The Impact of a Canine Assisted Reading Program on a Reluctant Reader's Literacy Learning

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Abstract

This capstone explores the opportunity to provide an alternate reading intervention program to reluctant readers in the comfort of their own home. Canine-assisted reading programs have been implemented in school districts around the country; providing students with a reading partner that will not judge them and will make them feel safe. These programs have proven to help students gain confidence in their reading abilities, as well as aid in student experiencing increased growth in fluency and comprehension. The author explores how implementing this program at home can be just as beneficial.

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Chapter I: Introduction

DJ and I are sitting on the floor, Caydence lying on the floor between us. He is petting her, he is relaxed and calm.

Samantha: "Do you like to read?"

DJ: "No, I am not very good at it."

Problem Statement

Reluctant readers fill our classrooms every day. Teachers implement countless strategies and interventions in order to engage the unengaged reader. Sometimes teachers exhaust their resources and have to think outside the box. Canine-assisted reading programs are a new way to engage those students deemed hopeless when it comes to reading. This type of program provides students with a unique experience where they can read to a canine companion in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

Significance of Problem

Multiple Studies (e.g., Sorin et al,. 2015; Jalongo, 2005) have indicated that students feel more comfortable and less anxious when reading to a canine companion. These same studies showed that dogs are known to reduce a person's blood pressure and heart rate, the same is said for children. Additional studies (e.g., Bassette et al., 2013; Lane et al., 2013; Fisher et al., 2014) show that implementing a Canine Assisted Reading Program boosts students' self-confidence when reading aloud. The studies also show improvement in students' reading fluency and comprehension. Through this study we will add to the knowledge of how to engage the reluctant or struggling reader. This is a unique way to improve literacy skills. This particular study will help educators to understand if this technique is something that can be implemented in a

student's home with their own dog. This could become a reading strategy implemented not only in the classroom but at home as well.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study is to provide insight on the impact of canine-assisted reading programs on a reluctant reader's comprehension, fluency and attitude towards reading. As a teacher, I am always looking to find new and creative ways to engage reluctant readers, not only in the classroom, but at home as well. There is plenty of research that relates to the implementation of different reading strategies that can engage readers. However, this study went outside the box; looking for a reading strategy that most reluctant reader can connect with. The study allowed me to better understand the affects this program has on a student when implemented at their home instead of in a classroom.

Research Questions

Within my qualitative case study, I planned my methods and procedures in an effort to answer the following questions:

- How does the implementation of a Canine Reading Program impact the fluency and reading comprehension of a reluctant reader?

- How does reading to a canine for ten 20 minute sessions impact a reluctant reader's attitude towards reading?

Rationale

Previous research confirms that students who participated in a canine-assisted reading program have had improvement in fluency and comprehension. Most participants have voiced that this program makes them feel safe and secure when reading aloud. Further investigation needs to take place because the research is always conducted inside a classroom. It would be

beneficial to see some research of a canine-assisted program implemented in a different way or place. A program such as R.E.A.D. goes into libraries, but does not bring the canine into a person's home. I believe it would be valuable to see the impacts that reading to a canine companion can bring, within a child's home environment. Conducting research such as this, could lead to a strategy that parents could implement at home with their own dog and a reluctant reader. Sometimes parents have a hard time getting their child to read, so this might be an alternative that not only meets the needs of the student but is enjoyable as well.

This study will help inform educators' thinking and literacy teaching practices outside of the classroom. It may also inform their literacy teaching practices inside the classroom, if they chose to implement this program in an educational setting. This research is important because it changes students' literacy experiences. This provides a different approach to literacy tools to implement in the instruction of struggling readers. This research will add to that body of research. Not conducting research of this nature could be a missed opportunity for understanding the effectiveness of utilizing this non-traditional literacy practice in the facilitation of literacy instruction for reluctant readers.

