

Animal-Assisted Therapy Using Dogs:

The Benefits to Children

by

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Abstract

Animal-assisted therapy, including dogs, has gained widespread support and has been implemented in many areas throughout the past few decades. Animal-assisted therapy was first recorded in England in 1792, where mentally ill patients were given small animals for which to care. Since then dogs have been used to aid in the well-being of adults and children. Many programs have implemented using dogs, horses, cats and more in their therapy programs. From using dogs in hospitals to provide emotional support and diversion to their patients, to dogs in the classroom to encourage reading skills and conflict resolution, dogs are getting to be a part of many people's daily lives.

The paper reviews three main questions: 1) What benefits do animals provide children and adolescents? 2) What benefits have been reported about dogs in the school

settings? and 3) How do schools address the difficulties of bringing dogs into a school?

Much of the research has shown that having animals in schools has benefited students.

Educators have learned that having dogs in the schools not only calms students, but

promotes positive changes in students. Students who were involved in the Reading

Education Assistance Dogs program increased reading level, some by over two grade

levels, in 13 months (Intermountain Therapy Dogs, n.d.). Little empirical research has

been done in the area of animal-assisted therapy involving children and dogs at this time.

It is recommended that more empirical research be conducted on animal-assisted with

dogs in a school setting.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

Many researchers have begun to understand the influence that animals, including dogs, have on people. According to Jalongo, Astorino and Bombay (2004), the presence of a mellow companion can reduce stress, lower heart rate and reduce other observable signs of anxiety. The authors go on to say the presence of a calm, attentive dog lessens stress more than the presence of an adult or a supportive friend during a routine medical check up. Julie Miller and Katherine Connor, nurses at Trinity Mother France hospital and authors of *Going to the dogs...for help*, found that dogs not only reduced stress but provided other healthy qualities (2000). Dogs have eased loneliness, improved communication, fostered trust, reduced the need for medication by providing diversion from the pain, improved cognitive functioning, improved body image, and improved motivation for the patient's quick recovery. Throughout history, people have been using animals, including dogs, in therapeutic settings. It has only been in the past few decades that animals have been formally used in therapeutic settings, including prison, schools, hospitals, and out-patient programs (Chandler, 2001).

With the growing research on the benefits of having dogs to lower anxieties, many programs have started using dogs to help encourage the reading skills of children. One program called Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D.) involved children with reading difficulties reading out loud to trained therapy dogs for a half hour (Martin, 2001). The program pairs children with a dog and its handler to work on the child's reading skills. The program is said to increase students' enthusiasm for reading, develop reading skills, and promote confidence in the children's reading ability. The children may make mistakes in their reading, but are not corrected or hurried through their book

by their canine friend (Intermountain Therapy Dogs, n.d.). Children get the opportunity to read to someone who is nonjudgmental of their reading abilities, and the confidence and extra practice improves reading skills for many children. Using dogs in animal-assisted activities has show great promise for motivating children to complete academic activities, not only for reading skills but also across the curriculum (Nebbe, n.d.). Not only are dogs beneficial for improved reading skills, the presence of dogs can be very beneficial in the counseling process.

Using dogs in animal-assisted therapy can be beneficial to the counseling process. The presence of dogs during therapy has been shown to assist in creating a trust-building relationship between the therapist and client. It has been shown that talking to dogs while the therapist listens is easier than talking to the therapist about more difficult issues (Netting, Wilson, & New, 1987). Sharing these feelings with or about the animal can open the sharing process with the therapist.

Animal-assisted therapy is founded on two principles: children's natural tendency to open up in the presence of animals and the stress-moderating effect of an animal's calm presence. Research estimates that over 70% of children of all ages do tend to talk to and confide in animals. (Jalongo et al., 2004, p.10)

For the child, the dog is seen as a friend, presenting a safe atmosphere for sharing (Chandler, 2001). Jalongo et al. (2004) suggested that bringing canine visitors to the school or hospital for children gives support to those children's learning, physical health, and emotional well-being.

