

QUOTES

"The children really loved the books and activities. These resources are so unique, because they are very entertaining for children, while also being highly educational. My only worry about the resources refers to the "screen-time" they require."

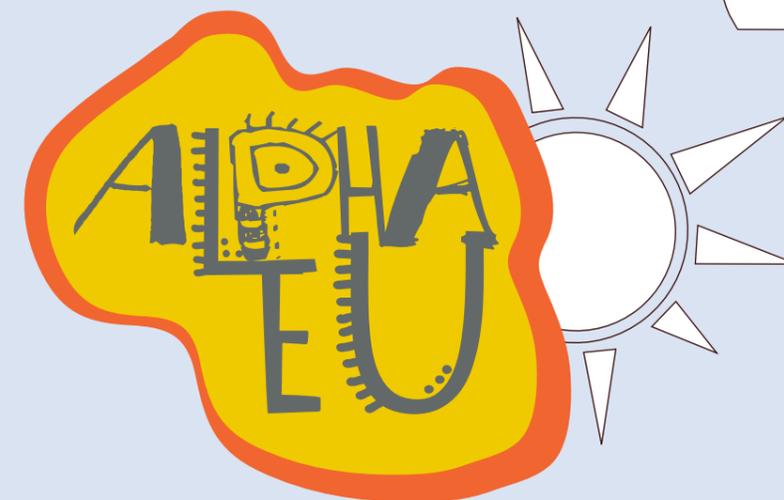
(Teacher)

"The books and activities were fantastic for teaching my child about the different cultures and languages in Europe. If the range expanded to include French, I think the books would be even more beneficial."

(Parent)

"I have used the books to teach my child English, as she currently is learning English and Mandarin. They are very useful. I would like to translate these into Mandarin to also use with my child."

(Parent)



Alphabets of Europe

www.alphaeu.org
CASE STUDY - IRELAND



Lifelong Learning Programme

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein. [Project number: 531092-LLP-1-2012-1-CY-KA2-KA2MP]

CONTACT US

Jennifer Land, Programme Manager
Meath Partnership, Unit 7, Kells Business Park, Kells, Co. Meath, Ireland
E: jennifer.land@meathpartnership.ie
T: +353469280790 F: +353469252335



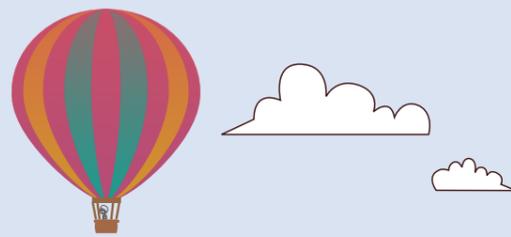
PROJECT OVERVIEW

Studies have shown that phonemic awareness is closely associated with reading ability in the early and later years of schooling, while letter-sound correlation is proved to play an important role in learning how to read and write a language. The Alphabets of Europe (AlphaEU) project focuses on the European Commission's priority of "Promoting early language education." It aims to promote the acquisition of multilingual awareness, and to foster language learning and language skills of pre-schoolers in various European countries, by developing, piloting, and implementing digital alphabet books and alphabet-related interactive activities. Targeted alphabets/languages include: English, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, and Romanian.

The innovative aspect of AlphaEU is that active and creative language learning is channelled through digital media that encourage children to approach European languages and alphabets in a comparative manner. An AlphaEU guide introduces stakeholders to the project's approach and material, while eLearning modules inform and train adult mediators in utilising the digital material. The project encourages involvement of family members in supporting language learning and is expected to have a positive impact on pre-primary language education across the EU.

The AlphaEU project aims to:

- Develop an AlphaEU ELL approach.
- Pilot, design, and develop 30 digital alphabet books and 30 interactive activities in relation to 6 different European languages.
- Provide free access to these materials, by incorporating them in an online platform.
- Provide eLearning training for at least 20 adult mediators in each participating country, bringing teachers and parents in contact through blended learning environments.
- Implement the AlphaEU approach and materials in collaboration with 10 pre-primary teachers and 10 parents in each partner country.
- Author and publicize at least one case study from each country, in order to evaluate, valorise, and demonstrate the AlphaEU approach and materials.
- Pursue intense dissemination and exploitation, in order to make stakeholders aware of the AlphaEU resources, as well as the general value of playful and creative ELL.



