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The Impact of Canine-Assisted Therapy and Activities on Children in an Educational Setting

Abstract

Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) and animal-assisted activities (AAA) are becoming more prevalent in educational settings. Research has shown that there are many benefits to having animals involved in therapy, specifically canines. Canine-assisted therapy/activities and the use of therapy dogs are being incorporated into schools and classrooms. The purpose of this paper is to explore the impacts canine-assisted therapy and activities have on students academically, physically, socially, emotionally, and behaviorally. It will also identify any caveats of the use of therapy dogs in schools, and investigate the evidence to further determine if and how therapy dogs have positive impacts on children in an educational setting.

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The Impact of Canine-Assisted Therapy and Activities on Children in an Educational Setting

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Abstract

Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) and animal-assisted activities (AAA) are becoming more prevalent in educational settings. Research has shown that there are many benefits to having animals involved in therapy, specifically canines. Canine-assisted therapy/activities and the use of therapy dogs are being incorporated into schools and classrooms.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the impacts canine-assisted therapy and activities have on students academically, physically, socially, emotionally, and behaviorally. It will also identify any caveats of the use of therapy dogs in schools, and investigate the evidence to further determine if and how therapy dogs have positive impacts on children in an educational setting.

Literature Review

Children of all ages face challenges and struggles in school every day. Students may struggle academically, behaviorally, emotionally, socially, and physically. There are many interventions and strategies to help students in these areas; however it is not always effective. Animals are often considered an effective tool for therapy, or to help assist in a problem area. Therapy dogs are one of the more common types of animals to be utilized in schools and classrooms today. Canine-assisted therapy or activities are often integrated for use with students with disabilities or struggles in any of the aforementioned areas. Research has shown many positive effects that therapy dogs have on students.

In this research study, the effects of canine-assisted activities in schools and classrooms will be discussed. A survey was sent to teachers in both a Primary, and an Intermediate Elementary school, with access to a registered therapy dog on a daily basis. In addition, the survey was posted to a social networking site targeting those with any experiences with therapy dogs. The purpose of this study was to discover how the therapy dogs were being utilized in an educational setting and the effects on students academically, socially, behaviorally, emotionally, and physically. The data from the survey contained both first hand experiences with a therapy dog, as well as second hand experiences.

The results of this study illustrated that therapy dogs can have significant effects on students in many ways. The data indicated that in the students in this school have benefitted from having interactions with the therapy dog.

The role of animals in schools and classrooms has become increasingly common, in efforts to assist students in many different ways (Siegel, 2004). Animals are being integrated into the school setting to provide support to children academically, behaviorally, socially, emotionally, and physically. Schools are using animal-facilitated programs referred to as “Animal-assisted therapy,” and “Animal-assisted activities” to help students in these various ways (Bassette & Taber-Doughty, 2013). There is much research on the benefits and effects, as well as the social construct, and common concerns of therapy animals in the schools and classrooms.

What is Animal-assisted therapy (AAT)?

Animal-assisted therapy and animal-assisted activities are two different types of programs that focus on different goals (Hatch, 2007). Animal-assisted therapy usually has a specific goal or outcome for one particular person, often used for people with various disabilities (Hatch, 2007). The Delta Society (as cited in American Veterinary Medical Association, 2014) defines animal-assisted therapy as:

Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) is a goal directed intervention in which an animal meeting specific criteria is an integral part of the treatment process. Animal-assisted therapy is delivered and/or directed by health or human service providers working within the scope of their profession. Animal-assisted therapy is designed to promote improvement in human physical, social, emotional, or cognitive function. Animal-assisted therapy is provided in a variety of settings, and may be group or individual in nature. The process is documented and evaluated. (1992, p.48)

While Animal-assisted therapy and animal-assisted activities are similar, animal-assisted activities provide opportunities for motivation, education, or recreation to enhance quality of life (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2014). This type of program allows animals to simply “visit” with no specific therapeutic goals (Hatch, 2007). Therapy animals should not be confused with service animals. With service animals, dogs are most commonly used. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), defines services dogs as “dogs that are individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities...” In addition, “The work or task a dog has been trained to provide must be directly related to the person’s disability”(Pet Partners, 2012). Often, service dogs provide guidance to people who are blind, alerting people who are deaf, communicating seizure alerts, etc. (Pet Partners, 2012). While easily confused, service animals and therapy animals are utilized in different ways.