While animal-assisted therapy may be beneficial for many children, it is not appropriate for all children. Children who have shown aggression towards animals or

other children may not be appropriate for this type of therapy (Reichert, 1998).

Counselors need to be aware of these types of issues with children before using animals in therapy sessions.

Many different types of animals can be used for this form of therapy. The most common are dogs, cats, and horses. Farm animals can be therapeutic, as well as less common types of animals, such as rabbits, birds, fish, hamsters, and even llamas (Chandler, 2001). Although many animals are used in animal-assisted therapy, the majority of research throughout this paper will focus on the use of canines working with children and adolescents.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Animals have demonstrated many benefits to children and adolescents, but this use has not been well documented. The benefits of animal-assisted therapies using dogs have not been made clear to individuals in education. More research needs to be conducted in the area of children and animal-assisted therapy. Researchers need to investigate what needs to be done to address bring dogs and other animals into the school. Schools present special challenges because of all the different children that are in the building at one time.

The intention of this literature review is to review and analyze research that may be available on animal-assisted therapy with dogs. The intentions are to find more information on the use of pet therapy in therapeutic settings, including schools. Benefits have been shown in many settings, but schools as settings present special challenges. The literature review is focused on the benefits of animals to children and adolescents. Many benefits have been reported on the use of animal-assisted therapies, but there are

many obstacles that arise when someone wants to bring animal-assisted therapy into the school setting. This review will also focus on how to address obstacles that face individuals who want to bring dog-assisted therapies into their schools

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this literature review is to investigate the effects of animal-assisted therapy, focusing mostly on using dogs with children and adolescents. This review will look at the research that has been conducted on animal-assisted therapy with dogs and review programs that are available using animal-assisted therapy. The literature reviewed focused on the benefits of animal-assisted therapy, and the challenges that come with using animals in school settings. This study will look at how these challenges are met and what can be done in the future. Animal-assisted therapy using dogs is one option for working with children who have difficulties communicating and expressing their concerns. Animal therapy could be a healthy release for many children if barriers to implementation are addressed.

### *Research Questions*

The following questions helped guide the research on this topic and concentrate on one area of study.

1. What benefits do animals provide to children and adolescents?
2. What benefits have been reported about dogs in school settings?
3. How do schools address the difficulties with using dogs in a public setting?

### *Assumptions of the Study*

At this time little systematic, carefully controlled research has been done on the topic of animal-assisted therapies, especially dogs. Therefore, it is assumed that information will come from diverse sources including non-peer reviewed journals. Lastly, it is assumed that the researcher will not be able to retrieve all information.

### *Limitations of the Study*

A limitation of this study is the fact that not much research has been done in this area of study. Most the research that has been conducted was not done with children, but with adults. This lack of research made it difficult to find scholarly journals as well as many studies done in animal-assisted therapy.

### *Definition of Terms*

Below are several terms that are defined for use of this study.

*Animal-assisted therapy.* Also referred to as pet therapy, is the use of trained animals and handlers to achieve specific physical, social, cognitive, and emotional goals with patients.

*Visitation Programs.* A short-term intervention intended to improve morale. This may be a one-time visit, and may not be a trained therapy dog like animal-assisted therapy. The animal may just be the pet of a patient, or a volunteer's pet.

*Zoonotic.* A disease of animals, such as rabies or psittacosis, that can be transmitted to humans.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter looks at the literature that is currently reported on animal-assisted therapy focusing on using dogs. This chapter first focuses on the history of animal-assisted therapy. This chapter then addresses what the research states about the benefit of using dogs with youth and how programs have been implemented in the schools using dogs. Lastly, this chapter looks at what the literatures states about the challenges that come with using dogs in the school setting. Literature will be presented to show how the influence of dogs may improve people's well-being. This chapter will focus on programs have been offered in the school setting from canine visitors to reading programs with dogs.

