



**THE PROJECT “STAR-LITTLE STAR”. STRENGTHENING  
4-AND 5-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN’S SOCIO-EMOTIONAL  
AND COLLABORATIVE SKILLS THROUGH SINGING AND  
REPRESENTING A SONG VISUALLY AND DRAMATICALLY**

**Eirini Nikolaou<sup>1i</sup>,  
Sofia-Spyridoula Zoi<sup>2</sup>,  
Aglaia Papageorgiou<sup>3</sup>,  
Konstantina Tzalali<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Senior Teaching Fellow,  
Department of Primary Education,  
University of Ioannina,  
Greece

<sup>2,3,4</sup>Early Childhood Educators,  
Greece

**Abstract:**

The present study explores the attitudes of early childhood children towards activities that combine the arts on the occasion of an original song and its visual and dramatic representation. The project was carried out in the context of a nursery school/kindergarten children’s (N=20) participation in a song contest that was conducted by “Make a wish” of Greece, an organization that aims to support children who are struggling with serious illnesses. The aims of the study were to cultivate children’s collaborative and social-emotional skills, to entertain them and to provide opportunities to encourage their creativity. The project was carried out in 4 stages: a) creating an original song on the theme of a star that makes wishes come true, b) young children learning to sing the song, c) recording the song in the studio, d) visual representation of the song working individually and in groups, d) creating of a video presentation that included the young children's paintings with the song as background music, d) dramatization of the song and its performance at the summer celebration of the school. The data were collected through observation, diary notes and children's products. General findings show that the young children were given opportunities to cultivate their creativity through their engagement in the activities, have fun, cooperate with each other, feel part of a larger group and cultivate social-emotional skills such as empathy, self-confidence, learning to accept the criticism of others and respect others’ views.

---

<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [enikolau@uoi.gr](mailto:enikolau@uoi.gr)

**Keywords:** music, visual and dramatical song's representation, early childhood education, empathy

## 1. Introduction

Music, movement and singing play a leading role in the everyday life of early childhood children (Barrett *et al.*, 2022; Burke, 2018). Singing combines music with language, promotes collaboration and communication (Kim, 2017), develops creative thought and activity in music (Barrett, 2006), contributes to language development (Hooper, 2023; Lawson-Adams *et al.*, 2022; Sušić, 2019; Kultti, 2013), to the expression of feelings (Ali & Peynircioğlu, 2006; Adachi & Trehub, 1998), but also it is a means to convey ideas, values and messages to children aiming at the "*acquisition of social values*" (Öztürk & Can A, 2020, p. 1061).

In preschool education, through music education, social-emotional skills (Váradi, 2022; Jucan & Simion, 2015; Raptis & Spanaki, 2017; Egermann & McAdams, 2013; Jacobi, 2012), which are necessary for the future social relationships of children, social interaction (Ilari, 2016), emotional development (Raptis, 2023; Blasco-Magraner *et al.*, 2021) as well as the enhancement of collaborative skills (Rabinowitch & Meltzoff, 2017; Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010) can be strengthened.

Taking into account the importance of music for the holistic development of the child along with the possibilities that the song gives us to combine several activities in the context of early childhood education, the project "Star-little Star" was carried out. This project was based on an original song that was written for the participation of nursery school/kindergarten children in a song contest that was conducted by the organization "Make a wish" of Greece, an organization that aims to support children who are struggling with serious illnesses. The project included the following activities:

- a) creating an original song on the theme of a Star that makes wishes come true,
- b) children learning to sing the song,
- c) recording of the song in the studio,
- d) visual representation of the song by young children individually and in groups,
- e) creating a video presentation that included the children's paintings with the song in the background,
- f) dramatization of the song and its performance at the summer celebration of the school.

The project's activities were organized with the aim of strengthening the young children's empathy and activating their interest in issues concerning other children who are deprived of their health, which is the greatest of all goods.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows: in section 2, the "Research Purpose and Questions" are outlined. In section 3, a complete account of the study is presented ("Participants", "Project design" and "Presentation of the activities"), whereas the "Data collection and Analysis" are presented in section 4, and the "Findings" are discussed in section 5. The discussion is rounded off in section 6.

## 2. Research Purpose and Questions

The present study investigates the attitudes of 4- and 5-year-old children towards activities which were organized on the occasion of an original song and the representation of its meaning visually and dramatically. The survey addressed the following questions:

- 1) What were the children's attitudes to the designed activities?
- 2) Did the project activities contribute to the strengthening of the children's social-emotional and collaborative skills?

