A TOUCH OF HOLA!

A Holistic Approach
to Language Learning

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PREFACE

This publication results from two years of joint work on the HOLA! Comenius project. It aims to support the teacher in implementing a global approach to English language teaching in Primary Education. Natural learning, active and responsible pupils, learning styles and strategies, second language acquisition principles, authenticity, … these are the ingredients of our holistic approach. Our challenge is to combine efficiency with fun in foreign language learning. The HOLA! teacher is more than an "instructor". Sometimes he is the encouraging guide who actively listens to the learner; sometimes he is a facilitator or a comforter. He addresses the full potential of the young learner by providing him with cognitive, affective, social and metacognitive strategies. The learner is stimulated so that he can engage his thoughts, emotions, creativity, imagination and genuine curiosity in order to go beyond the cognitive level. He interacts with his classmates sharing the fun of learning and the discovery of the surrounding universe. He approaches the foreign language as a whole, including the cultural aspects. Language is seen as a means for socialisation and as the vehicle of the culture of those who speak that language. Theoretical frames and concrete examples follow each other in order to support you in exploring and understanding the HOLA! universe.

HOLA! stands for a Holistic Approach to Language Learning for Kids. The materials and the theoretical framework originate in a European Cooperation Project in the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme. The project partners who contributed to the elaboration of HOLA! are:

− Vzw Nascholing in het Katholiek Onderwijs, VSKO (General Secretariat of Catholic Education in the Flemish Community), Brussels, Belgium, represented by Cécile de Fré, Greet Van Mello and Karine Van Thienen (project coordinator)

− The Fédération de l'Enseignement Fondamental Catholique (FédEFoC) of SéGEC (General Secretariat of Catholic Education in the French Community), Brussels, Belgium, represented by Anne Belien and Bruno Mathelart

− The University of Aarhus, Center for Undervisningsudvikling (Professional Education Center), Aarhus, Denmark, represented by Hanne Leth Andersen and Stacey Cozart

– The Regional Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education of Central Macedonia, State School Advisers' Office of Emathia Prefecture, Veroia, Greece, represented by Theodoros Skenderis and Chryssa Laskaridou

– The University of Alcalá, Escuela Universitaria de Magisterio de Guadalajara, Madrid, Spain, represented by Manuel Megías and Maria José Valiente

– Thélème International, Soissons, represented by Catherine Macquart-Martin and Catherine Adam

– Direzione Didattica Alcide de Gasperi (the Elementary School Alcide de Gasperi), Palermo, Italy, represented by Maria Giovanna Granata and Tiziana Venturella

– Doğuş Educational Institute, Acibadem, Istanbul, Turkey, represented by Michael O'Neill and Songül Ömürdağ.

Together we come across different perspectives on elementary education: those of the elementary school, the pedagogical advisor, pre- and in-service training as well as local authorities. Furthermore we can count on two experts. Rosangela Baggio, member of the management team of the Italian school in Madrid, is our didactic expert. She supports us in the portfolio practice: in setting up reflection, self-assessment and process assessment activities which reinforce learning. Our second consultant is Harry Verkoulen, educational advisor in The Netherlands. He brings in his expertise on the well-being of children. Both experts take part in the monitoring and evaluation of the project.

With the support of the European Commission in the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme, Comenius action, we have developed principles and materials to contribute to the implementation of holistic foreign language learning and teaching in Europe, most of all for French and English. From theory to practice and the other way around, we have fine-tuned our pedagogical and didactic options as well as the management of the materials in the classroom to balance fun in learning and efficiency. This way we came to two publications, a French and an English one, to the design of a web site www.holaforkids.be and to the development of a Comenius course which will take place every year in France, in Great Britain and in Cyprus from 2010 onwards.

We thank all those who contributed to the project. First of all we thank the partner institutions, the pre- and in-service training services and our schools. Our joint commitment led to a number of outcomes we are really proud of. We are particularly grateful to vzw Nascholing in het Katholiek Onderwijs, the Regional Directorate of Primary and Secondary Education of Central Macedonia, Greece, the Primary Education Authority of Veroia, the Prefecture of Emathia, the Municipality of Veroia and the Aarhus University which offered us the opportunity to organise training sessions for their school heads, teacher trainers and teachers.

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We also want to show appreciation to the teacher education centres that disseminate and integrate our concept in their initial teacher education programmes: the University of Aarhus (Aarhus, Denmark), the University of Alcalá (Madrid, Spain), the Doğuş University (Istanbul, Turkey), the Aristotle University (Thessaloniki, Greece) and the University of Palermo (Palermo, Italy). May the Erasmus exchanges instil in the future teachers the desire to apply HOLA! in their teaching practice.

We are particularly grateful to Marina Matheoudakis from the English Department of the Aristotle University (Thessaloniki, Greece) and to Anastasia Spyropoulou from the ELT-News Journal (Athens, Greece) for their enthusiasm, their support and the interest they took in our project.

Thanks to the schools which opened their doors to the HOLA! practice and to our video cameras. Without the authorisation of the parents to record their children we wouldn't have managed to create the DVD which serves for reflection in our teacher training activities. This DVD will not be commercialised. It is a precious support to our national and international training sessions, most of all for our Comenius courses.

We have had the opportunity to try-out our materials in the following Primary Schools:

− The 3rd Primary School of Evosmos, Thessaloniki, Experimental School of the English Faculty of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece), and more particularly Chryssa Laskaridou, Katarina Kaiktsi and Sissi Georgiadou, as well as Vasilios Virlios, school head, and Marina Matheoudakis, Associate Professor and member of the School Board

− The Primary Schools in Veroia (Greece)

− N. Kochs School in Aarhus (Denmark), and more particulary Bodil Grud Rasmussen, Torben Lovschaal and Martin Kaack Andersen, as well as Stig Madsen, school head

− The Ave Maria School in Vlezembeek (Belgium) and more particularly Clara De Bolle, as well as Viviane De Win, school head.

We express our special thanks to Danielle Droog for the lay-out. We also thank all those who gave us feedback. Thanks to Chryssa Laskaridou, Manuel Megías, Theodoros Skenderis, Anne Belien and Glykeria Trahana for their proofreading.

We also thank Colette Samson, who took the role of external evaluator at the end of our first project year. We thank her for the critical comments and questions inspired by her special expertise in didactics for young learners. She drew our attention to fundamental questions which led us to envisaging new options and to documenting others.

We thank Clara Megías for creating the wonderful HOLA! logo and the illustrations of the learning styles and strategies, Zippo, the Japanese temple tree and the picture on the cover.

We also want to express our gratitude towards the European Commission. They believed in our project and co-financed our work. Beata Guillerm and Jean-Michel Boullier supported and encouraged us in our work. We thank them for the opportunity they gave us to present our project to the new project coordinators in February 2009.

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INTRODUCTION

For our young Europeans it is very important to know foreign languages. It enables them to travel, to discover other cultures and habits, to make friends abroad, that is to enrich themselves. The knowledge of foreign languages is one of the priority objectives of Europe. Recent reforms aimed at integrating opportunities for language awareness and language initiation, together with reforms of initial teacher training, are devised to facilitate access to language learning for all youngsters. New ways towards equity, new paths to include learners who have "problems" require a different quality of teaching and learning in order to include them all in education and training projects and curricula. Of course, this all starts in elementary education, where we plant the seeds for the future.

We all have our traditions in language teaching, and we are proud of them. The child who arrives in his first foreign language class is still at a stage of natural learning. He has learned to explore the universe which surrounds him. He takes stock of whatever is meaningful to him according to the culture of the family and the environment he lives in. At school he discovers the school culture, based on well-reflected beliefs. Within this culture he learns things he might not necessarily learn outside school according to methods and approaches which have shown their efficacy, even if some of them are particularly cognitive. HOLA! wants to include both universes, domestic and academic, and have them merged in order to enrich each other in an approach conciliating efficiency and fun in learning.

HOLA! a challenge

The hugest challenge of HOLA! is to work out a holistic approach to language learning for kids. We want to enable the young learner to experience language by using it and to have fun while discovering the foreign language and culture. Therefore our starting point is the universe of the child, his daily reality.

The HOLA! objectives are the following ones.

First of all, we want to act in a positive way on the child's motivation by associating pleasure and success at learning, by making him aware of his progress through self- and peer assessment and by making him reflect on the impact and the power the command of a foreign language gives him.

Secondly, we want to develop strategies for classroom management which facilitate the implementation of the approach we have developed.

Thirdly, we want to offer immersion opportunities to the teachers who want to improve their language command through Comenius courses.

Finally, we want to support the schools in their implementation efforts by providing them with the means to integrate the HOLA! practice into the daily repertoire of the language teachers and by reflecting together on the conditions required for a large-scale application of our approach.

In order to meet our objectives we have come up with evidence-based didactic and pedagogical principles. They are based on research findings in second language acquisition, in brain research, in the current lifestyle of young people and in the wellbeing of children. These principles are illustrated by means of practical examples which we call "materials". These materials are presented in two distinctive ways. First, by means of the narrative of what happened in the classroom during a try-out lesson. Secondly, by analysing the classroom experiences and making the underlying HOLA! perspective explicit. A pedagogical file card which we commonly call "the HOLA! template", gives an overview of the most salient issues of the proposed learning unit for use in the classroom. Some of the lesson try-outs have been recorded in order to exemplify the classroom management. These recordings serve as a basis for reflection during our Comenius courses targeted to all those who are involved in teaching foreign languages in primary education. All our public outcomes are also available on our project website (www.holaforkids.be).

This English publication has a twin sister in French: *HOLA! Une approche holistique de l'apprentissage des langues*. The French publication contains our theoretical principles as well as other examples of materials tested in French classes. Both serve as appetisers for the attendants on our annual Comenius courses, which will be advertised on our project website.

HOLA! holistic

HOLA! is a holistic approach to language learning. This means HOLA! considers the learner, the teacher, the language and the world as wholes. The overall vision is the one of "opportunities for all" in school and combats actively failure and demotivation. HOLA! is positive and optimistic.

An analytic approach to foreign language teaching and learning would consist of dividing language into slices which would be put one on top of the other and reconstitute language in a progression from simple to complex. It relies on the principle of grammar enabling the learner to formulate unique utterances which have not been formulated before. So this would provide freedom for the learner. The production of correct utterances however requires lots of time, patience and effort from the learner. He might give up before having acquired enough words

and rules to say something meaningful to him. An analytic approach is beneficial to a certain category of learners, commonly called those who are "good at languages".

HOLA! wants to address all learners, not just those who are verbally smart, but also those who are less self-confident, those who are afraid to make "mistakes", those who have difficulties in memorising the rules, let alone in applying them. The HOLA! learner is accepted as he is, and respected in his personal choices. He is not a "machine that produces correct utterances". He learns by doing, he draws, he creates, he imagines. His emotions are taken on board. The teacher takes him by the hand, makes him reflect on his learning styles, his gifts, his emotions and his achievements in order to become aware of who he is and to feel safe. The learner chooses, he negotiates, he involves himself. His need for belonging, competence and autonomy is recognised. As a matter of fact he wants to be on good terms with the teacher, he wants to be acknowledged for what he can already do, and he needs some vital space in which he can make some choices. Opportunities for choice and reflection are the first steps towards ownership of learning. By means of the appropriate learning strategies the teacher will help the youngster become who he chooses to be. The teacher will value his talents and his capabilities. He will show him how he progresses and lead him towards learning autonomy.

The language he learns is also seen as a whole. There are several layers. The one in the middle is the layer of the linguistic elements: vocabulary, morphology, syntactic structures and elements of phonology. Around these micro-elements, there is the layer of discourse: the way in which these discrete point elements are sequenced in order to become an oral or written text, following the conventions and traditions of the language. It's the way to create a particular text type. Around the discourse level we have pragmatics: language serves at making impact on others. How to convince, to put self and others into text, to seduce, to refute, to express like or dislike… The outer layer is the one of culture, of the conventions, habits and preferred behaviour of a specific group of people. If the learner wants to access a group and integrate himself, he will adopt the habits they practise. Articulateness and pragmatics will support him when he opts for keeping some distance while still belonging to the group.

The HOLA! approach also goes through "formulaic language", that is through chunks, prefabricated groups of words which can be reinvested in the learner's own productions. It is called "chunk learning". Exposed to language by means of nursery rhymes, songs, stories for children, the youngster enters the universe of the target language. He first learns ready-for-use expressions he needs to formulate what is meaningful to him. After a certain period of time, having gathered a stock of a certain amount of language – what is called a corpus – he will start analysing parts of utterances in order to discover some patterns and regularities. Actually, the search for patterns happens unconsciously. It is the stage where the first errors occur, when the learner takes the risk of creating something new from what he has already got and simplifies or generalises target language regularities. The first grammatical rules will show up when the youngster has reached a level of maturity necessary to internalise them.

The HOLA! universe refers to the environment of our young learner. The language he learns covers the part of the world he feels at ease in and the part he wants to explore. Authenticity is a major value in this universe: it is the children's world with his interests, his technologies, his media, his needs for communication, exploration and information. By means of "authentic" real life experiences, the child will be able to go beyond the level of the stereotypes and see the target language user as a human being, partly similar, partly different from him.

The HOLA! teacher is fully involved in the teaching and learning process. He takes special care of all pupils in a warm and affective way. From his observations he has a clear view on specific talents and possible contributions of each child to the group. He plans, instructs and structures, he behaves like an ally in the learner's process of acquiring a foreign language. He facilitates, supports, animates, guides, asks questions, offers variety and choices, observes, encourages awareness and reflection… He reveals himself as a model learner who makes his own learning and problem solving strategies explicit in front of his pupils. He is flexible and at ease in the language he teaches. He provides a rich and safe environment where the learner can progress at his own pace. Before intervening or explaining something, he exploits all the resources the learner and his classmates can bring in. He connects the youngsters with each other so that they can discover and learn from each other's talents. This way the language class becomes a safe environment where the most diverse talents meet each other and mingle in order to provide a richer cocktail. Discovery and exploration outweigh explanations. In other words:

> A holistic approach is an approach to teaching and learning that considers the learner as a whole. A holistic approach to language learning allows the learner to feel safe and happy interacting with real people and real life according to who he or she chooses to be, at a pace that maximises the individual potential. This implies language teaching and learning that allows the learner to discover, think, feel, imagine and practice language which is seen as a vehicle of culture and as a means of socialisation.
>
> *Michael O'Neill, Brussels, October 2007*

HOLA! assessment and evaluation

We all have a lot of assessment instruments and tools at our disposal. Instruments to measure performances and others to inform learning. An approach to language teaching and learning needs tools which enable us to assess and evaluate the objectives. The HOLA! assessment is meant to reinforce learning and is therefore assessment for learning. The main goal is to reveal the current situation and to pinpoint the next steps in the learning process.

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The HOLA! approach is holistic, so is its assessment. The learner, the language and the universe of the child are considered as wholes. Progress in knowledge, skills and attitudes come together. It's not just about cognitive processes, the affective and social processes are part of the reflection process as well, including use and awareness of learning styles and strategies. Teacher and learner join their efforts and redefine how to get further in an ongoing way.

HOLA! portfolio

All school systems have their particular requirements as to assessment. Some countries have central examination systems. Others leave it to the school to organise them according to more or less strict instructions. In that case there is an inspection system for validating the decisions. The current tendency in Europe goes towards self-evaluation systems. HOLA! doesn't want to exclude any system. Therefore, we propose a flexible approach by means of a portfolio. In the HOLA! universe, a portfolio means interaction between several parties – learners, teachers, school, parents and other allies – in a culture of openness, inclusion and transparency. The portfolio refers to a way of being and learning together. It is a philosophy in which assessment is respectful and rewarding. The young learner is compared to himself over time. The portfolio aims to make the pupil aware of what he has achieved and how he managed to do so, how he has progressed and what the next step is, who he wants to be helped by and how. The achievements are celebrated and serve as catalysers of motivation.

We think it is crucial to be aware of the outcomes, both the language and the learning process outcomes which are to be reinvested in future learning. The former refers to what the pupil can already do with language, the latter how the learner goes about his learning.

HOLA! criteria

We have worked out a number of instruments for evaluation of our approach. We have set a number of criteria and turned them into models, questionnaires, file cards which allow us to measure the holistic value of the materials and classroom practice. Some of the most fundamental criteria of our approach are the following.

First of all, the learner knows from the start what particular end product he is going to achieve by means of a particular task and how this product will enable him to communicate better and to develop as a person. The product is always part of the learner's universe; it is meaningful to him and makes him a better language user.