### *History*

Animal-assisted therapy, also known as pet therapy, is the use of animals in a therapeutic setting. Although the use of pets in therapy is not a new concept, it was not until the 1960's that the term pet therapy or animal-assisted therapy was used (Hooker, Freeman, Holbrook & Stewart, 2002). Animals and handlers are trained to work with individuals with emotional, physical and social limitations. Animal-assisted therapy takes place in homes, hospitals, schools, prisons, and out-patient facilities (Kavanagh, 1994). Pets have been a complementary part of animal-assisted therapy since the domestication of animals. Since that time, the use of pet therapy "has grown from incidental use to research-supported incorporation in the health institution programs of care" (Hooker et al., 2002, p.17).

Although pet therapy has not been well documented until the 1960's, it is said to have started as early as 1792 by the York Retreat in England (Hooker et al., 2002). It all

started when therapists were concerned with how the mentally ill were being treated. They tried to come up with alternatives to their current system of care. William Turke suggested that they incorporate gardening, exercise, and the presence of animals to the treatment plans for the patients, and the York Retreat was born from this concept (Hooker et al., 2002). The patients at these facilities were given small animals such as rabbits and chickens to care for.

There have been many influences that brought animal-assisted therapy to the United States. The United States' first encounter of animal-assisted therapy was in 1919 when Secretary of the Interior, Franklin K. Lane, suggested the use of dogs with psychiatric patients (Hooker et al., 2002). Then in 1942, the U.S. military began to use animals at a hospital. The hospital had a working farm as a diversion for recovering veterans. These were just the beginnings of animal-assisted therapy in the United States, but actual documentation of its benefits did not occur until 1961 (Hooker et al., 2002).

Although animal-assisted therapy as a specific intervention was said to have started in England, there were many others throughout history who thought that animals had a healing nature about them. To many peoples' disbelief, Sigmund Freud was one of the first who thought that animals had a special sense that allowed them to determine peoples' personality characteristics. It was reported that Freud's dog, Jo-Fi, attended many of his therapy sessions (Eggiman, 2006). According to Eggiman, it was rumored that Freud used his dog to sense the patient's tension. If the dog lay close to the patient, it was thought that the patient had less tension than if the dog was laid far from the patient. Freud also thought that having a dog in the room was calming to the patient, especially when working with children. Many thought that Freud's presence of a dog

during therapy was in complete contrast to his strict psychoanalysis theory (Eggiman, 2006).

Dr. Boris Levinson was one of the first to document his observations in the use of animal-assisted therapy (Eggiman, 2006). His documentation leads to the beginning of pet therapy as a legitimate therapy. Dr. Boris Levinson, a child psychologist and considered by some to be the father of pet therapy, found that the presence of a dog was a positive thing in the therapeutic relationship. Levinson discovered by accident that having a dog present during therapy was beneficial to his children clients. When asked to meet with a child that had had many failed therapy sessions in the past, Levinson's dog, Jingles, happened to be there and greeted the child warmly and excitedly. Levinson soon realized that having Jingles as his "co-therapist" creating a trusting and solid relationship between himself and the child (Eggiman, 2006). Bringing in an animal opened up communication, allowed clients to soften their defenses, and helped build rapport and a trusting relationship with the clients. Early research indicated that clients were more at ease and had reduced anxiety when in the presence of an animal.

Throughout history animals have been used as examples to explain situations to children. Therapists were using animals in many areas of therapy, from the Blacky tests, where children were shown pictures of sexual activities performed by dogs in order to determine their knowledge and awareness of many inappropriate sexual acts, to the Children's Apperception Test (Eggiman, 2006). This test involved showing children pictures of animals in conflicts (Eggiman, 2006). It was thought that children would respond better to pictures of animals engaged in conflict relationships, then to pictures of humans engaged in the same roles (Eggiman, 2006).

By the 1990's, people had been conducting more research and were using animals in many different aspects of counseling and visitation for patients. A study done by Struk and Brady (as cited in Jalongo et al., 2004) found that, by bringing dogs to healthcare home visits, children and parents' attention was diverted to the animal, making the nursing visit a more pleasant and less painful experience for the child and parent.

Much of the research that has been done to this date has been done with psychiatric patients (Hooker et al., 2002). These authors reported that a case study done with chemically dependent person in a group therapy setting revealed that the presence of a therapy dog removed barriers, and increased group cohesion and communication. History has shown us great strides in animal-assisted therapy, and many of the benefits of animal-assisted therapy can be seen today.

