UNIVERSITY OF PEDAGOGICAL SCIENCES

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HOLGUÍN

DIPLOMA PAPER

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASKS TO IMPROVE NINTH-GRADE STUDENTS' ORAL EXPRESSION IN ENGLISH AT CARLOS MANUEL DE CÉSPEDES JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN HOLGUÍN

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DEDICATION

To my professor forever and second father Robert Amado Rodríguez Padilla. He will always have a place in my heart.

To my parents: The best parents. Without them there is nothing.

To my boyfriend. His support and love were essential.

To my teachers, who have helped me in my professional growth, especially to my tutor.

ABSTRACT

Tests applied showed the existence of difficulties in the ninth-grade students' oral expression in English at Carlos Manuel de Cèspedes Junior High School in Holguín during the 2013-2014 school year. Empirical methods helped corroborate this problem: observation of lessons, survey to students, interview to professors and analysis of written documents (Syllabus), rendered problems in the integration of skills to improve ninth graders´ oral expression.

A theoretical foundation of the research is presented in the first chapter with a diagnosis of the current state of oral expression and its connection to skill integration. It also includes a theoretical foundation for the connection betwween oral expression and skill integration in foreign language teaching. Chapter Two is devoted to present the proposal of the Diploma Paper: skill-integrating tasks to improve ninth-grade students´ oral expression in English at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín. Also, a corroboration item is included to verify preliminarily the feasibility and effectiveness of the proposal firstly through the Specialists' Opinion (Survey), then in practice via a Pre-experiment.

At the end of the corpus appendixes were added for the reader's further clarification on the work done.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a means of communication that allows social interaction. It shows people's ways of thinking and acting. Language is the way of expressing the system of symbols and codes that represent a cultural background.

The great scientific and economic changes of the century, as well as the advances in the technological field, demand from any educational system new dynamics in which the teaching of foreign languages plays an important role as an instrument to approach knowledge, to exchange ideas, to communicate. English, particularly, has become an international language and is used by over three hundred million people around the world. It is the official language of many nations and of most of the spoken and written business and scientific production globally.

The teaching of English as a foreign language not only contributes to linguistic accuracy but also to the construction and reconstruction of knowledge. This is nothing more than the improvement of the basic habits and skills that allow people to communicate in English.

Teaching and learning English is a priority in the Cuban System of Education. It responds to economic, social, cultural, political and diplomatic realities. The main goal of the English subject in terms of language is to develop communication and an acceptable level of communicative competence in English, which takes place in the interaction of two or more persons. The subject contributes to the students' formation of their vision of the world, and will reinforce the curriculum of Junior High School by favoring the education of responsible and committed students.

A search for information related to the development of oral expression in the direction of the teaching-learning process of English as a foreign language made it possible for the author to determine that this topic has received a wide and profound attention by linguists, professors and researchers at international, national, and local levels. Such relevance has

been analyzed in a variety of investigations addressed at determining the most effective strategies for developing oral expression within the teaching-learning process of English.

The development of oral expression aims at achieving a better communicative competence. Authors such as Antich, R. (1975, 1986); Richard-Amato, P. (1988); Abbott, G. (1989); Byrne,D. (1989); Finnochiaro, M. (1989); Terroux, G. (1991); Ur, P. (1996); Faedo, A. (2001); Medina, A. (2004, 2006, 2012) among others, have offered valuable contributions.

Developing oral expression is an aspect of a great priority within the main objectives of the   subject. Oral expression is used for many functions. Through oral expression, people can establish relationships, find out information and compare viewpoints. Oral expression is the key for communication. By considering what oral expression tasks can be used in class, and what specific needs learners report, teachers can help them improve their oral expression and overall oral competence.

Factors of a manifold character have shaped the development of oral expression. The results of tests and tasks done by ninth-grade students of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School during the 2013-2014 school year, and the assessments made, rendered recurring difficulties in the development of their oral expression within the English subject, especially in terms of the insufficiencies detected in skill integration.

The ninth-grade Syllabus declares the following objectives of the English subject, which are related to the integration of skills:

- Comprehend simple texts through visual, oral and written exercises.
- Communicate orally and in writing by describing and interchanging information related to activities, experiences, persons and places in present, past and future tense.
- Communicate orally and in writing by asking for and offering help including instructions and directions.

- Read different texts demonstrating general comprehension through oral and written tasks.
- Listen to different conversations demonstrating comprehension through oral and written tasks.

As can be seen, the objectives of the subject do refer to the integration of skills. This is a positive element that should be considered when dealing with the topic. Other elements that favor the development of the teaching-learning process in ninth grade are:

➢ Two-year experience of the teacher.
➢ The students are adolescents, therefore:
- Their memory and imagination are enriched because of experience.
- Their thinking processes are more conscious particularly with the teacher`s guidance.
- Their intellectual development has increased as a result of the influence of the teaching-learning process.
- They carry out independent work more easily.
- They are in the sensitive-critical period to learn the foreign language.

However, in the process of the investigation the author also found different insufficiencies concerning oral expression and its connection to skill integration in English. This was detected in class, through the revision of documents, observation of lessons, survey to students, and interview to professors. These can be summarized as follows:

- The students have poor results in the different tests applied because of insufficiencies in the mastery of the four communicative skills, in particular oral expression.

- Many students do not like the way practical activities are handled because they have few opportunities to talk.

- When teachers conceive the activities they do not keep in mind the need to integrate skills so the students feel more in real life situations.

- Teachers do not exploit the potentialities of the contents for the development of the lessons, concentrating only on one skill and failing to use the material in hand with an integrated perspective.
- Teachers use one-skill mechanical and structural exercises.
- Though the language lessons focus on one skill at a time because of the way the skills are presented in the unit in the course book (speaking/ listening-+ reading-+ writing) in a sequence that recycles and reinforces language items, teachers do not integrate skills in any real sense.

The author of this Diploma Paper considers that skill integration has a great influence on learning English and developing an appropriate oral expression, as is revealed in the quotation below:

> *A simple but effective way of ensuring that skills are integrated is to get the learners to collaborate, in pairs or in groups, on fluency-focused tasks. Integrated skills activities are important because: they provide opportunities for using language naturally, not just practicing it; many pair and group-work activities call for a variety of skills, sometimes simultaneously, in order to involve all the learners; students seem to learn better when they are engaged on activities which involve more than one skill.*[1]

Therefore, the insufficiencies spotted and declared establish the necessity of exploring ways to improve ninth-grade students´ oral expression through skill integration in English at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín, what allows declaring the following **Research Problem**:

How to improve ninth-grade students´ oral expression in English at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín?

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[1]Taken from Teaching Oral English by Donn Byrne.

The part of the objective reality in which the problem is manifested is **The Research Object** of this investigation: Oral expression in the teaching-learning process of ninth-grade English at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín.

In order to solve the problem **The Research Objective** formulated is: Elaboration of skill-integrating tasks to improve ninth-grade students` oral expression in English at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín.

The Scope of Action where this research is going to have an influence upon is defined as: Skill integration to improve ninth-grade students` oral expression at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín.

In order to direct the course of the investigation logically, and thus fulfil the objective and solve the problem, the following **Research Questions** were formulated:

1. What is the current state of oral expression in relation to skill integration in the ninth-grade students at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín?

2. What is the main theoretical foundation concerning oral expression in relation to skill integration in English?

3. How to devise tasks to favor the improvement of ninth-grade students' oral expression through skill integration in English at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín?

4. How effective are the skill-integrating tasks proposed to improve ninth-grade students' oral expression in English at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín?

The actions to be carried out in order to fulfil these research questions are planned in the following **Research Tasks:**

1. To determine the current state of oral expression and its connection to skill integration in the ninth-grade students at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín.

2. To reveal pertinent elements of the theoretical foundation that link oral expression and skill integration.

3. To design skill-integrating tasks aimed at improving ninth-grade students' oral expression in English at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín.

4. To corroborate the effectiveness of the proposal of skill-integrating tasks declared on the 2013-2014 ninth-grade students to improve English oral expression at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín.

To develop this investigation the author applied **Theoretical** and **Empirical Methods**:

Theoretical:

- ➢ Analytic–synthetic. *The studying of the separate features of the observable facts and putting them together to draw conclusions.*
- ➢ Inductive–deductive. *To get to deductions on the elements under analysis.*
- ➢ Abstract–concrete. *To process scientific data and for the conceptual interpretations of the theoretical foundation.*
- ➢ Modeling. *To structure tasks to achieve skill integration.*

Empirical:

- ➢ Observation of lessons (ninth-grade lessons in group 4). *To determine how the professor deals with the scope of the research. To give arguments on the research problem.*

➢ Survey to students (ninth-grade students from group 4). *To explore the opinions of the students on the problem.*

➢ Interview to professors (ninth-grade teachers from group 4). *To obtain information on aspects related to the preparation and presentation of the English lessons.*

➢ Analysis of written documents (Syllabus). *To obtain critical information on the organization of the process.*

➢ Specialists' Opinion (Survey). *For a preliminary validation of the proposal. (To obtain a preliminary corroboration from specialists on the feasibility and applicability of the proposal).*

➢ Pre-experiment. *For the corroboration of the effectiveness of the proposal of skill-integrating tasks declared on the 2013-2014 ninth-grade students to improve English oral expression at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín.*

The **population** of the research is made up by the total of ninth graders at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School (one-hundred and sixty-four students); while the **sample** is a representative number of students of one of the groups of this level: group 4 (forty-two students, eighteen students for pre-test, for a 42.85% of the whole group; and nineteen for post-test, for a 45.23% of the whole group).

Practical Contribution: Skill-integrating tasks to improve ninth-grade students' oral expression in English at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín.

