

*Programed learning*

This area is necessary to fulfill the needs and desire for more advanced training for certain trainees who are referred to Mahoning Valley Vocational School. It supplements the basic program and also provides the services of a library. The double coverage allows operation of the center during the day and also into the evening hours.

The Programed Learning Center was opened at Mahoning Valley Vocational School in August of 1965. The PLC has been able to fill many voids inherent in our type of educational situation. Programed instruction per se is not new. In fact it is as old as the Socratic method. We do feel, however, that in our creation of the center we are using in a most unique manner here at Mahoning Valley Vocational School.

First of all, let us try to understand what is meant by the term programed learning. Programs are self-instructional courses. This means basically that the student is really learning by himself with the help of a programed text or machine. These texts are not written like ordinary books. All of the fundamental knowledge the programmer is attempting to convey is broken up into small question-answer steps called frames. The student is involved in the learning situation for the program requires a response to every frame. Immediately thereafter the program allows the student to check his answer against the correct one. In this manner the student knows immediately if he is incorrect and needs review. If the student is correct, the process reinforces his learning through repetition and by showing him that he is correct. Psychologists have found that man learns better and faster when he is confronted with a minimum of errors. Programed instruction, through "framing," is geared to this end. There is an instructor present to help the student with any academic problems or explanation of the programed course that may be necessary. Along with the text programs we are attempting to utilize some teaching machines. At present we have two Autotutors and five Didactor Teaching Machines. We are only using those machines which offer us the programs that we need. These machines offer some advantages in teaching certain types of students. These are trainees who need unique learning experiences to break the monotony of programed instruction.

Mahoning Valley Vocational School receives many students who we know will profit from the PLC. There are many and varied ways in which we are using this type of instruction. A few examples are cited here:

1. Students functioning on an educational level above remedial in math and reading may be channeled into the center.
2. Students may use it for taking courses aligned with their vocational area.
3. Students may use the facilities of the center on their free time.

These are but a few of the many ways that we feel we are able to utilize our instructional center. We offer some 300 different courses of study in many general areas, including those in health and safety, leisure, sciences, languages, study habits, English, mathematics, economics, vocationally related topics, and many general works. At any one time we have had as many as 50 different courses of study being pursued simultaneously.

Each trainee referred to the PLC is given an interview by the director in which Programed Learning is explained. All of the available courses are then shown to the trainee. We try to point out to each individual trainee those courses which would benefit him the most. We do attempt to leave the trainee some choice in the matter however. Usually he is allowed to make a decision as to what he will take within a range of courses. Our approach to non-vocationally oriented courses (such as Interior Decorating, French, Chess, etc.) has been to allow the student to take leisure courses if he is also willing to seriously pursue a vocationally oriented course. So far this individual approach has proved successful.

In our first year of operation 450 courses were completed. We had our trainees completing about 44 courses per month. The center is now completing its second year and the success has been fantastic. We have just finished our thirty thousandth (30,000) hour of vocationally oriented programed instruction. Trainees completed approximately sixty-two (62) courses per month in our second year and a total of eight hundred and twenty-two (822) programs were finished. Following is a list of some representative courses with pre and post test scores: