

Teaching ESL Through Typing

by Mike Foley

Earlier this year I taught ESL for the Hawaii State Adult Basic Education (ABE) night classes to foreign-born military wives. Over 40 wives showed up for the first class, so I divided them into a beginning and intermediate group. The intermediate group presented the biggest teaching challenge.

Many of these ladies had lived stateside for several years, and all had previous ESL classwork. After the second night their abilities proved diverse and I could see we needed something special to hold everyone's interest.

The Education Center at Hawaii's Schofield Barracks has a well-equipped typing room which wasn't being used on our class nights. I had heard about other programs' success teaching ESL through typing and decided to propose that idea to our class the next session.

The ladies showed great enthusiasm and wanted to begin immediately, but I encouraged them to spend half our class time (2 1/2 hours) on more traditional ESL materials. We used *Learning English Through Typewriting* (by Charles W. Gay, Robert B. Kaplan, and Ron D. Schoesler; *English Sentence Patterns* (1969) as our workbook.

When we first began I divided our still large group into smaller groups, instructing them and demonstrating typing fundamentals such as posture, margins, inserting paper, various mechanisms, etc. After all had mastered these basics, we commenced typing in earnest.

As the text is designed for individualized study and progress, all went well. I circulated frequently, checking accuracy, answering questions, and freeing jammed keys. When a lesson had been completed, the student brought it to me to check. If correct, then we would discuss the new keys in the next lesson and learn the correct fingering.

As the weeks went by our class eventually learned the entire keyboard. Once past this milestone the GI wives began to type more grammatical

exercises--building proficiency in typing and English.

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Though not making excuses, these particular women found little outside use for typing. In fact most of them didn't have access to another typewriter. Briefly, their motivation suffered.

Despite this unhappy ending, I found the idea of teaching ESL through typing basically sound, especially for those students and potential workers who'll have use of the skill. The text proved adequate, but I recommend additional drill materials--materials not oriented towards typing skill but grammar acquisition. For ESL programs that may be slumping, I recommend a typing section to generate enthusiasm and aid language learning.

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