A second principle is the focus on the language system as a whole and not on discrete elements from the underlying linguistic system such as isolated vocabulary, morphological, syntactical, phonological items...: these micro-

elements have an instrumental value for performing real life tasks: the pupil learns to order a meal in a restaurant, to organise a birthday party, to play a game, to write a card for Mother's Day, to welcome someone at the airport. He does so from real life models and with the help of language chunks. After having mobilised previous experiences with the task, he gets on with the activities and he only discovers the linguistic materials when he needs to achieve his challenge, being aware of what he needs to do the task. What drives him is the need to mean. When necessary, he gets involved in the acquisition of knowledge, in order to better communicate in the context of the given task. Actually, the task sets the context for the language use.

When exposing the learner to language, the teacher carefully selects authentic material belonging to the child's universe and presents them with the necessary gestures, illustrations, movements, signs… to convey the message. The language is presented as in real life: including non-verbal cues. An appropriate choice of songs, nursery rhymes, stories the learner knows in his own language or stories with lots of repetitions is within the range of the young learner. In order to function with the target language in real life it is crucial that the learner is aware he doesn't need to understand everything; that he needs to be confident, building meaning from the bits and pieces he can understand. So he could, for instance, look at the weather forecast in order to prepare his luggage for a scout's camp without understanding all the details. By relying on his genuine ability to discover he will go as far as he can.

All material presented on paper can be used in several ways. This publication will gradually guide our reader through the HOLA! approach and invite him to share our philosophy. Our Comenius courses aim at reflecting, together with the participants, on how to adapt their textbook or home made materials and to design new ones. Starting from examples of lessons carried out in real primary classrooms in some of our project countries, we will guide the participants in applying our approach to their home context.

A touch of HOLA! the menu

From our experience in in-service training we know that most of the teachers are not so fond of theory. The same way, pupils are not that fond of grammar exercises. It is because an approach conveyed in an abstract way, through the theoretical shortcut explaining what works and why, requires a constant transfer effort: we try to imagine what it actually means for our classroom practice. Therefore, we have decided to alternate theoretical and practical chapters. The order in which the reader wants to discover them is not important. Each chapter is an entity in itself and has its own style, depending on the content. Even if some of us put pen to paper in order to weave a part of the HOLA! web, all project partners have had their contribution in each of the chapters. It is indeed the result of a joint effort. Going continuously from practice to theory and the other way around, all parts of the publication have benefited from continuous feedback. Besides the combination of the practical and the theoretical perspective, we deliberately opted for relying on both the French and the English

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foreign language teaching tradition. We also took into account the typical routines of each of the project countries. So our end product has a real European dimension.

All practical documents such as lesson plans, handouts for the pupils, useful web links are available from our website.

Our first chapter leads us into an Italian classroom in Palermo, where children prepare and play the *Hunting game* together. Maria Giovanna Granata tells us how the children gradually learn to cope with the story and how they act it out. It's about having fun and learning by doing. A number of follow-up activities enable our youngsters to consolidate their achievements.

The second chapter takes us *Behind the scenes in HOLA*! Karine Van Thienen introduces the "HOLA! template" which is in addendum of each materials chapter. Manuel Megías has designed and fine-tuned it after each project partner discussion at the meetings. This template describes the main HOLA! features as well as a number of practical issues. In the second section of this chapter, we suggest a number of instruments for evaluating the holistic value of foreign language lessons.

The HOLA! recipe brings us to the first theoretical chapter presenting the underlying theories we go for. Hanne Leth Andersen and Stacey Cozart explain our vision on language learning from several perspectives: the HOLA model, from whole to parts, the environment, authenticity and ICT are the ingredients.

In the fourth chapter, Tiziana Venturella tells us how she creates stories with the Italian pupils of her school. The *Fantastic binomial* provides a structure for letting the children's imagination become productive: after having agreed on the final story, the kids are invited to personalise the story and turn it into a rap or a performance.

The fifth chapter brings us to the reason why we believe variation in work formats and in presentation of materials is important. Manuel Megías and Maria José Valiente take us by the hand and lead us to the why, what and how of *Learner styles and Multiple Intelligences*. In order to take every child on board we need to have a better view on how our youngsters learn best and to provide a variety of activities catering for as many preferences as we can.

How a few words can change one's life… In the sixth chapter Songül Ömürdağ and Michael O'Neill show how a common story of a *Beggar* and a painting from *Van Gogh* inspire kids to work on a project from the "Workstations". Having been exposed to the story, the children choose from a number of task suggestions what they want to achieve from there. An example of self-directed learning in the primary classroom focusing on teamwork skills.

The seventh chapter, *How to become an independent learner*, is at the heart of HOLA! learning: how to encompass learning by means of a learning strategies

programme. Manuel Megías and Maria José Valiente take us to the mystery of the black box to address cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social strategies and show how the HOLA! materials deal with these in an implicit or explicit way. In HOLA! learning strategies are considered to be catalysers of lifelong learning as we believe they gradually lead our young learners to autonomy in foreign language learning.

The HOLA! teacher creates a warm, safe and motivating environment for his pupils. One of the most visible ways in which he does this is the feedback practice. *Feedback: a basic ingredient or the cherry on top of the cake?* This is the title of the eighth chapter, where Theodoros Skenderis and Chryssa Laskaridou reflect on how to act as a teacher in order to take all children on board by showing understanding, encouragement in a non-directive and non-judgmental way. A cocktail of warm authenticity, integrity and care where theory and practice come together.

Reflection, awareness and sense of self, self-assessment help the learner take responsibility for his own learning. In the ninth chapter Rosangela Baggio guides us through our portfolio philosophy: *Personalising learning through the Portfolio*. Rather than a neat document in a nice shape, the portfolio is concerned with the way in which the learner can be invited to share his thoughts about learning with the teacher and relevant others. For us the portfolio is a mindset, a philosophy in which reflection and interaction on the individual learning process and products lead to awareness, sense of self and improvement. The European Language Portfolio, the HOLA! portfolio, practical guidelines for the teacher and concrete examples from our HOLA! materials, these are the ingredients.

In the tenth chapter a class of Greek children welcome *Zippo*, the most famous inhabitant of planet Zi*, on planet Earth*. A teacher from Earth and a teacher from Zi reflect together on the HOLA! approach. While their pupils learn how to address Zippo and his friends, Chryssa Laskaridou and Theodoros Skenderis tell us how they managed to capture the attention of the learners in creating a wonderful universe with them.

In the eleventh chapter Karine Van Thienen takes us to the HOLA! universe we dream of. Storytelling takes an important place in a holistic approach, so we opted for a home made fairy tale, *Once upon a time there was HOLA!*, to deploy our vision of HOLA! with all ingredients from the work we enjoyed doing together the past two years.

All nice stories have an end and all publications have a *Conclusion*. We take advantage of this last part to highlight some crucial points of our approach and our work process. It's the section of the last good advice before practising HOLA!. Because HOLA! never comes to an end… at least, that's what we hope.

Karine Van Thienen
HOLA! Project coordinator

HOLA!

CHAPTER 1

THE HUNTING GAME

THE STRANGE STORY OF
SPECIAL ANIMALS LIVING
HAPPILY IN A WOOD AND
OF A HUNTER…

Although Ann is a primary school teacher with almost 10 years of experience behind her, she has arrived at that point in her career when she drags herself through daily school routines without enthusiasm and what is worse, with the feeling of not being able to arouse enthusiasm in her pupils any longer. She remembers all the years she has spent as a teacher, how in the past she felt reborn every time she helped her pupils discover their talents and to find new opportunities to use them; how she felt she was several persons performing several duties: coach, psychologist, friend, actor, nurse, substitute parent, story teller… how she enjoyed teaching and how she and her pupils had fun!

Now she seems to have no more interest or stimuli, and mainly relies on text books. Seated at her desk, her head in her hands, Ann is fully aware she is going through a professional crisis and is looking for a way to get out of it.

What can she do to bring life back to her lessons again? She needs new ideas. Maybe if she used stories again? Children love listening to stories. Stories can also be very helpful to introduce children into the real world, while at the same time being respectful of their psychological development stage, of their feelings and needs, and of the special way they perceive reality. "*With stories children enter the real world through the window, instead of through the door*": this statement by Gianni Rodari inspires Ann to experiment with stories including real context and authentic language use.

