

A Qualitative Study Examining the Use of Canine Reading Programs

With Young Readers

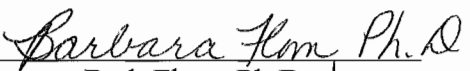
by

Carolyn A. Mertz

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
in

Education

Approved: 2 Semester Credits


Barb Flom, Ph.D.

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout

June, 2009

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI

Author: Mertz, Carolyn A.

Title: *A Qualitative Study Examining the Use of Canine Reading Programs
With Young Readers*

Graduate Degree/ Major: MS Education

Research Adviser: Barb Flom, Ph.D.

Month/Year: June, 2009

Number of Pages: 44

Style Manual Used: American Psychological Association, 5th edition

ABSTRACT

This study is an examination of the use of canine reading programs with young readers. With the decline in reading as a preferred activity, it has been proposed that canine reading sessions may be used as a positive reading intervention strategy for many types of young readers. Specifically, this study aimed at investigating the behaviors exhibited by children and dogs during a structured canine reading program. Naturalistic observations were collected at two Minneapolis Hennepin County Libraries hosting a canine reading program. Based on the observations of these behaviors, this study involved further exploration of the aspects of the process that appear to be linked to a positive canine reading experience.

The results of this study support the notion that canine reading sessions are in fact positive reading experiences for many young readers. The amount of participant-canine

interaction, along with the skill of the facilitator, appears to be linked to the quality of the experience. Other possible links include parent involvement, size of the dog, and age and gender of the participant. Furthermore, there appears to be a slight gap between program training and what occurs during an actual session. Based on the findings of this study, canine reading sessions show promise as a positive reading intervention strategy.

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin Stout
Menomonie, WI
Acknowledgments

This research paper combined my two favorite things in life: dogs and reading. I am thankful to my husband for the encouragement to write about what I love and also the numerous hours he spent entertaining our dog while I sat glued to my laptop. I also want to acknowledge and thank my parents for always being supportive of me. The support of my parents has made all things possible. Though he is no longer here to read this paper, I would like to acknowledge my great Uncle Merle Lockyer for all of the educational inspiration he provided me. I would also like to acknowledge those involved as trainers and facilitators in the READ Program; people like you make a difference one child at a time. Lastly, I would like to thank my research adviser, Dr. Barb Flom, for helping me turn my two favorite things into a legit research paper! Thank you for being patient and making the process flow smoothly.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
.....	
ABSTRACT.....	ii
Chapter I: Introduction.....	1
<i>Statement of the Problem</i>	3
<i>Purpose</i>	4
<i>Research Questions</i>	4
<i>Definition of Terms</i>	4
<i>Assumptions & Limitations</i>	5
Chapter II: Literature Review.....	7
<i>The Human-Animal Bond</i>	7
<i>Health Benefits Related to Companion Animals</i>	9
<i>Animal-Assisted Activities and Animal-Assisted Therapy</i>	11
<i>Literacy and Canines</i>	15
Chapter III: Methodology.....	18
<i>Selection and Description of Sample</i>	18
<i>Instrumentation</i>	18
<i>Data Collection</i>	19
<i>Data Analysis</i>	19
<i>Limitations</i>	20
Chapter IV: Results.....	21
<i>Participant Information</i>	21
<i>Case Analysis</i>	21
<i>Cross-Case Analysis</i>	27

<i>Summary</i>	33
Chapter V: Discussion	34
<i>Limitations</i>	34
<i>Conclusions</i>	35
<i>Recommendations to the Field</i>	36
<i>Recommendations for Future Research</i>	39
References.....	40
Appendix A: Data Collection Tool.....	43
Appendix B: IRB Exempt Form.....	44

Chapter I: Introduction

Literacy is the gateway to an expansive world of knowledge. It is also the building block to a solid education. Literacy is defined as being able to carry out complex tasks using reading & writing related to the world of work and to life outside the school (Temple, Ogle, Crawford & Freppon, 2005). The International Reading Association believes that literacy development is an ongoing process, and it requires just as much attention for adolescents as it does for beginning readers (IRA, 1999). The Wisconsin State Reading Association (WSRA) states that reading is a tool that spans disciplines, is integrated into all content areas, and addresses diversity (2003). As students mature, so do their reading levels, hence the need for further instruction to promote fluency and new reading opportunities. High-quality reading skills provide the framework to allow students to progress in their schooling with increasing complexity in classes and curriculum.

Aliteracy is on the rise. Aliteracy is defined as having the ability to read but choosing not to do so. While a complex issue, aliteracy can be attributed to many factors. One such factor is lack of self-esteem and confidence often resulting from poor reading experiences as a young student. Essentially, a struggling reader is born. A student that does not feel confident in his/her reading skills will read less and fall behind academically.

A struggling reader can be described in a variety of ways. Lack of fluency and/or accuracy is often a trait of a struggling reader. Those who struggle as readers are often embarrassed to read in front of peers, teachers and parents and fall even further behind with the lack of practice. Struggling readers often exhibit a lack of confidence, self-esteem and, at times, certain social skills including being able to work cohesively in a group or basic social

interactions among peers. Because reading is a skill required in academic subjects across the board, for apparent reasons struggling readers have grades that reflect this struggle.

Identifying a struggling reader is often fairly obvious when having students read aloud. Personal experience has shown that it is fairly accurate to say that a student who fumbles through words, stalls at parts, fidgets, mispronounces words, and ignores punctuation is probably not comprehending much in terms of the reading. It is often possible to determine through observation that a student is reading at frustration level because the student will exhibit some or all of the following behaviors: laborious word-for-word reading with flat intonation, pointing behaviors, squinting, rocking back and forth (Temple et al., 2005, p. 418). These behaviors are often noted by other students and can result in bullying and teasing. For this reason, many struggling readers refrain from reading aloud or reading altogether. Looking unintelligent and slow in front of a teacher or parent is another reason these students do not feel compelled to practice and improve their reading skills. According to a 2003 report by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (as cited in University of Minnesota, 2008), it is estimated that more than 37% of fourth-grade students, 26% of eighth-grade students, and 26% of twelfth-grade students read below grade level.

The need for positive reading interaction for readers at a young age is crucial. The National Assessment of Adult Literacy survey (n.d.) found that about 30 million adults have below basic reading skills. Adults in this category struggle with even basic simple and concrete literacy activities. Another 63 million can only perform basic literacy activities. These dismal statistics demonstrate that to spark a lifetime of positive literacy habits ideally all children would have countless opportunities for positive reading experiences both within and outside of the school environment. Unfortunately, large class

sizes and budgetary constraints, in addition to other varied reasons, have caused many students displaying reading difficulties and poor reading habits to be overlooked.

Students who have poor reading experiences lack the academic (and sometimes social) skills necessary to successfully progress through school. Strong reading skills are the building blocks to achieving success in all subject areas such as math, science, English and social studies. A struggling reader will most likely have difficulties in other subject areas, which is why the need for positive reading interactions at a young age is vital.

Reading with a companion animal is an example of a positive literacy experience. Animal-assisted activities and 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 (Jalongo, Astorino & Bomboy, 2004). Because the use of animal-assisted activities in education has been demonstrated to reduce student stress and anxiety as well as build self-esteem and confidence, further investigation into the benefits of a canine reading program such as *READ* is needed in order to evaluate its effectiveness.