## 3. Material and Methods

### 3.1 Participants

The activities of the project were carried out in the context of the participation of nursery school/kindergarten children of the Prefecture of Ioannina in a song contest that was held by the organization "Make a wish" of Greece. The project was carried out with children aged 4 and 5 ( $N=20$ , 9 children aged 4-year-old and 11 children aged 5-year-old) and lasted two months. The parents were first informed about the project, and their consent was obtained.

### 3.2 Project Design

The project was designed by the researcher who teaches in a Department of Primary Education in a Greek University and specializes in Music Education and was implemented by the three early childhood educators-researchers of the nursery school/kindergarten. The early childhood educators-researchers who participated in the project were familiar with the integration of the arts in education as they had previously carried out activities where the arts were involved in an interdisciplinary context. The first university-researcher composed the lyrics and the music of the song, the first early childhood educator taught the children the song, and all the early childhood educators carried out song's visual and dramatic representation with the young children. The academic researcher was present at the recording stage as well as in the final summer celebration.

### 3.3 Presentation of the Activities

- **Activity 1:** Class discussion about the goals of the organization "Make a wish" which focuses on making wishes of children suffering from serious illnesses come true.
- **Activity 2:** Children learned to sing the song (Table 1, 2).

**Table 1:** Lyrics<sup>ii</sup> of the song "Star-little Star"

<p><b>Children:</b>                  Asteri-asteraki psila ston urano thelo na se rotiso an argisa na rtho.                  Thelo na matho an xeris afto pou lachtaro ki an isos mu to fereis poso tha to charo.</p>	<p><b>Children:</b>                  Star-little Star high in the sky I want to ask you if I came late.                  I want to know if you know what I long for and if perhaps you will bring it to me how glad I will be.</p>
<p><b>Star:</b>                  San ena paidaki mou gnepsei apo ti gi mazi tou xekinao taxidi sti zoi.                  Mia spitha eimai psila ston, ourano lampsi tha gino na rtho, na ertho na se vro.</p>	<p><b>Star:</b>                  When a child beckons me from the earth, I start a journey through life.                  A spark I am high in the sky, a glow I will become to come, to come to find you,</p>
<p><b>Children:</b>                  Asteri-asteraki psila ston urano, thelo na matho an xeris afto pu lachtaro.</p>	<p><b>Children:</b>                  Star-little Star high in the sky I want to know if you know what I long for.</p>
<p><b>Star:</b>                  Dino chara, elpida, dynami gia zoi.                  Eimai ena asteri konta se kathe pedi.                  Stasu tora gia ligo kane mia efchi.                  Ta panta ego tha kano na vgei alithini.</p>	<p><b>Star:</b>                  I give joy, hope, strength for life,                  I am a star near every child.                  Now stop for a moment and make a wish, I will make everything come out real.</p>
<p><b>Children:</b>                  Asteri-asteraki psila ston urano, thelo na matho an xeris afto pou lachtaro.</p>	<p><b>Children:</b>                  Star-little Star high in the sky I want to know if you know what I long for.</p>

- **Activity 3:** Children's visual representation of the song through individual and group work.

In this activity, the children either painted stars that were given to them in pictures or freely drew or painted on the theme of the Wishing Star that the song talks about (Figure 1).

<sup>ii</sup> In the paper, lyrics are either transliterated or translated in English.

**Table 2: “Star-Little star”. Song’s sheet music**

**Star-little Star**

**Children** Lyrics-Music: Eirini Nikolaou



**Figure 1: Indicative visual representations of the song “Star-little Star”**

- **Activity 4:** Recording of the song in the studio

The children visited a studio where they recorded the song. The first early childhood educator also participated in the recording, who, having also studied music, undertook to sing the part of the Star, as the song had a dialogic character between the children and the Star that makes wishes come true.

- **Activity 5:** Creating a video presentation that included the children's visual representations of the song with the song in the background.

The video presentation was posted on YouTube on the school's Channel.

- **Activity 6:** Dramatization of the song and its performance at the summer celebration of the school.

After the implementation of each activity, a discussion followed with the young children concerning their thoughts and feelings.

#### 4. Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected through:

- a) observation, the university researcher was present at the recording stage and at the final summer celebration, participant observation – the early childhood educators also had the role of researchers,
- b) diaries notes, in which the early childhood educators' self-reflections were recorded in detail upon each activity's completion,
- c) children's produced work. After the implementation of the activities, the research team held a meeting to discuss the most important findings. The first researcher also had the role of a "critical friend" (Baskerville & Goldblatt, 2009).