Novelty: The research focuses on the problem of oral expression from the angle of skill integration. The proposal will offer tasks to improve oral expression based on skill integration for the 2013-2014 ninth-grade students at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín, an aspect that has not been dealt with in a Diploma Paper before in the teaching of English, exploiting the contents of the lesson towards an intensification of a factor that has not been exploited sufficiently.

The Paper is divided into two Chapters. Chapter One comprises the diagnosis of the current situation of oral expression and its connection to skill integration in the 2013-2014 ninth-grade students at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín, and the theoretical foundation for the connection between oral expression and skill integration in foreign language teaching.

Chapter Two presents chiefly the skill-integrating tasks aimed at improving ninth-grade students´ oral expression in English at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín. Also, a corroboration item is included to verify preliminarily the feasibility and effectiveness of the proposal via Specialists´ Opinion and in practice through a Pre-experiment.

The Paper will include also appendixes to illustrate the elements examined in the corpus.

CHAPTER ONE - THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF THE RESEARCH

This chapter concentrates on the examination of some elements concerning the teaching-learning process of ninth-grade students´ oral expression in English at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School in Holguín. It includes the diagnosis of the current state of ninth-grade students´ oral expression and its connection to skill integration, and the theoretical foundation for the connection between oral expression and skill integration in foreign language teaching.

1.1 A diagnosis of the current state of oral expression and its connection to skill integration

A variety of factors has influenced the development of oral expression in the context of study of this Paper. The results of tests and tasks done by ninth-grade students of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School during the 2013-2014 school year, and the assessments made, rendered recurring difficulties in the development of their oral expression within the English subject, especially in terms of the insufficiencies detected in skill integration.

Observation of lessons, survey to students, and interview to professors (See Appendixes 1, 2, 3) proved that English oral expression is not properly treated in ninth grade, and that skill integration is not consciously and systematically exploited to improve oral expression.

Firstly, observations were carried out to know how the teaching-learning process is carried out in ninth-grade English lessons in reference to skill integration. Three lessons from unit 4 were visited in the current 2013-2014 school year.

Indicators that would approach the main concerns of the observation as a method were designed: (See Appendix 1)

1. What kind of activities does the teacher develop to start the lesson?

2. What abilities are developed by the teacher?

3. How is the attention that the teacher gives to the students?

4. How is the participation of the students?

5. What kind of interaction prevails in the classroom?

6. Does the teacher use skill-integrating tasks during the lesson?

After tabulating the results of the observations and analyzing them, the following was concluded:

It was detected that there was not enough oral practice with the students during the lessons. The tendency is to teach structurally, and most of the time teachers do not give the sufficient treatment to the skill with integrating procedures.

INDICATOR 1- The teacher starts the lesson with activities or proposals that do not integrate skills, or simply do with listening.

INDICATOR 2- The abilities developed center on listening and speaking.

INDICATOR 3- Little attention is paid to the students and their specific needs.

INDICATOR 4- The students do not participate much.

INDICATOR 5- Interaction is mainly teacher-student.

INDICATOR 6- Skill integration is not systematic.

Furthermore, the teaching- learning process of oral communication in ninth grade evidenced difficulties related to the development of the students' oral expression. It can be added that there is not an appropriate development of the tasks the students do, mainly orally. Some aspects spotted were:

✓　　Lack of motivation towards the subject.

✓　　Teacher-centered lessons.

✓ There is not an appropriate treatment of the tasks the students do, with hardly any integration with other skills to motivate and change the routines of the lessons.

The observation of lessons session detected that oral expression activities linked with other skills are not applied, or applied at a very general level, that time is consumed by explanation and copying, that the students hardly talk and are unmotivated.

Secondly, a survey was applied to know the students´ opinion about the English lessons.

The survey (See Appendix 2) was applied to fifteen ninth-grade students of the group object of the investigation.

In the survey applied to students it was detected that they are not interested in listening much because they do not understand what the teacher says, and they prefer to use the basic language, for example to know how to meet someone or to describe something.

The survey rendered that many students do not like the way practical activities are handled, and that the activities are merely for speaking. Some declared that the teaching process could improve. No comments were added in the "*alguna otra actividad*" item.

They said they have few opportunities to talk, their favorite activities are hardly reflected in class, and time is not favorable for the lessons. Everything is done in a hurry almost always.

Thirdly, an interview was applied to five ninth-grade English teachers: (See Appendix 3). The objective was to know the English teachers´ criteria on the teaching-learning process of English in ninth grade and on the aspects under research. This interview rendered the following regularities:

1. They give stressed importance to oral expression, but they do not make reference to the students.

2. They declare there are many ways to achieve oral expression, but the time and the sequence of lessons is too poor to develop the skill, or to integrate many skills no matter how important they are.

3. They state that they try to do their best, but it is difficult due to time. Listening is the one mostly used.

4. They state that oral practice is not properly implemented or combined with other skills, that they design some activities and copy others from books, and that skill integrating activities are rarely prepared.

With the application of the method of analysis of written documents (Syllabus) the following was obtained.

In the analysis of the subject it is stated that the teaching of the English language has as an end the development of the cognitive-communicative competence. This concept implies the expression, interpretation and negotiation of meanings in the interaction between two or more persons, or between a person and a written or oral text. The teaching of English should not only contribute to the linguistic-functional efficiency, but also to the ability of constructing and reconstructing new knowledge; what means to develop in the students the knowledge and the basic habits and skills that allow them to communicate in the foreign language: to comprehend oral and written information and to express themselves orally about familiar topics to their school and social lives, as well as, to write simple and brief messages.

Here it is also stated that in the first cycle (from seventh to ninth grade) teachers should work in an integral and harmonic way in the development of the four main skills, that is, listening comprehension, oral expression, reading comprehension and written expression. In all the above-mentioned it is evidenced that skill integration is a crucial objective to develop the students` communicative competence in ninth grade.

In the learning context is declared as a second objective that: "Speaking, listening, reading and writing integrate themselves as a reflection of the

principle that the domain of one skill enriches and reinforces the progress in the mastery of the others", what evidences the importance of the development of the four skills through their integration in the teaching-learning process of English.

In the evaluation system is stated that the evaluation should be directed to assess the fundamental communicative skills and not the linguistic structures, but it does not consider the idea of skill integration. Moreover, there appear examples of exercises to evaluate the different skills, which do not show skill integration in any sense. Examples: the description of pictures, objects and actions; expressive reading, games of roles, answers to questions, sentences and dialogues filling, composition of brief paragraphs, etcetera.

These exercises are centered only on one skill at a time, what shows that the treatment and evaluation of the four skills is carried out one by one and not integrating them. In the different activities that the students should be able to participate when they finish ninth grade, skill integration is not evidenced, for example: to present an oral report about one of the studied topics, to show comprehension of simple oral and written texts, to present a written report about one of the topics already studied, etcetera.

In the analysis of the subject in the grade is declared that the English subject in ninth grade should favor the development of the communicative skills that allow the students to comprehend oral and written information in English and to express themselves about their family, school and social lives using the basic structures of present, past and future in an integrated way. This integration makes reference to the three tenses the students should use to express themselves about the different studied topics, but not to the four skills they should learn.

In the ninth-grade syllabus there are five objectives that are related to skill integration:

- Comprehend simple texts through visual, oral and written exercises.

- Communicate orally and in writing by describing and interchanging information related to activities, experiences, persons and places in present, past and future tenses.

- Communicate orally and in writing by asking for and offering help including instructions and directions.

- Read different texts demonstrating general comprehension through oral and written tasks.

- Listen to different conversations demonstrating comprehension through oral and written tasks.

In the Methodological Orientations is declared the necessity of the realization of activities that favor communicative interaction, not skill integration. A reference to skill integration is appreciated in the item of reading, and within it, only in the post-reading exercises.

With this analysis the author realizes that some sections of the syllabus declare the importance and necessity of skill integration, while others do not.

These empirical methods demonstrated that much is to be done still to improve the teaching-learning process of English and the development of oral expression through skill- integrating tasks.

1.2 A theoretical foundation for the connection between oral expression and skill integration in foreign language teaching

Oral expression

From an interpretation of what really happens in the communicative act, language teachers, among others, use the following terms, which describe the four skills of the language: listening, speaking, reading and writing. This is a generalized use and some specialists still maintain it: Antich, R. (1975); Plattor, E. (1981); Acosta, R. (1996); Cook, V. (1996); Ur, P. (1996).

In the decade of the 80s, other authors approach a different way to name these skills in teaching: listening comprehension and reading comprehension. Antich, R. (1986); Abbott, G. (1989); Byrne, D. (1989);

Terroux, G. (1991); Brown, D.H. (1994). Likewise, during this period oral expression and written expression began to be used too. Antich, R. (1986); Byrne, D. (1989); Brown, H. (1994). This expresses in a better way the exactness of the content of the verbal skills. So, they are assumed by the author.

"Oral expression particularly is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information" (Brown, H. 1994). Its form and meaning depends on the context in which it occurs, including their participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for oral expression. In order to know how to produce specific points of language such as grammar, pronunciation or vocabulary (linguistic competence), required by oral expression, learners should also understand when, what and in what ways to produce language (sociolinguistic competence).

"Oral expression is a productive skill involved in a two-way process of oral communication" (Byrne, D. 1989). The speaker has to encode the message he wishes to convey in an appropriate language. A good speaker synthesizes this array of skills and knowledge to succeed in a given speech act.

Oral expression has received a wide treatment lately because of the importance of the development of this skill. Its formation and development implies two abilities: a receptive one (listening) and a productive one (oral expression), so it is a dual process which includes the sender or speaker (who encodes the message) and the receiver or hearer (who decodes the message). It is an interactive process in which in a dynamic way the roles are interchanged.