Study Approach

In order to explore and answer my research questions, I conducted a qualitative case study in the home of a 10 year old boy, observing the impact of reading to a canine on the literacy learning of the student. Specifically to determine if reading to a canine in a safe environment influenced the student's fluency, comprehension and attitude towards reading. I conducted my research based on a social constructivist approach, the theoretical perspective with a focus on learning and the interaction between one's natural ability to learn and one's environment (Lightbrown & Spada 2013). Vygotsky (1978), in his research, suggests that social

interaction for children in various settings within their varied learning environments is necessary for children in the building of their schemas, correcting schema and making new connections of learning, allowing for language acquisition development and promoting enriched learning experiences which support learning and cognitive development. The idea being that my participant will gain confidence in his reading based on the positive interactions while reading to the dog. In hopes that this development of confidence will then transfer to the classroom, enhancing his learning experiences and interactions with peers. I selected the canine based on the participant's funds of knowledge and background, in that he has been exposed to and had positive interactions with canines his whole life; which Owocki & Goodman (2002) believe contributes to learning. These interactions shape who we are as people and learners. Education enrichment opportunities, provided during our primary years of learning, help in the forming our funds of knowledge. Based on his prior learning experiences, he would be more comfortable engaging with the canine because this animal is a common part of his environment. He thinks of his dog at home as an important member of his family; therefore, making the experience more comfortable for him.

Chapter II- Literature Review

Introduction

Literacy learning is a social construct, and one of the most important aspects of student learning in our education system. It is the foundation upon which other areas of student learning are built, and which aids in student success across subject content areas. There are many literacy programs and strategies out there to engage our students. However, what happens when a student receives additional support, but still struggles as a reader? Some teachers have looked to their canine friends to help engage the struggling and unengaged reader. Canine-assisted reading programs have become a popular alternative to normal reading programs, they are "… a form of animal-assisted therapy (AAT) or animal-assisted activity (AAA) in which children read aloud to a specially trained dog," (Lane & Zavada, 2013, p. 87). Canine-assisted reading programs have offered students the opportunity to have a safe reading experience with a non-judgmental companion.

Canine-assisted Reading Programs

Although working with animals in a classroom setting may seem unconventional, the use of animals in a therapeutic nature has been common practice since the late 1700's. The use of any animal can be beneficial to a person's health, "pet interactions are known to benefit people physiologically, socially, psychologically and cognitively, including lowering blood pressure and pulse rates," (Sorin et al, 2015, p. 23). It is not uncommon for people to feel happy and safe when working with an animal. It wasn't until the 1960's that dogs were introduced to working with children. Psychologist Boris Levinson was working with a child patient and was making little progress. He decided to bring his dog, Jingles, to a session with the young boy (Lane &

Zavada, 2013). The boy felt more comfortable and opened up more, "Levinson found that children were more willing to talk about their problems to the dog than to himself," (Pillow-Price et al., 2014, p.5). Children were able to feel comfort and stability from the canine companion. This was the start of something big, "*Pet-Oriented Child Psychotherapy,* was penned by Levinson 1969, with a dedication to Jingles, his 'co-therapist,'" (Lane & Zavada, 2013, p. 88).

In 1999, the first organized program was designed by Sandi Martin, who was a board member of the Intermountain Therapy Animals in Utah. It was named Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D). This program was introduced to bring dogs into the classroom, "the goal… was to provide struggling readers with a non-judgmental, empathic listener as they practiced their reading skills," (Pillow-Price et al,, 2014, p. 6). This is only one of the many programs that have been established around the country. The dog is a certified therapy dog and the handler is also certified in reading instruction. "Before being included in any program, all dogs and their handlers must meet specific criteria and training, including health check and vaccinations," (Fisher & Cozens, 2014, p. 71). The handler is responsible for bringing the dog to and from the school. They set up a blanket in a quiet area and the dog knows that is their safe place.

Canine-assisted reading programs are used around the world. "R.E.A.D. recommends that 20 minutes be set aside each week for struggling readers to practice reading aloud." (Jalongo, 2005, p.153). Although this number may seem small to some, it is proven effective. It is 20 minutes of uninterrupted, one-on-one reading instruction. The students feel safe and reading strategies are practiced and perfected. This is also 20 minutes of enjoyable reading time, where they are able to read books that interest them and they do not have to feel pressured.

My case study is intended to provide additional insight on the benefits canine-assisted reading programs can bring when conducted in a more intimate setting, such as a child's home.

