

Animal-Assisted Literacy

A Supportive Environment for
Constrained and Unconstrained
Learning

Analytical Framework

- This research is part of a growing body of research on animal-assisted literacy.
- It is also grounded in Literacy Theory
- Sociocultural Theorists Lev Vygotsky John Dewey posited that the environment in which a child learns greatly impacts that learning.

Lev Vygotsky and John Dewey



DOGS AS SUPPORTIVE PARTNERS IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

- Research conducted over the last 30 years suggests that dogs, in particular, due to their nonjudgmental and highly social nature can provide a valuable support to children's learning (Jalongo, Astorino & Bomboy, 2004)



The Dynamics of Animal-Assisted Literacy

- Animal-assisted literacy programs are based on the same triangular dynamics than animal-assisted therapy is. An animal, a literacy mentor and a young student or a small group of students are all interacting and involved in the learning process.
- They can provide a unique and valuable social, emotional and academic support to children.

Reading and Learning with Pooch

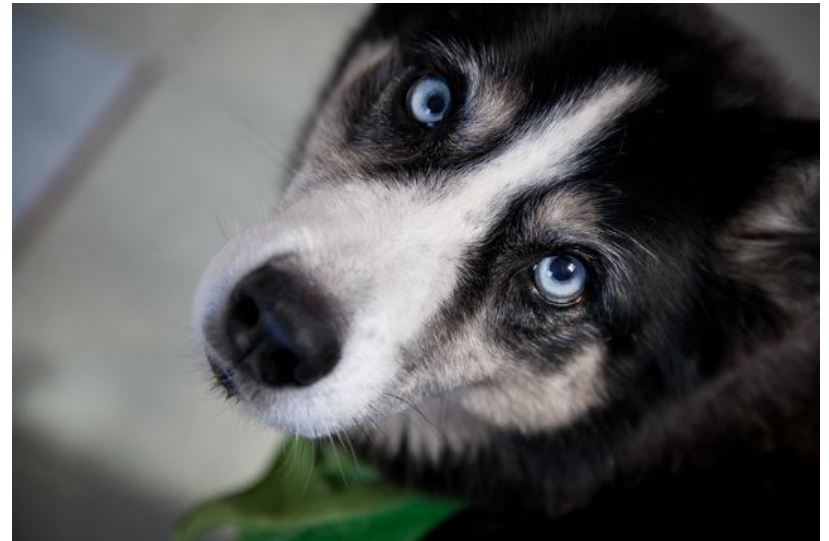
- These are the names of the two animal-assisted literacy programs I implemented in 3 French Speaking elementary Schools and 1 English-Speaking elementary school in Montreal (Canada) from 2005 to 2009.
- 45 children (27 boys and 18 girls) from grade 1 to 3 participated in one of these program.

My Animal Collaborators

PRINCE



MATISSE



My Animal Collaborators

Lucky



Oreo the Guinea Pig



Fostering a Sense of Agency on the Part of the Child

- Interactions with the animal served as a conduit playful communications and fostered a sense of agency on the part of the child.
- That sense of agency contributed to an emotionally safe and caring connection between the adult and the child.
- The adult often acted as the interpreter of the dog's or guinea pig's feelings and reactions.
- In one instance, the children became the French teachers of Lucky, the female bichon who was living in an English-speaking household.
- The child chose the book he or she wished to read to the animal.

The Mentor's Strategies

- Because the child reads to the animal, the mentor appears less of an authority figure.
- Most corrective comments were conveyed through the animal and not directly to the child.
- To ascribe a behavior to the dog that the literacy mentor wanted to address in the child.

Ascribing an Active Role for the Animal

- Matisse congratulated the children with a high-five.
- A child would celebrate a success by giving Oreo a baby carrot.
- Matisse could also choose the question the children had to answer by putting her right front leg on one of the three sheets of different colours laying on the floor.
- Prince could turn a book's page with his paw.

Constrained and Unconstrained Skills

- To help children remember to pause when they came across a period, they had to pause to touch the dog for two seconds; for a comma, they paused even more briefly to touch the dog.
- To make children write meaningful compositions. Writing a get well card to Oreo, writing a letter to Prince on the blackboard. These exercises became a springboard for relevant spelling and writing lessons.

A Picture is Worth Thousand Words



Social Literacy

Providing an Ethos for the Group

- The Learning with Pooch program involved 5 students from the second grade.
- We worked on English and Maths.
- When an argument erupted between two students, I reminded them: « Friends of Matisse don't fight! They argue and they settle or they leave each other alone. »

A POSITIVE ENDING

- A full report was filed after each session of Reading and Learning with Pooch.
- All the students involved in Animal-Assisted Learning improved, to varying degrees, their reading and writing skills during. Some left the program early, other not.
- They all receive a certificate at the end of the program.