There are many different kinds of therapy animals. The most common are dogs, cats, and horses. They are often used in educational and health care settings, such as schools, hospitals, or nursing homes (Jalongo, Astorino, & Bomboy, 2004). In the educational setting, dogs are used most often (Chandler, 2001). In schools, programs that incorporate the use therapy dogs are often referred to as “Canine-assisted” programs, which are a type of AAT (Lane & Zavada, 2014).

Canine-assisted therapy

Canine-assisted programs have become increasingly popular (Jalongo et al., 2004). Intermountain Therapy Animals (ITA), a well-known organization that specializes in providing AAT, reported that 14,000 dogs were registered as therapy dogs across 50 states and in some other countries in 2003 (Jalongo et al., 2004). The use of therapy dogs in an educational setting is only increasing, and becoming more of a common sight (Jalongo et al., 2004).

Canine-assisted reading programs are a very common intervention in schools today. Many canine-assisted reading programs have students read to dogs one on one. The foundation behind this is that by reading to a dog or animal, the child will feel a sense of trust with the animal, in knowing they will not be negatively criticized (Lane & Zavada, 2014). An accepting, non-judgmental bond can be formed between child and dog, which is very beneficial to the child's motivation and attitude toward reading (Friesen, 2009). Researchers have observed, many children who feel uncomfortable interacting with other humans, do not feel the same inhibition when interacting with an animal (Siegel, 2004). This allows for the student to practice reading skills without fear of being judged. It also offers a more structured and appealing alternative to reading alone (Jalongo, 2005). Furthermore, it teaches children to build a deeper understanding of reading, as well as associate reading with enjoyment. Some of the goals of canine-assisted reading programs include increasing fluency, motivation to read, providing encouragement to averse readers, and making reading more fun (Lane & Zavada, 2014).

Studies were conducted by researchers at the University of California–Davis (as cited in Lane & Zavada, 2014), to test the efficacy of dogs in improving reading fluency. In one study, a group of home schooled children visited the campus weekly, where they would read to a dog for a 20 minute time frame, over the course of ten weeks. At the end of this ten week study, there was a 30% increase in the children's fluency (Lane & Zavada, 2014). Parents of the children also reported their child read aloud more frequently and with greater confidence, after reading with the dogs (Lane & Zavada, 2014).

Not only has research found an increase in fluency rates, but also an increase in children's overall reading abilities. A well known program that focuses on reading to dogs is the Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D) program (Jalongo et al., 2004). This program was created by Intermountain Therapy Animals (ITA), and was one of the first canine-assisted programs in the United States (Lane & Zavada, 2014). ITA conducted a study where all of the students who participated in the R.E.A.D program over a 13 month period, gained at least two grade levels in reading level, and some even higher after reading to the dogs (Jalongo et al., 2004) Some teachers have used this concept with students practicing their reading and math in the presence of the dog. As stated by Pillow-Price, Yonts, & Stinson (2014), in addition to the R.E.A.D program, other similar programs have developed all over the country. *Reading with Rover* is one program that started in Washington State, along with *Read to your Breed* in California (Pillow-Price et al., 2014). Other programs include *All Ears Reading* and *SHARE* programs in California, *Literacy Education Assistance Pups (LEAP)* in Delaware, *Sit, Stay, Read!* in Chicago and *Canine-Assisted Reading Education (CARE)* in the Washington, DC (Lane & Zavada, 2014). These programs are becoming increasingly popular due to the positive outcomes (Pillow-Price et al., 2014) Teachers have reported that because of the dogs, there have been more motivation and interest in reading aloud in class, going to the library, and even less absences (Siegel, 2004). Canine-assisted activities are shown to have effective results in not only reading but across the whole academic curriculum (Jalongo et al., 2004).

