be sectioned into. Within my acquired data, these themes that I will identify can vary across the different participants. However, these themes need to relate with my research questions, and they need to be consistent as the themes are developed (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2015).

Thematic analysis has been identified by its recognition of patterns and themes in qualitative data and it is known for its flexibility due to this method being free from specific epistemological and/or theoretical perspectives (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 2). It is one of the most common analysis types used after reading various studies, but it also felt the most appropriate method when considering the research questions and the type of data from this study. Thematic analysis tends to be less structured (in comparison to quantitative research) and allows more room for the influences or biased concerns to emerge from the researcher (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2015). To keep these ideas accounted for, the researcher may reflect on these issues with reflexivity in mind, or with transparency by keeping their own observations in mind when thinking about your own assumptions (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2015, p. 37).

The total data set collected was on a smaller scale and therefore, no specific data analysis software was used in this study. With five participants in this study there were around 20 pages of transcribed text data from the audio recordings of

interviews. Due to this small data corpus it is important that the research questions are focused and straightforward to ensure that the data fits into the research aims. Instead, the data was analyzed through manual methods such as hand written notes in a notebook and software such as Microsoft Word and Excel which were used during this process.

After transcribing, translating material into English, and consolidating all of the files/data into one text document, then the data was coded by following Braun and Clarke's (2006) analysis framework. The process of this framework was completed multiple times, once with digital files and another time with handwritten notes which recorded the initial codes and highlighted the categories in order to create themes. In this six-step process it is important to mention how the research questions of this study had guided the formation of coded categorizations into themes. The approach of this framework will be explained with each step in the following paragraphs:

The first step prompts the researcher to first *familiarize oneself with the data*. This was done by reading over the data corpus multiple times. While transcribing and translating the data, this process was already done repetitively prior to the analysis stage, however, the data was read a few times on its own after acquiring the full data corpus. While reading over the data, a few notes were documented and specific lines, words, and phrases were highlighted according to the text's relation to the research questions.

In the next step this involved the method of *generating initial codes*. Even before creating these initial codes, there was somewhat of a thought process for possible codes when highlighting text that is related to the research questions. While going through the data corpus for every highlighted text I would add a note in the text to determine the different sets of codes. These code names would be abbreviated as C1, C2, C3, and so on (as in code one, code two, code three, etc.). A codebook or a key for these codes was recorded in a notebook along with the use of Microsoft Excel to organize the notes for the coding process. The names of these initial codes were brief with about 1-4 words that define the code title.

The third step includes the process of *searching for themes*. In a separate Microsoft Word document two table graphs were created which were separated by the appropriate research question. Columns were created as “clusters” which listed codes that had relevant topics with one another. These clusters with relevant codes were the first step when creating potential themes. This was a tedious step but had a lot of possibilities with coding outcomes.

In the fourth step it was time to *review the emerging themes*. This continued the process when determining possible themes that could be coherent with the related codes. I would check if there were enough codes in certain clusters which could generate a theme and some clusters had some codes that were irrelevant and would be fully omitted. Some codes would also be consolidated in one cluster/potential theme and moved from one research question to the other. It was important to determine which main ideas from the possible theme would fit with the appropriate research question. Figures 1 and 2 help to visualize this with the use of thematic mapping.

Defining and naming themes was the fifth step. Each cluster title (cluster 1, cluster 2, etc.) would become the name of the theme. The names of the themes would describe the definitions and overarching names of said cluster. Table 3 displays how the previous steps with data samples create/organize this step.

Figure 1

Thematic map organized according to the first research question

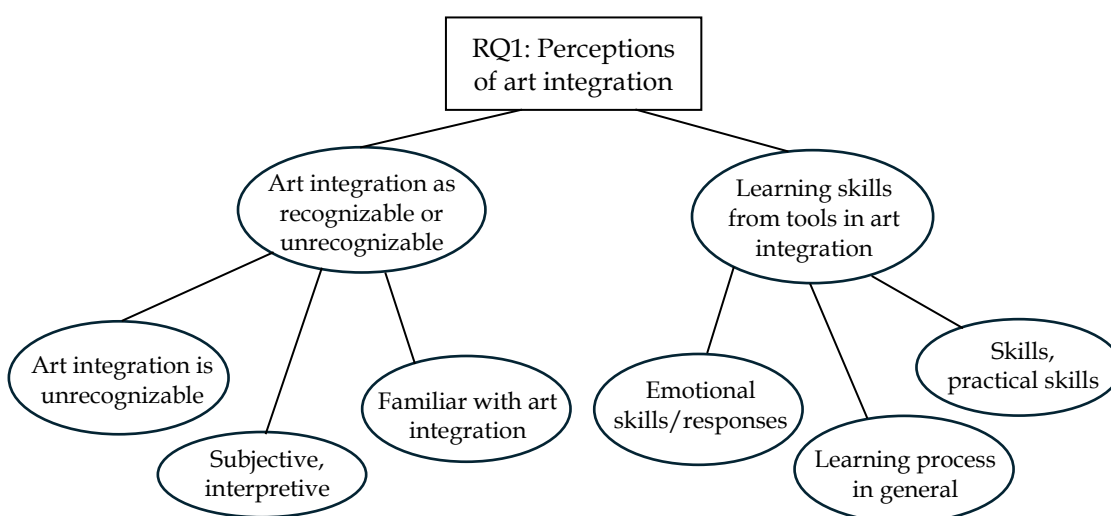
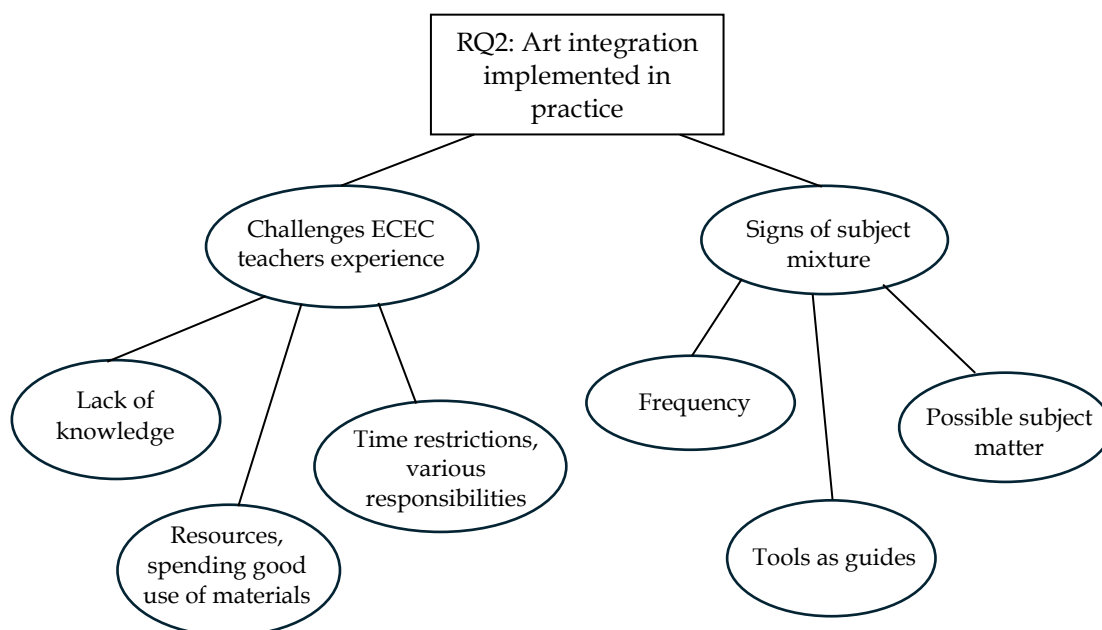


