

**An Examination of the Themes of Care, Emotional Intelligence, and the Presence of a Dog
in a Classroom**

by

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Abstract

For some of the children in our classrooms today, having a connection to someone or something can be the key to improving their overall well-being, sense of self-worth, and indirectly have a positive impact on their academic success. This study, through qualitative research methods, and the use of grounded theory and narrative as methods of analysis, aimed to shed light on the interconnectedness and relationship between the themes of a caring classroom, emotional intelligence, and the presence of a dog in a classroom. A total of six individuals participated in this study, over the course of a three month period. Individual interviews and a focus group discussion were conducted and allowed the emergence of six themes. These themes are; emotional connection, love and care, empathy, risk taking in a non-threatening environment, calm, and self esteem. A personal narrative, and the inclusion of several stories from the participants were included in the analysis. While this is an area of study that warrants further research and educating colleagues prior to bringing a dog into a classroom environment, it is also an area of study that this full of possibilities and promise.

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FORWARD

The sun was just beginning to set as our car pulled into the drive. I jumped up from my spot on the couch and ran out onto the deck, shaking with anticipation. It was time. She was finally here! Eric climbed out of the car first, and gave me a small, knowing grin. He knew that I was anxiously awaiting her arrival.

“Well?” I asked. “Where is she?”

Eric slowly opened the passenger door, reached in, and placed a small brown object on the ground. It was difficult to see her; she seemed to blend in with the encroaching darkness. As I crouched down, Eric called out, “Go get Melissa”. Out of the darkness came a tiny pixie of a dog; with legs that were still too big for her body, and eyes that seemed to pierce straight through to my heart. She slowly galloped (in that clumsy puppy manner) towards me and climbed up onto my lap. She reached up with her tongue and gave me an introductory lick. She then proceeded to nuzzle my neck and softly whimper. I picked her up and held her close. She was warm and fuzzy, with that distinctive sweet puppy smell. I started to cry, and thought, “this is it”. This is who I have been waiting for. I whispered softly into her ear, “Welcome home, Tessa”. She gave me another lick and nuzzled into my neck further. Eric looked over and smiled. And I felt—bliss.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In the Beginning ...

While Tessa was the first dog I ever owned, she is certainly not the first animal to come into my life; although she may be the most significant. Some of my earliest memories surround interactions with animals. My Mom has a photo of my sister and me (I believe we were five and three) hanging in her bedroom. My sister is sitting on a swing, with a huge smile on her face. I am sitting on the grass in front of her. I have two large scabs on my knees (I don't think there is a picture of me as a child without some sort of visible injury!), and I am holding three kittens. I too have an abnormally large smile on my face, but I am not smiling at the camera. I am smiling down at the kittens I am holding. Our cat, Tabby, had just given birth to kittens several weeks earlier. We gave the kittens away, and my Mom said I cried myself to sleep for weeks afterwards. Apparently they ended up having to buy me a special toy to help me cope. What was the toy you ask? Well, it was a plastic dog that I pulled around on a string. She was a dog detective, complete with "Sherlock Holmes" hat and cloak. I named her Rosie, and she literally went everywhere with me: to the bathtub, bed, dinner table, car, and so on. We were inseparable.

Growing up in a military family, there were always a large number of things that were constantly changing. I was always in a new school, always trying to make new friends, and always overwhelmingly anxious about it all. Throughout all of it, however, there was a constant. We were never without a family pet. Those pets were always there for me to "talk to" and receive comfort from. As a child I was (and still am to some degree) shy. Moving around all the

time just seemed to add to my anxiety and nervousness, but having a family pet always seemed to normalize things a bit.

The constant moving put a strain on my ability to adapt and make friends. I often felt defeated by the constant moves: why should I bother to make friends when I was just going to have to leave them in a couple of years anyway? I often withdrew, and became somewhat socially isolated and awkward--all due to fears of rejection and low self-esteem. It was a difficult cycle to shake as it more often than not became a self-fulfilling prophecy. The impact of my shortcomings was not fully realized until adulthood when I was forced to make a decision. I had come to the realization that I was intentionally isolating myself. I was, to some degree, damaged. Now, my Mom will argue with you that I had a natural affinity for animals, and that is why they became such a large part of my life. I agree with her somewhat, but I also believe that I really did take solace in the interactions I had with them. Our pets became safe confidants to whom I could express what was deep inside, without punishment or repercussions. Odeon Cusack, author of *Pets and Mental Health* (1988), contends that, "For an emotionally troubled youngster, the animal's role can be paramount, offering solace, comfort, security and a listening post in a way that no human can" (p. 95). Our cat Tabby, and dogs Andy, Jenny, and Sarah filled the void over the years left from a broken relationship with my family, difficulties making friendships due to our constant moving, and my sometimes debilitating shyness. Through early adulthood, the void has been filled by my cats Zoe and Zak; and of course, my dog Tessa.

An Idea Takes Hold

Seven years ago this spring, Tessa was brought into our lives. We purchased her from a German Wire-haired Pointer breeder in Nebraska, and were set to pick her up over the July 1st long weekend. At the time, I was teaching a Grade 1/2 multi-age class. The children in my class knew that we were getting Tessa over the summer because of the photos I shared from the breeder. At the end of that school year, I made a promise to the children that I would bring her in one day in the fall so that they could meet her. They were very excited at the prospect.

Over the summer months, I brought Tessa in to school with me while I was getting things ready for the up and coming school year. She was very well-behaved during those visits. She would often just curl up on my chair and sleep, or wander around the classroom. It was after Thanksgiving when I finally brought Tessa in to meet the children. I did a considerable amount of preparation to prepare the children for her arrival. We talked endlessly about safe animal behaviour, and decided what “rules” we would have when she came to visit. The children even had a “Tessa countdown” in which they kept a tally of how many days until her visit. Yes, it was safe to say that they were excited, and so was I.

Once the children got over the initial, “Oh my goodness! There’s a dog in our classroom!” the day went really well. So well in fact, that half way through the day I invited my administrator down to take a look at what was happening. It was as though Tessa was immediately accepted as a fellow classmate and fully embraced into our classroom community. She was lying beside kids on the carpet area as they worked, some were reading to her. Basically, they began treating her like a classmate. Tessa was eating it up as well. She was very gentle and careful around the children. My administrator was amazed by what she saw. I asked

her if I could possibly bring Tessa again, or on a more regular basis, and she agreed that it was worth a try. She, and I, loved what we saw.

And thus began my current journey with Tessa involved with me at school. After that day, Tessa visited our class on a one day per week basis. “Magic” was all around us on those days. Reluctant readers and writers were snuggling up to Tessa to read and write with her, and about her. She had her own birthday cupcake on our chart, and her own attendance card. My bulletin board became full of drawings the children made of her (some of them for her, not me). Basically, she crept into our classroom lives even on “non-Tessa days”, and I was continually amazed by what I was seeing in the classroom. One of my graduate classes at the time had a final assignment where we needed to research anything that was going on in our classroom. I decided to do a bit of digging into the involvement of animals in the classroom, just for interest sake, to see what I might learn. It turned out that it was a topic I was very interested in learning more about, and I completed that assignment with ease. Further reading and research led me in the direction of the topics of creating a caring classroom and fostering emotional intelligence. All of these topics seemed to fit in with what I was observing in the classroom with Tessa. And thus, an area of inquiry was born. It was brought forth after a parallel emotional and spiritual journey within, and realized in front of me in my classroom. Seeing my students interact with Tessa brought me all the way back to my childhood and what my interactions with animals had meant to me. A seed was planted, and it has grown to where I am now.

The Evolution of an Idea

Upon entering the teaching profession eleven years ago, I had a clear vision of the teacher I wanted to become. I wanted to reflect daily upon my practices so that I could make the most out of my teaching. I wanted to be open to new ideas, collaborate with other teachers, stay motivated, and not fall into a rut. More than anything, however, I wanted to bring “myself” into the classroom. I always found it somewhat strange when colleagues would refer to their “teaching selves” and “personal selves” as separate and distinctive identities. To me, it seems impossible to distinguish between the two. Teaching, more than perhaps any other profession, is an incredibly personal act. It is an extension of ourselves. It seemed odd to me then that I was being told by seasoned teachers to be two different people. Their reasoning at the time was that I needed to be professional and maintain a position of authority within my classroom. Again, this seemed foreign to me. Could I not be myself and achieve that too? Early on I decided to keep most of the advice I was given “under my hat” (knowing that I’d need to sort it out on my own), and just be myself. I believe that I am a kind, caring, compassionate, empathetic, patient, and loving individual. I wanted to let those characteristics be my “teaching driving force” as well.

As a result, I became interested in the notion of a caring classroom; a safe place for children to be themselves and where learning, as a result, flourishes. Rogers and Webb (1991) state, “Caring is the basis for thoughtful educational and moral decision making, and it requires action” (p. 174). Goldstein and Freedman (2003) contend, “The core of caring teacher education lies in the nature of the interactions between the teacher educator and her (his) students” (p. 442). And finally, Noddings (2005) believes, “A child’s place in our hearts and lives should not depend on his or her academic prowess” (p. 13). Essentially, care is at the core of thoughtful and purposeful teaching, and is paramount for academic growth to occur. The

relationship between student and teacher becomes reciprocal in nature. A teacher giving of herself or himself in an honest and true manner often results in students not only returning that level of care, but also opening themselves up to the learning possibilities around them.

It is essential to also take into account what part of yourself you are bringing into the classroom on a daily basis. Children are extremely perceptive, and will instantly pick up on the “mood” of the room. This is where emotional intelligence comes in to play. Again, like care, emotional intelligence is a “two-way street”. We display our emotional intelligence outwardly just as the children in our classroom do. Low emotional intelligence, or an inability to read the emotions of others becomes problematic, as it leaves you unable to change your interactions with people “on the fly”. If you are unable to read or understand when someone has become upset, for example, you will not be able to modify your actions and conversation with them as needed. As Kremenitzer (2005) states, “It is important, therefore to challenge early childhood teachers particularly veteran teachers, to take a closer look at their own social and emotional skills within the classroom setting and to systematically reassess these skills through an emotionally intelligent lens” (p. 3). Ellison (2001) takes it a step further when she states, “Handling our emotions is a learned skill that affects the rest of our lives. It is an ever present task” (p. 21). If then, it is important as an adult to be more cognizant of our emotions, it only makes sense then that it could be an area that children need assistance with as well. Ellison (2001) contends, “For many children, our schools play a major role in teaching them how to handle their emotions” (p. 22). Unfortunately for some of our students, school may be the only environment where they see positive role modelling. It is paramount then, to allow our schools to be places where care, and social/emotional support and learning are occurring on a daily basis (McCombs, 2004, p. 33). It is far too important to ignore.

Guiding Questions

The intent of this research study is to not only shed light on, and contribute to a growing body of research surrounding the use of animals in the classroom, but to also closely examine the relationship and interconnectedness of all three concepts: care in the classroom, emotional intelligence, and the presence of animals in a school setting.

The research questions to be examined are:

- 1) How has the inclusion of a dog in a classroom setting impacted the learning and emotional needs of the students involved?
- 2) How has the level of care among the children and towards an animal been affected by the involvement of a dog in a classroom?
- 3) What are the potential benefits and challenges of having a dog in the classroom?

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Care

According to Nel Noddings (1984) the meaning of the word “care” has many layers. To care can mean to take a “responsibility type role”, especially if it is used in the sense of caring for someone. It can also, however, be closely related to the word “burden”; both professional and private. Finally, care can be related to the feelings evoked surrounding a person, situation, or interest. In more recent work, Noddings (2005) furthers this idea by suggesting that a caring relation is a “Connection or encounter between two human beings, a carer and a recipient of care, or cared for” (p. 15). Essentially, care is a relationship where both parties have to be open and receptive to acknowledge and continue the relationship. Noddings (2005) contends that, “The desire to be cared for is almost certainly a universal human characteristic” (p. 17). However, this manifests differently among individuals. In his book *Whole Child Education* (2010), author John Miller states, “Caring is conveyed by non-verbal behaviour as well; a warm smile and direct eye contact can be as powerful as any spoken word” (p. 98). It does not necessarily equal hugs, kisses, or intimate moments. It could also be shown as giving respect, a smile, kindness, and so on. Caring is individualized.

Building upon the work of Noddings, Lisa Goldstein (1999) adds, “Caring is not something you are but, rather, something you engage in, something you do” (p. 656). It is an all encompassing act that requires willing participants. For Goldstein (1999), “Caring then, is simultaneously a choice, a responsibility and an obligation, involving both affect and volition” (p. 656). Much like Noddings (2005), Goldstein (1999) believes that a caring relation involves

more than one person, and should ultimately enhance the relationship—on both sides. She states, “Caring encounters should sustain and enhance, not weaken and diminish, both the one-caring and the cared-for” (p. 660). It is therefore easily concluded that a caring relation between that of teacher and student would only serve to enhance the lives of both parties, and something that should be explored.

The Teacher as a Caring Person

Unfortunately for some of our students today, one of their only stable loving relationships might be the one which they share with their teacher. Noddings (2005) contends that while the teacher/student relationship is not necessarily as close as that with their parent; for some children it is just as, if not more, important. It has become almost essential then, that this be an attitude or behaviour that is not only sought among educators, but one that is attempted to be cultivated as well (Rogers & Webb, 1991, p. 174). In their article, “*The Ethic of Caring in Teacher Education*”, Dwight Rogers and Jaci Webb (1991), state that, “Thoughtful consideration of caring must become central in teacher education, so that the ethic of care can guide teachers’ professional decision making” (p. 174). The authors add, “Like the nurturing parent, the caring teacher can help fulfill a child’s basic need for security and attachment by considering what is best for the child” (p. 176). And finally, “As in relationships with their parents, students need to know that their teachers are steady, dependable, and always there for them” (p. 176). A seemingly stable adult figure in an ever changing world could make the world of difference to a student.

Noddings (2005) strongly believes that the social and emotional climate in which our students live is vastly changing. She states, “They feel alienated from their schoolwork, separated from the adults who try to teach them, and adrift in a world perceived as baffling and hostile” (p. 2). It is therefore essential that both schools and teachers be prepared for their role as care givers in the lives of their students. She states, “Schools should be committed to a great moral purpose: to care for children so that they too, will be prepared to care” (p. 64). Furthermore, Noddings (2005) contends that students and teachers need each other: “Students need competent adults to care; teachers need students to respond to their caring” (p. 69). It is therefore much like any other reciprocal relationship; complete with lots of give and take.

Rogers and Webb (1991) have found that students often bring up the notion of caring in relation to what they see as good teaching and good teachers. They (students) believe that “Good teachers are caring teachers” (p. 174). The authors agree with the students, stating, “Good teachers care, and good teaching is inextricably linked to specific acts of caring” (p. 174). So what then, is a caring teacher? According to Rogers and Webb (1991), a caring teacher has three defining characteristics. First, a caring teacher encourages dialogue. This dialogue is between students and teacher, as well as students to students. Second, a caring teacher is aware and sensitive to the needs and interests of their students. In other words, they do not merely teach content, but attend to all aspects of their students individually. And finally, caring teachers make school fun. This may be accomplished through engaging activities, meaningful “outside the box” experiences, and being given the opportunity to deviate from the curriculum to an area of special interest (p. 174). These ideas align with Noddings’ (2005) thinking in that, “Caring teachers listen and respond differentially to their students” (p. 19). Goldstein (1999) states it best as, “Children’s engagement with a task and willingness to challenge themselves are maximized

when collaboration with the adult is pleasant, warm, and responsive” (p. 654). Perhaps then, a way to ensure that teachers in our schools today fall into the category of that of a caring person is by making it an integral part of the curriculum.

The Caring Curriculum

Rogers and Webb (1991) believe that it is important to educate the whole child; not simply the child’s cognitive domain. One cannot assume to educate the individual without paying attention to his or her underlying emotional well being and character. They state, “The education of the whole child, based on an ethic of care, is a necessary first step in the process of addressing both the individual’s and society’s needs in a meaningful and lasting way” (p. 176). Noddings (2005) beliefs follow along the same lines. She states, “To make real changes in education and escape the dull tick-tock of pendulum swings, we have to set aside the deadly notion that the school’s first priority should be intellectual development” (p. 12). Further to this, Fopiano and Hayes (2001) add, “School success, then, involves not only developing cognitive skills, but also forming friendships, developing interactive skills with groups, and understanding oneself and one’s behaviour” (p. 47). The solution then, it would seem, lies with us and how a caring curriculum is carried out within the walls of our classrooms: “Caring, is not merely the development of warm, interpersonal relationships. It must be embodied in the curriculum” (Rogers & Webb, 1991, p. 177). Miller (2010) furthers these statements as he believes that the essential way to reach a child is in providing him or her with a community that is caring at its core. Miller (2010) sees this as beginning in the classroom, with the teacher setting the tone and the children taking the reins.

Noddings (2005) brings it all the way back to John Dewey, who believed that students should develop their own learning constructs, and work together to problem solve. Noddings contends that, “Classrooms should be places in which students can legitimately act on a rich variety of purposes, in which wonder and curiosity are alive, in which students and teachers live together and grow” (p. 12). Adler (2002) takes it a step further and states that care itself cannot be achieved without first looking to the wants, needs, and desires of your students. She states, “Care, the ability to naturally care for and about one another, increases self-esteem, augments sense of belonging, creates a sense of service to others, and cannot be maintained without employing intellectual inquiry and flexibility” (p. 246). The classroom is the ideal, natural setting for this.

A classroom should be a place to wonder, grow, and feel safe. McKernan (2008) would argue that the classroom and curriculum should be one that does its best to tap into one’s imagination and creativity. He states, “A curriculum must provide opportunities for students to think critically and fully for themselves” (p. 22). Furthermore, he believes, “Too many of the things that students experience in school curriculum do not matter in the living of one’s life” (p. 3). McKernan (2008) contends that curriculum should be something more. It should truly test us, and not in the traditional sense of the word. He states, “A curriculum is something of taste and judgement, testing the power of creativity, research, and evaluation, calling upon our best powers of imagination” (p. 10). Finally, McKernan believes that real change will come when we put the power of curriculum development into the hands of our teachers: “Giving teachers the role of curriculum development and research is an ultimate act of democratic education for it admits to authority and power to change at the local level and requests educators to operate

within a reflective research and professional development” (p. 18). How, then, can care become manifested either directly or indirectly in our curriculum?