IMPLEMENTATION OF BOOKS AND ACTIVITIES

The AlphaEU books and activities were implemented in Ireland over a six-week period. In total, the implementation involved 10 pre-school teachers and teaching assistants, 10 parents/caregivers and 48 children under the age of six from across three pre-schools; two of which were community pre-schools and one which was a privately owned, fee-paying school. The teachers and teaching assistants were aged between 27 and 59, and all had qualification in childcare or early childhood development and education. The 10 parents were aged between 32 and 40.

The implementation in Ireland was a very exciting and challenging time, as the professionals were new to trying to integrate foreign language learning in their classrooms, and parents and caregivers had very little experience in using interactive digital learning resources with their children. Despite this, all the participants were excited about and interested in the AlphaEU books and activities. The implementation took place towards the end of the school term, with parents, caregivers and teachers typically spending 1-2 hours per week using the resources. The books relating to the themes of 'Home', 'School' and 'Farm' were most popular among both groups of participants, as they found it to be useful to be able to use props from the home, school, and farm environments to encourage the children to learn the words and sounds of other European languages. The 'Match the Language' activity was by far the most popular, as it could be used in a group setting with ease. The teachers found it particularly easy to integrate the books and activities into their lessons, because the themes that the books covered were also featured in the pre-school curriculum. For this reason, the teachers also used the books in English, as well as German and Greek, as the books were seen as a very useful resource in encouraging letter recognition and vocabulary development in children.



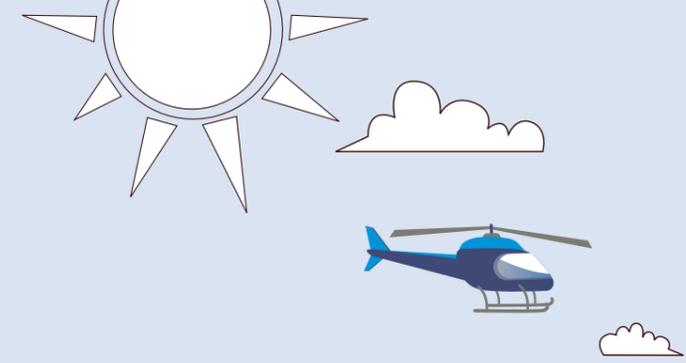
RESULTS

Benefits

- Many parents and caregivers praised the cultural awareness which these books brought to children, and pre-school professionals were complimentary towards the language awareness and the idea of plurilingualism was also seen as beneficial to pre-school children.
- The digital books were seen as a very positive step forward in planning for and considering the linguistic development of pre-school children; they were also innovative because they allowed the children to hear the alphabet and some vocabulary spoken by a native speaker of each European language.
- The activities were the most popular resource and they were seen as beneficial, as they allowed adult mediators to develop strategies for children to learn by playing, in a way which they are rewarded for doing well.
- The activities are age-appropriate but they also challenge the children with languages, letters, and sounds which they may never had heard before. In this way, the books and activities are interesting and entertaining to children, as well as raising their curiosity about other cultures and languages.

Challenges

- The biggest challenge was the limited IT resources found in rural pre-schools in Ireland, and the limited ICT competence of parents, caregivers, and professionals when using digital resources as teaching and learning aids.
- The lack of experience that teachers, parents, and caregivers had with encouraging foreign language learning was also challenging. With a lack of foreign language awareness themselves, participants in the implementation felt under-confident in implementing these books.
- These challenges could be overcome with more planning and time, additional supports such as an introductory course for professionals on integrating early foreign language learning into the pre-school curriculum, and some basic IT training for teachers, parents, and caregivers.



TIPS FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS

Teachers

- Integrate books and activities in the curriculum, as they help reinforce language awareness, vocabulary recognition, and cross-cultural awareness.
- Study thoroughly the material before implementing it in the classroom.
- Encourage role-play based on the characters and storyline of the books.
- Create Alpha and Zara puppets.
- Integrate the story line in the lesson and ask the students to come up with alternative development in the storyline, or ending, or continuation.
- Use flashcards and a poster to play a game on it with letter and flashcards beginning from that letter.

Parents

- Learn a new language along with your child; make this a shared experience!
- Play WITH your child!
- Build on what is done at school and extend on it at home.
- Explore different languages and compare vocabulary between them.
- Do not focus on mistakes; the important aspect is that children are daring to learn a new language!