Jalongo et al. and Eggiman both focused their studies on the use of dogs with children. Both studies resulted in positive benefits for children and adolescents. Both studies found that when children interact with animals they have positive educational outcomes. The Intermountain Therapy Dog website also gave numerous positive outcomes to having children work with dogs. The Intermountain Therapy Dog founded the Reading Education Assistance Dogs, which has aided students reading since 2000. This program has not only increased reading, but also improved other social skills of the students involved.

#### *Benefits of Animal-Assisted Therapy with Youth*

Animal-assisted therapy has been growing rapidly for the past few decades. People have come to see the many benefits that animals can bring to their lives. Animals are used in many different therapeutic ways, from animal-assisted therapies to Reading to

Rover programs, where children get the opportunity to read out loud to a canine companion. Programs like Reading to Rover and R.E.A.D have become popular all over the United States. Researchers have found that the presence of animals can break down social barriers that many children face. In a study done by Kathcer (as cited in Jalongo et al., 2004), a child without a disability was ten times more likely to interact with a child who had a disability if the child was accompanied by a dog. According to the Delta Society, the “physiological as well as psychosocial benefits of positive interactions between young children and therapy dogs are not purely anecdotal; rather, there is a growing body of research to support the existence of a human-animal bond” (2006, ¶ 3).

Animal-assisted therapy is not a stand-alone therapy such as a behavioral therapy. Animal-assisted therapy is to be used as a complimentary therapy to whichever therapy fits best (Chandler, 2001). Elisabeth Reichert (1998) used a dog with her child clients and was able to get her clients to open up about the sexual abuse that they faced. She told stories about the dog and then asked the children questions relating to the story. Reichert commented that having the dog to project their feelings towards made it easier for the children to open up about their experiences. Dogs in animal-assisted therapy are used to try and calm children in this situation, but there are also other benefits to using dogs in a therapeutic setting.

Children see a dog as a peer, and teaching them to be empathetic with an animal is easier than with a human (Chandler, 2001). With animals, what you see is what you get. Children will learn to transfer their experiences with animals to experiences with humans (Nebbe, 1997). Children are learning appropriate social interactions from their experiences in animal-assisted therapy.

Research has shown many positive reasons for using dogs in therapy. In an article by Miller and Connor (2000), the authors stated many benefits to using animals in a therapeutic setting for children. They found that the presence of a dog could ease loneliness, improve communication, foster trust, and reduce the patient's need for medication by providing a diversion for the patient. They also found that dogs decreased stress and anxiety and improved body image, because animals do not judge.

Dogs are great motivators for children. According to Serpell (cited in Jalongo et al. 2004, 10),

Animal-assisted therapy is founded on two principles: Children's natural tendency to open up in the presence of animals and the stress-moderating effect of an animal's calm presence. Research estimated that over 70% of children of all ages do tend to talk and confide in animals (p.10).

Chandler (2001) found that having dogs in the classroom not only aided students, but also taught children valuable lessons. Children gained knowledge about dogs, developed better motor and physical skills through human-animal interaction, learned animal training, and incorporated kindness and compassion for animals. According to a study in 1999 by Ascione and Weber (as cited in Chandler, 2001), "Animal-assisted therapy may be used to curb violence in the schools. Animals in the classroom have empirically been proven to enhance humane attitudes toward animals and these more humane attitudes persisted in a one year follow up" (¶ 10). Chandler (2001) believed that emotional connections that are made with animals could transfer to more positive attitudes towards other persons. Bringing dogs in the classroom has been shown to

support children's learning, physical health, and emotional well-being (Jalongo et al., 2004).

According to an article by Oakley and Bardin, children with special needs respond extremely well to the interaction with dogs that they receive during therapy.