Statement of the Problem

Little to no peer-reviewed research is available on structured canine-assisted reading activities. Benefits, outcomes, and evaluation of the process are absent from literature on the use of canines in reading. This study further investigated the benefits of using dogs as an option for creating a positive reading experience for young readers within the library setting. The purpose of the *READ* Program is to provide a safe, non-threatening reading environment for a child, regardless of reading ability. This shared experience is meant to focus on the positive and help children develop a love of reading and literacy. Additionally, having an opportunity to read with a non-judgmental furry

friend aims to boost self-esteem and confidence. Research was conducted through passive naturalistic observations. A convenience sample of children involved in the READ Program in Hennepin County, located in Minnesota west of the Twin Cities, participated in the study.

Purpose

The focus of this study was directed at the behaviors exhibited by child participants and dogs during a canine reading session. The results of this study will be used to determine if animal-assisted reading programs that involve canines can be used as a positive reading experience for young readers. It is hoped that a positive reading experience will set the tone for optimistic reading habits that will aid towards successful progression through school.

Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What behaviors do children exhibit towards dogs during a canine reading session?
2. What behaviors do dogs exhibit towards children during a canine reading session?

Definition of Terms

Aliteracy. Aliteracy can be defined as having the ability to read but choosing not to.

Animal-assisted activities (AAA). AAA is the use of animals to promote motivational, educational and fun experiences. Progress is not usually monitored or documented (Intermountain Therapy Animals, 2007).

Animal-assisted therapy (AAT). The purposeful use of animals to provide affection, attention, diversion and relaxation is best described by the term animal-assisted therapy.

Companion animal. This is an animal that is considered a friend or part of the family. This term is used interchangeably with the word *pet*.

Delta Society. The Delta Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving human health through service and therapy animals.

Fluency. Fluency is defined as being able to decode words automatically, group them meaningfully, read with expression and understand what is read.

Literacy. An individual's ability to read and write at a proficient level; the ability to carry out complex tasks using reading & writing related to the world of work and to life outside the school is a broad definition of literacy.

Pet partner team. The Delta Society coined this term which allows volunteer pet owners to provide animal-assisted activities and/or therapy to those in hospitals, school settings and other facilities with their pet. The team must be certified and registered.

READ. The mission of the READ program is to improve the literacy skills of children through the assistance of registered therapy teams as literacy mentors (Intermountain Therapy Animals, 2007).

Young reader. A young reader is defined as someone in kindergarten through eighth grade.

Assumptions & Limitations

The main assumption of this study is that the behavior viewed will resemble typical behaviors in a canine reading session; the presence of an observer will not affect

the behavior of the participants. It is also important to note that the convenience sample is not representative of the entire READ program. Furthermore, it is important to clarify that research of the qualitative design tends to generate more questions for further study rather than simply test a hypothesis.

One limitation of this study will require a child who is free of canine allergies to participate. Additionally, cultural differences may be a limiting factor. Jalongo et al. (2004) stated that in some Southeast Asian cultures dogs are considered unclean and/or as a general nuisance. A significant youth population within the intended district of this study are Hmong, immigrating from Laos and other areas of Southeast Asia. This may in fact become a factor of consideration when observing participants for the study.

Furthermore, the lack of peer-reviewed research was a limiting factor in itself. The examination of READ literature did not produce peer reviewed, scholarly journal articles and empirical research. Rather, anecdotal evidence in the form of letters of support for current programs, testimonials, and informal verification were utilized. Preliminary research involving literacy and canines is occurring, though not systematic at this point.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This literature review addresses the research around the human-animal bond, the subject of pet ownership and related health benefits, animal-assisted activities as well as animal-assisted therapy and how they are being used presently in a variety of settings. More specifically, the issue of literacy and the connection between positive reading habits and experiences will be explored using canine reading programs.

The Human-Animal Bond

“Pets are totems of values we hold dear and a conduit to our historic connections between humans and nature. They help cultivate the awareness that we are not alone in this world, but united to all living things,” states Becker, a veterinarian (2002, p. 254). For ages humans and animals have forged a bond that extends into many aspects of life. According to Pattnaik (2004), since time immemorial, animals have been serving humans society in at least three broad roles: as teachers, as healers, and as companions and friends. A 2005 survey by the American Pet Products Manufacturers showed that 63% of all U.S. households own one or more pets (Pitts, 2005). Of these animals, dogs, cats and fish are most popular as companion pets. For adults, pets provide a variety of physical and psychological benefits which will be addressed at a later point. For children, their interest in pets is the one strong element that survives as they mature, creating a constant in a changing world (Becker, 2002, p. 32). Through pets children learn responsibility, friendship and empathy. Most importantly, pets offer unique *teaching moments* for parents to use to teach and model emotions, responsibility, and consequences all within a reachable, familiar context. Sensitive issues like birth and death are more easily explained and accepted when parents are able to use household pets as examples (Delta Society, 2008). Pets are often able to assist in bridging the communication gap between adults and children.

Furthermore, Endenburg and Baarda stated that pets within a household provide opportunities for social-emotional development in children (as cited in Delta Society, 2008). Working together, parents and children can make taking care of a pet an ideal hands-on learning experience. Numerous studies by Davis, Bergesen, and Covert have concluded that households with pets contribute greatly to an increase in a child's self-esteem and perceived self-concept (as cited in Delta Society, 2008). Additionally, pets provide opportunities for empathy development, the child's ability to understand how someone else feels. By caring for a pet, children learn to understand others feelings and needs, which are unique to each individual, both human and non-human. Pets provide 'social support' and allow us to feel unconditionally loved and accepted, all without judgment (Delta Society, 2008). Lastly, in a global society, Pattnaik (2004) supports the notion that pets can help prepare children to become environmentally conscious citizens. Environmental educators around the world recommend promoting a spirit of "deep ecology"; instead of embracing anthropocentrism, children would develop an ecocentric attitude instead (Pattnaik, 2004).

In addition, and in ways reaching beyond companionship, animals have been used presently and historically in supporting roles for humans. According to the Americans With Disabilities Act (1990), service animals are legally defined and trained to meet the disability-needs of their handler who has disabilities (as cited in Delta Society, 2008). It is important to note that service animals are not pets. Service dogs compensate for those who may have hearing or visual impairments (McColgan & Schofield, 2007). Alert dogs also provide assistance for those who are prone to epileptic seizures and other emergency medical situations. Within a similar category to service dogs are search and rescue dogs. These dogs serve as part of many police departments as well as emergency rescue teams.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) reported that in 2007 69.6% of U.S. households owned either a cat or dog (2008). Approximately 43 million households owned dogs, with another 37.5 million owning cats. These numbers are up approximately 6 million for households owning dogs and 4.5 million for households owning cats compared to the AVMA 2001 estimates. These numbers alone demonstrate the increasing interest in owning companion animals in this country. Furthermore, the U.S. Pet Ownership and Demographics Sourcebook states that in 2006 nearly half of pet owners, or 49.7%, considered their pets to be family members (AVMA, 2008). According to Arluke and Sanders (1996), dogs, in particular, are often treated like virtual persons, family members and social beings with whom close and significant relationships are formed (as cited in McColgan & Schofield, 2007, p.21). With more than 72 million dogs and 82 million cats living as companion animals in the U.S. it seems obvious to pet owners the many benefits of sharing a household with a four legged friend.

Health Benefits Related to Companion Animals

The inclusion of companion animals in the home provides a bridge to use these same companions in the field of therapy, health and healing. Any person who owns a pet can understand the benefits of pet ownership; one just needs to ask why he or she brought a companion animal into his/her life. Though not quantitatively measurable, unconditional love and constant companionship are just two reasons among many as to why someone may enjoy being a pet owner. Opportunities for play, laughter, and pleasure also top the list of reasons why pet ownership is seen as a healthy choice. Constant companionship, a battle against being alone, is yet another benefit. Duncan states, "Loneliness is a stress--like pain, injury/loss, grief, fear, fatigue, exhaustion. Physiologically, loneliness can trigger the same stress response as a broken leg" (1995, p. 5). Even more, it is possible for loneliness to lead to a barrage of other illnesses. A

companion animal, whether it be a dog, cat or fish, may be a solid option in combating loneliness.