Data were interpreted through content analysis.

#### 5. Findings

Based on the data analysis and interpretation, the following key themes are: (a) Children's attitudes to the designed activities, (b) Contribution of the activities to the development of children's social-emotional skills, (c) Contribution of the activities to the development of children's collaborative skills.

- a) Children's attitudes to the designed activities

The children showed a particularly positive attitude towards all the activities. The general purpose for which the entire project was created and related to the Wishing Star along with all the values that it represented contributed to this attitude. More specifically, they enjoyed singing the song and particularly the musical dialogue between the children and the Wishing Star. In addition, the children responded with enthusiasm to the unique opportunity they had to record the song in the studio. Moreover, they showed that they

loved representing the theme of the song visually, both individually and in groups. The variety of the artistic performance served as a contributing factor to this, as they participated with noteworthy interest in the dramatic representation of the song with kinetic gestures, both during the preparation of the dramatization of the song in the classroom and its final performance at the school summer celebration.

b) Contribution of the activities to the development of children's social-emotional skills

According to data analysis it appeared that the children's empathy and their concern for other people's needs and anxieties were stimulated. The children became aware of issues concerning other children's problems, but they also understood the necessity for the psychological support those children need to cope with difficulties, such as the treatments that must be done to deal with serious illnesses. The first activity, where a discussion was held for the purposes of the "Make a wish" organization, as well as the discussions which followed each one of the six activities, contributed to the cultivation of empathy.

Furthermore, the children had the opportunity to feel like young artists presenting their works in front of an audience, both through the posting of their video presentation on Youtube and their performance at the school summer celebration. Through their engagement in the activities, they learned to accept the criticism of others, respect others' views, they develop their self-confidence and receive the applause of the audience as a reward for their preparation.

c) Contribution of the activities to the development of children's collaborative skills

During the implementation of the activities, the young children cooperated in an excellent way with each other. The visual and dramatic presentation of the song contributed to children's better understanding of the meaning of the song but also gave them the opportunity to create and co-create with their classmates. In addition, the children's effort to learn to sing the song and coordinate with their peers to record it in the studio, the group visual representation of the song where they had to work together for the final result, and the dramatization of the song in which each child took on a specific role within the group, aiming at the success of the team, contributed to the children placing the team above the individual.

## 6. Discussion-Conclusion

The present study investigates the attitudes of 4- and 5-year-old children towards activities, which were organized on the occasion of an original song and its visual and dramatic representation. Through their engagement in the project activities, young children had the opportunity to be informed and to reflect on issues related to the necessity and importance of supporting other people especially those who are most in need as their health, which is the greatest good, is at risk. Overall, in addition to

cultivating empathy through the implementation of the project, the children were given the opportunity to work together as a team, to have fun, to strengthen their creativity and imagination, to express their thoughts and feelings, to listen and see the different opinions of their peers.

Since this is a qualitative study, there are some limitations as the sample was small. However, the homogeneity of the participants contributes to the existence of similar characteristics from which we can draw safe conclusions. Each one of the activities could be implemented either exactly as described in the study or with changes, or they could be extended. For example, the main activity of this work, which concerns songwriting, could be used in the context of early childhood education for the creation of original songs by young children themselves. For example, young children, with the early childhood educator's guidance, could create the lyrics of a song on a specific topic by working in groups, aiming at language development, vocabulary development on a specific topic, but also introduction to activities of musical improvisation and composition in the classroom. As for the lyrics' creation, young children guided by early childhood educators could compose poems as a group, using closed poetic forms, such as the haiku (Garifullina & Bashinova, 2017; cf. Nikolaou *et al.*, 2024, for songwriting based on haikus), given that the use of pattern poems often offers children "*a stable vehicle through which they can express themselves*" (Smith, 2013, p. 13), as they are "*especially useful and motivational*" (Moulton & Holmes, 1997, p. 89). After creating the lyrics of the song young children can experience improvising melodically on the lyrics they created and then revise their ideas, composing the final melody of the song (Burnard, 2000).

It should be noticed that in activities where the arts are involved, the process is just as important as the final art products (Marrucci & Piazzoli, 2017). In addition, it is important for a successful conduct of arts activities that educators create an appropriate classroom atmosphere (Nikolaou, 2023a) where children can express themselves freely (Eisner, 2002) and, at the same time, set the necessary limits to ensure discipline in the classroom.