McKernan (2008) believes that there are essentially five types of curriculum. The first is the formal curriculum. This is the government mandated curriculum; the curriculum that is clearly laid out with guideline and goals. It is often subject area specific. The second is the informal curriculum. This is the curriculum that is formed in support of the formal curriculum. Field trips or extra-curricular activities would fall into this category. Thirdly, there is the null curriculum. It may be defined as, “The curriculum that schools do not teach but that is perhaps equally as important as the formal curriculum” (p. 35). The fourth type of curriculum is that of the actual curriculum. This is what is actually being taught day to day in our classrooms. And finally, we end with the hidden curriculum. It is, “the curriculum that is latent or covert, but present in school culture” (p. 36). Lessons on care could be directly or indirectly taught in any of those “curriculum areas”. The argument could be made that many teachers include “lessons on care” in many different and varied ways; perhaps infused in one of the curricular domains.

In order to determine how these curriculums are carried out in our classrooms, we must first determine what kind of curricular ideology we subscribe to as educators. McKernan (2008) believes that there are six such ideologies. While some teachers may fall more into one category than others, it is not unreasonable to have a teacher who subscribes to a bit of each ideology. The first ideology is the intellectual rationalist. A person who believes in this ideology is knowledge driven. They believe, “the function of education is to cultivate the intellect and to further intellectual growth by subjecting students to the most rational forms of subject organization that have been consistently passed on” (p. 28). The second ideology is the theoreligious. Here, philosophy and guiding questions are strongly rooted or founded in religious

principles or entities. Thirdly, there is the social-romantic ideology. This has its roots in the work of Dewey and getting children to be functional members of society. It “focuses upon the needs and interests of the child rather than the subject or content to be taught” (p. 29). Many educators follow this ideology. The fourth ideology is the technical-behavioural. This is an essentially capitalist view. A person subscribing to this ideology would be career and end results driven, and would “encourage students as consumers in the capitalist system: producing, measuring, and vocationalism” (p. 29). The fifth ideology is personal-caring. An individual subscribing to this ideology is concerned with the growth of their students as people, highlighting the skills of self actualization, inner harmony, self-respect, and the dignity and worth of others. Within this ideology, students would learn to make moral decisions and choices which would therefore affect their well-being, as well as the well being of others. Many educators follow this ideology. A person who followed this ideology is most likely to naturally incorporate care into their curriculum. The final ideology is critical-political. This perspective is rooted in the social reconstructionist view, and is aimed at exposing the values of the curriculum. A person who subscribes to this ideology would question the validity of the formal curriculum.

For care to weave itself naturally into the curriculum, the teacher must first subscribe to an ideology such as the social-romantic, or the personal-caring, and then be willing to implement it into the curriculum. Adler (2002) states, “Caring teachers make it their business to be aware of the particular learning styles of all students and then gear their curriculum and instruction and social organization decisions accordingly” (p. 246). It is not something that should be tackled offhandedly or without a great deal of time and consideration. It is far too important. As Fopiano and Hayes (2001) state, “The early school experiences to which a child is exposed contribute significantly to the individuality and perceptions that determine how this individual

may view and respond to the world” (p. 47). It is a significant and lasting impression, and therefore essential to ensure it is as positive and warm as possible. In this sense, a first impression is extremely significant.

Emotional Intelligence

Prior to establishing a working definition of emotional intelligence, it is necessary to first take a step back and examine the theory of multiple intelligences. Howard Gardner (2006), a pioneer in the field, believed that traditional measurements used to test intelligence were insufficient. He believed that intelligence was a multi-faceted entity that differed from person to person. For Gardner (2006), cognitive competence was best described as abilities, talents, or mental skills which he deemed “intelligences”. He states, “An intelligence entails the ability to solve problems or fashion products that are of consequence in a particular cultural setting or community” (p. 6). Gardner (2006) developed a set of seven core intelligences. They are: musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, naturalist, existential, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Both interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences are important in developing a working understanding of what emotional intelligence is and how it works.

Gardner (2006) believed that interpersonal intelligence, “builds on a core capacity to notice distinctions among others--in particular, contrasts in their moods, temperaments, motivations, and intentions” (p. 15). Adults who are savvy in this area are able to read the intentions and desires of others; even if they are unspoken or hidden. Gardner contends, “Damage in this area can cause profound personality changes while leaving other forms of problem solving unharmed--after such an injury, a person is often not ‘the same person’” (p. 15). Furthermore, Gardner (2006) believed that when a close attachment to a mother (or someone in a

mother role) is not possible or engaged, “normal” interpersonal development becomes much more difficult.

According to Gardner (2006) an individual with strong intrapersonal skills could be characterised by having the ability to know internal aspects of themselves, understand one’s range of emotions, and have the capacity to decipher and distinguish their emotions in order to eventually label them and draw upon them to build understanding and guide behaviour. “Interpersonal intelligence allows one to understand and work with others. Intrapersonal intelligence allows one to understand and work with oneself” (p. 18). Furthermore, Gardner (2006) states, “A person with good intrapersonal intelligence has a viable and effective model of him- or herself one consistent with a description constructed by careful observers who know that person intimately” (p. 17). Being aware of your own level of inter and intrapersonal skills is therefore an essential skill that you must be acutely aware of, as it helps you navigate the world around you.

Building upon the foundation laid by Gardner, Daniel Goleman (1995) furthered these ideas into what has become known as emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence draws upon many of the multiple intelligences as described by Gardner (2006), but both interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence align themselves nicely with Goleman’s (1995) thinking. Goleman (1995) states that emotional intelligence is, “abilities such as being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one’s moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; and to empathize and hope” (p. 34). Goleman (1995) believes that those individuals who have the ability to manage or navigate their own feelings and those of others are at a significant advantage in any domain, and are more likely to be happy, effective, and productive. Essentially, “emotional life is a domain that, as

surely as math or reading, can be handled with greater or lesser skill, and requires its unique set of competencies” (p. 36). It demands a specific skill set.

From here, Goleman (1995) expanded his definition of emotional intelligence to include five domains. The first domain is knowing one’s emotions. This, essentially, is self-awareness. It is the ability to recognize a feeling as it happens. According to Goleman (1995), “People with greater certainty about their feelings are better pilots of their lives, having a surer sense of how they really feel about personal decisions” (p. 43). The second domain is managing emotions. This is the ability to shake off or soothe irritability as well as handle or manage feelings appropriately. Goleman (1995) states, “People poor in this ability are constantly battling feelings of distress, while those who excel can bounce back from a set back quickly” (p. 43). This domain may be difficult for those who suffer from depression. The third domain is motivating oneself. Individuals high in this domain are highly effective and productive with any task they set out to accomplish. The fourth domain is recognizing emotions in others. Essentially, this is the ability to be empathetic. A person who scores high in this domain is more aware of the cues individuals display socially. And finally, the fifth domain is handling relationships. An individual high in this domain is very savvy socially. It is the domain that underlies popularity, leadership, and interpersonal effectiveness. This domain is perhaps the most important. Goleman (1995) states, “The art of relationships is, in large part, skill in managing emotions in others” (p. 43). This domain is not only perhaps the most important, but also possibly the trickiest to navigate as well as it draws upon a vast skill set that does not necessarily come naturally to everyone.

Goleman (1995) also believes that when dealing with, or navigating our emotions, we generally fall into three main styles. The first style is self aware. Here, an individual knows

their moods as they are experiencing them. These individuals have a more positive outlook, and do not tend to obsess over bad moods. Therefore, they are able to recover more quickly than others. According to Goleman (1995), “In short, their mindfulness helps them manage their emotions” (p. 48). The second style is engulfed. Here, an individual often becomes overwhelmed by their emotions, and feels helpless to escape what they are feeling. Essentially, it is the mood itself that is in charge. People who have this style are generally not aware of their feelings, they often feel they have no control over their emotional lives. The final style is accepting. An individual who is characterized by this style might be clear about whatever he or she is feeling, but he or she also accepts what is happening without trying to change, learn, or grow from it. These individuals are generally either happy or depressed.

The Emotionally Intelligent Teacher

Why is it important for a teacher to be emotionally intelligent? How will it affect his or her students growth and learning? Bahman and Maffini (2008) believe, “If we want to teach children to be emotionally intelligent, we first need to be emotionally intelligent” (p. 8). Further to this, Kremenitzer (2005) states, “Being able to regulate and manage your emotions within the classroom is an important factor for effective and successful teaching” (p. 7). Jennings and Greenberg (2009) take this thinking one step further and state:

Socially and emotionally competent teachers set the tone of the classroom by developing supportive and encouraging relationships with their students, designing lessons that build on student strengths and abilities, establishing and implementing behavioural guidelines in ways that promote intrinsic motivation, coaching students through conflict situations, encouraging cooperation among students and acting as a role model for respectful and appropriate communication and exhibitions of prosocial behaviour (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, p. 492)

Finally, according to Bahman and Maffini (2008), “Developing self-awareness is a vital skill for teachers. When you have good self knowledge, you can better understand your students, and when you understand your students, you can definitely teach them better” (p. 7). Essentially, the authors indicate that if you want your students to be emotionally aware, you must first become aware yourself.

The stakes are quite high when a teacher is unable to navigate his or her own emotional world. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) believe that if a teacher is unable to manage or navigate her own emotional needs or challenges, it will lead to an inability to do so with her students. It also leads to an increase in “off-task” behaviours and poor performance on tasks. The authors also state:

The deteriorating climate is marked by increases in troublesome student behaviours, and teachers become emotionally exhausted as they try to manage them. Under these conditions, teachers may resort to reactive and excessively punitive responses that do not teach self-regulation and may contribute to a self-sustaining cycle of classroom disruption (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, p. 492).

Kremenitzer(2005) agrees. She believes that teachers often become complacent and fall back into old habits and practices that they know are not helpful under the pressure of being unable to manage their own emotions and those of their students. It is therefore easy for teachers to become emotionally exhausted. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) state, “Emotionally exhausted teachers are at risk of becoming cynical and callous and may eventually feel they have little to offer or gain from continuing and so drop out of the teaching workforce. Others may stay, although unhappily, coping by maintaining a rigid classroom climate enforced by hostile and sometimes harsh measures bitterly working at a suboptimal level of performance until retirement” (p. 492). While the emotional lives of a teacher’s students may take their toll, a teacher’s own private life might also be a factor in her ability to negotiate emotions. Jennings

and Greenberg (2009) contend, “A teacher’s overall well-being and efficacy as well as factors such as friendships, marital relations, and degrees of life stress in a teacher’s personal life might also affect the performance of social and emotional abilities in the classroom” (p. 494). It is naïve to believe that a teacher, much like any other person, would be able to completely leave her personal life at the door. However, it is essential to realise and correct when the boundary between the two is becoming blurred and one is adversely affecting the other.

While those teachers with low emotional intelligence may experience negative effects both in and out of classroom, a teacher with high emotional intelligence may just as easily experience positive effects in and out of the classroom. Having a positive work environment, or one that acknowledges the importance of emotional intelligence is key in promoting the overall well-being of teachers . Radford (2003) states, “There is an ‘emotional culture’ in the school that is made up of the emotional dispositions of teachers and is implicit in the attitudes and values that the school espouses” (p. 256). It is often said that moods are contagious; so it is critical to have the right tone and environment for our students to learn and grow in. While this may begin with self examination and personal emotional work, it can also include improvements or changes to one’s teaching practice. According to Jennings and Greenberg (2009), “Improvements in classroom climate may reinforce a teacher’s enjoyment of teaching, efficacy, and commitment to the profession, thereby creating a positive feedback loop that may prevent teacher burnout” (p. 493). In addition to this, “A healthy classroom climate directly contributes to students’ social, emotional, and academic outcomes” (p. 493). Miller (2010) sees the world revolving around love, and love should, therefore, also be at the core of teaching and teaching practices.

The role of the teacher in the lives of many students is of vital importance. For some students, this may be the only opportunity they have to connect with a positive role model. A

teacher is constantly under the watchful eye of their students; it is therefore paramount to present our best selves each day. According to Jennings and Greenberg (2009), “Teachers influence their students not only by how and what they teach, but also by how they relate, teach, and model social and emotional constructs and manage the classroom” (p. 499). If that teacher has a high level of emotional intelligence, the opportunities become that much greater for their students to grow and learn: “When teachers are warm and supportive, they provide students with a sense of connectedness with the school environment and the sense of security to explore new ideas and take risks-both fundamental to learning” (p. 500). The authors also state, “A teacher’s support and sensitive reactions to their [students] challenging behaviours may have lasting positive effects on the students’ social and emotional development” (p. 501). This may also contribute to the teacher’s ability to foster a positive sense of community in the classroom: “When teachers foster a sense of community in their classrooms, students exhibit a more pro-social orientation (cooperative, helpful, concern for others), resulting in fewer disruptive behaviours” (p. 508). The classroom becomes equated with a family setting; this family-like community is a place where they can learn, grow, and feel safe to be themselves.

According to Noddings (2006), “Possibly no goal of education is more important or more neglected-than self understanding” (p. 10). Why is it then that many teachers do not recognise the important of emotional intelligence in their students? As previously discussed, the hesitation may reside with the teacher themselves and their own conception of emotional intelligence, or even their own personal level of emotional intelligence. It is, nonetheless, of critical importance to recognize and foster emotional intelligence in our students. As Cigman (2008) states, “Childhood is a time during which feelings about one’s worth develop through attachments to adults, and those can have lifelong importance” (p. 545). Fopiano and Haynes (2001) suggest

that to develop emotional intelligence: “A school must be able to provide learning opportunities to build and strengthen children’s affective and cognitive skills simultaneously” (p. 48). Low emotional intelligence consistently leads to both academic and social difficulties from childhood and beyond: “Emerging epidemiological studies are confirming the intuitive belief that early manifestations of social and emotional difficulties are strongly associated with continuing problems through childhood” (Mugno & Rosenblitt, 2001, p. 60). Wang, Walber, Weissberg, and Zins (2004) in their article, “*The Scientific Base Linking Social and Emotional Learning to School Success*” agree that emotions-either positive or negative can either help or hinder school success. They indicate that the evidence is clearly laid out and supportive of the notion that utilizing emotional intelligence education in turn fosters strong academic learning.

A child (or adult for that matter) who does not have the emotional intelligence to ride out whatever has been thrown at him or her is one that faces negative consequences in the classroom. According to Goleman (1995):

The extent to which emotional upsets can interfere with mental life is no news to teachers. Students who are anxious, angry, or depressed don’t learn; people who are caught in these states do not take in information efficiently or deal with it well. When emotions overwhelm concentration, what is being swamped is the mental capacity cognitive scientists call ‘working memory’, the ability to hold in mind all information relevant to the task at hand (Goleman, 1995, p. 78-79).

While the window of opportunity to build emotional intelligence in children is an extended one, there are none the less milestones and markers that if left undeveloped at their critical time, could remain undeveloped. Goleman (1995) believes that the ability to be empathetic is one of them. He states, “When a parent consistently fails to show empathy with a particular range of emotion in the child-joys, tears, needing to cuddle-the child begins to avoid expressing, and perhaps even feeling those same emotions. In this way, presumably entire ranges of emotion can begin to be obliterated from their repertoire.” (p. 101). He goes on to state:

It stands to reason that the key skills of emotional intelligence each have critical periods extending over several years in childhood. Each period represents a window for helping that child instill beneficial emotional habits, or, if missed, to make it that much harder to offer corrective lessons later in life. The massive sculpting and pruning of neural circuits in childhood may be an underlying reason why early emotional hardships and trauma have such enduring and pervasive effects in adulthood (Goleman, 1995, p. 227).

Developing emotional intelligence within the lives of teachers and students is a difficult task, but certainly one that cannot be left undeveloped. Radford (2003) refers to Aristotle who suggests that emotional intelligence begins to emerge in infancy: “Aristotle suggested that infants are born with a basic set of emotional responses that can be refined and developed in the context of schooling in the qualities of character, courage, loyalty, confidence, and the emotions that relate to love of intellectual and aesthetic truth” (p. 265). Such early development is ignored at our peril. In closing, Kremenitzer (2005) calls for educators to take action. She states, “It is important, therefore, to challenge early childhood teachers particularly veteran teachers, to take a closer look at their own social and emotional skills within the classroom setting and to systematically reassess these skills through an emotionally intelligent lens” (p. 3). It therefore is up to us as educators to take a stand and make promoting/fostering emotional intelligence within ourselves and our classrooms a priority. Change is possible: we just need to be willing to take the first steps.

Animal/Human Relationship

The Emotional Lives of Animals

For many individuals, it is not credible to suggest that animals have the capacity to develop, foster, and maintain emotional lives. The idea is rife with controversy. Marc Bekoff, an ecologist, and pioneer in the field of research surrounding the emotional lives of animals,

however, is beginning to open up our minds about animals and their capacities as emotional beings. Bekoff (2007) states, “It’s because animals have emotions that we’re so drawn to them; lacking a shared language, emotions are perhaps our most effective means of cross-species communication” (p. 15). Furthermore, “if animals didn’t show feelings, it’s unlikely that people would bond with them” (p. 19). Sharon Sakson (2007) believes that it is more the give and take relationship with animals that appeals to us as humans: “They offer[ed] their owners raw, unfiltered, and unconditional love, trust, and respect” (p. 63). Odeon Cusack (1988) agrees with all of Sakson’s observations, but also focuses on what animals do for us as they display their emotions. He states, “Pets provide unconditional love and acceptance; they offer spontaneous affection and undying loyalty” (p. 9). He goes on to state, “By relating to animals, we can once again become part of nature and thereby heal many of the rifts in our souls caused at least in part by our more civilized lifestyle” (p. 26). This is a relationship or connection that has been thousands of years in the making.

Bekoff (2007) contends that animals essentially have two main types of emotions. These are primary and secondary emotions. Primary emotions are those the animal is born with. These are emotions such as: fear, happiness, sadness, surprise, disgust, and anger. They are reflex like in their expression, and instinctual in their origins. These emotions and responses are “hardwired” in the brains of animals through generations of evolution. Secondary emotions are much more complex. These are processed in higher areas of the cerebral cortex, and are not automatic in their delivery. They are processed in the brain, and then a decision is made about what will be done with them.

Temple Grandin, renowned animal behaviourist, agrees with Bekoff. She states, “All animals and people have the same core emotion systems in the brain” (p. 5). Grandin (2009)

believes that all animals are born with a core emotional system that consists of several innate emotional responses; they are: seeking, rage, fear, panic, lust, care, and play. These are the driving forces behind all animal interactions and displays of emotion. Regardless of the emotional system, or type of emotion displayed, both authors agree that core emotions are in their most raw, and real form. According to Bekoff (2007), “When animals express their feelings, they pour out like water from a spout: Animal’s emotions are raw, unfiltered, and often uncontrolled” (p. 19). He goes on to state, “Knowing that animals feel-and being able to understand them when they express joy, grief, jealousy, and anger-allows us to connect with them and also to consider their points of view when we interact with them” (p. 2). It is because of this, Bekoff (2007) contends, that we are drawn to them and often form close bonds.

