

Chapter 5

Humane Education: A Call to Action for Elementary School Students

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between human and canine has long been a topic of interest, studied by many. It can be argued that the effect of a canine on their human is one of life's greatest and most impactful. Humane education recognizes this relationship and those of other animals in humans' lives. Humane education provides students with the background information necessary to properly treat animals, while simultaneously instilling a multitude of desired character traits that young people carry far into adulthood. During the 2014 and 2015 school year, an elementary school in The School District of Palm Beach County, Florida began implementing humane education in the classroom, as part of their environmental Green and School-wide Positive Behavior Support initiatives. Humane education curriculum implementation included visits from local author and President of The Little Blue Dog, a non-profit organization with humane treatment of animals at its core. A field trip to a Peggy Adams, a local, no-kill animal rescue was also provided for students in Grades 3rd and 4th, where students toured the facility and wrote haiku poetry about the pets that were up for adoption. Classrooms in Grades Pre-K through 5th were consistently exposed to topics and content pertaining to the proper care and treatment of animals, including critical character traits such as respect, empathy, responsibility, and kindness. As a result of the implementation of the humane education integration, the elementary school's student body further developed a culture in which the fore mentioned character traits (among others) were admired and adopted, creating a school environment in which respect and kindness were the expectation, and responsibility, a necessary must.

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A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Grassy Waters Elementary School is located in suburban West Palm Beach, Florida and serves students Grades Pre-K through 5 (J. Galindo, personal communication, December 5, 2015). A Title I campus with approximately 730 students in attendance, 75 percent of students on campus qualify for free or reduced lunch. Approximately 87 percent of the students on campus are minorities, with 9 percent identified as English Language Learners (ELL). Among the 730 students in attendance, a significant 21 percent qualify for Individualized Education Plans (IEP) (J. Galindo, personal communication, December 5, 2015).

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This chapter will walk you through the evolution of the human-canine relationship, bond, positive effects, history of humane education and finally an example in practice at Grassy Waters.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE HUMAN-CANINE RELATIONSHIP

In order to fully understand the significance of human-animal liaison, it is necessary to briefly review the evolutionary history of the human-animal relationship. Archeologists have found fossils showing people with canines since the dawn of humanity (Fawcett & Gullone, 2001). Most researchers agree that the mutually beneficial relationship between people and dogs has existed in history for thousands of years (Caspari, 2003; Clutton-Brock, 2006). Evidence of this companionship even pre-dates the agricultural revolution (Bradshaw, 2011; Hare & Woods, 2013).

The behavior and role of dogs has changed throughout history to adapt to the human social environment (Russack, 2000). Through the ages, dogs have guarded, herded, hunted for food, pulled sleds for transportation, sniffed out criminal cases and medical cases, and were the first animal to be domesticated (Dotson & Hyatt, 2008; Schaefer, 2002). Tales of the dog-human relationship date back to ancient Chinese, Greek and Egyptian societies. In his royal court, the Han Chinese emperor, Ling, was said to keep dogs as senior officials; aristocratic Athenians reportedly paid more for dogs than they did for human slaves; Mary, Queen of Scots kept a pack of little dogs adorned in velvet suits. (Schaffer 2009, p. 9)

In more recent history, The Society of Friends formed York Retreat in the 1790s to use animals to help asylum patients learn self-control and nurturing skills as a means to prevent drug use (Digby, 1984). In January of 1821, the domestic dog was first defined as “man’s best friend” by an unknown author in a poem published in the *New-York Literary Journal*. In the early 1900’s, Sigmund Freud discovered that when his Chow Chow, Jofi, was present during psychoanalysis sessions his clients felt comfortable and encouraged to confide (Beck, 2010).

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