HOLA!
A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO FOREIGN/SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR KIDS

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1. Introduction

The project HOLA! emerges from the need to bring into the primary classroom a type of methodology consistent with language acquisition principles, away from the uniformity and monotony that the use of more traditional approaches involves. In the language classroom we can find a good number of methodologies intended for children which present new language, fragmented, as isolated items of vocabulary. When children learn their mother tongue, they do not hear isolated and decontextualised words. They grasp the language as a whole, no matter how simplified their parents/caretakers have made it. An approach like the one proposed by HOLA! aims mainly at respecting the way in which the child acquires his/her first language by applying similar principles to learning a foreign/second language.

Learning to understand and say things in the foreign/second language are the axes of a holistic approach. Learning to read and write is also included within its scope but, when it comes to a stage like primary school, these two skills must be subordinated to the former. HOLA! principles are based on cognitive theory, humanistic approaches to language learning, communicative methodologies, and more recent theories on the functioning of the brain, (neuroscience) especially Multiple Intelligences theory. HOLA! also includes learning styles and language learning strategies as variables and tools that can considerably

improve language learning. These characteristics, along with the definition, principles of Holistic Language Learning (HLL), and a holistic sample activity, will be the subjects of the following pages.

2. Cognitive theory and holistic language learning (HLL)

According to Bach (2005), HLL concepts have their roots in cognitive development theory and constructivism. HLL takes the need for a rich learning environment from Piaget and, in the foreign language learning context, a rich language environment for learning. Children are active learners and thinkers who construct their own knowledge from working with objects or ideas and look for intentions and purposes in what they see other people doing, bringing their knowledge and experience to their attempts to make sense of other people's actions and language. They are curious and creative in their discovery of how the world functions and emotionally involved in their quest.

From Bruner, HLL borrows two important contributions to language teaching. On the one hand the individual's ability to change the way the child interacts with the environment, particularly through the acquisition of language as the cohesive agent in all processes involving learning, mediation and appropriation. After investigating how adults use language to mediate the world for children and help them to solve problems, Bruner considers language as the most important tool for cognitive growth. Talk that supports a child in carrying out an activity with his/her parents (*scaffolding*) can be transferred to the classroom and applied to language teaching. On the other hand, the second contribution is his notions of *formats and routines,* features of events that allow scaffolding to take place, and combine the security of the familiar with the excitement of the new. Transferred to the holistic language classroom, routines may provide opportunities for meaningful language development; they allow the child to actively make sense of new language from familiar experience and provide a space for language growth (Cameron 2001).

Finally, it was Vygotsky (following Piaget and Bruner) who recognized the importance of the social environment in cognitive development (Bach 2001). Social processes will enhance cognitive development when children are encouraged to work cooperatively and on collaborative projects, with adults or peers. When we observe a child working or communicating independently, we see the actual developmental level of the child. When the child works under the guidance of an adult or expert, we see the potential development of the child under optimum circumstances. Vygotsky calls the difference between these two levels the *zone of proximal development.* It is the zone learners live in most of the time, as they negotiate between guided and autonomous learning. In deciding what a teacher can do to support learning, we can use the idea that the adult tries to mediate what it is that the child can learn next; this has applications in both lesson planning and in how teachers talk to pupils minute by minute. The new language is first used meaningfully by teacher and pupils, and later it is transformed and internalised to become part of the individual child's language skills or knowledge.

3. Humanistic education: From Whole Language to Holistic Approach

Many methods and approaches that can be labelled as humanistic, have influenced the holistic conception of foreign language learning. We can go back to nearly a century ago to find the *Direct Method* (1920s) which, as HLL, defended the target language as to the means of instruction, everyday language as the first goal and inductive techniques to grammar learning. Holistic language learning shares a common instructional rationale with *Communicative Language Teaching*, especially with Task Based approaches (Estaire and Zanón 1992, Willis 1996, Skehan 1998, Willis and Willis 2001) since HLL emphasizes the importance of meaning and meaning making in teaching and learning, by mapping form and meaning with a primary focus on what Peter Skehan (1998) calls "the need to mean" in the context of a task which sets a social context to use language. It is also connected to the *Natural Approach* to language learning (Krashen and Terrell 1983) or the *Lexical Approach* (Lewis1993, 1997, 2000). The former intended to help children and adults learn a second/foreign language in the same way that children learn their first language, the latter having the lexical chunk as a central element and making language lessons a combination of input, awareness-raising, learner training, and language practice where comprehensible input is emphasised and receptive skills (especially listening) are given a relevant role.