Academic Benefits

Research in this topic has shown many beneficial aspects to using animals in an educational setting. One area that therapy animals can be very beneficial is in an academic setting, to increase student's academic achievement. Studies have shown that animals can improve student performance by reducing stress, and increasing motivation, focus, and task persistence, even when other interventions have failed (Jalongo, 2005). In addition, animals are naturally a calming force. Therapy dogs are known to decrease stress and blood pressure, while also eliminating anxiety (Siegel, 2004). In addition to being a motivating force, dogs can also assist in all subject areas, by providing an engaging topic. They may be used in science (when learning about reproduction, life cycle, etc.) math and economics, (students calculate costs of living, food, and supplies to maintain a safe environment for a pet), health (students study the diet of the animal), social studies (students compare the role of animals across different cultures) etc. They may even be used to help a reluctant writer, by providing a topic of interest for them to focus on. Wendy Lowe Siegel explains a personal experience where one of her students who had previously never produced any piece of writing, became inspired and motivated by the presence of a dog in the classroom. The student ended up writing a lengthy paper on the experience of having a dog in the classroom (Siegel, 2004). While dogs have been shown to contribute to children's academic success, there are also many more benefits.

Physical Benefits

Animals have been utilized in the school setting to address a range of diverse needs. Children may increase motor and physical skill development through human-animal interactions (Chandler, 2001). Depending on the physical need of the child, the child may participate in throwing a ball to a dog, walking the dog on a leash, buckling a collar, pouring water into a

bowl, and brushing the dog (Siegel, 2004). These activities focus on both fine and gross motor movements. Incorporating dogs into physical therapy may help to motivate the child to enjoy physical therapy more (Siegel, 2004). Student will view therapy as more fun, rather than hard work, which benefits the process (Siegel, 2004).

Furthermore, therapy dogs may also be used as a catalyst to encourage and motivate children to be more physically active (Wohlfarth, Mutschler, Beetz, Kreuser, & Korsten-reck, 2013). Often, school is the only place where children participate in physical activity while in physical education class, and it is often not enough. In a study conducted by a group of researchers, a group of obese children were examined to determine the effectiveness of a therapy dog on exercise performance (Wohlfarth et al., 2013). In this study, twelve 8-12 year old male and females, who were considered obese (measured by BMI in the 90-97th percentile), were given an accelerometer to measure activity. The children participated in sessions that consisted of various exercises. In the first session, the dog was present along with two other human confederates. The children were to do agility exercises where they had to try to be faster than the dog, or run as many laps as they could before the dog retrieved a thrown object. In the next session, the dog was not present, and the same types of exercises were done, in competition with only the human confederates. The results of the study showed there were significantly less passive behaviors (sitting, standing, lying) when in the presence of the dog as compared to the humans. In addition, the children also showed a remarkable difference in the distance and amount of time walking, when they completed with the dog vs. with the humans. The data from this study demonstrates that the presence of a therapy dog has the potential to increase physical activity in children. Based on the findings, the researchers suggest that “in the presence of a dog children gain more pleasure from the activity, because a dog serves as an affectively hot stimulus

and a natural incentive, therefore the implicit motivation for activity was strong” (Wohlfarth et al., 2013). In addition to the many benefits a therapy dog can serve children physically, therapy dogs can be used to motivate and help students emotionally.

Emotional Benefits

Emotional well-being in the classroom is crucial to students’ success. Animals are being incorporated into schools to help children address issues of grief (Mockler, 2010). Many children are reluctant to open up to a teacher or school counselor about issues in their own lives.

Interacting with animals can have a cheering effect on children, as well as relieving their anxiety and providing emotional support (Siegel, 2004). Teachers can use interventions with animals to address grief by having students talk with the animal. Children who are disinclined to talk to an adult may find comfort in talking to an animal, knowing that they are just there to listen, without fear of being judged. It is estimated that over 70 % of children of all ages do tend to talk to and confide in animals (Jalongo et al., 2004). There is a growing realization that the therapeutic benefit of animals can be extremely valuable in schools and classrooms (Friesen, 2009).

