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Internalising Nine Character Pillars Through Clapping Games in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Character education in early childhood requires activities that connect moral language with participation and everyday conduct. This study examines how clapping games supported the introduction and initial internalisation of nine character pillars at TK Barunawati, Bengkulu. A qualitative descriptive design was used during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. Data were gathered through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, with teachers and children selected for their involvement in the activities. Analysis involved data reduction, narrative display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that researcher-designed chants combined short value statements, movement, rhythm, modelling, and repetition across opening, main, and closing activities. Children recalled phrases, coordinated with peers, and sometimes initiated or led the games. Younger children experienced greater difficulty synchronising words and movements and required slower demonstrations. The study contributes a process account of transforming clapping from an incidental classroom energiser into intentional character learning. Given the approximately one-month implementation and absence of longitudinal assessment, the findings indicate engagement and emerging understanding rather than established, enduring character change.

Keywords: Character; Clapping; Internalisation; Kindergarten; Habituation

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INTRODUCTION

Character education for young children depends on how values become intelligible in everyday experience. Words such as honesty, responsibility, fairness, and tolerance can be introduced verbally, but their meaning remains limited if children have no opportunity to connect them with actions and relationships. Early childhood classrooms therefore need activities that make moral language concrete without reducing character to memorised slogans. The educational challenge is to combine the accessibility of play with deliberate opportunities to recognise, discuss, and practise valued conduct.

The nine character pillars associated with Ratna Megawangi and the Indonesia Heritage Foundation provide the framework used in this study. The pillars encompass love of God and creation; independence, discipline, and responsibility; honesty, trustworthiness, and wise speech; respect and courtesy; generosity, helpfulness, and cooperation; confidence, creativity, and perseverance; leadership and fairness; kindness and humility; and tolerance, peace, and unity. Megawangi (2016) presents character education as a sustained educational

responsibility. The framework is useful because it links spiritual, personal, and social values rather than confining character learning to isolated rules.

Comprehensiveness, however, does not guarantee equally meaningful teaching of every pillar. In the setting examined here, teachers more readily addressed concrete expectations such as helping and discipline than abstract ideas such as fairness or leadership. Verbal advice also competed with children's changing attention and preference for active participation. A framework that is clear to adults may consequently remain unevenly experienced by children. The issue is not only which values a school endorses, but how its classroom practices make each value accessible and relevant.

Clapping games offer one possible bridge. They combine sound, movement, shared timing, and short verbal expressions within an activity familiar to kindergarten children. In many classrooms, clapping functions as an energiser or a signal between tasks. Its familiarity can be an advantage because participation does not require elaborate equipment. Yet the same familiarity can conceal an educational limitation: if the activity has no explicit connection to learning, its effect may end when attention returns to the next task. An intentional character game must therefore connect the chant with both meaning and action.

The distinction between engagement and internalisation is central. A child who repeats a phrase about honesty may remember its wording without applying it outside the game. Enjoyment can support continued participation, but it is not evidence of stable moral conduct. The present study therefore examines internalisation as an emerging process: values are introduced, negotiated through interaction, and connected with initial behaviour. Evidence of durable character formation would require observation across settings and over a longer period than was available in this study.

TK Barunawati, Bengkulu, provided the context for examining this process. The researcher had teaching experience at the school and developed clapping activities informed by earlier practice elsewhere. That prior experience motivated the design but is not treated as evidence from the present fieldwork. The study focuses specifically on how the activities were implemented at TK Barunawati, how teachers mediated the value messages, how children responded, and what developmental difficulties appeared during participation.

Recent research provides both support and cautions for the proposed activity. Joint musical play has been associated with helping and sharing in preschoolers (Beck & Rieser, 2022), whereas a controlled field replication found no prosocial advantage from musical synchronisation (Baier et al., 2021). A more recent classroom trial of staged group music games reported improved cooperation (Yang et al., 2026). The differing results show that rhythm should not be treated as an automatic producer of character. Activity design, social context, what children actually do together, and the behaviours assessed remain important.