HLL is also linked to the *Whole Language* movement emerged in the 1980s and supported by a group of U.S. educators concerned with the teaching of literacy. This movement disagrees with the idea that the different components of language should be taught separately and argue that language should be taught as a "whole": "If language isn't kept whole, it isn't language anymore" (Rigg 1991: 522). Whole language views language organization from an interactional perspective (language use is always in a social context, and this applies to both oral and written language, to both first and second language use). It also sees language as a vehicle for internal interaction, for egocentric speech, for thinking, and as something that is used for meaningful purposes and to carry out authentic functions (Rigg 1991: 523).

According to Sakash (1988)[1] Whole Language consists of a set of beliefs based on the following suppositions:
- Language is for making meaning, for accomplishing purposes,
- what is true for language in general is true for written language,
- phonology, orthography, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics are always simultaneously present and interacting in every instance of language,
- language use always occurs in a situation,
- situations are critical to meaning-making,
- language acquisition occurs through actual use.

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[1] Quoted in Lonon, L. "A holistic approach to college ESL", ELT Journal, 46/3, July 1992, OUP, page 289

Richards and Rodgers (2001) consider Whole Language as an approach based on key principles about language (language is whole) and learning (writing, reading, listening, and speaking should be integrated in learning). The humanistic and constructivist schools are the basis of the learning theory underlying Whole Language. Constructivist learning theory holds that knowledge is socially constructed, rather than received or discovered. Thus, constructivist learners "create meaning," "learn by doing," and work collaboratively "in mixed groups on common projects." Rather than transmitting knowledge to students, teachers collaborate with them to create knowledge and understanding in their mutual social context. Rather than seeking to cover the the (lexical and grammatical) curriculum , each Whole Language teacher implements the theories of Whole Language as he or she interprets them and depending to the kinds of classes and learners he or she is teaching.

According to Bach (2005), though 'holism' cannot be described as a unified theory or even a new dominant paradigm, there are some assumptions about education in general and language learning in particular that are common to all holistic approaches. These shared assumptions in (foreign) (language) learning are that holistic learning is:

- *task-oriented:* focus on meaning and authentic activities with real results,
- *content-oriented:* focus on content that relates to the learner's existing world knowledge,
- *process-oriented:* focus on awareness of the strategies and processes involved in language learning,
- *product-oriented:* focus on activities promising real results,
- *cognitive:* focus on language awareness combined with cultural awareness,
- *multi-sensory:* focus on activities that encourage the use of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic inventories and skills,
- *experiential:* focus on what the learner brings to the new learning context from his range of knowledge, feelings, fears and hopes,
- *autonomous:* focus on the fact that the learners need to take control of their own learning and the strategies they employ,
- *context-situated:* focus on the function of an activity and its context,
- *group-situated:* focus on collaborative social interaction,
- *authentic:* focus on activities that project real tasks leading to real, practical, immediate results,
- *collaborative:* focus on the realization that all knowledge is socially constructed.

A teaching/learning process based on the previous suppositions and assumptions must consider learner styles and learner strategies that, together with authenticity will be thus the core elements of HLL.

4. Learning styles

For HLL, the foreign language teacher must take children learning styles into account to guarantee the success in learning foreign language. Skehan (1998) defines style as the preferred way in which individuals process information or approach a task. A plethora of learning styles has been identified, at least

conceptually, in the literature, and a great variety of learning style taxonomies have been proposed. For the Perceptual approach for instance (Dunn Dunn, 1978), related to the way individuals prefer to *perceive* the input to be learned, despite the wide range of learning models, the three basic perceptual learning styles are *visual* (relate most effectively to visual displays like written information, notes, diagrams and pictures), *auditory* (relate most effectively to verbal lectures, discussions and by listening to what others have to say) and *kinesthetic/tactile* (learn through moving, doing and touching). For The Action approach (the style used in different environments - Kolb, 1978) adapted by Skehan (1998) to the context of a second language, there are also four types of styles but they are determined by the continuum formed by a vertical and a horizontal axis: *active-passive/reflective* and *analytic-holistic* styles. These four types are *convergent*, *conformist*, *concrete*, and *communicative* learners[2].