Figure 2

Thematic map organized according to the second research question

**Table 3**

Example of codes, categories, and themes derived from the data

| CODES: | CATEGORY: | THEMES: |
|---|---------------------|---|
| <p><i>'...not as I understand, its so broad all the arts, I guess you don't understand how versatile it could be used even more.'</i> TR2</p> <p><i>'you can imagine what it means'</i> TR1</p> | SUBJECTIVE | TEACHERS RECOGNITION AND FAMILIARITY OF ART INTEGRATION |
| <p><i>'...some of them, they can't speak at all first and then they suddenly they start to sing.'</i> TU1</p> <p><i>'Well, at least with it you can motivate children to different things.'</i> TR2</p> | EMOTIONAL RESPONSES | LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENTAL SKILLS |
| <p><i>'I would feel the challenge here is me. That the material is there, and everything is possible and the children get excited and so on, that if you just know how to bring that thing up.'</i> TR1</p> | LACK OF KNOWLEDGE | CHALLENGES TEACHERS FACE WITH ART INTEGRATION |

Lastly, the final step which *produces the final report*. There were a few decisions to be made when finalizing which extracts of text should be included as examples for the themes. Organization was determined by producing the clearest format which would be easy for readers to follow along. Since the research questions were the primary guidelines in the analysis process, they would be the main points to visualize which themes were generated from the analysis.

When considering the reliability of this analysis process it may be important to state the recognition of what is true from the data without myself as the researcher that may interfere with the meaning. In qualitative methods, this observation of knowledge and reality ties with paradigms, which sample information and understanding and aim to understand reality (Tracy, 2013). The research beliefs of this study align with the interpretive paradigm. In this research belief the interpretivists “do not believe it is ever truly possible to see the world from their participants’ eyes, but to strive for empathetic understanding with the German concept *verstehen* (to understand)” (Tracy, 2013, p. 41).

I have tried to keep this perspective in mind when it comes to my data analysis, as I do not want my personal or emotional biases/ways of thinking to hinder the truths of what my participants are expressing in their statements. The idea and meanings that are presented in the interpretive paradigm varies for each individual person as it focuses on the idea of relativism (Scotland, 2012, p. 11). However, the question of validity is apparent for the interpretive model as Scotland (2012) describes this paradigm to often use open-ended questions. Although, I personally feel that research can (and should be) hard to measure and evaluate at times, since the discovery of results cannot always be predetermined. Sometimes the individual expressions and experiences of people can vary, and it can be difficult for the researcher to fully understand the reality of the truth.

4.5 Ethical Solutions

Before engaging in the semi-structured interviews with the ECEC teachers, the teachers were sent a notice of the research plan and expectations of the interview process via email. The researcher first asked the approval from the ECEC center's head director in order to find the appropriate participants for this study. Once it was time for the interview, the participants received a privacy notice and a consent form (that they could sign) which were printed in Finnish, so that participants would have a better understanding when using their native language.

In the consent form, the text explained to the teachers that they may choose to cancel or withdraw from the research study at any point if they wish to do so. They would have access to the researcher's contact details and the details from the university of Jyväskylä (JYU) as well. In addition to the interview process, the participants were also asked orally to give consent to an audio recording of the interview.

All interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded with an audio device from JYU along with an empty cell phone device (unlocked phone) from the researcher which is password protected (as a backup device for the recordings). The files associated with the participants each had their own alias as a name code which would protect their identity, and the files were stored securely with password protected files on USB stick that are only accessible to the researcher. Each audio file was transcribed into text, although three of the files had an additional step which was to translate the transcriptions from Finnish to English. This process was done by the researcher alone to avoid sharing sensitive research data with other third parties. In order to translate the texts, the researcher used additional AI programs, 'Google Translate', 'DeepL', 'Sanakirja', and a physical Finnish-English dictionary textbook. By repetitively listening to the interview audios over and over in order to correct any errors that the transcription software may not have detected. This process was done multiple times to ensure that the language translation could be done as accurately as possible, but it is important to note that the researcher does not understand

Finnish in a fluent manner and has a proficiency of an A2-B1 level. After completing this thesis work, all audio recordings, notes from teachers' background/demographic information, and other relevant research material/notes will be deleted or destroyed according to the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) and in accordance to the research policies of JYU.

5 RESULTS

The following sections of text are broken into two portions that report the findings in relation to the two research questions from this study. The subsections list the overall themes that were identified in this process.

5.1 ECEC teacher perceptions on the integration of the arts

Two themes have emerged from the first research question, the following themes are followed as: art integration as a recognizable and unrecognizable term and arts as a tool to enhance learning and developmental skills. There are a few differences in some of the teachers' answers that vary between the themes. Some of these differences may be based on a variety of factors, such as the ECEC center's resources as a bigger program from an urban environment or as a smaller program from a rural location. However, the analysis stage does not necessarily perform a comparison of these factors since every ECEC center may have a different situation.