For children with special needs, the ability to interact with a dog, cat, or other furry friend can have a very positive impact upon their quality of life. Interacting with a pet can sometimes enhance recovery following a serious illness. It can change behavior, create a sense of responsibility and even improve a child's ability to participate in therapeutic treatment leading to achievement in relation to identified goals and objectives. Children are often extremely trusting and easily achieve a level of intimacy with animals. This special bond contributes to pets' effectiveness as co-therapists. (Oakley & Bardin, n.d., ¶ 1)

Many occupational therapists have found that when working with children with special needs that they respond really well to working with animals in during their therapy.

The occupational therapist conducts the therapy session using the dog as a modality to facilitate the development of skills needed by the child to achieve independent functioning in the areas of self-help, play and learning. The children react with excitement and enthusiasm, always looking forward to the next visit from their "furry therapist." The children are also highly motivated to interact with the dog, allowing the occupational therapist to facilitate the use of skills needed for independence in such areas as: dressing; grooming; play skills; cognitive skills and fine motor skills. The occupational therapists involve the children in motivating activities that help them achieve, to the greatest extent

possible, the self-help, play and learning skills appropriate for their individual age level. (Oakley & Bardin, n.d., ¶ 2)

There are many benefits for using dogs when working with children. Many programs involving animals have been implemented in schools, hospital, and libraries to teach and enhance children's lives.

Not only are animals being used in classrooms, but there are now programs that have therapy dogs visit hospital, nursing homes and correctional institutions. A study was done at a Midwestern hospital to determine if children were enjoying and benefiting animal-assisted therapy in comparison to children involved in a child-life group (Kaminski, Pellino & Wish, 2002). The study found that children who were involved in the animal therapy program were happier and more excited about their upcoming session. Hospital visitation programs are done throughout many hospitals in the United States. Hospital staff has noticed that visiting with animals can help people feel less lonely, and less depressed. Visits from dogs can provide a welcome change from routine, or the renewal of old friendships. People become more active and responsive both during and after visiting with animals. An animal visit can offer entertainment or distraction from pain and infirmity. People often talk to the dogs, and share with them the thoughts, feelings and memories that they may not share with other people. Animal visits provide something to look forward to. Stroking a dog or cat can reduce a person's blood pressure and also aides in motor skills and coordination (Miller & Connor, 2001).

#### *Benefits of Using Dogs in Schools*

More and more dogs are being used in classrooms, hospitals and other programs with children. Therapists are using dogs to ease the tension in children when going to the

doctor or having to read a book out loud (Jalongo, 2005). The largest, most well known of these reading programs is called Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D.).

The R.E.A.D. program was introduced in 1999, to aid literacy in the United States. This was a unique program in which children had the opportunity to read out loud to a canine companion. The R.E.A.D. program has been conducted with therapy dogs that have been trained and tested for health issues, social skills and temperament. These dogs and their owners have volunteered their time to help children learn, and hopefully to look forward to reading (Martin, 2001).

Sandi Martin, a nurse and board member of the Intermountain Therapy Animals, first started R.E.A.D in Salt Lake City, Utah. Martin first brought the idea to the libraries and then to an elementary school in Salt Lake City. In 2000, a pilot program was started in the schools with children were selected by their teachers as having other difficulties in reading, poor social skills, or difficult home lives. The study not only improved students reading abilities, but also increased confidence in students, lessened late work, decreased absences, and improved hygiene in many students (Jalongo, 2005). Teachers who have implemented this program in their classroom have been nothing but enthusiastic about it (Jalongo, 2005).

The R.E.A.D. program allows children to read without interruption or corrections to a dog (Martin, 2001). According to Jalongo et al. (2004), students who participated in the R.E.A.D. program gained at least two grade levels of reading skill in 13 months. These reading programs are helping children feel confident and excited about reading because they get to see their canine friend. According to the Delta Society, the primary source for human-animal bond, found that children involved in the R.E.A.D. program not

only improved reading skills, but also had decreased absenteeism, improved self-confidence, involvement in other school activities, and were checking books out of the library and asking the librarian about the books (Melson, 1990).