In reference to this topic, the author supports that to attain this goal, teachers have to bring the students from the stage where they are mainly imitating a model of some kind, or responding to clues, to the point where they can use the language freely to express their own ideas. The

development of the oral ability is a good source of motivation for most learners.

Ur, P. (1996) stated that speaking is not just any skill, the author highlighted that it is arguably the most important, and therefore should take priority in any language. Within this analysis it is stated that:

> *The role play is virtually the only way we can give our learners the opportunity to practice improvising a range of real - life spoken language in the classroom, and is an extremely effective technique if the students are confident and cooperative; but more inhibited or anxious people find role play difficult and sometimes even embarrassing.*

Oral expression has gained space in the last decades within foreign language teaching. It includes both receptive and productive sub-skills. It is generally defined as "*An interactive process in which roles between people are dynamically changed*" (Medina, A., 2004). Another definition given by Medina, A. (2006) is:

> *The oral expression is the process through which the student – speaker, in interaction with one or more persons and in an active position, carries out the double role of receiving and coding the message, with the aim of satisfying his communicative needs in the foreign language. The development of this skill covers a wide spectrum, from the approach based on language and which emphasizes accuracy, up to the one based on the message and which emphasizes meaning and fluency; and its highest aim is that the student should be able to develop communicative acts with the necessary competence. This is mainly the ruling skill in the teaching-learning process of foreign languages and its effectiveness depends on the integration with the rest of the verbal skills and the strong entailment between affective-motivational and cognitive elements.*

These authors have offered important criteria for the development of English communication and the analysis of this information allowed the researcher to determine that there is an ample variety of proposals, approaches, techniques, procedures, principles, and exercises; provided with the intention of improving the effectiveness of the teaching–learning process of English as a foreign language.

Medina, A. (2012) also says that the formation and development of the communicative skills implies the formation of linguistic habits: they are the basis for the formation of the former ones. This view is assumed because of its didactical clarity to understand how this process of formation and development works.

After the study developed, the author assumes the definition of oral expression offered by Medina, A. (2006). It is assumed because it refers to the students learning the foreign language, it views the skill from the communicative perspective and it includes the integration of skills, which is central to the objectives of this Diploma Paper.

To be effective when teaching oral expression, some methodological aspects should be kept in mind:

❖ The development of the oral expression skill is a good source of motivation for most learners (Byrne, D. 1989).

Points to pay attention to:

- Demonstrate the learners that they are making progress in the language all the time.
- Correction should not discourage the learners.
- Encourage the learners about how to complement the knowledge they have in the English language.
- Teach patterns of real interaction.
- Give guided preparation.
- Teach interactional language.

If the teacher encourages the students to speak by using as many ways as possible and creating a good language –oral expression environment–, they will speak actively, willingly and naturally. Oral expression can only be mastered through practice.

The importance of oral expression

Oral expression, originally labeled speaking, allows human development and stands as the ultimate tool for interaction in man´s activity. It is part and parcel of communication. People are "clients" of the skill and use it to express ideas, share feelings and establish social relations among themselves.

Oral expression is at the center of every language course either as a primary skill –due to the primacy of oral language over the written one-, as a prop skill or as the natural path to exchange in listening, reading and writing activities.

Most syllabi for teaching foreign languages give prominence to oral expression. Being a component of oral communication (listening is the other constituent), it primarily acts as a channel to verify the processes of listening and reading comprehension as much as it assists in doing so while socializing the produce of writing sessions.

Therefore oral expression is a formidable inherent, ideological, didactic and educational catalyst of anthropological and social growth.

Skill integration

Linguistic and methodological bases for integrating the four skills

As early as the 1970s, many researchers and methodologists noted that the teaching of language skills cannot be conducted through isolated and discrete structural elements (Corder, 1971; 1978; Kaplan, 1970; Stern,

1992)[2]. In reality, it is rare for language skills to be used in isolation; e.g., both speaking and listening comprehension are needed in a conversation and, in some contexts, reading or listening and making notes is likely to be almost as common as having a conversation. The central innovative characteristic of the communicative approach in second or foreign language teaching was the integration of the four skills.

Widdowson (1978) was one of the first linguists to call for integrating the four language skills in instruction to raise learners' proficiency levels and enable advanced language learning. In his proposal for integrated and communicative language teaching in general and in particular in English for specific purposes, Widdowson emphasized that virtually all language uses take place in the form of discourse and in specific social contexts.

In the 1980s and 1990s, a great deal of elaboration and refinement took place in communicative and integrated teaching of the four skills. In light of the fact that opportunities for meaningful communication in the language classroom are limited -particularly so in the regions where English is taught as a foreign language- a great need arose for integrated communicative activities. These had to be interaction-centered and as authentic as possible to enable students to use the language for purposeful communication (Savignon, 1983; 1990).

At present, language practice exercises for groups or pairs of learners typically combine listening and speaking, reading and speaking, or reading, writing, and speaking. Such integrated classroom activities (also called tasks), include, for example, listening to language tapes, playing games, or working on information gap and problem-solving exercises. These types of practice require learners to engage in interaction and integrated language usage because group or pair work can be carried out only if the participants

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[2] The authors included on pages 18 and 19 (six in all) are mentioned in the original text taken from the website www. the importance of integrating skills in the teaching of english as a foreign language. monografías.com.

share and discuss, or read and pool their information. Task-based teaching is probably the most widely adopted model of integrated language teaching today, and it is often considered to be the closest classroom simulation of real-life interaction.

According to Nunan (2001), effective integrated modules are characterized by uses of authentic language models and exemplars, continuity of language work from comprehension to production, explicit connections of classroom language practice to real world uses (e.g., a business presentation or a job interview), and a systematic language focus that enables learners to identify and analyze language regularities.

In his later work on designing integrated syllabi, Nunan explains that the first step is to identify the contexts and situations in which learners will need to communicate. After the communicative events are identified in general terms, the next phase should work towards learners' functional goals along with the linguistic elements required to achieve them.

When a teacher makes use of activities that have been specially designed to incorporate several language skills simultaneously (such as reading, writing, listening, and writing), they provide their students with situations that allow for well-rounded development and progress in all areas of language learning.

Through daily activities, teachers provide learners with opportunities to develop each skill: students *listen* (to the teacher using the target language, to a song, to one another in a pair activity), *speak* (pronunciation practice, greetings, dialogue creation or recitation, songs, substitution drills, oral speed reading, role play), *read* (instructions, written grammar drills, cards for playing games, flashcards) and *write* (fill-in-the-blank sheets, sentences that describe a feeling, sight or experience, a dialogue script, a journal entry).

Two activities that make use of all four skills in tandem are Self-introduction and Reading and Retell.

Self-introduction takes the answers to a series of personal questions (name, age, grade level, where you live, members of your family, favorite sports, animals, colors, subjects, etc.) and sequences them into a self-introduction. Students are given large visuals to trigger each component of the self-introduction. The teacher can point to each picture while modeling a self-introduction (students are *listening*) and then invite learners to introduce themselves (*speaking*) to one or two if they are in peers.

Some of the visuals can then be changed and the students can be invited to introduce themselves to others in the class to whom they have never spoken. This activity can be adapted to become a regular (daily, weekly) warm-up activity to get learners talking in the target language. Having covered *listening* and *speaking* in the oral self-introduction, a scenario can then be created wherein learners must *write* a self-introduction to a potential homestay host. The same picture cues can be used, reconfigured to show a salutation, closing and signature. The picture cues provide learners with support without giving them a text to memorize.

In multilevel SL classes, graded readers can be excellent springboards for another activity that integrates the four skills- a Reading and Retell. First, learners select a book or story at their own level and *read* it. Learners are then given a template to follow to summarize their thoughts about the story (*writing*). The summary is designed to help learners gauge the amount of detail required in a retell.

After additional practice *reading* the summary silently and aloud several times, learners are asked to select two or three illustrations from the book to help them tell the story. They then practice telling the story by using the pictures and remembering what they wrote in the template. Students find a partner who has not read the same story and retell (*speaking*) their story to one another using the selected illustrations. Partners not only listen to the retell but also complete a feedback checklist (*writing*) about the retell. After *reading* the feedback, partners switch roles.

Why are four skills activities useful?

Some may argue that the integration of the four skills diminishes the importance of the rules of listening, speaking, reading, and writing that are unique to each separate skill. Such an argument rarely holds up under careful scrutiny of integrated-skills courses. If anything, the added richness of the latter gives students greater motivation that converts to better retention of principles of effective speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Rather than being forced to plod along through a course that limits itself to one mode of performance, students are given a chance to diversify their efforts in more meaningful tasks.

Four skills activities in the language classroom serve many valuable purposes: they give learners scaffolded support, opportunities to create, contexts in which to use the language for exchanges of real information, evidence of their own ability (proof of learning) and, most important, confidence.

Medina, A. (2006) proposes for the formation and development of oral communication in English a system of methodological principles for the direction of the teaching-learning process of English.

One of these principles is the **"Principle of the integral character of the communicative abilities for their formation and development"**[3]**.** It states that the four communicative abilities (listening comprehension, oral expression, reading comprehension and written expression) cannot be separated and they have common aspects that make them a unit and they are naturally integrated in the act of communication.

In more specific terms, there are suitable proposals for the teaching– learning of this language with specific purposes. However, none of such proposals meets the specific needs of ninth graders under the conditions in which the teaching–learning process is being carried out.

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[3] Taken from Didáctica de la Lengua Extranjera con Enfoque de Competencia by Alberto Medina.

The context is favorable, given the right conditions and proposal of tasks, to integrate skills in class so that students find other ways to use the language and practice different skills at the same time.

