

Correspondent: Kenneth E. Beighley

"Force in Disguise?"

Platteville, Wisconsin

Dear Editor:

I feel the necessity to respond to Dr. Yelon's reply¹ to Dr. Alam's article,² since I believe that he leaves the reader with a few misconceptions. However, the complexity of the issues he raises or dismisses is so great that one who responds in any less than the full contents of a doctoral seminar on each issue is in danger of being "nailed" by Dr. Yelon again, in terms of "unsupported assumptions and misleading statements."

That raises my first point. Dr. Alam apparently did not feel it necessary to go to great lengths to "support" his contentions, which are already well-supported by human learning research and literature. Apparently, Dr. Yelon and I have not been reading the same things, or we have been reading with very discrepant selective perception.

The second point I raise refers to Dr. Yelon's belief that a teacher competent in application of learning principles could

"teach" his colleagues and thus avoid rejection by them because he is "different," though competent. Dr. Yelon must be aware of the fact that you cannot really "teach" anyone anything unless he or she wants and needs (from his or her own point of view) to be taught, or unless you have the power and authority over an individual, as do teachers over kids and psychologists over pigeons, which enable you to control the behavior of the person by the reinforcement approach. Notice, reference here is to behavior, not causation, as causation is dismissed by reinforcement theorists in the initial part of the "learning" sequence.

I submit that one teacher, who is "different," has neither the power nor authority over his or her colleagues to cause them, by shaping, to change their teaching behavior. (If he did, what would happen when the reinforcement system was no longer in operation, for example, the teacher leaves the system?) Nor do many traditional teachers have a strong, conscious, driving need to change anything of consequence. They are often traditional, not only out of habit and conditioning, but because being traditional best meets their needs as they see it, even though they may have some conflict and anxiety over so being. Dr. Yelon's approach to producing change sounds acceptable, but his interpre-

¹ Stephen L. Yelon. "When Teachers Are Rejected: A Reply." *Educational Leadership* 27 (2): 187-88; November 1969.

² Dale V. Alam. "X Institutions with Y Purposes." *Educational Leadership* 26 (7): 674-76; April 1969.

tation of what happens as conditioning may also be viewed from another perspective; namely, that instead of being conditioned, the people involved are being allowed and encouraged in a safe environment to bring to further awareness their innate but suppressed true humanness and need to become more self-actualizing.

So, as I view the situation (and as do others, if sources are needed), anything a person does because of his innateness, his natural need to become all he could possibly become, is meaningful and valuable. Anything done because of reasons not related to his innateness, such as being controlled or forced to respond to stimuli to satisfy the conditions laid down by others, is external, alienating, dehumanizing, and thus meaningless in the sense that it is distorted, not

authentic. One does not have to understand a forced, mechanical response to a stimulus.

Dr. Yelon rejects the use of "force" by a principal or teacher, and wisely so. But is not the reinforcement system force in disguise, because of its external orientation? It seems that reinforcements are usually administered *by* someone, *to* someone, *for* doing something that the former thinks is good or bad. The latter merely acquiesces according to the "rules of the game." As Dr. Alam implies, rarely in our society does the child have the opportunity in home, school, or church to have the primary say-so in setting up or modifying the rules.

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