The Human-Animal Bond

A bond, or perhaps level of intimacy forms with the animal once we see our emotions being displayed in them. It is a bond that is pure and honest in nature, and also one that can be mutually fulfilling. Bekoff (2007) states, “We form close relationships with our pets not only because of our own emotional needs but also because of our recognition of theirs” (p. 19). Cusack (1988) agrees and adds, “Unlike intimacy between humans, which requires some prior understanding, intimacy with an animal can be achieved instantly and can be expressed at times when such displays toward a human would be highly inappropriate” (p. 13). He goes on to state, “We can indulge our feelings for an animal far more freely than we can our feelings for another person” (p. 13). There is no fear of judgement.

Bernie Graham (2000) believes that there are essentially two schools of thought on how our attitudes and level of bonding with animals have developed. He sees it as a nature versus

nurture debate. Those who follow a nature point of view are in line with the thoughts of psychologist Carl Jung. Graham (2000) deemed this the “Jungian psychoanalytic approach” which builds upon the principle that, “(the) essence of our relationship (to animals) is innate” (p. 41). Essentially, we have learned through thousands of years of interaction with animals that there are both positive and negative situations and outcomes, as well as those which we should embrace or avoid. It is something that is hardwired within us; this is not necessarily something that needs to be learned. Another perspective presented by Graham (2000), who assumes a nurture stance, is that our interactions and level of bond is a learned response. Children may be encouraged to interact and view animals in a certain way based on the experiences of their parents or ways they may have experienced animals themselves. This is typically a reactive response, and based upon either a negative or positive interaction. Whatever school of thought individuals prescribe to, there is evidence that a bond with an animal is unlike anything else you may have experienced. Pichot & Coulter (2007) state:

People have a special kind of relationship with animals that can rarely be found with human companions. Animals have a way of accepting without judgement; they don't condition their love and affection, and they are able to quickly forgive injustice (Pichot & Coulter, 2007, p. 12).

For some children, the bond between themselves and an animal can be described as almost magical. Cusack (1988) sites interaction between animals as the most common dream sequence for children. Zasloff and Hart (1999) state, “Children seem to have a natural affinity for, and can be captivated by, animals. They can develop strong emotional attachments to their companion animals which can contribute to their development and quality of life” (p. 348). There is an innate curiosity and interest surrounding animals and children. Having a pet can be a life changing experience for anyone who is blessed enough to have one. According to Cusack (1988), “The pet, in addition to supplying love and companionship, can give a child purpose and

make him feel wanted” (p. 100). Cusack (1988) also contends that caring for a pet encourages and develops the ability to nurture, instills a sense of responsibility, and helps the child to keep to a daily schedule. Allen Schoen (2001) also believes that the lives of children may be greatly improved with the inclusion of a companion animal: “Animals may improve the quality of a child’s life by helping create a sense of trust, one of the building blocks of character formation. Companion animals also may facilitate play, exploration, and identity formation; cornerstones of healthy development” (p. 66). Pichot and Coulter (2007) agree with Schoen. These authors believe that the positive effects of a relationship between animal and child include: developing a sense of responsibility and self-esteem, building trust, and developing a sense of empathy towards other humans and animals. Furthermore, the authors state, “The pet provides a safe relationship in which imagination can flourish and social skills can be developed and practiced” (p. 13). Finally, Noddings (2006) states, “Life with pets, handled considerately, teaches us not only about responsibility in the sense of duty or obligation but also about response-ability” (p.148). Noddings (2006) also believes that conversations about our relationships with animals should start early in life, and deepen with age.

Animals in Caring Relationships

Companies and organizations around the world are beginning to recognize the role animals can play in breaking down barriers and in creating a more comfortable home- like setting. Companies such as Google and Amazon are not only bringing dogs into their offices, but are also using this as a strategy to hire and retain employees (Abrams, 2011, p. 19). Abrams (2011) states, “Dogs make it easier for employees to connect with one another and to communicate” (p. 19). Some banks are “getting on board” as well. Sunova Credit Union has St

Bernard D.O.G's (director of greetings) that are present to ease stress and make the environment more welcoming. It is also becoming increasingly common to see animals in the health care field as well. Roosevelt (2001) states, "Dogs in hospitals are treating human patients with secure, creature comfort and unconditional love" (p. 52). Roosevelt (2001) contends that animal involvement in patient care will soon be akin to the many machines and devices meant to prolong or sustain life.

Most animals involved in health care facilities are certified Therapy Dogs. While the use of a dog (or other animal) in a classroom designed to lift the level of care and emotional intelligence of the children within that classroom is a somewhat rare occurrence, the use of a therapy dog (or animal) is becoming increasingly popular. What exactly is Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT)? According to Parish-Plass (2008), AAT may be a way of breaking through to a difficult patient when other more traditional avenues have failed: "Animal-assisted therapy (AAT), a type of psychotherapy employing the presence of animals within the therapy setting, addresses these issues and provides avenues for circumventing these difficulties, as well as providing additional tools for reaching the inner world of the client" (p. 8). Parish-Plass (2008) believes that it is the animal human bond that allows for clients to see success. She states, "Animal-assisted therapy is based on emotional connection and relationship—between therapist and child, between therapist and animal, between child and animal, and between animal and animal" (p. 12). Jalongo et al. (2004) agree with this statement. They contend, "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" (p. 10).

Parish-Plass (2008) identifies several distinct and unique qualities consistent with Animal-assisted therapy, essentially, the "how and why" such a strategy might be considered in

case management. They are: an ability to enable a connection to the patient; invoking a sense of normalcy; friendliness in relation to the therapy setting; acceptance; self esteem; the animal as an attachment figure; development of more adaptive representations and strategies, empathy; as well as the need for control and touch. Jalongo et al. (2004) also identify that, “Animal-assisted activities show great promise for motivating children to complete academic activities, not only in reading but also across the curriculum” (p. 10). Furthermore, the authors state, “Research estimates that over 70% of children of all ages do tend to talk to and confide in animals” (p. 10). It appears then that there is a good reason to include an animal in a therapy type situation. Pichot and Coulter (2007) believe, “Dogs have the ability to mirror us back to ourselves in unmistakable ways that; if we are open, foster understanding and change” (p. 66). But perhaps Bekoff (2007) says it best as a concluding thought when he states, “Children also provide some of the best examples of the powerful effect of animal emotions and empathy on human lives” (p. 19). Animals are often a mirror to ourselves as a society and as individuals.

Therapy dogs are also being utilized as resources to support children’s reading development. First developed by Sandi Martin, a Salt Lake City nurse, READ programs (and programs that are similar, but not necessarily READ) are “popping up” across North America (Baskin, 2011, p. 47). READ, or Reading Education Assistance Dogs, are therapy dogs who “lend a paw” to struggling readers as they gain confidence and feel empowered. According to Baskin (2011), the program instils confidence in a safe, non-judgemental, non-threatening presence. The Winnipeg Humane Society has a similar program in See Spot Read (Speirs, 2008). Again, the program pairs children who are struggling with reading with therapy dogs to encourage reading and boost confidence. And, ultimately, this program can also boost the child’s level of emotional intelligence as well.

Animals in Schools

For many of the children in our classes today, the teacher may be the one constant, stable relationship in their lives. As stated by Rogers and Webb (1991), the need to have a caring teacher in the lives of his or her students is paramount. According to these authors, “Genuine caring fulfils the fundamental human need for security and attachment” (p. 176). Noddings (2005) furthers this by stating, “Caring in education differs from brief caring encounters in that it requires strong relations of trust upon which to build. Such relations take time and require continuity” (p. 64). And in the lives of our children today, it more important than ever for them to have someone (or something) to turn to. Fopiano and Hayes (2001) contend, “These [negative] circumstances, and how they are processed by the child, will influence the child’s perception and thus the child’s responses to learning objectives presented in the school environment” (p. 49). So what, then, would happen if all children in a classroom had both a teacher and companion animal as their vehicles of care and emotional support?

Noddings (2005) welcomes the idea. She believes that animals may be used to teach lessons about care, empathy, and responsibility. She cautions, however, that removing the pet must not be used as a threat for bad behaviour, and that all participants involved must want and enjoy the pet to fully reap the benefits. Zasloff and Hart (1999) agree with Noddings. Their article, “*Animals in Elementary School Education in California*” (1999) examines the attitudes and teacher/student perceived benefits and drawbacks of involving animals in elementary school settings. According to the authors, “The majority (73%) stated that the presence of live animals teaches the children care, responsibility, kindness, and respect for living things” (p. 351). The potentially bigger benefit, however, lies in the emotional/physiological benefits that occur when an animal is present in the life of a child over extended periods of time.

Jalongo et al. (2004) noted many positive physiological benefits to interacting with animals, specifically, dogs. They state, “Physiological measures such as a reduction on heart rate, lowered blood pressure, and other observable signs of anxiety reveal that interacting with a dog can moderate stress” (p. 9). Parish-Plass (2008) believes that animals in a therapy context can produce similar results with patients. She states, “The presence of animals provides a calming and less threatening atmosphere for therapy, enabling the child to work through traumatic issues” (p. 27). Indeed, Anderson and Olson (2006) also noted several positive benefits as well. Their article, “*The Value of a Dog in a Classroom of Children with Severe Emotional Disorders*” (2006) examined the effects of the 8 week involvement of a dog in a classroom with children who had severe emotional disorders, and found a significant de-escalation of emotional episodes, improvements in the children’s attitudes towards school, and contributions towards the students’ overall emotional stability, which allowed the students to learn and understand lessons on empathy, respect, and responsibility. The authors state:

The strong bonds between these children and the toy poodle subsequently contributed to the stabilization of the students’ emotions. The students’ relationships with the dog were instrumental in effectively managing their behaviours in that they seemed to have a greater sense of self and increased understanding of their emotional triggers and ways in which to solve their emotional difficulties (Anderson & Olson, 2006, p. 47).

Furthermore, Anderson and Olson found that the students, “Were respectful of the dog’s daily presence, were accepting of his behaviours, were empathic to his feelings, and were able to see the parallel between his feelings and their own” (p. 47). Rud and Beck (2000) agree that having an animal, improves a child’s self image and ability to connect with the world around him or her. They state, “There is evidence that the mere presence of animals alters a child’s attitudes towards him-or herself and improves the ability to relate to others” (p. 313). Indeed, the potential impact of having a dog in your classroom is quite powerful.

For many, the inclusion of a pet enhances the life they are living. Rud and Beck (2000) see the interactions of animals and children as one of the most natural things in the world. The authors state, “The interactions between animals and children are neither random nor rare. Children spend a disproportionate amount of time with animals. They are intensely, perhaps naturally, interested in animals” (p. 313). And why shouldn’t they be? Especially when, as Cusack (1988) states, “Talking to pets lowers blood pressure, but talking to people raises it” (p. 11). Cusack also believes, “The pet, however, is always there, always loving, and always willing both to give and accept affection” (p. 11). A silent partner, in a sense. Ever present, ever giving.

There are also indications that including a pet in the life of a child has positive effects on the child’s learning. Melson (2003) states, “ Although most studies of pets in children’s lives have understandably focused on social and emotional aspects, there are intriguing indications that companion animals also may play a role in perceptual, cognitive and language development” (p. 33). Melson (2003) believes that companion animals are powerful motivators for learning for two main reasons. The first is that, “children learn and retain more about subjects in which they are emotionally invested” (p. 34). And the second is that, “children’s learning is optimized when it occurs within meaningful relationships” (p. 34). Which is, essentially, the goal of education, especially for a teacher who is attuned to the emotional needs of his or her students. Bahman and Maffini (2008) state, “Creating and maintaining a positive; safe and healthy learning environment must be a top priority for teachers. If the environment is not a positive one, a great deal of teacher effort is wasted” (p. 19). The inclusion of a dog to a classroom environment could be an additional vehicle of care, safety, and overall well-being.

Melson (2003) believes that companion animals can assist in the development and formation of two functions of social emotional development. The first function is social support.

Melson (2003) has found that a lack of social support, especially for more vulnerable adults and children, places children at a significant risk for developing psychological and physical problems. She states, “Many pet-owning children derive emotional support from their pets” and adds that, “pet owners were as likely to talk to their pets about sad, angry, happy and secret experiences as with siblings” (p. 35). And finally, Melson concludes that, “Children appear to discriminate among the support provisions of different relationships; when comparing parents, friends, and pets, elementary school kids considered ties with pets as most likely to last ‘no matter what’ and ‘even if you get mad at each other’” (p. 35). The second function is nurturance. Melson (2003) believes animals (more specifically, pets) depend upon human care for survival and development, they can, therefore, provide children with opportunities to learn, practice, and be motivated by nurturing another living being. While there is no significant evidence that being able to nurture a pet equates with more caring or a more sensitive level of care provided to other humans, it does point out that there is consistent and compelling evidence to support that such nurturing leads to higher levels of empathy.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this study, qualitative research methods (grounded theory and narrative) have been selected. As a researcher, I wanted to select a method that allowed for discovery or insights in its analysis and interpretation while at the same time maintaining academic rigour. Qualitative research methods fit this criteria perfectly. As Creswell (2007) states, “Qualitative research is a form of inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand” (p. 39). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) note that, “Qualitative research is an umbrella term used to refer to several strategies” (p. 2). The authors go on to state, “The best known representatives of qualitative research are participant observation and in-depth interviewing” (p. 2). In this study, I conducted one on one interviews with six teachers who have dogs involved in their classrooms, facilitated a focus group with four of the participants, as well as included my own story; or personal narrative with reflections on my life with animals, personal experience with my dog Tessa at school, and thoughts on how Tessa currently fits with my role as an elementary Guidance Counsellor. All of these were conducted to ensure trustworthiness through a triangulation of results. This methodological design created opportunities for the intersection of what I heard, viewed, understood, and interpreted.

Creswell (2007) contends that we conduct qualitative research when there is an issue or problem that needs further examination, or because we are in search of a more detailed, complex understanding of the issue (p. 40). Furthermore, he believes, “We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices.” (p. 40). I connected with educators who use dogs in their classroom in order to record these stories. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the purposes of this study, Creswell (2007) believes,

“We use qualitative research to develop theories when partial or inadequate theories exist for certain populations and samples or existing theories do not adequately capture the complexity of the problem we are examining” (p. 40). As I progressed in my plans for this study, this need became more and more evident. I was on somewhat new theoretical ground with this research focus; not a great deal of literature exists in relation to the use of dogs in a classroom setting. Qualitative research methods allows for discovery and insight that can lead to an empirically supported theory construction.

Why Was Grounded Theory Selected?

Grounded theory was implemented to analyse, interpret, and synthesize the data into a cohesive, well-rounded articulation of the findings. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) believe that it is the job of a qualitative researcher to inductively interpret and analyse his or her data in order to see how the various pieces of the research puzzle fit together- to look for the themes, and interconnectedness (p. 31).

Grounded theory was selected because according to Creswell (2007), “Grounded theory is a good design to use when a theory is not available to explain a process” (p. 66). Grounded theory is essentially the revealing of theory from data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 1). Glaser and Strauss (1967) further suggest that, “Grounded theory can be presented either as a well codified set of propositions or in a running theoretical discussion, using conceptual categories and their properties” (p. 31). It is a form of analysis that allowed me as a researcher to form an initial theory, and then to shape that theory as it is changed or added to by participants in the study. As Creswell states, “Grounded theory is a qualitative research design in which the

inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, action, or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants” (p. 63). It was a natural fit for this study.

Data Collection

To ensure triangulation and trustworthiness of results, data was collected in several forms. Dey (1999), believed that it is, “important to collect from a variety of sources in order to reveal variations and confirm conceptualizations” (p. 6). For the purposes of this research, data was collected via episodic interviews, focus group, my personal story, and field notes.

As Creswell (2007) states, “In a grounded theory study, the researcher chooses participants who can contribute to the development of the theory” (p. 128). He adds, “The concept of purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research. This means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 125). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) agree with this practice, stating that such selection will only further develop and expand the theory (p. 71). For the purposes of this study, this criteria was implemented. Letters were sent out to all Winnipeg school divisions (see Appendix A), as well the surrounding rural divisions of Sunrise and Lord Selkirk. These letters clearly outlined the research and invited participants to get in touch with me to discuss the use of dogs in their classrooms as vehicles to promote emotional intelligence and increase levels of care among their students. It was my hope to have a minimum of five participants, and to conclude all interviews and complete observations within a three month time period. This was achieved.

Following this, episodic interviews were set up with each participant. The episodic interview, “facilitates the presentation of experiences in a general, comparative form and at the same time, it ensures that those situations and episodes are told in their specificity” (Flick, 2006, p. 182). It is based upon the assumption that the interviewees experiences will appear in the form of a running narrative, which may be teased out with carefully designed prompts (p. 181). As researcher, I prepared prompts (see Appendix B) of topical domains that related to situations specific to my research questions (p. 182). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) believe that it is also essential to build rapport as quickly as possible with participants to set them at ease and allow them to speak freely when asked questions (p. 96). They also caution against making the participants feel as though they are being evaluated or judged. Bogdan and Bilken (1992) state, “Question not to challenge, but to make clear” (p. 98). It is essential to control your facial and body language while listening and recording responses.

For Creswell (2007) the interview is key in grounded theory. He states, “Interviews play a central role in the data collection in a grounded theory. Other data forms besides interviewing, such as participant observation, research, reflection, or journaling, participant journaling, and focus groups may be used to help develop the theory” (p. 131). For the purposes of this study, all of the above were used except participant observation (in their respective classrooms) and journaling.

During the episodic interviews, a voice recording device was used, which was later used to transcribe the notes. It is important to know that context, body language, and level of perceived enthusiasm (of the participants) also came into play. While conducting the interviews, close attention was paid to all of these areas as they solidified the fact that those particular key words or phrases were the most important part of what was being said. These behaviours or

physical changes were noted in my field notes. For instance; it was easy to recognize that empathy was an important topic because the volume of the participant increased, and their body language showed enthusiasm and interest (leaning in, alert eyes, smiling). Participants not only verbally expressed the importance of these key words or phrases, but also in their body language and non-verbal cues. This is interpretive, but no less important than quantifiable results. As Stern (2011) believes, it is just as important. “Your interpretive thoughts, regardless from whence they derive, are always another source and form of data” (p. 51). In this case, it further assisted my research process. Grounded theory allows for this flexibility. From here, it became clear that there were several themes that occurred again and again in our conversations. In this sense, my field notes became essential while transcribing the notes. It was easier to recall exactly what the participant was saying/doing with the field notes there to guide me. After all, field notes are, “the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study” (Bogdan and Bilken, 1992, p. 107). They were essential to my research process.