Animals not only helped students improve their reading, but they also have aided in breaking some social barriers. In an article written by James Lynch he stated that:

When children read books aloud (whether in schools or at home or in the laboratory) their blood pressure increased, sometimes up to very precipitous levels. It was these observations that led us to study factors that might help to lower their pressure. The introduction of pet animals did the trick. (Lynch, n.d., ¶ 9)

Lynch studied 38 children and observed that the presence of a pet dog resulted in lower blood pressure both when the children were quiet and also when they read a book aloud (Lynch, 2006). Animal-assisted activities have shown great promise for students across all academic areas, not just reading.

If a school counselor had the dog with them as a counseling tool, the children would often use the dog as an excuse to visit the school counselor (Chandler, 2001). Children would come down to the counselor's office and play with the dog and often open up to the counselor about the real reason that they wanted to come to the counselor's office. The presence of the dog would enable the school counselor to interact with more students than would normally visit with the counselor (Chandler, 2001). Talking to the counselor with an animal present has been found to lower anxiety and motivate participation in therapy by the students (Serpell, 2000).

### *Challenges to Using Dogs in Schools*

Although there have been great ideas and programs brought forth by animal-assisted therapy, there are also limitations to this therapy. There have been many concerns over issues with having dogs in the schools and hospitals interacting with children. The first concern is that dogs may transmit zoonotics, diseases and infections that are transmitted from animals to humans (Jalongo et al., 2004). This is mostly a concern with children who are hospitalized due to the fact that they are more susceptible to illness. Although there is a risk to children from dogs, the risk is minimal due to the safety measures that are taken to ensure that the children are safe. Each participant is asked to let the dogs get to know them by letting the dogs smell their hands. All the dogs are well groomed and cleaned previous to working with children in a school setting. Before dogs can enter a school, they and their handler must be well-trained and receive a therapy license (Delta Society, 2006). Trainers teach therapy dogs not to lick or scratch, which lessens the chance of transmitting diseases (Jalongo et al., 2004).

With the many sanitation concerns also comes a concern for the children safety when interacting with dogs. Many people are concerned with the behavior of the dogs when they are in the school or hospitals. People are leery about having dogs in the building due to the fact that they could get out of control. This aspect of safety is controlled by having the dogs thoroughly trained before they become therapy dogs (Jalongo et al., 2004). Along with having a dog that is trained in obedience and therapy, handlers are also trained to ensure that everyone is safe when engaging in animal-assisted therapies (Delta Society, 2006).

Although animal-assisted therapy has been beneficial to many students, there are some students who do not get the opportunity to participate in this form of therapy. Students who have allergies to dogs would not be able to be involved in this therapy. Because of this limitation, some people may think that this therapy is not beneficial in the schools. This is something that cannot be controlled, as animals have pet dander. Those involved in animal-assisted therapy using their dogs should ensure that the dogs be well groomed and bathed, which will eliminate much of the dander issues (Jalongo et al., 2004).

In some cultures, most notably the Middle East or Southeast Asia, dogs are regarded as unclean and a nuisance (Jalongo et al., 2004). Individuals involved in animal-assisted therapies need to be aware of these issues before they go into a school or hospital where people are not used to animals being around. According to Jalongo et al. (2004), although many adults view dogs as unclean, most often their children living in our society are often very interested in dogs. It is important to assess how children are reacting to dogs before they become involved in animal-assisted therapy.

Some children not only do not like dogs, but are deathly afraid of them. These children are often scared and nervous around dogs. Children who are afraid of dogs may be unwilling to participate. These children would not be given the same opportunities that others involved in the therapy would be receiving. According to Jalongo et al., the best approach to working with these children is to not force the issue (2004). Many of these children, although they may be frightened of dogs, are also curious about them, especially when other children are engaged with the dog. Most often children will stand to the back and watch others interact, and at some point want to interact themselves (Jalongo et al.,

2004). "According to psychological therapy research on phobias, one of the most powerful ways to reshape a fearful behavioral response is to provide a positive peer role model" (Bandura, 1976).

Although bringing children into closely supervised and gradual contact with registered therapy dogs cannot be expected to eliminate all fear or dislike of dogs, it may help a child to recognize that not all dogs behave in the same way as those he or she may have had negative encounters with in the past. (Jalongo et al., 2004)

Therapy dogs may be beneficial to children even if they never interact one-on-one with the dog. Just by being a part of the experience and seeing well behaved dogs may ease their concerns about dogs.