5.1.1 Art integration as a recognizable and unrecognizable term

Regarding the first research question, ECEC teachers in Finland perceive the recognition of art integration in three ways: as a term that they initially did not recognize from theory or in their personal training, as a subjective or interpretive term that can vary for the individual, or as a recognizable term that they have had personal or teaching connections with. When asking the participants about this term, there were a couple of teachers who were not familiar with art integration or with the term itself. As one teacher, states:

'Well, I haven't necessarily heard of it...' (TR2)

However, this teacher also admits the subjective and interpretive side of art integration. By digesting the term and understanding it from the words alone.

'-But I can understand it very well, that what it means yes, that integration says quite a lot in itself already.' (TR2)

Another teacher expresses their ability to recognize art integration from previous training or educational studies. There are various requirements that are included within teacher training, this was a curious element for this study to examine whether teachers may have been introduced to art integration from their prior studies or experiences. TR1 describes their training as:

'Education, no. I have quite a bit of what you get in these normal studies, not really a bit of education, but you still have work experience so that it's pretty much like that. I looked for information and ways to act myself, but there is not much training.' (TR1)

For teachers who did recognize the term of art integration they either recognized it from their teaching practices, from separate courses or training sessions, or even from personal life.

'Yes, yes I've heard of it and in fact I have used it many times-' (TR3)

'Yes, I know it very well, and I'm working with it nearly all of the time.' (TU1)

Another perspective which was mentioned briefly with the second data text example, is that the understanding of art integration could possibly be subjective, and it could be interpreted on its own depending on the individual. The term includes the arts and this topic on its own had one participant question the meaning of the arts and what the arts includes when defining it. Another participant recognized this understanding with arts integration as:

'...not as I understand, it's so broad, all the arts, I guess you don't understand how versatile it could be used even more-' (TR2)

It is interesting to see that the term is associated with "broadness" when related to the arts. The arts could be the factor in resulting in a broad term since the arts include various media.

5.1.2 Arts as a tool to enhance learning and developmental skills

There were a few interpretations within this context that correlate to a variety of benefits that art integration can create. Although the idea of benefits and positive aspects can be different for each individual. With this theme in learning and developmental skills, there were three categories that emerged from this theme: emotional skills/responses, the learning process in general (what can be learned), and general/practical skills (this will be explained further on and will be clarified with supporting data texts).

The enhancement of development through the use of materials and experiences through the arts can include a variety of factors that relate to emotional skills. Emotional thinking is not generally taught, as it is something that can already be part of the human experience, however, it can be interpreted and recognized differently from person to person. One teacher recognizes the reaction of joy from children when working with art integration from her teaching practices as the children develop a sense of interest or an emotional connection to an activity.

'I think that it's so funny for children and giving joy for them and when they are having this feeling that they are interested and they say, "Oh what is this?" and they like to do it. So they learn. It's -clap- straight away that they learn things. They- it's not so hard for them if there are these joy moments.' (TU1)

Or in terms of students' desire or willingness to do something, another teacher mentions the motivational aspect with the integration of the arts.

'Well, it can motivate children to do different things.' (TR2)

Another interesting component which a teacher makes a remark on involves the observations from students' families, parents, or guardians. It is quite common that teachers generally have first-hand experience with what happens in the classroom with their students. They can observe patterns and processes of development with students over time. With development in mind, this may include individual components of attitude and even one's personality. The possibilities of personality shifts can occur with multiple influences. So, while teachers may mostly encounter and notice these changes in their students, it may also carry over from the classroom into the student's personal life.

'Their families, that their own mother and father they had said that "they are singing many songs at home, and this is funny that there are, it's they are little by little, that they are coming and they are doing things. And some of them, they can't speak at all first and then they suddenly they start to sing.' (TU1)

One repeated arts-based discipline mentioned from multiple data sets included music. While music can have a variety of influences in art integration it also has an impact on emotional development. It was mentioned in the previous data set example when the process of singing can give students an opportunity when opening up to others. A teacher states the influence of music as a general aspect when considering children's development of emotional skills.

'Music is used in many places when teaching something, anything, even emotional skills, music can be used.' (TR2)

Another example of these emotional skills was described as an emotional connection which resulted in the interactions between the teacher and the student. TU1 narrates a story that they experienced with a student despite a language barrier that occurred. They explained that this child did not talk but was very observant and during a music class session the children were playing with the Finnish kantele instrument. The teacher gave the young child a kantele and with the experience of play and from the teacher's demonstrations he learned to play a little. During this moment while the teacher may discuss a little bit with the child, he was able to follow the teacher's example and mimic, but also connect to the teacher. This interaction between the child and the teacher, while it was non-verbal, through the use of eye contact which was not a common trait before this experience.

'-And after that this boy and me, we have some contact. We have this deep contact because we, we are doing something together even though we don't talk. And this is, this is the art can- when its influence was so magical.' (TU1)

'-Everytime we see each other, he was looking to me, to my eyes and his contact, even we don't talk. I know. I know that. Because I can feel it. Earlier he doesn't, doesn't take contact he was not looking at me...' (TU1)

Regarding learning skills, this involves the process of learning something with curiosity or inquisition; the overall learning process when one engages in a new matter. How one learns a new skill or subject is unique to everyone and not all will be able to learn the same way as others. This idea of learning styles is discussed with TR3 as they explain how the integration of the arts can aid students according to learning methods.

'...it would help with a wide range for many different learners to learn. In other words, children have many different ways of learning things.' (TR3)

'...to learn by doing and experiencing it for himself learns and gains more in-depth knowledge from it, that is, in a way serves many different learners.' (TR3)

Learning can connect with subject matter and specific disciplines in ECEC centers, but another teacher describes the internationalization and diversity of learning. These ECEC programs continue to grow with children who have multicultural backgrounds and upbringings. A couple of the teachers from this study mentioned how they have noticed this uprise in children with international backgrounds, such as the recent increase in Ukrainian children in Finnish schools/educational centers.

'I think it's very important that we take – take those new influences what we have now, because we have children abroad coming here and we can, we have a possibility to get more information of their culture and language and what they have.' (TU2)

There were a few occasions with the ECEC teachers mentioning the practice of “versatile” teaching. Or perhaps the diversity of teaching with art integration as it was stated that this brings a learning advantage or opportunity for the children. Although it still can correlate with the first example from TR3 about different teaching methods/styles.