In addition to the episodic interview, the participants were invited to participate in a focus group. According to Flick (2006), “The hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (p. 182). Creswell (2007) adds, “Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information, when interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other, when time to collect information is limited, and when individuals interviewed one on one may be hesitant to provide information” (p. 133). It is this dynamic that produced interesting insights into the participants programming; in terms of both highlighting the positives, and stating the negatives. As researcher, it was my job to ensure that

the atmosphere was casual and conducive to informal discussion (p. 198). Again, a guiding set of questions were on hand (see Appendix B), and the conversation was voice recorded to be transcribed at a later point.

Finally, I included my own personal story. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) refer to this as personal documents. “The phrase personal documents is used broadly to refer to any first person narrative that describes an individual’s actions, experiences and beliefs” (p. 132). This story unfolded on three fronts: my life with animals, Tessa’s involvement with children in my school, and finally Tessa’s involvement with children in my current position as an elementary school Guidance Counsellor. Webster and Mertova (2007) state, “Narrative is well suited to addressing the complexities and subtleties of human experience in teaching and learning” (p. 1). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) feel that the use of a narrative or personal story is what ties the research together-it is the bridge between research and classroom practice. The authors state, “Narrative inquiry is a relational inquiry as we work in the field, move from field to text, and from field text to research text” (p. 60). In that sense, including my personal story then just seemed to make sense.

Meet the Participants

Please note that all participants have been given a pseudonym, and their school names have been changed to maintain confidentiality. There were a total of six participants. All participants were female, and varied in age from 26 to over 50 years of age. All participants were employed in school settings with varying responsibilities and roles within their respective schools. Three of those participants were interviewed both individually and as part of a focus

group discussion. Two of the participants were only able to be interviewed individually due to scheduling conflicts and availability. And finally, one of the participants was only included in the focus group discussion, again due to scheduling conflicts and availability.

Robin

Robin has been a classroom teacher for seven years, and a Learning Support Teacher (at the elementary and middle school level) for two years. Robin has been employed by the same school division throughout that time, and currently provides support to middle years students in an ethnically diverse school in Winnipeg's suburban north west. While Robin does not have (or have has) a dog involved in her work at Ecole Elliot, she has seen the involvement of my dog Tessa in our school setting for the past six years. Robin expressed an interest in being involved in the study to provide perspective from someone on the "outside"- someone who has been indirectly involved in Tessa's programming for a good number of years. Robin and I often teamed our classes for buddy reading or group projects, and she was often present in the classroom when Tessa came to visit. Robin also witnessed Tessa's interactions and impact on the students of Ecole Elliot when I moved out of the classroom into my current position. This was done through first-hand accounts, and debriefing with me about something I (or she) witnessed with Tessa and the children. It was a welcome perspective. Robin participated in both the individual and focus group interview.

Darla

Darla has been a classroom teacher for over 25 years, all of those years being at the Kindergarten to Grade 4 level. Darla currently teaches Kindergarten in an ethnically diverse

school in Winnipeg's suburban north west. An avid dog lover, Darla has been bringing her dogs into school with her in various capacities for over 20 years. Most recently, the involvement of her dogs was a part of an inquiry thread in her classroom. Wanting to connect her home life with that of her school life, Darla often shared the adventures of her dogs with her students, who in turn became increasingly interested in them. Darla maintains that the connection and involvement of her dogs in her classroom has always been something that was very organic in its origins, and ultimately meant to enhance the learning occurring. Darla was involved in both the individual and focus group interview.

Annie

Annie has been a classroom teacher for over 25 years. Most of her career has been spent at the high school level. Annie currently teaches in an alternative program setting, with her students ranging from grade 10 through 12. Her school is ethnically diverse, and in Winnipeg's suburban south east. Annie is a self proclaimed "non animal" person, but has been so impressed with the benefits of her Educational Assistant's dog in her classroom that she is very willing to overlook this personal preference. Annie grew up surrounded by animals in a rural setting, but never really thought that they were "her thing". After much discussion, debate, research, and consultation with her administration, Annie decided to take her Educational Assistant up on her offer to bring in her dog once a school cycle- and they haven't looked back since! Annie participated in both the individual and group interview.

Melanie

Melanie is currently going into her third year of teaching. She has an ethnically diverse early years multiage classroom at Ecole Elliot, in Winnipeg's suburban north east. An avid dog lover, Melanie has had numerous dogs in her home setting growing up. While Melanie does not currently have a dog of her own involved in her classroom, Tessa has been involved in her classroom for the past two years in numerous capacities. While the majority of Tessa's involvement concentrated on working one on one with a particular student, she was also a reading buddy, and catalyst for an inquiry thread on animals. Melanie expressed an interest in participating in this study to reflect upon Tessa's involvement, and reflect upon her own questions surrounding the subject, as she would eventually like to bring in her own dog. Melanie participated in the individual interview.

Sheila

Sheila is a classroom teacher with over 20 years of experience. Sheila has been in a variety of educational settings, and is currently a middle years teacher in an ethnically diverse, urban school setting in Winnipeg's north east. An animal lover, Sheila has occasionally brought in her dogs into her classroom over the course of her teaching career. Sheila has noticed that kids are often struggling to connect with something-anything, and has therefore made an effort to have her dog come into her classroom on a more regular basis. Interestingly, her dog is a rescue with visible scaring from past abuse which sparked many lively conversations in class. Sheila participated in the focus group discussion.

Cathy

Cathy is a classroom teacher with over 10 years of classroom experience. Cathy currently teaches middle years students in an ethnically diverse, urban school in Winnipeg's north east. A dog lover, Cathy felt compelled to bring in her dog to help create a "home" setting for her students. Cathy was also going through some difficult times personally, and having her dog there helped keep her calm, and minimize her stress throughout the course of the day. Cathy does not have a set schedule for her dog to be in her classroom, but would very much like to develop a program that allowed kids to build confidence working with her dog on agility training, or obedience. Cathy also experienced some resistance with some of her colleagues and administration finding value in her work with her dog and her kids. Cathy is hopeful that studies such as this one will be able to educate, and perhaps even persuade those who are sceptical about just how valuable the experience can be. Cathy participated in the individual interview.

Data Analysis

All data collected was synthesised using grounded theory to reveal the emergence of themes, and point to a clear, consistent theory. Creswell (2007) suggests utilising a data analysis spiral that is designed to analyse and refocus with every curve of the spiral (p. 148). Creswell (2007) contends, "The process of data collection, data analysis, and report writing are not distinct steps in the process-they are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project" (p. 150). The entire process is cyclical in nature, and can often continue indefinitely. Further to this, Creswell (2007) believes data analysis to be a three-step process that begins with preparation and organisation of the data, then moves into reducing the data into common themes

via coding, and finally, representing the data in a discussion, table, or figure (p. 148). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) agree with this process. They believe, “Analysis involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important, and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (p. 153). This is why grounded theory works well in this study. For the purposes of this study, data was represented as both a narrative and in two tables.

Grounded theory has an established analysis process that will be followed for the purposes of this study. The process follows a data analysis spiral. In the first step, known as open coding, all relevant text will be examined to be placed into similar categories. Data are constantly compared (Creswell, 2007, p. 160). This first step is used to reduce data into smaller categories. The second step, axial coding, looks to interconnect the data categories and determine how they relate (p. 160). The final category, selective coding, involves essentially building the story that the related data are showing (p. 160). Dey (1999) agrees with this procedure, and believes that grounded theory is indeed cyclical and constantly comparative. He states, “Coding in grounded theory is said to proceed simultaneously with analysis and indeed is sometimes equated with it” (p. 256).

The originators of this theory also agree with this process of coding and comparing. Glaser and Strauss believe there to be four stages of analysis in grounded theory (as cited in Dey, 1999, p. 7). The process begins with generating a theory, then moves into integrating categories and their characteristics (p. 7). Next, the researcher begins to delineate the data, before finally writing an emerging theory (p. 7). All data collected from the interviews, focus group, field notes, and personal narrative will undergo this process of analysis.

Trustworthiness and Reliability

To ensure research integrity, trustworthiness and reliability must be maintained. Part of this is recognising and acknowledging any biases that exist. Creswell (2007) believes reliability and a sense of trustworthiness can be achieved through a prolonged interaction with the topic being studied, having a peer review your work, by conducting member checks, and having your study undergo an external audit (p. 208). Creswell (2007) also recommends triangulating the data; essentially using multiple literature sources, different methods of data collection, and using multiple methods and theories to shed light or explain the topic (p. 208). While Creswell recommends that any researcher use a minimum of at least two validation strategies (p. 209), for the purposes of this study, I will be using more than that. To ensure validity, I will:

- a) conduct the core study (interviews, focus groups) over at least 3 months;
- b) have a trusted, unbiased peer frequently check my work for clarity and generalizability;
- c) use multiple literature sources, as well as methods of data collection to ensure triangulation (interviews, focus group, personal narrative);
- d) constantly compare and analyse using grounded theory;
- e) be up front and open about my bias in this research

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity is essential in any research, but when there are human participants, it becomes even more essential. For the purposes of this study, the Tri-Council Policy Guidelines (TCPSZ) clearly laid out by the University of Manitoba Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) were followed.

Informed consent was obtained via letter (see Appendix A). The letter clearly stated the purpose of the research, a brief description of the procedures, time frame required to participate, and a list of the recording procedures. The letter also clearly stated how participants could, at any time, withdraw from the study without any consequence. Finally, it described how I will make the information available to participants upon completion of the study. This letter was on University of Manitoba letterhead clearly stating my name as principal researcher, and Dr. Gary Babiuk as supervisor.

Pseudonyms were used for all participants and affiliated schools, and all relevant data was kept on my secure, password protected personal home computer. Data will be kept for the period of one year, and then destroyed. At present, I am no longer in the classroom at my school. I am currently in a Guidance Counsellor/Learning Support position. This has allowed me to remove myself directly from a direct position of “power over” a particular group of students.

Reciprocity

This study was reciprocal in nature on several fronts. First, it was reciprocal to both the participants and me in terms of professional development. Professional dialogue shared between two or more colleagues about a topic of mutual interest is invaluable to the growth of all persons involved. Second, it was reciprocal in nature as I shared my experience, listened to what they do, and shared the latest research, and so on. And finally, this study was reciprocal in nature as the topic being studied is still in its beginning stages. Participants and myself are, in a sense, “pioneers” in this field of research. Results will be shared with all interested participants. One of the school divisions has also requested a summary of the research, which will be sent to them upon successful defence.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Pulling it All Together

Considerable time and energy was spent pouring over the individual and focus group interview transcripts, as well as their personal stories to look for phrasing or key words that could perhaps suggest an emergence of a theme(s). As Stern (2011) states, “Transcripts are data for the purposes of comparison and conceptualization” (p. 58). The use of grounded theory as a method of analysis allows for themes to emerge, concepts to be compared, and multiple perspectives to be included. Stern (2011) believes this is a key and important characteristic of grounded theory. She states, “Grounded theory allows for recognition of more than one perspective, and permits and elicits multiple voices” (p. 31). With the exception of a few key words that were repeated in multiple interviews, it became clear that it was essential to examine the transcripts and my field notes for wording or phrasing that illuminated themes. See Table 1 and 2.

Key word/Phrasing Table 1

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Key words or phrasing used during interview</i>
<i>Robin</i>	<i>Improved self esteem, risk taking, empathy, confidence building, increased comfort level in class, improved general disposition</i>
<i>Melanie</i>	<i>Emotional connection, love, calming, confidence building, non-judgemental environment</i>
<i>Annie</i>	<i>Emotional connection, calming, empathy, love, improved self esteem, confidence building, allowed for risk taking by learners, improved general disposition, increased attention span</i>
<i>Cathy</i>	<i>Empathy, improved self esteem, non-judgemental environment, calming, increased attention span</i>

<i>Darla</i>	<i>Calming effect, emotional connection, empathy, allowed for risk taking by learners</i>
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Key word/Phrasing Table 2

<i>Focus Group</i>	<i>Key words or phrasing used during interview</i>
	<i>Improved self esteem, non-judgemental environment, emotional connection, empathy, love and care for each other, improved general disposition, allowed for risk taking by learners, helped build a sense of community, increased attention span and focus</i>

It also became evident that it was necessary to examine the stories that the participants told in direct relation to the use of animals in their classrooms. How were their stories and my story similar? How did they differ? What can all of these stories, including mine, tell us about the use of a dog in a classroom?

Their stories

Being able to sit and listen to colleagues talk about the dogs in their lives, and the impact they believe those dogs are having on their students has been enlightening. For the longest time, I thought that I was the one person who was bringing my dog in to school. It was refreshing, uplifting, and inspiring to listen to the participations speak so passionately about their work with the children in their classrooms in relation to their dogs. Several of the participants also commented during their individual episodic interviews about what having dogs involved their lives has done for them personally. This next section will briefly examine the stories of Annie,

Cathy, and Melanie. It will not only provide context for why they have chosen to bring their dogs into the classroom, but also illuminate the importance of dogs in their everyday life.

Annie's story

Annie grew up in rural Manitoba on a farm, which meant there were always animals around. Dogs, cats, chickens, mice-you name it, it probably lived on their farm at some point or another. Annie always enjoyed the company of the animals on her family farm, but took the death of a dog when she was six years old very hard. She recalls that the dog died in her arms, and she remembers being absolutely heartbroken and devastated about it. Annie felt very closely connected to this dog. He was her friend, her “partner in crime”. It was at this point that Annie made the conscious decision to never own a pet again; the pain she was feeling over the passing of her dog was so intense that she did not ever want to experience it again. So, at the age of six, Annie decided to not have a pet again. She has stuck to this, even today.

While Annie will be the first to tell you that she isn't a “pet person”, she certainly understands and sees the benefits of an animal/human relationship. During our conversation, Annie reflected upon her elderly great grandmother who recently got a cat from the Humane Society. Prior to getting the cat, Annie stated that her great grandmother was somewhat reclusive, shy, and disconnected from the world around her. Since the cat has come to live with her great grandmother however, Annie states that there was been a noticeable difference in her great grandma. This cat has become her link to the outside world. It has become a means for her to socialize and converse with her peers who also have cats. Annie beamed while she shared this story. It was evident that she was happy for her great grandmother.

For Annie, it seemed only logical that she continue to have her Educational Assistant bring Benji into the class. Annie felt like the benefits of having him involved in her classroom community were far more important than her own personal opinions on animal companionship. While owning a pet was not “for her”, she felt like she could not deny the impact Benji was having. On more than one occasion, Annie commented that she would do “whatever it took” to make connections and progress with the students in her class. Their needs, in this instance, took precedence over her own.

Cathy's story

While Cathy has always had an interest in animals (dogs in particular), she never had a family pet growing up. Her Mom did not enjoy the company of animals at all, and so, therefore, Cathy had to wait until she was an adult to have a pet of her own. Currently, Cathy has a Boston Terrier Chihuahua cross. He has been a source of stability, calm, joy, and unconditional love for her; particularly over the past several years when Cathy was going through some very tough issues personally. Both at home and school, her dog became one of the things she could look at (and pet), and immediately decompress from the situation. He was able to remove her from that moment and reassure her that everything was going to be just fine. Cathy immediately recognized the “power” her dog had, and thought that her students could benefit from it as well. She knew that her dog was not passing any judgement upon her in those moments when she needed his support most, and felt like her students could benefit from that type of relationship as well.

Reflecting upon her dog's visits to the classroom, Cathy recalls one student in particular that benefitted most from those visits. She describes him as a socially awkward child, one who

struggled to “fit in” and be a part of the classroom community. This student also, unfortunately, became involved in scenarios that got him “in trouble” and further alienated him from his peers. On days when her dog visited however, this boy became someone that her dog really gravitated towards. The dog would choose to lay beside him while he worked, and seemed to just love “hanging out” with the boy. Cathy believes that this did wonders for the boys’ self esteem and sense of self worth. He would beam with joy and pride when the dog chose to sit near him. For Cathy, these glimpses of happiness on that students’ face made bringing her dog in worthwhile. He was becoming not only a support to her, but the children in her class as well.

Melanie’s story

Growing up, Melanie and her family were never without at least one family dog. These dogs travelled everywhere with them, but loved being out at the family cabin the most where they were free to roam and explore at will. Melanie felt very connected to all of the dogs over the years, and felt like they truly were a part of her family. She believes that her dogs provide her with comfort, attention, and the unconditional love “that we all crave”. Melanie does not have a dog of her own at the moment, and is really missing having one in her life. Her family dogs are, of course, always there at her parents’ home whenever she’d like to visit; but it isn’t the same as having one to snuggle up with every night in the comfort of your own home. Melanie is hopeful that she will have a dog of her own by the time the summer rolls around.

For Melanie, one of the most significant aspects of having a dog in her life is how they just seem to know when you are needing some support. She recalls a time when she broke her ankle, and the dogs somehow seemed to know that they needed to be careful around her and her

cast. Melanie remembers the dogs being “extra affectionate” during this time as well. Melanie also commented that she believes her dogs sensed her grandmothers’ illness, and need for extra emotional support. They would immediately shower her grandmother with affection, and be reluctant to leave her side. For Melanie, seeing the emotional support her dogs gave her grandmother, and continue to give to her was more than enough of a “strong case” to have my dog Tessa involved in her classroom.

Tessa spent(spends) one on one time with several of Melanie’s current and former students. These students were children who both Melanie and myself recognized as students who needed “that little bit extra” in terms of love, care, and emotional connection. For Melanie, much like Annie, she was willing to do whatever she could to make those connections and progress with those students. Her own personal experiences with dogs throughout her life allowed her to have first -hand knowledge of the power those connections can (and do) possess. Melanie looks forward to the day when she can bring her own dog into her classroom community.

My personal story

Animals have been a significant part of my life right from the beginning; they are among my first memories as a child. They were my confidants, my friends, and my calming presence in a sea of emotional turmoil. I have always known the power of a connection with an animal. They are a counter balance in my life, the one consistent thing that provides unconditional love and understanding when I feel like I am not getting that anywhere else. Yes, this indeed makes me biased in this study. However, it also makes me incredibly experienced with the subject.

This story will touch on several formative moments in my life with animals that contributed to the origins and tone of this study. It will also examine how this study took hold and the role my dog Tessa continues to play in all of it.