According to Karen Papasergiou, a special needs teacher, “I thought pet therapy might be the best way for the students to understand unconditional love” (Mockler, 2010, p.24). Similarly stated in an article by Wendy Lowe Siegal, feeling loved, respected, accepted, trusted, and important are all basic human needs. Therapy animals can help show this nurturance and teach children empathy and unconditional love (Siegel, 2004). According to A. Katcher (as cited in Siegel, 2004), children who are not nurtured themselves are often unable to nurture others. Many children who experience emotional troubles often lack trust, and using the intervention of a dog may help the child to develop trust. Interacting with animals helps to decrease anxiety, manipulative/ abusive behaviors, depression, increase self-esteem, self-worth,

expression of feelings, and ability to trust (Chandler, 2001). Having the ability to trust is important in building positive relationships. Some children find interactions with animals to be less stressful than interactions with humans (Siegel, 2004). The animals provide a feeling of safety, allowing the child to trust the animal. It is hopeful that if a child can build a trusting relationship with an animal, eventually a trusting relationship can be built with other humans (Siegel, 2004). Another benefit therapy animals serve in the emotional well-being of children, is the affectionate touch the animal provides. As cited in Siegel, 2004, Levinson theorized that affectionate touch produces endorphins, which can soothe anxiety. Children can receive emotional support from soft contact with another living creature in the school setting, which can have immense positive effects (Siegel, 2004). Meaningful interactions with therapy animals can help strengthen self-concepts such as esteem and identity (Siegel, 2004).

Behavior Benefits

In addition to emotional benefits, there are also ways in which a dog may contribute to decreasing negative behaviors. Similar to other types of positive reinforcement or reward systems that teachers use in their classroom to manage behavior, dogs can be a part of the reward and a method of motivation (Siegel, 2004). Students may have an opportunity to hold or pet a therapy dog or animal as a reward for good behavior. Furthermore, research has shown animals to serve as a “bridge” to help teach students self-control, responsibility, empathy, and positive self-concept (Siegel, 2004).

Effects on children with various disabilities

Many uses of AAT is with children with disabilities. Children with severe emotional and behavioral disabilities (EBD) may experience positive effects from the use of therapy dogs. Many students struggle with EBD’s that hinder their ability in school. Frequently, children with

an EBD experience extreme difficulty with reading, and lack adequate reading skills. These students may struggle with reading due to other difficulties with attention, hyperactivity, and aggression (Bassette & Taber-Doughty, 2013). Many facilities have incorporated the use of therapy dogs as a regular component of treatment when working with children with emotional and behavioral disorders (Jalongo et al., 2004). Research done by Kotrschal and Ortbour (2003) showed that elementary students demonstrated reduced problem behaviors such as aggression, and hyperactivity and had an increase of positive interactions, following exposure to having a dog in the classroom (Bassette & Taber-Doughty, 2013). Children who are nonverbal, may feel more comfortable confiding in a dog, rather than a human. Verbalizing information to the dog can help promote self-reflection because it helps build more concrete emotions, which is easier dealt with than abstract fears (Siegel, 2004). Researchers conducted a comparison study at Capitol University in Columbus, Ohio. In the study, two groups of children with severe emotional disorders were used to determine effects of a dog in therapy sessions. One group received standard therapy sessions, while the other group played with a dog in the therapy session. The group of children who played with the dog showed improvements in understanding others, and controlling impulses, while the other group did not (Siegel, 2004).

In another study completed by Kogan (as cited in Geist, 2011), two boys with emotional disorders were chosen to participate. Both boys were placed in an emotional support classroom and received group and individual counseling along with their Individualized Education Program (IEP), where they showed no signs of improvement. An animal-assisted therapist was introduced to these sessions, where children were able to learn commands for the dog, and groom the dog over a period of fourteen 45-60 minute sessions. At the end of the study, data showed a decrease

in distractibility, improved appropriateness of tone, increased eye contact, and increased self-control (Geist, 2011).

Therapy dogs are commonly used in assistance to children with other various disabilities. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is one disability in particular where research has shown positive outcomes. Redefer and Goodman (as cited in Berry, Borgi, Francia, Alleva, & Cirulli, 2013) found that when introducing a dog into therapeutic sessions, children with ASD showed an increase in the frequency of both verbal and nonverbal social behaviors. According to Obrusnikova, Bibik, Cavalier, & Manley (2012), when in the presence of a therapy dog, children with ASD had been found to be more likely to initiate a social interaction, and less likely to become off topic. Redefer and Goodman found that interactions with dogs had positive effects. The children had a decrease in stereotyped behaviors, decreased self-absorption, and increase in prosocial behavior (Silva, Correia, Lima, Magalhães, & de Sousa, 2011).