Communication implies the acquisition of knowledge about the language system and the development of habits and skills within each of the language skills. Teaching should attempt to develop all the language skills in the sequence: listening, speaking, reading and writing since the beginning of the course, as they complement each other within the teaching-learning process.

While one of the skills is the objective of teaching, the others may act as a means for its development and develop themselves at the same time. Listening and speaking are treated first due to the primary character of oral communication where listening is the basis for speaking. Reading precedes writing as the basis of it, and the latter is considered an instrumental skill. This means writing is not an objective in itself (except in specialized courses), but a means for the development of listening, speaking and reading.

As sources of talk are necessary, whether guided or free, it is apparent that many of these will come from reading and writing activities.

Students will, of course, need dialogues as conversational models but these are not necessarily the best stimulus for talk. A reading text on an interesting or relevant topic may be much more productive, often because the ideas are presented more directly. Through reading the learners can also greatly expand their receptive knowledge of the language, especially in the often neglected area of vocabulary. Similarly, a writing activity, done collaboratively in pairs or small groups, will be accompanied by a good deal of talk, talk that is needed to get something done.

Skill integration aims at achieving a better communicative competence. This theme has received attention both at national and international levels. Authors such as Antich, R. (1975, 1986); Byrne, D. (1989); Brown, H. (1987); Acosta, R. (1996); Ur, P. (1996); Medina, A. (2006); Olivé, M. (?)

among others, have offered valuable contributions.The latter offers the following definition[4]:

Skill integration: "*The combination of two or more skills of the language in the teaching-learning process of English to attain a further goal, which can be the improvement of one particular skill; or their integration in follow-up stages to complete a sequence of learning or comprehension in the same process.*" (Olivé, M., ?).

Such definition of skill integration leads to the awareness of the role of each separate skill in regards to this combination. For an understanding of this role an analysis is made.

Speaking is one of the language skills to be developed in most of the school courses in English at all levels. The skill is either developed independently as a primary goal to be attained at the very end of learning and/or as a means for other skills such as reading. Consequently, as a general rule, speaking is a teaching point and this is reflected in the objectives of such courses.

Speaking relates intimately to the other language skills, but it is most closely connected with listening. This connection between listening and speaking reveals itself in their character as parts of oral communication in which both of them -the receptive skill of listening and the productive skill of speaking- take part. In this process, both listener and speaker play different roles and, thus, while one is working on the encoding of the message, the other is decoding the meanings embodied in the language forms produced by the speaker and aided by non-verbal means such as facial expressions and gestures. In some situations, one person may do all the speaking and so keep up the flow of speech (transactional function of language) as, for example, in a lecture; and in other situations, such as in conversations, speakers constantly change roles (interactional function of language).

The above, however, does not mean, under any circumstances, that speaking does not relate to reading and writing within the natural process of

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[4] Taken from notes for a prospective article by Miguel Olivé due in 2015.

communication. This is clearly seen, for instance in the following activity: "You meet a foreigner from an English speaking country who is paying a visit to Cuba. He gifts you with a book and after he has gone back to his country, you write to him". Here the exchange covers listening-speaking first, reading then, and finally writing. So the interrelation among the skills in the process of communication is evident.

Developing speaking requires knowledge of the language skills system, skills in the mastery of language (linguistic skills) and skills in its functioning as speech (communicative skills). Thus, in learning a language as communication, the learner must assimilate its components -pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar- and use them in speech.

Learning to speak, then, requires much practice in the functions and forms of the language. The aim of the teacher is to develop the linguistic and communicative skills integratively and progressively until free and spontaneous speech is attained.

Listening Comprehension is an exceedingly important skill; it makes up almost one third of people's language activities. Besides, listening is a very difficult skill to acquire when learning a language, because the listener has no control over what he hears (language content, complexity or speech). He cannot choose his pace; he cannot avoid structures he does not know; he cannot skirt around ideas he cannot express.

Besides, spoken words do not stay to be scrutinized and puzzled over, as do written words. Speakers vary in the amount of consideration they show to foreigners in the clarity and care with which they express themselves. The main difficulty people face when visiting a foreign country is that they cannot understand what is being said to them.

The ability of listening comprehension is not acquired naturally; then, it must be taught. Listening practice is especially important in classrooms where English is taught as a foreign language; that is, in situations (like in Cuba and in Brazil) where English is not the language of the country, and where opportunities for hearing English outside the classroom are few. Students in such environment often learn to read and write English, and

even to speak it, but they frequently have great difficulty comprehending English spoken to them.

Reading is one of the main skills that the learner should acquire in the process of mastering a language. Through reading the learner enriches his knowledge of the world around him. He increases his knowledge and understanding of the culture of the speakers of the language, their ways of thinking, and their contributions to many fields of artistic and intellectual endeavor. Reading develops learners' psychological processes such as analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalization, memory and imagination. Reading is a mighty weapon to develop in the learners qualities such as patriotism, internationalism, responsibility, honesty, loyalty and love.

Findings of applied linguistics have stated that language is primarily oral, and writing is derived from it. Scientific procedures in language learning involve listening first, followed by speaking. Then comes reading, and finally the writing of the language. The assumption is that written language is a graphic representation of vocal signals, and therefore to read must come after one has acquired the habits to respond to vocal signals.

Reading is also a way to improve listening, speaking and writing. The introduction of reading permits to bring in carefully controlled writing exercises. These two reinforce each other and consolidate the aural-oral learning. The oral language is the constant factor in the reading process, and it is the teacher's primary task to ensure mastery of related audio-lingual exercises as a prerequisite to the introduction of reading. This aural-oral mastery will aid students in learning to recognize the written forms. Through the perception of the visual forms via the eye, the student must establish a relationship of meaning based on auditory signals.

Writing has for many years, even centuries, occupied a large place in teaching and learning procedures in school. To be literate has implied to read and write. Besides, writing exercises keep students busy and out of mischief. The exercises are easy to handle and poorly qualified teachers may take them directly from the textbook.

Writing is, in its simplest form, a graphic representation of speech; that is, letters or combinations of letters which represent the sounds one makes in speech. It involves the correct association of conventional graphic symbols with sounds which have no meaning and no significant interrelationship for the writer. In a more complicated process the graphic symbols (letters, numbers and diacritic signs) have to be arranged into words, according to certain rules.

Words have to be arranged to form sentences and these are linked together in a certain way to form a text around a topic. In this sense, writing involves the encoding of a message for someone who is generally not physically present. Thus the writer has to ensure that what he writes can be understood successfully.

Generally speaking, writing as a simple process is taught in the elementary level, while as a complex process it is taught in the intermediate and advanced levels.

In non-specialized courses writing is not an objective in itself because not many students will need to write in English. In fact, in these courses writing is an instrumental skill at the service of reading, speaking and listening abilities, so it should not be taken as a major skill to be developed. Writing facilitates practice in the use of learned vocabulary and structures. It helps the students retain in the memory patterns of all kinds: graphemes, words, phrases, sentences, and texts.

The importance of integrating skills

There is a tendency in language classrooms (although perhaps a diminishing one) to focus attention on one skill at a time: thus, in one lesson, or part of a lesson, special attention is paid to oral work; in another to reading and so on.

This sometimes reflects the apparent needs of the learners. Often, however, it is a pedagogical convenience rather than a necessity and probably reflects the way skills have been sequenced in the unit of work in the course book: speaking/listening-+ reading-+ writing. This kind of

sequencing recycles and reinforces language items, but does not integrate skills in any real sense.

Notice that in "real life" language skills are not used in any set order or in any necessary conjunction with each other. For example, if there is an interesting advertisement in the paper for a holiday, people may discuss it with somebody and then perhaps ring up or write for more information. This nexus of activities, which so far has involved reading-+ speaking/listening either speaking/listening or writing, may continue or stop at that point. It can provide a model for integrating skills in a realistic way and is especially useful at a post-elementary level. Another simple but effective way of ensuring that skills are integrated is to get the learners to collaborate, in pairs or in groups, on many of the fluency-focused tasks. Finally, both simulation and project work provide a natural framework for integrating skills.

First, however, integrated skills activities are important because:

(a) They provide opportunities for using language naturally, not just practicing it.

(b) Many pair and group-work activities call for a variety of skills, sometimes simultaneously, in order to involve all the learners.

(c) Students seem to learn better when they are engaged on activities which involve more than one skill.[5]

The author of the Diploma Paper emphasizes that Byrne uses the terms as they were originally conceived. Today most research, mainly at a national level, names these skills as oral expression, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, and written expression, to refer respectively to speaking, reading, listening and writing. There is nothing wrong with the latter denominations; it is just a matter of updating and contextualizing new terms to new contexts and fuller definitions.

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[5] Taken from Teaching Oral English by Donn Byrne.

It must also be clear that single-skill activities are not effective: there will in fact be many occasions when the students are asked just to talk or read or write, because this is appropriate. Equally, however, opportunities to knit skills together must be considered, because this is what happens in real life.

Integrating the four main language skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) has showed to be very beneficial in the foreign language classroom. From the tapestry of language learning, it was noted that a single skill is rarely used when communicating, so it makes sense to focus on more than one skill at a time. Considering that communication requires the integration of the four skills, it makes sense that language is taught in a communication promoting way.

There are several advantages for using an integrated skill approach. It exposes English language learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturally in the language. Learners rapidly gain a true picture of the richness and complexity of the English language as employed for communication. However, with a segregated approach, it is difficult to use language in a meaningful way. For example, when students are focused on only one skill at a time, such as writing, it is not very meaningful or very likely that they will ever be focused on just writing while they are communicating.

