Hamline University

DigitalCommons@Hamline

School of Education and Leadership Student
Capstone Projects

School of Education and Leadership

Fall 2021

HOW CAN INCORPORATING AN ANIMAL BASED CURRICULUM INTO AN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM HELP PROMOTE SOCIAL/ EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

Stephanie Stickney

HOW CAN INCORPORATING AN ANIMAL BASED CURRICULUM INTO AN

ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM HELP PROMOTE SOCIAL/ EMOTIONAL

DEVELOPMENT?

by Stephanie M. Stickney

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master

of Arts in Teaching..

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

Date, 2020

Primary Advisor: Karen Moroz
Secondary Advisor: Jeff Fink
Content Expert: Danielle Lynch

Acknowledgement

To my family for their continuous support and sacrifices made in order for me to complete my educational journey. Thank you for always being there and giving me the encouragement to complete my Master's and become an elementary school teacher.

"Our task must be to free ourselves… by widening our circle of compassion to embrace

all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty."

– Albert Einstein

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Stickney, S. How Does Incorporating Animals into an Elementary Classroom Promote Social/ Emotional Development? (2021)

The research question addressed in this project was, how does incorporating animals into a fifth grade classroom promote social/ emotional development? This project describes a teacher's journey in implementing an animal based curriculum in the hopes of promoting social/ emotional development. The purpose of this project is to examine the effect that having animals into a classroom environment can have on students in regards to their social/ emotional development. This project describes the challenges, struggles, and opposing views on having animals in a classroom as well as the successes and highlights from an animal based classroom.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This chapter will explore my personal and educational journey into my passion for having animals involved in education. Each section will look at how I was personally and educationally influenced by animals in my life and how that has influenced my passion and interest for looking at ways to integrate this into an elementary classroom setting. It will include my early childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and current experiences and how building relationships and connections with animals helped me build strong social and emotional developmental skills. Through these stages in my life I will explain why I believe animals should be a part of elementary education. This chapter will examine how animals in school can help build empathy within students and will help their social and emotional skills later in life.

Starting in 2020, students have dealt with a disconnection with schools because of the COVID-19 virus. Students have had to be pulled from traditional schooling and have experienced a new online model which takes them away from their everyday social interactions with peers and adults. Being forced to quarantine at home for the past year and half, away from friends, family, and school has brought a change in how we interact with the people around us. I would like to help address this issue in education because with the pandemic coming to a slow end students will start going back to school, and continuing their almost normal lives. Returning back to school will mean new challenges with social interactions because they have been isolated and away from others. This might cause a delay in their social and emotional skills, and this research will look at how

to address the issue of returning back from a pandemic and how to interact within society when we have been isolated for the past year. I hope to address this social deficit and hopefully transition students back into the social world with the help of animals with a classroom setting. That is why I would like to research, *How can incorporating an animal based curriculum into an elementary classroom help promote social emotional development*?

Early Childhood

Personal Connections

Some of my earliest memories are those that include animals and my connection with being outdoors. Growing up, my home was always filled with a variety of animals. I remember having a house filled with dogs, and at one point we had four dogs living in our small two bedroom home. Throughout my childhood, we gave a home to: a field of chickens, two pigs, a rabbit pen, ducks, cats, parakeets, and one surprising ferret. I was always surrounded by animals. No matter where we lived, it was simply   part of my life to engage and interact with animals.

When I think about my animal experiences, there are connections between how my social and emotional skills developed and how I built a strong sense of empathy. Being surrounded by animals filled my life with great joy, but it was always important to consider responsibilities and the dark side of dealing with so many different creatures. During the life of an animal you will see them grow old, sick, and die. After building a strong connection with them it can be very challenging to deal with. Seeing the course of nature take place in front of my eyes helped me create a sense of empathy for the things

around me because I wanted their lives to be joyful. This experience created my interest in animals and would shape the way I would look at life around me and realize how I could help others build social and emotional skills.

Early Education. When I look back on my educational journey and the connections with animals, most of my fondest memories are those that are closely related to animals in my elementary years. The moments that I remember the most of elementary school are my trips to the beach, tide pools, fish hatchery, and dissecting a small squid and then eating it. My school in Northern California was right next to the ocean. A lot of the curriculum had to do with our connections with the water and marine life. Out of all the things that we learned about while I was in school these few memories stick out to me because they were the most meaningful.

My school would take me on trips to the beach to explore the tide pools and sea life found in those ecosystems, as well as take part in cleaning up our beaches to help preserve those environments. I also learned about the life cycle of a fish and other sea animals, and had the opportunity to go to a fish hatchery to watch this in action in person rather than just through books. While we learned about marine life and animal life cycles we would dissect some of those animals for hands-on experience. My science teacher would cook up what we had dissected for us to eat in order to make the connections between what we were learning about and how that relates to our everyday lives. This impacted me because I was able to see how first hand experience that was meaningful could make a lasting impression. This helped me relate this back to my research question, *How can incorporating an animal based curriculum into an elementary classroom help*

promote social and emotional development, because I want to do something that will make an impression on students.

Early Influence. I think the importance of an animal based education was that having these bonds with animals and nature helped build the connection between what we were learning and how that relates to us as individuals. This type of curriculum was relevant to us because we lived in a fishing community and our families had some type of association with fishing and the ocean because we lived right next to it. When education is meaningful and relatable to students to allow them to make those meaningful connections with the curriculum which will result in lifelong learning experiences. If you see how the curriculum can relate to your life, you can better understand why it is important to learn about it rather than learning about something that would not be relatable. I would like to explore this further because it provides me the opportunity to discover something that might enhance meaningful learning for students. This was the first influence in my passion for animals in elementary education and impacts the research that I would like to conduct. I think it is important to have animals involved in early childhood because it can help build empathy and social skills needed for future implications.

Adolescence

Personal Connections. Transitioning from my early childhood years and into adolescence, understanding my place in the world and how I could make a difference really stuck out to me.My adolescence was filled with finding a way that could make a difference in the world around me and take on more responsibilities in my life.I had a

responsibility to care for animals. Seeing stray animals and wanting to make a difference, I would leave food outside for local cats that were in my neighborhood and eventually a few stray cats would come by everyday to get a little bit of food. I had noticed that one of the cats who would come by my house looked thin and dirty, and helped it out because no animals should be left out being uncared for. We eventually took this cat into our home and started taking care of it and providing it with the love and care that it needed.

These experiences allowed me to build a stronger sense of empathy, caring, and responsibility because I learned how to take care of something other than myself and connect with how they were feeling. The dictionary says that empathy is defined as "the ability to understand and share feelings of another," and those skills were strengthened through the use of animals, because it can help you understand how they were feeling and make emotional connections with them (Brown, 2020). Much like the ferret or cat found on the street, nobody would not want to feel alone and hungry. Through helping them I could connect with how they were feeling and build empathy skills. Helping out animals that were in my community gave me a sense of belonging and allowed me to feel like doing something was making a difference and helping other things in need rather than just myself was more important. The connection with animals had an impact on me and helped me care for other creatures. This influenced my emotional development, and my interest to explore how this can make a difference in others lives. The impact that taking care of animals in my community had for me, and knowing this guided my desire to explore how I can use this connection with my students. Learning to care for animals helps you build stronger emotional skills and a sense of responsibility because you are no

longer just caring for yourself; you are taking care of something that might not have the resources to do it themselves.

Secondary Education. During adolescence, social and emotional development is a key part of your experiences in school and can shape who you become as a person for better or worse. High school is a critical part of developing a sense of belonging and it is important that you have strong social and emotional skills. Those connections you make with your peers can be very influential.

In school, finding my social place and interacting with peers was a big part of my development. . I would watch the different groups of people come together and form cliques based off of different interests. Within those groups you could see everyone develop a sense of belonging with peers. Being involved with cheerleading in high school helped me make meaningful friendships with that group of people. We shared an emotional bond based off of a social activity. The influence that social groups have in high school is clear because this is a time that people create clubs, get involved in sports, music and other social activities.

Adolescent Influence. Social interactions are an important part of high school, but I can see the challenges that some face when they have not had the opportunity to build strong skills at a young age. Bullying, isolation, harassment, and mental health are some of the struggles that people face during this period of time and could be related to a lack of social and emotional skills. This is what influenced my interest in finding a way to build social and emotional skills because you can see the destruction that this can cause when people are missing this key part of development. I wanted to find a way that we can

address the issue of lacking social and emotional skills and help students build those important skills at a young age because it will help them adjust later in life and especially adolescence.