'...the lesson becomes so versatile and expands all of the senses from that activity. Challenging and developing and taking into account all levels of learning, mostly as versatile' (TR1)

And lastly the focus of skills is recognized as another emerging category. In this context this area of skills is defined in more general aspects with practical skills which children can acquire in their process of growth and development. The use of exercises or activities can stimulate the learning process of skills. As TR1 explains with painting and the use of painting tools for developmental practice.

'then especially the painting and fine motor exercises and all eye and hand cooperation.'
(TR1)

One exercise that was narrated as a pedagogical practice involves counting. It has a physical aspect with counting something physical that children can observe and touch. It evokes sensory learning with counting, but also there is an element of memorization that is discussed. There also is this use of patterns and repetition which can collaborate with music as this teacher describes how children were engaged and worked with musical tones.

'But then I realized that five string kantele is a very pedagogical instrument here in early childhood education. You can count, there is only five strings, and you can- you can play with those five strings, you can learn, and you can try to remember what you have to remember to this song or you can take those tones' (TU2)

'There are three tones very easily, and it's very easy to mark the children - strawberry and blueberry and- and cloudberry tones. So it's easy to teach that way.' (TU2)

It was stated that a musical instrument could serve as a pedagogical tool for young children. Although it is implemented at a basic level which is taught with an age-appropriate method when children learn how to count and how to associate this skill of counting with a learning tool.

5.2 Implementing art integration

The next two themes that were generated according to the second research question are based off of the same interviews with the ECEC teachers along with the 10 hours of observation that occurred in this study. Observations will be clearly stated to how they fit within the theme and how practical aspects from the ECEC centers (either from center A or B) relate to what some of the teachers have described from their experiences or statements. One finding/theme emerged from the challenges that the ECEC teachers have experienced or would

notice when implementing the arts. In the second finding, there was a significant number of details and examples of how the arts are integrated in these ECEC teaching practices. It was expressed through a dynamic process in how often this integration occurs, the resources of arts which fit into the integration process, and the subject mixture that is identified. While subjects and lessons are not the primary focus of Finnish ECEC centers and as it was stated in earlier theory that this involves a holistic view of teaching and care. However, there is some correlation to subjects and a preparation for these future disciplines that prepares young children for primary school.

5.2.1 Challenges ECEC teachers experience

A pattern concerning the lack of knowledge from the teacher's side or not knowing how to work with the arts with integration in mind revealed itself across the data. One teacher even questioned the meaning of the word "arts" in the interview process and some teachers from the previous theme did not recognize art integration. Being unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the execution/practice with the arts can disrupt the orientation of art integration and it can present itself as a challenge for teachers without the proper knowledge or experience.

TR3 mentions that they know of art integration but did not have previous experiences or education that pertains to this practice. The teacher explains that art integration is a part of the classes at the ECEC center, but not their preferred method. So, when describing this challenge without having the proper content knowledge, they explain the support that could help them confidently teach with the integration of the arts.

'I would really like training, more training in the way that I can approach different things, and specifically from the point of view of art. That is in a way, the training and ideas and tips would be the kind that that I would definitely need a lot more of, and then when I got them, I would have the courage in a way to try and implement it yourself.' (TR3)

There were some comments on the practical and physical materials or tools that are involved with this teaching practice. The materials were also commented on as a part of this aid that can support this challenge when being unaware of how to incorporate the arts.

'...how to use some of the materials, for example. Or how, for example, is it used properly? Well yes, I now know how to actually use a watercolor brush, but all of these involve my own techniques.' (TR2)

'Practical tips, yes. Not exactly the same as the small as always trainings that we do now.' (TR2)

With the discussion of challenges presented to the ECEC teachers there was an element of self-reflection that was expressed by one participant. Although this reflection digs into what the teacher knows with art integration and how that amount of knowledge makes it difficult to fully engage with this teaching.

'...at least I would feel that the challenge is here in me. That the material is there and everything is possible and the children get excited and so on, that if you just know how to bring that thing up.' (TR1)

Another example of this uncertain knowledge is represented with what the teacher notices from other teachers. TU1 reported that they had a significant amount of time and experience with art integration, but they observed other colleagues who have expressed feeling uncomfortable when working with specific types of arts.

'...sometimes I notice that- it's very, very often someone says "I can't sing, I can't-" these kind of things and then they say "I can't do all these things" but you can. Somehow you can do it. But there are these stances.' (TU1)

The challenges have also characterized an issue with resources, a challenge with spending good use of materials or not having enough materials. Resources in this context can refer to physical items, materials, tools, etc. Along with equipment and essentially people/staff as support.

What is available and the value of resources and support can depend on program to program, as TU2 states. They explain that this idea varies in the ECEC field and how the use of these resources also connects with teachers' courage whether they understand or do not understand how to work with these materials.

'We have different kind of situations in different kindergartens and these places where we have early childhood education.' (TU2)

'Depends on equipment and resources and knowledge and courage to do things.' (TU2)

This teacher also mentions this struggle with bigger class groups of children. Resources and the support of adults go along with this situation since ECEC has specific guidelines for class ratios of children and adults/teachers present.

'But now stuff is changing and we don't have sometimes enough stuff, so we have to mix our groups and do that kind of thing.' (TU2)

'Oh, children haven't enough adults. Yes, and the groups are quite big. And of course, nowadays children have very much diagnosis. Different kinds of diagnosis. Here we have support and assistance here, but sometimes not enough.' (TU2)

An issue of space is presented by one of the teachers. TU1 has described another ECEC center where there are accommodating spaces that have a designated role where the arts can be worked with. However, the current ECEC center that this teacher works at does not necessarily have those kinds of rooms, so they must be mindful with the space that they work in.

'The rooms. Here when I'm working – rooms. When I'm not especially if I can make some rooms- There are painting rooms, and you can leave the things there. But it's not here. You always have to be thinking "where are we now" and there not so plenty of rooms at all.' (TU1)

In art integration there are some time restrictions that appear as a challenge. Since there are many responsibilities that teachers have in their shifts which can limit the possibilities for this integration. Especially from my visit and observations in center A, I noticed that teachers were very strict with the time and constantly looking at the clock. Activities and procedures are carefully timed and there is this constant motion when implementing routines in the ECEC schedule/timeframe.

'Challenges well, somehow I feel that we are always too busy here in early childhood education.' (TR3)

Responsibilities and this sense of being in a rush as an ECEC teacher is described by TR3 when talking about these challenges with incorporating the arts. They state the process of integrating the arts as “themes” as something that they would like to flesh out while teaching, but there simply is not always enough time. Or to expand on this properly, it requires more time.