Setting the stage for who I am today

If I am asked to reflect on a particular time period in my life, I would first try to recall where I was living at the time; but I would also automatically try to recall which family pet was there during that time as well. My childhood memories are stored as such in my brain, so recalling place and then pet ensures for “quick reference”. As I mentioned earlier in the Introduction, I grew up in a military family, which meant I never really lived anywhere longer than about five years. From nursery school through grade twelve, I moved a total of four times- which doesn’t seem like a lot. However, what is significant about those moves is at what age they occurred. Our first move (while I was school aged) was from Saskatchewan (at the end of gr two) to Alberta. From Alberta, we moved to Germany. We only lived in Alberta for two years, so I was entering gr five when we arrived on the Canadian base in Germany. I was lucky enough to live in Germany from gr five through nine. From here, we moved to Nova Scotia where I attended high school from gr ten through twelve.

The move from Germany to Nova Scotia was by far the toughest. All of the friends I had made during my time in Germany were scattering because the base was closing. They were, as I was, being moved to various parts of Canada. These friends felt like the first “real friends” I had ever made. We had deep connections with each other. Our parents fought in the first Gulf War together, which made us even closer. Indeed, it was a time in our lives when bonds were made fast and tight. And then it all just ended, and we were forced to go our separate ways.

Some of my friends were lucky enough that their parents were being relocated to the same military base, so they would continue to be together. I was not as lucky. There was no one going to Nova Scotia but my family. I was starting high school in a school that was nearly quadruple the size in terms of student population of the school in Germany, alone-with no one to talk to and navigate high school together with. Starting a new school not knowing anyone was something I had done before, but this time it felt different. And it was. All of the students at this new school had been together since Kindergarten--they had grown up together. I was the weird outsider with short hair, the one who had a body that was way too tall and scrawny to be that of a girls', the one who dressed in strange clothes and seemed to be too smart for her own good. It was an incredibly tough period of time in my life, and certainly one that shaped who I am today. I'm getting ahead of myself a bit here, though. Let's back track a bit.

Having to move all the time was very difficult for me. I was (and am still to some degree) a shy, introverted individual. The constant moving and leaving of friends made it tough for me to even want to make friends. It seemed like a silly thing to do, since I was going to be leaving soon anyway. But, I did always manage in those early years to have some friends. In fact, if you were to read any of my report cards from Kindergarten through gr nine, you would notice that the teacher made comments in relation to me like: shy and quiet, friendly and well liked by peers, responsible, earnest, and a pleasure to have in class. I presented myself very well in public, but often felt very differently about myself in private. The constant moving made me very aware of all of my outward physical flaws. My new classmates often made it their mission to point them out to me, as if I was unaware of their existence. I was always the tallest in my class, kept my hair short, and had teeth that needed some work. Years of the overuse of penicillin (doctors refused to remove my tonsils until I was ten) had literally rotted my front

teeth, leaving them horribly stained. They were also, unfortunately, in need of some braces. The teasing and name calling was constant and relentless, and didn't stop until I finally got my front teeth veneered when I was eleven. Braces followed very quickly behind. But, the emotional scars remained, even to this day.

To me, it always seemed like a perfect storm--these negatives smashing together and forming or setting the stage for who I am today. There was my innate shyness and introverted personality, the constant moving, my incredible awareness and self-loathing of my less than perfect body and physical appearance, and the immense pressure I felt from home to be the best and appear normal. It all seemed to collide and feed off of each other. It was my perfect storm that collided and smashed around inside of me, hidden very carefully from those around me--turning, spewing, and building deep down in my core waiting to erupt at the right moment. Please don't misunderstand me; my life was not without its positives. I have warm and loving parents, and an older sister who did the best that they could, providing me with as many opportunities to participate in sports and activities as they were able. I have great memories of us as a family, which I wouldn't change for the world. With that being said, I believe very strongly that it is my challenges that shaped who I am, and are most relevance to this study.

This brings us back to the beginning of high school. For me, it marked the beginning of a journey into deep self-loathing, intermittent depression, social anxieties, and doubts about my place in this world. It was, indeed, the period of time in my life where my perfect storm of emotions spilled over the bows of my ship and nearly permanently sank me. It was a release of all the pain and hurt I had kept hidden deep inside of me finally fighting to get out and be heard. It was an explosion that I felt with every tingling fibre of my being, but might not have necessarily been visible to those around me. I did it in secret, behind closed doors where no one

could tell me that I needed to feel differently, or act differently, or “snap out of it”. Sometimes this release would be simply crying (and crying, and crying), but other times it was screaming into a pillow, or writing all my emotions or thoughts on the day down in a journal. I was depressed, anxious, and felt very much alone. While this journey may have started in high school, it certainly did not end there. This is a journey that I would continue on (to varying degrees) right through until my early thirties. I am not completely naive enough to think that those closest to me didn’t notice, I am sure that they did. But it wasn’t until my early twenties when someone actually commented on my emotional state, and seemed to see through to the “real me” underneath everything. Today, I am closer to this person than anyone. It is a journey that allowed me to really come to terms with who I am as a person, who I want to be, and truly start to love and appreciate who I am in each and every moment. It is what got me here, writing this story.

The emotional connections and support of animals in my life

Throughout the moving and emotional upheaval, there remained one constant: the presence of a family pet. For me, these pets brought solace and quite often ended up being my confidants. They were ever present, and welcoming with their unconditional love and understanding. In the early years, there was Tabby- our calico cat who hunted mice and gave me my first experience in owning a pet. While we lived in Saskatchewan, there was Andy the Cocker Spaniel. He was the first animal I ever bonded with, and I was heartbroken when my parents had to put him down due to illness. Andy was quickly replaced with Jenny, our high energy, loving Jack Russell Terrier. She moved with us from Saskatchewan to Alberta, but was unable to come with us to Germany. Jenny was given by my parents to close family friends. I

was heartbroken, and really missed owning a pet during our time in Germany. Shortly after our arrival in Nova Scotia, we adopted a Terri-Poo named Sarah. She was the last pet we ever had as a family, and the first one we ever had with Epilepsy. She lived with us, and later with just my Mom. Sarah died on my birthday several years ago of congestive heart failure. She was sixteen. While away at University, I adopted a small calico cat named Zoe. She still lives with me today, and will forever be my first pet (one that I owned, not the family). Shortly after starting teaching, I got another cat named Zak. He was a rescue given to me by a co-worker. He and Zoe are great friends. And then, there is Tessa. Tessa is my six year old German Wirehaired Pointer. My boyfriend bought her from a breeder in Nebraska, and she came to live with us the same summer we bought a house and moved out of the city. We also have a horse named Cookie. He will be joined later in the fall of this year by another horse named Apple, along with her foal. The more the merrier!

In high school, it was something of a comfort to know that when I got home Sarah would be there waiting for me, wagging her tail, ready to love me and pick up with our relationship just where we had left it when I went to catch the bus that morning. Some days, when the teasing and bullying from my peers got so bad I would hide in the bathroom stall at school, thinking of her; and what we were going to do for fun together after school is what allowed me to get through. I knew that it would only be a few more hours until I was able to take her for a walk, stroke her fur, snuggle up with her, and feel her unconditional love wash over and protect me. Sarah was someone I could tell things to when I needed to get them off my chest, but didn't dare actually say the words aloud to another human being. I really leaned on her for strength and support, and in her own way, she was able to reciprocate what I needed. I trusted her, more than I trusted any human at the time. This was because I knew that she could not actually say

anything. Sarah would not be able to use what I told her in confidence against me, nor would she be able to pass judgement or go back on her word. During that period of time in my life, this was key. I felt mounting pressure from my parents to “just fit in”, so it was easier to keep up appearances with them by lying to them about how my day was if I was then able to confess all or snuggle up with Sarah later. So this became our pattern. I’d grin and fake it as best I could throughout the school day, lie to my parents about how the day really went when they asked, and crumble (or perhaps, allow myself permission to let it all go) in those private moments with Sarah. There is not a doubt in my mind that she was one of the factors that got me through high school. There was also a strong desire and drive to do my best during this time so that I could then get as far away as I could during University. Knowing that University was not far off, and knowing that I would be in a place that where I could completely reinvent myself was very motivating to me.

Attending University away from home was, indeed, a blessing. I lived in residence for the first two years, and developed strong friendships with amazing people who became incredibly important to me. Their friendships meant the world to me, and going into third year, a group of us decided to move in together in a town house across the street from the University. Boys, tests, assignments, and typical University life passed me by fairly uneventfully. I was incredibly happy, and reflect back on that time in my life as indeed, one of my happiest. Going into my fourth year of my undergraduate degree, I met someone who remains the most important person in the world to me. We started dating, and are still together today. During a weekend visit to his family farm, we stopped off at the barn to see some of the kittens that were born a few weeks earlier. This is where I got Zoe. Her mom was struggling to feed her litter, so we removed Zoe when she was old enough to be away from her mom. I bonded hard and fast to

Zoe. This was partly due to the fact that I was seeing Sarah less and less (I had chosen to go to University out of province), but also due to the fact that I was simply missing animal companionship.

I was accepted at several Universities for my Education degree. I decided to come to Winnipeg for several reasons: One, my parents had recently relocated there and would be able to financially support me. Two, I was going to be alone again in a new place, and my boyfriend and I both agreed that having family around would make that adjustment easier. And finally, it just seemed like the best option at the time. After I graduated from Education, I lived alone with Zoe. My boyfriend was finishing school at a different University, and my parents had once again moved. I again, much like I had with Sarah, began to lean on her for emotional support. It got to a point where I couldn't fall asleep until she was on my bed with me and I could hear her rhythmic purr lulling me to sleep. I was in a long distance relationship, my parents were talking about separation, I did not yet have a permanent position, and my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was not an easy time. The companionship I felt with Zoe calmed my fears, and it became a great stress relief to curl up with her at the end of a long day. I feel like Zoe and I have been through a lot together. She is fifteen this fall, and I cannot imagine what it is going to be like without her around. She is part of my family. The thought of losing her; well it is almost more than I can bare.

The dog of my dreams

I say that Tessa is the dog of my dreams, somewhat tongue in cheek. When my boyfriend first showed me a picture of her that the breeder had sent to us, I was immediately in love. Her eyes weren't even open yet, but she was looking up at the camera with this look of

pure sweetness that made my heart melt. She makes a similar face today, with her eyes open of course, that evokes similar feelings. Reflecting upon my feelings while looking at that picture, I do not think that at the time I would ever have dreamed that she would mean as much to me today as she does. Tessa is so much more to me than “just a dog”. She is my faithful companion, my confidant, my everything. She is, to put it quite crudely, my little girl with fur. I have not yet been blessed with children, but she certainly means just as much to me as I imagine a child would. I miss her when we are apart, I am constantly looking out for her well being and welfare, and she fills my heart with more joy than I ever thought possible. She loves to snuggle, be hugged, petted, and held close. She loves to play, go for walks, and explore the world around her. Tessa also seems to be at her most content when both “her people” are home and spending time in her company. She loves to go for car rides, chase chipmunks and squirrels, and go swimming. When Tessa and I come across people on our walks, one of the first things they always comment on is just how happy she looks. And it’s true--no other dog I have ever known has been able to convey such joy in their facial expressions or loving demeanour. Tessa does all that with a tilt of her head, wiggle of her bum, and a bounce in her step. She amazes me.

Tessa and I mutually bonded fairly quickly. My boyfriend was teaching summer school, so he wasn’t around for a good chunk of the day those first few months, which meant that Tessa and I were joined at the hip; thus forever solidifying our bond. Tessa and I went everywhere together, and did everything together. We even attended a Puppy Kindergarten class to help with her socialization skills. We were inseparable, and I knew right away that she was going to be different than other dogs I have known and owned. Part of that was because she was the first dog I ever owned that was mine, not one that belonged to the family. She also had the perfect demeanour for me. It was like I had found my soul mate, my ideal match with four legs. From

those very early days until now, she has given me more than all of the other animals in my life combined. She is an unwavering source of calm, stability, love, and care. She is my rock, my confidant, and the one thing that even on my most down days, will bring a smile across my face. I love her, and I know that in all that she does, she is telling me that she loves me too.

Tessa, school, and children

As I mentioned in the introduction, the children in my multitage class knew that I was going to be getting Tessa over the summer. We had agreed as a class that I would bring her in for a visit once I felt that she was ready. During that very first visit, the magic in the air was palpable. It seemed like everything was aligning itself for this to be an experience the children would get to have again and again. It was the right dog, right set of children, and right set of circumstances that allowed that first initial visit to be successful enough to warrant more. Success in this instance was: no barking, no urinating on the floor (as she was only 6months old then), calm and happy children, and a calm and happy puppy. Tessa fit in so naturally with the children, and they with her. To not explore the idea of bringing her in on a regular basis seemed ridiculous. I am extremely grateful that my principal at the time was so accommodating and encouraging. Without her support, truly, none of this would have ever been possible. She was able to understand all of the potential downfalls, but was able to see the possibilities that may lie ahead in going through with it. We knew there were going to be questions about allergies, safety (of the children and Tessa), and general misunderstandings about why we were going to try it. She saw the connections Tessa was beginning to make with the children, and agreed that we were, in fact, “on to something”. She noticed that the potential positives were going to be what would enable her to defend our decision to anyone who opposed it.

Right from the get go, Tessa had this uncanny ability to seek out those kids who needed the most love and attention that day. She always managed to recognize, and act upon in her own unique way, the need for a loving connection some children were searching for. There is one little boy in particular who comes to mind that I feel Tessa was always able to pick this up on way before I ever saw it. She loved to go up to this boy as he entered the classroom and “say hello” to him in her own unique way. This included bum wiggles, little jumps, and face licks; all of which the boy ate up with a huge smile on his face. Tessa would also make sure she stayed in contact with this boy throughout the day. She had free range to wander the classroom, and she would make her way over to see him several times a day. She would drop her head, wiggle her bum, place her chin on his lap, and look up into his eyes with an expression of pure contentment and love. He would respond by scratching her ears and chin, petting her head, and saying, “Oh...you like it when I scratch there, don’t you?” Tessa, of course, would respond with a bum wiggle; which we had discussed at length as a class to mean contentment and pleasure. This would inevitably make this boy smile, and indeed, lift his spirits while she was there. The boy never forgot that interaction with Tessa. He would ask me about her in the halls (when he was no longer in my class) and he would inevitably end our conversation with reminding me, “Remember when I used to scratch her under her chin? Remember how much she loved that?” I always smiled and agreed, stating of course I remembered. It was interactions such as the one between Tessa and this boy that made me realize that this was something that potentially all children could benefit from. After all, animals had given me so much throughout my life, it only seemed to make sense that Tessa could perhaps do the same for them. She could (and inevitably would) be a personal and intimate connection that children were seeking.

It also became clear early on that Tessa was going to be someone that would help boost the self esteem of those around her. Not only could she sense those kids who needed emotional support that day, but also those who could use a little support with their self esteem. The children in my class rarely worked at their tables, preferring to spread out on our carpet area. This was even more true on days when Tessa visited, because that is where she rested when she wasn't wandering the classroom. They loved to cozy up to her while they worked, read to her, and include her in all of their creative, as well as journal writing. Children who were reluctant to read to me had no problem sitting beside Tessa and reading to her. Children who did not take risks in their writing, or who had very minimal writing skills were now including her in their work. She boosted the self esteem of those children in the classroom who seemed to need it most. This was true even on "non Tessa days" as well, as some of the children would create stories for me to share with her, or sign up on our list to read to her. She was ever present in the classroom, even when not physically there. The novelty of this never wore off. It's been six years since she first came to Ecole Elliot with me, and year after year, week after week, the level of excitement and motivation for an impending Tessa visit remained extremely high.

Tessa takes on a supportive role

When I moved out of the classroom three years ago and into my present role in guidance (now a blended role of guidance and learning support), I was not sure how Tessa's involvement would continue and what sort of structure it would take. After playing around with several different formats, one of the most successful was when she was having one on one time with students in my office and outside. This one on one time allowed Tessa to make deeper, more meaningful connections with those students. This was especially true for one Grade One girl

who struggled to make emotional connections with those around her, as well as sort through her own emotions. She preferred the company of adults, often choosing to be in their company than with her peers. Her peers struggled to connect with her as well. They saw her as “babyish”, and difficult to manage (she was hard to keep on task). She would often cry and appear very upset, but was unable to pinpoint or recognize what she was feeling and experiencing when I asked or prompted her. Questioning her about what was going on got me nowhere-she would just sit and cry; which is what I ultimately let her do.

For a short period of time, it seemed like she just needed to “let it out”; she needed to be able to cry out the emotions that she was feeling. After several months, it seemed like she wanted to be held close and hugged. She would climb up onto my lap and just melt into my arms. This became our pattern. Her teacher would bring her down to me, she would snuggle up on my lap, and I would quietly reassure her and give her hugs. Eventually she was able to calm down quicker, and tell me about what was upsetting her. Turns out that this little girl was living with her Aunt (who we thought was Mom) and her Mom was living in Vancouver. She had very little contact with Mom, and felt like her family abandoned her. She actually stated on several occasions, “I have no family. No one loves me”. Throughout all of this, she was very interested in Tessa. She would ask to see pictures of her on my phone, want to sit with her in the classroom, ask to take her for walks, comment on how cute she was, pet and hug her at every opportunity. This is when her teacher and I decided to set something up a bit more formally between her and Tessa.

During Tessa’s weekly visits, a portion of her day was spent with this little girl, whether it was in my office or outside playing together. It was during these visits that I was able to help her see emotions in Tessa. She learned what a wagging tail, face licks, and body/facial language

meant on Tessa. As such, eventually, she was able to open up and interact with Tessa freely, and recognize not only her own emotions, but Tessa's as well. It was almost as though Tessa acted as a mirror to her own emotions. Having Tessa as an option to "work" with students on my case load also acted as a way for me to get "in" with those I was struggling to get to open up, as was the case with this little girl. Tessa became common ground, something neutral for us to discuss and bond over. She helped open doors of communication, and I believe made my daily practice better. Today that little girl, now in gr three, is doing quite well. She is able to express herself with a fair amount of ease, but still cherishes the one on one time with myself, and of course, Tessa.