In a study of a young boy who was deaf and had cerebral palsy, interactions with a therapy dog had positive effects. While working with the dog, the boy practiced behaviors that were very difficult for him such as sitting calmly and quietly, maintaining eye contact, and fine motor skills. The dog helped the boy transfer necessary skills into his everyday life (Mockler, 2010). Most therapy dogs are trained auditorily. There are some dogs that are trained visually, using standard hand signals, and or American Sign Language. Dogs that are trained visually are ideal for classrooms for the deaf (Mockler, 2010). Many children can benefit from having interactions with a therapy animal.

Social

Therapy animals also have a vast impact on children socially. Researchers have found that poor social skills often lead to other problems in the classroom, such as peer rejection and

academic failure (Siegel, 2004). Siegel (2004) explained that in order to help a child with poor social skills, a trusting relationship is the first step toward improvement. Students may have a negative perception of teachers, so incorporating animals into the classroom can help to overcome these biases.

While working with these animals, children learn how to care for an animal, which in turn makes them feel useful. Feeling useful and needed increases the child's social participation (Siegel, 2004). Lane & Zavada (2014) found in research, children who were shy or normally rejected by peers, felt more confident when receiving regular interactions with the dog. Also, there was an overall increase of communication with peers when in contact with the animal.

Additionally, research suggests that the presence of a therapy dog can increase goals of inclusion (Jalongo et al., 2004). When studying peer interaction, a child without disabilities was ten times more likely to interact with the child with disabilities when the child was accompanied by a dog (Jalongo et al., 2004). A physical education teacher in Grove, Illinois reported that working with a dog helped teach her students patience, sharing, and verbal skills (Siegel, 2004). Two dogs were added as "special helpers" to a special education classroom in Fort Collins, Colorado and the teachers and parents of the students noticed a drastic improvement in social skills and communication (Siegel, 2004). Therapy dogs function as a "social lubricant" for the children, ultimately improving inclusion of all students by enhancing peer interactions and other social skills (Jalongo et al., 2004).

Common concerns

While there is much research to the many benefits of canine visitors in the schools and classrooms, there are also some common concerns. Health and safety are two areas of major concern. It is possible for a dog to carry a disease or infection that may pose harm to children

(Jalongo et al., 2004). In addition, the dog may vomit, urinate, or defecate inside of the school raising sanitation concerns. Although it happens on rare occasion, the handler of the dog is responsible and prepared to clean up after the animal. (Jalongo, 2005). To address these concerns, all registered therapy dogs must have regular and frequent check-ups with their veterinarian, as well as provide proof of vet visits and vaccinations. This ensures the dogs entering the schools are healthy and do not put anyone at risk (Jalongo et al., 2004). Allergies are also a common concern. Therapy dogs are bathed and groomed immediately before visiting a school, reducing the amount of dander (Jalongo et al., 2004). Certain precautions should be taken such as finding out students who may have an allergy, in order to plan accordingly (Jalongo et al., 2004). Safety of students is questioned when bringing in a dog, for fear it may act aggressive and cause physical harm to a child. To reduce potential harm, considering breed and temperament is important when selecting a therapy dog (Siegel, 2004). Dogs that are registered through Therapy Dogs International (TDI) are required to renew their annual membership to maintain therapy dog certification. Canines are also required to take obedience classes as well as other specialized training before entering the facility (Jalongo et al., 2004). Not only is the safety of the children considered, but also the safety and well-being of the animal or dog.

Many argue against canine visits in schools and health care facilities because of the well-being of the dog. Some worry that the dogs may have limited access to water or will be exposed to high temperatures while in the schools and classrooms (Hatch, 2007). The dogs may also feel fatigued from the physical touch and duration of their visit. An unpleasant situation may cause the canine to become stressed, which affects their mental well-being (Hatch, 2007). The potential for harm does exist, however handlers responsible for the canine can reduce such risks by taking important safety measures (Siegel, 2004).