So in a brainstorming she writes down some key words for an activity which could liven up her lessons again: storytelling, games, music and movement, a link to some other subjects, a touch of emotions, and… in other words some of the ingredients of a HOLA! activity – that's when she comes up with "The Hunting game". But before joining Ann let's present our school.

1.1 Context

1.1.1 *"It is language that makes us equal"*

In Italy learners are expected to have a good command of a European language, mainly English, and basic communicative skills in a second foreign language by the end of compulsory education. The main aim is not only to make them able to communicate with people of other countries and to have more chances to get information, but to develop a European consciousness as well, so that they can feel and act as citizens of Europe. Another important aim is to give all young people equal opportunities to study, find a job, develop themselves as persons, without any borders or obstacles limiting their choices and possibilities. Language is a powerful means to pull down the barriers and to reduce differences. Recalling Don Milani: *"It is language that makes us equal".*

1.1.2 *Language learning at Alcide de Gasperi*

The "Alcide De Gasperi" school is located in a residential area in Palermo. It has almost 950 pupils from kindergarten (9 classes) to primary (30 classes). The presence of about 100 children of other nationalities has provided us with the opportunity to focus on a multilingual and multicultural educational project. This project uses the narrative as one of the main means of developing language skills, both in the first and in the foreign languages. French and Spanish are included in the local curriculum, and children can choose to study one of them besides English which is compulsory. CLIL is also used by some teachers in Years 4 and 5 for subjects such as art and environmental education. Teachers are interested in experimenting with new approaches.

1.1.3 *Let's brighten up our lessons!*

The Hunting game has been tried out with learners of Year 4 who have a basic English language competence. The expected pre-requisites are: names of animals, action verbs, basic vocabulary; being able to understand an oral narrative which includes familiar language; knowledge of geography and environmental education such as parks, woods, lakes and rivers, islands in Sicily; basic collaboration and organisation skills.

The end product of this learning unit is the performance of *The Hunting game*. The learning objectives are:

− to develop listening comprehension, language interaction and narrative skills (whole language)

− to develop cooperation and planning skills, autonomy, language awareness, self and peer assessment skills and to improve relationships (whole learner)

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– to develop awareness of environmental issues, to promote social skills such as relationships and to respect the environment and rules (whole world).

1.2   The Hunting game

The Hunting game is a learning unit composed of various activities over four lessons of 60 minutes each, based on *HOLA!* principles. Before a detailed description of each sequence, a summary is provided as an overview of the whole learning unit.

1   Warm up (30 min.):

- In the wood
- "Guided fantasy": Let's go into the wood
- A link with environmental education

2   Sequence 1 (60 min.): The Strange Story of Special Animals Living Happily in a Wood and of a Hunter (storytelling)

3   Sequence 2 (60 min.): Making and animating animals… and the hunter (re-telling the story with language interaction)

- Warm up: Let's act and dance as animals!
- Making and animating animals… and the hunter

4   Sequence 3 (60 min.): The Hunting game (acting out the story)

5   *Follow*-up activities (30 min.): Let's play games:

- What am I doing?
- Do what I say

6   *Portfolio* activity

The warm up activity is divided into three sections which aim at creating the context by using poster, flash cards, pictures or shapes of animals, notice cards. The activity also aims at recalling previous knowledge and creating a safe, relaxing, stimulating setting.

In this phase the learners interact using either the target language or their mother tongue. We use the target language, and make ourselves understood by miming, gesturing, showing flash cards or pictures, or any other non verbal cue.

In the wood

This scene takes 5 to 10 minutes.

We invite the learners to sit down in a circle on the floor. We show a poster of a wood and ask: "What is it? What can we find in a wood? What animals live in a wood?". They pick up some animal shapes or pictures from a box and stick them on the poster. We ask what animals do in the wood. "Right, rabbits jump. And what do foxes do?"

"Guided fantasy": Let's go into the wood!

This activity takes 10 to 15 minutes.

We invite the learners to close their eyes. We then tell them they are all going to a special place. We then say: "Now imagine you are in a wood. What can you see? Are there any lakes, rivers or ponds? What animals can you see? What are they doing? Do you hear any sounds or noises? What can you smell? Fresh grass? The scent of flowers? Are you enjoying being in the wood? You still have one minute to stay there". After few moments of silence we say: "Now you can open your eyes and come back to the classroom". The learners open their eyes and are asked to talk about their experiences.

A link with geography and environmental education

This activity takes 5 to 10 minutes.

We ask the learners if there is something or somebody in the wood the animals

have to fear. Then we show a picture of a hunter and ask questions about him – who he is, what he has got in his hand, what he is going to do in the wood with his gun, whether a hunter can go hunting whenever he likes or not. We show a notice with the date and the hour established for the beginning

of the hunting season. Previous knowledge of geography (parks, woods, lakes, islands, protected areas, etc.), of environmental education and of rules related to hunting is recalled.

Sequence 1: The Strange Story of Special Animals Living Happily in a Wood and of a Hunter

The discovery of the story takes 20 to 30 minutes.

We inform the learners we are going to tell a story, a special one, where animals can speak, and where something magic happens; we invite them to sit in a comfortable way on the floor, as we do. We then start telling the story using paper shapes or pictures of animals. We encourage them to interact in the storytelling.

This sequence aims at developing listening comprehension skills, and at introducing new language and structures in a "real" context, i.e. the story.

We create a safe, relaxing, stimulating environment: relaxed posture, smiles, eye contact, body language, clear and expressive voice. We use pictures, posters, notices to capture their attention and to facilitate comprehension.

The Hunting game story[1]

"*We're in a wood… and in the wood there are lots of animals.*
There are … what animals are there in the wood? (The learners answer)
And what are they doing? (The learners answer)

But… listen: What's that noise? Somebody is coming: it's a hunter, with a gun on his shoulder and a hunting dog beside him! All the animals run away as they see him, as quickly as they can: the squirrels climb up the trees, the rabbits run away to their caves under the ground, the foxes and the wild pigs run to their hidden caves, the ducks run to the lake and swim away, the frogs jump into water, the birds fly away (miming the actions).

But… look at these notices (pointing at some notices hanging on the wall nearby and inviting the learners to read them): *"Hunting season starts on 1st September*

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[1] *In the story we refer to the learners as "A" when they play the animals and to the teacher who tells the story as "H" when she plays the role of the hunter. Contextual issues are given in brackets.*

at 3 o'clock". What day is it today? (we point at a daily calendar). It is 31st August. The hunting season is not open yet, so, let's tell the animals to come back.

All the animals come back, they are curious and they ask the hunter: "What are you doing Mr. Hunter?"(we invite the learners to repeat)
A: *"What are you doing Mr. Hunter?"*
H: *"I'm having lunch. Go away!"*

The animals go away, but after a while, they come back (we invite the learners playing the animals to ask again)
A: *"What are you doing Mr. Hunter?"*
H: *"I'm cleaning my gun. Don't annoy me!"*

The animals go away but they come back soon…
A: *"What are you doing Mr. Hunter?"*
H: *"I'm going to bed, in my tent; go away".*

The animals go away but they come back early in the morning:
A: *"What are you doing Mr. Hunter?"*
H (yawning):*"I'm sleeping, go away and be quiet!"*

A: *"What are you doing Mr. Hunter?"*
H: *"I was sleeping, but I'm awake now, I'm getting up and… (having a look at his watch…) It's 3 o'clock… I'm going hunting!"*
He takes his gun and starts shooting.

All the animals run away as fast as they can: the birds fly away in the sky, the frogs and the ducks jump into the water and swim away, the squirrels climb up the trees… but some are shot out, and… the magic is that… whoever is shot, becomes the hunter".

As we finish telling the story first we ask the learners if they liked it and then we ask whether they understood it. We ask questions about what made it easy to catch the meaning of the language they didn't know. The learners refer to the context, the pictures, our miming and gesturing… We ask other questions regarding the comprehension process. Was it helpful to recall some language and knowledge before the story-telling? Was it easy to interact? What facilitated it?

This discussion provides us with feedback and helps the learners to become aware of their learning process: what strategies facilitated the comprehension, the memorization of new language, and language interaction.

Warm up: Let's act and dance as animals

The warm up takes 5 to 10 minutes.

We start by saying: "Let's go to the wood again where our animal friends live happily and let's act and dance with them! Try to follow the rhythm of the music."

We put on disco-music and give some commands: run, jump, swim, fly, walk, climb, eat, drink, shoot, catch, go hunting, sleep, get up… The learners mime and dance.