Another advantage for using an integrated skill approach is that it stresses that English is not just an object of academic interest nor merely a key to passing an examination; instead, English becomes a real means of interaction and sharing among people. This also relates to motivation, and it is more likely for students to be motivated to learn a language if they are able to use it to interact, rather than to just have knowledge about the language. A third advantage of an integrated approach deals with the teacher's side of the process.

Teachers are able to track students' progress in multiple skills at the same time. Also, skill integration allows for growth in all main skill areas at the same time, this allows students to be able to use their strengths in order to help them grow in their weaknesses. In other words, if a student is

particularly strong in reading, they may be able to use this skill to help them with listening. This advantage also relates to motivation, because if the learner is a weak reader, but a very strong speaker, they may be prevented from becoming discouraged and unmotivated to continue learning the language. Integrating the language skills also promotes the learning of real content, not just the dissection of language forms. Finally, skill integration, whether found in content-based or task-based language instruction or some hybrid form, can be highly motivating to students of all ages and backgrounds.

An integrated skills approach is obviously a more realistic approach to authentic language learning, whereas a segregated approach does not offer a meaningful understanding of language. Nor does it seem to be a motivating style to learning a foreign language.

What are the implications of skill integration for teaching?

As noted earlier, integration of the four skills is concerned with realistic communication. This means that it is taught at the discourse level not just at the level of sentences or individual words and phrases. Discourse is a whole unit of communicative text, either spoken or written.

Focus on discourse: the main implication for teaching is that the discourse features of a text must be kept in mind and students must be made aware of them. This helps the integration of skills because it makes clear the teaching points and, for simple integration, the discourse features are the main language aspects that are transfered from one skill to the other. Discourse features include aspects such as: the way that the text is organized, its layout (for written text), the style of the language (formal or informal), the register (the vocabulary that is commonly found in such discourses).

Teachers have to use their professional judgment, based on their knowledge of the students, to decide how much detail should be included in the lesson. It is important to keep a balance. Too much information may confuse them. Too little information may mean that they are not clear about the features of a particular type of discourse.

Adjusting the textbook contents**:** another aspect of teaching that requires attention in an integrated approach is the use of the textbook. Although many modern textbooks have some integration of the four skills, changes may be needed in the contents. This could involve altering the order of the contents. If the discourse of the writing activity is closely related to the reading passage, but it is placed in a different part of the unit in the textbook, the focus should be on the writing straight after the reading passage is finished.

For simple integration can be designed a listening or reading comprehension activity that becomes a plan for speaking or writing. For complex integration, it could mean making changes to the activities in the textbook.

In order to integrate the language skills teachers should consider taking these steps:

* Learn more about the various ways to integrate language skills in the classroom.

* Reflect on their current approach and evaluate the extent to which the skills are integrated.

* Choose instructional materials, textbooks, and technologies that promote the integration of listening, reading, speaking, and writing, as well as the associated skills of syntax, vocabulary, and so on.

* Even if a given course is labeled according to just one skill, remember that it is possible to integrate the other language skills through appropriate tasks.

With careful reflection and planning, any teacher can integrate the language skills and strengthen the tapestry of language teaching and learning. When the tapestry is woven well, learners can use English effectively for communication.

Partial Conclusions of Chapter One

Chapter One permitted to establish the theoretical foundation of the research. It analytically delved into the reality of the teaching-learning process of English, exposed the main difficulties the ninth-grade students have in relation to oral expression and skill integration to be efficiently involved in that process, and approached a theoretical foundation for the connection between oral expression and skill integration, categories that are central to the investigation as a whole. Chapter Two will contribute the proposal made by the author to solve the problem declared.

CHAPTER TWO – A PROPOSAL OF SKILL-INTEGRATING TASKS TO IMPROVE NINTH-GRADE STUDENTS´ ORAL EXPRESION

This chapter contains a presentation of the characteristics of successful oral expression exercises, preceded by a clarifying overview on the term *task*, among other elements. It also presents the tasks to improve the ninth-grade students' oral expression already mentioned, which is the practical contribution of the research, through skill integration. Finally a corroboration item is included to verify preliminarily the feasibility and effectiveness of the proposal through the Specialists´ Opinion and in practice via a Pre-experiment.

2.1- An overview on the term *task*

A review of materials on the term shows that the most frequently used terms are tasks, teaching tasks, learning tasks, teaching-learning tasks, cognitive tasks, didactical tasks, professional tasks and pedagogical-professional tasks. The author assumes *tasks,* adding the element *skill-integrating*.

Grichin (1960)[6] refers to this term as Teaching Tasks, subdividing them in Cognitive, Practical and Creative.

Concepción (1989) proposes two types of tasks:
- Exercises (an orientation is given on what is to be done to find a solution).
- Problems (a situation is provided so that the student solves it).

Garcés (1997) includes the function that is played by the tasks within the teaching-learning process:
- Preparatory tasks. Those which create the basis for learning the contents included in the tasks.

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[6] All author references made in this item were taken from Rafael Rodríguez (2001). Sistema de Tareas Diagnóstico-Formativas para el Diagnóstico y Formación de la Generalización del Pensamiento en la Asignatura Gramática Inglesa en los ISP. Tesis de Maestría. CDIP del ISPH, and translated by Pupo´s tutor.

- Formative tasks. Those which lead to the grasping of the essential traits of specific contents.
- Developing tasks. Those which allow to establish relations and give the tools for problem-solving approaches.

There is a sequential implication in this classification, as the tasks are meant to prepare the students, give them the essence of the phenomena under analysis, and then lead them to face situations.

Pidkasisti (1971) proposes Cognitive Tasks and divides them in:
- Model tasks.
- Reproductive tasks.
- Productive tasks.
- Creative tasks.

Díaz (1995) uses the term Professional Tasks. She states these "…*are taken from the object of the future profession of the graduate-to-be, and from the role that he must play. It is the type of activity that shows the role of the professional to solve the situations that will come up in the object of his profession in a specific context and conditions".* She refers to Didactical Tasks, these seen as the actions led by the teacher and performed by the students within the teaching-learning process.

Alvarez de Zayas (1996) posits that the Teaching Task leads to the fulfilment of a goal, to the "*Resolution of the problem posed to the student by the teacher*". He expounds that "*The teaching-learning process unfolds from one task to another until the ultimate goal is brought off".* One communicative element is stressed by the author: "*through the process the student should expose, analyze, discuss, value, convince, criticize and self-criticize*". A participative component is highlighted: "...*the students participate in the development of the process and their criteria can change the road to follow. This gives them a sense of commitment with the process and put their efforts in achieving it*".

While there are multiple criteria on the term, this Paper only intends to present a cursory view on them. The purpose is not to delve into their features, rather to prove that the tasks to be proposed cover different classifications, which overlap in accordance with the context.

2.2 General methodological analysis

Didactic considerations for the teaching-learning process of English oral communication:

The author assumes that oral abilities should not be developed in isolation in the classroom. Classroom techniques that develop the students' ability to express themselves through speech would therefore seem an important component of all up-to-date language courses.

Characteristics of successful oral expression exercises:

- Students talk a lot: as much as possible of the period of time allotted to the activity is in fact occupied by students' talk.
- Participation is even: classroom discussion is not dominated by a minority of talkative participants: all get a chance to speak, and contributions are evenly distributed.
- Motivation is high: students are eager to speak because they are interested in the topic and have something new to say about it, or because they want to contribute to achieving a task objective.
- Language is of an acceptable level: students express themselves in utterances that are relevant, easily comprehensible to each other, and of an acceptable level of language accuracy.

What the teacher can do to help solve problems regarding the development of oral expression:

- Use group and pair work.
- Base the activity on easy language.

- Make a careful choice of topic and task to stimulate interest.
- Give clear instructions.
- Keep students speaking the target language.

It must be added that the activities that are proposed in class should reflect reality, and whenever possible they should be presented in integration with other skills besides listening. The author of this Diploma Paper assumes the theoretical foundation of skill integration described in the first chapter.

2.3- Pair-work organization to implement the tasks

Pair-work activities provide the students with opportunities to talk to one another without constant supervision or correction from the teacher. It will provide the learners with the maximum amount of meaningful practice. At the same time, it will get the students to work on their own. There are two ways of getting the learners to work in pairs: fixed pairs and flexible pairs. To achieve a successful pair work, teachers should follow certain procedures:

- Make sure the students know exactly what they have to do.

- Divide the students into pairs (taking advantage as much as possible of the way they are seated).

- Carry out selective checking by walking round the class and listening in.

- Control noise level by stopping an activity and asking the students to start again more quietly.

- Gauge the amount of time an activity should go on for.

- Provide any necessary feedback.

Pair work is on the whole more suitable than group work, partly because the students do as much talking as possible and partly because it is usually easier to divide a class up into pairs.

Pair work helps the students to increase their confidence in being able to say something in English. Also, the students learn from each other. This

kind of activity provides more possibilities for correcting real communication.

For developing pair work the students should be allowed to move around the classroom and to interact freely with other students in the classroom, but most of these activities work quite well if the students remain seated and interact only with those who are near them because it helps to control discipline.

2.4- The proposal

This proposal is to be implemented in ninth grade. The proposal and introduction of these tasks will contribute to improve oral expression through skill integration.

As a word of advice the author wants to make clear that in the case of the proposal the reading comprehension skill is not treated as such, rather as reading only, that is, as a technique that combines with the other skills of listening, speaking and writing.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 1

Write on a piece of paper what you like to do the most. All the pieces of paper are going to be collected and put in a box.

a. Pick up one sheet of paper and try to guess who wrote it and why you think so.

b. The owner of the sheet of paper is going to confirm or deny your answer.