Furthermore, other concerns are present that cause some to be apprehensive to the idea of a therapy dog. Cultural differences such as viewing the dog in a negative way, or fear of the dog, may pose a problem. In some countries, dogs are seen as unclean or a nuisance and some view the dog as a fierce protector, which may instill fear in a child (Jalongo et al., 2004). It is important to keep these differences in mind when utilizing a therapy dog. When the therapy is completed, some believe the child may have problems with separation from the animal. They fear that it would be upsetting for the child, once the dog was gone (Siegel, 2004). There are many concerns regarding the use of therapy animals in the public setting.

Summary

Based on research, animal-assisted therapy and activities seem to have various positive effects on people. Especially in an educational setting, therapy dogs can be an effective intervention in helping students physically, emotionally, behaviorally, academically, and socially. Children with disabilities are one population of students that may benefit greatly from animal-assisted therapy or activities. When other interventions have failed, there has been tremendous success when using a dog with children. There is much support for the use of therapy animals, and therapy dogs in schools. It is advantageous to utilize a therapy dog, and could really make a difference in a child's growth and success..

Methodology

Context

This study was conducted in a primary and intermediate building, in a suburban town in update New York. Each building has a registered therapy dog that is present every day. The study location was due to convenience and knowledge of a therapy dog.

Participants

The participants in this study are current teachers and staff in both a primary and intermediate building, as well as retired teachers in the same town. All participants have access to a registered therapy dog on a regular basis. There were approximately 80 teachers or staff between both schools to receive the survey.

Researcher Stance

I am certified Early Childhood and Childhood Education (B-6) and working towards earning a Master's of Science in Special Education. I am currently working as a substitute teacher. My interest in this topic came from an experience I had while observing in a self-contained classroom for students with severe behavioral struggles. A therapy dog was brought into the classroom for a short period of time to involve students in canine-assisted activities such as reading to the dog. As soon as the dog walked in the students were drawn to the dog, listened attentively to the dog handler, and there was an overall shift in energy in the room. Students had the opportunity to read with the dog, and negative behaviors decreased as the dog was motivation to stay task. The use of therapy dogs in schools is becoming more of a common sight, so it was in my interest to learn more about the positive effects and experiences these animals have on children.

Method

The use of canine-assisted therapy and activities in schools and classrooms is growing. The purpose of this study is to find out any experiences teachers have had with canine-assisted therapy or activities in their school or classroom, and what kind of effects the dog has on their students or the students in the school. To gather data, a survey was sent to all teachers and staff working in a primary and intermediate building. It was also posted on a social networking site targeting any other teachers in the area.

Design and Data Collection

To conduct this study, an anonymous survey was generated using the survey system, “Qualtrics” and was sent through e-mail to all of the teachers with permission from the principal. It was also posted on a social networking site to family and friends with experience with canine-assisted therapy or activities. For this study it was ideal to collect data using an electronic source to ensure more responses. Out of about 80 participants, there were a total of eight responses.

To analyze the data from the surveys, I looked for common themes among the responses. The survey questions focused on participants own experiences, as well as second-hand experiences they may have had with canine-assisted therapy. Nine questions were short answer responses, and one was a multiple choice question. There were several common trends within the data collected.

Findings & Discussion

After sending the survey to approximately 80 people, there were eight total responses. One of the eight surveys was left blank, with ten unanswered questions. According to the data, there were several common themes.

Question 1: What are your experiences with canine-assisted therapy or activities (therapy dog) in your school / classroom? How does the presence of the dog impact students?

- We have a therapy dog in our school but I have very little contact with her.
- There is a school therapy dog in my primary school building. He wanders around and whenever he walks into the room, the students' faces light up. They are sincerely happy to see him. The students enjoy petting him and saying hello.
- Therapy dogs have been used effectively as incentives for students in need of behavior plans. I have only observed positive effects in use of therapy dogs.
- The dog has not entered my room while kids have been in it. It does not affect my students.
- I have a therapy dog named Gus, a 9 year old Golden Retriever. He has done visits to schools and I can say that students are always excited to see him. I would say that he affects students in a very positive way each and every time he visits.
- All students enjoy seeing a dog and their spirits appear lifted. In the past, we had a therapy dog visited once a month and it would give responsibility for the students (brushing, feeding, walking and commanding tricks).
- I worked in a classroom for a year with our school's therapy dog. She is very skiddish,

and I'm guessing, not a typical therapy dog. Most of the time she would lay underneath her owner's desk. - When the students saw her in the classroom or in the hall, they would pet her.