'I wish we had more time to calm down around the themes of things with that [art integration], to expand the different methods of operation or approaches that can be used.' (TR3)

'It will take longer, but I feel that even if we shouldn't be in a hurry, we are still in a hurry, sometimes that time sets limits.' (TR3)

TU2 also states this same notion of time as TR3 did. Although in the sense that it takes more time, and it requires collaboration between teachers when working together.

'And this cooperation takes time. Quite much. And- and we have many other things to do in our working time than only this and being with children.' (TU2)

Again with the idea of collaboration, TU1 describes how they cannot work alone and cannot decide on art integration-based lessons on their own. This is a process that must be done with teachers working together, and with planning this can take an additional amount of time.

'I have to discuss with everyone. I have to- I can't be a "big star" when I do these things, we are doing it together and we plan it together.' (TU1)

So for this teacher, they must be mindful not only of the space or room that they work with. But also with the teachers and staff as they need to be informed and the teachers need to work together as this teacher [TU1] works with an arts-based activity.

5.2.2 Signs of subject mixture in arts-based activities

One recurring pattern in teachers' responses of integrating the arts was this frequency of teaching this practice in multiple situations or at many points of time. All five teachers had admitted that this integration does occur or that they have worked with these methods. The teachers were given a definition of art integration during the interview from the researcher and once they understood the definition of art integration (if they did not recognize or understand it previously) then they could state if they have taught with this in mind.

During my observations in center A, I also witnessed this practice firsthand. The teacher(s), staff, or teaching assistants would walk their respective group of children to the library for interactive storytelling and reading sessions. Groups of children from the ECEC center would have their turn for this process and library activities. This occurred about once a month for the children for them to

get the opportunity with interactive literacy learning. And from the interviews the teachers would state how often art integration was executed from their own practice.

'In other words, we use a little bit of that. Weekly, almost daily.' (TR2)

'...so in many ways we use them every week.' (TR2)

'I'm working with it nearly all the time because I'm using art methods when I'm working here.' (TU1)

In this case it was stated that it is used, but also follows an example of the integration method when it may be more relevant. Such as a holiday season, in which both ECEC centers A and B did have some of the children's artworks that were displayed across the facility's interior. Although this was more apparent in center B due to the time that was spent there, the researcher was closer to the winter holiday season. And another example states the specific age group that they associate the teaching with.

'But yes, that it always depends on the situation. Now it's coming up, for example, Christmas...' (TR3)

'Well yes, with those little ones under the age of three.' (TR1)

The frequency of art integration was also stated as something "conscious," a natural occurrence that is part of the framework and pedagogy of ECEC. It is described as a daily teaching method that continues throughout the day. Also somewhat situational but correlates still with pedagogy.

'Yes, and I mean- the whole work here is including these arts. And it's a – how can I say it somehow, a conscious action.' (TU2)

'And it contains different kind of parts in early childhood education work and nowadays we do this work like everyday pedagogy. So all these situations here are pedagogical and we have those important little things containing in every situation when the children came in the morning. And continuing the whole day the arts comes in everyday situations here.' (TU2)

There were various tools, techniques, and descriptions of examples when working with the arts that are noted from the observations and from teachers' descriptions. From the ECEC centers they were well equipped with various types of devices and tools that would support the care and teaching practices for the children. I had noticed that there were designated spaces for specific activities, for example in the special education room in center A, there was a section in the room that had a variety of resources for the children. These resources would include books, craft materials, toys, a drying rack for children's artwork, and so on. Tablets would be implemented for children to learn and play. This process was explained by a teacher from center A who described the game on the tablets to help children by conceptualizing emotions when dressing a character in the game. It was an activity that processes the emotional development for children, although it works with technological equipment that children can work with many factors in singing, music, drawing on the screen, etc.

There are many purposes that can emerge from technology and electronic devices and tools. Such as another process that was explained from TR1 along with other teachers while I had my observation period. This activity involved the use of technology and a fixed scene that was created by the ECEC teachers and the staff. For Father's Day the teachers worked with the children in the youngest age group (mice group) for example, by crawling from underneath a table which displayed a "Happy Father's Day" sign/poster. This was a recorded clip that was generated and imbedded into a QR code which could be accessed for the children's parents.

'Yes, a video was made for the Father's Day card, with a QR code on it' (TR1)

Resources from the ECEC center are also used in the integration process by using what is available to the teachers. For example, the amenities and the space of their own gym were used as a resource for the teachers. This space is mostly specific for physical activities, but it was also used for other activities, such as musical learning activities. In center B I noticed they had various equipment that children could use for play and exercise, but also a few other elements that could fit the arts in the kinesthetic and process of movement that is acted upon in physical education. This was described by TU2 with the elements of music that included a CD player in the corner of the gym. Time spent outdoors was also implemented for children, whether it be an outdoor break, playing outside, or nature activities in the forest. Children would also have various activities related to artmaking and crafts. This was sometimes done in the cafeteria space too besides the regular classrooms from center A. Although both centers A and B emphasized this importance of outside time which also acts as a resource for teachers when they go to the forest and to work with natural elements (i.e., twigs, leaves, stones) as further educational tools.

'We include music and art, visual arts and the maths. And of course the gym. This is a very good, good possibility to mix things. For example, we have something- some things of the gym area. What we are training in this month. So we have this little track here, and then we have music here.' (TU2)

'And for example, when we were here yesterday with our younger children, we came here and I said, "Hey we have some music here, let's vote which music you want to listen here." And then I take three possibilities of CDs.' (TU2)

'And building own instruments from stones and sticks and- it's easy to do because we have good materials.' (TU2)

From the discussion of working with the forest as a resource, TR2 described the aid of photographing. They described how the forest is an example of a place where children can learn about natural sciences. From the observations, I noticed

that children could work with the ECEC center's tablets which have camera options and with the aid from teachers they can learn how to tinker with basic photography elements.

'But of course in the past, yes it has been used last year, yes, photographs are also used. We take pictures of the forest and plants and then we combine it with painting or something.' (TR2)

As a result of proper equipment or possible resources and the ability to integrate the arts, there were some examples of subject mixture or the preparation of subjects for young children. The descriptions of subjects were sometimes presented more generally as an area of discipline, but also in terms of how these subjects are conducted and modified for young children. As some children in these age groups are too young to speak or to make out words and may communicate more in the non-verbal sense. Of course some of the communication is expressed through sounds, cries, and babbling, but these ages are the introduction for possible subjects or skills that are acquired when learning about discipline methods (i.e., counting).