Increased activity through lifestyle changes required when owning a pet is also a benefiting factor. According to McColgan & Schofield (2007), pets often act as social catalysts to get adults up and moving. The simple exercise routine of an average canine requires multiple daily walks and *play sessions*. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention states that pets can increase opportunities for outdoor activities and exercise as well as reducing stress levels (n.d.). Additionally, pets have been shown to increase feelings of contentment in humans.

There are additional more measurable health benefits as well. Becker reports that pets “break our cycle of isolation and inactivity, to get us out seeing the world again, walking and talking to our neighbors, and feeling more confident and content with our physical and animal selves” (2002, p. 121). They provide a safe outlet for people to share pent-up stress, emotions and feelings, therefore reducing rising stress levels. According to the CDC (n.d.), pets can decrease cholesterol, blood pressure and triglyceride levels. Improvements in physical health, reduced cardiac problems and lowered blood pressure are key in the human-animal bond (Brodie & Biley, 1999).

Non-measurable, emotional aspects of health like self-esteem and self-worth are also areas to consider when addressing animal-related health benefits. Tilsen, a psychologist who uses canine therapy while working with patients, reported that those who had worked with her dog and spent time caring for another living creature “generated feelings of self-worth and discussion on the topic” (1998, p. 54). She added, “Giving directions to Bongo and having them followed provided to be the first time many of these kids were seriously listened to by another living being” (Tilsen, 1998, p. 54).

Animal-Assisted Activities and Animal-Assisted Therapy

Because of the positives associated with the human-animal bond, the area of animal-assisted therapy is not a new one. However, society has just begun to explore the complete list of benefits associated with this type of therapy. One distinction must be made before delving into each area of therapy: the difference between animal-assisted activities and animal-assisted therapy.

Animal-assisted activities (AAA) are often social in nature and do not have any goals or objectives for the patient and/or pet partner team. For example, a pet partner team may visit the library on a day when the theme involves animals in storybooks for children. Other animal-assisted activities may have a pet partner team visit a local school to talk about how to approach a dog or why it is important to spay/neuter your pet.

On the other hand, animal-assisted therapy (AAT) involves a pet partner team with a facility professional such as a teacher, counselor, nurse or librarian. Animal-assisted therapy is defined as goal-directed intervention in which an animal meeting specific criteria is an integral part of the treatment process. Like AAA, assistive therapy animals are used in a variety of settings: hospitals, classrooms, nursing homes, hospice, and counseling. The extent to which therapy animals are involved depends on the needs of the participant. For some needing increased physical activity, the animals are used for walks or to play fetch. Other participants simply need a non-threatening, non-judging companion to listen as they share their thoughts and feelings. There are both goals and objectives for patients and often written documentation of patient progress by the professional at hand (Burch, 1996). For example, a pet partner team may spend an afternoon making rounds at a local nursing home to work on gross motor skills or fine

motor skills with various patients as instructed by the nursing home staff. As specified by Burch (1996), improving gross motor skills with a dog may include walking or throwing a ball. Improving fine motor skills with the elderly may include filling a water dish, combing a cat, petting an animal or feeding the pet treats. The pet partner team would spend a specified amount of time with each patient in the presence of a staff person who records the activities, progress and comments for each patient.

Further explanation of the human-animal bond as well as the use of therapy animals in various settings is pertinent to exploring the use of animals as a literacy intervention strategy. It is important to note that before any pet may participate in therapy activities they must be certified for either AAA or AAT by a reputable organization (Delta Society, 2008). Organizations that provide AAA and AAT training and certification include the Delta Society, Therapy Dogs International, Inc., or Therapy Dogs Inc. While each organization provides certifications for pet partner teams, the type of test and frequency of renewal and testing differs.

Canines are the most common companion participating in AAA and AAT. Becoming certified requires the canine and handler (typically referred to as the pet partner team) to pass the Canine Good Citizen Test with some additional requirements specific to each organization. Simple exercises on this test include things like *sit*, *stay*, *come* and *down* (American Kennel Club, 2008). Additionally the canine must be pleasantly groomed and have passed a veterinary examination. Decisions about whether or not an animal has a temperament for this kind of work should be made by the pet owner prior to testing.

In hospitals. According to Becker, animals have been used to soothe the sick since the ninth century (Becker, 2002, p. 136). The use of animals as a therapy tool has increased in acceptance over the past twenty years. In 1977, the Delta Society was

formed to promote research about human-animal interactions and to encourage the use of pets or animals in health care (McDowell, 2005, p.81). Dogs and cats are generally used in hospital therapy, but other “pocket pets” like bunnies, guinea pigs and hamsters have also been used. Birds typically have not been used as they can carry psittacosis, a disease transmittable to humans that causes fever, chills, headache, muscle ache and a dry cough (McDowell, 2005).

As stated previously, AAT within hospitals involves a variety of opportunities for pet partner teams. A patient recovering from surgery may need non-strenuous physical exercise to keep blood moving and to prevent stiffness in joints. Walking a dog would aid in this process. Another kind of patient may need to talk about their experience and emotions as they battle cancer, with pet partner teams serving as a buffer during a difficult conversation. The role therapy animals can play within a hospital setting varies, but all require pet partner teams to be trained and able to deal with a multitude of scenarios.

In counseling. Dogs often seem empathetic with suffering humans, and in turn, can be used to comfort and put a smile on the face of someone desperately in need. For this reason, therapy animals have been used as an outlet in counseling (Becker, 2002). Children experiencing trauma early in life often have difficulty opening up about these experiences and taking steps toward healing. “Dogs are now being used... in individual therapy as a means to draw patients, the elderly, and children out of isolation or depression by interacting with dogs,” says Masson (1997, p. 185). Masson states, “Those who have been abused, battered and mistreated throughout life have every reason to be depressed, but seeing these healthy, happy animals lifts them, momentarily at least, from

their sadness (1997, p. 185). From here the steps to a path to recovery can start to be taken.

In education. The usefulness of animal-assisted activities and/or therapy within the classroom has demonstrated multiple benefits. Animals have often been kept as class pets in courses like agriculture and animal science. Course offerings like companion animal science and wildlife management at the various age levels are on the rise. One such example of this is the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). The UIUC College of ACES offers courses on companion animal biology, social issues and nutrition, but student demand has caused new classes related to animals to debut (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, n.d.). Another popular new course, *Companion Animals in Society*, debuted recently. Always looking for a way to grab student's attention, teachers and students alike have found ways to incorporate those from the animal world into everyday life in the classroom.

Furthermore, some special education classrooms have adopted pets to help reduce tension and anxiety in their students as well as teach responsible behaviors. Pet care routines can effectively operate in both mainstream and self-contained settings, proving to be beneficial for all learners (Law & Scott, 1995). Law & Scott chose to focus on students with pervasive developmental delay and autism. Their research supports the notion that, by learning about and caring for a classroom pet and by being assigned routine duties related to the pet such as watering, feeding, nurturing, students were able to relay these concrete classroom concepts to practical, real-life situations (1995). This pet care program allowed students to gain a better understanding of the animal kingdom, as well as promote empathy and concern for other beings. One unique aspect of the project

allowed students to “pet sit” on the weekends at home, a task that required parents to become involved in the learning process. “This program affords the student enjoyable activity while simultaneously providing a forum for cooperative interaction...and serves as a forerunner for the generalization of concepts and skills necessary for future independent living,” (Law & Scott, 1995).