Adulthood

Personal Connections. In my next stage of life one of the most influential parts of my life was getting my own dog and having something that I am fully responsible for taking care of. Growing up, my family always had animals around us and we would take care of them, but it was different when you are the one who is truly responsible for the animals' care. The responsibility was on my parents to take care of our animals and think about what to do with them when we were not home. When I got my own dog it helped me truly understand the importance of responsibility. The importance of being selfless while starting to care for my own animal influenced everything that I do today.

This is important because it helped me understand the importance of responsibility and what can happen when you are in charge of another living thing. I can no longer just think about myself because my animals rely on me to take care of them. Taking care of my dog has helped me build the necessary skills that will help me become a better person. I wanted to explore this area of development because this skill is important to learn. Having animals in the curriculum at school will help students start to build this understanding that will help them become selfless in the future.

College and Animals. When I was in college I would see signs and posters that highlighted the importance of taking care of your mental health. I struggled in college because I did not know what I wanted to do with my life and dropped out for feeling

overly stressed out and lacked a vision for my future. I needed a few years to find my place in life and find a career path that was right for me.When I went back to college and started my path towards education and started learning about how animals can help people out during times of high stress and how social and emotional development is important for students. Seeing posters about service dogs that would be on campus t for students to come and pet and take a moment to de-stress helped me notice the importance animals can have . I also learned about people using animals as reading buddies to help struggling readers, and would allow them to read to an animal in a safe space rather than the pressure of reading to another person.This opened my eyes into the possibilities that animals could be used to help others, and that is what I would like to explore for this project.

Adult Influence. What I learned in college helped influence my educational path because I found out that I could connect what I was passionate about and use it to help students in different areas of development. I learned about how students developed and what areas are crucial in order for students to be successful in the future. I really grabbed on to social and emotional development because it really makes the difference when students are lacking in these areas. I have always found a connection with animals and how that influenced my development, and when I started seeing how that can be used in education I wanted to focus on this area. Animals influence my research because I see the benefit that taking care of animals can have on someone's development because you understand that the world is not about themselves, but that you have a part to do in your environment. This is how I started to narrow down my research and find an area that I

thought is important for students' development. I want something that could address issues and will help make students more successful in the future. In the end I found that I want to know more about how incorporating animals into an elementary classroom can help promote social emotional learning.

Hands-On Experience

Looking at my current educational and professional experience, my student teaching gave me the opportunity to see what students might need in a real-life setting and apply what I have learned about in school to real practice. This experience allowed me to see what students needed compared to what I had been learning about throughout my classes. Most of the issues that I saw students were dealing with during my student teaching experience had to do with social or emotional issues. Students dealing with bullying, teasing, name calling, friend drama, were just a few of the examples that I had to deal with and they all related to their social and emotional skills. I could see that students struggled with how to fit into the classroom environment socially and how to interact with their peers because they might have lacked social and emotional skills.

I also worked at an environmental school and could see the impact that having a curriculum based around nature and the environment had on students learning because it was hands-on and meaningful. Students would be excited to go outside and learn about different things because we were not in a classroom sitting down and listening to a teacher tell them what they should be learning about, but instead they could see it in person. This hands-on learning experience allowed students to make a connection with the community and environment and connect with what they were learning about and

how it could be relatable to them. This influenced the area that I wanted to research because I could see the impact that environmental education has on students and how beneficial this could be to making learning meaningful. Identifying the problem that students lacked social and emotional skills, and seeing the benefit that environmental education has on students I wanted to connect those two things together through animals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I think concentrating on the idea of exploring how animals in an elementary classroom help promote social and emotional development and can help students during this post-pandemic time in education where social skills are lacking. My research will explore how people have been addressing the issue of lacking social and emotional skills, and how animals could be used as a tool to help strengthen that area of development.

Coming Next

Chapter 2 will be a literature review examining different areas of education and how animals are being utilized to help with student development. This chapter will explore the importance of social and emotional development and how it develops in young children. Then I will explore how animals are already being used in education and the pros and cons of having them in an elementary setting. Then I will examine how animals can help children build prosocial interactional skills, and how that is important in how students interact with each other and the world around them. Finally, I will explore research that looks at how animal bonds can help children build empathy skills and the implications that this has in education.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature review

Introduction

This chapter will be broken down into four main sections: Social/ Emotional Development, Animals in Education, Social Interactions, Empathy and Animal Bonds. Each section will explore subtopics within each major section that will help outline the purpose of this research and how this will help address lacking social skills in elementary school through the use of animals. This project will address the research question : *How can incorporating an animal based curriculum into an elementary classroom help promote social and emotional development?*

In social/ emotional development social this section will explore how emotional skills develop in children and the leading research that influences how we teach students positive social and emotional skills. Animals in education will explore how animals are being used in elementary education around the world and their benefits, as well as, the challenges and opposing views. Social interactions will look at how children interact with their peers and adults and how animals can be used to help influence those interactions. Finally, it will look at how students build empathy skills and how bonds with animals can help strengthen social relationships and empathy towards others. The purpose of this literature review is to look at what research is being done in the field of education and what areas need more support in regards to animals being utilized in our school system.

Social and Emotional Development

This section will explore the importance of positive social and emotional development for young children. The beginning of this section will focus on the idea of what social and emotional development is, theories on how social and emotional skills develop in children, and how those skills have life-long implications for how children view themselves and interact with others. We will also delve into the implications that can occur when children lack social and emotional development and how that can lead to challenges in social interactions and behavioral struggles. The second portion of this section will look at how animals can impact this area of development, and specifically how having pets can help build positive social and emotional skills compared to others without pets. The idea that having animals or interacting with animals at a young age can help build positive social skills will help lead into the next section about having animals in education.

Background

Social and emotional development is an important part of elementary school because it involves how students view themselves/others, and interact with the world around them. When talking about social and emotional development in children it is first important to understand what this term even means. Scholars Kendziora and Osher (2016) from the American Institutes for Research define social and emotional learning (SEL) as being:

> (SEL) is the process through which children learn the skills to handle themselves, their relationships, and their work effectively and ethically. These skills include recognizing and managing emotions, developing caring and concern for others,

establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling

challenging situations constructively. They are the skills that allow children to

calm themselves when angry, make friends, resolve conflicts respectfully, and

make ethical and safe choices. (p. 798)

Kendziora and Osher (2016) define social and emotional learning (SEL) as an all

encompassing term that affects a variety of factors in children's lives and it is important

that students develop those skills in order to be successful in life (p.798). When students

have positive social and emotional skills it can lead to better performance in school and a

higher likelihood to succeed in future endeavors (Kendziora & Osher, 2016, p. 798).

Kendziora and Osher (2016) states the importance of social and emotional development

by saying, "Students who set high academic goals, have self-discipline, motivate

themselves, manage their stress, and organize their approach to work learn more and get

better grades" (p.798). By understanding what social and emotional development is, we

can better understand why it is important that students learn these skills in order to do

well in the future.

Social and emotional learning is important in younger elementary schools because

this is the time when students are beginning to develop their self-identity and understand

how the world around them works . Elementary level is an important time for social and

emotional development because they spend most of their time in an education setting

with peers, and adults and those adults play a large role in those students lives when

shaping those skills (Conners-Burrow et al., 2017, p. 187; Snyder & Dillow, 2015). This

research is focused on elementary education because it is a key point in childhood when

students are learning how to interact with peers and adults in a safe space. Elementary school setting is a good time for social and emotional learning because they have time to adapt and change behaviors rather than waiting until secondary school when many of their thoughts and opinions have already been shaped (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). This influences the purpose of this study looking to early childhood and elementary education rather than secondary education and adolescence.

In conclusion, social and emotional learning is an important part of development and influences the way that we build relationships with ourselves and others (Conners-Burrow et al., 2017, p. 187; Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Early education is a critical phase for this type of development because students spend most of their time in an educational environment and are just beginning to learn how to interact with their environments. This influences the research question and allows the research to narrow down the topic to elementary education specifically and identify the appropriate audience. The next section will look at the common theories surrounding social and emotional development and how students develop those skills. This will allow the reader to understand how animals will influence this area of development, because it allows them to better understand the theories around how those skills develop without animal involvement.