Other studies broaden this distinction. A rhythm and movement programme delivered by kindergarten teachers examined social and behavioural development (Williams & Bentley, 2026), while a mixed-reality movement study investigated synchrony and prosocial behaviour under controlled conditions (Gali et al., 2025). Research with younger toddlers also distinguishes the effects of emotionally different music on different helping tasks (Siu & Ho, 2022). These are adjacent rather than equivalent interventions: the present study uses short spoken value phrases and hand clapping within an Indonesian kindergarten. Its contribution is to document the local pedagogical process without importing effect estimates from those other settings.

Nine-pillar implementation research in Indonesia provides the closer content comparison. Putri and Prahesti's study examines the use of nine-pillar books (Putri & Prahesti, 2025), while another character education discussion presents an overlapping set of spiritual, personal, and social values (Rachmah et al., 2022). The question here is how comparable value content is made available through an embodied, recurring activity, how teachers connect it with

everyday conduct, and how participation differs for children who need additional coordination support.

The research questions are how the nine character pillars were introduced and initially internalised through clapping games, and how the games were organised within daily teaching. The article contributes an account of the transition from incidental clapping to planned character learning. Its practical value lies in identifying the role of short chants, embodied participation, teacher modelling, repetition, and developmental adjustment. Its analytical value lies in preserving the difference between remembering values, participating in socially organised activity, and demonstrating enduring moral habits.

METHODS

Research Design and Context

The study adopted a qualitative descriptive design at TK Barunawati, Bengkulu, during the second semester of 2025/2026. The kindergarten serves children approximately four to six years old in Groups A and B. Researcher-designed clapping games were integrated into ordinary classroom teaching over approximately one month. The focus was the implementation process, teacher mediation, and children's responses, rather than an experimentally established effect on character. The researcher's teaching experience informed the activity design and access to the classroom.

Participants and Sampling

Teachers and children were selected purposively for their direct involvement in character learning and clapping activities. The findings draw on three teacher perspectives and brief accounts from participating children. Group B formed the main stated focus, while the reported experiences also include Group A children's coordination difficulties. The overall number of children observed is not consistently specified. Consequently, the findings are presented as contextual evidence about participation and developmental variation, rather than a numerical comparison of age groups.

Instruments and Materials

The main material was a repertoire of nine short Indonesian chants corresponding to the nine character pillars. Most phrases were followed by three claps, with an affirmative closing expression followed by two claps. Teachers demonstrated words, movement, rhythm, and expression, then guided individual, paired, or collective participation. Observation addressed attention, enthusiasm, recall, coordination, peer interaction, and relevant behaviour. Semi-structured teacher interviews explored implementation and difficulties; brief child conversations explored enjoyment and meaning. Photographs, videos, teacher notes, and classroom documentation supplied complementary evidence.

Procedure and Data Collection

Clapping was incorporated into opening, main, and closing activities. Opening sequences invited shared attention; main activities connected value phrases with themes and everyday examples; closing sequences revisited the message. The researcher participated in observation while teachers led and supported the activity. The interview material records teacher and child accounts from late March to mid-April 2026. These encounters describe a short implementation period and do not constitute a fixed experimental schedule. Individual names are replaced by role descriptions in the article.

Data Analysis

Data were reduced according to the research questions, displayed in thematic narratives and tables, and interpreted through conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The analysis considered the introduction of values, interactive participation, and emerging

application alongside the organisation of the games. Teacher accounts, observation, child responses, and documentation were considered together. The terms value transformation, transaction, and transinternalisation are used as interpretive categories, without treating their boundaries as independently validated stages. No standardised character scale, inter-rater coefficient, or statistical test was reported.

Ethical Considerations

Children's responses are reported without personal identifiers, and the article avoids presenting developmental difficulty as a fixed individual trait. The researcher's simultaneous design and observation roles are acknowledged as an interpretive limitation. The documentation does not provide a formal ethics-review identifier or detailed consent record; no unrecorded procedure is claimed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Figure 1 summarises how the value messages, rhythmic activity, social participation, and emerging meaning are connected in the classroom account. Teacher example and developmental adjustment support the whole sequence.

