

COMPUTER COMPATIBILITY IN THE CLASS ROOM

by Michael D. Miller

Of the many different approaches to teaching students in the ESL classroom, perhaps it can be said that there is not any one "best" way. Certainly, methods that involve the students in teaching themselves have considerable merit, and much of this is due to the involvement and interest generated in the learning experience.

For many years the computer has been used to analyze, compute and manipulate materials, and has also been the base for many self-teaching systems. There are many different ways that a computer system can be applied to the ESL classroom; this being facilitated by the many school systems which have computer systems available. With the use of a simple, easily adapted program many different ESL lessons can be taught and utilized, using available materials and the student's own interest and curiosity to achieve this learning process.

At Brigham Young University--Hawaii Campus a program written and adapted to existing materials is now available to students in the English Language Institute program, and the results have been quite appreciable. Using the Dyad Series (Newbury House Publishers) students receive the questions on a video scanner, type their response, and the computer makes a comment as to whether the answer is correct or not. If the answer is incorrect, students are given two more attempts, and if still unsuccessful, the computer gives the answer, and a comment about the mistake. This comment is an example and an explanation, and can be completely adapted and selected by the user/instructor. The students have not only found the exercises interesting and profitable, but have enjoyed the novelty of the approach. Another point is that the student can receive instant feedback on his work.

The program itself is short and requires very little computer system to store and run

the program. What the program does is compare two strings of words (which can range from one word to 75 words, plus punctuation) and if there is a difference in the two strings there will be an error cited. As the program is accessed by the instructor (or lab assistant, as in the BYU--HC study) a card deck is simply fed into the system which contains the introduction and instructions for the student, an example, and the questions (sentences, words, etc.) to be presented to the student with the appropriate answers. The program gives the question to the student (in the Dyad Series a sentence with a blank to filled in), the student types his answer or response, e.g., fills in the blank, rewrites the sentence, etc., and the computer compares the student's answer with the answer (s) already entered by the instructor in the card deck, thus giving the student instant feedback.

Lessons on pronouns, prepositions, sentence construction, contractions, negative sentence patterns, plural noun forms, spelling and definition of words, etc., are readily adaptable to this type of program.

TESL Reporter

A quarterly publication of the Communication and Language Arts Division of the Brigham Young University-Hawaii Campus

Editor Alice C. Pack
Staff William Gallagher
Greg Larkin
Ron Safsten

Articles relevant to teaching English as a Second Language may be submitted to the editor through Box 157 BYU--HC, Laie, Hawaii 96762.