Skills involved: writing, oral expression and listening.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 2

Imagine the classroom is empty: no furniture, no people, nothing. Create in writing your ideal classroom arrangement taking into account your preferences.

a. Share your project with your partners.

Skills involved: writing, oral expression and listening.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 3

Write on a sticky label your first name, your family name, your favorite color and your favorite hobby. Then, stick it on to your clothes and move around the classroom until you find someone with whom you share something according to the label.

a. Establish a conversation with the partner you selected and try to find as many things in common between you and your partner as possible: likes, dislikes, preferences, etc.

b. Get ready to make a class report about any surprising discoveries and coincidences.

Skills involved: writing, oral expression and listening.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 4

Select one of the following actions and draw a stick figure related to it:

- Painting.	– Cooking.	– Sweeping.
- Dancing.	– Watching TV.	– Swimming.
- Traveling.	– Cleaning.	– Running.

a. Then, prepare a conversation by asking and answering questions on what the person in the stick figure likes to do.

b. Act out the conversation.

Skills involved: writing, oral expression and listening.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 5

Write on a sheet of paper a sentence expressing what you hate the most.

a. Give it to your classmate, who is going to add a comment or question.

b. Take it back and write an answer.

c. Do this until you have a six-line dialogue.

d. Dramatize it.

Skills involved: writing, oral expression and listening.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 6

Work with the beginning of a story on a topic you enjoy.

a. Give it to your close partner, who is going to write an end to it.

b. Get ready to dramatize it in front of the class.

Skills involved: writing, oral expression and listening.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 7

Work with your partner. Imagine it is a hot Sunday in summer.

a. Telephone your friend and plan the activities you would like to do during the whole day. Write them down in dialogue form.

b. Get ready to dramatize the conversation.

Skills involved: writing, oral expression and listening.
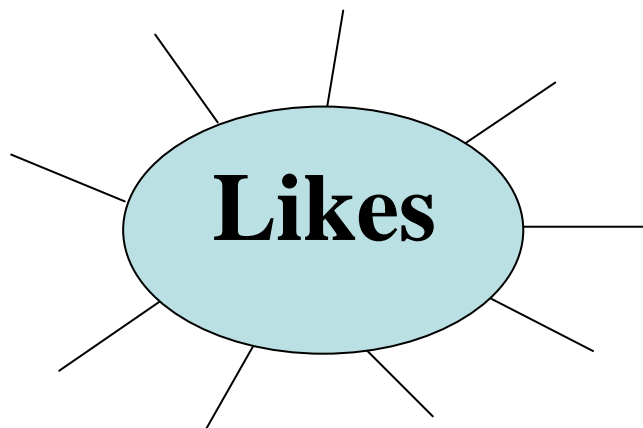

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 8

Prepare a conversation with your partner in which you express the feeling, the mood, the value and the quality you prefer and the ones you dislike. Be sure you give reasons for your choices.

a. Act out the conversation.

Skills involved: writing, oral expression and listening.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 9

Write a sentence that comes to your mind by looking at the following word:

Likes

a. Read the information you wrote to your partner.

b. Get ready to talk about your partner's information.

Skills Involved: writing, reading, oral expression and listening.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 10

Write six sentences that can be true or false about your likes, dislikes and hates.

a. Read them to your partner, who is going to guess which are true and which are false.

b. Your partner is going to make a report about his/her guesses and you are going to say if he/she is right or wrong.

Skills involved: writing, reading, oral expression and listening.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 11

Write a list of what you would like to do in the future.

a. Order them hierarchically according to your interests.

b. Explain why you ordered them in that way.

c. Be ready to read it to your classmates.

Skills involved: writing, oral expression, listening and reading.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 12

Describe in writing how you would want your Prince/Princess Charming to be like.

a. Specify his/her personality traits and read them out to the class.

b. Now get ready to present everything orally.

Skills involved: writing, reading, oral expression and listening.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 13

Write a description of the place in which you would like to live.

a. Read it to your partner, who is going to draw a picture.

b. Explain to your classmates why you chose that place and not another one.

Skills involved: writing, reading, oral expression and listening.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 14

Look at the following items and arrange them in order of preferences.

A. Television programs.   D. Parties.

B. Songs.   E. Foods.

C. Colors.   F. Sports.

a. Write reasons for the order of preferences that you gave to the list and read them out.

b. Compare and discuss your choices with your partner.

c. Get ready to report to your classmates the similarities and differences you found in both lists.

Skills involved: writing, reading, oral expression and listening.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 15

Think about what is behind you without turning around including other people in the class, furniture, pictures on the walls, windows, etc. Write descriptions about what you like and dislike of the things you mention.

a. Read to your close partner the information you wrote and make a list of the likes and dislikes you both wrote.

b. Get ready to comment on that list with other couples.

Skills involved: writing, reading, oral expression and listening.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 16

Think what your favorite word is.

a. Write a brief paragraph in which the word you selected is the key of the message you want to express.

b. Read it to your partners.

c. Hear carefully all the paragraphs and get ready to say which your favorite one was and why.

Skills involved: writing, reading, oral expression and listening.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 17

If you had the possibility to be anyone, who would you like to be? Why?

a. Discuss the ideas orally.

b. Write down the characteristics you prefer in him/her.

c. Get ready to read it to the audience.

Skills involved: oral expression, listening, writing and reading.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 18

Work with a partner. Ask questions to find out what he/she thinks about the following activities. Ask questions like: "Do you enjoy (talking on the phone)?" "Do you like (going on picnics)?"

Activities	Like	Dislike	Love	Hate	Enjoy
Talking on the phone					
Eating alone					
Spending time with your family					

Singing					
Reading					
Watching TV					
Studying English					
Playing volleyball					
Going on picnics					
Listening to music					
Swimming					
Spending time with friends					
Watching professional baseball games					
Window shopping					
Cycling					
Taking walks					
Drawing or painting					

a. Read to the class what you found out after writing a short paragraph with the information.

Skills involved: oral expression, listening, writing and reading.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 19

Interview your classmates until you find someone who:

- likes practicing baseball

- loves listening to music

- prefers dancing

- dislikes playing football

- enjoys fishing

- likes reading

- hates riding bicycles

a. Write a brief paragraph comprising the information you got.

b. Get ready to read it to your classmates.

Skills Involved: oral expression, listening, writing and reading.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 20

Imagine you are traveling in a bus in your holidays and your favorite actor (actress) is sitting beside you.

a. Prepare a conversation in which you are going to ask him/her questions about his/her like, preferences, dislike, hates, etc.

b. Write a letter about your experience and get ready to read it to your partners.

Skills involved: oral expression, listening, writing and reading.

2.5- Corroboration of the effectiveness of the proposal

This item includes the corroboration of the tasks proposed by the author. In the first place, the tasks are presented to a group of experienced professors for a preliminary revision on the feasibility of the proposal before it is put in practice. Secondly, the tasks are applied and verified via a Pre-experiment.

Specialists' Opinion

Initially the tasks were presented in March 2014 to six experienced professors from the University of Pedagogical Sciences " José de la Luz y Caballero" with years devoted to the teaching of English as a foreign language.

This phase of the research allowed to have a preliminary notion of criteria from outstanding professors on the feasibility of the proposal. This added validity and practicality to the second phase, in which the proposal was to be corroborated in practice. The professors were surveyed by giving them the proposal with the skill-integrating tasks.

Note 1: For the specific objective of the survey see Appendix 4.

Their academic levels are summarized as follows:

2 Specialists in a Psycho-Pedagogical Major with a Master´s Degree Status, 2 Masters in Pedagogical Sciences, 2 Bachelors in Education.

5 Assistants, 1 Associate Professor.

Their years of experience averaged 17.8%.

Note 2: A special item where the professors are asked if they have in anyway been in contact with the topics (oral expression and skill integration) was added to the survey. All of them marked <u>yes</u>. Together with the average of their years of experience and their academic levels, this item adds an extra reliability to their capacity to give validations on the matter, and singles them out as specialists.

The results in each indicator rendered the following:

Indicator #1:

Six marked C2.

Indicator #2:

Six marked C2.

Indicator #3:

Three professors marked C2. Three marked C3.

Indicator #4:

According to the contribution of the proposal in this indicator, all the professors surveyed marked C3.

Partial Conclusions from the Survey to the Professors (Specialists' Opinion)

An analysis of the results obtained in this survey shows that the tasks proposed have potential enough, therefore, they qualify as an adequate alternative to be applied in the teaching-learning process of English to improve oral expression through skill-integrating tasks.

The prevailing categories marked were C2 and C3. Another positive element is that no professors marked below C3. The fact that the categories selected moved from C2 to C3 allows to state that the tasks are an adequate contribution and an alternative to what is being done in class, and marks them as a proper choice to be applied.

The opinions given by the group of specialists meant an initial breakthrough in the pursuit of quality modeling of the skill-integrating tasks. This first moment, the corroboration of their effectiveness, allowed the researcher to have a preliminary informed view on the status of the tasks. Such achievement offers more credibility to the product that is presented in the Pre-experiment. It can be concluded that six experienced professors considered the tasks an above-average and well-into-highly-acceptable proposal that can be promoted to the next corroboration stage, the Pre-experiment.

Pre-experiment

To apply and validate the proposal a Pre-experiment was carried out during the months of February, March and April 2014.The **population** of the research is made up by the total of ninth graders at Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School (one-hundred and sixty-four students); while the **sample** is a representative number of students of one of the groups of this level: group 4 (forty-two students, eighteen students for pre-test, for a 42.85% of the whole group; and nineteen for post-test, for a 45.23% of the whole group).

The students had evidenced low results in the different tests applied because of insufficiencies in the mastery of the four communicative skills, in particular oral expression and many of them did not like the way practical activities were handled because they had few opportunities to talk.