Literacy and Canines

Current issues in literacy have forced educators to look to new intervention methods. Due to the strength of the human-animal bond as well as the inclusion of pets in the home, pairing dogs and literacy seemed like a logical step in helping put the spark back in reading for many students. The examination of READ literature did not produce peer reviewed, scholarly journal articles and empirical research. Rather, anecdotal evidence in the form of letters of support for current programs, testimonials, and informal verification were utilized. Preliminary research involving literacy and canines is occurring is occurring, though not systematic at this point.

Essentially, starting a Reading Education Assistance Dogs (READ) program requires two things: a certified pet partner team and a need within a community. Programs can be set up based on the preferences of the pet partner team and site, but on average a session will last 15-20 minutes per student (N. Brooks, personal communication, October 12, 2008). The idea is simple: the pet partner team sits and interacts with a child as s/he reads a book of their choice. Brooks states that the experience is meant to be a positive, unique reading time for the child to practice in a safe, “critique-free” environment. Here, the adult acts as a resource for the reader, but ideally the child and the dog are the focus during the session. According to the Reading

with Rover Program out of Woodinville, Washington, the dogs involved in the program help turn the reading environment into a non-threatening place where there is no risk of being embarrassed by mispronouncing a word, reading at a slow pace, or not comprehending (Reading with Rover, 2008).

Woodmor Elementary School, one of the current READ locations for Reading with Rover, involves students ages seven through twelve who are reading below grade level and/or have self-esteem issues. The READ program appears to be a success at Woodmor, with teachers noticing the following from students in the program: increased fluency, decreased absenteeism, improved self-confidence, involvement in other school activities, improved hygiene, respectful interactions with animals and peers, volunteering to read aloud in class, and more books being checked out from the library (Reading with Rover, 2008). Woodmor is not alone in their findings; currently every state except South Dakota has certified READ teams working in schools and libraries (Intermountain Therapy Animals, 2007).

The use of canines as a positive reading experience may assist in the development of strong, positive literacy habits and experiences at a young age. Literacy development has been demonstrated as an ongoing process, and it requires just as much attention for adolescents as it does for beginning readers (IRA, 1999). Students in the adolescent stage need to see the relevance of the activities they are asked to do (Temple et al., 2005). Being clear with goals and purposes of activities and how they relate to students is important. Beamon (2001) suggested that adolescents learn best when activities are interactive and purposeful and include meaningful engagement, which is why a canine reading program may spark an interest that is dwindling.

Perhaps this is why many adolescents do not latch onto reading in the middle grades. In many cases, unfortunately, students detest reading. Reading researcher Kyleene Beers of Yale University says something happens to U.S. kids as they make their way through school. “About 100% of first-graders walk in on the first day and are interested in this thing called reading,” she says. “Eighty percent of graduating high school seniors tell us they will never again voluntarily read another book” (Beers, as cited in Toppo, 2003, p. 8D). The loss of interest in reading among adolescents is an on-going problem in schools today. Fortunately, a large number of canine reading programs are being established in libraries and districts throughout the country with the aims of increasing reading interest and excitement.

Chapter III: Methodology

The development of strong reading skills and habits is vital to student success and the ability to later navigate the adult world with ease. The use of animal-assisted activities such as a canine reading program may assist in providing positive reading experiences for those in the early to mid stages of reading. This positive reading experience sets the tone for continued success in the progression through school and life thereafter. Within this chapter explanations will be provided regarding selection and description of sample, intended instrumentation, data collection and analysis as well as possible limitations pertaining to the method used.

Selection and Description of Sample

The Hennepin County Library System, located west of the Twin Cities in Minnesota, offers a multitude of canine reading sessions throughout the winter season. For the purposes of this research a convenience sample of students was observed through multiple canine reading sessions at a variety of locations in the Hennepin County Library System. Students observed were already willing participants in one of these canine reading programs. Students may or may not have been struggling readers. Participants included students in kindergarten through upper elementary school.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation for this research consisted of a chart including the following data: length of session, student age group, number of times student touches/pets dog, number of times student speaks to dog, description of seating arrangement, and a section for general comments. One data chart was used for each library location (see Appendix A). It was anticipated that between 4-6 students would be observed at each library; therefore, the data chart accommodated space for

ample observation of each student within the sample. No measures of validity or reliability have been documented since this observation chart was designed specifically for this study.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected through passive naturalistic observations. This research was deemed exempt from review by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (see Appendix B). The intended observations occurred during multiple canine reading sessions in two Hennepin County Library locations. To maintain anonymity, student's names were not collected. Instead, the age of each student was estimated and grouped into one of the following categories: pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, elementary.

Fourteen sessions were observed. The length of each session was recorded, as well as each student's interaction with the canine. Data were recorded for the following: number of times student touches/pets the dog, number of times the student speaks to the dog. Additionally the seating arrangement between the student and dog was recorded as this may have influenced the interaction between the two.

Lastly, general, open-ended observations were included in the data collection. Data in this section reflected student's comments about the experience and general field notes about the session(s).

Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed qualitatively to explore the connection between the child participant and canine reading companion. The analysis looked at the age group of the student, the number of times student touched/pet the dog, as well as the number of times the student spoke to the dog. The bulk of data were analyzed to describe the child participant/canine interaction and to generate hypotheses about the positive aspects of reading to dogs. Data were

analyzed iteratively for commonalities and tendencies within each category with the aim of linking aspects of the experience to a positive canine reading session.

Limitations

Though it was anticipated that observations would be gathered from numerous sessions with students of varying ages, this is only a minute sample of students involved in the canine reading program in an urban setting. Additionally, observations were conducted at only two libraries, limiting the number of participants in the study. The lack of males participating in an already-existing canine reading program at the library was also a limiting factor. Of the 14 observations conducted, data were only collected for three males.

Furthermore, the facilitator in charge of the reading session, along with the preference of the child, designated the seating arrangement. A child who chose to sit on a parent's lap had less canine interaction than a child who chose to sit next to the dog on the floor.

Additional limitations included the simple fact that students with canine allergies or negative views of dogs were unlikely to participate in a canine reading program hosted at a library. As mentioned previously in Chapter I, cultural differences may have also been a limiting factor in those who decide to participate in the program.

Chapter IV: Results

This chapter includes discussion regarding the purpose of this study, participant demographics, a case by case analysis of each canine reading session, and a cross-case analysis for commonalities. Specifically, the cross-case analysis will address two research questions proposed in Chapter I as well as questions generated from observations.

The purpose of this study was to determine if animal-assisted reading programs that involve canines can be used as a positive reading experience for young readers. Data were collected through passive naturalistic observations of canine reading sessions at two Hennepin County Libraries. A convenience sample of children already involved in a canine reading program was used to collect these observations.

Participant Information

Participants for this study were part of a convenience sample from two Hennepin County Libraries- Southdale and Golden Valley. Of the 14 participants, 11 were female and three were male. Of these 14 participants, six were of kindergarten age, seven were of elementary school age, and one was a pre-kindergarten child. There were no participants of middle school age.

Case Analysis

Data collected for each reading session included the following: number of times participant pets/touches dog, number of times participant speaks to dog, a description of dog's reaction to participant, and general session notes. A description of each individual seating arrangement was also recorded. Child participant approximate age and gender were noted.