This activity aims at recalling some action words included in the story. Learners have to listen to the commands we give, and move according to them while trying to follow the rhythm of disco-music. Body-movement and music are very attractive to learners and facilitate the memorization of new language.

Making and animating animals… and the hunter!

This activity takes about 45 minutes.

We inform the learners we are going to re-tell the story all together using plasticine animals. We ask them which role they would like to play (the hunter or one of the animals). We invite them to make the character they choose with a piece of plasticine. Most of them prefer to play the animals. We divide them into two groups: a small group, who will play the role of the hunter, and a bigger one, who will play the animals.

We re-tell the story, animating the plasticine animals and the hunter. We invite the learners to say what animals do in the wood, to ask the hunter questions or to answer, according to the role they chose. After re-telling the story one or more times we ask the learners if they enjoyed it.

We ask questions about what they learned: what new language; what helped them to better understand the story, to memorize the new language. We take notes of what they say.

This activity aims at improving language production and interaction among the learners. New language and structures are acquired by repetition, which naturally occurs in storytelling, so that the authenticity in language use is guaranteed.

Creating plasticine figures is important in this phase to get the learners fully involved and to facilitate the interaction: talking through puppets helps them in expressing themselves in the dialogue without being afraid of making mistakes. The learners are free to make choices according to their personality.

We tell the learners we are going to play *The Hunting game*. It is a catch and fly game.

We remind them of the context by referring to the poster of the wood on the wall. We show them a notice, indicating the date and the time the hunting season starts:

> HUNTING SEASON STARTS
>
> ON 1st SEPTEMBER
>
> AT 3 O'CLOCK

We invite the learners to organize the place so that it may become an imaginary wood, with trees, caves, a lake, a pond or river… The children decide where the hunter's tent is and where to put the notice. We then show some other notices with the names of parks, woods, lakes, islands,… of the country or region where we live and invite the learners to read them. "You know that some of these places are protected areas. Hunting or fishing is forbidden there" we say.

Using a map we recall previous knowledge about the places which are protected areas. We then point to the folded corner in a notice and tell them that the ones with a red circle are protected areas. We suggest the learners memorize the names of the protected areas because it will be useful when they play the game. We invite them to put all the notices on a desk. Afterwards we explain the game and the rules related to it.

GIB ILMANNA	ETNA	BOS CO MIRAGLIA	B OS CO FICUZZA
VENDICARI ●	CAPO GALLO ●	P AR CO DE LLE MADONIE ●	P AR CO NATUR ALE DE LLO ZINGARO ●
S AN MARTINO DELLE S CALE	US TICA ●	MONTE PELLE GRINO	LAMP E DUS A IS OLA DE I CONIGLI ●

The children first have to choose who will be the hunter and who the animals; we suggest they can choose the hunter by a counting rhyme such as:

> *"One duck/frog/…, two ducks, three ducks, four five ducks, six ducks, seven ducks, more!"*

The game starts with the learners acting as the animal they chose. Every now and then we suggest some actions: birds flying in the sky, squirrels climbing trees, frogs jumping in the pond,...

When the hunter arrives, all the animals fly away. The hunter stops in front of a notice indicating when the hunting season starts. He mimes that he is taking his gun off his shoulders and putting it on the floor. As he does this, all the animals come back. They realize it is not hunting time yet. They go close to the hunter, and ask: "*What are you doing, Mr. Hunter?"*

The hunter answers: "*I'm having dinner, lunch, breakfast…, I'm walking, swimming, going to bed, cleaning my gun…*". He decides when it is time to go hunting. As soon as the hunter says: "*I'm going hunting*", all the animals run away after having taken a notice with the name of a park, wood, lake or island…

The hunter throws paper balls at the animals. He can only see the front of the notices. He can't see the folded corners indicating a protected area. Only the animals holding the notice can see it. Whoever is shot or caught becomes the hunter. But if the "animal" who has been shot or caught has got a notice with the name of a protected area, the hunter goes to prison and stops playing the game for one turn.

After having explained the game we ask the learners to cooperate in organizing the place and decide on their roles in the game.

We play the game two or three times. The first time we guide the learners through the game and then we let them play it on their own. We spend a few minutes on the feedback.

In this sequence of the learning unit the learners practice the acquired language playing the catch and fly game. All the language skills are included: they have to understand what they have to do, to interact and to read notices. Memorizing the names of parks, woods, reserves is not a mere mental exercise: it serves the main purpose of the game, i.e. catch or don't get caught according to the role they take and know about the protected areas.

1.2.5 Follow-up activities: Let's play games

The fourth lesson is dedicated to follow-up activities. They take some 30 minutes and are organized in the classroom, a courtyard or a hall.

Peer assessment is the main purpose of these two follow up activities, presented as games, with music and body-movement. The learners check each other's performance by taking the role of the observer in turn, giving and receiving feedback, and so becoming aware of their language progress. The use of games helps the learners to be spontaneous, to reduce the anxiety of being evaluated, and to feel safe in exposing themselves.

What am I doing?

This game takes 15 minutes.

The class is divided into three groups of six or seven pupils. Each group forms a circle. A member stands in the middle and mimes some actions (2-5) while the music is on. Another one takes on the role of the observer. He gives one point for each action guessed correctly and said in the correct order. All roles are taken in turn.

Do what I say!

This second game also takes some 15 minutes.

All the learners stand in circle. Two children chosen by the counting rhyme observe their friends and point out those who make mistakes. We put music on and one learner gives a command, e.g.: run like a rabbit, run-run-run; climb like a squirrel, climb-climb-climb… All the others mime the actions. In turn, all the learners give commands. Those who mime a wrong action, or give a wrong command such as fly like a fox are out of the game. The winners are those who have acted out all the actions and given the commands correctly.

1.2.6 Portfolio activities

After a short feedback session we ask the learners to fill in a self-assessment sheet they will put in their portfolio. We explain that the questions are about all the sequences of the activity. They are also free to put in the dossier a drawing or picture of the animal or hunter they made.

Assessment has a formative function here and is mainly based on informal observation throughout the activity. A logbook is helpful in evaluating the learning process of the pupils after two or three months. At the end of each section a common reflection session helps the learners become aware of their progression. The activity for the portfolio strengthens this awareness and helps develop self-assessment skills.

1.3 Referring to HOLA!

1.3.1 Whole world

The whole world implies a contextualised activity. The context is given by the story, with the help of imagination. Through a child's imagination the classroom may become a wood, a park, or any other place. The "Guided fantasy" plays an important role in the warm up activity, placing the learners into the context   and

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personalizing it. The environment where the children live is recalled throughout the activity, as are habits and rules related to environmental education.

1.3.2   Whole language

The whole language stands first of all for authenticity, which is guaranteed here by the situation (storytelling, games) and by the social context where language is used. Morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics are simultaneously present. Language is not explicitly taught. It is acquired through repetition which often occurs both in storytelling and in games.

Whole language is task oriented: in each sequence of the activity language is used for specific tasks: telling a story, playing games.

Language awareness is developed during a briefing after each sequence and in the portfolio activity.

1.3.3   Whole learner

The learner is considered as a whole, including his head, heart and hands as well as his intelligences and learning style.

The whole unit is learner centred: his needs and feelings are taken into account. A safe and comfortable environment is created before starting each sequence. Learners have fun in doing the proposed activities as they are varied and multisensorial. Assessment is mainly informal, and as a self and peer assessment, without formal marks or notes from the teacher. They will surely keep their plasticine animal.

Learning strategies are implicit throughout the activity, to facilitate learning and to make the learners aware of their progress.

1.3.4   Whole teacher

Being a whole teacher means having a sensitive attitude to learners' feelings and needs, to their intelligences and learning styles; to stimulate curiosity and motivation and to involve all the learners.

The whole teacher welcomes the learners into a warm and safe environment and leads them towards becoming more aware of their learning process, more autonomous learners. The whole teacher supports the children when they feel insecure and enjoys sharing their experiences.

1.4   As musical instruments in an orchestra…

Ann is seated at her desk, trying to see where she and her pupils stand now. She enjoyed the lessons and the learners had fun! They learned a lot and spoke more fluently, making some errors, yes, but over time they will improve!

The HOLA principles and the various activities which emerged during her first brainstorming at the beginning, fell into place and sound like musical instruments now, each one integrating its own timbre in the harmony of an orchestra… where she is the conductor!