For a holistic approach to language learning this is by no means to say that the best thing a teacher can do for his/her students is to use their preferred learning style exclusively. Students will inevitably be called upon to deal with problems and challenges that require the use of their less preferred style, and so should regularly be given practice in the use of those modes. Furthermore, learners do not belong completely to a specific learning style. They are idealized types, and individuals with one style may switch to another in certain circumstances. No individual can be said to belong to one single category. His/her learning approach will depend on the situation, the task and other elements. There is no learning style which is the 'best' for learning, only a better style in a particular situation for a specific learning task" (Rubio, Pérez-Paredes, Luque, 2004: 117).

A point no educational psychologist would dispute is that students learn more when information is presented in a variety of forms than when only a single form is used. Neuroscience research indicates that learning improves when it is meaningful for the learner. When learning styles are taken into account in the language classroom, "teachers are better able to tap into the areas of personal meaningfulness of their students since they are recognizing the differences inherent in the students and putting individuals with their different ways of learning where they belong, back at the centre of the learning process" (Arnold y Fonseca, 2004: 125). Thus, to maximize success, primary teachers should employ an approach which involves passive and active elements, reflective and analytic tasks, pair, group and individual work, inductive and deductive paths, analysis and synthesis, focus-on-form and communicative teaching, etc.

5. Multiple intelligences theory

Multiple Intelligences is a theory developed by Howard Gardner (1993, 1999) at Harvard University. When Gardner studied human intelligence he realised that the traditional two-fold view of intelligence - the logical-mathematical and linguistic types- could not explain many people's professional and personal achievements in life. He then proposed expanding the number of ways in which human beings are intelligent, identifying at least eight kinds of intelligences

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[2] For a complete description of this approach see Skehan, P. (1998): A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning. Oxford University Press.

which work together so that we all possess a mixture of them. These intelligences, besides the logical/mathematical and linguistic ones are: kinaesthetic, musical, visual/spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, environmental and existential.

According to (Krechevsky & Seidel 2001) it may be helpful to clear up that Multiple Intelligences should not be equated to learning styles. Learning styles have been defined above and refer to the different approaches that individuals take when trying to make sense of diverse kinds of contents (Dunn &Dunn 978).Typically, a learning style is thought to cut across all content areas whilst intelligences represents potentials or capacities that are linked to neurological functions and structures and that responds to particular content in the world. Furthermore, intelligences have distinct developmental paths that are tied to the achievement of valued roles in our society. "If we want children to become skilled artists, mathematicians or solid citizens, then we need to nurture particular intelligences. Learning styles do not show these connections to meaningful societal roles. One can be a tactile or auditory learner and still become an accountant or a botanist. However if one has not developed strong logical-mathematical or natural intelligences, success in those professions will be limited" (Krechevsky & Seidel 2001: 48-49).

Arnold and Fonseca have applied multiple intelligences theory to the language classroom. They claim that a multiple intelligence perspective in the foreign language classroom is

> …a framework that can help language teachers to recognise the holistic nature of learners and to address student diversity. It enables teachers to organise a variety of contexts that offer learners distinct ways to engage meaning and strengthen memory pathways; it is a teacher-friendly tool for lesson planning that can increase the attractiveness of language learning tasks and therefore create favourable motivational conditions. (Arnold and Fonseca 2004:120)

It is clear that in the foreign language classroom teachers cannot attend all learners' intelligences simultaneously. However, as stated before, it is important to be aware of the fact that pupils learn in very different ways and for that reason provide activities according to their preferences and capacities. One of the strategies to turn the +1 element of comprehensible input (input unknown features) into intake, is to make it more salient and in this way to enhance noticing and speeding up the acquisition process. Addressing more 'intelligences', or at least more senses, means appealing to more learners in respect of their preferred or most effective discovery style. If teachers include activities appropriate for different intelligences and different moments, learners will have more opportunities to work more easily and efficiently as they are offered the possibility to get familiar and develop other ways of learning. As MI theory suggests, activating different memory pathways through the use of a variety of language activities that require diverse tools for learning could be an effective way to facilitate memory ability and output. Teaching English in primary education using models that provide a rich variety of learning activities, which at different moments will call upon the eight different intelligences, will surely make for an interesting, lively, and effective classroom for all students.

Furthermore, learners will feel more activated and drawn into language learning, something which will enhance their motivation, increase their interest, accentuate their otherwise hidden strengths, and augment their willingness to take risks and try out new thinking processes.