While some have very little contact with the school therapy dog, majority of the results indicate that the children are excited and happy when interacting with the dog. Based on the data, it does not appear that there are any specific therapies that are done within this school district on a regular basis. Overall, the affect the presence of the dog has on students seems to be positive.

Question 2: Have you ever done any specific activities using a therapy dog, in your own classroom? If so, what were they?

- I've used Marley as a reward for good behavior.
- The dog just visits and stays for short amounts of time so I have not done any specific activities.
- I was retired when my dog became a certified therapy dog.
- The therapy dog is a motivator for our students. If they complete their work, they are able to visit her to bring her a treat. Many of the students enjoy this opportunity. The therapy dog is also used to help students calm down when feeling frustrated. It works every time. In previous years, the students would walk her once a day.
- Tried to set up a plan for a student with a behavior plan as a reward, but it did not happen.

A common trend for those who did use the therapy dog in their own classroom, was using the therapy dog as a motivation tool for good behavior and to complete work.

Question 3: If not, do you think canine-assisted activities would be beneficial to your students?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Very beneficial	3	60%
2	Somewhat beneficial	0	0%
3	Not beneficial	1	20%
4	Only with certain students	1	20%
	Total	5	100%

For those who did not use therapy dog in their classroom, 60% reported that they would find the use of a therapy dog for activity purposes very beneficial. 20% reported the therapy dog would really only affect certain students and 20% reported it would not be beneficial to their students. Two participants did not answer the question.

Question 4: What are some experiences you have had, or have heard from others, about the use of therapy dogs impacting students' **academic needs** (such as motivation, focus, task-persistence, etc.)?

- Increased motivation of desired behaviors
- n/a
- none
- Motivation to complete work- students enjoy reading to the dog, also.

- Therapy dogs increase all of these areas and have positive impacts on them as well. Research tells us that therapy dogs allow children to feel confident and self assured while doing academic tasks.

Three out of eight participants did not answer the question. Two participants concluded that they have had no experiences to discuss regarding effects on students' academic needs. The remaining three answers had a common theme of the therapy dog having a positive and motivating effect on students in the area of academics.

Question 5: What are some experiences you have had, or have heard from others, about the use of therapy dogs impacting students' **emotional needs** (self-esteem, self-confidence, trust, affection, decreased anxiety/stress, etc.)?

- I've only had experiences with behavior plans.
- I have worked with a student with self-esteem and anxiety issues. This student was able to take the dog on a leash outside once a week. This act really made him feel special, needed, and secure in school. It helped him also by giving him a task to look forward to.
- I have heard it can be calming for some students. My students have had no benefit from this.
- It builds confidence with the responsibility of taking care of her. It changes their attitude-every student becomes jovial after handling the dog. She is a great distraction when feeling angry. The therapy dog helps students calm down. She is a calming break for my students in the 8:1 special class. When my dad was in the hospital, a therapy dog

would visit and his spirit was lifted afterwards. He looked forward to seeing the dog and would tell everyone about him.

- All of these areas are affected in positive ways...students emotional needs are well met by the presence of therapy dogs in the classroom.

When responding to experiences regarding emotional benefits, participants noted that the therapy dog has had a calming effect for students, especially students who had self-esteem/anxiety challenges, or students in a special education class. The overall results from this question was that the therapy dog has had positive impacts on students' emotional needs.

Question 6: What are some experiences you have had, or have heard from others, about the use of therapy dogs impacting students' **social skills** with peers or teachers (communication, eye contact, etc.) ?

- None
- The therapy dog in our building has a calming effect on the students. This has helped some students open up and want to talk more.
- None
- Students realize that communication is important.
- Students on the autism spectrum specifically relate to therapy dogs, and their social skills are enhanced due to interaction with these animals

Another common theme among this data is that the therapy dog is calming to students, and has helped them open up more socially because they are feeling comfortable. It also helps students to realize that communication is important. Two participants did not have any experience in this

area.