Theories

In order to understand social and emotional development, it is important to examine how theories believe that those skills develop. This section will examine three main theories and approaches about social and emotional development which include;

attachment theory, discrete emotion theory, and cognitive approaches (Thomann &

Carter, 2008, pp.200-202). The purpose is to examine how social and emotional skills

develop and establish connections between theories and animals.

Attachment theories. Thomann and Carter (2008) define attachment theory as

being, "...centered on understanding the manner in which children internalize and

elaborate a working model of the history of their caregiving relationships" (pp. 200-201).

The overview of this theory suggests that children develop attachments to caregivers

based on their ability to establish care and tend to basic primal needs (Thomann & Carter,

2008). When an adult establishes their ability to take care of an infant's primal needs it

develops a "secure" attachment (Thomann & Carter, 2008, p. 201). Thomann and Carter

(2008) describe this as meaning that when an adult does not take care of the needs of an

infant it establishes an insecure attachment which leads to lifelong implications for future

relationships.

The importance of this theory for social and emotional development is that when

a child is unable to develop a secure attachment with an adult, we can look at other ways

for them to develop this bond (Thomann & Carter, 2008). Thomann and Carter (2008)

define attachment to;

> include an avoidant pattern, in which children learn to over-rely on themselves, a
>
> resistant pattern, in which children seek out assistance but are not easily soothed,
>
> and a disorganized pattern, in which there is not a coherent attachment style and
>
> atypical attachment behaviors may be observed (p. 201).

Animals are an outlet to allow students to develop those secure attachments when they might be lacking that in their own home environment. This is one theoretical background that influences how people view social and emotional development. This will lead to our next theory that specifically looks at biological emotions that drive our behavior.

  Discrete emotional theory. The second major theory surrounding social and emotional development is discrete emotion theory. Lindebaum and Jordan (2012) define discrete emotions as, "individual-specific, short-term emotional reactions to stimuli". (p.1027) The purpose of this type of research is that it looks at how our basic emotions can have different implications when they are not developing properly. Lindebaum and Jordan (2012) states;

> "nurturing positive emotions may aid organizations in preventing stagnation, while enhancing employees' well-being and health. In contrast, studies on destructive leadership highlight the negative consequences that stem from aggressive leader behaviors, such as low loyalty, low job satisfaction, and increased bullying". (p.1028)

According to discrete emotion theory, all humans and animals alike have basic emotions that are used to guide behavior and communication in order to survive (Thomann and Carter 2008, p. 201). These basic fundamental emotions, like love, gratitude, and compassion are important for this research because it connects humans' primal needs with animals, and how those are used to communicate with others (Lindebaum & Jordan, 2012). A large part of social development is interactions with the world around you, and discrete emotion theory addresses how our emotions influence those interactions

(Lindebaum & Jordan, 2012). If someone can understand how our emotions play a part in how we interact with the social world, it can help us address how to help students who might be struggling in this area of development.

Cognitive Theory Approach. The final social emotional development is the cognitive approach. Cognitive theory approach is defined as, "ability to experience and communicate discrete emotions is connected to the development of cognitive abilities (Thomann & Carter, 2008, p. 201)". Thomann and Carter (2008) explains that the leading figure in this type of development is Vygotsky who describes social development as being influenced by interactions between people and mostly older individuals. Newman and Latifi (2021) state, "Vygotsky is also one of the most prominent names in sociocultural and socio-constructivist perspectives" (Newman & Lafiti, 2021, p.4). These interactions with older individuals are important because Vygotsky (as cited in Thomann & Carter, 2008) explains how those interactions can help people learn new skills and have better opportunities for development (p. 201). This is important because students in schools interact with their peers and adults on a daily basis and those connections are what influence social and emotional development. When students are able to learn from their peers and have positive connections with older individuals they are more likely to develop stronger social skills. By understanding the importance of social interactions and its connections with social and emotional development we can address how to use this to help students.

Summary. Social and emotional theories are important to understand because when you know how skills develop you can better address how to help build those in

children (Thomann & Carter, 2008). In order to know how to influence social and emotional development it is important that you understand what theories are out there that believe that those skills develop. It is important to understand this development area because when they do not develop positively they can lead to an increase in antisocial behaviors like aggression, and bullying (Lindebaum & Jordan, 2012). This research will explore how or if animals could be used to help build social and emotional skills. In the next section we will be looking at the implication for developing positive social and emotional skills, as well as the negative effects.to not having a strong development in this area.

Lifelong Implications

Now that this chapter has looked at the basic ideas behind how social and emotional development occurs we can better look at the implications for why this is important. This section will look at implications of social and emotional development and the importance of this area of development. Then, it will look at what happens when students develop positive social skills and how that can lead to things like better grades, more motivation in school and healthy relationships (Coryn et al., 2009). This will also explore the negative effects that occur when people do not develop healthy social and emotional skills like depression, anxiety, and other harmful attributes (Singh et al., 2019). This will allow us to better understand the importance for why research should be focusing on this area of development, and why we should look into finding solutions to help students develop those skills.

Positive Implications. Addressing social and emotional development is important because when students develop positive social and emotional skills it can have lifelong implications for success in the future (Coryn et al., 2009). Coryn et al., (2009) state, "It is likely that this is because strong links between social-emotional health and broader academic success have been firmly established" (p.285). Healthy social-emotional development is important for students' success in education because it can allow them to get better grades and be more motivated in school. Kendziora and Osher (2016) claim that, "There is increasing evidence that social and emotional skills and dispositions undergird the behaviors that promote engaged learning and long-term academic success" (p.798). When students have healthy social-emotional development it allows them to feel more confident in themselves which translates into them being more successful in school. Kendziora and Osher (2016) state; "

> "when schools focus on social-emotional learning it, "Overall, school-based SEL
>
> programs (a) enhance students' social and emotional skills and classroom
>
> behavior; (b) improve attachment and attitudes toward school; (c) decrease rates
>
> of violence and aggression, disciplinary referrals, and substance use; and (d)
>
> improve academic performance". (p.798)

Social-emotional development is an integral part in students' success in school ,and the reason why we should be focusing on this area of development in order to enhance those skills.

Negative Implications. There are various positive effects of having healthy social and emotional development, but now we will look at the implications for when children

develop unhealthy social and emotional skills. According to Singh et al., (2019),

"Mid-adolescence appears to be a critical period for the onset of depressive disorders,

coinciding with a rise in prevalence from less than 1% among primary school-aged

children, rising up to 5% of adolescents at around age 12" (p. 1101). Depression is an

increasing issue that should be addressed in young children and can be seen as early as

12, which means that depression can be prevalent in elementary school students (Singh et

al., 2019). states, "Adolescents with elevated depressive symptoms are more likely to

experience longitudinal decreases in school and work performance, general social and

cognitive functioning, and increased risk of substance use" (p.1101). With depression on

the rise and the implications that it can have for school it is important that we address this

and find a solution to help promote social-emotional learning now to help students in the

future. This is important to this research because it highlights the importance of looking

into solutions in order to help students develop those skills earlier and decrease the

likelihood of negative outcomes.

Summary. When social-emotional skills are lacking it can lead to issues such as

depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and other harmful influences (Singh et al., 2019).

When social-emotional learning is promoted and strengthened it can lead to higher

academic achievement, motivation in school, and decreased behavioural issues

(Kendziora & Osher, 2016). When we can focus on social-emotional learning and

promote healthy development it will have lifelong implications for children's success in

future endeavors (Kendziora & Osher, 2016). By understanding the impact SEL has on

students, We can find strategies and tools to mitigate the negative effects of not doing

anything. In the next section we will be looking at how animals can help influence social-emotional development, and help children build those skills necessary to be successful. In the next section we will discuss how animals can be used to help build upon this area of research and promote social and emotional development.

Animals

Animals can help children develop strong social skills and empathy. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how animals can be used to help social-emotional development in order to support the idea that animals should be used in schools to help this very reason. This will look at how animals have been used in the past to build social skills, and the counter argument about the negative impacts of animals on children's development. This will look at how animals can be used to help children's development and lead into the next section which explores how educational systems around the world use animals to help students.

Having animals in your home provides you with the opportunity to make connections with something, and have a long standing companionship that can be beneficial in different ways (Melson, 2003). Melson (2003) states "Companion animals and children literally go together; their co-occurrence within households raises the question of what, if any,influence each might have on the other (p.32). With animals being a large part of many children's households it brings up the question whether or not they influence the development of those who have pets in the house. Melson (2003) argues that the benefits of animals are;

Moreover, for many children,companion animals are likely to be powerful

motivators for learning,for at least two well-established reasons: (a) children learn

and retain more about subjects in which they are emotionally invested and (b)

children's learning is optimized when it occurs within meaningful relationships.