Nevertheless, as Puchta (2006) points out, teachers need to be cautious not to mix up multi-sensory teaching with MI teaching. In other words, using pictures in the language class is not necessarily about teaching from the visual-spatial intelligence, just as singing a song with your children will not automatically activate their musical-rhythmic intelligence. As Howard Gardner said in an interview on the US radio show *Edutopia* some time ago:

> "I remember seeing a movie about Multiple Intelligences and there were kids crawling on the floor and the legend said "bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence". I said," That's not bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence, that's kids crawling on the floor. This is making me crawl up the wall!" ... to have kids crawl or exercise their vocal cords, that's not intelligence."

Gardner stressed the importance of deciding what our educational goals are, and, when we know what those goals are, considering how we can help our children achieve them better. Multiple Intelligences itself cannot be a goal, nor is singing a song, using pictures, getting students to move around the classroom, etc, but it can help us achieve our goals better[3].

6. Language learning strategies

One last key element of the learning process to consider is the role of learning strategies connected to holistic language learning. When it comes to learning a second language, strategies learners use spontaneously to promote their language learning can make the difference between successful and unsuccessful language learning. Successful strategies are "strategies employed by people known to be good at L2 learning" (Cook, 1991). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) exploit theories from cognitive psychology and describe strategies as processes whereby knowledge taken in and stored in short- and long-term memory is reorganized and automatized. Oxford (1990) defines foreign or second language learning strategies as specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques students use, often consciously, to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing, and using the foreign language. Strategies are tools that learners can use to develop L2 communicative ability. For Chamot (1987: 71), strategies are techniques, approaches or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) group learning strategies into the following categories:

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[3] In Ghosn's article "Whole language EFL with style: Adapting traditional texts to diverse learning styles and intelligences", selected strategies are presented to raise teacher awareness of possible classroom techniques to accommodate students' learning style and intelligence preferences in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

- metacognitive strategies: the strategies used to make decisions on learning, to organize and manage it;
- cognitive strategies: strategies used directly to process the information being handled;
- social/affective strategies: strategies having to do with the learner and the learner's attitude to the target language, culture and speakers.

Oxford (1990), divides strategies into two major groups: *direct* and *indirect.* Direct strategies are ones that directly involve the target language. They imply mental processing of the language and are subdivided in *memory, cognitive*, and *compensation* strategies. Indirect strategies are applicable in all language learning situations and are divided in *metacognitive, affective* and *social* strategies.

Affective strategies have to do with emotions, attitudes, motivation and values. Successful language learners are often ones who control their emotional attitudes about learning. By contrast, negative feelings can stop or affect the learning process. Social strategies are also quite important in learning a language because language deals with communication at all levels. Metacognitive strategies provide the learners a way to coordinate their own learning. They are very important for successful language learning because learners have to arrange and plan their language learning in an efficient and effective way. According to Chamot et al (1999), metacognitive strategies include four processes or steps in language learning, which are planning, monitoring, problem-solving and evaluating.

Macaro (2001) offers a classification based on the idea of a continuum of subconscious (or 'less conscious') and direct strategies at one end and conscious and indirect strategies at the other, because a clear dividing line between what is conscious and what is subconscious is not easy to identify. He uses the term *learner strategies* because it more effectively captures the learner as active participant in the learning process. The strategies at the left end (cognitive strategies) tend to be deployed in direct relationship to the learning task, usually in immediate response to teaching instructions or to written or spoken text. Those at the right end (metacognitive/social affective strategies) tend to be deployed in preparation for, or subsequent to, a learning task or set of tasks, with the learners more in control of their learning.

Metacognitive strategies are the tools which learners must have if they are to be ready to assume autonomy in their learning process. As students become more skilled at using metacognitive strategies, they gain confidence and become more independent as learners. Independence leads to *ownership* as student's realize they can pursue their own intellectual needs and discover a world of information at their fingertips. For a holistic approach the task of educators is to acknowledge, cultivate, exploit and *enhance* the metacognitive capabilities of all learners.

7. Key elements of HOLA!

> "Don't ever try to teach language *per se,* rather, teach life (joy, sorrow, work, play, relationships, concepts, differentiation, self-awareness of others etc.) by involving the children in situations and activities that are highly significant to them." Gaarder 1977: 78.