Throughout the data corpus there was a pattern of language and linguistic elements that can align with the arts. This topic of the arts and communication was expressed earlier with the kantele example and the boy who could not speak with the teacher. Although this finding relates more to the sense that the arts can serve an emotional connection despite language barriers. However, within these next statements it shows how the arts can work alongside subjects.

'...That is, precisely in the language-rich world and art. They can be combined with mathematics and art, that is actually, I have used it in music, painting, and so on...' (TR3)

'...you can connect all kinds of things with art, music, painting and then link them to mathematics and a rich world in languages.' (TR3)

'And we have gym with colors or music or dancing and we can mix art to the math'
(TU2)

This statement looks into what is also needed from the ECEC guidelines, which can relate some national history or customs with teaching. Of course, these are young children in ECEC, so they are not necessarily being taught in-depth with cultural backgrounds, but it is an introduction. From my observations I witnessed groups working with handicrafts in both centers A and B. And while children work with crafts which includes fibers, textiles, and sewing, there were generally multiple teachers that would assist in this process. From TU2's example, the discipline of language followed into this significance with the arts, but more so on its significance for the Finnish cultural identity.

'...and I include these, everything what I do here. For example, own roots and culture, it's the basics here in Finland and our ECE culture. Our own folk music and handicrafts and these kind of things. Drawing and paintings, and of course, literature and language. Because we have very rich language and it's a big part, and storytelling...' (TU2)

The subject of mathematics was repeated on several occasions (and stated in previous quotes). Although it can use specific techniques which allow the arts to help children learn some basic structures like counting in mathematics. Two teachers explained certain techniques which involved the arts to assist children when being introduced to basic math.

'Well, the mathematics is teddy math, so it's a tabletop theater every time you play with a teddy bear, so it's used in quite a few places.' (TR2)

'Of course the songs have mathematics like that, even when you count that one little elephant like these different songs where the numbers are repeated.' (TR1)

This introduction of mathematics is implemented so that young children can grasp the basics of mathematical thinking with elements that can be fun and

playful. Such as the use of theater, imagining multiple animals, and through song. Again, it is an introduction, but with these aids from the arts, play, and activities this helps children to get an idea of basic skills which are part of subjects/disciplines.

6 DISCUSSION

In this last chapter, the remaining sections address the examination of the results and concluding thoughts on the findings. This is followed by the evaluation of the study (or limitations) which will reflect the validity and trustworthiness for this research. Which then leads to the discussion of further research. The concluding remarks consult the ongoing conversation of research and the topics of this study in which ECEC and the arts will continue to expand in further studies.

6.1 Recognizing art integration

The understanding and levels of recognition in the scope of art integration was interesting as there was some variety. Almost half of the participants were familiar with the term and the other half required clarification as this was a new term for them. There were some questions in the interview stage that asked about teacher's backgrounds, previous knowledge, and education or training which involved art integration. Again some of the teachers had educational upbringing which had experience with the arts or art integration and the others did not. Or they would state that they did not have much experience in addition to working with this teaching method [in art integration].

There was an interesting perspective from teachers that would digest this term. When they were not exactly familiar with or do not know how they would personally define this term, they would state that art integration speaks for itself. This shows that the term could be subjective and interpretative depending on one's own ways of defining the method. One teacher had questioned the arts and found the arts to already be in a broad spectrum as it could involve so many elements when incorporating these art forms in teaching. Since the term of the arts was asked from one of the participants it could be due to the fact that the arts include multiple media as it was defined in theory from Mikow-Porto (1998).

From my observations and from the data as the findings progressed, it is apparent that art integration is a common practice and a routine method that progresses throughout the field of ECEC. It was clearly mentioned that the arts are a part of the ECEC core curriculum according to the Finnish National Agency for Education (2022). So, this research proves that this is also implemented and reflected in practice. Some of the teachers' direct responses that concern this practice show that they may not always recognize this integration from their own personal teaching execution, but it is there. Which may be a result in their comfort in what they know about the arts, although this idea is more significant later on in the third theme.

6.2 Learning opportunities enhanced from tools in the arts

In order for art integration to take full effect, there must be some kind of aid from the arts to learn another context. This was fully defined when working with a type of art form or the arts in general when mixing or learning a subject/skill (John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, n.d.; Silverstein & Layne, 2010; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala, 2016). The findings have resulted in the process of learning and development in children with emotional skills, the learning process in general, and practical matters when obtaining new skills. The degrees and measurement of emotional competencies in young children is critical as children are learning so much from the surrounding world/society and from what is processed in the human experience (Huotilainen, Rankanen, Grothe, Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, & Mäkelä, 2018; Philips et al., 2010; Baum, 2019; Reynolds & Valerio, 2017).

There were statements of joy and motivation when working with the arts as this eased and created enjoyment when children learn. When learning is fun, this can create connections in the learning process and prompt interest when learning new content. Enjoyment in learning while it is motivational for children, it also can allow factors of discovery and feeling when determining how one truly feels about their own interests. Or even in the sense of play which was also

demonstrated in the core curriculum for ECEC in Finland as an important value (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022). This emotional connection can grant meaning in content rather than being coerced into learning something just for the sake of it. Another finding showed the value of music as a response to confidence building in children or as a way to open up to others. In relation to music expression, it was stated that it can be a creative experience which involves creative play that is not only restricted to the development of cognitive learning/thinking (Reynolds & Valerio, 2017). There are various arguments in the emotional operations that music can express, but it was interesting to see how parents would notice a shift with their children as they began to express themselves through singing. Or the example of learning a new instrument with a teacher despite having a language barrier. Music allowed this emotional experience to serve as the connection for children and adults as its own language or method of communicating expressions to each other.

The learning process is unique and an individual trait since everyone has different methods that work in their favor. It has been commonly stated that the influences of learning are tied with cognitive development (Mikow-Porto, 1998) or measured from legislative acts that promote academic success and performance (NCLB, 2022). In art integration there is this element of interdisciplinary teaching when working with multiple fields (i.e., arts and other content areas), which is generally learner-driven (Park & Son, 2010). However, this is recognized in the Finnish curriculum by allowing a space for children to act on autonomy when making their own choices in their learning and care. This was seen throughout the observations in the ECEC centers as teachers would guide the children to take account of their own activity decisions or choices in materials. The Finnish National Agency for Education (2022) also connects young children's learning in ECEC programs with an opportunity to engage in intense development and learning with pedagogy and through play.