Final thoughts

All in all, Tessa's involvement with the children at my school has been nothing short of miraculous to watch. I often have to hold back tears, and refrain from shouting from the rooftops how great having her there each week really is. Without a doubt, part of what makes this special for me is the fact that she is my dog. It fills me with pride to know that she is able to provide the children of my school all of the things that she gives to me, including: unconditional love and care, a sense of calm, and an ability to have an emotional connection with something. As long as Tessa continues to have a positive effect on the children at my school, I will continue to bring her. It brings me joy to see her spread her love to the children at our school. It is innocent, pure, and from the bottom of her heart.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The Six Themes

Distinct themes were formed based upon what the participants observed in relation to having a dog in their classroom. These themes are the participants' interpretations of what they were observing or experiencing while the dog visited their classroom. While some of these themes were named directly, some were implied in the conversation with the participants during the individual episodic interview and focus group. The themes are:

- 1) Emotional Connection,
- 2) Self Esteem,
- 3) Empathy,
- 4) Calm,
- 5) Love and Care,
- 6) Risk taking in an Non-judgemental Environment.

Emotional connection

Love is a universal want/need. We want to be loved unconditionally, and wholeheartedly. We want to have our love reciprocated, and feel secure in our attachments. Unfortunately, this is not always a reality. Relationships are messy, and complicated. And an emotional connection, for whatever reason, is not always possible. The same is not necessarily

true with an animal. Robin (P)¹, in reflecting upon her observations of Tessa “in action” states, “Dogs respond to people’s affects, right? They have that sixth sense that other animals don’t”. Bekoff (2007) would agree with Robin’s remarks. Their love is unconditional, unwavering, and eternal (p. 27). It can be a very powerful connection and relationship. Beck (1999) states, “While there’s significant evidence that human companionship has a positive effect on increasing over all well being, the same can be said about companion animals” (p. 282). The animal is ever present, always listening, and never judgemental.

For Annie (P), this was especially true for the children in her class. She teaches a grade ten to twelve “high risk” program, where her students are often struggling with their own emotional lives on a daily basis. She states, “A lot of those kids emotionally are still functioning at an elementary level. So you sorta think, well if adults and kids can make that connection, why wouldn’t it work? Like it just makes sense, and why not try it?” In Annie’s case, having a dog involved in their class seemed to open the doors of communication with her students to begin to develop an emotional connection with the world around them. Cathy (P) also believes that for some of the children in her class (and for one student in particular she was reflecting upon who struggles socially), having the dog there was a way for them to connect on an emotional level and see that they do in fact have the capacity to form friendships. Cathy states, “Yah it allowed him to have a buddy! Someone who wasn’t going to judge if he was spelling something wrong, or...yah”. For the children in both Annie and Cathy’s classrooms, having the dog present appears to be fulfilling a need.

Most participants seemed to recognize that it is essential to have social and emotional learning infused in their everyday teaching practices to allow for authentic emotional

¹ From this point on, all participants will be designated with (P).

connections to develop. The means of achieving this however, varies from classroom to classroom, teacher to teacher. In my practice as a classroom teacher, having an emotional connection with all of the children in my class was something I always kept in the back of my mind. I knew that there would be children who it would be more difficult to have that connection with due to complications such as trauma, attachment disorders, or a life spent in the foster care system; but I knew that those were also going to be the children who needed an emotional connection the most. I was, (as were the participants in this study) willing to do whatever I needed to within reason to provide that emotional connection for them. Cusack (1988) contends, “But for an emotionally troubled youngster, the animal’s role can be paramount, offering solace, comfort, security, and a listening post in a way that no human can” (p. 95). It is not surprising then that the participants of this study brought up the theme of an emotional connection again and again.

Melanie (P) believes that the emotional connection that formed between my dog Tessa and one of her students is what allowed this student to begin to recognize and express her own emotions appropriately. She states, “Well, I think that for Jessica² (S) it was very beneficial. She had some emotional issues, and some attachment issues. She was able to connect with Tessa and show emotion when she had difficulties showing emotion”. Anderson and Olson (2006) found this to be true in their study as well. A participant in their study was able to have a reciprocal relationship with the class dog. The authors state, “[The dog] served as a model for [the student] on how to have a relationship with another living thing, and teach cause/effect in relationships” (p. 43). For Annie (P), this was especially true for one of her students who are currently in foster care. It was obvious to those surrounding this child at the school level that he

² All students have been given a pseudonym, and will be indicated in the text with a (S).

needed to be able to express and communicate his emotions appropriately. She recalled a time in her class dog Benji was present, and the student became engaged with the task, and even started to write a poem for their poetry unit while Benji was on his lap. She states,

“This kid has not talked to anybody yet about what’s going on. And we know he needs to. So when he was sitting there, one of the things he was working on was his poem. One of the lines in there talks about his brother, and how his brother means the world to him. That’s the closest we’ve gotten to anything with this kid. And I’m thinking, Benji was sitting right there with him”.

During the focus group, Darla (P) reflected upon a past student who came from a very neglectful situation, and spent most of his time in her classroom acting like a cat. Apparently, the child had a cat at home, and often it was his only person to engage with. Darla also had the brother of the child who played cat, and found he also struggled to connect emotionally with the world around them. Having her dog visit her classroom, overtime, drastically changed the way these boys would act, especially in the presence of the dogs. There was less and less aggression and playing of cat at school. She states, “Usually both boys are so emotionally flat, but this brings out an emotional engagement that I don’t see happening very often in any other way”. She adds, “So to have that warmth, that unconditional love from an animal, you know they aren’t going to be judged, they know they are safe”. Zasloff and Hart (1999) support this statement, and agree that having live animals around for children to bond with allows them to express and receive affection (p. 351). It is a connection that is pure in nature, and full of unconditional love and affection. This is ultimately what all of us are searching for.

Indeed, for both myself personally, and the children at my school who have worked one on one with Tessa, having an emotional connection to something was a necessity to our emotional well being. In the sharing of my story in Chapter Four, I outlined how having animals involved in my life filled a void I felt. I struggled to connect emotionally with those around me,

mostly out of fear that they would betray my trust, or that I would fall back into the pattern of being constantly bullied. People made me nervous, while animals seemed to put me at ease. When Tessa was two years old, she missed about three weeks of school. She injured her paw badly, and needed to rest before I could bring her in. The children in my class knew why she wasn't coming, and often made her Get Well cards, or asked how she was doing.

One student in particular found this period apart difficult. He cried when I told the class how she injured her paw, and asked about her on a daily basis. He bought her a box of dog biscuits, and wrote her notes stating that he loved her and hoped she would come visit soon. He was a quiet boy, who by all appearances, came from a "good home" with two parents and a younger brother. He was, however, someone who constantly wanted hugs from me, to sit beside me, and receive my praise and approval at every opportunity. He loved to lay with Tessa on the carpet, and work with her. I often caught him in fact not working, but gently stroking her fur and whispering into her ears. I never discouraged him from doing any of those things as they appeared to be what he needed in those particular moments. During those three weeks without Tessa in regular attendance, the boy often told me he felt like he had no friends and no one to talk to (despite being one of the more popular children in our class), he felt lonely. He was "not himself" to say the least. When Tessa began visiting the class regularly again, the boy seemed to perk up, and fell back into his more normal patterns of behaviour. This boy has since left our school and is now in high school. He visits often, however, and always asks me how Tessa is doing. During one of his visits, I recall asking him what it was about Tessa that he liked so much. He smiled shyly and replied, "She was like home for me. She made me feel safe, and loved, and special. She listened to me like no one else. She was home".

Self esteem

Self esteem came up over and over again in the interviews as one of the benefits of having a dog in the classroom. For Cathy (P), having her dog in the classroom was something that levelled the playing field and “stuck with” those students who needed it most. She states, “It’s done something for their engagement, and it’s done something for the self esteem of kids who can’t find it anywhere else”. Indeed, it is something that Zasloff and Hart (1999) agree with. The authors contend, “Interacting with the animals can help promote the children’s self esteem” (p. 351). For Annie (P), having Benji in her room means that one of her students who struggles to connect, and struggles with her own self worth feels included and special. Annie states, “For the girl in particular, she often feels left out. And the dog singles her out. So, somebody has picked her. And that makes her feel really good. It just warms your heart when you see it happen”. And for Annie, while she was surprised that this boost came from a dog, she was certainly not going to discount its significance. She states, “Most of the kids in my class have not realized a lot of positivity in school. They feel pretty academically or socially disconnected. That’s what we try to do, bridge that gap, right? I don’t care how we do it! (laughs) I really don’t!”. It is evident that care for her students, not necessarily just curriculum, are her driving force and motivator to continue having Benji be a part of her classroom community.

During the focus group interview, Robin (P) reflected on the relationship and interactions between my dog Tessa and a particular student, Jessica (S). For Jessica, having something to connect to was paramount to her growth in various areas; one of those being her own self esteem. Robin states, “And now, if you look at her, she just seems to have found her place. She understands that she can contribute, that she can care about people, and it’s important”. Robin

goes on to say, “Tessa built her self esteem, she connected with Tessa in a way that you wouldn’t know to look at her”. For Jessica, and countless others like her, her self esteem was negatively influenced (for unknown reasons) and she required an outside influence to invoke a change within. With Tessa’s help, Jessica is now thriving. It was the spark that allowed her to see her worth through Tessa’s eyes.

While reflecting on a particular student, Sheila (P) became quite animated and spoke passionately about a young girl in her class for whom she saw as benefitting from the self esteem boost brought on by the presence of her dog. According to Sheila, this girl had a negative outlook on her life and self worth, but lit up at the opportunity to work with the dog and to be given specific responsibilities for him. This student was grateful at the opportunity to show her classmates that she was worthy of such responsibilities, and in turn it boosted her self esteem. Sheila states, “And just the sense of responsibility for that student, I found that it was very confidence building, self esteem, and just a genuine loving relationship. [She was] so grateful that I had entrusted her with that responsibility”. In that moment, that student shone; and the feeling related to it “stuck”. Sheila believes it was somewhat of a breakthrough for that student.

It is a seemingly easy idea, the notion of cultivating ones’ self esteem. After all, it originates from within, and therefore it should be something that an individual should be able to ensure they have to the highest degree. But, it is not that simple. In fact, it is exceedingly more complicated. Our self esteem is connected to how we perceive how others see us, how we see ourselves in this world, and to what we believe we deserve out of life. It is, perhaps, a learned understanding of who we are in the world. A learned behaviour or understanding that is learned, cultivated, and born out of our interactions with the world around us. It is, in fact, cyclical in nature (Cigman, 2008, p. 555). And for someone like me, who has struggled with self esteem

throughout my life, it is a never ending battle from within. I have to constantly remind myself that things aren't always as they appear (those people laughing in the corner are most likely laughing at a joke, not me), and that more often than not, it is my perceptions of things rather than reality.

However difficult it may be to break the cycle of self doubt and negative self outlook, it is vitally important. For many teachers, finding various methods to cultivate self esteem is something that they are able willing to explore by any and every means necessary. A little girl in my class found her niche as Tessa's official artist and back scratcher, and it made her beam with pride that she was able to do something no one else could. She gave Tessa such good back scratches that Tessa would roll on her side, stretch her legs out as far as she could, and grunt/moan in pleasure as the girl scratched this particular spot on her back. I couldn't even get Tessa to do that! This little girl could also draw amazingly accurate pictures of Tessa. I knew that this girl saw herself as a poor student, as she would often vocalise that she couldn't read or write, and was bad at math. Admittedly, she was not the strongest student I've ever had, but I tried to help her see what she could do well at every opportunity. So when we discovered she could draw Tessa with ease, and gave her amazing back scratches, we as a class praised her for them. Initially, she was hesitant that we were telling the truth. However, she was able to see in Tessa's reaction to the back scratch that we were, in fact, telling the truth. It might seem minor to us, but it made that little girl light up and feel better about herself in those instances. While she still struggles academically, (currently in Grade 6 at our school) her self esteem has improved dramatically. She sees herself as an artist, and her parents are open to allowing her to volunteer at the Humane Society when she is old enough. Tessa continues to enjoy her back scratches at every opportunity.

Empathy

Empathy is an ability to see the world from another's perspective. This can lead to feelings of compassion and acts of care. This ability, to feel and express compassion towards others, much like self-esteem, is an inherently innate skill. However, for whatever reason, it is not necessarily something that comes easily to everyone. As a Kindergarten teacher, Darla (P) often deals with children who have not yet discovered a world outside of their own.

Developmentally, for some, their world consists of themselves and their families, and that is it.

For her, the impact on the ability for her children to be empathetic was much less obvious.

However, that is not to say that she did not see glimpses of it emerging in her students.

Darla (P) began to notice one of her male students move from quite rough play with the stuffed animals in their play animal hospital, to more calm and appropriate. In this case, more appropriate play was characterized by: holding the animals gently, using their leashes correctly, and not throwing them or purposefully "hurting" them. Darla worked hard throughout the school year to model (on her own dogs) appropriate care, grooming, and love towards animals. Slowly but surely, she noticed this student move away from dragging the toy animals around on a leash roughly. She noticed he would seek the dogs out during their visit. He would want to be beside them, stroking their ears gently. For this student, having Darla bring her dogs in has allowed him to change the way he cares (or begins to) for the world around him. She states,

"I saw that one little guy, starting to walk the dog. Or he would...he's started to love playing the veterinarian. So he puts on the white coat, and how he's handling the stuffed animals has really shifted. He's gently putting them in their play crate, you know their little boxes that they made. He's more focused in his play with those animals, and he's playing with them as animals no rather than random things. And I'm hoping that the dogs being here, and being able to be hands on with the dogs in a real supportive way has translated".

For Darla (P), it is these seemingly small events or noticings that have garnered the drive for her to continue to bring in her dogs.

Annie (P) noticed that Benji's involvement helped her create the classroom she desired. She states, "It helps us build that kind and compassionate community that we want them to have". Annie believes that having Benji in the classroom was perhaps the biggest impact in them developing some empathy for each other. She also did a fair bit of smudging, and sharing circles; but found that Benji was the one consistent link that made the biggest impact. During the focus group, she brings up this point: "We have some pretty volatile students, as I'm sure do most of you. And it's with those kids that we see the biggest impact. Because while they might wind up and punch another kid, they would never hurt the dog". It's a stepping stone, a beginning point for her students to see the impact of their actions, and perhaps begin to transfer what they would never think of doing to Benji over to their peers. Annie went as far as to compare Benji's involvement to that of *Roots of Empathy*³. Annie has had this program in her classroom in years past. Annie states, "It does many of the same things that *Roots of Empathy* sets out to do. It's just another vehicle that is quite...you know. There's no judgements".

For Sheila (P), the demonstration of empathy really came across for her students loud and clear. As mentioned earlier, Sheila's dog is a rescue. He suffered abuse and neglect in his former home, and still bares the scars of it. For her and her students, it opened up dialogue about what life is like for some animals in this world, how inhumanely and unfair they are often treated. Sheila states, "And the empathy, again, was just amazing. Because if they really looked, you know, they could see scars around his neck or whatever. So it's just giving them a broader

³ Developed by Mary Gordon, *Roots of Empathy* is a program designed to increase the empathy in children. It accomplishes this through a carefully designed curriculum, and the use of a family and their baby. The baby acts as the teacher, and a mirror for the children to see/feel/imagine what empathy is and can be (Gordon, 2007).

view on the realities that animal's face and the society that we live in". Sheila found her students to be very respectful and responsive to her dog as a result of this. Their ability to show compassion towards the dog made her believe that it could be impacting their abilities to be empathetic in other situations as well.

Robin (P) believes that through my dog Tessa, Jessica (S), has been able to develop an empathetic side. Jessica had a classmate with Cerebral Palsy, and was confined to his wheelchair most of the day. Robin noticed that Jessica would seek this boy out at every opportunity, wanting to sit with him and help him in any way that she could. Jessica volunteered to be his buddy for everything. She would hold his hand, and help push his wheelchair down the hall. Jessica was a student who often didn't see the world outside of the one that revolved around her, so it was always great to see her relating to, and reaching out to her peers. Robin states, "Jessica has totally taken him [student with Cerebral Palsy] under her wing. I see that and I kinda think about that, and wonder about her and her relationship with Tessa. Did she take what she had with Tessa and transfer it over [to this student]?" Robin believes that this is exactly what happened between Jessica and this boy. She sees Tessa as the catalyst. "Tessa helps individual kids...helps kids feel comfortable, and helps them show empathy towards others. She's helped kids to bring out their empathic side, where they normally wouldn't do that". Jessica and this boy are no longer in the same class, but she still seeks him out on the playground as someone to play with. It is obvious she cares for him.

Rogers and Webb (1991) equate empathy with care. The authors contend, "To care for others means fostering each individual's growth and self actualization" (p. 176). So it would seem then, that self esteem, and the ability for one to be empathetic are inextricably connected and dependent upon each other. But as Goleman (1995) believes, the ability to have empathy

will increase your own self esteem. He states, “Empathy builds on self-awareness; the more open we are to our own emotions, the more skilled we will be in reading feelings” (p. 96). The “teaching” of empathy however, is not something that can necessarily occur authentically in a teacher driven lesson. Having students experience the power of empathy first hand, in a natural environment, is ideal. For Bekoff (2007), this would be an environment where the students could experience the power of an animal/human relationship. He believes, “Children also provide some of the best examples of the powerful effect of animal emotions and empathy on human lives” (p. 19). So it seems to follow that the teachers involved in this study outlined firsthand observations and interpretations showing greater empathy in their students with the involvement of a dog in their classrooms.

Calm

In his book *Creature Comfort*, Graham (2000) cites several studies that indicate that the act of stroking an animal is highly effective at relieving stress and lowering blood pressure (p. 9). It evokes a sense of calm, and relaxation that for some individuals, is unmatched by anything else. For Anderson and Olson (2006), the toy poodle JD was instrumental in calming down the students involved in their study. Indeed, part of his purpose in the classroom was to aid in just that. However, the authors were surprised at the dog’s overall effectiveness. The authors state, “The strong bonds between these children and the toy poodle subsequently contributed to the stabilization of the students’ emotions. The students’ relationships with the dog were instrumental in effectively managing their behaviours” (p. 47). Melanie (P) would wholeheartedly agree with the authors. For one of her students in particular, my dog Tessa had an amazing impact on this students’ ability to self regulate. She (the student) observed that

Tessa needed calm to be in the room with her, and she worked very hard to be that way herself. Melanie states, “I think that the way Tessa was so gentle had a calming effect on the kids”. The relationship was reciprocal in the sense that the calm Tessa required to be in the classroom in turn had a calming effect on the children.