(p.34)

Animals are tools that help encourage learning in young children and allow them to

connect with something emotionally and influence their relationship building (Melson,

2003). Hawkins et al., (2017) asserts;

Pets satisfy the need for comfort and reassurance, assistance, and protection [20].

Attachments to a pet dog may function as a secure base by providing security and

stability from which children can explore their environment. Furthermore, dogs

may help children to regulate their emotions because they can trigger and respond

to a child's attachment related behaviour (p.2)

Animals provide children with the secure attachment that they might be lacking which

allows them to fill that gap in their development and still be able to build the skills

needed to have healthy social-emotional development (Hawkins et al., 2017). These are a

few of the reasons that the bond with animals can allow children to make connections and

build healthy relationships (Hawkins et al., 2017). Animals can be used to help build

social-emotional skills through connection in young children, therefore, using animals in

an educational setting can have large benefits. .

While having animals in the home can lead to positive effects in regards to

social-emotional development we just also have to consider the negative issues facing

animal and child connections. One issue around having animals and development is that there is limited research on this topic (Melson, 2003, p. 36). With limited research it can be challenging to argue correlation between positive and negative influences of development because there is not enough evidence to support those ideas (Melson, 2003). Another concern according to Melson, G. F. (2003) states, "A concern is the tendency to examine either presumably positive aspects of children's relationships with their pets, such as attachment to one's pet, or less frequently, negative aspects" (p.32). Including only biased information about the positive aspects of animal human bonds does not give the study the information necessary to make an appropriate assumption (Melson, 2003). These examples are important to highlight because this is a new area of research and can tend to provide one-sided conclusions (Melson, 2003).

Impact on the Educational Setting

The purpose of this section is to provide both sides of the argument for how animals can benefit human development in order to allow the entire argument to be presented. This will lead into the next topic in which we will talk about how animals are being used in educational settings to help support development. With knowledge of how social-emotional development occurs, why it is important, and the pros and cons of animal connections we need to explore how animals are being used today. Overall this section was to provide the necessary background information and how it connects with the research topic about how animals can influence social-emotional development in elementary school. This next section will look into how animals are used in educational settings to help promote the social and emotional well-being of students. It will also look

at the different ways that animals are being used in schools and how that can help build important skills and relationships.

Animals in Educational Settings

Animals are all around us in the world, and in elementary school we spend several units in a variety of grades learning about the life cycle, anatomy, habitats, and behaviors of those animals (Serpell, 2006). This research will look at how animals can increase students' positive attitudes towards others, increase motivation in school, and influence other aspects of education. The second part looks at the other side of this argument and weighs the costs and challenges of having animals in a classroom such as allergies, cost, fears, and more. This explores how animals are being used in world-wide educational systems and the implications that come from such a program.

By looking at what programs are in place in schools around the world, and how they help students develop healthy social skills. We will also be exploring arguments for why animals do not belong in classrooms and why people do not support this idea. Overall, this section is meant to give background information on what is already being done in this field and find areas that could be improved by more research to help support the research question that incorporating animals into an elementary classroom can help promote social and emotional development.

Animal Assisted Interventions. There are a variety of ways that animals are being used in educational settings around the world. One of the first ways that animals are being used to help students in school is with animal assisted interventions (Kirnan, Shah & Lauletti, 2020). Kirnan, Shah, and Lauletti (2020) defines animal assisted

interventions (AAI) as, "AAIs are used with all age groups (child, adolescent, adult and elderly), to address a wide array of concerns (physical, mental and behavioural) in many different settings (hospital, provider office, residential and camp)" (p.198). This is just one way that animals are being used as a way to give people of various ages help in a variety of fields. Animals allow people to feel comfortable and provide them with an area of support that can help de-stress and provide social support for those in need (Kirnan, Shah & Lauletti, 2020). The purpose of this type of program is that it provides one example for how animals are being used to help people build social-emotional skills.

Classroom Pets. Another way that animals are being used in an educational setting is having a classroom pet, or an animal that is in a classroom. Herbert and Lynch (2017) explains, "Keeping classroom animals is a common practice in many classrooms. Their value for learning is often seen narrowly as the potential to involve children in learning biological science" (p.107). Having a classroom pet is something that can be seen in classrooms around the world and they have various benefits, like increase in empathy and compassion, for how they can help student development (Herbert & Lynch, 2017). Relationships with animals help promote social-emotional development by providing support and companionship when they need it the most (Herbert & Lynch, 2017). Herbert and Lynch (2017) also states, "Classroom animals may serve a role in humane education which is designed to nurture respect, kindness, empathy and positive attitudes to people and other animals" (p.109). Animals can help build pro-social skills in young children which relates to animals being used in educational settings.

Animal Assisted Education. The third way that animals are being utilized in the educational systems is with the use of Animal Assisted Education. This type of program's goal is helping students with disabilities, mainly ADHD. ADHD is defined as being, "Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder is a neurodevelopmental disorder with a worldwide prevalence among children characterized by chronic symptoms of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity" (Jurickova et al., 2020, p.678). Assists with students with disabilities like this can be challenging because they struggle with attention and impulsivity during class. Jurickova et al., (2020) explains, "The primary treatment approach for children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is medication" (p. 678). The implications of this type of program are that students at a young age are being prescribed medication to help them deal with this disorder, but the lifelong effects can be harmful (Jurickova et al., 2020, p.678). With medication being the primary solution for dealing with students with ADHD, animals provide a less harmful alternative to dealing with inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. Jurickova, et al., (2020) explains this program as, "Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) is a structured, goal oriented therapy that intentionally uses the involvement of animals in health, education, and social programs" (p. 678). The benefits of this type of program can be improved social functioning, like decreased distractibility, and increase positive attitudes towards learning (Jurickova et al., 2020)

Summary. This study demonstrates the positive effects that animals can have on education with students with ADHD, meaning that it could also help those students without a disability. This relates to this study because it highlights how animals can be

used in schools to help students gain healthy development in a variety of areas. While there are many other examples for how animals help in education I have chosen a few that highlight some areas that animals can help improve, like social-emotional development because it connects with this research. The purpose of this study is to look at how incorporating animals into a classroom environment can help promote development, and this study supports this claim. This leads into the next section where we will discuss the alternative views, and possible harmful effects of having animals in schools (Jurickova et al., 2020).

***Considerations for Animals*.** Now that we have discussed how animals can help students in various ways, it is important that we also address issues that people have for animals in schools and things to consider. This section will look at some of the reasons why animal involvement in education is a contested space, and relate that to why it is important to this research topic. In order to create an argument for why animals belong in education it is important to understand why people argue against this idea, which is what we will be discussing.

Animal Rights. The first reason that people argue against having animals in education is that we humans use, and abuse the rights of animals in order to make them do what we want them to do (Pedersen, 2019). Pedersen (2019) argues that;

> "The position of the animal in education may be the product of ages of
> socialization into a society where animals seem to be forever subordinated and
> destined for involuntary exposure to human intervention. Drawing on Cary
> Wolfe's Derridean analysis of the question of the animal [31], education is an

institution of speciesism not only enabling, but requiring the sacrifice (or

subordination or killing) of the animal in order for the human to achieve his full

potential" (p.9).

Animals are used by humans, and rarely are people thinking about the well-being of

animals in order to use them to help out other human beings. Pedersen (2019) argues that

humans use animals for their own good, in order to improve ourselves when we should be

thinking about what the animals would like to do and their voice towards their

involvement in education. This is an important point to consider because we must always

consider the point of the animal when being involved in anything because in the end it is

their life that they are being forced to be a part of when they might not want to be.

Humane treatment to animals is a key factor when getting them involved in school and

connects with what we will be discussing later in this chapter when we explore how

connections with animals impact empathy.