There are many theories and methods of learning styles that are shown across studies, but it is important to recognize that one approach of learning (i.e., listening), may not be as effective to some children as it is to others. Having

content that is versatile and has an element of challenges also proves to help with this learning experience as children cannot learn more if they are not challenged. Sometimes this results just by learning a new media, and this can easily be achieved when working with any type of art form.

6.3 Challenges in art integration

A few properties were analyzed as challenges that ECEC teachers encounter in art integration. One surprising element of these findings was the lack of knowledge when working with the arts. There are reports that the arts do not always get recognized or designated time for its practice in other educational contexts (Hardy, 2011). However it is common in the Finnish practice according to the national core curriculum (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022). Still, it is stated that there could be additional training sessions that are executed for teachers to build their confidence when working with unfamiliar materials such as the arts (Turkka, Haatainen, & Aksela, 2017). It was an interesting aspect when considering the teacher training and continuing education for teachers as they progress in their career. Without experience and knowledge of arts-based activities or techniques created somewhat insecure notions for teachers to implement or integrate the arts as a learning method. Although this was only present for some teachers, two of the teachers were more comfortable with arts integration as they had various opportunities and experiences with the arts.

Resources, materials, and the space in the ECEC centers was another challenge that teachers commented on. With resources and support, there was an issue that concluded that there were not enough adults in the facility. When working with young children this is an important aspect since supervision and guidance can be so crucial. It was reported that the teachers face big groups in some of the classes and at least with ECEC it is also important to maintain proper adult-child ratios. There are specific guidelines that can also be found from the Finnish National Agency for Education (2022) which account for the numbers of teachers aligned with children. Along with equipment and space was a potential

challenge for teachers. The spaces were shared with various adults and children from my observations since there is this constant flow of movement. Children are not confined to one room until their parents pick them up, so teachers have to be aware of the space and to recognize what they can do in that space and the duration for their planned activities.

Time restrictions were discussed as challenges for teachers since they already have a significant number of other responsibilities besides teaching and working with children. As one teacher states that it would be healthier for teachers to have more time so that they can focus on building their teaching content rather than always being in a rush. I noticed this aspect even while planning and scheduling these one-on-one interviews with the teachers, as it was a bit of a challenge at times to even meet with them. And after the interviews most of the teachers were already in a rush to continue their work since time is a very valuable component in teachers' responsibilities. In addition, time also includes proper planning since teachers work collaboratively and must plan together. Especially with art integration, it cannot always be an independent act and requires the attention of other teachers.

6.4 Possible subject mixture from the arts

There was a consistent quantity of examples that displayed this subject mixture which generally involved visual arts, music, singing, dance, movement, theater, photography, and other elements as defined from Reif and Grant (2010). With these different mediums mentioned, there were a variety of ways that these art forms can connect and contribute to the learning of subject matters. As Silverstein and Layne (2010) explain that with the connection of an art form or multiple art forms along with another subject area then these two ideas will meet and evolve into this practice. In relation to the second research question of this study, it was evident that the arts were consistently incorporated into everyday pedagogy and the care and development practices of ECEC. It was used frequently and sometimes daily, but also for specific events and holidays which generate the

opportunity to work with a variety of art forms and to connect it with learning skills that prepare children for subject matter.

In addition to the regular occurrence of art integration, there were supportive matter as forms of techniques, materials, and resources that could make this implementation possible. The spaces and classrooms were equipped with sufficient materials and equipment to support the arts and ECEC teachers had an aspect of flexibility when working with this integrative approach as they could work in other rooms (i.e., technology room, cafeteria, library) as the arts do not need to be confined to one specific room. Teachers work and plan together and they have the support of other staff members. This teamwork was seen in centers A and B as teachers would announce and discuss with their colleagues on the matters of which groups they would work with and what they would be doing. It was often seen that teachers did not necessarily always work alone and had another teacher or staff member present with the children.

The pattern of two specific subjects were repeated from the teachers: literature/language and mathematics. There have been various studies and links with the benefits of the arts as it pertains to the literacy and linguistic development in children. Such as the study from Greenfader and Brouillette (2013) which explained that the use of arts-based activities can enhance literacy skills and has supported ELLs. Mathematics is mentioned at a more basic level in these findings; however, it is more of an introduction to the components of mathematics which could include counting or working with blocks. And of course, relations to the national culture and language also correspond to art integration. As it is an important part of Finnish education, to engage with one's own history and language.

6.5 Limitations

The evaluation of the study addresses the limitations concerning its validity, reliability, and ethics of the investigated phenomenon. Limitations from the

study are reflected upon the challenges that emerged in the thesis process. Possible biases are also inspected when addressing the data collection and analysis stages.

During the analysis steps and even afterwards, the concepts of validity emerged when writing a report of findings that could display the truth or accuracy from the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that when disclosing the narrative of the analysis it should be comparable to the supporting data, concise, and understandable within the context of the outlined themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). This concern with validity was also discussed earlier in subtext 4.4 when asking questions that are open ended and within the interpretative paradigm. Thematic analysis is already quite broad when making sense of the data and attempting to understand the perspectives of the participants. To help aid this process I tried to carefully understand my data and to fully connect with the statements that were told. It was a repetitive process that required reading over the data various times and repeating the analysis portion multiple times.

In relation to transparency, Yin states that the reporting of the results and the procedural process must be understandable for the audience to inspect the work with data evidence that is relevant to the findings (Yin, 2016). When listing the results which leads into the discussion, I tried to create clear subtexts that describe its meaning and significance from the supporting evidence. Such as the themes which were organized according to the relevant research question. Having clear research questions makes this process easier when analyzing specific points from the participants thus it reveals results that are comprehensible to the reader.

Reliability is defined by Tracy as the consistency of the research method and that the prospects of the study could be replicated the same way from another perspective or researcher (Tracy, 2013). This correlates to the trustworthiness when measuring data that the sources, data process, and reporting data that is true and close as possible to the source when making potential interpretations. By checking my steps during each stage of the study, this helped me to correct any possible errors or to make any corrections that were needed. There was a

significant amount of attention to detail especially when transcribing and translating material, as this was my main objective to produce the text format of the interviews to be as accurate as possible.