Thus, to evaluate the effectiveness and the degree of acceptance of the tasks proposed, the author of this investigation began to work with the students and applied a pre-test (Appendix 5) in order to know the status of development of the oral expression skill in the English lessons without the skill-integrating tasks. The following results were obtained:

- Eight pupils could solve the tasks in a correct way, representing a 33, 3 %.

- Ten pupils could not solve them and manifested a poor mastery of the English language, representing a 41, 7 %.

At the end of the investigation, a post-test (Appendix 6) was applied in order to know the level of development of the oral expression skill after the implementation of the proposal of skill-integrating tasks. The following results were obtained:

- Fourteen pupils could solve the tasks in an appropriate way, representing a 58, 3 %.

- Five pupils could not solve them and manifested a poor mastery of the English language, representing a 20, 8 %.

This time the students evidenced higher results in the test applied as a result of the application of the new tasks, in particular in oral expression

and many of them enjoyed the activities proposed as they had more opportunities to talk.

Taking into account the results previously stated, the author of the current research concluded on a scientific basis that the tasks are effective. The following chart offers a closing comparative analysis of the results in the pre and post-tests in both indicators.

The difference rate in indicator 1, success of the students in completing the tasks, must therefore render a positive (plus) result to be significantly contributive to the research, and so it does. The difference rate in indicator 2, failure of the students to complete the tasks, must therefore render a negative (minus) result to be significantly contributive to the research, and so it does[7]. Thus it can be concluded that the tasks were effective.

	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	DIFFERENCE
INDICATOR 1 (+)	33.3	58.3	+25
INDICATOR 2 (-)	41.7	20.8	- 20.9

The reliability of the Pre-experiment as a research method to validate models and proposals in practice is beyond question. The one carried out here allows the researcher to draw conclusions that self-stand: when pre and post-test results are compared, there is a noticeable (See Chart and Graph) difference in the two instances. In pre-test results the students were markedly at a loss and most of them failed, whereas in the post-test the percentages evidenced a positive reaction.

It must be noted too that the pre-test responded to less demanding ways to elicit answers from the students, following the standard procedures in school; however they failed in mass. Yet the post-test raised the bar of expectations and presented the students with the challenge of the skill-integrating tasks proposed. The results were highly satisfactory.

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[7] See Appendix 7 for a graphic representation of the comparison.

Partial Conclusions of the Item

Item 2.5 was devoted to the corroboration of the effectiveness of the proposal to favor the development of oral expression in English through skill-integrating tasks in the students already mentioned. It was proven that the tasks were feasible and effective for the accomplishment of the objective proposed in this research. All this analysis allows to state that skill-integrating tasks can have an incidence on the students´ oral performance in English. The results obtained so attest for this assertion.

The crossing of methods, Specialists´Opinion and Pre-experiment, guaranteed the scientific validity of the proposal and the corroboration stage of the research. Both moments proved that the proposal was pertinent and appropriate, and that during the Pre-experiment there was an adequate preparation and modeling of the tasks, certified by the Specialists´ Opinion. Once the second part, the Pre-experiment, was carried out, the significance of the result was factor enough to state that the proposal is valid. There is a sustained correlation between the results of the Specialists´ Opinion and what was detected in the Pre-experiment.

Partial Conclusions of Chapter Two

Chapter Two was chiefly devoted to the presentation of the skill-integrating tasks proposed to improve ninth graders´ oral expression, with a methodological proposal at the beginning, and corroboration via Specialists´ Opinion and Pre-experiment of their effectiveness, which was positive. Along with these, a document to vouch the application of the proposal in the school is included under the name of Certification Letter. (Appendix 8), as well as the application certificates (Appendixes 9, 10, 11) of the introduction of the tasks in the teaching-learning process of the subject Integrated English Practice for non-philologists at the University of Pedagogical Sciences "José de la Luz y Caballero".

CONCLUSIONS

Oral expression in ninth graders was detected as a problem: the procedures and tasks elaborated by the teachers were not sufficient, and hardly ever considered the integration of skills as an effective weapon to develop oral expression. Therefore, the students´ performance in the skill was not adequate.

The different phases of the Paper allowed characterizing the teaching-learning process object of the investigation, substantiating the research problem by detecting and describing the situation of the scope of the research, and proposing tasks to remedy the problem, so that the chief objective could be accomplished.

The tasks proposed were used to solve the problem of skill integration to improve the ninth graders´ oral expression from "Carlos Manuel de Céspedes" Junior High School, via the application of a Pre-experiment previously assessed by Specialists´ Opinion. Both moments proved the tasks were effective and valid. The author considers the main objective of this Diploma Paper was fulfilled.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The author suggests to:

- Deepen on theoretical foundation concerning oral expression and skill integration.
- Enrich the tasks with new ideas and variations.
- Apply them in other levels after proper modification.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1. Observation guide.

Objective: To know how the teaching-learning process is carried out in ninth-grade English lessons in reference to skill integration.

INDICATORS:

1. Activities the teacher develops to start the lesson.   .

2. Abilities developed by the teacher.

3. Attention the teacher gives to the students.

4. Participation of the students.

5. Interaction between teacher-student and student-student.

6. Use of skill-integrating tasks during the lesson.

Appendix 2. Survey to ninth graders.

Objective: To know the students´ opinion about the English lessons.

Querido estudiante:

Estamos realizando una investigación para mejorar las clases que te impartimos y tu aprendizaje. Te pedimos que respondas con sinceridad las preguntas que te hacemos. Esperamos poder contar contigo en otro momento. Gracias.

1. ¿Te motivan las clases de inglés?

Siempre _____   A veces _____   Nunca _____

2. De las actividades que aparecen a continuación marca con una cruz (X) las que más te agradan durante las clases de inglés.

Dramatizar _____   Ejercicios orales_____

Juegos didácticos _____   Ejercicios escritos _____

Alguna otra actividad: _____

3. ¿Es frecuente el uso de tus actividades preferidas en las actividades de expresión oral?

_____

4. ¿Durante las actividades realizadas en el aula en las clases de expresión oral intercambias y hablas con tus compañeros en inglés?

Sí_____   No_____   A veces _____

¿Por qué?_____

5. ¿Te parece suficiente el tiempo dedicado a las actividades en las clases de expresión oral (cuando tienes que hablar)?

Sí _____   No _____

Appendix 3. Interview to English teachers.

Objective: To know the English teachers´ criteria on the teaching-learning process of English in ninth grade and on the aspects under research.

Esteemed colleague:

We have embarked on a research about oral expression issues in the English lesson, particularly those related to skill integration to improve it. Your answers in this interview will be crucial in charting our research course. Thank you.

1. How do you value the development of oral expression in your students?

2. Do you consider that skill integration during the English lessons has a paramount importance for the development of oral expression?

3. Do you frequently use skill integration in your oral expression lessons?

4. Are the activities developed in the classroom created by you or taken from consulted materials and books? Do they integrate skills?

Appendix 4. Specialists' Opinion.

Objective: To obtain a preliminary corroboration from specialists on the feasibility and applicability of the proposal of skill-integrating tasks.

Dear Professor:

We are in the middle of a research on oral expression improvement for ninth-grade students through skill-integrating tasks. It will be very valuable to have your opinion on the tasks we propose to achieve that goal. They are annexed here. We certainly hope to be counting on you whenever we need you. Thank you.

General Information:

Years of experience

Categories	B.Ed	Instructor
	Master	Assistant
	Ph.D.	Associate
		Full Professor

Have you done any exploratory research or studies on the matter of oral expression and skill integration?

Yes   No   Little

NOTE:

Classifications C1, C2, etc., mean Category 1, 2, etc. C1 is the most positive valuation of the indicator; C5 the lowest successively. The underlined words in each indicator are the guide for the valuation.

For example, in indicator 3, Coincidence of the proposal made…, C1 reads High coincidence, C2 Good coincidence, C3 Coincidence, C4 Low coincidence, C5 No coincidence.

The categories High, Good, Coincidence, Low and No are valid for all five indicators, changing only in C3, where it will be the underlined word in each indicator. Thank you again.

INDICATORS TO BE PONDERED:

1. <u>Pertinence</u> of the proposal of skill-integrating tasks to improve oral expression in respect to the theoretical foundation declared in the research.

        C1   C2   C3   C4   C5

2. <u>Correlation</u> between the linguistic demand of the tasks and the students' language level.

        C1   C2   C3   C4   C5

3. <u>Coincidence</u> of the proposal made with the methodological foundation suggested about skill-integrating tasks to improve oral expression.

        C1   C2   C3   C4   C5

4. <u>Contribution </u>of the proposal to the teaching-learning process of English in general and of oral expression specifically.

        C1   C2   C3   C4   C5

Appendix 5. Pre-test (without skill-integrating tasks).

Objective: To diagnose the level of development of the oral expression skill in ninth graders from group 4.

Heading: Read the following instructions and try to say them in English.

Instructions:

1. Preguntar a alguien cómo está. Responder en caso de que le pregunten lo mismo.

3. Preguntarle el nombre. Responder en caso de que le pregunten lo mismo.

4. Preguntarle de dónde es. Responder en caso de que le pregunten lo mismo

5. Preguntarle a qué se dedica. Responder en caso de que le pregunten lo mismo.

6. Preguntarle con quién vive. Responder en caso de que le pregunten lo mismo y describir los lugares usando comparativos.

7. Expresar gustos y preferencias usando comparativos.

Appendix 6. Post-test (with skill-integrating tasks).

Objective: To determine the level of development of the oral expression skill in ninth graders from group 4 after applying the proposal of skill-integrating tasks.