### *Summary*

Having dogs in classrooms, hospitals and nursing homes may cause a disruption to people's lives, but most of the time these interruptions are seen by people as being a positive experience in the end. There has been much controversy over bringing dogs into public places in the past (Delta Society, 2006). Many people do not think of dogs or other animals as therapy for adults or children. Using dogs in the classroom has been empirically proven to enhance attitudes towards animals and showed positive attitudes towards animals increased the positive attitudes toward other people (Chandler, 2001).

### Chapter III: Summary, Analysis and Recommendations

This critical analysis examines the gaps in literatures that result in a lack of information on animal-assisted therapy. This chapter also analyzes the current benefits and challenges that come with implementing canines in a school setting. Lastly, this chapter will provide recommendations to educators and school counselors on needed research studies and programs that would be beneficial in a school setting.

#### *Summary*

Since the implementation of animal-assisted therapy in the United States in the early 1960's, there have been many documented benefits. Miller and Connor (2000) found, that there were many benefits to using animals in a therapeutic setting. They reported that dogs could ease loneliness, improve communication, foster trust, and reduce the patient's need for medication by providing a diversion for the individuals. They also found that animals decreased stress and anxiety and improved body image, because animals do not have the ability to judge. Other benefits included improved cognitive functioning, orienting confused patients and stimulating comatose patients. Researchers also found that students who are involved in the R.E.A.D program have been shown to improve reading levels by two grades in some cases (Jalongo, 2005). Animal-assisted therapy using dogs is limited only by our own thoughts and the need for funding and research done in the area.

Animal-assisted therapies using dogs have shown many positives influences in therapy and education with children, but there are also challenges that come along with implementing these programs. To return to the questions stated earlier, what benefits do animals provide to children and adolescents? Research and history have shown that

many benefits are found when animals are used in therapeutic settings with children. Animals have been shown to ease tension, lower blood pressure and lower anxiety of children in therapeutic settings (Jalongo et al., 2004). What benefits have been reported about dogs in the school settings? Several programs have been implemented in schools that have shown to improve student's educational process. For example, the R.E.A.D. program has found that not only have student's reading ability improved, but they have greater self-confidence, complete and turn in homework more frequently, were tardy or absent less, and had improved hygiene (Intermountain Therapy Dogs, n.d.). Although there have been programs done in the schools, more research needs to be done to acquire more solid evidence. Lastly, how are schools addressing the challenges that come with bring dogs into a school? Those opposed to implementing animal-assisted programs are often concerned about the disease and infections that dogs can bring into the schools. Although there is always a risk having children involved with dogs, great strides have been taken by certified therapy partners to ensure that animals are well trained and well cared for by their owners (Jalongo et al., 2004). Although these students may not have the opportunity to be involved in the animal-assisted programs, they may still benefit from having dogs in the schools by watching and learning from other children's interaction with the dogs.

### *Analysis*

Using dogs as a therapy tools may be beneficial for many people, but there are many aspects of these therapies that are still to be discovered. The little empirical research has been done in this field of study at this time. There are few scholarly journals that have focused on animal-assisted therapy with dogs and their use in schools. While

many programs are being implemented, there is a great need for more research done using dogs as a therapy tool with children. Although there were convincing articles used in this study that were empirically based, much of the information was more anecdotal and needs to be followed up with by empirical research.

A program that was implemented in 1999 called R.E.A.D. reported impressive results from those involved. Although individuals involved in R.E.A.D are seeing great results, there is still little research on the program at this time. Some of the research has found that when children read to animals they forgot about their limitations and relaxed (Bueche, 2003). According to Kathy Klotz, the ITA Executive Director, the participants in the R.E.A.D. program improved their grades by at least two grade levels in 13 months; some improved as much as four grade levels in 13 months (Bueche, 2003). Having students involved with the R.E.A.D. dogs has shown many positive aspects in their education, but more research needs to be done on this program to in order for the program to show all its potential.