The rating system used in this study was devised based on a variety of factors. Factors of consideration include the presence of a parent at the session, the level of interaction between the dog and child, and the facilitators attempt to involve the dog in the session. Interaction was

defined as touching or petting the dog as well as speaking to the dog. Reading experiences rated as *Basic* are considered below average canine reading experiences. Though not negative in nature, basic sessions exhibited too few characteristics of an exemplary canine reading session as recommended in the READ manual. Reading experiences rated as basic were deemed to be unmemorable and lacking in establishing a positive connection between the dog and participant. Reading experiences rated as *Intermediate* are considered average canine reading sessions. Reading experiences rated as intermediate included some positive aspects of an exemplary situation such as a medium level of interaction. Cases rated as intermediate left room for improvement. Reading experiences rated as *Exemplary* were considered ideal, memorable canine reading sessions on which to model for others. In each of these exemplary cases, there was a high level of interaction between the dog and the participant. Furthermore, the session was left to just the dog, facilitator, and participant; no parent was involved. Facilitators making the presence of a dog a focal point of the session were also classified as an exemplary rating. Reading experiences rated as exemplary established positive connections between the child, the dog, and the act of reading. In many of these cases, the child's enjoyment was outwardly apparent.

Case 1 was a kindergarten-age female. The participant was rather timid when it came to working in close proximity to the dog, and actually had her parent sit with her and read the story. Though her session lasted only 10 minutes, she did touch the dog three times and speak to him once. Being an older dog, the dog was initially interested in the child and cooperative, but then proceeded to rest and/or sleep throughout the session. While reading did take place at this session, there was little to no canine interaction. She only touched the dog once. Additionally, the involvement of the parent restricted the involvement of the facilitator. This particular case was rated overall as basic.

Case 2 was a kindergarten-age female. The first five minutes of this session involved three instances of interaction between the child and the dog. The child also spoke to the dog once during this time. Again, the parent was involved in this session and read the book, the child appeared more interested in the dog. The last ten minutes of the session, the child interacted with the dog four times. Again, the dog was very cooperative, and the child showed a preference for observing the dog as opposed to looking at the pages of the book. This case was rated overall as intermediate.

Case 3 was a pre-kindergarten male. Though only lasting five minutes, this session provided much insight into the mind of this participant. He was very fearful of the small dog, yet he was very intrigued. His mother started to read a story about trucks, but the child did not want to sit down or listen. The facilitator attempted to involve the dog in the session by asking him questions and then asking the child the same question. Around minute five the child throws a bit of a tantrum and decides he wants to leave. Throughout all of this the dog remained calm, interested, and on the reading blanket. While this session was rated as basic, the one redeeming aspect of it was the little boy's return to say goodbye to the dog prior to leaving the library. After a few minutes of browsing the library after the initial failed canine reading session, the little boy asked to come back to say goodbye to the dog. It was obvious that the mother was glad the child had made a good connection with the dog, even if no reading had taken place. This speaks volumes about his simple short-lived experience with the dog. In summary, this case was rated as basic.

Case 4 was a kindergarten female. The parent of this child did read the story, and the child did acknowledge and interact with the dog a total of five times. This child did say hello to the dog and talked throughout much of the session about the dog. At this point in the afternoon

the dog appeared rather tired and/or bored but was still cooperative and calm. This child was very talkative and seemed rather thrilled to have a dog near her, which did cause her to focus less on the reading. This case was rated overall as intermediate.

Case 5 was an elementary-age female. No parent was present during this session. The child was comfortable reading and actually read through two books during the 15 minute session. While the dog was asleep much of the session, the child was petting the dog or had her hand resting on the dog the majority of the session. She seemed equally interested in the story and the dog. At the end of the session she liked watching the dog eat treats and was very hesitant to leave the dog after the session was over. This case was rated as exemplary.

Case 6 was an older elementary-age female. Despite the fact that this child was a strong reader, her parent stayed with her throughout the session. During the 10 minute session she interacted with the dog four times. The dog was very friendly, interested and calm. The latter part of the session found the dog resting, but the participant did not seem to mind. She was a strong reader, focusing primarily on the story, but she did have an occasion smile while interacting with the dog. For a variety of reasons, this case was rated as intermediate.

Case 7 was a unique case in which no reading took place. No parent was involved. This elementary-age male was overly excited to meet the medium-size dog. There was no way to accurately tally the amount of interaction between the boy and the dog because it was a constant. The boy kneeled next to the dog the entire 15 minutes and made comments like, "This dog is so cool!" and "You shed a lot!" The child was very inquisitive and asked a variety of questions directed to the facilitator about the dog's training, behavior, and habits. Specifically, he wanted to know if she was trained and what tricks she could do. The boy even explained to the facilitator his desire for a dog. It was overheard in the background the mother explaining to another READ

facilitator that the boy was not a strong reader and was embarrassed about it. Even so, this boy's fondness for the dog and high level of interaction supports the idea that this may be a positive reading experience for him in another session, which is why it was rated as intermediate. The boy's final comment to the dog was "I bet she gives you lots of kisses!"

Case 8 was an older elementary-age female. The facilitator actually requested that the parent leave the child to read on her own. The parent complied and the girl attended the session with only the dog and facilitator. The session began with the facilitator and girl talking about dogs. The small dog was very excited to meet the girl. While there was only a minimum level of interaction between the dog and the child, it was obvious that the girl was enjoying the experience. At one point the dog fell asleep and snored, and the facilitator was quick to jump in and comment that the girl's "calming voice" must have put the dog to sleep. As the reading continued the child got closer to the dog on the blanket. The small dog ended up rolling over on his back and the girl found this amusing. The facilitator commented, "He must feel very safe with you!" Though the interaction was minimal, the reading was strong and there was a definite connection there, though weak. For these reasons the session was rated as intermediate.

Case 9 was a kindergarten-age female. No parent was involved. The facilitator read throughout this session as the child could not read yet. This chatty little girl had lots to say about the story and the dog. The child interacted with the dog 12 times, with one of those times being verbal. The majority of this session the dog was asleep, but it was apparent the girl was interested in the session. As the reading progressed the girl crouched closer and closer to the dog. The last few minutes of the session she petted the dog as the story continued. At one point she appeared completely immersed in the canine reading experience, crouching next to the dog,

petting him, and following along with the pictures in the story. At the end of the session she said “Thank you” to the dog. For these reasons the session was rated as exemplary.

Case 10 was an elementary-age female. While no parent was involved in the session, the lack of interaction between the dog and the child, along with the minimal reading that took place, this case was less than ideal. Interestingly, the dog was also fidgety and needing a bathroom break, which may have contributed to the lack of cohesiveness of the session. Though the child did seem to enjoy the book at parts, she was distracted by the dog and somewhat intimidated by his medium size. This case was rated as basic.

Case 11 was an elementary-age female very familiar with dogs. As in case 7, it was impossible to accurately record the number of interactions between dog and child because it was a constant. This dog was very well-behaved and trained to be an integral part of the reading session. The child made multiple comments to the dog throughout the session including “Hi”, “Good dog”, “You’re a good dog”, “Thank you” and “Bye”. Despite the fact that the actual reading took a few minutes longer to begin than expected, it was clear the facilitator, dog and child were immersed in the experience. At the end of the session the child was excited to receive a bookmark from her new reading buddy. There was no parent involved in this session. For these reasons the case was rated as exemplary.

Case 12 was a kindergarten male. This boy made two comments to the dog during the 10 minute session- “Hi” and “Bye”- and interacted with the dog by touching/petting him approximately 10 times. The dog appeared very welcoming and almost seemed to smile while sitting with the boy and reading. The child seemed equally interested in the story and the dog. This case was rated as exemplary.