Gaarder's quotation clearly summarises the rationale behind HOLA! and in a straightforward way outlines the ideas and concepts covered in previous sections. In a holistic approach there are, nevertheless, three key elements (learner, teacher and language) that need to be further developed, especially the role of the different stakeholders involved in the process and the way the principles seen above can integrate in the concept of language as a whole proposed by this approach.

a) The learner

HOLA! considers the learner as a whole, autonomous, collaborative person situated in a rich and safe environment where his/her learning style and type of intelligence is taken into consideration; a reflective learner aware and self-conscious of language learning strategies and able to self-evaluate his/her progress by means of the different tools (i.e. the European Language Portfolio). For HOLA!, a language learner:

- is flexible and able to take risks
- is creative and able to employ language in context
- is curious to discover the surrounding world through language
- recourses to common experiences (his environment)
- proceeds with a objective in mind
- keeps repositioning himself strategically
- reveals language awareness
- interacts with variety of learning context to actively learn and communicate

b) The teacher

A holistic language teacher has a good command of the language he/she teaches, is aware of the language learning strategies their learners use and could use. He/she is an educator and facilitator who encourages learners to take risks and is him/herself a model learner, a model language user and a model team player. He/she is also a reflective, sensitive and flexible teacher able to response to and build on his/her learners' needs and feelings, a teacher who is both, a performer and an entertainer in education. A holistic language teacher:

- guides and controls partially over communication
- encourages to convey what the learners want to express
- is dynamic and provides situations and activities highly significant to children
- facilitates active learning rather than being the dispenser of wisdom

- generates and mediates tasks tailored to the needs of his/her learners in each learning situation

c) Language (and language instruction)

As stated in the introduction to this paper, language is not a mere construct of fragmented and isolated items of vocabulary that the speaker connects to make sentences. Being able to speak and understand a language implies not only mastering a number of grammatical components (lexis, morphology, syntax, phonetics and phonology), but also managing sociolinguistic, pragmatic and cultural components, some of which can be easily transferred when language learning takes place in a natural setting but whose transfer can in no way be given for granted when the language is learnt in the foreign language classroom.

For *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe 2001: 118-123), sociolinguistic competence is concerned with "the knowledge and skills required to deal with the social dimension of language use: linguistic markers of social relations, politeness conventions, expressions of folk-wisdom, register differences and dialect and accent. Pragmatic competence is concerned with "the user/learner's knowledge of the principles according to which messages are a) organised, structured and arranged ('discourse competence'), b) used to perform communicative functions ('functional competence') and c) sequenced according to interactional and transactional schemata" ('design competence').

According to Carter (2003: 255), theories of language are now going through rapid changes. The disciples of discourse analysis, pragmatics and especially corpus linguistic are pushing back existing frontiers and compelling new descriptions of language. New approaches to language reveal that levels of language traditionally considered unconnected, such as grammar and vocabulary, are actually closely interconnected in the construction of meanings and of texts, both spoken and written. This fact must necessarily influence language teachers' approach to grammar teaching as "the predetermined language syllabus loses its authority, and leaves room for exploration with more holistic language teaching approaches" (Masuhara 2003: 254). The traditional focus on forms methodology (i.e. discrete point, step by step grammar instruction) must give way to another type of instruction in which "learners discover language for themselves" (Tomlinson, 2003: 251).

Language is also culture and that's a powerful reason to include cultural competence in the broader concept of communicative competence which is nowadays the basis of any approach to foreign or second language learning. Of course, knowing about the target language culture does not mean having the native speaker's identical cultural competence but being able to understand the other's behaviour. From here, the intercultural dimension of cultural competence must be underlined within the concept of language learning. By trying to understand the other, an individual may begin to be more aware of his/her own culture and from that point, having discovered differences and similarities

between people, languages and cultures, he/she can construct an international conscience. And from there discover the whole world

8. Towards a definition of HOLA! principles

These beliefs about learner, teacher, and language can be summarised in the following definition: "*A Holistic approach is an approach to language teaching and learning which looks at the learner, the teacher, the language and the world as wholes*", the term "whole" understood as inclusive not exclusive[4].

From this definition a number of principles can be outlined:

a) Language is acquired and developed by the learner rather than taught by the teacher.

The learner is the protagonist of the learning process whilst the teacher brings reality (the world) into the classroom. Presentation and practice of language should be put together so that children understand the new language as something real, a tool they have to use to do things. Language should be taught/ acquired as a means towards other ends.

b) Acquisition occurs through actual use, through rich, authentic and meaningful input.

