

PAWS-ITIVITY: ANIMAL-ASSISTED INTERVENTIONS, ONE PAW AT A TIME:
A META-SYTHENSIS OF THE CURRENT LITERATURE ON ANIMAL-ASSISTED
INTERVENTIONS IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

by

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Abstract

Animal-Assisted Interventions (AAI) are becoming increasingly more popular in various fields including education. AAI has been incorporated into numerous reading programs across Canada and the United States where studies have found AAI to have a positive impact on reading ability as a result of an animal's ability to remain neutral and nonjudgmental. Other studies involving AAI have found benefits on student emotion, behaviour, and motivation. Throughout the literature there is evidence that supports the use of AAI to increase concentration, motivation, engagement, mood, and academic performance. AAI has also been shown to decrease anxiety, depression, aggression, avoidance, and stress. Knowing the benefits that AAI has on student academics, wellbeing and behaviour, the research presented in this study sought to determine the benefits AAI has on the optimal learning environment. The optimal learning environment is one where barriers are removed for students to feel safe, accepted, connected and ready to learn. Guided by qualitative meta-synthesis research design, two data sets from research on the optimal learning environment and AAI were gather, organized, and analyzed. The results generated a resource for teachers to refer to prior to incorporating AAI into the classroom while providing recommendations for future research.

Keywords: Animal-Assisted Intervention (AAI), Animal-Assisted Education (AAE), Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT), Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA), Optimal Learning Environment