Case 13 was an elementary-age female. The child petted the dog 8 times during the session, but did not speak to him. The dog was calm and appeared interested throughout the majority of the session. The child seemed slightly confused about reading to a dog but caught on eventually. This girl did struggle with reading, possibly with sight words. While the dog did not seem to make her uncomfortable, it was obvious she was struggling slightly with the reading. Since no parent was present the facilitator took over the reading. The facilitator even attempted to get the dog involved in the session by placing a treat in the binding of the book. This case was rated as a 2 for the times of slight awkwardness and lack of cohesiveness in the session. With one purpose of the reading session being to provide a positive, happy reading experience, it was clear that this child's struggle with the story impacted the outcome of the session. Again, this case was rated as intermediate.

Case 14 was a kindergarten-age female. While the session only lasted 10 minutes, this squirrely little girl was in constant contact with the small dog. She made multiple comments to the dog as well, though they were hushed and spoken softly towards the dog's ears. No parent was present at this session. No actual reading took place at this session, but the girl did go through the book and point out pictures with the facilitator. She had a lot to say about stories and dogs. Because of her enthusiasm for the dog and interest in the storybook pictures, this session was rated as exemplary.

Cross- Case Analysis

The following questions included both the two research questions guiding this study and additional questions generated during and after the observations of a canine reading session. Data were collected to gather an understanding of the behaviors exhibited between children and dogs during a canine reading session. The remaining questions were derived from data collected

during observations. Questions generated may be used in developing further hypotheses regarding the value of the READ Program and also to identify factors that may be linked to a positive canine reading session.

What behaviors do children exhibit towards dogs during a canine reading session? The participants in this study displayed a wide array of behaviors towards the dogs. Participants interacted with each dog depending on individual comfort level. Children with a keen interest or previous experience with dogs were likely the participants with high levels of canine interaction. Those with less comfort and experience were likely to shy away from canine interactions. Of the seven cases of participants with high levels of interaction (Cases 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14), the behaviors displayed included smiling, petting, scratching, speaking directly to the dog, laughing, and a close proximity to the dog. The participant in Case 11 was particularly comfortable around dogs and literally could not keep her hand off the dog. This participant made multiple comments to the dog, including “Good dog”, “You’re a good dog!”, “Thank you” and “Bye”. The participant in Case 13 also exhibited these same behaviors. She had a constant hand on the dog and whispered things in his ears while giggling and smiling.

Of the four cases of participants with a medium level of interaction (Cases 2, 4, 6, 8), the behaviors exhibited towards the dogs were less intense and frequent. Participants in this category generally did not speak to the dog much, nor did they display as much petting or touching. Even so, the dog was acknowledged and at least minimally involved in the reading experience.

The three participants with low levels of interaction (Cases 1, 3, 10) exhibited minimal if any interaction with the dog. Coincidentally, these same three cases were also rated as basic canine reading experiences.

What behaviors do dogs exhibit towards children during a canine reading session? Four dogs were observed during the study. Of these dogs, two were small, one was medium sized, and the other was a large dog.

The large dog was an older dog with lots of experience as a canine reading partner. Generally, he was cooperative and asleep during the reading experiences. He was interested in the participants only for the first few seconds of each meeting, greeting them with a casual sniff or lick of the hand. Perhaps due to old age or boredom, he often groaned and sighed during the experience.

The medium size dog was a black, white and brown mix. This dog was very interested in greeting the participants, and his energy showed. He was very friendly and often looked to be a part of the reading experience with the child by staring at the book or “smiling” with the child.

The two small dogs seemed to be most appealing to the participants, perhaps indicating that size of the dog is a factor related to a positive canine reading experience. The first dog was a small, black dog. This dog was very well-trained and had learned some tricks that appealed to the participants like placing a paw on the book or watching the pages of the book turn. He was very friendly and well-groomed. Being so small, it allowed him to wedge himself between the participant and facilitator.

The other small dog was a white Schnauzer mix. This dog exhibited many of the same characteristics as the small black dog above. He was alert, interested, and well-behaved during the reading experiences.

What aspects of the process seem linked to a positive reading experience? A variety of factors appear to be linked to a positive reading experience. Though not observable, a child participant with previous dog experience would appear to enrich the experience. The size of the

dog appears to have an apparent, though weak, link to a positive reading experience. Of the seven cases involving a small dog, four of these were rated as exemplary canine reading experiences. Furthermore, of these same seven, two cases were rated as intermediate canine reading experiences. While experiences with medium size and larger size dogs do not appear to hinder the experience, personal observations support the idea that young participants appear more comfortable around dogs smaller than themselves.

One obvious factor in creating a positive canine reading experience is interaction with the dog. Those who had direct interaction with the dog, either through talk, touch, or a combination of both, appeared to enjoy the experience more. Of the seven cases rated as high touch/interaction (Cases 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14) five of these were rated as exemplary canine reading experiences (Cases 5, 9, 11, 12, 14). The remaining two cases were rated as intermediate canine reading experiences.

The age of the participant may also influence the outcome of the experience. Of the fourteen participants, 13 were of school age. Of these 13 participants, 11 were rated as having intermediate to exemplary (or ideal) canine reading experiences. The one participant below school age (Pre-Kindergarten) had neither a positive or negative canine reading experience. In this case, there was no interaction with the dog and little if any reading taking place. The outcome of this experience appears to be based on the fact that the pre-schooler was inattentive and unable to sit for even short periods of time. Though not an intermediate or exemplary canine reading experience, this child did return to say goodbye to the dog later in the day, which says something about this brief yet memorable experience with the dog.

Of the five cases in which a parent was part of the experience (Cases 1, 2, 3, 4, 6), two of these were rated as basic canine reading experiences. The other three were rated as intermediate

canine reading experiences. Data and observations seem to support the idea that the lack of parent involvement actually provides for a better canine reading experience. Though not explicitly outlined in the Reading Education Assistance Dogs manual, the canine reading experience is solely meant to be an experience involving only the child, dog and facilitator. With the main purpose of the READ program being to provide a judgment-free environment in which children can enhance their love of reading, the presence of a parent or peer would hinder the intent of this program.

One factor that does not appear to alter the quality of the canine reading experience is the reader. Regardless of whether the child read independently or the facilitator read while the child followed along, the emphasis was not on who was reading but focused more on the actual experience of reading with a dog. Instances when the parent was involved and read the book do not seem to support a positive canine reading experience.

Does the facilitator have an impact on the canine reading experience? Four facilitators were observed during this study. Facilitators are certified with their dogs as pet partner teams and receive five hours of READ training. Skill level of the facilitator appears to be linked to a positive canine reading experience. Of the four facilitators, only two appeared to be using a large number of techniques presented during the training. These techniques included speaking directly to the dog to create involvement and using training techniques to get the dog to look at and touch the book. These facilitators made every attempt to focus on the dog's involvement as a large piece of the reading session. Facilitator 3 was especially keen on involving the dog. At one point the dog rolled over onto its back. The facilitator was quick to comment to the child, stating that the dog must feel very safe with [the reader] because he was comfortable enough to roll onto his back. At another point the dog fell asleep, and this facilitator was quick to point out to the child

that her “calm, soothing voice put [him] to sleep!” While all of the facilitators are volunteers that have an obvious interest in dogs, children and the reading experience, the levels of interaction and involvement appeared to vary and actually did affect the quality of the canine reading experience. It is important to note that the three cases rated as basic canine reading experiences all occurred with different facilitators.

Is a certain age group more prone to interaction with the canine? Of the two age groups involved in the study- kindergarten and elementary age- no one group seemed to dominate in regards to having a positive experience. Both groups had a good number of participants that were rated as having an intermediate to exemplary (ideal) canine reading experience.