According to modern methodology, acquisition takes place when learners are offered authentic, comprehensible and meaningful input. The terms rich and comprehensible are not contradictory but complementary. The use of body language in the first stages is fundamental. It is important not to force children to say or do things (sing, move, play, etc.) if they are reluctant to do so. Utterances will emerge spontaneously when the child has assimilated the new linguistic code and linguistic hypothesis have been tested.

c) A teacher is sensitive to learners' feelings, real needs, interests and various styles, a facilitator and a learner him/herself. His/her most important responsibility is his/her response-ability.

When children enter the language classroom they bring with them a number of abilities. Halliwell (1990) mentions the following:

- are already very good at interpreting meaning without necessarily understanding the individual words
- already have great skill in using limited language creatively
- frequently learn indirectly rather than directly
- take great pleasure in finding and creating fun in what they do
- have a ready imagination

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[4] According to Johnstone (2005), research evidence suggests that some of the components of styles that would undoubtedly be 'oppositional' to an exclusive definition of 'holism as alternative' can in fact be of considerable value to language-learners. Holism therefore should 'include' these rather than oppose them and should accept the contradictions that go with this.

- take great delight in talking

FL teachers take into account all these capacities if they want to construct knowledge and support children's cognitive development. The teacher is a fundamental figure for children, a model in any sense. The teacher's way of checking understanding and treating mistakes will have a decisive influence on children's confidence and self-esteem.

d) The learner is be treated as a whole, and acquires language in a safe and secure environment of belongingness.

According to De Andrés (2003), teachers promoting a sense of security define procedures and routines, involve students in defining rules, enforce rules in ways that build self-respect and foster self-responsibility. Sense of belonging is promoted when teachers create an accepting environment, reduce feelings of isolation, provide opportunities to be of service, develop group identity and pride, and promote interpersonal relationships and friendship.

e) Learners are encouraged to rather bend the language than risk a breakdown in communication.

Strategic competence in communication is the ability to cope with unexpected problems when no ready-made solutions are available. Of course, not all communication strategies may be worth bringing to the learners' attention, but it seems clear that achievement strategies can favour hypothesis formation and therefore learning: in other words, if learners stretch their resources to their fullest potential in order to reach their goal, their interlanguage can profit from being put to the test of real performance. According to Mariani (1993), teaching directly these types of strategies is not always possible as is it doubtful to save the spontaneity of interaction while at the same time helping learners, especially those who most need it, to acquire a wider range of interaction patterns. For him, teachers "would rather want to lead their students to discover, discuss and develop their own strategies for doing so."

f) Learners are encouraged to take the lead and the ownership of their learning and their development.

According to Skehan (1998:265) metacognitive strategies are concerned with reflection and flexibility: "reflection represent the learner developing some degree of self-awareness (…) in learning. Flexibility arising from effective metacognitive use organizes and gives purposes to the way cognitive and social-affective strategies are used (…)" Rather than engage in activity for its own, the good learner is more able, through metacognitive awareness, to select strategies appropriate to a particular problem". In the long process of building up communicative competence the value of learning strategies in language learning, especially metacognitive strategies seems clear. Being able to plan and self-evaluate one's own performance from an early age are the seeds that will lead children to become autonomous, life long learners.

**g) Learning is learner-centered and develops cooperative skills.**

Learners are considered the centre of the teaching and learning processes. Consequently, the communicative situations proposed ought to satisfy their needs and interests and be related to their personal experiences. Thus, connections between what is taught and the linguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge that the learners already possess could be established. This interconnection is believed to favour the integration of the new elements in the student's cognitive network and produce meaningful learning. Furthermore, great emphasis could be placed on pair work and group work in order to encourage collaborative working habits and promote socialisation in the classroom. The learner is not only supposed to learn from the teacher or by him/herself, but also from the contribution of their peers.