Maria Giovanna Granata

"I have a past that is rich in memories.
I have a present that is challenging, adventurous and fun
because I am allowed to spend my days with the future.
I am a teacher… and I thank God for it every day"

(J.W. Schlatter)

The HOLA! Template

Title	The Hunting game	
Level	A1. Pupils aged 8-10. Year 3-5	
Duration	4 hours	
Objectives	**Whole learner** • To develop cooperation • To develop planning skills • To develop language awareness • To develop assessment skills **Whole world** • To develop awareness of environmental issues • To develop awareness of the need of rules both in games and in life and of respecting them **Whole language** • To develop narrative skills • To develop language interaction skills	
Language use	**Listening** • Listen to understand the story • Listen to understand specific information **Speaking** • Retell a story • Answer questions **Interacting** • Act out a story • Ask and answer questions **Reading** • Read notices to get information	
Language focus	**Linguistic focus**	**Discourse focus**
	Grammar Verb "to be", Simple present, Present continuous **Vocabulary** Animals, vocabulary linked to a specific environment (wood, lake, …), action verbs **Phonetics and Phonology** Pronunciation of vocabulary Intonation and stress of questions and statements	**Description**: *We are in a wood. What can you see in a wood? There is..., there are...* **Narration**: Retell the story **Questions and corresponding answers**: What are you doing? I'm having dinner/ lunch. I 'm going hunting. What do rabbits /ducks do? They climb up the trees/ swim…

	Pragmatic focus	**Cultural focus**
	How to talk according to the interlocutor and the moment, e.g. "What are you doing?" to find out if the hunter is going to come after them.	Applying rules, playing in the universe of storytelling
Reflection on learning **Towards learners' autonomy**	**Learning strategies**: Activating background knowledge, Planning, Memorizing, Resourcing, Transfer, Cooperation, Reinforcement, Peer assessment **Learning styles**: Concrete, Visual, Verbal, Active, Inductive **Multiple Intelligences**: Linguistic, Visual/spatial, Kinaesthetic, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal **Portfolio**: Self-assessment sheet, Drawing of the favourite character	
Assessment	• Assessment based on observation • Peer assessment • Portfolio	
Materials and resources needed	Poster of a wood, pictures or shapes of animals, of a hunter, notices, signs, plasticine, paper balls, recorded music	
Sequence of activities	1 Warm up: – In the wood – Guided fantasy: Let's go into the wood – Act and dance like animals! 2 Sequence 1: The Strange Story of Special Animals Living Happily in a Wood and of a Hunter (storytelling) 3 Sequence 2: Making and animating animals… and the hunter! (story re-telling with language interaction) 4 Sequence 3: The Hunting game (acting out the story) 5 Follow up activities: Let's play games – What am I doing? – Do what I say 6 Portfolio activities	

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CHAPTER 4

THE FANTASTIC BINOMIAL

Do you remember the time your mum used to tell you a story before you went to bed? How could you forget the adventures, the funny and scary moments, the heroes and the happy endings? And how important dreaming about this fantastic world has been for your growth. Since we were children we have learnt about life through storytelling, taking those magic aspects into our real life and experiences, learning wise truth and morals and learning to interact with others. Stories belong to childhood and enrich children's way of thinking and behaving.

In primary school, learning is not mechanical and repetitious. We deal with a whole person's needs; emotions, communication, socialization, learning styles and strategies, multiple intelligences, a safe environment... that's what we focus on.

The technique presented in this learning unit is the *Fantastic binomial*. It is taken from the Italian writer G. Rodari[2], whose aim is to develop language skills by means of creative processes. We found it very interesting to apply this technique to FL learning and teaching, enriching it with the principles of the HOLA! approach.

4.1   Context

4.1.1   Foreign language in the learner's universe

English is the European language included in the National Curriculum of primary education in Italy. The curriculum presents foreign language learning mainly as a means to communicate spontaneously and naturally, and not only as an object of study. According to this point of view, English is considered as a vehicle towards contents and topics, which elicits interest and motivation in the learners, mainly through spoken language, and by using a natural learning environment. By the end of primary school the learners are expected to reach the A1 level of the Common European Framework.

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[2] *Rodari, G. (1983) La Grammatica della fantasia (The Grammar of Imagination). Torino: Einaudi*

English is mainly taught by primary school teachers who attended a specific language course and have a B1 language level at least.

It is compulsory for learners to study English from the Year 1 of primary school at 6 years of age. In some schools they start in kindergarten, though it is not compulsory.

In Year 1 English is studied for 1 hour per week; in Year 2 for 2 hours and in Years 3, 4, 5 for 3 hours. The average class consists of 20 to 25 pupils. English learning may be improved through different projects and workshops. Motivation is also given by the European programmes, mainly the multilateral partnerships, e-twinning projects, and the European Language Label.

4.1.2 Our school's "multivision"

The multilingual and multicultural background of our school, facilitates learning and teaching within an open-minded vision of the world. As a matter of fact, teachers and learners learn to see reality from different points of view, sharing habits and attitudes of different cultures around them. All special events such as Christmas, Ramadan, Gerdan, Mother's Day… are a means to spread knowledge of the different realities coexisting in our school. There is also the annual recital at the end of the school year which is always centred on multicultural and multilingual aspects.

In our school, from kindergarten, children experience the English language through the "Narrative format approach"[3].

In our primary school, English learning is further promoted through:

- an extra English class: 2 hours per week in Year 1, 1 optional hour for CLIL[4] in other years
- extracurricular workshops
- European projects
- City camps: full immersion in the language with native speaker tutors, after the end of the school year
- International Certificate of Language Competence, at the end of Year 5 and 6.

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[3] *The "format" is a psycholinguistic model of second language teaching. This narrative approach, experimented in a Socrates project, refers to Bruner's theory of mother tongue acquisition in very young children (since the early months) through routines, repetitions and special mother-child rapport. See Bruner, J.S. (1983) Child's Talk. Learning to Use Language. Norton and Taeschner, Traute (1997-99) The Adventures of Hocus and Lotus. Vol. I, II, III, Franco Angeli.*
[4] *Content and Language Integrated Learning*

A second European language – French or Spanish – is included in the optional curriculum from Year 3 onwards. Italian as a second language is also taught in workshops for foreign pupils.

Most of the teachers use communicative, multisensory or task-based approaches. Some make use of the textbook as the main support and sometimes as a guide.

4.2   Come in...

The *Fantastic binomial* lesson is set for Year 4 (9 years of age). This activity requires pre-knowledge such as: the parts of the body, colours, qualifying adjectives, to have and to be, the present progressive, the simple present and the use of 3rd person singular.

Our purpose is to give the learners the opportunity to use the foreign language in an amusing way, using their imagination.

The end product of the learning unit is the production of a narrative text through the selection of characters, places, events and an ending, as well as playing with the language.

The objectives established for the whole activity are:

− to develop creativity

− to know the structure of a story (beginning, development, ending)

− to promote interaction

− to enrich language.

The *Fantastic binomial* doesn't require any specific material.

The teacher:

− creates a safe environment and a stimulating teaching atmosphere through a positive attitude and good rapport with the class

− motivates the learners and involves them in the activity arousing their interest and curiosity

− guides the learners into the world of fantasy

− recalls and introduces language through real life experiences

− supports learners with non-verbal language: mime, gesture and eye contact.

With stories the atmosphere becomes magical and learners turn into the characters, jumping into the story. The teacher is the facilitator, always attentive and confident. The learners get involved, mainly because the elements and events of the stories often reflect their feelings, hopes and their experiences: their *whole world*.

The learning activity can be divided into 6 steps (4 lessons):

1	Warm up: Do you like stories? (duration: 15 min)
2	The magic hat: Match the characters and start creating the story (duration: 60 min)
3	The Menu: Choose your favourite garnish (duration: 60 min)
4	Performance corner: Present your performance (duration: 60 min)
5	Feedback on the activities
6	Portfolio: self-assessment

4.2.1   Let's warm up : Do you like stories?

We are in a Year 4 class in Italy and we are going to create a story according to the Rodari technique[5].

The setting: Learners sit in a circle to enable whole group involvement.

The lesson is introduced with stimulus questions by asking the learners if they like stories, and, of course, children do!