Question 7: What are some experiences you have had, or have heard from others, about the use of therapy dogs impacting students' **negative behaviors** (attention seeking, defiant, aggressive behaviors)?

- If a child loves dogs they want to behave well so they can earn Marley time.
- n/a
- Reward program for some kids.
- A therapy dog relaxes students and is a wonderful distraction. Students will often not become aggressive when a therapy dog is present, because they do not want to scare the dog or hurt her. It does decrease the chances of students showing aggressive behaviors in my experience. With students with ADHD, it lends them a positive action (petting) to receive a stimulation they seek and it is a socially appropriate action to do while listening to instruction.

The general consensus of participant's experiences regarding the therapy dog affecting negative and undesired behaviors was that it has helped students keep their bodies calm, not making any aggressive movements so it wouldn't scare the dog. It was also stated that the therapy dog has been a positive children with ADHD as it served as a stimulation allowing students to listening to directions.

Question 8: What are some experiences you have had, or have heard from others, about the use of therapy dogs impacting **students with disabilities** (Emotional/Behavioral, Autism Spectrum Disorder, etc.)?

- Na
- n/a
- None
- Once I worked with a child who was deaf and it gave him self-confidence because the dog responded to his signs as commands. I worked with a boy with severe autism and he responded well to a therapy dog. It gave him responsibility by feeding her and taking her for walks. They had a wonderful relationship and he didn't have with people. The dog could break that social barrier.
- As the math specialist, I would bring the therapy dog to a special needs classroom. I would have to drag her down the hall on her leash. The students did like seeing her and I used taking her on a walk as an incentive/bribe for the students to complete their work.

Two participants had information to share about effects on students with disabilities. They reported that student who were deaf, had autism, and students with other various special needs benefitted greatly from the therapy dog. The overall theme within this data is that therapy dogs have helped students with disabilities with self-confidence and motivation.

Question 9: Have you had, or heard of, any negative experiences with a therapy dog? If yes, please explain.

- No!
- No I have not.
- No

Based on the data the participants have had no negative experience with the use of a therapy dog in their school or classroom.

Question 10: Please share any other experience you have regarding therapy dogs, canine-assisted therapy/activities, benefits, effects, etc.

- Visitors to the school find it warm and inviting to see a dog wandering the halls.
- It is a wonderful experience for all students. My own children often talk about the therapy dogs in their school.
- Gus has had many interactions with hospital patients as well as library visitors. I once took him into an Alzheimer's ward where he encountered a patient who had lost her affect. Within a few minutes of settling in with her, she began stroking him and petting his fur. One of the nurses remarked, "Look at that...that's the first time she has come back to us in months". It was just short of a miracle but incredibly beautiful to watch.

A general theme of experiences with therapy dogs is that students enjoy seeing the dog, lifts peoples spirits, and outside visitors find it warm and welcoming to see the presence of a therapy dog.

Conclusion

Based on the data collected, the overall findings concluded that the use of therapy dogs in canine-assisted therapy/activities can impact students in various ways. Some implications of the data were that therapy dogs generally have a positive effect on students. Their presence created a calming and motivating force for students to excel academically and behaviorally. The sight of the therapy dog made students and visitors feel comfortable and welcome. Also, there was no indication of any negative experiences with the use of a therapy dog.

The importance of the data is that it shows the use of therapy dogs has positive benefits and effects on students in education, and that aligns with the research. Research and studies completed have shown similar outcomes. This research and data collection may impact students and teachers in a great way. The use of therapy dogs in schools is becoming more common, but is still a new idea to many. As further research is done, the use of therapy dogs in an educational setting may increase. Schools may implement the use of therapy dogs in the form of canine-assisted activities, and/or as a more formal intervention for students. The profession of teaching will also be affected as there may be opportunities to implement the therapy dog into lessons, or activities in your own classroom.

To continue this research, more studies can be completed to further investigate the effects and impacts canine-assisted therapy/activities may have on children. If more studies are completed, there will be more evidence to determine how much students benefit academically, physically, socially, emotionally, and behaviorally. There needs to be more quantitative research and concrete evidence on the positive effects of therapy dogs. If more quantitative research and

studies are done, than the implementation of therapy dogs in education may significantly increase.

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