Engagement

Engagement is one of the most important aspects of education. Student achievement can be solely based on whether a student is engaged during the lesson or not. According to Danielson (2013), "When students are engaged in learning, they are not merely 'busy,' nor are they only on 'task.' Rather, they are intellectually active in learning important and challenging content" (p.69). Students develop their understanding through what they do. They are actively a part of the classroom discussions and activities. It has shown that giving students a choice in their activities can lead to higher student engagement. When they are interested in what they are doing, they are better able to make meaning. Some indicators of student engagement can be: high level questioning, enthusiastic and interested learners, highly motivated, actively working, and problem solving (Danielson, 2013). The higher the level of student engagement, the deeper the thinking occurring during literacy experiences and the deeper the understanding of the content.

Summary

Struggling readers may sometimes have a hard time being engaged in reading lessons. If they do not feel confident in themselves and their reading abilities, they are not able to fully involve themselves in the lesson and may become resistant to learning. Reading comprehension and fluency are important aspects of literacy education. If competency in these areas of literacy learning does not occur, students may not realize their full academic potential, minimizing their becoming fully invested or engaged in the reading process. Although reading instruction is incorporated in school, there needs to be other opportunities for struggling readers that do not

respond well to those programs. Reading to a dog can meet the needs of students that have not responded to other interventions. It provides the students with a safe-environment for them to practice their strategies. If they are engaged while reading to the dog, they are maintaining the skills needed to be successful.

Chapter III- Methods and Procedures:

Introduction

This study is about trying new strategies to engage the reluctant reader. To try and help those students that struggle with reading to gain self-confidence, improve their comprehension, and fluency. Some students do not respond to the traditional reading interventions. Through my research, I gained insight on a non-traditional intervention, reading to canines, to help motivate and engage a reluctant reader. In this chapter, I will be sharing my research questions, participant, and data collection methods I used. I will also address the limitations surrounding my research.

Research Questions

Within my qualitative case study, I planned my methods and procedures in an effort to answer the following questions:

- How does the implementation of a Canine Reading Program impact the fluency and reading comprehension of a reluctant reader?
- How does reading to a canine for ten 20 minute sessions impact a reluctant reader's attitude towards reading?

Participants and Context

My participant, who for the purpose of this study shall be referred to as DJ, is a 9 year old boy who is going into 5th grade. He lives in Henrietta, NY with his mother and grandmother, attending Rush-Henrietta Central School District. He will be spending his summer with his father, step-mother and two younger brothers in Spencerport, NY. DJ identifies as a reluctant reader by frequently expressing his distaste for reading. His parents also express concern for his

lack of interest in reading. DJ loves to play video games and play outside. He is a very active boy and loves running around outside playing with Nerf guns. The other participant of the study will be the dog that DJ will be reading to. Her name is Caydence and she is a certified therapy dog. My research will be conducted in the comfort of DJ's home. His father lives in a three bedroom house in Spencerport, NY. They are a middle class family. His step-mother is a stay at home mom and takes care of his two younger brothers. DJ's father works long hours as a mechanic to support the family. DJ's dad dropped out of high school when he was 16, he went on to get his GED later in life.

Positionality of the Researcher

I am a 30 year old white female, living in Greece, New York with my husband. I was raised in Henrietta, New York in a middle class family; attending the Rush-Henrietta Central School District. I completed my undergraduate studies at The College at Brockport, State University of New York. I earned a Bachelor of Science degree in History and teacher certification in Inclusive Childhood Education, grades one through six. Currently, I am pursuing my Master of Science degree in Literacy Education B-12 at The College at Brockport. After student teaching in a sixth grade Social Studies classroom in Rush-Henrietta Central School District, I went on to become a district substitute teacher there. Then, I worked as a sixth grade English Language Arts long term substitute in the same school I student taught at. Currently, I am a 5th grade teacher in the Rush-Henrietta Central School District.

I am passionate about students feeling comfortable and confident as readers in the classroom. I am always looking for new strategies to help engage students in reading and to improve their skills. This study is significant to me because I feel that I can bring two of my passions together to be something successful. I have always grown up with dogs and find them to

be a part of the family. When I was younger my golden retriever was my best friend, he always comforted me when I was upset and provided that silent but calming support that I needed. I believe that if you provide students with a non-judgmental companion to read to, they will have learning experiences that they will always remember. I am hoping this study will help other teachers to think outside the box when it comes to reading interventions. Not every student learns the same way, so you have to be creative and provide them with as many options as you can.