Annie (P) loved how Benji just seemed to know which of her students needed him the most on that particular day. Whether it be because they needed someone to hug, someone to talk to, or just someone to calm them and bring them out of their own mind and troubles, Annie noticed that Benji was very astute at this, and the children (through non verbal communication) were very astute at conveying this to him. During the individual interview, Annie (P) reflected on a student who this was very true for. She states, “Almost everytime Benji [the dog] is in the class, he’s sitting on that kids lap. And he’s just sitting there petting him and petting him, and he’s not calling anyone an f—so and so...”. Annie said this boy was unwilling to do any school work, got into many physical and verbal fights with his peers, and carried around a demeanour that seemed to indicate something was really bothering him. They struggled as a school team as to what their next steps should be for this boy. And then, it seemed to no longer be an issue after a visit from Benji. Annie states, “Benji came to class, and it was like he knew that this kid was so upset. He walked over to him, and the boy bent down, Benji wanted up. The boy picked him up. That kid completely calmed down, and it sustained itself for a couple of weeks. He needed that moment where ‘I can be in this space, and I’m okay’ ”.

During their study, Anderson and Olson (2006) noticed this with several of their participants as well. Petting the toy poodle, and being able to look him in the face (and get a lick from him every now and then) immediately calmed them, and made the desire to return to school the next day even greater (p. 43). Sheila (P) believes that having a dog in the classroom changes

the tone or feel of the environment for the better. It is an environment that honours the multiple intelligences, and is one that students want to spend time in. Sheila states, “It’s amazing how having an animal in the room can set the tone, or the climate, or change the temperament...and it’s just a phenomenal kind of change. It falls off of the multiple intelligences approach, because using a tool, such as a dog, is just another strategy”. I certainly noticed a change in the classroom environment whenever Tessa came for a visit. I discussed with my students that they needed use softer voices in her presence to keep her calm, but I noticed right away that this sense of calm that came over them was way more than just keeping their voices low. Their shoulders dropped, they were more willing to “go with the flow”, and they just loved to be near her to stroke her fur and snuggle. My students would correct each other on their behaviour when Tessa was visiting as well. “Don’t yell! You’ll upset Tessa!” “Pick up your garbage! Tessa will eat it!” “You need to be quiet so Tessa will come and sit with us!”. She certainly did become another strategy to evoke calm in the classroom.

Again reflecting upon her student who acted like a cat, Darla (P) noticed that her dogs were able to bring a sense of calm over him like nothing she had ever previously attempted. Darla described his behaviour as normally anything but calm, but more that of a “whirlwind”. She noticed, in the presence of the dogs, he was able to be immediately focussed, engaged, and calm. Darla states, “But when one of the dogs is there, he can sustain the activity by just stroking their fur, or just looking at them. He’s just so curious, and he can sustain his focus and attention for a long time. And smiling!”. She notices this student being very drawn to the dogs, and sees how the repetitive motion of stroking the dog or holding their leash positively impacts his sense of calm. She states, “To be on the other end of that leash, to be attached to them seems really significant to him. He seeks that out, and he gets very calm when he’s with the dogs”. We

may not ever know why this dog has such an impact on him, but Darla is grateful for it nonetheless. Darla now knows that there is a way to connect with this child. He was after all, displaying that when he was acting like a cat. Being a cat in those instances was his only way to “calm the world around him”. He was telling us this all along. Darla is quite glad that she was able to experience moments like these with her dogs in the classroom. It was an eye opening moment. The boy who played cat is still at Darla’s school today. While he no longer needs to play cat, he still struggles socially and emotionally.

Interestingly, only one participant commented on the sense of calm that they get when a dog is in the classroom with them. Now, it may be that the participants did in fact feel this way, but Cathy (P) is the only one who verbalised it during our interview. It wasn’t a question that I asked of them. Cathy states, “It is a benefit stress level wise, right? Like when it gets crazy in here I can escape, and look in his eyes and say I love you and pat him on his head, and I can just ignore everything else. I can feel my pulse slow down a bit, and just like, calm”. For Cathy, having her dog involved in her classroom is as much for her students as it is for her. It helps to take her out of that stressful moment, however briefly, and return more focussed and calm. Which, ultimately, is what we want for our students as well. We want to be able to give our students tools to cope, manage, and overcome those high stress situations. For the participants in this study, having their dogs involved in their classrooms did just that.

On a personal level, I find having Tessa present at school has an amazing calming effect on me (she’s a pretty good help at home too). There is no better feeling than driving to school with her by my side. I know that with her there, it is going to be a good day. It is going to be a positive day. I know that if I need her support at any time during the day, she will be there for me to pet, hug, and “center” myself with. In moments of stress, I can feel my heart rate lower as

soon as I touch her fur and hold her close. Breathing in rhythm with her helps regulate me during stressful moments. Taking a moment to look into her eyes, stroke her ears, and having her give me a supportive lick on the cheek are sometimes all it takes for me to come out of the moment and be ready to go back to whatever it is I was doing before. Being able to do that, in that moment at work, is amazing. That means that I won't carry around with me all day whatever it was that upset me. I can decompress and calm myself with Tessa, and immediately be back and ready for the rest of the day. It is such a great feeling, one that I'd much rather than bottling it up all day until I get home.

Love and care

During the one on one interview with Melanie (P), she reflected upon a student David (S), who's home life was less than ideal. He was attempting to cope with a sibling who had a serious physical illness, as well as a caregiver who had a serious mental illness. Most days, this student could be described as "happy". It was his lows however, that really showed us how insecure in his attachments he was to his family, and how much he was searching for an unconditional loving relationship. David kept a "feelings journal" in his classroom where he was able to write/draw his feelings whenever he felt he needed to let them out. Many of the entries talked about his parents fighting, his sister being sick, as well as his feelings of loneliness and the sense that he got from his family that he was unloved and unimportant. While Melanie and I did provide a caring relationship for him, it was my dog Tessa who gave him that extra little boost he needed. Melanie states, "I think that for kids like David it is a comfort to knowing that there is unconditional love, and someone that they can talk to that doesn't necessarily talk back". This was also true for Anderson and Olson (2006) during their study. In the closing interview with

one of the parents of a participant, they said that their son had conveyed to them that [the dog] was a better friend than any human because he played with him and accepted him no matter what (p. 45). The dog/child relationship can be a truly powerful connection.

Sheila (P) believes that having a dog in the classroom helps her students recognise the need for touch in their lives. She believes many of her students seem to have forgotten the power of touch, and that being able to hug, stroke, and connect with the dog in a loving and caring way has been very beneficial for them. Sheila states, “So to have that warmth, that unconditional love from an animal, you know like you said, they aren’t going to be judged, they know they are safe”. Robin (P) agrees with her. Robin reflected on the many times she witnessed Tessa and kids just sitting together, just being there with each other, and how powerful it was. For some students, Robin saw the close proximity and stroking of Tessa’s fur as being “enough”. She states, “Just sitting with them, or just reading, or maybe just talking to the dog while they are petting them, and that just being enough. That being the human interaction, without judgement. They (dogs) unconditionally love everyone, right? All they want you to do is love them”. Which I believe, is ultimately what all our students want as well. To be loved and cared for unconditionally.

Upon further reflection, Robin (P) also believed that having my dog Tessa involved in classrooms brought out a strong sense of care. Robin states, “Having a dog there was kind of like a vehicle for kids to come out of their shell. To have something to talk about, or interact with. Tessa was the go-between, and she was safe, fun”. She strongly believes that having Tessa there brought out this sense of care among the students that levelled their playing field, and made them realise that there was at least one person in the room who was going to love and care for them regardless. She states, “ I always think about not only dogs going to kids that

need it, but kids going to the dog that normally just sit there and not know how to deal with what they are thinking or feeling. They know she's there to comfort them and care regardless". Tessa was the safe "person" for them, she was an equalizer.

Darla (P) also saw having a dog in the classroom as a great way to bring out caring responses, or that caring instinct among her students. She saw her students develop a drive to love and care for her dogs, which in turn allowed her to some extent, extend that to those harder to reach children. When nothing else in Darla's tool box of tricks to "reach" children worked, it appeared that having the dogs there was a step towards building that bridge. Her dogs allowed her to reach her students to let them know that she was there to care and love for them. She states, "And when the dogs come in, it's just so natural and so automatic". They naturally migrated to the dogs, and automatically "opened up" to them. The dogs allowed her to reach those children.

To feel love, to be loved, and to give love is a basic human want and need. The act of loving and caring for someone is one of those universal truths that we want to experience. Children are not above this. Noddings (2005) believes that we learn the most from those that we love (p. 107). And while this is typically the role of parents or family, it can also, for many reasons, carry over to the classroom teacher. The students in our classrooms come from diverse families where unconditional love and care may not be "normal". This looks different in every family. And while teachers love and care for all of their students to some degree, there generally seem to be those in our classrooms who just require that extra little bit to be able to function at school. Miller (2010) contends, "Both Gandhi and Martin Luther King stated that love is at the center of the universe, and likewise it should be at the heart of teaching" (p. 8). While the participants in this study most certainly appear to be loving and caring teachers, they found that

having a dog in the room allowed them to see that connection with some of their students they were unable to reach. And as Alder (2002) contends, students are able to tell those teachers who genuinely care for them, and those who were just pretending out of obligation. They in fact, often worked harder for those teachers whom they believed loved and cared for them. The author states, “Students said they worked harder when they perceived that their teachers care about them personally and academically” (p. 245). And so, it would seem, you get what you give. The love and care you show and share with your students will come back to you in one form or another. But, as mentioned earlier, this is tough for some of our students. This is where having a dog in the classroom is beneficial.

In my role as an elementary Guidance Counsellor, I see Tessa filling the need for a loving and caring relationship for many of the children that I see on a one on one basis. Much like Darla (P), I believe that there are often those children that you just can’t seem to make a connection with, and that you need some kind of an “in” to begin to develop a relationship. Tessa’s involvement has, in many cases, allowed this to happen. Last year I had a student on my caseload where Tessa was pivotal in developing rapport with. This boy was in care, and struggling to connect with his foster family. He was acting out in class (aggression towards others, non-compliance), and would often state to his teacher that he felt like no one loved him or cared about him. His teacher brought it to my attention that he was always reading dog books, and often talked about a dog that he left behind with his biological family. So, we decided to have them meet and go for a walk together with me outside over one of the recesses. The boy’s face instantly lit up when he saw Tessa, and he very excitedly agreed to walk with her. During that initial walk, he talked non-stop about her, asking me all sorts of interesting questions. He gave her many pets, and a hug when it was time for us to leave. From that point on, that boy was

very willing to come and work with me one on one; especially of Tessa was going to be there, or if he could have the opportunity to create something for her. For this boy, Tessa was a link to his biological family, and someone who showed unconditional love and care for him at all times.

Risk taking in a non-judgemental environment

This is a theme and key phrase that came up over and over again in both the individual and focus group interviews. All participants involved believed that having a dog involved in their classrooms allowed for their students to take risks both academically and emotionally in an environment that was free from judgement. There is often an assumption made that those around you are judging you, making it difficult for those who struggle with self esteem, or caring connections to take risks and be themselves. Annie (P) states, “Animals don’t have value judgements that people do. Lots of people don’t, but others assume that they do. Same with kids, right? We don’t have that bias when it comes to animals”. She adds, “The dog doesn’t pass any judgement. And the kids know that the dog isn’t going to think that they’re an idiot, you know? They never have to go there”. Feeling safe and secure in your environment and with those around you is paramount to success in all aspects of your life, but especially in school.

One of the many ways the participants saw their students taking risks academically was with reading. Quiet reading time with the dog meant a captive audience that was only going to listen, not point out their mistakes. Buche (2003) believes that students ultimately find reading with a dog as fun, but also as someone who is inherently safe. The author states, “The student who has social fears and is terrified to read aloud forgets about what they can’t do. Dogs are magical catalysts” (p. 46). This is exactly what Melanie (P) and I would witness when students would read with my dog Tessa. It was like everything else seemed to disappear, and they would

just become engrossed in a story. Melanie states, “I think it was nice for them to be able to read to Tessa which was something that we did a lot of because it was kinda a non-judgemental moment for them, and it was something that they were better at than Tessa and she could just listen”. Anderson and Olson (2006) also saw this with their participants. Across the board they saw students who were not only more willing and eager to come to school, but also ready to engage in formerly “risky” academic activities (p. 43). It is a powerful thing to be able to be yourself, try something new, and know that your audience around you is not going to mock, ridicule or belittle you. The presence of these dogs allowed for this to occur.

Darla (P) believes that the presence of her dogs allowed her Kindergarten students to also take risks as writers. Much of the writing that occurs in the Kindergarten classroom is very creative, so it is not surprising for a dog to then become a main character in their writing piece. Darla did notice however, that dogs were turning up in stories that might not necessarily fit in conventional ideas of where a dog should be. She states, “I’m wondering if that [their writing] has been impacted in that there is a dog in the story. Perhaps the presence of the dogs is weaving itself in that way”. She also noticed a greater number of her students looking through nonfiction books, and copying and creating lists of all of the dogs that they knew or had been involved in their lives. Darla pointed out that Kindergarten is not necessarily a place where significant amounts of writing occur, so this was indeed a case where her students were compelled to take that risk.

Robin (P) and I certainly noticed kids taking risks with their reading when Tessa was in the room. A child who would never read aloud to either myself or Robin was choosing to read to Tessa. Robin states, “The kids would read out loud, and read to her, and I almost think that she made them more confident in their reading”. I would have to agree with Robin’s statement.

There was a boy in my class one year who really struggled as a reader/writer. He was in grade three, but unable to decode most sight words or phonetic sounds with any degree of consistency. He was, however, very motivated to read to Tessa and write about her. My Learning Support teacher at the time and I decided to take photographs of Tessa and this boy together and create a book. We helped him make a plan for what pictures we would include, and assisted him in the writing when it came time. This book became something very special to this boy. He read it over and over and over, always with a smile and high level of enthusiasm. It helped him to see himself as a reader, and he often stated so to us. "I can read this!" It did wonders for his self esteem and sense of self worth. It became a small stepping stone that allowed us to carefully and slowly help him take risks as a reader/writer. I still have a copy of the book in my office.

Whether it is academic or emotional, the presence of the dogs in the participants' classrooms allowed for the students to take some degree of risk in a non-judgemental environment. It was the theme or key wording that participants became most animated when discussing. They were excited that they had found something that allowed their students to shine and "just be". One of the research questions in this study is: How has the inclusion of a dog in a classroom setting impacted the learning and emotional needs of the students involved? While no participants could definitively indicate that having a dog present in their classrooms directly impacted the learning of their students, it can be concluded that several of the themes brought out by the participants indirectly did just that. Those themes would be: self esteem, calm, and risk taking. It can be concluded that improving self esteem will impact your learning in a positive manner. Higher self esteem will improve your own personal academic outlook. Working in a space that is calm and allows to you take risks with your learning will also have a positive impact on a students' learning needs. In a sense, having a dog present in your classroom seems to be

another way to assist you in bettering the emotional health of your students so that optimal learning can occur. This is certainly an activity Goleman (1995) would approve of. He believes that building emotional literacy in our students requires that teachers go beyond the conventional curricular outcomes and activities to include lessons that merge naturally with the needs of the student (p. 271).

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research study was to not only shed light on, and contribute to a growing body of research surrounding the use of animals in the classroom, but to also closely examine the relationship and interconnectedness of all three concepts or themes driving this study: care in the classroom, emotional intelligence, and the use of animals in a school setting.

The guiding research questions were:

- 1) How has the inclusion of a dog in a classroom setting impacted the learning and emotional needs of the students involved?
- 2) How has the level of care among the children and towards an animal been affected by the involvement of a dog in the classroom?
- 3) What are the potential benefits and challenges of having a dog in the classroom?

Upon Divisional approval (sent to all school divisions in Winnipeg, as well as Lord Selkirk, and Sunrise) a call for participants letter (see Appendix A) was sent out to all staff in those respective Divisions clearly outlining the study and participation requirements. The first six participants who contacted me were included in the study. Individual interviews were conducted at the participants' respective schools, and the focus group interview was conducted at my school. All interviews were voice recorded, and participants were given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. Upon completing the interviews, they were transcribed and examined using Grounded Theory to look for emerging themes and key words that related back to the research questions and literature review.

The analysis of the data collected allowed for the emergence of six themes. These themes derived directly from repeated key words or phrases throughout all of the interviews. I also paid close attention to those areas where the participants allowed their body language convey the importance of what they were saying. These observations were recorded in my field notes. Leaning in, smiling, rising of voice volume, gesturing, and talking faster were all cues I looked for (and noticed) when the participants were talking about something they saw as significant. The six themes were:

- 1) Emotional connection
- 2) Self esteem
- 3) Empathy
- 4) Calm
- 5) Love and care
- 6) Risk taking in a non-judgemental environment

All of these themes relate directly back to the guiding research questions, and provide answers as described in Chapter Five of this study. With that being said, the final guiding question, “What are the potential benefits and challenges of having a dog in the classroom” was not fully answered. Specifically, this study has not yet presented and examined the challenges of having a dog in the classroom. The reason for this is two-fold. The first reason is that the predominate view of the participants was positive, and second, that the challenges that did in fact come up were of minor significance (according to the participants), they didn’t feel it was necessary to elaborate. These challenges will be examined (as I experienced similar issues) when I discuss the limitations and recommendations of this study.

Limitations of this study

Personal bias

I have made it very clear since the onset of this study of my own personal bias. This study originated out of a desire to learn more about bringing animals into the classroom because I had begun to do that myself with Tessa. I had already experienced many positive and rewarding encounters between Tessa and my students, so I was aware and somewhat partial to the fact that this idea was a good one. My personal bias exists towards this study because I have lived and breathed it. Listening to all of the participants made me reflect upon all of the experiences I’ve had with Tessa and children. It made me aware of the fact that other people found this idea worthwhile. That being said, I do not believe it has any effect on the validity of this study. I was also extremely diligent during the interview process not to share with the participants my own experiences with Tessa and children. I simply asked the questions and attempted to engage them in a casual, but focussed dialogue.

Nonetheless, I am putting personal bias under the category of a limitation because I am aware that the results of this study are extremely positive; and I don't want the positivity to be overshadowed by doubt that I am not willing or aware to admit my own bias. I am fully aware, and I believe I had done my due diligence to ensure reliability and trustworthiness.

Limitations of the sample

While I certainly do not want to take anything away from the stories and experiences shared by the participants throughout this study, it could certainly be stated that the sample for this study consisted of likeminded individuals with seemingly similar (from the contact I had with them) experiences with dogs in their classrooms, and indeed in their personal lives as well. The study group therefore could be seen as homogeneous in its composition as all were from similar urban schools. This, of course, occurred in part due to the design of the study. I wanted individuals who worked with dogs in their classrooms, and these were the first respondents to my call for participants. What was unexpected, however, was just how likeminded they all appeared to be. As a result of this "like-mindedness", the themes that emerged from our conversations were perhaps limited in their scope and perspective. Not included in this study, for example, is the perspective of new Canadians, those with significant varying socioeconomic status, or a wide variety of ethnicities. I believe that a broader sample, both in terms of size and composition, would have yielded a wider variety of responses and shared experiences.