    Health and Safety. The second main argument for why animals do not belong in

the educational systems is issues regarding health and safety. The health and safety of

every student in a classroom is the main priority for educators and having animals in the

classroom might risk those factors. Sokal (2020) states that, "Friesen (2010) showed that

hygiene and allergies were the primary deterrents of adults bringing animals into contact

with children, although only 6% of Americans with allergies have allergies to animals"

(p.276). Allergies are a big concern when incorporating animals into a classroom but with

a small percentage only a few students will actually experience a reaction. Driscoll, Sears

and Sughrue (2020) explains that can deal with allergies when regarding service animals

the same way as peanuts stating, "Options may include adjusting a student's class schedule or relocating a class, similarly to how an administrator would proceed when working with a student with peanut allergies" (p.119). Even though students have allergies to animals it should not deter people from having them in the classroom and we can work around it much like any other type of allergy (Sugrue, 2020).

Safety is another important factor when it comes to all forms of education, and as an educator you want to make sure that you students feel safe in the school environment. . Sokal (2020) states, "Jalongo (2008) showed that it is not uncommon for dogs to bite young children, however she showed that these situations can be minimized by training children in proper behaviours around animals, such as how to touch animals and what to do it if they are afraid." (p.276). When dealing with animals such as dogs, biting is a main concern because nobody wants a child to get hurt or bitten by any animal. Training children how to interact with animals can help reduce this risk and allow parents and educators to feel more comfortable with having animals in the classroom (Sokal, 2020). Driscoll, Sears and Sughrue (2020) also explains that, "The probability of a service dog biting someone is quite low if the animal has been trained properly" (p.117). When the children and animals involved are properly trained we can reduce the risk of someone getting hurt and hopefully reduce the hesitation surrounding animals in schools.

Summary. If you are considering having animals in the classroom it is important that you consider the well-being of the animal, and common health and safety risk before bringing anything into schools. The purpose of outlining some of the main concerns is to bring awareness of some of the common arguments against having animals involved in

education in order to give people a good outline of some of the risks that must be considered. When thinking about this research topic about incorporating animals into an elementary classroom you must first be aware of the concerns and risks that will arise when suggesting such a program.

Impact on Research. To summarize this section, we first discussed how animals are being used around the world in educational settings, and the benefits that can come from such programs. The purpose of this was to highlight what is already being done in this field and how that can improve the lives of students in schools. This project's main goal is to identify how animals can help students develop social-emotional skills, and by looking at other examples it helps support this topic and identify why it is important.

The second portion of this section was to highlight the concerns, and issues that people have when thinking about incorporating animals into the classroom. It is important to consider these topics because children should feel safe and secure in the classroom, and animals can pose a risk to those basic needs. When an animal, and students, are properly trained it can help reduce the risk of something negative happening, but that does not mean that it eliminates all risk potential. The purpose of examining this subject is that it outlines some of the main concerns that this project will face because it involves incorporating animals into the classroom.

As we move into the next topic it is important to consider what has been done in this field and some of the main concerns for this type of research because it gives you an idea of where this project can fit into this field. We have mentioned the background of social-emotional development, and some of the main theories and implications for why

this area is important to help students. We have looked at how animals can help build social-emotional skills and how they are being used in schools today, as well as, the implications and concerns to consider. Moving forward we will look at how connections with animals and the bonds people form will help students develop empathy which is an important skill to have in life. Understanding the importance of the animal bond will help support this research topic because it will look at how animals will promote social-emotional learning.

Humane Education and Empathy through Animal Bonds

According to the Dictionary, empathy is defined as being the ability to understand and share feelings with others. In elementary empathy skills are important for children to have because it allows them to connect with others and understand their unique identities. In elementary school students are beginning to understand their own identity in relation to the world, and think about who they are and would like to be in the future. Developing positive empathy skills will allow students to connect with one another at a time when students are beginning to express their true selves. The first part of this section will explore what humane education is and how it can be used to help build empathy skills in students. The second part of this section will look at the benefits, and challenges to humane education and future directions for this type of research. This research will explore how animal assisted-education and companion animals can help students develop positive empathy skills and demonstrate humane behaviors towards animals and students. This relates to this research project because we are looking at how incorporating animals

into an elementary school classroom can help promote positive social and emotional development.

Humane Education.

Normando, Meers and Samuels (2016) defines humane education as being, "the humane treatment of human and nonhuman animals" (p. 598). Daly and Suggs (2010) also defines humane education as;

> "humane education has typically referred to individuals' responsibilities with respect to animals, which is grounded in a moral philosophy. However, while 'humane education' programs typically have as their goal the fostering of positive attitudes toward animals, it is a widely-held belief, increasingly supported by research, that teaching children kindness toward animals will transfer to kindness toward people" (p. 102).

What both of these authors have in common is that humane education refers to the fair treatment of animals, and humans. When people are involved with humane education, hopefully it will encourage them to engage in positive social-interactions with all creatures in the world around them. The importance of this type of educational program to this research is that it looks at how animals can be used to build skills and support the research question. Daly and Suggs (2010) explains that this type of research;

> is to foster compassionate values such as integrity, honesty and mercy. Informally, a growing body of research underscores the contribution to moral and empathic development of incorporating animals within a classroom environment. In fact,

many studies suggest that including animals simply by virtue of discussion or

representation has beneficial effects on child development. (p. 102)

This is a growing body of research in this field and looks at how incorporating animals

into a classroom can positively impact children's development which is the purpose of

this paper. This is an example for how we can use animals in a classroom setting, that is

not limited to just service animals but looks at how creating a curriculum around animals

and the treatment of animals in the world can help build social-emotional skills which is

what this research project would like to explore in the next Chapter.

Humane Education and Empathy. We have looked at what people have defined humane

education as being, but now we will look at how it influences those social-emotional

skills, like empathy. One way that research has concluded that animals help students is

that, " animals could be influential in making settings more home-like and hence

strengthening connections between the classroom and the wider community" (Herbert &

Lynch, 2017, p.109). Animals allow students to feel more comfortable in different

settings that help build that social-emotional bonds for a positive classroom environment

(Herbert & Lynch, 2017).

Another example for how humane education can help students build empathy

skills is by looking at schools who have used this type of program and identified areas

where students were positively influenced. Daly and Suggs (2010) provides an example

by stating;

In a study of a dog's consistent presence in a grade one classroom (Hergovich et

al., 2002), not only did animal-directed empathy increase, but teachers also

observed that the six year-old students demonstrated increased social interactions and reduced aggression. A similar study (Kotrschal & Ortbauer, 2003) reported that the presence of a dog in an elementary classroom led to reduced aggressive behaviour and hyperactivity and ultimately more social cohesion in the classroom. (pp. 102-103)

Having students exposed to animals, and being involved with programs that encourage animal involvement tended to demonstrate a decrease in unwanted behavior, like aggression and hyperactivity, and increase social connections and interactions (Daly & Suggs, 2010). Daly and Suggs (2010) also stated that;

Though live animals were not used, results suggested that children exposed to animal-related curricula were more likely to have positive attitudes toward animals. A follow-up study one year later (Ascione & Weber, 1996) indicated that the benefits were sustained and that enhanced attitudes toward animals actually seemed to generalise to human-directed empathy (p.102).

Even though animals were not used in this example, a connection with animal based curriculum helped strengthen positive skills that eventually reflected an increase in positive attitudes towards fellow people and empathy (Daly and Suggs, 2010). This demonstrates that having an animal based classroom or curriculum can help students build positive social-emotional skills that can eventually reflect that same positive association with fellow humans and are not just isolated to an increase in positive relationships with animals. We know that humane education has an impact on children's development but it is still a relatively new field and research still needs to be done to look

at the full impact of animals in education which is what we will be exploring in the next section.

Future Research and Direction. Now we will look at the future direction for this field and what still needs to be done. This is a very specific field of research and there are a few limitations for this type of study that can help encourage future research and guide what still needs to be done in this field. Daly and Suggs (2010) explains one limitation is that, "Although scant, research in this area of human-animal interactions consistently indicates the positive benefits of having animals in educational environments, particularly dogs (p. 110). There is not a lot of research in this field and much of what is being done is centered around dogs specifically so this is an area that we could improve on because there is a variety of types of animals that can be used within a classroom environment. This is important because it highlights that some of the research that is done might only be focused on dogs in educational settings, and we might be limited to what other animals might be used to help promote positive development.

Another area where more research can be done is, " future studies may also begin to distinguish between which areas of humane education are most amenable to change, and at which ages, and which areas require more prolonged efforts for humane educators and school-based professionals (Normando, Meers and Samuels, 2016, p. 609). Normando, Meers and Samuels (2016) explains that research can be done to examine humane education specifically and look at what areas might promote more benefits and where we can improve or focus on in the future. When we can look at the program and examine what areas could be improved and what areas we should focus on more, it will

allow us to create a program that will be the most effective and help students develop those skills more effectively.