Procedure of Study

My study consisted of eleven sessions of canine based reading experiences over twenty weeks. The sessions took place at DJ's home, with Caydence, a certified therapy dog in attendance. During the first session, I got to know more about DJ as a reader and he got to know Caydence. I conducted a Running Reading Record at this time to determine his reading strengths and weaknesses, fluency rate and comprehension skills. I also administered a reading interest questionnaire to gauge his interest in reading independently, reading aloud, and his feelings about himself as a reader. After that, sessions began with a 10 minute meeting with Caydence to warm up. DJ then read aloud from a book of his choice to Caydence, it was a chapter book chosen by DJ that he continued to read at every session. Most of the reading sessions took place in the living room, on a blanket on the floor. During the reading session, I took observational notes, noting how DJ was interacting with the dog and the strength of his reading/retell. I also kept track of the time. When the time was up, I allowed DJ to feed Caydence treats and to play with her outside for 15 minutes. When the eleventh and final session occurred, I conducted another Running Reading Record. I was comparing his comprehension and fluency scores from the first session to the last session. I concluded the session by asking DJ to complete a self-reflection based on his experiences with Caydence.

Instruments of Study

During the course of this study, I gathered both qualitative and quantitative data using multiple methods. I used a qualitative research design of a case study, with one male participant for twenty weeks. My data was collected through the use of interviews, reading running records, field notes and observations. These methods provided me insight into my participant's fluency rate, comprehension level, and attitude towards reading.

Running Reading Record

I conducted a Running Reading record on DJ during the first session to determine his fluency rate and comprehension score. I also got to know him as a reader. This allowed me to assess where he was as a reader at the beginning of the study and have a starting number to compare to at the end of the study. I then conducted another Running Reading Record to compare his fluency rate and comprehension scores. Both Running Records took place in the participant's home with a book at his level.

Semi-Structured Interview- Student

In order to better understand DJ as a reader, I conducted an interview during the first session. The questions involved his feelings towards reading, as well as his perceptions of himself as a reader. The questions were answered by DJ verbally while I took notes based on his responses. I gave him adequate time to respond, not forcing answers and writing down exactly what he said. This interview took place in DJ's home setting while DJ interacted with Caydence.

Read-aloud

A read-aloud occurred ten times throughout the research process. DJ read the same chapter book to Caydence every time they met. During our first session, I explained to DJ that Caydence may not understand everything he read to her because he knows more vocabulary

words than she does. I communicated to him that it would be essential for him to retell what he read in his own words to Caydence at the end of each session. This allowed me to check his understanding without interfering with the actual read-aloud.

Anecdotal notes-

Anecdotal notes and observations were taken during each read aloud session. This allowed me to record the interactions between DJ and Caydence. I recorded any behaviors I observed demonstrated by DJ towards reading or the dog that I noticed. I took note of any reading strategies DJ used, as well as how accurate his retell was at the end of the session. I rated each retell using the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Comprehension Scoring Key.

Self-Reflection- Student

I created a self-reflection for DJ to complete after the last session. This allowed DJ to be honest about his experience with Caydence. He also revisited how he feels about himself as a reader. I was able to compare some of his responses with those of his initial interview.

Criteria for Trustworthiness

As a researcher working with children, it was crucial that I accurately conducted this study in an ethical manner. I made sure all the data collected in this study was accurate and unbiased. I minimized researcher bias creep, by using the words of DJ in my reports and observations. I also used the triangulation of my data to strengthen the validity and credibility of the study I conducted.

Limitations

This study included some limitations. For one, this study was only conducted with one participant. The results of the study may not be characteristic of all reluctant readers. Basically, this study is not generalizable. Second, this case study took place outside of an academic

environment. This may have hindered the child's interest in reading during the sessions. Another aspect of this limitation is that I was unable to observe if the student was participating in reading activities in the classroom due to the participation in this program. The student was going to school during the sessions; therefore, I cannot accurately determine if the growth in fluency and comprehension is a direct result of the study, or intervention in school.