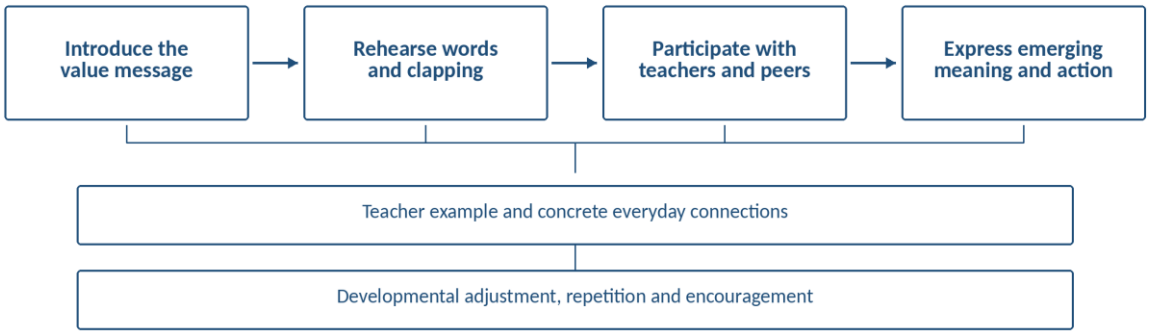

Figure 1. Clapping activities as a bridge between value messages and participation

From Incidental Clapping to Planned Character Learning

Before the activity was developed, clapping was mainly used as an energiser or a short interruption between classroom tasks. The study introduced a more deliberate structure: each chant corresponded to a character pillar, teachers linked its wording with a learning purpose, and the sequence was revisited within the school day. The key change was therefore functional rather than technological. A familiar classroom practice became an intentional means of presenting and revisiting values.

Teachers described the earlier difficulty of sustaining children's attention through ordinary verbal explanation. Short rhythmic phrases gave children something to say and do while encountering the same message. One teacher reported that children sometimes repeated the chants during play without being instructed. This account indicates that the wording had become memorable and that participation extended beyond the immediately led activity. It does not establish that every repeated phrase was understood or consistently enacted.

The design also addressed uneven coverage of the pillars. Some values had previously been easier to connect with visible classroom behaviour than others. Naming all nine within a planned repertoire made them more available for teaching. However, inclusion within a chant should be distinguished from equal depth of understanding. The evidence supports more systematic presentation, while the extent of internalisation remained dependent on explanation, modelling, and opportunities to practise the corresponding conduct.

The Nine-Pillar Repertoire

Table 1 presents the value content of the clapping repertoire. The phrases are translated into English for the article, while implementation used the Indonesian wording familiar to the children. The table summarises the phrases used to introduce each pillar. It describes the designed messages rather than measured outcomes for each pillar.

Table 1. Value messages in the nine clapping sequences

Pillar	Translated chant content
1	Love God; care for friends; care for the environment
2	Be independent; be disciplined; be responsible
3	Be honest; be trustworthy; speak wisely
4	Be respectful; be courteous; be a good listener
5	Be generous; help others; cooperate
6	Be confident; be creative; persevere
7	Be a good leader; be a fair leader
8	Be kind; be humble; be polite
9	Be tolerant; love peace; stay united

Note. Implementation used Indonesian phrases. Most phrases are followed by three claps; each sequence ends with an affirmative expression and two claps.

The repertoire was intentionally brief. A typical sequence named a value, invited a rhythmic response, and moved to the next phrase before ending with a shared affirmative expression. This structure made the activity repeatable within ordinary classroom time. It also allowed teachers to use a recognisable pattern across different messages. Children could therefore focus on a new value phrase while retaining a familiar mode of participation.

Teachers connected the phrases with examples from everyday school life. Honesty was related to telling the truth, cooperation to tidying toys together, and tolerance to sharing and respecting peers. These connections were important because words alone could remain abstract. The game supplied a memorable cue, while the teacher's explanation supplied a situation in which the value could become intelligible. The educational unit was consequently the chant together with its contextual explanation and practice.

Some pillars overlapped in their wording. Courtesy appeared alongside respect and also within kindness and humility; cooperation related to helpfulness and collective responsibility. Rather than treating this overlap as a flaw, the repertoire can be understood as revisiting connected values through different entry points. Nevertheless, the study did not assess whether children differentiated closely related concepts. Teachers' use of concrete examples remained necessary to avoid presenting the pillars as interchangeable labels.

Introducing Values Through Modelling and Repetition

The first process identified in the study was the introduction of values, described as value transformation. Teachers presented the words and demonstrated accompanying actions with clear rhythm and expression. Children watched, listened, repeated the language, and copied the movements. This combined verbal and physical participation distinguished the activity from advice delivered while children remained passive.