Regarding ethical concerns, one of my main challenges during my data collection was the details of language and if its properties and experiences were translated correctly for the participants and for myself to understand the meaning from these interviews. This is due to the fact that my participants had English as a second language, so it is difficult for me to understand how they perceive my research and questioning. I wondered how much I should explain the definition of art integration to my participants, but also questioned the idea of providing too much information since this could shape or structure their answers in a specific manner. It has been mentioned that researchers must make ethical decisions when coming across ethical dilemmas and that these decisions can be situational and contextual (Wiles, 2012). So, with these language dilemmas, I tried to pre-plan and plan ahead in case of any situation that could emerge. I also think it is important to analyze my own situation as a researcher. Since I am trying to understand art integration from the Finnish perspective as someone who does not have a prior background or an upbringing with the educational system, I did not grow up in Finland nor was I a student in the system until university/higher education. My school experiences and educational background predominantly come from the American perspective, and I have a close connection with art integration in the United States since I was certified to be a visual arts teacher. This made me think critically about my interview questions as I did not want them to lean towards a certain ideology or to be biased in the sense that would make art integration only have a positive role.

6.6 Suggestions for further research and conclusion

Initially while collecting data for this study, I questioned my approach when gathering data and if the interview format was the most appropriate method to

collect authentic, reflective, and personal experience from the ECEC teachers. Especially when considering the aspects of language in these interviews, which two participants were speaking in a language that is not native to them, and the other three participants had interviews which were conducted in a language that is not native to me, the researcher. Perhaps with a narrative approach and implementing narrative analysis would have resulted in different responses if participants would be able to write/type their experiences in their own native language and in their own time that is not fixed and structured. The interviews are a bit stricter with a specific timeline that is set at a specific hour, so this could indicate more of a stressed response. Whereas written responses could be done in the teachers' own time and done outside of their work environment.

It would be interesting to see this study conducted with new teachers in the profession or perhaps pre-service teachers that are training to become teachers. This is due to the fact that the participants from this study already have prior experiences and history with teaching. There is also a possibility that the results of this study would differ if the context would include more ECEC centers in different municipalities across Finland.

It would be interesting to have more accessibility of the arts, art integration, and ECEC practices in Finland that are reported in English. During my search for literature and previous studies that were conducted, there was not so much information that addresses these topics. Although, it is possible that there are some research studies that are reported in Finnish. More literature was found and accessible in terms of ECEC and the educational system. Finland has a reputation for education such as previous high ranking for the International Program for Student Assessment (PISA) from 2018 and amongst other previous years which ranked Finland in the top three education systems within OECD countries (Sahlberg, Gardner, & Robinson, 2021). In addition, there is a possibility that there will be an increased attention at a worldwide level that is due to Finland receiving the seventh year as the world's happiest country from the World Happiness Report (Helliwell, Layard, Sachs, De Neve, Aknin, & Wang, 2024). With this in mind, having accessible studies of these topics in the arts and

integration in Finland could serve as an example for other educational systems that may struggle with incorporating the arts.

The purpose of this study does not resolve or end the conversation of the arts, art integration, ECEC, or all of these topics combined with each other. This work serves to break this barrier of the “art world” since there are various stereotypes which follow the arts. In this research, the aim is to connect educators with the arts to be seen as accessible, something that everyone can work with, and a learning experience. Within art integration this ties closely with the pedagogy of student learning and as an outlet of expression. It is hoped that this text is understandable for all readers despite the individual’s background whether it involves education, the arts, or any background in particular.

This thesis examined a small scale of this topic within the Finnish context and there is much more that could be addressed from other perspectives, municipalities, communities, educators, etc. Even at a global level the relation of the arts and ECEC could have different meanings and implementations in other countries, or it possibly has no relationship or priority in some educational centers. While art integration is a common practice in Finland it can be executed in a simple format, however, the concern is that teachers just may not realize that they are teaching with this method despite working with it all of the time. The experiences young children face in ECEC is already known as a critical aspect in children’s development, but for the teachers involved it is always beneficial to reflect on the teaching methods and practices that lead into the wellbeing and development for children.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview questions in both English and Finnish.

ENGLISH VERSION

Questions regarding art integration

1. Have you heard of the term art integration? What do you know about it?

(If the participant does not know, then give its definition)

Art integration has been defined as “an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form. Students engage in a creative process which connects an art form and another subject area and meet evolving objectives in both disciplines.” For example, teaching math with a song or dance, teaching science with the use of painting, etc.

2. Do you incorporate the arts in your instruction and how so?
3. What kind of training or experience do you have with the arts?
4. Are your lessons interdisciplinary - involving a connection between two or more subjects/disciplines?
5. What benefits could you see in the integration of the arts?
6. What challenges could you see in the integration of the arts?
7. In your opinion, how does the Finnish ECEC field value the arts based on your teaching experience?
8. What kind of support would you need if you taught with the approach of art integration?

Appendix 2. Interview questions in both English and Finnish.

FINNISH VERSION

Kysymyksiä taiteen integroinnista

1. Oletko kuullut termistä taiteen integraatio? Mitä sinä tiedät siitä?

(Jos osallistuja ei tiedä, anna määritelmä)

Taiteen integraatio on määritelty "lähestymistapaksi opetukseen, jossa lapset rakentavat ja osoittavat ymmärrystä taiteen kautta. Opiskelijat osallistuvat luovaan prosessiin, joka yhdistää taiteen muodon ja toisen sisällöllisen alueen ja täyttää kehittyvät tavoitteet molemmilla tieteenaloilla. Esimerkiksi matematiikan opettaminen laululla tai tanssilla, luonnontieteiden opettaminen maalauksen avulla jne.

2. Miten sisällytät taidetta opetukseesi?
3. Millainen koulutus tai kokemus sinulla on taiteen parista?
4. Ovatko oppituntisi poikkitieteellisiä - yhdistävätkö kaksi tai useampia oppiaiheita?
5. Mitä etuja voisit nähdä taiteen yhdistämisessä opetukseen?
6. Mitä haasteita näet taiteen integroinnissa?
7. Miten Suomen varhaiskasvatus mielestäsi arvostaa taiteita opetuskokemuksesi perusteella?
8. Millaista tukea tarvitsisit, jos opettaisit taiteen integraation lähestymistavalla?