We can also see limitations in research when looking at other factors that may be contributing to positive development, and influences children that might not be connected with animal involvement. Tardif-Williams and Bosacki (2015) states, "Further research is needed to better understand the impact of socioeconomic, ethnic, and other demographic factors (e.g., current and past companion animal experiences, etc.) on the impact of HEPs" (p. 597). Research should be done that looks at other aspects of student's lives that might also contribute to a positive, or negative, impact of development (Tardif-Williams & Bosacki, 2015). The social and home lives of students are extremely important factors for how they develop social-emotional skills, and we must always consider those factors when looking at humane education programs. We must be sure that what research is finding is related to the program and not a change in home-life or other contributing factors. This is another area that further research needs to be done in order to make sure that we can see the true effect of a humane program to make sure that the program is actually helping development. Gee, Griffin, and McCardle (2017) also restates the importance of this limitation by arguing, "Given our own theory that HAI activities can impact social-emotional development and learning, as depicted in Figure 1, through four possible pathways, we would also urge researchers to design studies to challenge or confirm this model" (p. 6). Studies should be done to make sure that we are either confirming or challenging the benefits of humane education to make sure that the results are true (Gee, Griffin & McCardle, 2017).

These are a few of the limitations and areas that further research needs to be done in order to truly test the positive, or negative, impact of humane education and animal involvement in education. The purpose of this section was to look at what future research needs to be done in order to determine what areas this research project can look at exploring in the next Chapter. Making sure that the research you are doing is relevant and needs to be done supports the purpose for this type of study, and reinforces how this will help the field of education. This section was to highlight what areas still need to be done in order to support why this topic is important to the field of education and is needed.

Impact on Research. The purpose of this section is to highlight how humane education can help strengthen certain aspects of social-emotional development, like empathy. This relates to this research project because it looks at the benefits of incorporating animals and an animal based program can have on social-emotional development. When students are exposed to an animal based curriculum and classroom it can help them build empathy skills that might impact their relationship and interactions with other people. We look at what areas still need further research and what limitations other studies face in order to support why this research topic is important. This helps outline the purpose of this study for the field of education and identify what area this research project can try and improve. This leads into the next chapter where I will be discussing what this project will look like, and will use these examples as references when moving forward.

Literature Review Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to look at the research question about, *How incorporating animals in an elementary classroom can help promote social-emotional*

development, and identify the literature surrounding this topic. We explored the background and importance of social-emotional development and what lifelong implications can occur from both positive and negative experiences with this area of development. When looking back at the theories of attachment for young children in regards to social-emotional development we discussed how having a secure attachment helps build social relationships. The purpose of this was to highlight why we should be focusing on social-emotional development and why it is important to the field of education.

Next, we looked at how animals are being used in educational settings around the world and how those can have both positive and negative impacts on student development. We examine animal-assisted education and the benefits and challenges of animal involvement for students with disabilities. We looked at common arguments for and against animal involvement for educational purposes in order to provide an unbiased perspective. The purpose of this was to look at what is already being done and what are some common benefits and challenges for this type of program in order to determine what still needs to be done.

Finally, we looked at the background of humane education, connections with humane education and empathy, the benefits and challenges, and future directions for research and limitations. This was to describe what programs are in place that encourage animal involvement and provide an alternative model that does not require an animal to physically be in the classroom. The purpose of this was to outline another type of program that this research project can explore in order to find an area that will be the

most beneficial to student development. Overall this will lead into the next Chapter which will outline what this project will look like while reflecting on what literature has already been done and what limitations to consider moving forward.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

The purpose of this research chapter is to outline the curriculum idea that I will use in order to incorporate an animal based model. The research question is focused on incorporating animals into an elementary classroom to help promote social and emotional learning. The research questions for this project is: *How does incorporating animal based curriculum into an elementary classroom help promote social and emotional development?"* I hope to create a curriculum model that will be used with a small group of students and observe whether their empathy skills increase based upon a test that is given to them in the beginning and end of this unit. By implementing this type of educational program I am hoping to increase social and emotional development for animals that will help influence relationships with others. In this chapter I will be discussing the overview of my curriculum model, referencing previous research from Daly and Suggs (2010), methods, setting/ audience, and the description that will include a timeline for this project. In the end I will summarize the purpose of this project and hopefully demonstrate the importance of this type of curriculum and how it can help students develop important skills.

Overview

The research question that will be addressed in this project is; *How can incorporating an animal based curriculum into elementary school help promote social and emotional development.* The overview of this project will be that I will create a curriculum that is centered around animals and encourages humane behaviors like

empathy. Daly and Suggs (2010) states, '"humane education' programs typically have as their goal the fostering of positive attitudes toward animals, it is a widely-held belief, increasingly supported by research, that teaching children kindness toward animals will transfer to kindness toward people" (p. 102). I will be focused on creating a humane based curriculum model that can be used to help promote social and emotional learning towards animals and humans, like mentioned from Daly and Suggs (2010). The overall purpose of this type of project is to hopefully help students build social and emotional skills through the use of animals, and provide me with a starting point in creating something that can be sustainable in the future.

Framework

The framework that I will be referencing and using for this project is humane education (Daly and Suggs, 2010; Normando, Meers and Samuels, 2016). Both examine the humane education approach which looks at how an animal based educational program can help students build stronger empathy skills towards animals that will hopefully then lead to an increase in those behaviors towards others. I have used this information from my literature review to outline the importance of this type of educational program and what implications it can have towards developing healthy social and emotional skills.

My goal is to create a curriculum that is centered around exposure to animal based education, because just learning about animals encourages others to build social/emotional skills. Daly and Suggs (2010) would agree with this statement and outlines how exposure to an animal based curriculum can help students build empathy skills towards animals, which then translates to an increase in positive human

interactions. Normando, Meers and Samuels (2016) explains humane education and how it can be used to help promote respect in animals that will then influence relationships with others. Using these two frameworks to help influence my own research project will allow me to have a guide that will help me when creating my open curriculum aimed towards accomplishing similar goals. In the end, I will use this body of knowledge when creating my own animal based curriculum and look at how that can help improve social and emotional skills in elementary aged students because the research question for this project states, How can incorporating animals into an elementary classroom help promote social and emotional development

Methods

For this project I will be focusing on a small group of fourth and fifth grade elementary students at the elementary school. This will focus on teaching a curriculum that is centered around animals and takes place everyday for about 30 minutes. Students will come into my classroom for 30 minutes daily and will learn only about mammals and mammal related topics. We will do a combination of reading, writing, and speaking about mammals and then see how that changes students behavior towards them. Students will have the opportunity to choose to be involved in this type of program. If they elect to be involved, they will be enrolled for about two months. Students will be given a written test about social and emotional development at the beginning and end of this unit to see if there were any significant changes to their answers. This would try to assess their general level of empathy by asking them questions like, how often do you help others, would you consider yourself a good friend, and other examples meant to judge empathy skills. I will

also be listening to students throughout the semester and noting any opportunities that students display positive social interactions. I will collect data in the beginning of the unit and look for moments where students are demonstrating social and emotional growth and compare that to the other fourth and fifth grade students. The purpose of these methods is to set up a curriculum that will be taught in an elementary school and record any findings towards social and emotional growth throughout the course.

Audience and Setting

The setting would be an elementary school classroom, with a mixture of fourth and fifth grade students. The size of the class would be about 18 students and would occur 30 minutes everyday. I would be the only staff involved and would teach a unit at the school I work at that is centered around animals. The demographics of the school are mostly African American, and Hispanic. The school is classified as a Title 1 school with a large percentage of the students receiving free or reduced lunch. The community would be composed of students who are starting to return back to school after being in remote learning for the past year and a half.

This project is centered around the growth of students, but also looking at demonstrating to parents and other educators the importance of this type of program on a child's social and emotional development. The students will be the ones taking the course but the results will be focused on showing others how this type of program can help students in a variety of ways. Throughout this program I will be looking for examples that demonstrate student growth but also opportunities for improvement and reflection to help guide this project for the future. This would be a beginning point where the goal

would be to show parents and educators that this type of program would be beneficial to their student or child and provide evidence to support those claims.