A teacher contrasted the activities with verbal advice: "If we only explain through ordinary speech, the children quickly lose focus. With this clapping they become more enthusiastic" (teacher interview, 27 March 2026; translated from Indonesian). The account identifies the practical reason for combining value language with movement.

Teacher accounts emphasised repetition without overt pressure to memorise. The repeated pattern allowed children to encounter the same message several times while

experiencing the activity as play. Teachers perceived this as helpful for recall. The finding is a reported association between the repeated game and children's familiarity with the wording; no separate memory test or comparison with another method was conducted.

Modelling extended beyond the mechanics of clapping. Teachers were expected to demonstrate conduct consistent with the message, such as patient guidance, respectful speech, and encouragement. Their participation helped children recognise how to enter the activity and reduced hesitation among those unsure of the movements. Teachers also reported that less active demonstration could be followed by declining child attention. This places adult engagement within the implementation process rather than assuming that the chant operates independently.

Negotiating Values Through Shared Activity

The second process involved interaction, described in the study as value transaction. Children did not merely hear the message but participated in a socially coordinated activity. In paired or group clapping they adjusted to one another, waited, and followed a shared sequence. These requirements created immediate opportunities to practise cooperation and attention to others. The game's social organisation was therefore relevant alongside the words it contained.

Teachers reported children reminding peers about the sequence or rules. Such exchanges show that some responsibility for sustaining the activity moved beyond the adult leader. They also show why participation should not be equated with individual memorisation. A child's experience included noticing what others were doing and adjusting their own behaviour in response. This interaction offered a concrete setting in which words about cooperation and responsibility could be related to action.

Children's accounts supported this interpretation at a simple level. One child explained that clapping together required coordination; another linked playing well with being kind to friends. These statements do not demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the pillars. They do indicate that children could associate the activity with interpersonal expectations. The meaning expressed remained concrete and situated, which is consistent with the study's focus on emerging understanding.

Emerging Initiative and the Limits of Internalisation

The analysis also used the term transinternalisation for a more advanced process in which values begin to be appropriated. Some evidence is relevant to that interpretation: teachers reported children initiating the chants, leading peers, and explaining messages in their own words. These behaviours suggest increasing familiarity, confidence, and participation. They are particularly relevant where children moved from following a model to taking an active role within the group.

However, the descriptions of transaction and transinternalisation overlap considerably. Both include participation, peer interaction, and children's responses during the game. The present analysis therefore treats them as related aspects of an emerging process rather than as independently verified developmental stages. This avoids making a stronger claim than the evidence permits. Leadership within a chant, for example, is an observable classroom behaviour but does not establish stable leadership or fairness across situations.

The strongest evidence concerned the accessibility of value language and the quality of engagement. Evidence of sustained conduct outside the activity was less systematic. Teachers linked the messages to routines and described early behavioural signs, but the implementation was brief. Internalisation should consequently be understood as initial movement towards recognition and practice. The findings do not establish that all nine pillars had become enduring dispositions.

Opening Main and Closing Activities

The clapping repertoire was used across three parts of the teaching sequence. During opening activities, collective clapping helped establish readiness and shared attention. Teachers invited participation and used a familiar pattern to bring children into the learning situation. At this point, the activity had a preparatory role, but its value words also introduced the theme to be revisited later.

During main activities, teachers connected a chant with the learning theme and explained the meaning of its phrases. They guided participation, demonstrated movements, and related the message to concrete conduct. This was the clearest point at which clapping functioned as instruction rather than only classroom management. The value message was placed within an activity children could experience and discuss.

During closing activities, repetition reinforced the message encountered earlier. The same repertoire could therefore serve different functions across the day: readiness, contextual explanation, and recall. The study does not specify a fixed duration or frequency for every chant, so no standard dosage can be inferred. What was reported was a recurring and purposeful place within the daily sequence.

The structure also provided predictability. A teacher described children becoming more familiar with when to join and when to listen. Such familiarity can support participation without requiring lengthy new explanations for each activity. Still, predictability and responsiveness needed to coexist. A recognisable routine was helpful only if teachers could slow it down or change its complexity when children struggled.