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASK 13

Interview your classmates until you find someone who:

- likes practicing baseball

- loves listening to music

- prefers dancing

- dislikes playing football

- enjoys fishing

- likes reading

- hates riding bicycles

 a. Write a brief paragraph comprising the information you got.

 b. Get ready to read it to your classmates.

 Skills Involved: oral expression, listening, writing and reading.

Appendix 7. Comparative chart of the Pre-experiment.

	PRE TEST	POST TEST		
■ INDICATOR 1	33.3	58.3		
□ INDICATOR 2	41.7	20.8		
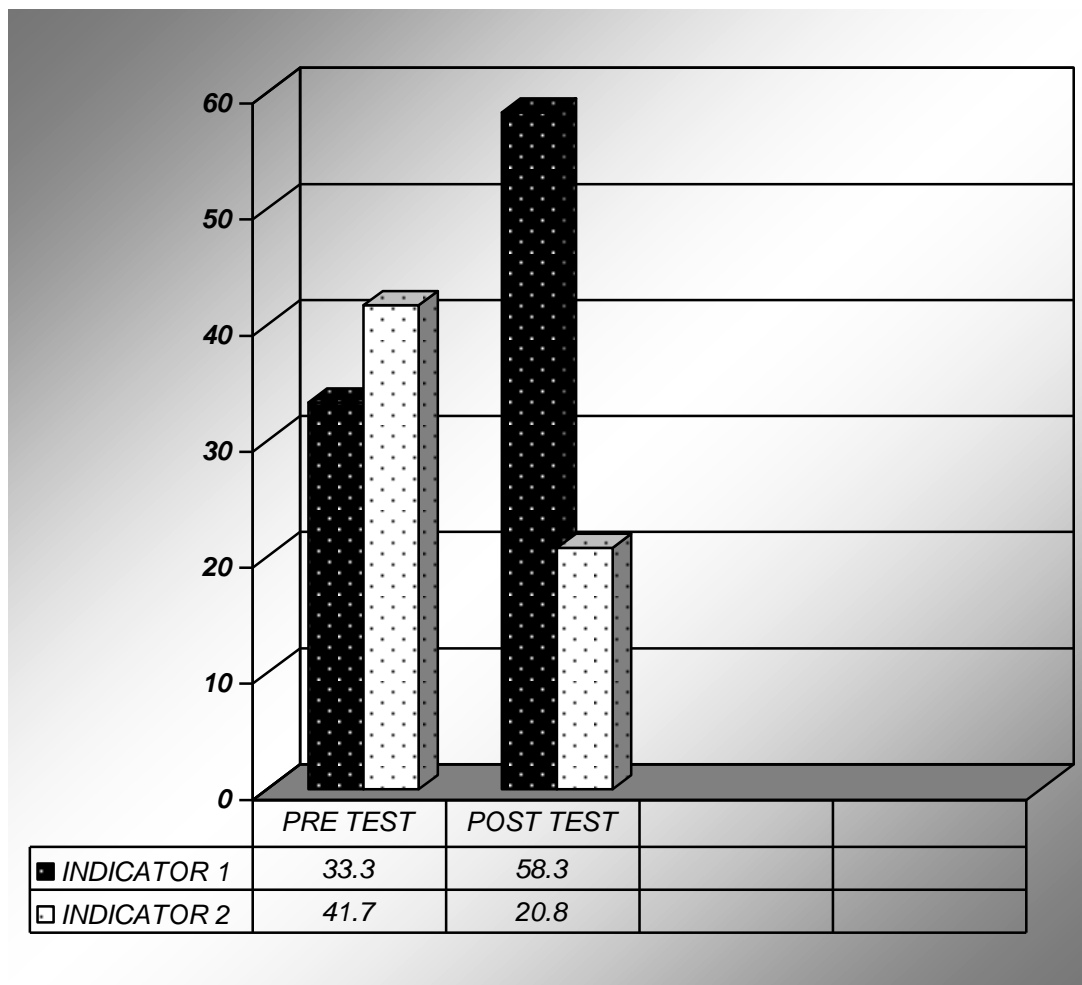
Appendix 8. Certification Letter.

CERTIFICATION LETTER

Institución: Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Junior High School. Holguín.

El presente documento hace constar que la aspirante Yudisleidy Ruby Pupo Almarales, estudiante del 5to año de la carrera Licenciatura en Educación Lenguas Extranjeras Inglés, aplicó y validó en esta escuela su investigación como Tesis de Diploma:

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASKS TO IMPROVE NINTH-GRADE STUDENTS'

ORAL EXPRESSION IN ENGLISH AT CARLOS MANUEL DE CÉSPEDES

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN HOLGUÍN

Los resultados obtenidos durante y después del proceso de validación preliminar pueden ser catalogados de buenos, a partir de la constatación de los criterios dados por los profesores y los resultados de los estudiantes en la habilidad, a quienes se les aplicaron las tareas elaboradas.

Dado en Holguín a los ___ días del mes de _____de 2014.

HACEN CONSTAR:

_____   _____

Director de la Secundaria   Jefe Dpto. o Tutor

Appendix 9. Introducción de resultados.

UNIVERSIDAD DE CIENCIAS PEDAGÓGICAS

JOSÉ DE LA LUZ Y CABALLERO

HOLGUÍN

DEPARTAMENTO DE INGLÉS

AVAL DE INTRODUCCIÓN DE RESULTADOS

El presente documento hace constar que la aspirante Yudisleidy Ruby Pupo Almarales, estudiante del 5to año de la carrera Licenciatura en Educación Lenguas Extranjeras Inglés, aplicó en esta universidad su investigación como Tesis de Diploma:

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASKS TO IMPROVE NINTH-GRADE STUDENTS'

ORAL EXPRESSION IN ENGLISH AT CARLOS MANUEL DE CÉSPEDES

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN HOLGUÍN

Los resultados obtenidos durante y después del proceso de introducción en la carrera Educación Primaria 1er año se consideran buenos, a partir de la constatación de los criterios dados por los profesores y los resultados de los estudiantes en la habilidad, a quienes se les aplicaron las tareas elaboradas.

Dado en Holguín a los ___ días del mes de _____de 2014.

HACEN CONSTAR:

_____   _____

M.Sc. Francisco Lemus Reyes   Dr. Hortensia Cruz López

Profesor Principal   Jefe de Departamento

Disciplina Práctica de la Lengua Inglesa

Appendix 10. Introducción de resultados.

UNIVERSIDAD DE CIENCIAS PEDAGÓGICAS

JOSÉ DE LA LUZ Y CABALLERO

HOLGUÍN

DEPARTAMENTO DE INGLÉS

AVAL DE INTRODUCCIÓN DE RESULTADOS

El presente documento hace constar que la aspirante Yudisleidy Ruby Pupo Almarales, estudiante del 5to año de la carrera Licenciatura en Educación Lenguas Extranjeras Inglés, aplicó en esta universidad su investigación como Tesis de Diploma:

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASKS TO IMPROVE NINTH-GRADE STUDENTS'

ORAL EXPRESSION IN ENGLISH AT CARLOS MANUEL DE CÉSPEDES

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN HOLGUÍN

Los resultados obtenidos durante y después del proceso de introducción en la carrera Logopedia 1er año se consideran buenos, a partir de la constatación de los criterios dados por los profesores y los resultados de los estudiantes en la habilidad, a quienes se les aplicaron las tareas elaboradas.

Dado en Holguín a los ___ días del mes de _____de 2014.

HACEN CONSTAR:

_____   _____

M.Sc. Francisco Lemus Reyes   Dr. Hortensia Cruz López

   Profesor Principal   Jefe de Departamento

Disciplina Práctica de la Lengua Inglesa

Appendix 11. Introducción de resultados.

UNIVERSIDAD DE CIENCIAS PEDAGÓGICAS

JOSÉ DE LA LUZ Y CABALLERO

HOLGUÍN

DEPARTAMENTO DE INGLÉS

AVAL DE INTRODUCCIÓN DE RESULTADOS

El presente documento hace constar que la aspirante Yudisleidy Ruby Pupo Almarales, estudiante del 5to año de la carrera Licenciatura en Educación Lenguas Extranjeras Inglés, aplicó en esta universidad su investigación como Tesis de Diploma:

SKILL-INTEGRATING TASKS TO IMPROVE NINTH-GRADE STUDENTS' ORAL EXPRESSION IN ENGLISH AT CARLOS MANUEL DE CÉSPEDES JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN HOLGUÍN

Los resultados obtenidos durante y después del proceso de introducción en la carrera Pedagogía-Psicología 1er año se consideran buenos, a partir de la constatación de los criterios dados por los profesores y los resultados de los estudiantes en la habilidad, a quienes se les aplicaron las tareas elaboradas.

Dado en Holguín a los ____ días del mes de _____ de 2014.

HACEN CONSTAR:

_____   _____

M.Sc. Francisco Lemus Reyes   Dr. Hortensia Cruz López

    Profesor Principal   Jefe de Departamento

Disciplina Práctica de la Lengua Inglesa

Tutor's Opinion

I must highly commend the author's proficiency in her Paper. Pupo was attentive to suggestions and orientations on how to improve the stages through which the research moved, but most of all she was very independent and creative, and applied hard and productively to the tasks ahead of her.

As a tutor I was fully satisfied along the sessions and preliminary presentations Pupo had. The result, solid and profound, is entirely hers: I simply charted the course a little. Flaws of any kind – if any, such is the author's punctilious devotion to her work – are my entire responsibility.

I am proudly fulfilled now seeing Pupo's achievement and foreseeing her dissertation day. She will be capable of defending her criteria and of answering the questions that will arise thereafter.

I am positive the examination board will find it easy and just to grant Pupo the mark she earned long before this final day.

Miguel Ángel Olivé Iglesias