1 What are the advantages and disadvantages of
  a teaching English as integrated skills?
  b teaching each skill individually?
2 What level is each method suitable for?

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I suppose it would be useful first to clarify what may be meant when we refer to an 'integrated skills' approach to teaching a language. In terms of theories of language learning which were common, perhaps, in the 1960s, and which were concerned with teaching the *forms* of a language system, often through procedures which were based on a behaviourist, or stimulus–response, model of language learning, the incorporation of the four traditional 'skills'–listening, speaking, writing, reading–into some kind of sequence, often in that order, was a means of securing reinforcement of the learning of the relevant forms, which were usually the only common link in the otherwise unrelated sequence. Though reinforcement (for example of lexis or routines and patterns) might still be a result of an 'integrated skills' approach, the rationale for the approach is very different, and neither teacher nor learner would today be likely to be aware of such an aim. On the surface, the approach is, for the teacher, one where in any one lesson or series of lessons or unit of material the learner is involved in speaking and listening and writing and reading in any sequence; that is, there is no necessary, clear division of the skills into separate lessons or units of materials. For the learner, it is one where the situation or context in which he is involved is dominant, and where, as in real life, he may have to perform operations within or concerning that situation involving any skill at any time. (A moment's thought will suggest that the division of separate skills into separate lessons or units may anyway sometimes be an illusion; if 'speaking' means anything other than lecturing or speechifying, it is hard not to listen too; and many 'writing' classes inevitably also require learners to read and comprehend matter other than instructions.)

Next, in order to explain the rather abrupt answers I shall give to the questioner, I should like to refer to some fairly widely accepted beliefs that today underlie approaches to language learning. It is perhaps necessary to state that few are the result of empirical research (on this, see Wilkins 1972 8.1–2); merely, they are often found to work, and accord with much common sense, experience, and

general educational *desiderata,* as well as theoretical positions in a number of fields of applied linguistics (for a brief and lucid exposition, see Maley 1982 34-6). But it is also necessary to state that reference to them here should not be taken to imply that different approaches may not also achieve excellent results; the variables are infinite, and language teaching should be nothing if not eclectic.

Perhaps the most significant of these beliefs is the distinction made by Krashen between language learning and language acquisition. Essentially this distinguishes the learning of language as system from the experiencing of language in use, and postulates that what is learnt is rarely immediately available when the learner is engaged in real communication; and that learners who are overly preoccupied with the correctness of the forms of the language they use may not be efficient communicators. Maley (in Johnson and Morrow 1981 : 137) succinctly sums this position up : '*acquisition* [is] characterised as largely unconscious, peripheral, effortless, "whole person" and deeply rooted, *learning* as consciously involving effort, at the centre of the learner's field of concentration, external to his personality, shallow and relatively easily forgotten'. This position chimes with the growing awareness that the sociolinguistic dimensions present in actual utterances affect the meaning of their linguistic exponents to a remarkable extent, so that meaning cannot in any real sense be regarded as 'given', but has to be negotiated by the participant-user (cf. Widdowson's 1978 distinction between usage and use). A further relevant area is the study of learners' interlanguage, and the detection of what may be common sequences in the eliminating of typical errors. This is also described by Maley (1983 : 296) : '....progressive elimination of error is often observable in foreign learners of a language. The process of learning a foreign language can be likened to a series of steps on a staircase : on any step, learners will exhibit the errors characteristic of that step. These will disappear as the learners move up to the next one. And they will do this when they are ready. In other words, each learner passes through a sequence of developmental stages. This is often obscured in classroom teaching by the fact that learners progress through the stages at different rates. But the order is the same for all. This helps to explain the apparent imperviousness of many, if not most, learners to correction procedures. No amount of correction will move them to the next step until they are ready for it.'

These are at least three (there are others) of the significant positions that underlie much current thinking on how to approach language learning, and they have helped to determine a methodology which can be characterised in the following ways. The development of fluency should be regarded as, at the least, equally important as the encouragement of accuracy; amongst other things, this will involve aiding learners to develop the ability to use a wide range of communication techniques, typically including such devices as message adjustment, appeals for assistance, even