Chapter IV: Findings and Analysis of Data

Introduction

As stated in my previous chapters, my study was conducted over the course of twenty weeks, using multiple methods for data collection. The purpose of the sessions was to examine student interactions with canine, focusing on: fluency, comprehension, and positive attitude towards reading. I used a coding system to analyze my data. After each session, I examined my observation notes, highlighting the positive interactions in green and the negative in red. I also scored his retell on a scale of 0-3, using the Fountas & Pinnell comprehension scoring rubric as a guide. I then compared the information from the Running Record given in the first session to the Running Record given during the last session. I highlighted green for any progressions and red for any data/scores that stayed the same or decreased. I also used this method of coding for the first interview, as well as the student-reflection given at the end. All comprehension and fluency grading was done using the Fountas & Pinnell fluency and comprehension scoring rubrics. My research reflects constant comparative analysis and triangulation of my data due to my use of interviews, reading records, and observation. Therefore, increasing the accuracy in which I answered my research questions.

The purpose of my study was to analyze how reading to a canine companion affected a 9-year-old's reluctance to read. I also looked into the impact it had on his fluency and reading comprehension. I characterized my findings by themes while analyzing my data. There were multiple themes I uncovered throughout my findings. This chapter will expand on the following themes: 1) the participant is aware of his literacy abilities; 2) the participant's attitude impacts his literacy engagement; 3) confidence in reading grew while reading to canine; 4) the participant's engagement affects his reading comprehension.

DJ Demonstrates Self-Awareness of his Literacy Abilities

The first thing I noticed was that DJ was aware of his current literacy skills. DJ was actually very hard on himself, lacking self-confidence as a reader. I conducted a literacy interview during our first session while DJ interacted with Caydence. He was really enjoying his time with Caydence, very calm and loving. I asked, "Do you like to read?" His immediate response was, "No, I am not very good at it." That set the tone for the rest of the interview. DJ's demeanor changed, his responses were short and to the point, which are indicated below in Figure 4.1. When the interview was over, DJ relaxed again and went back to playing with Caydence. DJ is very aware of his label, "reluctant reader." His attitude towards reading is not very positive and that could be due to his identifying himself as a struggling reading.

Figure 4.1 Semi-Structured Interview- Student

Questions	DJ's Responses
Reading a book is something I like to do: never not very often sometimes often	"Not very often."
I volunteer to read aloud in class: never not very often sometimes often	"Never! I hate reading in front of people."
Do you like to read?	"No, I am not very good at it."
I think I am: a poor reader an OK reader a good reader a very good reader	"I think I am okay, I read better in my head."
Do you think it is important to read well? Why?	"Yes, so you can be smart."

What do you like to read?	"I like to read books about video games. I don't mind reading those Dork Diary books."
Do you think you will like to read to Caydence? Why or why not?	"I like dogs, but I don't like reading. I am not really sure."
Do you think you will be comfortable when you read to Caydence?	"It seems weird to read to a dog. She probably won't even listen to me."
How do you think reading to Caydence will help your overall reading skills?	"I don't think reading to a dog will do anything."

Fig. 4.1 Semi-Structured Interview – Student Cont'd

DJ's Attitude Affects His Literacy Engagement

I noticed that DJ's attitude impacted his level of engagement during the read aloud. As you can see from Figure 4.1, DJ's attitude on reading was very negative in the beginning. Although he loves dogs and wanted to participate in the study, he was not buying into the idea that Caydence was going to listen to him read. I explained to DJ that Caydence is there to provide a non-judgmental ear while he reads. I did inform him that her vocabulary was not as advanced as his, since she is younger than him. I told him it was important for him to retell what he read in his own words to Caydence when he finished reading.

DJ's attitude was not very good in sessions 2, 3, and 4 (no read-aloud took place in session 1). When analyzing my observations, I noticed that he was not engaged in the reading. He would take frequent "bathroom" breaks. He quickly read the chapters in order to be done with the sessions. During the second session, he stopped mid-sentence to ask me if he could take Caydence outside to play with her. I reminded him that we play with Caydence after we have read to her for 20 minutes. When retelling the story in his words, he was brief and reflected no understanding of the text. He would often be off topic. For instance, when retelling chapter 3 of the book in session 3, he ask Caydence, "Did you know that there is a new nerf gun for sale at Target?" He was given a score of 0 or 1 in those three lessons.

During session 5, I decided to sit in the other room. I was able to see DJ and hear him, but I was no longer in the same room. It was during that session that I started to see a change in DJ's attitude. Instead of sitting next to Caydence like usual, he spread out on the floor next to her. I took note of the interactions that took place between them. DJ was still not 100% engaged; he stopped reading for a bit and pet Caydence, telling her about his day. He then went on to read a few more pages. I informed him that his reading time was up and asked him to explain to Caydence what he just read. DJ turned to Caydence and relayed important details from the text. His response earned him a 2 on the Comprehension Scoring Key.