Does participant gender impact outcome of experience? While gender does not seem to impact the outcome of this experience, it does play a role in the make-up of the convenience sample. Of the 14 participants, only three were male. Each of these three cases had a different experience. Cases 3, 7, 12 were males. Case 3 was a pre-kindergarten male that had no interaction with the dog. This child was not interested in having a story read to him or being part of the canine reading experience. Case 7 was an elementary school age male that had lots of interaction with the canine but no interest in reading. No reading took place during this experience. He was very in tune with dog, very hands-on, and extremely interested in learning about the dog's personality. Case 12 was a kindergarten male that had an exemplary canine reading experience, including a high instance of interaction and a hands-on reading experience.

The females involved in the study ranged in age, varied in amount of interaction with the dog, and had mixed levels of reading interest.

Summary

In summary, data collected through passive naturalistic observations appear to support the notion that the creation of a positive canine reading experience relies on a number of factors. The level of interaction between the canine and the participant, along with the skill level of the facilitator, seem to play a major role in creating an exemplary reading experience. Though linked in some way, the age and gender of the participant, and size of the dog also play a minor role. Though perhaps out of the facilitator's control, reading experiences tended to more closely model the exemplary canine reading session when no parent was involved.

Chapter V: Discussion

In this chapter, a review of the purpose of this study and limitations can be found. Additionally, conclusions from the study and recommendations for further study and to the topic of canine reading programs will be discussed.

The purpose of this study was to determine if the animal-assisted reading programs that involve canines can be used as a positive reading experience for young readers. Data was collected through passive observations at two Hennepin County Libraries. Participants in this study were part of a convenience sample and were already involved in the READ program sponsored by the library. The discussion of this research includes a summary of limitations, as well as concluding ideas and further recommendations for study.

Limitations

Several limitations existed within this study. As previously stated, the results of this study are limited to the convenience sample and are not able to be generalized. Furthermore, the convenience sample used does not wholly represent the READ program population.

The observations in this study are largely lopsided in that only three of the 14 participants were male. Further observation of young males is necessary to validate the usefulness of a canine reading program and experience for boys. Because the convenience sample consisted largely of females and mothers voluntarily bringing their girls to the canine reading program, a study conducted in a school setting may provide more data and observations in regards to males. It is possible that the issue of lack of interest in reading in males is linked to the observations, data and results of this study.

Lastly, qualitative research tends to generate questions for further study as opposed to providing results to support or challenge a hypothesis.

Conclusions

The results of this study appear to support the use of canine reading programs as a positive reading experience for young readers. Of the 14 participants observed in the Hennepin County Library System, six of these cases were rated as intermediate canine reading experiences. While not exemplary, the participants in these cases exhibited positive behaviors toward both the dog and reading during the session. Furthermore, of these 14 participants, five had exemplary canine reading experiences. An exemplary canine reading experience consisted of high levels of interaction between the child and dog as well as a focus on reading.

A variety of factors are linked to a positive canine reading experience. One strong factor linked to a positive experience is the amount of interaction between the participant and the canine. The following factors appear loosely linked to the quality of the canine reading experience: quality of the facilitator, parent involvement, size of the dog, and age of the participant.

The READ Program and those of a similar nature offer a multitude of options for all types of learners in a variety of age groups to practice and enhance reading skills. This research allowed for observations of all types of readers: readers who struggle, those who are average readers, and those who excel. Kathy Klotz, Director of Intermountain Therapy Animals, believes that dogs are “magical catalysts” (Bueche, 2003). Mie-Mie Wu, a co-founder of “Reading With Rover”, states, “Dogs are the fuzzy carrot. They are responsive and attentive and offer literal and figurative support” (Bueche, 2003).

On a larger scale, the canine reading session provides an ideal opportunity to directly link a child to a dog. This opportunity is a great talking point to discuss various things like how to approach a dog, how to avoid a dog bite, proper pet care, proper hygiene, as well as teaching all

things related to humane education (empathy, respect, compassion). Prior research conducted by Kidd & Kidd (1985) shows that 90% of the children involved in the study indicated that their pets provided learning opportunities, happiness, comfort, and unconditional love (as cited in Poresky, n.d.) Though some of the participants did not have the exemplary canine reading experience, it is accurate to say that each child did have a positive canine experience. Case 3 confirms this fact; though the child did not directly interact with the dog or read, this pre-kindergarten child returned at the end of his library visit just to say goodbye to the dog.

Again, the purpose of the READ Program is to provide a safe, non-threatening reading environment for a child, regardless of reading ability. This shared experience is meant to focus on the positive and help children develop a love of reading and literacy. Additionally, having an opportunity to read with a non-judgmental furry friend aims to boost self-esteem and confidence. Using what we know about the human-animal bond and the relevance of pets in society, it is only natural that we pair dogs, children and literacy.

The therapeutic benefits of companion animals make them a suitable match when it comes to the area of literacy development. Literacy is a key component in the educational process. Students cannot afford to dislike reading simply because it is the framework for the vast majority of their learning. With something so important at stake, it is vital to give every child a chance to succeed and find passion in reading.

Recommendations to the Field

The observations in this study focused on answering questions related to the behaviors displayed between a dog and a child during a canine reading session. Upon the completion of observations and case analysis, questions regarding which aspects of the process seem to be

linked to a positive reading experience were generated. These variables included skill level of the facilitator, parent involvement, age and gender of the participant.

As with many hands on experiences, there appears to be a gap between READ training and the actual experience. Even so, the pairing of a child, canine and facilitator emerge to provide a unique reading opportunity. While the positive experience rating varied between all 14 cases, the 11 cases in which the experience was rated as intermediate or exemplary appear to be beneficial to the participant. Though a variety of factors are linked to a positive canine reading experience, interaction between the dog and the child appears to be the most pertinent factor. The outline of a READ session is organized rather loosely, with major guidelines including a 15-20 minute session including a dog, participant and facilitator (Intermountain Therapy Animals, 2007). The experience is meant to be a positive, non-threatening time for a child to read in a judgment-free environment. The intended outcome centers on the enhancement of reading skills and encouraging a love of literacy.

The criteria above were met in each of the observed canine reading sessions. Though loose in interpretation, each facilitator followed the recommended session guidelines. Even so, following specified guidelines did not automatically produce an exemplary canine reading session. While basic criteria such as session length were adhered to and met, room for movement towards guidelines that set the child participant and facilitator up for an ideal experience are needed.

It is suggested that facilitators shadow other seasoned facilitators multiple times prior to actually hosting a canine reading session on their own. Perhaps teaching certain techniques with an actual dog would be a beneficial part of the READ training program. While these techniques are suggested in the READ manual, a visual demonstration of how to train the dog to look at the

book, place a paw on the book, or appear to be listening might be better understood and incorporated into actual canine reading sessions.

While size of the dog does not seem to be a critical factor in creating a positive canine reading experience, it would be suggested to include dogs of all sizes at each READ session. This may require additional planning and preparation on the part of the hosting library and READ facilitators. This way, small children who are uncomfortable around large dogs and are unfamiliar with the READ process can ease into the experience with a dog closer to their size. Once a comfort level is established, it is hopeful that the child will then be able to be introduced to dogs of all sizes. Yet again, another teachable moment that extends far beyond canines and reading.

Furthermore, as evidenced by Facilitator 3, training in how children learn to read might also be incorporated into the READ training. Facilitator 3 works in a school setting and has experience working with young children in the emergent stages of reading. Because of this, her work as a READ facilitator correlates with her educator experiences. It may be beneficial to provide the background knowledge regarding the emergent stages of reading in order to help guide facilitators in tailoring each individual canine reading session to the participant.

Parent involvement does seem to somewhat impact the quality of the canine reading experience. Because of this, it is recommended that a parent information meeting is offered at the library to explain the purpose and set-up of the READ Program: an experience between a child, dog, and facilitator in which a judgment-free environment is provided to allow children to enhance their love of reading. Topics such as what happens during a typical READ session the benefits of a canine reading program could be addressed. This informational session might also clear up some concerns or misconceptions about the safety of their child around the dogs.