message abandonment. As well, learners should be encouraged to negotiate meaning according to the context and sociolinguistic variables present (to rephrase Widdowson's (1978 : 19) example slightly) the utterance 'There's a policeman crossing the road' can equally have the function of reassurance or warning or threat; a recent videorecording of a CULI first year lesson shows a group of students trying to decide whether 'escape' is the appropriate word to use when a thief is about to be stopped by a policeman-can the term only be used, that is, when the 'escape' is successful? And to extend the idea of negotiation further, the same recording shows the group working from 'bad luck' to 'he got bad luck' to 'unfortunately'.) To facilitate both of these aims-fluency and the negotiation of meaning-lessons should as much as possible consist of interaction between and among learners, rather than containing only one-way teacher-student dialogue (with the typical I-R-F pattern, initiation-response-feedback, which is also sometimes termed the 'lockstep waltz' because it is so difficult to break out of). In addition (with especial regard to acquisition as opposed to learning), the interaction should centre as much as possible around task-based activities, where language is used (though not necessarily produced) as a means of securing a non-linguistic outcome (making a decision, solving a problem, finding a place on a map, discovering if a view on evolution or the nature of intelligence adds anything to or supports or contradicts learners' own ideas), so that overt concern with the language becomes secondary to involvement with the real-world outcome; and to ensure this, both participation and output should approximate as far as possible to natural language use. Further to encourage acquisition, there should also be as much input as possible, at a level only very slightly beyond that of the learners; and the provision of 'genuine' language input (in the sense that it is the actual language used between native speakers) may be less important than ensuring that the output is authentic, in the sense that it acknowledges the communicative intent of the input : 'Confronted with a class of physics students wanting to learn English so as to read textbooks in their subjects, I might be tempted to select passages of discourse which are thematically relevant from a whole range of sources on the assumption that I am thereby furthering the communicative purpose for which the learners need the language. But if I then exploit these passages for the traditional kind of comprehension question, structure exercise, and so on, their authentic potential remains unrealised.' (Widdowson 1979: 166). Finally, there is the fairly obvious fact that most learners are likely to gain most from lessons that have variety, interest, and of course relevance.

The advantages in 'teaching English as integrated skills' are simply that it enables these principles-beliefs and ensuring methods-to be put into practice together most effectively. Above all, perhaps, it enables learners to feel that they are engaged in something real. As Byrne (Johnson and Morrow 1981 : 108) puts it: 'We should keep in mind as a guide the way in which....skills are normally 'integrated'

in real life.   Here, the use of any skill may lead on quite naturally to the use of another. Reading, for instance, is just as likely to lead to speaking as the reverse.... While [no skill] is firmly predictable (just as there is no saying where [a] chain may end), at each point there is a *reason* for language being used in different ways: listening, speaking, reading or writing according to the situation.' And providing that short sessions of whatever specific skill training is needed (for example, recognition of vowel reductions/development of appropriate routines, or the pronunciation of consonant clusters/recognition of meaningful word groups, or the understanding of structures common to written text such as cleft or pseudo-cleft sentences/ways of achieving cohesion in writing) are included, there are few disadvantages; indeed one could suggest that such training could be the more effective for being perceived as relevant to real-world situations.   The only main proviso one might want to make is that productive skills may come most naturally when receptive skills are well-developed-in other words, a lot of input is needed before easy production can be expected. But this is simply a matter of balance and weighting, and no 'integrated skills' approach necessarily supposes that eqal time will always be spent by learners on each skill. It is of course possible to put the 'principles' that I have referred to into practice on single-skills courses. But I would contend that this will to an extent reduce their effectiveness.   For example, in social interaction courses listening and speaking are inextricably linked, and reading and writing also form as natural inputs as outputs.   Or for learners engaged in reading courses concerned with academic text, listening and writing are skills that in reality would naturally associate themselves with academic study. And the distance between suggesting that learners should, say, orally exchange information about different hotels they might want to stay in and then decide which one they would pick, and suggesting that they should orally exchange the key points of different theories of intelligence that they have read and then decide which is the most similar to their own preconceived views, or which seems the soundest to them, is less than might be supposed, although it certainly calls for ingenuity and imagination in both materials writer and teacher.

Finally, the question of level. In fact this is not such a significant factor as the *nature* of the group of learners-their learning styles or preferences, and more especially their needs.   It has been suggested that Munby's (1978) model of needs analysis has two drawbacks: it may account for the present (or even, conceivably, future) needs of an individual, but these then have to be applied to a class; and it emphasises the 'product' in terms of language requirements, but not the 'process' of how these requirements can best be acquired. The outline I have given above would be for many an attempt to begin to answer these two problems-that is, of how learners may best come to acquire the language they may need, and of how a framework of learning can be sufficiently flexible to accommodate a range of

different learning styles or preferences. No doubt the closer one comes to having a truly homogenous class of learners with very specific needs, the more the balance can be adjusted; other factors that are relevant are of course the motivation, maturity and experience of the learners (see Rivers 1980), as well as the time available. But does it follow that even a class of postgraduate physics students with an urgent need to read technical journals can *only* be helped to do this by doing nothing in their lessons but read? Even if it is the only or most important thing that they need to do, and they all share this perception, solid immersion in the discourse of scientific text may not necessarily suit the learning styles of all of them, nor may it constitute an effective learning process–about which, admittedly, we need to know more.

The establishment of real-world contexts in which learners may use, and thus come to acquire, language is a prime reason for integrating skills. The exact context of the group of learners may provide a basis for modifying the approach. But are there really–and I assume the questioner is interested primarily in students–many such contexts in Thailand? I should like to know.

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