8. A sample holistic activity

Title of activity	Fortune telling[5]
Level	8-9 year olds (primary). The activity can also be used with older learners.
Product	Learners will have to keep a conversation with their classmates based on the cards and the meaning attributed to them.
Sociolinguistic competence	Politeness Formal register
Functional competence	Predicting the future
Discourse competence	Can you tell me the future, please? You'll be a famous actor, you'll be … Thank you very much
Language focus	Future tense: will + infinitive: i.e. you will be a famous actor
Skill(s) involved	Listening, speaking and interaction, reading, writing.
Class organisation	Individual and pairwork.
Materials required	a set of picture cards for every learner
Procedure	See below
Learning to learn	planning and working independently
Assessment / ELP	Self-assessment and teacher assessment based on learners' performance. Cards + written predictions can be included in the European Language Portfolio (ELP)

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[5] Megías & Santamaría: 2004 (see bibliography)
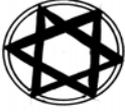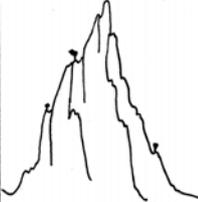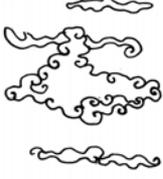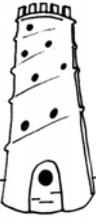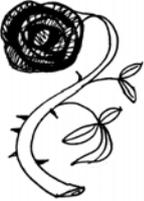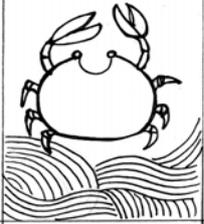
Procedure: Children give the cards a meaning. For example, the tree may refer to the family (*you will have two children*). The mountain may symbolise working life (*you will be an actor*) and the rose may refer to love (*you will marry Victoria at 22*). Cards can also make reference to specific topics covered in previous lessons. Depending on the learners' level of competence, teachers can decide to use all or only some of them. After attributing a meaning to each card, learners, working individually, write down a prediction for each of them. Finally, children working in pairs, choose in turn a number of cards so that their peers can "predict" their future by reading aloud the written sentences they have produced related to the cards chosen.

There are many activities that can be considered holistic. The activity above, besides following the three principles of a communicative activity: information gap, feedback and choice can be considered holistic for the following reasons:

- Learners are actively involved. The activity is amusing: children enjoy using their imagination when giving meaning to cards and predicting their classmates' future. Language is in context: with children, games are usually a perfect way to contextualise language.
- Children discover meaning: they can learn new language that will be applied to a meaningful situation. There is personal meaning for the learners: every child will give a particular sense to each picture. There is an ownership element: by giving meaning to their cards children make them theirs. When the activity is finished, children can keep the cards in their portfolio.
- Children have a reason for using the language, exploiting the relationships among them in order to accomplish the task. The target language is in use and all skills are catered for. Besides thinking about meaning, children will have to speak, listen, read and write. Certainly some kind of interaction will be set up.
- Learning is facilitated: indirect learning can take place easily. Children are not concentrated on the language but on giving meaning to their cards and understanding the meanings their classmates have give them.

- Easy classroom management: children can work in pairs and they can choose the classmates they want to give or receive the information from. The teacher observes and helps children develop the activity. He/she can be involved in the activity by asking a child to predict his/her own future, being part a secure environment of belongingness and reducing the potential feeling of isolation of weaker students.
- It is learner-centred. There is place for different learning styles and learning strategies. Children have a visual element as a prompt but also kinaesthetic/tactile and auditory learners can benefit from this activity. Their intelligences will come out as children will attribute each symbol a meaning according to their preferred intelligence. Surely predictions will be impregnated of each child inner feelings. Learning strategies involved in this activity are mainly metacognitive and social/affective. The learner has to plan how to undertake the activity and can self-evaluate through the feedback he/she receives from classmates. The social and affective components play a key role. In fact the relationship among learners and the safe environment will facilitate the learning process.

9. Conclusion

As stated in the introduction to this paper, the HOLA! approach will attempt to provide an option for the language teachers working with young children. Based on constructivism, humanistic approaches and modern methodologies, a rationale and a few principles according to which languages can be more effectively learned have been set. Language learning strategies, learning styles, and Multiple Intelligences Theory, play a major role for HOLA! as the learner is considered the centre of the learning process. The teacher and the language are also regarded as key elements for this approach and their roles and characteristics have been briefly described. Finally, a holistic sample activity has been provided.

Bringing reality (the world) to the language classroom is not as difficult as it may seem.
Entering the foreign language classroom means crossing the threshold of a space where multiple meaningful, predictable and unpredictable situations can occur. The learner takes advantage of these situations and is aware of the opportunities they may bring about. We can compare the FL, teaching/learning experience to playing a game whose rules have to be accepted equally by either party. This is a game which is successful only when both teams win the competition. Teaching learners to use a foreign/second language for real communication within a safe environment is the main objective of HOLA!, and, without doubt, the goal many language teachers have in mind when they enter the language classroom.

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