Project Description and Timeline

This project will teach students about a variety of subjects that are centered around animals. The first step of this project would be to test students' perceptions of animals and how they demonstrate social/emotional learning. This could be used to help gauge where students are at and see if there is any growth at the end of the program. Then I would implement the program and give them the same test at the end to see if they changed or showed an increase in social/emotional behaviors. During the project I would be continuously checking for social and emotional growth and taking notes of how students interact with others in this classroom. I will be tracking samples of students' work, verbal notes, and observations of the students' class work and behaviors to see if there has been any noticeable change in how they are acting and performing and reflecting on why that is happening. The timeline for this project is 1-2 months to implement the project and record any findings or influences to social/ emotional development. I will also be looking at students from other classrooms to see if I notice a difference between the behaviors of those with an animal based curriculum and those who do not. Overall I plan on taking 2-3 months to collect all the data and reflect on what I might be observing and if it is related to an animal based curriculum or not.

Summary

At the end of this unit I am hoping to see a change in behavior for those students who are receiving an animal based curriculum to help support research questions that

states; *How does incorporating an animal based curriculum into an elementary classroom help promote social and emotional development.* The purpose of this project was to identify an area that needed to be addressed and find a solution that will help students build the necessary skills needed to be successful. I believe that due to Covid-19 and social distancing students are lacking social and emotional skills needed in order for students to be able to function in a society. With my passion for animals, I have worked on creating a curriculum that will address this issue in education and hopefully help students build those social and emotional skills needed for the future. An animal based curriculum will allow students to build empathy skills because they start to identify the needs of animals and help their environment, which will hopefully relate to how they view their peers and others around them. In the end, the purpose for this project was to help students build skills that will help them be proactive and positive members of society.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

The previous chapters have discussed the importance of an animal based curriculum and how the hope is to increase students' social and emotional development. The research question for this project stated, How does incorporating an animal based curriculum into an elementary classroom can help promote social and emotional development. The first chapter discussed how my personal journey has led to my interest in incorporating animals into a school setting. Always being surrounded by animals growing up had an impact on my social and emotional development. I have a stronger sense of empathy because of this connection with the living things around me and reflect those connections with my peers and friends.

This love for animals followed me throughout my personal and professional life, and being able to find an outlet to connect those two allows me to use my passion while addressing important issues in education. The last year and a half has been a challenging time for young children because of the COVID 19 pandemic. This has influenced how schools function and some of the behaviors that I see in my classroom everyday. My experience has allowed me to see that students are lacking the skills needed to communicate with each other effectively now that they are back to in-person learning. This connection allowed me to bridge together my passion for animals and an area in elementary education that I felt needed more support. This allowed me to come up with the idea of incorporating an animal based curriculum into my classroom to see if there

were implications towards social and emotional development.

Chapter 2 was a literature review that explored different perspectives and theories surrounding an animal based educational program. Animals are used in education as a tool to help support students for various reasons. Chapter 2 was broken down into four main sections that included; Social/ Emotional Development, Animals in Education, Social Interactions, Empathy and Animal Bonds. Animal-assisted programs for students with ADHD and classroom pets are only a few of the examples discussed throughout the chapter and highlight the benefits that can come from animal involvement in school. Chapter 2 also looked into social and emotional development, and how it can have both positive and negative implications in young students' lives. It then ended with a discussion around what is already done in schools regarding animals and what still could be done to help support students. This literature review focused on addressing the research question that stated, *How can incorporating animal based curriculum into an elementary classroom help promote social and emotional development?*

Finally, in Chapter 3 I outlined the idea for my curriculum design and how it was planned to address the research question around an animal based curriculum. The purpose of this project was to look at how learning about animals could be used to help promote positive social and emotional skills that can be transferred to their interactions with fellow classmates. This was centered around an interesting based course that students were able to choose from and was connected with something that they wanted to learn about. Using their interests, the purpose of this curriculum was to see if including animals

into the lives of students could help them build strong empathy skills by connecting with animals first.

In this chapter I will describe how the project went, what thoughts and comments arose throughout, and summarize what I found. This chapter will be broken down into four different sections that will include; Project Description, Project Conclusion, Project Questions, Future Implications, Self Reflection. The first part of this section will look at the project as a whole and how it worked within the school that I am working with and that group of students that I had during this time. I will provide a conclusion of what I found interesting and some noticings that I witnessed throughout the project, and answer questions that arose. The second section will look at future implications and the plans for future directions that can be followed for this project. Lastly, I will provide a summary of everything and review what people should be taking away from this project and how the learned outcomes might influence education. The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate what was learned through this project and what benefits can be seen from an animal based curriculum.

Project Description

This project was centered around an existing curriculum guide that was about teaching students about mammals. This was originally a 12 week curriculum plan, but because of time constraints needed to be adjusted to 9 weeks. The school that I work at offers students a flexible choice to select a topic that they would like to learn more about and transition to a different classroom to learn about their interests. This is a program that allows fourth and fifth grade students to go into neighboring classrooms for 30 minutes a

day and learn about something that they were able to choose. The length of this program

follows a quarter calendar, and after each quarter students will then choose a different

subject to learn about and move into that course. This was the first time that I have done

this type of program and I adjusted the outdated curriculum guide to be more involved

and exciting for the students involved. Since this was also a shorter length of time I

needed to adjust the model in order to fit into a 9 week timeslot. I think including a

modern feel to this curriculum allows students to be more engaged and allows me to

incorporate things that they are familiar with.

This curriculum guide was created by classroom teachers and published within

the Magnet program. Magnet themed programs in Wake County, NC are defined as being

able to,

> "create well-rounded students by challenging them with programs tailored to their
>
> strengths and exposing them to new experiences. Innovative and pioneering
>
> programs challenge students to think creatively and analytically to solve
>
> problems, while diverse student body populations enable students to learn and see
>
> things from a different perspective." (2021)

The magnet theme is used to help attract students and families with the goal to give them

a well-rounded education that will help them be successful in future careers. This

experience aims at allowing students to learn about diverse subjects, and this curriculum

model that I have used is connected with those programs. Being written by classroom

teachers, allows it to be tailored toward the appropriate audience with the help of their

expertise in what elementary students actually need. I then took this model and

supplemented my own activities and videos to give students ample opportunities to learn about mammals in an engaging way that will help all learners. The goal of this curriculum guide was to help get students engaged with mammals and teach them about a subject area while also focusing on human impact to help promote social and emotional learning. Learning about ways that humans are impacting different mammal groups helps them focus on their own impact on their environment and helps motivate them to want to find a way to change the way they interact with their community. This skill will hopefully translate into how they interact with their peers and environment and encourage them to think about how they can socially make a difference.

Project Conclusion, Future Implications and Questions

In this section I will discuss how the project went during this first 9 week long quarter. I will be looking at the progression of the course and reflecting on what I noticed, and plans for future changes. SInce this was the first time that I implemented an animal based curriculum, I have found various areas that will need improvement and can reflect on what I think went well and I would like to continue in my career. I will look at the overview of what students learned and some social interactions that I witnessed throughout the course. In the end of this section I will look at what I would like to do next, and how I plan on using this curriculum guide for years to come.

There was a lot of growth and change that I witnessed during this first quarter of implementing my animal based curriculum. When students started my course I noticed that they were very engaged to learn about mammals and I gave them countless opportunities to help shape the way that I planned out this course. The first thing that I

had students do was write down what they are most interested in learning about and use that to guide the timeline of what mammals we would be discussing when. They had a choice in what we would be learning about first and I think that was the first step in having them feel like their thoughts and opinions were being considered. This was the first step that I wanted to implement to show students that I am caring about their social and emotional needs. I gave students a general overview of the course and what mammals we will be learning about during these 9 weeks.

The first part of this course went well but there are areas that I would like to improve on in order to help students and be able to really look at social and emotional growth. For future courses I would like to look at giving a social and emotional survey to gauge where they are in the beginning of the quarter, and can be used to compare how they might have changed at the end. I think this will allow me to collect more data in combination with what I am seeing and hearing during the quarter. I still wonder how I can create a social and emotional survey that relates to my mammal course, and does not feel like students are being asked random questions that do not relate to what we are learning about. I will continue to work on creating a survey that is relevant to mammals but will help me understand their social and emotional level in order to tailor what I would like to achieve to what level they are at. I think this will help make the course more effective in the goal of helping promote social and emotional development.