Recommendations for Future Research

Little peer-reviewed research was uncovered regarding the use of canines within the library setting. This investigation is further evidence that empirical research should be conducted related to several aspects of the benefits of a canine reading program.

The results of this study support the notion that canine reading sessions are in fact positive reading experiences for young readers. The amount of participant-canine interaction, along with the skill of the facilitator, appears to largely affect the quality of the experience. Other links include size of the canine, age of the child, and degree of parent involvement. Further investigation regarding these other links may be prove useful in fine-tuning the canine reading experience. Additionally, further research using males involved in the READ Program would provide information about the needs of emergent male readers.

Another intriguing topic of study relates to the READ facilitator training. As with many things in life, there appears to be a gap between READ training, the actual experience, and desired outcome of the experience. As evidenced, it is important to note that the ideal canine reading session does not translate that easily into the real world. Even so, further research exploring the how facilitators and canine reading programs can be used in other settings may provide fine-tuned training based on the event or location (i.e. school, hospital, tutoring center, summer camp). Advanced research regarding the use of the READ Program for delayed and severely delayed readers may provide insight into new ways to assist the struggling reader.

Lastly, outcome based research may prove helpful in determining whether reading with dogs actually improves the reading outlook and habits in children.

References

- American Kennel Club. (2008). *AKC's canine good citizen program*. Retrieved on November 30, 2008, from http://www.akc.org/events/cgc/training_testing.cfm
- American Veterinary Medical Association. (2008). *U.S. pet ownership-2007*. Retrieved November 30, 2008, from <http://www.avma.org/reference/marketstats/ownership.asp>
- American Veterinary Medical Association. (2008). *U.S. pet ownership & demographics Sourcebook*. Retrieved November 30, 2008, from <http://www.avma.org/reference/marketstats/sourcebook.asp>
- Beamon, G. (2001). *Teaching with adolescent learning in mind*. Arlington Heights, IL: Skylight Professional Development.
- Becker, M. (2002). *The healing power of pets: Harnessing the amazing ability of pets to make and keep people happy and healthy*. New York: Hyperion.
- Biermaier, C. (2008). *Hennepin county library helps Hmong speakers stay connected*. Retrieved November 30, 2008, from <http://www.hclib.org/pub/info/newsroom/?ID=132>
- Brodie, S. & Biley, F. (1999). An exploration of the potential benefits of pet-facilitated therapy. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 8, 329-337.
- Bueche, S. (2003). Going to the dogs: Therapy dogs promote reading. *Reading Today*, 20, 46.
- Burch, M. (1996). *Volunteering with your pet: How to get involved in animal-assisted therapy with any kind of pet*. New York: Howell Book House.
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention (n.d.). *Health benefits of pets*. Retrieved on November 30, 2008, from http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/health_benefits.htm
- Delta Society. (2008). *Delta Society mission and goals*. Retrieved November 30, 2008, from <http://www.deltasociety.org/AboutAboutMission.htm#mission>

- Delta Society. (2008). *What is a service dog?* Retrieved on November 30, 2008, from <http://www.deltasociety.org/ServiceInformationBasic.htm>
- Duncan, S. (1995). We are becoming a society of lonely individuals. *Interactions*, 13(1), 5-9.
- Intermountain Therapy Animals. (2007). *Reading education assistance dogs team training manual*.
- International Reading Association. (1999). *Adolescent literacy*. Retrieved on September 30, 2008, http://www.reading.org/Libraries/Position_Statements_and_Resolutions/ps1036_adolescent.sflb.ashx
- Jalongo, M.R., Astorino, T., Bomboy, N. (2004). Canine visitors: The influence of therapy dogs on young children's learning and well-being in classrooms and hospitals. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 32(1), 9-16.
- Law, S. & Scott, S. (1995). Pet care: A vehicle for learning. *Focus on Autistic Behavior*, 10(2), 17-18.
- McColgan, G. & Schofield, I. (2007). The importance of companion animal relationships in the lives of older people. *Nursing Older People*, 19(1), 21-23.
- McDowell, B. M. (2005). Nontraditional therapies for the PICU-part 2. *Journal for Specialists in Pediatric Nursing*, 10(2), 81-85.
- Masson, J. (1997). *Dogs never lie about love*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- National assessment of adult literacy*. (n.d.). Retrieved November 30, 2008, from <http://nces.ed.gov/naal/>
- Pattnaik, J. (2004). On behalf of their animal friends: Involving children in animal advocacy. *Childhood Education*, 81(2), 95-100.

- Pitts, J. L. (2005). Why animal assisted therapy is important for children and youth. *The Exceptional Parent*, 35(10), 38-39.
- Poresky, R.H. (n.d). Companion animals and other factors affecting children's development. *Anthrozoos*, 9(4), 159-168.
- Reading with Rover*. (2008). Retrieved November 1, 2008, from <http://www.readingwithrover.org/default.asp>
- Temple, C., Ogle, D., Crawford, A. & Freppon, P. (2005). *All children read: Teaching for literacy in today's diverse classrooms*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Tilsen, Julie. (1998). Vignettes from the doghouse: Tales of canine co-therapy. *Journal of Family Life*, 4(4), 53-55.
- Toppo, G. (2003). Why won't Johnny read? *USA Today*, Retrieved Wednesday, February 14, 2007 from the Newspaper Source database.
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. (n.d.). *Companion animal courses: Not just for pre-vet majors any more*. Retrieved December 9, 2008, from <http://students.aces.uiuc.edu/node/561>
- University of Minnesota. (2008). *Help for struggling readers*. Retrieved November 30, 2008, from http://www1.umn.edu/umnnews/Feature_Stories2/Help_for_struggling_readers.html
- Wisconsin State Reading Association. (2003). *Reading design for middle school levels*. Retrieved on September 30, 2008, from http://www.wsra.org/assets/pdf/Position_ReadingDesign.pdf

Appendix A: Data Collection Tool

Date _____

Library Location _____

Student gender: M F

Student age group: kindergarten elementary middle school

General description of seating arrangement:

Session Intervals	Number of times participant pets/touches dog	Number of times participant speaks to dog	Description of Dog's reaction to participant	General notes
Minutes 1-5				
Minutes 6-10				
Minutes 11-15				



Research Services
152 Voc Rehab Building

University of Wisconsin-Stout
P.O. Box 790
Menomonie, WI 54751-0790

715/232-1126
715/232-1749 (fax)
<http://www.uwstout.edu/rs/>

Date: February 26, 2009

To: Carolyn Mertz

Cc: Barb Flom

From: Sue Foxwell, Research Administrator and Human
Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional
Review Board for the Protection of Human
Subjects in Research (IRB)

Subject: **Protection of Human Subjects in Research**

Susan Foxwell

Your project, "*A Qualitative Study on the Process of Using Animal-Assisted Activities with Young Readers*" is **Exempt** from review by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. The project is exempt under **Category 2** of the Federal Exempt Guidelines and holds for 5 years. Your project is approved from **February 25, 2009**, through **February 24, 2014**.

In addition, the reviewer commented: "Well-done proposal! Succinct."

Please copy and paste the following message to the top of your survey form before dissemination:

This project has been reviewed by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46

If you are conducting an **online** survey/interview, please copy and paste the following message to the top of the form:

"This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal regulations Title 45 Part 46."

Please contact the IRB if the plan of your research changes. Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and best wishes with your project.

***NOTE: This is the only notice you will receive – no paper copy will be sent.**