Although empirically based research is lacking, interested individuals and classroom teachers have discovered many positive experiences that come with including animals in their classroom programs. Some interesting research has shown that teachers who use dogs and other animals in their classrooms have noticed an improved learning experience in the curriculum, teaches a respect for life, teaches compassion for animals and others, and increased social skills and emotional stability (Goodwin, 1999). Animal-assisted programs that are offered in the school have shown benefits to students across many spectrums of education. More research needs to be done to support these findings.

Animal assisted therapies using dogs have shown many benefits to children in the school setting and outside of that setting. Research has shown that the influence of dogs in our lives can have many benefits to our health and mental functioning that may influence children in an educational setting. Research has shown that students who have been involved in animal-assisted therapy programs have fewer absences than before, and have improved self-image (Jalongo, 2005).

For those who are looking to implement animal assisted programs using dogs, there are many obstacles to tackle on the way. Many of these issues are addressed by the strict policies that are put into place by the agencies like Delta Society or Therapy Dogs International. These agencies require that all dogs be not only well trained but pass several tests to prove they have the temperament to interact with children, along with yearly veterinary visits and documentation from the vet (Delta Society). Therapy organizations such as Delta Society also ensure that the handlers are as well trained as the animal. The dog and the handler must work as a team when they are involved in a therapy program. Strict guidelines govern that include the handler never letting go of the dog's leash and always being present and aware of the dog's surroundings (Delta Society). Handlers must pass a written test along with taking their dog through an evaluation. Handlers need to know how to control their dog and correct their dog to ensure the safety of everyone. Guidelines are put into place to ensure the safety and health of everyone that is involved with animal-assisted therapies.

### *Recommendations*

Animal-assisted therapy has been proven to be an effective way of connecting with children. Recommendations for educators would be to ensure that if they want to

begin an animal-assisted program in their school, they take the time to research all of the benefits and challenges to implementing a program in the schools. Educators should make certain that they take the time to research the responsibilities that come along with the implementation of an animal-assisted therapy program. Also, individuals looking to become involved with animal-assisted therapies should learn how to teach the children to interact with animals. Individuals that are interested in using animals as therapeutic tools in schools should first begin by contacting an agency that licenses therapy animals, such as Delta Society and Therapy Dogs International (Delta Society). The Delta Society and other agencies will work with individuals to ensure that their animals are appropriate for therapy work. Training and education are needed to be able to effectively implement animal-assisted therapies in schools.

More research needs to be done on animal-assisted therapies, especially focusing on its effects on children and adolescents. Researchers should look at how children are affected by the influence of dogs and how dogs may benefit children's educational needs. More research needs to be conducted on the effectiveness of animal-assisted therapy using dogs.

As the Reading Education Assistance Dogs program continues, research needs to be conducted with the children that are involved in the program. Research should be conducted on the effectiveness of R.E.A.D. programs, and why and where the program is distributed. Documentation is needed on children's involvement in the program, improvement in reading, and benefits of the R.E.A.D. program.

*Summary*

Since the 1960's animal-assisted therapy has been documented in the United States. Researchers have documented many benefits and others involved in animal-assisted therapies. Dogs can ease loneliness, improve communication, foster trust. Researchers have found that animals decreased stress and anxiety and improved body image, because animals do not have the ability to judge. Researchers also found that students who were involved in the R.E.A.D program were shown to improve reading levels by two grades in some cases (Jalongo, 2005). There are many possibilities when using dogs in the school setting. Future research will bring many new ideas for the use of dogs in the classroom.

Many programs have been implemented in schools that have shown to improve students' educational process. Those opposed to implementing animal-assisted programs are often concerned about the disease and infections that dogs can bring into the schools. Great strides have been taken to ensure that children are safe at school when interacting with therapy dogs. Agencies have strict policies to ensure the cleanliness and temperaments of the animals involved. Although there are students who may not get the opportunity to become involved in animal-assisted therapies, research has shown that those who are involved have shown great benefits from having the chance to work with dogs in and out of the classroom.

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