T: *"Hello children, do you like stories?... I like them! I love Cinderella and I don't like sad stories! Which stories do you like? Do you like those with… ? Would you like to create a story all together? We're going to do it in a fun way; it is called the Fantastic binomial."*

Learners usually give Yes/No or short sentences answers. We focus on basic functions and discourse: *"Do you like…? I like… I don't like…"* and support the learners with clear and simple language, body language and facial expressions. Learners, in turn, continue by saying and repeating *"I like… I don't like …".* and by asking the teacher and other classmates: *"Which story do you like?"*

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[5] *In our HOLA! experience, we had the opportunity to try out the Fantastic Binomial in two different countries: Italy and Greece. In the Italian class, there were 25 learners (an average class), in the Greek one, 15. This experience revealed a common background, common needs and other features which tell us that the application of the approach is feasible in different teaching and learning contexts.*

With this kind of repetition, the learners discover their friends' tastes and consolidate language structures as well.

4.2.2 *The magic hat*

After the warm up we are ready to start creating the story using the Fantastic binomial technique. The rules are explained in L1 if necessary.

– Each learner writes or draws (on a small piece of paper) an English word. This could be a person (famous characters, heroes, friends…), an animal, an object, real or imaginary.

– They fold the paper and put it into the "magic hat".

– In turns, two learners pick a piece of paper each; they read the words aloud and the first "binomial", i.e. a pair of words, is written on the board.

– From the list of binomials the learners vote for the most "bizarre" set.

"Monster and Rainbow" is the binomial chosen for our story.

4.2.3 *Once upon a time…*

Now that the binomial has been decided on we can start by saying "Once upon a time there was... a Monster".

T: *"Well, a monster! Ok, now let's jump into this story… one... two... three... let's jump!"*

The teacher and the learners jump as if entering a magical dimension. The teacher introduces the context of the story by asking:

T: *"Where does the monster live?"*. The teacher, if necessary, suggests options: *"In a town, by the sea, in a cave?"*

L: *"In a cave!"*

The teacher starts asking for more information about the character: *"What's his name? What is the monster like? Describe the monster"*. All the questions are supported by miming and gestures. As the learners describe the character, they all repeat the story so far so that they can consolidate the language.

L: *"His name is Ondris... he's green and red... three eyes... four legs..."*

T: *"Well well, let's see: here is the Monster. His name is Ondris. He's green and red, very tall and big. He has got three eyes, two noses, three horns, four hands, four legs. He lives in a cave, he lives alone..."*

The teacher writes key words or sentences on the board. Then she starts asking the learners "Why" questions to elicit information about the story.

T: *"Ondris lives alone in a cave. Why? Have you got ideas?"*

The learners may predict how the events develop and how the character will behave and act.

L: *"Because he have not a family!"*

T: *"Oh! Poor monster, he hasn't got a family, and do you think he's happy or sad?"*

L: *"Sad!"*

Now, the teacher suggests the learners introduce the second element of the binomial, in this case the Rainbow. The appearance of the second element of the binomial is meant to change events: *"But one day... what happens to Ondris? He sees...."*

L: *"Ondris see a Rainbow in the sky"*

T: *"Yes, Ondris sees a Rainbow in the sky"*

There's no explicit corrective feedback on grammar but the teacher's repetition in the correct form. The repetition is genuine as not to interfere with interaction.

As we are in the central part of the story, the teacher starts re-telling it while miming, with all learners, so they can recall the whole story so far and consolidate what they have already learned, through complete sentences.

With "What" and "How" questions, the learners go on developing the story:

L: *"Ondris wants to take the Rainbow, so he goes up to the mountain, jumps on the Rainbow. They fly to find Ondris' family".*

As the story is at its final stage, the emotional element is added. Ondris, the Monster, has solved his problem. We have to find an ending.

T: *"Well! Ondris has found his family! Is he still sad?"*

L: *"Nooo. Now Ondris is happy. Ondris and the Rainbow are happy together."*

So far this is the new story we have all created. A short and simple one, as it has to be at this age level. We can write the text on the board and we can read it all together.

4.2.4   The Menu: Choose your favourite garnish

In respect of personal styles, strategies and Multiple Intelligences, we give each learner the opportunity to "manipulate" the text according to his "taste".

So, they can choose among:

- drawing and writing the story board
- acting out the story
- turning the story into a rap.

We focused mainly on oral skills, but we may ask the learners to take notes and find some key words or short sentences in the written text to use in their performances. According to the learners' choices, different groups can be formed to work cooperatively.

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Two groups choose the rap. This activity addresses kinaesthetic, musical and linguistic pupils as well as active and verbal learning styles.

Two groups choose the acting out. This option addresses kinaesthetic, spatial and linguistic pupils as well as the active and verbal learning styles.

Here is how the rap was developed by one of the two groups.

The learners write down the key words of the story, or at least words they think can be useful to make the Rap:

Rainbow / monster / climb / Ondris / four legs / four hands / family / sky / happy / green and red / three eyes / once upon a time / jump / one / cave / colour / two noses / sad / corns / fly

Creating a rap is not easy. This musical style deals with rhythm and rhymes. It's important to play with these aspects in L1 first in order to let the learners feel safe. Learners are afraid they are going to make errors and hesitate in experiencing an activity. To help them with rhythm we can choose to use some visual marks to associate with the body movements:

| clap | clap | stomp |
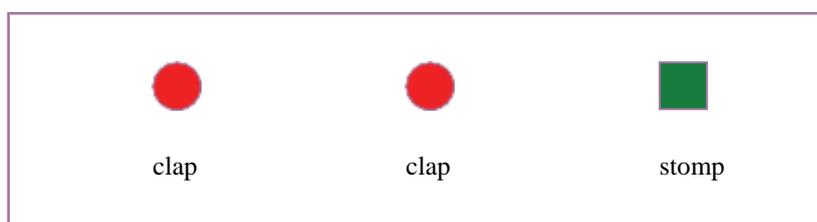
The learners associate this rhythm with the song *"We will rock you"*. They easily reproduce it. Afterwards they play with the rhythm and simple rhymes in L1, linked to their daily attitudes, but also with nonsensical issues. They are now ready to work on their own. The teacher is always attentive and the learners can ask questions for clarification: some ask if they can refer to the textbook for help.

We watch them working on the rap. We see that working cooperatively is not always easy. They sometimes quarrel. There appears to be a leader in the group, someone who mostly wants to decide how to proceed. Working in group is a very important resource, at a personal level as well as for learning. Teachers should always be aware of cooperative aspects in the learning process and always promote them, as these aspects deal with autonomy, thought sharing and respect for other points of view.

The teacher mediates all these aspects by guiding the learners toward setting goals, planning, balancing ideas and roles. *"How can you do this? Please reflect, present your proposal, listen to other solutions…"*

Once they start creating the rap they get more and more involved and happy. The group is composed of five learners. They assign roles: one is the vocal rapper, the others play the rhythm and dance. They are ready for the final performance!

> Ondris is / green and red
>
> And he is / very very sad
>
> He hasn't got / parents, sisters, brothers
>
> He hasn't uncle / cousin and mother
>
> He dreams to fly / very high
>
> And go round / around the sky
>
> So he hopes the rainbow touch / and his family again catch

4.2.5   Hot and cold: Feedback and portfolio

After the main steps related to the story creation and the follow up activity , i.e. the performances, we come to feedback which is what we call the hot moment. This means that learners may express themselves about the activity, referring to the emotional aspect: how they felt about it, if they enjoyed it, if it was hard or boring… Here all these aspects are expressed through visual means. The emoticons or smiley's are, nowadays, the way young people express their feelings, even in SMS messages. The setting is a round circle, the same as for the warm up.

The teacher draws the smiley's referring to feelings: happy, sad, confused, bored… on the board or a big sheet and the learners communicate how they feel.

An alternative is a poster sheet where the learners can select whatever means of expression to convey their first impressions: through painting, short sentences, whatever…

	(*free use of colours, painting, signs, symbols… to express their feeling about the activity*)	(*learners' spontaneous verbal feedback*) Hard to understand I liked it Creativity Very very very fantastic

The portfolio is the cold moment. It deals with metacognition, reflection on personal styles, on language competence... In this particular case, we opted for not doing it straight after the activities. When children have been performing a rap or acting out their story, when they are having fun and are involved in the activity, we let them enjoy these moments.

The portfolio is the final step of this learning unit. As for grammar reflection, for example, during the storytelling, the 3rd person singular "s" omission occurred several times. As there was no explicit grammar teaching or reviewing of errors during the activity, we used the portfolio to focus on form in the language reflection part.

