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## *"Serious Games for Fostering Multilingualism in Early Childhood Education"*

### Greetings from Language Games

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Dear partners, colleagues and friends, we are excited to bring you some fresh news about Language Games, a pedagogical software product, created within an Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic Partnership project, which aims to use serious games to foster multilingualism in early childhood. It provides a tool for kindergarten and primary teachers to use in language lessons, when children are getting familiar with the basics of a foreign language.

The project is led by the School Inspectorate of Bucharest, Romania and has five further partners— the Secondary School of Silves, Portugal, edUcation Ltd. in Richmond UK, the Centre for Research and technology, Hellas in Volos, Greece, the University Of

Thessaly in Volos, Greece and the University of Tallinn, Estonia.

A lot has happened since our last newsletter. We have organised a thorough audit of the early childhood language learning in the partner countries and published a report. We have been developing the software for the Language Games, based on the 9 thematic scenarios identified by the partners.

We are now near the end of the developmental phase of the project where the educational needs have been analysed, the software solutions have been defined and designed and the teacher guidelines on how to use the games in their lessons are about to be published soon.

The project is now

entering the second phase of its implementation, in which the partners will work with kindergartens and schools to test the Language Game as software and the pedagogical methodology developed alongside the game.

Teachers will be given free access to the game and will be trained on how to use the teacher guidelines, while being offered support by the partners along the process. They will then evaluate and provide feedback on the trialling, so that partners could finalise the methodology.



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#### Partners involved:

- ☺ Inspectoratul Scolar al Municipiului Bucuresti, Romania (the coordinator)
- ☺ Agrupamento de Escolas de Silves, Portugal
- ☺ edUcation Ltd, Uk
- ☺ Ethniko Kentro Erevnas Kai Technologikis Anaptyxis, Greece
- ☺ Panepistimio Thessalias, Greece

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# Learning Needs Analysis and Methodology Development



In the first stage of the project all partners conducted thorough research on national level in order to establish a baseline for this project and analyse the learning needs amongst the youngest language learners. The result of the analysis was a report and a developed methodology.

This report presented the theoretical background supporting the LanguageGames project implementation of a serious (learning) game for building early language skills among learners aged 5-7 years. The proposed learning methodology involves active and experiential approaches that immerse learners into learning activities based on real-life use of languages.

The activities are rooted both on school curricula and on real-life experiences challenging learners to build pre-A1 level vocabulary related, for example, to greetings, animals, family, colours, numbers, jobs, objects pertaining a classroom, a typical house, and more. The proposed learning design takes

into account current school and wider learning practices in countries represented in the consortium through project partners, namely Greece, Estonia, Portugal, Romania, and the UK. While at proposal time the project aimed at focusing on the English language, the final result also includes the same activities for building skills in French as a second language. This choice was made in order to facilitate an effective and meaningful evaluation in the UK,



where English is the official language.

The analysis of direct stakeholder needs, namely learners and educators, also took into account the results of a contained case study during which educators were asked to document their experiences with the deployment of technology as a learning tool in L2 learning. The input from educators demonstrated limited familiarity with what serious games as learning tools offer in terms of learning benefits; at the same time, however, educators appear positive in participating in learning experiments that deploy serious games in language education and in evaluating the potential learning benefits for their learners and for themselves.

The results of the analysis documented in this report inform the design of the LanguageGames serious game for building L2 skills among young learners, which constitutes a significant outcome of the project.

# Game design and software development



As a direct result of the methodology defined in the Learning Needs Analysis Report the partners have discussed and developed the technical specifications of a software product to be used as a serious game for language teaching in early childhood.

The partnership has defined 9 most relevant topics to be featured in the game. Those are:

1. Meet and greet
2. Colours
3. Numbers
4. Animals
5. Family
6. Professions
7. Body
8. Food
9. Classroom

There is a leading story in the game following the Earth-crashed alien Lingo, who is learning all the basics about humans, like a child learns the basics of a new language.

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## Partner Meetings

During the first phase of the project the partners met two times. The project kick-off meeting was held in May 2016 in Bucharest hosted by the School Inspectorate of Bucharest. The Partnership Agreements were signed, the Management Handbook and Deliverables Grid were agreed and Project Website specifications were defined.

Appropriate game activities were designed to introduce and consolidate the language learning content like Drag&Drop, Click&Select, Identify& Name, etc. The Greek partner CERTH worked on the software development using the coding platform Unity, which allows to develop a software product accessible through most operating systems and types of devices. In cooperation with an experienced graphic designer, the developer managed to code a child-friendly and visually appealing game, which

is simple to use, and full of gradually introduced learning content.

The game is accompanied by Teacher Guidelines explaining how Language Games should be used in practice when working with the kids. The guidelines and the game will be tested and trialled in the second part of the project in cooperation with partner schools, gathering feedback in order to finalise the improve the teachers' toolkit and the game itself.



The visiting partners had the chance to visit some kindergartens and primary schools and gather valuable information from practitioners which was used in the work that followed.

A second partner meeting was held in September 2016 hosted by the University of Tallinn in Estonia. By

then the Learning Needs Analysis was ready so the partners were able to discuss its findings and define the guiding principles for the game development which followed the meeting. All the topics and activity types were finalised at the Tallinn meeting. The next meeting will be in Silves, Portugal in May 2017.



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