Awards

Award for Lifetime Achievement in Behavior Analysis Presented to F. S. Keller, May 29, 1994¹

The awards just received have been formally established by the Association for Behavior Analysis and are given on a regular basis. The next award has never been given before and may never be given again. It is the Award for Lifetime Achievement in Behavior Analysis—it was designed specifically to honor and celebrate the work and life of Fred Simmons Keller.

Professor Keller was born on January 2, 1899. His early education was uninspired, and he left school at age 18 to become a Western Union telegrapher. After serving in the Army in World War I, Fred completed his secondary education at Goddard Seminary in Vermont in 1920. He went on to Tufts College, graduating with his BS degree in 1926—at age 27. Keller had apparently acquired an appetite for the intellectual life because he then entered Harvard University. He was doing graduate work at Harvard when B. F. Skinner was accepted by the Psychology Department to work on his doctorate. The two men formed a friendship based on mutual interests in European cuisine, bicycling, and certain countercultural views in politics and philosophy. Most important was their mutual attraction to behaviorism.

Despite their friendship, however, Keller's interest in "Skinnerian" research did not begin when they were both at Harvard. In Keller's words "Burrhus Skinner was primarily a systematist . . . and I was essentially a teacher. . . . He was a producer of a system; I was a promoter, and he had nothing yet ready for promotion." I believe that Keller's role as a promoter of Skinner's system is the

reason that Skinner's system survived the mentalistic backlash that began in the 1930s, engulfed academic psychology in the 1970s, and is currently played out in the dozens of mini-disciplines that make up modern psychology. In short, behavior analysis exists today because of the behavior of Fred Keller. B. F. Skinner was the originator of the conceptual system and the scientific methodology. But F. S. Keller was the founder of the cultural entity we know as behavior analysis.

It began like this. Upon graduating from Harvard in 1931, Keller became an instructor at Colgate University. In 1938 he accepted an instructorship at Columbia University. He was promoted to assistant professor in 1941 and to associate professor in 1946. In 1950, Keller was promoted to Professor of Psychology at Columbia where he remained until 1964. It was during those years at Columbia that Keller kindled the fire that gave rise to the discipline of behavior analysis.

Keller's goal was not to start a new discipline but to give psychology the system and the methods that his friend had devised. He attempted to start with the methods, but there were problems. Columbia's animal behaviorist Carl John Warden rejected Keller's overtures to make common cause of their behaviorism. Warden did not allow his graduate students to use the operant chamber, and he refused Keller access to experimental space on the second floor of Schermerhorn Extension where Warden reigned.

In 1938 Keller received in the mail a copy of *The Behavior of Organisms*—the B of O, as he calls it. Now the system was available, as well as the method, and Keller's role as promoter began in earnest. Keller began promoting reinforcement theory by conducting experiments on light aversion. World War II resulted in his switching to research on teaching

¹ The Award for Lifetime Achievement in Behavior Analysis was presented to F. S. Keller at the 20th annual convention of the Association for Behavior Analysis by outgoing President Sigrid S. Glenn.—Ed.

Morse code for the military, and it was here that his collaboration with Nat Schoenfeld began. Although Schoenfeld had received his PhD in 1942 from Columbia, he reported that it was only in 1943 that he came in close contact with Keller or with the experimental analysis of behavior. Keller introduced him to the B of O, which according to Schoenfeld "produced an explosion in my thinking." He thereupon "got a rat and borrowed a box . . . to see things for myself." The two of them proceeded to develop an introductory course in which lectures exposed incoming students to Skinner's system and extensive lab experience exposed them to Skinner's method. Writing to Keller 28 years later, Schoenfeld recalls the first day of the new lab. "We gave the signal for students to put their levers into the . . . boxes . . . and then the suspense of waiting to hear whether any rat would respond—and the first sounds, and the rising to a full chorus, and our turning to each other to shake hands . . . while the darkened room hid your tears as it did mine." They knew they were witnessing a beginning.

By 1947, two new laboratory courses had been added and two senior seminars were introduced, making Columbia the first university to have a *curriculum* in behavior analysis. That year the first two PhDs were awarded by Columbia for work in the experimental analysis of behavior. According to Keller's records, 9 PhDs were awarded in the 1940s, 28 during the 1950s, and 21 in the 5 years between 1960 and 1965. Many of these graduates could not break into traditional psychology departments and took jobs outside the academy, where, sadly, they had little opportunity to influence the next generation of students.

But the culture that was to be behavior analysis had been founded, and Columbia's graduates introduced succeeding generations of students to that culture in places scattered across the nation, and later the world. Behavior analysis at Columbia, however, died out because it was not institutionalized as a cultural entity there; it existed only so long as the behavior of Keller and Schoenfeld occurred

in that setting. Keller reflected on this perennial problem for the culture of behavior analysis when, at the 1985 conference of the Southeastern Association for Behavior Analysis, he said that it had been a mistake to try to make psychology over from within.

Keller himself went on to participate in the replication of the Columbia culture at the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil, which led to further replications in that country. He participated in another replication at Arizona State University and yet another at Western Michigan University. He did not return to experimenting with the box but instead went on to develop a system of education that individualizes instruction, ensures mastery, and enhances motivation. Today, the key features of Keller's Personalized System of Instruction are incorporated into many of the most effectively taught college courses within and outside behavior analysis.

There is more. After performing as the "starter" for the culture of behavior analysis and initiating a revolutionary approach to higher education, Keller went on to provide insightful historical accounts of the early days of behavior analysis. His writings are a treasure of behaviorist history. In *Summers and Sabbaticals*, he treats us to insightful sketches of the behavior of people at Harvard and Columbia, in Brazil and Mexico. And he places the behavior of all these individuals in the context of the cultural practices in which it was embedded. In *Pedagogue's Progress*, we accompany Keller on his odyssey—as learner and as teacher—through the educational system. At the end we have a vision of what could be, if we made full use of behavioral principles in the educational process.

In summary, we can all learn much from Fred Keller. Perhaps most important of all, he has taught us what it takes to create a viable cultural entity. It takes a repertoire possessed by a vision of what *could be* and the perseverance, humor, hard work, and political acumen to turn that vision into reality. It also takes a repertoire that draws other people into

the vision and binds them like glue to one another in their common quest—a quest that overlooks the flaws and forgives the errors of compatriots and always, always relies on positive reinforcement. It takes a Fred Keller; he lit the flame and he has tended it for over 50

years. If enough of us can match to sample, behavior analysis will thrive.

I am deeply honored to present to Fred S. Keller the Award for Lifetime Achievement in Behavior Analysis.

Sigrid S. Glenn
President 1993–1994