Moreover, the integration of arts in early childhood education enables educators to approach issues of social content in more creative ways, connecting in that way the school with the children's daily life and society, giving opportunities to children to develop their critical (Charissi, *et al.*, 2019) and creative thinking (Alter, 2009) as well as entertain them through qualitative activities (Nikolaou, 2023b). Finally, early childhood educators have the opportunity to collaborate with other colleagues, exchange opinions, and create collective projects with young children, something that also contributes to the understanding of the way children think.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.



### About the Authors

**Dr. Eirini Nikolaou** graduated as a musicologist from the Department of Music Studies (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens). She received the Msc degree and PhD degree from the Department of Philosophy-Pedagogy-Psychology of Ioannina University (Greece). Furthermore, she has a diploma as a piano soloist and composer, for which she received first and second awards. She is a Senior Teaching Fellow in the Department of Primary Education at Ioannina University, teaching *Music Education* and conducting the *Choir* of the Department. Her special interests include music education in early childhood and primary education, philosophy of music education, music in ancient Greece, arts Integration, ICT in music learning and song composition. She is the author of two books in Greek, in the field of music education, of papers in Greek and International Journals, of Book Chapters and International Conferences.

**Sofia-Spyridoula Zoi** graduated as an Early Childhood Educator from the Department of Early Childhood Education (University of Ioannina). She holds a postgraduate degree in Arts in Education (University of Ioannina) and a diploma as a guitar soloist. Furthermore, she is a player of the traditional instrument "canonaki" and a singer specialized in traditional Greek music. Her special interests include early childhood education, music education, traditional songs in early childhood education, storytelling and arts education.

**Aglaia Papageorgiou** graduated as an Early Childhood Educator from the Department of Early Childhood Education (University of Ioannina). She has attended many conferences, seminars and educational programs in the field of early childhood education. Her special interests include arts and play in early childhood education.

**Konstantina Tzalali** graduated as an Early Childhood Educator from the Department of Early Childhood Education (University of Ioannina). She is involved in sports as she is a volleyball athlete. She is also the Director of the Nurseries schools/Kindergartens "Proti Prova" and "Epirus Nature School" in the Prefecture of Ioannina (Greece). Her special interests include creativity in early childhood education.

### References

- Adachi, M., & Trehub, S. E. (1998). Children's expression of emotion in song. *Psychology of Music*, 26(2), 133–153. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735698262003>
- Ali, S. O., & Peynircioğlu, Z. F. (2006). Songs and emotions: are lyrics and melodies equal partners? *Psychology of Music*, 34(4), 511-534. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735606067168>
- Alter, F. (2009). Understanding the Role of Critical and Creative Thinking in Australian Primary School Visual Arts Education. *International Art in Early Childhood Research Journal* 1 (2), 1–12. <https://hdl.handle.net/1959.11/4486>

- Baskerville, D., & Goldblatt, H. (2009). Learning to be a critical friend: from professional indifference through challenge to unguarded conversations. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39(2), 205–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640902902260>
- Barrett, J. S., Schachter, R. E., Gilbert, D., & Fuerst, M. (2022). Best Practices for Preschool Music Education: Supporting Music-Making Throughout the Day. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 50(3), 385–397. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01155-8>
- Barrett, M. S. (2006). Inventing songs, inventing worlds: the 'genesis' of creative thought and activity in young children's lives. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 14(3), 201–220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760600879920>
- Blasco-Magraner, J. S., Bernabe-Valero, G., Marín-Liéñana, P., & Moret-Tatay, C. (2021). Effects of the educational use of music on 3-to 12-year-old children's emotional development: A systematic review. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(7), 3668. DOI: [10.3390/ijerph18073668](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18073668)
- Burke, N. (2018). Musical development matters in the early years. *Watford: The British Association for Early Childhood Education*.
- Burnard, P. (2000). Examining experiential differences between improvisation and composition in children's music-making. *British Journal of Music Education*, 17(3), 227–245. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700000310>
- Charissi, A., Tympa, E., & Karavida, V. (2019). Contribution of Systematic Exploration of Artworks in Raising Children's Critical Thinking and Empathy about Friendship and Difference through Early Years. *International Journal of Education*, 11, 35-47. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ije.v11i4.15857>
- Egermann, H., & McAdams, S. (2013). Empathy and emotional contagion as a link between recognized and felt emotions in music listening. *Music Perception*, 31(2), 139–156. <https://doi.org/10.1525/mp.2013.31.2.139>
- Eisner, E. W. (2002). *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Garifullina, A. M., & Bashinova, S. N. (2017). The art of Haiku as a means of multicultural training of children in pre-school education. *Revista ESPACIOS*, 38(25). <https://es.revistaespacios.com/a17v38n25/17382523.html>
- Hooper, A. (2023). Sing and Play Your Way to Reading: Building Emergent Literacy Skills in Infants and Toddlers Through Music. *The Reading Teacher*, 76(4), 451-458. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2167>
- Ilari, B. (2016). Music in the early years: Pathways into the social world. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 38(1), 23–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X16642631>
- Jacobi, B. S. (2012). Opportunities for socioemotional learning in music classrooms. *Music Educators Journal*, 99(2), 68-74. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ987233>
- Jucan, D., & Simion, A. (2015). Music background in the classroom: its role in the development of social-emotional competence in preschool children. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 180, 620-626. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.02.169>

- Kim, J. (2017). Transforming Music Education for the Next Generation: Planting 'Four Cs' Through Children's Songs. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 49, 181–193. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-017-0187-3>
- Kirschner, S., & Tomasello, M. (2010). Joint music making promotes prosocial behavior in 4-year-old children. *Evolution and human behavior*, 31(5), 354-364. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2010.04.004>
- Kultti, A. (2013). Singing as language learning activity in multilingual toddler groups in preschool. *Early Child Development and Care*, 183(12), 1955–1969. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2013.765868>
- Lawson-Adams, J., Dickinson, D. K., & Donner, J. K. (2022). Sing it or speak it?: The effects of sung and rhythmically spoken songs on preschool children's word learning. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 58, 87–102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2021.06.008>
- Marrucci, L. & Piazzoli, E. (2017). Evaluating learner engagement in arts education: Perspectives from music and drama in education. In Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Higher Education Advances (pp. 1068-1076). Editorial Universitat Politècnica de València. <http://ocs.editorial.upv.es/index.php/HEAD/HEAD17/paper/v>
- Moulton, M. R., & Holmes, V. L. (1997). Pattern poems: creative writing for language acquisition. *Journal of the Imagination in Language Learning*, 4, 84–90. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED420199.pdf#page=89>
- Nikolaou, E. (2023a). Encouraging creativity through music improvisation activities: Pre-service primary general teacher-students' reflections and beliefs. *International Journal of Music Education*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/02557614231178925>
- Nikolaou, E. (2023b). Issues concerning the integration of arts in education. In S. G. Soulis, M. Liakopoulou, & A. Galani (Eds.), *Challenges and Concerns in 21st Century Education* (pp. 398– 407). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Nikolaou, E., Galani, A., & Theodorakopoulos, D. (2024). The poetic form of haiku as a guide to poetry and music composition: Primary school students' views and attitudes. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 12(2), 49-66. <https://www.ijern.com/journal/2024/February-2024/04.pdf>
- Öztürk, E., & Can A, A., (2020). The effect of music education on the social values of preschool children. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Science*, 15(5), 1053-1064 <https://doi.org/10.18844/cjes.v15i5.5150>
- Rabinowitch, T. C., & Meltzoff, A. N. (2017). Synchronized movement experience enhances peer cooperation in preschool children. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 160, 21-32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2017.03.001>
- Raptis, I., & Spanaki, E. (2017). Teachers' attitudes regarding the development of socio-emotional skills in elementary schools in Greece. *International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies*, 4(1), 21-28.

- Raptis, T. (2023). The study of past emotions as a basis for emotional education in music education today. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 10(10). <http://dx.doi.org/10.46827/ejes.v10i10.5029>
- Smith, C. (2013). Creative writing as an important tool in second language acquisition and practice. *The Journal of Literature in Language Teaching*, 2(2), 11–18. <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:57086845>
- Sušić, B. B. (2019). Preschool education students' attitudes about the possible impact of music on children's speech development. *International Journal of Cognitive Research in Science, Engineering and Education (IJCRSEE)*, 7(1), 73-84. DOI:[10.5937/IJCRSEE1901073B](https://doi.org/10.5937/IJCRSEE1901073B)
- Váradi, J. (2022). A Review of the Literature on the Relationship of Music Education to the Development of Socio-Emotional Learning. *Sage Open*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211068501>

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Social Sciences Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind of content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)