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The Essential Features of the Personalized System of Instruction (PSI) or the Keller Plan

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The Essential Features
of
the **Personalized System of Instruction (PSI)**
or
the **Keller Plan**¹

While the elements vary somewhat from list to list most authors agree that the five points presented here constitute the essential aspects of PSI. Even wider variation exists among lists of learning principles prepared by various psychologists. While some arbitrariness is inevitable, the principles offered in support of each element of the PSI approach were chosen in an attempt to represent at least a modicum of consensus among psychologists concerning the way humans learn. These principles are offered here primarily as a means of showing how the Keller Plan incorporates some of the basic concepts of learning:

1. PSI is self- (individually) paced.

a. Sharing with the student responsibility of learning increases his involvement in the learning process. The student rather clearly has a large part of the responsibility for learning in PSI; if he does not complete a unit, the course does not move ahead automatically as is the case in the traditional approach.

b. The more similar the learning situation to the one in which the learning is to be used, the more likely the student is to transfer his learning from the former to the latter. The self-paced, individually initiated PSI course seems to resemble more closely the situations an adult will typically encounter than does the traditional lecture course.

c. Learning progresses more rapidly when up to eighty percent of the learner's time is spent reciting what he has read or heard. The self-paced features, as well as others in PSI, place emphasis on the learner's demonstrating his skill/knowledge rather than on his passively assimilating information.

2. The student is expected to master 100% of the content on the examination signalling completion of each unit. To facilitate learning maximally, rewards should be presented in a variety of forms. One of the most important of those forms seems to be the sense of satisfaction achieved by mastering a task or problem. This element of PSI rather clearly incorporates the sense of mastery.

3. Lectures and other techniques are used as vehicles of motivation rather than as sources of critical information.

a. Rewards are most effective when they follow directly the action(s) they are meant to reinforce. Lectures and other devices recognizing student achievement are employed after the student has completed one or more units. The fourth element, involving use of the tutor, also incorporates this principle of immediate reward.

b. Learners should be able to discriminate one sort of a learning task from others they encounter. This use of lectures, the self-paced quality, and other features distinguish PSI rather clearly from other learning situations the student is likely to experience.

4. Proctors, usually consisting of students who have recently completed the course units in a highly adequate fashion are used, making possible multiple testing opportunities, testing on demand, tutoring, and personal interaction with students.

a. Feedback, or the knowledge of results of one's performance, is an essential ingredient in the learning process. The proctor makes frequent feedback feasible.

b. Behavior that is punished tends to be avoided. PSI focuses on the positive aspects of the student's behavior rather than its negative aspects, thus avoiding the deleterious effects of punishment.

5. In PSI, stress is placed on the written word.

a. Establishment with the individual of objectives for his learning can facilitate his learning. Each written unit begins with an explicit statement of the objectives for that unit.

b. Both recall of learning and insight into new ideas are facilitated by organization of facts and concepts within the larger framework. The explicit presentation in writing of the material to be learned in unit form provides a coherent organizational scheme in which to place one's learning.

c. Again in this feature, as well as in the first one, the similarity to the most typical adult learning situation increases the likelihood that the learning habit will be continued in adult life. Since most adult learning centers on the written word, PSI should enhance the transfer.

¹Fred S. Keller, "Good-bye Teacher...", J. Applied Behavior Analysis 1, 78-89, 1968.