Developmental Differences and the Need for Adjustment

The most clearly described difficulty involved younger children, particularly those around four years old in Group A. They struggled to synchronise words, movement, and rhythm. Teachers linked this to developing concentration and memory and responded with repeated, slower demonstrations and more intensive guidance. Group B children, approximately five to six years old, were described as more readily coordinating the components.

A child expressed difficulty and willingness together: “It is a little difficult, Ma’am, but I want to learn. I like clapping; it is fun” (child interview, 5 April 2026; translated from Indonesian). This response supports retaining effort and enjoyment in the account alongside incomplete coordination.

This pattern is not an experimentally established age effect. The study did not provide age-specific sample sizes, standardised coordination measures, or equivalent exposure across groups. It nevertheless identifies an implementation problem that teachers could observe. The same short chant can impose several simultaneous demands: listening to words, remembering their order, controlling movements, and attending to peers. Simplicity from an adult perspective does not guarantee accessibility for every child.

Children’s reported responses also showed persistence alongside difficulty. Some described the activity as challenging but enjoyable and expressed willingness to keep trying. This matters because hesitation was not necessarily rejection. Teachers could maintain participation through patient assistance rather than interpreting initial errors as lack of interest. The findings therefore support adjusting the pace and support, while avoiding the assumption that all children should perform a coordinated sequence immediately.

Tables 2 and 3 bring together the observed teaching sequence and the developmental adjustments indicated by participant accounts.

Table 2. Teaching sequence and child participation

Stage	Teacher practice	Reported or observed response
Opening	Lead a familiar collective clapping sequence	Children orient towards the activity and join
Main activity	Relate the chant to a theme and concrete conduct	Children rehearse, coordinate and discuss simple meanings
Closing	Revisit the value message through repetition	Children recall the phrase and sometimes initiate repetition

Note. The three stages describe the use of the repertoire within the school day, not independent experimental conditions.

Table 3. Developmental variation and responsive support

Issue	Evidence in the case	Support indicated
Coordination	Younger children struggle to combine words, movement and rhythm	Slower demonstrations and stepwise repetition
Confidence and effort	Some children enjoy the game while finding it difficult	Patient guidance and appreciation of attempts
Meaning beyond recitation	Recall is more visible than sustained conduct outside the game	Connect phrases with concrete situations and observe application
Adult mediation	Participation is linked with an active teacher example	Maintain clear demonstration and responsive pacing

Note. Suggested support is derived from the case; a comparative intervention test was not conducted.

Teacher Participation and Children's Initiative

Teacher participation was repeatedly connected with children's willingness to join. One teacher explained that children became more confident when the teacher participated actively, while attention could decline when the demonstration was less engaging. Teachers therefore did more than announce the title of a chant. They set the pace, modelled expression, showed the sequence, and adjusted their support as children tried to follow. These actions made participation possible for children with different levels of familiarity.

A teacher also described the value of small expressions of appreciation so that children felt recognised and wanted to try again. This account helps explain why errors did not necessarily end involvement. Some children reported difficulty and enjoyment together, and teachers responded through patient repetition. Persistence was visible as willingness to remain in the activity, rather than established as a general personality trait.

Children's initiative appeared when they repeated a chant without being directed or took a turn leading others. Teachers described these occasions as a change from children only listening to adult explanation. The evidence indicates growing ownership of the classroom routine. Nevertheless, initiative within a familiar sequence should be distinguished from independent application of all the named values. The observation is educationally meaningful because it creates further opportunities for sharing leadership, responding to peers, and talking about the value message.

Discussion

Interpreting Rhythm Through Convergent and Divergent Evidence

The findings should be understood against an evidence base that is promising but heterogeneous. Joint music-making has been associated with preschool helping and sharing (Beck & Rieser, 2022), and a staged classroom music-game intervention reported cooperation gains (Yang et al., 2026). However, a controlled field study found no prosocial effect of musical synchronisation (Baier et al., 2021). The local pattern of engagement is therefore plausible, but it cannot be used to claim that synchronised movement automatically produces moral

conduct. What children rehearse, with whom, and under what conditions remains part of the explanation.

A teacher-delivered rhythm and movement trial examines social and behavioural outcomes over a more specified programme (Williams & Bentley, 2026), while work involving embodied interaction and mixed reality investigates another form of synchrony (Gali et al., 2025). Findings concerning emotionally different music and toddler helping are also task-specific (Siu & Ho, 2022). These comparisons show why the present clapping game needs to be described in its own terms. It is a short, value-labelled classroom activity with teacher mediation, not a replication of those interventions or evidence of identical mechanisms.

Value Content Adult Example and Social Participation

The nine-pillar repertoire connects with Indonesian implementation research using books (Putri & Prahesti, 2025) and discussion of early childhood character values (Rachmah et al., 2022). Its distinguishing feature is the repeated combination of words and embodied participation. Khaironi's account of early childhood character education (Khaironi, 2017) and the knowing, feeling, and action perspective discussed by Susanti (Susanti, 2022) help clarify the intended direction of learning. The present evidence is strongest for accessible language, participation, and initial links with conduct. It does not verify that all dimensions have become stable habits.

Teacher mediation supplies the link between a chant and a situation in which a value matters. Empirical work on teacher example (Oktavia et al., 2024) and teacher roles in moral and religious learning (Siyami & Zaharuddin, 2023) supports attention to that link. Reviews addressing Islamic values (Ardiansari & Dimyati, 2021) and influences on religious and moral development (Susetya & Zulkarnaen, 2022) also place learning within adult and environmental relationships. These comparisons support combining the repertoire with consistent adult conduct and everyday opportunities for practice. They do not support replacing that environment with recitation of value words.

Developmental Accessibility and Purposeful Design

The difficulty among younger children highlights the need to separate an educational aim from a uniform performance demand. Guided-play evidence is sensitive to the forms of adult guidance and outcomes examined (Skene et al., 2022), while research connecting play and assessment shows that what teachers notice depends partly on their pedagogical orientation (Pyle et al., 2022). Children who do not lead or synchronise immediately may still be listening, remembering, or attempting to participate. A performance-based judgement of character would therefore risk confusing coordination with moral understanding.

Social and emotional programme research provides a related lesson about intentional design. Intervention mapping connects needs, aims, and teaching practices (Blewitt, Morris, et al., 2020), and a review examines how such programmes affect teachers as well as children (Blewitt, O'Connor, et al., 2020). Trials of preschool social-skills training (Larose et al., 2020), I Can Succeed (Kats Gold et al., 2021), and PATHS (Eninger et al., 2021) evaluate specified outcomes rather than assuming global improvement. The local clapping activity would benefit from similarly clear distinctions between recall, cooperation during play, persistence, and conduct beyond the game.

Finally, implementation must remain culturally and institutionally intelligible. Research on preschool programme adaptation identifies teachers' pedagogical cultures as an implementation factor (Norman et al., 2024), while research on Panca Cinta in RA settings illustrates how values can be connected with familiar routines (Seprya, 2026). The present case adds an accessible repertoire embedded in one kindergarten's daily practice. Its low equipment requirement supports feasibility, but the short duration and researcher involvement limit claims about sustainability. Longer observation should examine whether value meanings remain visible when the teacher is no longer leading the chant.

Study Limitations

The findings come from a single kindergarten, a short implementation period, and a researcher-involved design. The complete number of participating children and systematic observation frequencies were not supplied. These limitations restrict comparison across ages and assessment of the breadth of behavioural change. Teacher enthusiasm and the researcher's investment in the activity may also have influenced interpretation, although child difficulty and variation remained visible in the findings.

Further research should document implementation duration more precisely and follow conduct beyond the clapping session. Multiple observations of comparable situations would help distinguish familiarity with the routine from transfer of values. Clearer records of participant coverage and independent observations would also strengthen credibility. Such work could build on the present process account without presuming that memorisation, enjoyment, or coordinated performance are sufficient evidence of enduring character.

CONCLUSION

Clapping games at TK Barunawati connected the nine character pillars with short verbal messages, rhythm, movement, teacher modelling, and repeated classroom participation. Their principal contribution was to turn a familiar energiser into an intentional resource for introducing values and creating opportunities for cooperation, initiative, and persistence. Teachers gave the activity meaning by relating chants to concrete conduct and revisiting them during opening, main, and closing activities.

Children showed enthusiasm and emerging understanding, while younger participants required slower modelling and more guidance. The brief implementation and limited behavioural follow-up mean that enduring internalisation cannot be established. Continued use should combine developmental adjustment with observation of how children understand and enact values beyond the game.

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