When I started actually teaching about mammals I noticed a few changes within the group of students that I was working with. The first thing that I noticed was that throughout, students were starting to build new friendships and interacting with people

that they did not know in the beginning. One of the first assignments that I had students work on was a poster presentation about a group of mammals we had been learning about in small groups. I placed students in groups based on their interest and what type of mammal that would like to learn more about. I noticed two things during this project, one was that these interactions based off of their interests helped forge new friendships and peer pairings that demonstrated positive social and emotional growth. The second was that some students who were unwilling to work with others tended to become more isolated as the course went on.

Focusing on the positives, students who interacted with their project groups positively tended to want to stay in the groups that I had placed them in, even after the project was complete. Fourth and fifth graders were becoming new friends and branching out from who they came into the classroom knowing already. Some of the fifth graders took on a leadership role with their younger fourth grade group mates, and were able to communicate with each other in a positive way. An example that I witnessed was with a fifth and fourth grade boy. These boys were placed in a group together and seemed to build a bond that lasted the entire quarter. When I watched them, the older student tended to help guide the younger with how he should be acting and re-directing him when he became off task. The older student would stand up for the younger when fellow classmates were treating each other unfairly, and mentioned to me that he made a new friend in this course. This was a positive that I would like to see throughout the semester. I think pairing them based on their interests helps them find similarities in not just mammals but other facets of life. I would like to look more into how I can recreate these

interactions and help promote that type of behavior in future animal based classes. I will continue to work on this area of the course because it connects with what I would like to see happen and the purpose of an animal based curriculum.

The second interaction that I noticed during the quarter was students who were unwilling to work with their groups tended to become more isolated as the class progressed. For a small group of students, when I placed them in their groups based on their interests they were unwilling to work with someone who they did not know. This unwillingness led to those students becoming more isolated while other groups who did work well together tended to become closer and build friendships. This would be an area for future implication growth. If I can take notes about these interactions and find ways to incorporate more activities where relationships can be built would help those struggling to build social and emotional connections. This is some insight into what areas of my project could continue to improve and change in order to meet my project goal which is to promote social and emotional learning.

Self Reflection

While I reflect on the past, present, and future of this project there are areas that can see improvement and others have a solid foundation to help students build social and emotional skills. Something that worked well in the beginning of the stages of this project is that it is something that has been built on a passion and area of interest. Finding a project that works with my needs and wants, and can also help students is a great start for the building blocks of a project that I can continue to work on for years to come. Making sure that it is relatable to the students and not centered around my personal needs will be

the challenge to focus on as I move forward with this project. After watching the start of this project, I noticed that it started out well and was engaging for the group of students I had during this quarter. Basing something off of their interests and knowing that it is not based on grades allowed them to engage without the fear of being graded or tested on the material. I also reflected on working on having them still be engaged by doing projects and work but having them know that this is just to increase their knowledge. I need to work on ways to keep them engaged while also having them complete work to make sure that they are paying attention. Looking into the future for this project, I have reflected a lot on what I want the outcome to be and how I can continue to change this course to better meet the needs of my students. I will need to make sure to keep changing this course and making tweaks to make it the most effective, while also not forgetting the main goal of social and emotional needs. Social and emotional skills is the topic that I will need to keep adjusting because each new group of students will have their own unique development levels. I will need to work on finding ways to test the social and emotional skills of the students and tailor this course to be adaptable to the individual needs of the group. I will need to continue to build my knowledge of social and emotional needs in order to find ways to incorporate what I have learned into this course.

Summary Conclusion

The purpose of this project is to address the research question : *How can incorporating an animal based curriculum into an elementary classroom help promote social and emotional development?* I was looking to create something that will help students gain social and emotional skills through a curriculum model that is based on

students interests. Finding a way that engages students and allows them to build useful skills was the main emphasis of this project. I have learned that creating a curriculum guide to meet those needs should be centered around what each group of students wants, and must be adaptable because every group of students will be different. I will need to keep learning and finding new ways to meet the social and emotional needs of students because each year students will be changing and developing at different rates, and a one size fits all model will not work for every group. In conclusion, I will need to keep adapting my curriculum every chance I get to make sure that it is effective and remind myself of the main emphasis and goal of promoting social and emotional needs through an animal based curriculum. I think continuing to find ways to boost this project and incorporate real-life animals could be a change that I would like to explore in the future. I hope that each year I can improve this project and help students in a way that works for them, and can be used for many years to come.

References

Brown, J. (2020). Perseverance. In E. M. Sanchez (Ed.), *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Merriam-Webster.

https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/perseverance

Conners-Burrow, N., Patrick, T., Kyzer, A., & McKelvey, L. (2017). A preliminary evaluation of REACH: Training early childhood teachers to support children's social and emotional development. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 45*(2), 187-199. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-016-0781-2

Coryn, C. L. S., Spybrook, J. K., Evergreen, S. D. H., & Blinkiewicz, M. (2009). Development and evaluation of the social-emotional learning scale. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 27*(4), 283-295.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0734282908328619

Daly, B., & Suggs, S. (2010). Teachers' experiences with humane education and animals in the elementary classroom: Implications for empathy development. *Journal of Moral Education, 39*(1), 101-112. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240903528733

Gee, N. R., Griffin, J. A., & McCardle, P. (2017). Human–Animal interaction research in school settings: Current knowledge and future directions. *AERA Open, 3*(3), 233285841772434. https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858417724346

Hawkins, R. D., Williams, J. M., & Scottish Society For The Prevention Of Cruelty To Animals, Scottish Spca. (2017). Childhood attachment to pets: Associations between pet attachment, attitudes to animals, compassion, and humane behaviour.

International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health; Int J Environ Res Public Health, 14(5), 490. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14050490

Herbert, S., & Lynch, J. (2017). Classroom animals provide more than just science education. *Science & Education, 26*(1-2), 107-123. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11191-017-9874-6

Jurickova, V., BozdAchova, A., Machova, K., & VadroAova, M. (2020). Effect of animal assisted education with a dog within children with ADHD in the classroom: A case study. *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal, 37*(6), 677-684.

Kendziora, K., & Osher, D. (2016). Promoting children's and adolescents' social and emotional development: District adaptations of a theory of action. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology; J Clin Child Adolesc Psychol, 45*(6), 797-811. https://doi.org/10.1080/15374416.2016.1197834

Kirnan, J., Shah, S., & Lauletti, C. (2020). A dog-assisted reading programme's unanticipated impact in a special education classroom. *Educational Review (Birmingham), 72*(2), 196-219. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1495181

Lindebaum, D., & Jordan, P. J. (2012). Positive emotions, negative emotions, or utility of discrete emotions? *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *33*(7), 1027–1030. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1819

Magnet Schools Overview. (2021). Wake County Public School Systems. Retrieved October 2021, from https://www.wcpss.net/Page/113

Melson, G. F. (2003). Child development and the human-companion animal bond. *The American Behavioral Scientist (Beverly Hills), 47*(1), 31-39. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764203255210

Newman, S., & Latifi, A. (2021). Vygotsky, education, and teacher education. *Journal of Education for Teaching : JET, 47*(1), 4–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1831375

Pedersen, H. (2019). The contested space of animals in education: A response to the "Animal turn" in education for sustainable development. *Education Sciences, 9*(3), 211. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci9030211

Samuels, W. E., Meers, L. L., & Normando, S. (2016). Improving upper elementary students' humane attitudes and prosocial behaviors through an in-class humane education program. *Anthrozoös, 29*(4), 597-610. https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2016.1228751

Sears, J. A., Driscoll, L. G., & Sughrue, J. A. (2020). Considerations for principals: Service animals in K-12 public schools. *NASSP Bulletin, 104*(2), 110-124. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636520918303

Singh, N., Minaie, M. G., Skvarc, D. R., & Toumbourou, J. W. (2019). Impact of a secondary school depression prevention curriculum on adolescent social-emotional skills: Evaluation of the resilient families program. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence; J Youth Adolesc, 48*(6), 1100-1115. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-019-00992-6

Sokal, L. (2020). Balancing benefits and risks of animal-assisted activities (AAA) in

 child care centres. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 48*(3), 273-283.

 https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-019-00982-0

Tardif-Williams, C., & Bosacki, S. L. (2015). Evaluating the impact of a humane

 education summer-camp program on school-aged children's relationships with

 companion animals. *Anthrozoös, 28*(4), 587-600.

 https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2015.1070001

Thomann, C. R., & Carter, A. S. (2008). Social and emotional development theories.

 *Encyclopedia of Infant and Early Childhood Development (*pp.199-207).

 Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-012370877-9.00149-3