Name: .... Year: ....……................
Date: ....……............................

PORTFOLIO ACTIVITY *"The Fantastic binomial"*

Choose your emoticon

I liked it because: it was funny ☐ it was easy ☐

I didn't like it because: it was boring ☐ it was hard ☐

What was easy for me was:
oral understanding ☐ speaking ☐ reading ☐ writing ☐
Why?: ....…..

What was difficult for me was:
oral understanding ☐ speaking ☐ reading ☐ writing ☐
Why?: ....…........

I was able to:
ask and answers questions ☐ ask questions for clarification ☐
help the others ☐ work with the others ☐

Who/what helped me in doing the activities?:
Cooperation with my classmates ☐ listening to others' ideas/proposals ☐
using pictures ☐ note taking ☐

Planning: by myself ☐ with others ☐

Find information in:
books ☐ web ☐ …………… ☐

My teacher through:
translation into L1 ☐ mime and gesture ☐ repeating ☐

Other: ....…...........................

I felt at ease when I worked:
by myself ☐ in pairs ☐ in a group ☐ with the class ☐

I felt involved ☐   I didn't feel involved ☐

I was good at: ....

I was happy with/gratified by: ....

Language reflection:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4.3 Focus on the HOLA! universe

4.3.1 What about language?

The *Fantastic binomial* follows the holistic principle of whole language, according to which language learning proceeds from whole to parts to whole: from creating the story to looking for keywords for the rap, and ending with the actual performance.

In the warm up and during the creation of the story, language is used to convey genuine and interesting content for learners: "Do you like stories? I like Cinderella, she's a good singer, she has got a lot of friends: mice, horses, hens... which story do you like?"

There's no explicit description of structures, syntax or semantics; repetition is useful to consolidate new language in context.

The focus on linguistic elements comes along the narrative activity through the stimuli of the teacher: "Let's describe the monster…" The children are invited to add information related to parts of the body, colours, feelings, … "He's green and red, very tall and big. He has got three eyes, two noses… He is sad. He hasn't got a family." During the creation of the story, linguistic elements come in a natural way through the prompts of the teacher asking the learners to provide descriptions. Language is dealt with as a whole.

Once the learners are used to the language elements of the story, they are asked to re-tell it in a personal way. Therefore they are going to "manipulate" it. The rap, as well as the acting out activities, requires the learners to come up with a personal version of the story within the same language range. It is a genuine way to use language. During the rap activity, communicative awareness and spontaneous use and choice of language are developed.

Language is used to produce meaning in a wider context. Furthermore, the whole group interaction, in building the narrative text, facilitates the coherence and cohesion of the text and enriches it more and more by adding personal meaningful ideas related to the narrative context.

Learners often ask: "How do you say... in English?" On the one hand, speaking fluency is hindered because of a lack of a wide range of vocabulary. On the other hand, learners, through explicit or inferential language description (by means of examples, mime, actions...), are encouraged to produce spontaneous language through dialogue, open answers…

As learners at this age are mostly visual, concrete and kinaesthetic, they benefit from drawing and acting out what they have just experienced, within a global approach.

4.3.2   What about the learners?

Learning by doing is something in which we believe and through which we experienced the HOLA! approach. Recalling psychologists and psychomotoric theories[6] about learning and communicating through body and movement, we want to underline the importance this aspect had in this learning unit. The memory of the body has the same importance and value as the brain.

The whole learner is free to choose how to "manipulate" and re-tell what he creates, by making the story into a rap, acting it out (using his body as an instrument to learn), writing or drawing, because we want learners to feel safe and happy in their learning process, to express themselves through an integrated use of languages, and to perform according to one's personal intelligence and style.

Abilities, attitudes, attention, concentration and participation are aspects that are never uniform in a class but according to HOLA! each learner is as important as the other.

We deal with different levels of learning abilities, with children with difficulties; giving them the possibility to express and use the different codes. Using alternative languages in a funny environment means let them feel safe and able to participate. In the experience we had in Thessaloniki (Greece), there was a child with dyslexia. This learning disease is related to writing and reading skills and in the Fantastic binomial all skills are involved; *"that day, K. seemed to be a little worried when the story was written on the board, but as we used to repeat it orally step by step, he felt involved and participated without fear. He, then, performed through the acting out. His expression turned from worried to happy, and it was a great gratification, when he gave his positive feedback by asking: "Are you coming tomorrow?"* (notes from Thessaloniki).

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[6] There's a wide literature about these theories and studies; among the various authors:
P. Vayer, J. Estrooper, *Il corpo nella dinamica educativa* Emme Ed, Milano1976; J. Le Boulch, *Educare con il movimento*, Ed. Armando, 1979; H. Wallon, *Importance du mouvement dans le développement psychologique de l'enfant*, "Enfance", 9,1. 1956.

4.3.3　*What about the world of HOLA!*

Young learners, through creating a story, express the way they are in the world as well as the world around them. The monster they describe, in this short narration, is lonely and sad because he lost his family, and the search for it becomes the central idea of the text. Children just express what is central in their life: affection and love. Sometimes they like introducing obstacles, anger, sadness, but they always come up with a happy ending, for they feel safe and happy.

4.3.4　*What about the teacher?*

A teacher always experiences what and how learners learn: play with clay, sing songs, dance, create fantastic stories, that's to say learn through having fun. We have to consider ourselves as learners! Therefore, a whole teacher is aware, first of all, of a child's world made up of authentic experiences linked to everyday life, family and emotions. A whole teacher pays attention to process and product as well as the class atmosphere. To involve the learners means to provide them with a safe environment in which they feel confident with the teacher, their classmates and the tasks they perform.

4.4　The end… maybe

All is well that ends well! The learners are so proud of their creation and their performances. But magic never ends.. One day, the tricky- teacher finds a letter that says: " The poor she-monster was imprisoned by a bad dragon in the black forest; she needs help! Will Ondris be able to save her?" Well, this is another story… to be continued!

Tiziana Venturella

Hola! A Holistic Approach to Language Learning

The HOLA! template

Title	The Fantastic binomial	
Level	A1. 9-11 years of age	
Duration	60 min (1 lesson) + 120 min (2 lessons)	
Objectives	• **Whole learner** Interaction with teacher and classmates; cooperative learning • **Whole language** Develop the learners' ability to create a narrative text • **Whole world** Use of imagination to create stories Develop the learners' ability to describe the main narrative sequences: beginning-development-ending with characters, places, time	
Language use	Develop language and interaction with a focus on oral skills Enrich vocabulary Ask and answer questions about the story; help, suggest, find solutions • **Listening comprehension**: General understanding, Specific information • **Speaking**: Choosing (was the monster happy or sad?), Describing characters (he was tall, green with three eyes..), Re-telling the story (acting-out, rapping) • **Reading**: Binomials, Text • **Writing**: Key-words, Text	
Language focus	**Linguistic focus**	**Discourse focus**
	Grammar Verb to have/to be, Singular / plural, Descriptive adjectives + noun, Questions and answers, Present progressive, Simple present, with focus on 3rd person singular **Vocabulary** Most known action verbs Physical characteristics of persons, Animals, Imaginary characters **Phonetics and Phonology** Pronunciation, Intonation	The structure of a story and typical discourse features Synthesize and extrapolate from a narrative text in short and clear sentences From close to more open, from teacher guided to learner–centred

	Pragmatic focus	**Cultural focus**
	Persuasiveness: impact on the course of the story	The culture of the stories for children and fairy tales
	How to put the characters in text	
	The effect of repetitions	
	Problem solving during the creation of the story	
Reflection on learning **Towards learners' autonomy**	**Learning strategies**: Develop planning skills, Collect and organize materials by themselves; Recall previous knowledge **Learning styles**: Varied according to individual learning needs **Multiple intelligences**: Linguistic, Kinaesthetic, Spatial, Interpersonal **Portfolio reflection**: Self-assessment (language and learning competences), reflection on language and work	
Assessment	Feedback at each step through free ways of expression (drawing, emoticons, verbal..). Portfolio (self-assessment and reflection)	
Materials and resources	Class atmosphere, blackboard, paper, colours	
Sequence of activities	1 Warming up 2 The magic hat 3 The menu 4 The performance corner 5 Feedback 6 Portfolio	

Hola! A Holistic Approach to Language Learning