

Alphablocks

Alphablocks was produced by Magic Lantern Production and was broadcast on BBC, UK. **Alphablocks** is an animated show for young children that asks: What happens when letters come to life? What is it like to be an A or a T? And what happens when F, O and X hold hands? **Alphablocks** is a world in which 26 unique characters discover they can make words and when they do, something magical and often quite funny happens. This episode is a two-parter: Sing: B plays bass and D plays drums – but they need a singer! N joins in but he won't sing and soon A, E, I, O and U are all auditioning: which one has what it takes to join the 'BND'? Band: When the BAND split up over creative differences, they agree to hold a battle of the bands. Two great new groups are formed – and it is down to superhero X to decide between them. The **Alphablocks** world and characters are revealed over the full series: in other episodes we discover that I is the big egotist, O is always surprised, and U thinks everyone is talking about him. Superhero X, with his X-ray vision, can see when the others need his help and flies in to save the day.

Alphablocks was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2010 finalists in the “up to 6-Non-fiction” category.

International experts' opinions



Figure 1: Playing with letters to form words.



Figure 2: B, D, and N decided to form a band. But they needed a singer.

not crazy about the show” (female expert, USA). “This show, for us, would be a little bit complicated for 4- to 5-years, because they cannot recognise the letters yet” (male expert, Argentina).

The international experts had mixed opinion about the program. Some liked the program for its simplicity and unique concept. “I liked it. It is always fun to play with the letters like that. It is fun. It is a simple idea, but it is genuine in a way” (female expert, Sweden). Some also found the program “interesting” and “appealing.” “You wanted to play with them. It was very simple, so you could actually grasp what was going on as a little kid” (male expert, USA). The female expert from UK who was also one of the producers explained, “It is all about for young kids, they recognise the letter. Then if they can hear its primary sound, then that is just about what you are doing” (female expert, UK).

However, some thought that the program was not appropriate for the target audience. “I am not sure if children at that age understand the **alphablocks** already” (female expert, Germany). “Children are really more ready to be learning these sounds at six or seven. I was



Figure 3: Letter A joined them and they formed a BAND.



Figure 4: The BAND soon split over due to creative differences.



Figure 5: They formed two bands, FAB and DIN.

the video on the Internet, and so on - potentially on mobile phones - but probably not for this age group” (male expert, UK).

The international experts appreciated the fact that the program was available on different media. “I think it was interesting - the trans-media elements in it. It was a property that you really could see in a lot of different applications: wireless applications and a lot of places where young kids are just seeing short segments, which allows for all that reinforcement and learning – that was great – built into the design of it” (female expert).

Others explained the effect of different media on the kids in their respective countries. “At least in the States the kids-not so much at that age group - but certainly eight and up – some of the broadband stuff is the first thing that they find” (male expert, USA). “In Korea, there are many commercial companies that set up this kind of online education, attract lots and lots of kids, and actually parents. Parents put their kids in front of the computer and they work on them” (female expert, Korea). “I think, from my perspective, the kids now are really into video games. This is not very complicated. I thought it was actually good. If you are saying that it is for kids from 4 to 6 years, I think it would work. I understood it: they had a lot of repetition, they took two minutes to form that word B-A-N-D for the first time. I thought it was fine” (male expert, Chile).

Some also felt that the sounds of the alphabet were not consistent in the program. “They said, “ae” for the “A”, which is I what I know. They said “ah” for “O”, but then they would call the “ae” “ah”- and then they were going “BAND”, and so I thought it was confusing” (female expert, USA). To which the male expert from UK who was also one of the producers explained, “It is aimed at four- to six-year-olds who know their letters and are ready to start putting them together to make words.”

The program was commissioned for multiplatform activities which led to a lot of discussion among the international experts. The male expert from UK who was also one of the producers of the show informed the discussion group that the show went online for a week before it went on air. “It is commissioned for complete multiplatform activities: television, Internet, the games that go with it, the



Figure 6: FAB and DIN competed with each other.



Figure 7: Superhero X came to resolve the dispute.



Figure 8: X “FIXed” the problem and the BAND came together again.