Time

This limitation may be broken down further into several sub categories: Divisional response time, participant time, and personal time. Approval from school divisions was not as

quick as I had hoped it would be. Letters were sent out in February, but approval did not come until late May. This meant that I was left interviewing my participants in June.

Because I was limited to interviewing my participants in June, their time also became a limitation of the study. I did not want the study to carry over the summer months, so it became essential to conduct all interviews before we dismissed for the holiday. June is typically one of the craziest months for teachers. They are busy trying to write report cards, keep their students engaged (and themselves!), attending retirement parties for colleagues, taking their own children to outdoor after school commitments, and so on. As such, I became flexible with my participation requirements. If they could be interviewed individually (preferred), but unable to attend the focus group due to a prior commitment, I allowed them to be included in the study regardless. Had I not done this, I was confident that I would never complete this study. So, I let it go. And in doing so, perhaps put a limitation on the study.

And the final time limitation was my own. Working full time, and changing jobs three times throughout the course of starting and completing this thesis has made it a challenge to complete in a timely manner.

Recommendations

Educating colleagues

Both myself, Annie (P), and Cathy(P) have experienced colleagues who were less than excited about the prospect of coming to work and having a dog greet them in the hallway. While

it is certainly their right to have a difference of opinion, our professional judgement and own quality of character came into question by those who are attempting to figure out exactly what we are doing. Cathy felt like she was constantly under the microscope when her dog visited, and felt like both she and her dog had to be “perfect” on the days that he came. Annie, although not a “dog person” welcomed Benji into her classroom, but was questioned by colleagues on the fact that she admitted to not completely loving animals. It was a dichotomy that her colleagues did not seem to understand.

Perhaps the answer then lies in educating our colleagues about the why, and the how, of a dog is being included in our classrooms. I certainly know that having a half day professional development day where I did just that went a long way to answering these questions for my colleagues, and in fact, changed some of their opinions to more supportive. I would recommend that anyone looking to bring their dog into their classroom not only do their own research behind the benefits and pitfalls of it, but also that they offer a session for colleagues so that they can experience first-hand just what exactly is going on. That being said, there are always, no matter the work environment, going to be those who disagree with things just for the sake of disagreeing. Trust that after completing your informational session with your colleagues you have done your part, and that they will come to their own conclusions. And while those conclusions and opinions may not reflect that of your own, you need to respect them nonetheless.

Consistent programming

Each of the participants of this study brought up the fact that they wished they could have more consistent programming with their dog in the classroom. For most participants, this meant being able to bring the dog in on the same day of the week, or day of the cycle throughout

the year. Consistency was important to not only them, but also their students. It would have been great to allow the students to know ahead of time that this was the dogs' designated day, and he/she would be there every time. But life doesn't work that way, things happen. Meetings come up, or the dog gets sick, or the cold weather becomes an issue for the dog. All the participants recognised that while it might be unreasonable to expect the dog to be there 100% of the designated days, it would be a reasonable recommendation to try to ensure that this happened at minimum 80% of the time. Consistency is key, and in order for the dog to be effective, he/she needs to be in the school on a regular schedule to ensure bonding and attachment occurs.

Further study

This was a challenging topic to research. While it was easy to find related articles about care and emotional intelligence, it was very difficult to find literature related to having a dog in your classroom. There is starting to be a growing body of research out there about the benefits of therapy dogs as reading companions, or therapy dogs in hospitals. Studies such as this one, however, remain largely unexplored. Further research in this area is needed. I believe that further research will only help to not only increase awareness about this kind of programming, but also further validate those already embracing dogs into their classrooms. I am sure that those people often feel alone in their beliefs, or feel like others see them as the "crazy dog person". I certainly felt that way before interviewing my participants. It seemed like I was the only one around me willing to take this on. But, that was not the case. Turns out, there are other likeminded individuals out there! Each participant was appreciative that I was conducting the study, and wished there were more people out there conducting similar research. And so do I. That would then mean that more children are going to reap the benefits of having a dog in their

classroom, and more teachers are going to see yet another strategy for possible use at their disposal. I see further study as a win-win situation.

It would also be interesting to conduct a study with the adults in the building on the impact of a dog in their work environment. The participants in this study all agree that the general demeanour of those in close proximity to the dog was improved, and that they noticed their colleagues smiling, laughing, and generally enjoying the company of the dog.

Proceed with caution

While the evidence might suggest that this is a study and idea more teachers should be willing to attempt, I urge caution in this. Bringing an animal into your classroom should be a deliberate and well thought out plan that looks at a variety of factors such as: allergies, temperament of the dog, needs of the children, your confidence in your dog (or that of the one possibly coming in), space, and safety of your students and dog. While this experience can be extremely rewarding, I did not, nor did any of the authors cited in this study, enter into this without careful planning and consideration of all factors.

Concluding thoughts

The purpose of this study was to examine the use of a dog in a classroom, along with the themes of care in the classroom and emotional intelligence. The goal was to shed light on this emerging area of study, as well as share the stories of teachers who are currently using a dog in their classroom in some capacity. My story was weaved in as well to not only provide context for why I decided to study this, but also act as a baseline for the study. Through personal interviews, a focus group discussion, and the sharing of the participants' stories, the data

illuminated the emergence of six themes. These themes were; emotional connection, self esteem, empathy, calm, love and care, and finally, risk taking in a non-judgemental environment. It was concluded that the involvement of a dog in a classroom improved, or acted as a catalyst to all of the themes.

It is interesting that when I started this journey with my thesis several years ago, I struggled to find stories and supportive research about the presence of dogs in schools. There were a few, but not many. And now, within the past year or so, more and more are popping up. In Coquitlam, British Columbia for instance, a yellow lab named Orion helps a grade six/seven class feel more at home and teach them about their own social emotional learning (Strandberg, 2013). Orion is a therapy dog, trained by the PADS (Pacific Assistance Dog Society) to be calm and respectful. The teacher, Lindsay Hill, believes (and has supportive research to back it) that specially trained dogs such as Orion help regulate the behaviour of those around him. The children see him as a calm and reassuring presence (Strandberg, 2013).

The University of Manitoba, University of Regina, McGill, and Dalhousie University are also starting to recognise the power of a dog with their students. During exam time, each of these institutions have “puppy rooms” set up where students can come and de-stress with a number of trained therapy dogs and their owners (Crosier, 2013). For these students, the presence of a dog not only eases their feelings of homesickness, but also acts as a regulator to their mood and well being. Being able to sit and pet a dog, or play with them for a short period of time, is as one student described it, “Enough to get me through my papers and exams” (McDonald, 2013). I think that these universities should be proud of their efforts, and I hope more join in with this “movement” soon.

So, it would seem that this seemingly blossoming area of interest of how the presence of a dog can help students, is only in its infancy of study. More research, attention, and documentation is needed in this area. I hope my research will add to this, and perhaps spark an interest in someone else to explore it further.

APPENDIX A

Superintendent Consent Form



Fort Garry Campus Research Ethics Boards

CTC Building, 208 - 194 Dafoe Road

Winnipeg, MB R2T 2N2

Research Title: An Examination of the Themes of Care, Emotional Intelligence, and the Presence of a Dog in a Classroom

Researcher: Melissa Rogers

Research Supervisor: Dr. Gary Babiuk

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Melissa Rogers, and I am a Faculty of Education graduate student at the University of Manitoba. I am also an elementary Guidance Counsellor in Seven Oaks School Division. I am currently in the process of completing the thesis portion of my program, and I am in need of participants in my study. My thesis examines the use of dogs in the classroom. The idea for this study originated out of my own observations of the interactions and overall influence of the involvement of my dog, Tessa, in my school, and classroom. It also arose out of observations of the children in my classroom seeking a caring relationship in which they could receive and provide unconditional love and care.

Your signature on the bottom of this letter indicates your authorization for me to conduct this study in your school division. Please ensure that you follow research protocol according to your divisions' individual policy on how to contact participants. Should your policy require you to forward a letter to all principals, please forward the attached letter to all principals in your school division. Principals are then asked to forward the call for participants to **all** staff in their schools. Should your policy indicate that you are able to contact teachers directly, please forward the call for participants letter directly to **all** staff in your school division. At this point, interested participants may contact me directly.

In order to participate in this study, educators must have a dog involved in their classroom community in some capacity. This could be: as a member of their classroom

community of a regular basis, as a reading buddy who visits, as a soothing method used to deescalate, and so on. I encourage any potential participants to contact me if they are unsure as to whether or not their program is what I am looking for.

Educators will be asked to participate in two phases. First, there will be a semi-structured interview conducted at their convenience. This interview will be voice recorded, and participants can expect it to be approximately one hour in duration. Second, participants will be asked to gather at a mutually decided place of convenience to be involved in a focus group discussion. Again, this will be voice recorded, and guiding questions will be provided to stimulate conversation. Participants can again expect this to be for approximately one hour in duration.

In accordance with University of Manitoba Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) ethical policies, pseudonyms will be used for participants and for the schools from which they came. All data collected from the interviews and focus group will remain on my personal home computer which is security password protected. All information gathered will be kept until the thesis has been successfully defended, at which point it will be shredded/deleted. All participants will be given copies of transcripts to edit/submit omissions, and a summary of study itself upon completion. All participants must read and sign an informed consent letter (supplied before participation begins), and can withdraw at any time from the study without prejudice.

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. Please sign and mail an additional copy to me for my records at the address supplied below. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Melissa Rogers, Faculty of Education graduate student

Consent Form

I, _____ (please print) hereby give my permission for Melissa Rogers to conduct research for the purposes of the completion of her thesis. This study will be conducted during the months of February-June 2013, and the researcher will contact me if more time is needed.

In initialling here _____, I agree that I have read and understood the study to the best of my abilities. I have contacted the researcher for further clarifications if this is not the case.

Name: _____ (please print)

Contact information: _____ (day telephone number)

_____ (email address)

Signature: _____

Please keep one copy for yourself, and send a signed copy to the address below. You could also simply fax it to the number below:

Melissa Rogers

Principal Information/Consent Form



Fort Garry Campus Research Ethics Boards

CTC Building, 208 - 194 Dafoe Road

Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2

Research Title: An Examination of the Themes of Care, Emotional Intelligence, and the Presence of a Dog in a Classroom

Researcher: Melissa Rogers

Research Supervisor: Dr. Gary Babiuk

Dear Principal,

My name is Melissa Rogers, and I am a Faculty of Education graduate student at the University of Manitoba. I am also an elementary Guidance Counsellor in Seven Oaks School Division. I am currently in the process of completing the thesis portion of my program, and I am in need of participants in my study. My thesis examines the use of dogs in the classroom. The idea for this study originated out of my own observations of the interactions and overall influence of the involvement of my dog, Tessa, in my school, and classroom. It also arose out of observations of the children in my classroom seeking a caring relationship in which they could receive and provide unconditional love and care.

Your signature on the bottom of this letter indicates your authorization for me to conduct this study in your school. Please forward the letter of informed consent to **all** members of your staff. Interested educators may contact me directly should they wish to be included in this study.

In order to participate in this study, educators must have a dog involved in their classroom community in some capacity. This could be: as a member of their classroom community of a regular basis, as a reading buddy who visits, as a soothing method used to deescalate, and so on. I encourage any potential participants to contact me if they are unsure as to whether or not their program is what I am looking for.

Educators will be asked to participate in two phases. First, there will be a semi-structured interview conducted at their convenience. This interview will be voice recorded, and participants can expect it to be approximately one hour in duration. Second, participants will be asked to gather at a mutually decided place of convenience to be involved in a focus group discussion. Again, this will be voice recorded, and guiding questions will be provided to

stimulate conversation. Participants can again expect this to be for approximately one hour in duration.

In accordance with University of Manitoba Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) ethical policies, pseudonyms will be used for participants and for the schools from which they came. All data collected from the interviews and focus group will remain on my personal home computer which is security password protected. All information gathered will be kept until the thesis has been successfully defended, at which point it will be shredded/deleted. All participants will be given copies of transcripts to edit/submit omissions, and a summary of study itself upon completion. All participants must read and sign an informed consent letter (supplied before participation begins), and can withdraw at any time from the study without prejudice.

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project, you may contact any of the above named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. Please sign and mail an additional copy to me for my records at the address supplied below. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Melissa Rogers, Faculty of Education graduate student

Consent Form

I, _____ (please print) hereby give my permission for Melissa Rogers to conduct research for the purposes of the completion of her thesis. This study will be conducted during the months of February-June 2013, and the researcher will contact me if more time is needed.

In initialling here _____, I agree that I have read and understood the study to the best of my abilities. I have contacted the researcher for further clarifications if this is not the case.

Name: _____ (please print)

Contact information: _____ (day telephone number)

_____ (email address)

Signature: _____

Please keep one copy for yourself, and mail a signed copy to the address below. You could also simply fax it to the number below.

Melissa Rogers

Informed Consent Letter to Participants



Fort Garry Campus Research Ethics Boards

CTC Building, 208 - 194 Dafoe Road

Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2

Research Project Title: An Examination of the Themes of Care, Emotional Intelligence, and the Presence of a Dog in a Classroom

Researcher: Melissa Rogers

Advisor: Dr. Gary Babiuk

Dear Participant,

My name is Melissa Rogers, and I am a Faculty of Education graduate student at the University of Manitoba. I am also an elementary Guidance Counsellor in Seven Oaks School Division. I am inviting you, as a teacher with a dog in your classroom, to participate in my thesis study. The study will examine the use of dogs in the classroom, and how they relate to, as well as contribute to the development of emotional intelligence and a caring classroom community. The first five teachers who agree to participate will be chosen for this study.

Should you agree to participate in this study, this consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you a basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here; feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully.

My thesis examines the use of dogs in the classroom. The idea for this study originated out of my own observations of the interactions and overall influence of the involvement of my dog Tessa in my school, and classroom. It also arose out of observations of the children in my classroom seeking a caring relationship where they could both receive and provide unconditional love and care. My thesis is qualitative research based, with grounded theory being used as a method of analysis.

In accordance with University of Manitoba Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) ethical policies, you will be given a pseudonym and all distinguishing characteristics for your respective schools will be changed. This consent form, and your pseudonym identity will be kept in separate locked file cabinet in my home. Raw data will be

stored on a voice recording device. When not in use, it will be kept in a locked file cabinet; separate from both the pseudonym and consent form information. All data collected from the interviews and focus group will remain on my personal home computer, which is security password protected, until the thesis has been successfully defended at which point it will be securely shredded or deleted. You will be given a copy of your interview transcript so that you may make corrections, additions, or delete passages you do not want included. You will also be given a summary of the study electronically upon completion of defence. A full copy of the study will be provided electronically upon request. You may withdraw at any time from the study without prejudice by simply contacting me at any of the contact information supplied above. All information gathered up to the point of withdrawal will be shredded and/or deleted. A hard copy of the thesis will be available at the University of Manitoba. At present, I have no plans to publish or present the findings at conferences. Should this change, you will be contacted and given the option to have your data removed from the study should you wish.

You will be asked to participate across two fronts. First, there will be a semi-structured interview conducted at your convenience. As privacy and confidentiality are paramount to any research I strongly encourage you to select a location that will be private and comfortable. Should you not have a space available that matches this criteria, one on one interviews will take place in the conference room at my school. This interview will be voice recorded, and you can expect it to be about an hour in duration. Second, you will be asked to gather at a mutually decided upon place of convenience to partake in a focus group discussion with the other study participants. Again, this will be voice recorded, and guiding questions will be provided to stimulate conversation. A commitment of no more than two hours is required. Once again, the conference room at my school will be made available as a possible meeting place to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. The University of Manitoba may look at my research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way at any time.

This research has been approved by your Superintendent and the University of Manitoba Education and Nursing Research Ethics Research Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-mentioned persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you for your records and reference.

Sincerely,

Melissa Rogers, Faculty of Education graduate student

Consent Form

I _____ (please print) hereby consent to participate in the study mentioned in the Letter of Informed Consent.

I can be reached at _____ (H) _____ (W)

Email: _____

Participant signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B

Individual participant guiding interview questions

This is not an exhaustive or conclusive list of interview questions. These are meant to be “conversation prompts” or to assist during the interview as needed to encourage an open and easy sharing of information.

- 1) How long have you included a dog as part of your classroom community?
- 2) What factor(s) initially prompted you to bring a dog into your classroom? What was your classroom like before the dog arrived?
- 3) Describe a typical day with your dog at school. Are there special considerations you take, or protocols you follow? How could a day in your classroom with your dog present be described?
- 4) How has the inclusion of a dog your classroom setting impacted the learning of the students involved?
- 5) How has the inclusion of a dog in your classroom impacted the emotional lives of the students involved?
- 6) Is there a student for whom this experience has been particularly beneficial? Please describe.
- 7) How has the level of care (between students, between students and your dog, between yourself and your students) been affected by the involvement of a dog in your classroom?
- 8) Describe the best day in your classroom with the dog.
- 9) What are the challenges of having a dog involved in you classroom community?
- 10) How do you feel about the sustainability of using a dog in the classroom? Is it something that you will include on a yearly basis?
- 11) Describe some feedback you have been given about the use of a dog in your classroom from parents, administration, or colleagues.
- 12) Do you have any concluding thoughts, or anything else you would like to add?

Focus group questions

This is not an exhaustive or conclusive list of questions. These are meant to be “conversation prompts” or to assist during the interview as needed to encourage an open and easy sharing of information.

- 1) Please describe what factor(s) led each of you to bring a dog into your classroom community.
- 2) How was your idea (to bring a dog into your classroom community) received by administration? Parents? Children potentially involved?
- 3) Please describe what, if any, special considerations and protocols you implemented in order to bring your dog into your classroom community.
- 4) How has the inclusion of a dog in your classrooms impacted the learning of your students?
- 5) How has the inclusion of a dog in your classrooms impacted the emotional needs of the children involved?
- 6) Do you see the involvement of a dog in your classrooms as a vehicle of care?
- 7) How do your school communities address the emotional needs of your students?
- 8) Do you see your programs with the dog evolving? If so, how?
- 9) Will you be implementing this program with the dog on a yearly basis?
- 10) What, if any, challenges are there to having a dog in your classroom community?

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