During session 6, DJ struggled through the read aloud. There was some difficult vocabulary words, DJ tried his best to work through them. He used context clues as well as repeating words and phrases to check for understanding. He constantly looked at Caydence, pointing out the words and illustrations. It went from just reading to an interactive read-aloud, with DJ acting as the teacher. He was more engaged than I had ever seen him, even though he was struggling through this particular chapter. This is where my observations were filled with green coding, rather than red.

I noticed through my observation notes that when DJ was negative about the read-aloud sessions, his engagement in the reading activity was low to nonexistent. This may have been due to my presence in the room. He may have felt embarrassed reading in front of me. Once he made the connection with Caydence he was more engaged in the read-aloud, taking on a more active role. He no longer dreaded the 20 minutes of reading, instead he interacted with the text and Caydence. He could have shown this positive change because he knew that Caydence was not judging his reading, but instead listening to every word he said. It was evident from his interactions, that he enjoyed being with Caydence.

DJ Gained Confidence in His Reading Abilities

I discovered that DJ's confidence in his reading abilities improved from the first interview to the student self-reflection that took place at the end. DJ did not see himself as a great reader, but he did score himself more highly at the end of the study than he did at the beginning. When analyzing my data, I noted the change in his demeanor as the session progressed; he seemed more calm and collected when reading with Caydence. In the later sessions, I observed a change in his volume while reading. In sessions 2-5, he was very quiet while reading. He spoke softly, without much expression. As the sessions progressed, DJ's volume increased, and he gained some expression in his voice. In his reflection (**Figure 4.2**), he voiced how he felt confident and comfortable while reading to Caydence. This could be because he felt safe.

Figure 4.2 Student Self-Reflection

Questions	Responses (written)
Did you like reading to Caydence? Why or why not?	I did not like it at first. But then I started to love it.
Did you feel more confident in your reading skills when you read to Caydence?	Yes I did because Caydence always listened to me.
Did you feel comfortable reading to Caydence?	I felt very comfortable. She was nice.
Did reading to Caydence help you learn to read better?	No. It did make me read more.
Did you feel like you understood what you were reading more when you read to Caydence?	Yes because I had to explain it to her because she didn't understand all the words.
Would you want to read to Caydence more in the future?	Sure
Do you think you will volunteer to read more in class?	Maybe
If you could change one thing about reading to Caydence, what would it be?	Can we read outside next time
I think I am: a poor reader an OK reader a good reader	A good reader

a very good reader	
Rank your experience of reading to Caydence on a scale of 1-10 (1 being a terrible experience and 10 being an amazing experience) Explain your rating:	8 Caydence was really nice to me while I was reading. She liked listening to my book. I liked helping her learn to read.

Figure 4.2 Student Self-Reflection Cont'd

DJ's Engagement in Reading Influences his Reading Comprehension

I discovered that DJ's level of engagement affects his reading comprehension score. At the end of every read-aloud, DJ was asked to retell what he read in his own words for Caydence. My purpose for the retelling was so I had insight into his understanding of the text. Without prompts, I wanted to know what he got out of the reading. For each retell, I wrote down his conversation with the dog, listening for keys ideas and ultimately scoring him on a scale of 0-3. I used Fountas & Pinnell's Benchmark Assessment Comprehension Scoring Rubric as shown in **Figure 4.3** to score his comprehension (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008). I used this scoring system because it was something that I am familiar with and understand what each level is.

Figure 4.3 Fountas & Pinnell Comprehension Scoring Key

0 Reflects **no** understanding of the text. Either does not respond or talks off the topic.

1 Reflects **very limited** understanding of the text. Mentions a few facts or ideas but does not express the important information or ideas.

2 Reflects **partial** understanding of the text. Includes important information and ideas but neglects other key understandings.

3 Reflects **excellent** understanding of the text. Includes almost all important information and main ideas.

There were many factors that went into the scoring process. I mainly looked at how many pages he was able to read and his fluency. While coding my observation notes, I noticed that during the sessions where I marked DJ as more engaged, his comprehension score was higher. Those first

three sessions, where he was not engaged in the read-aloud, his score was a 0. He had trouble

remembering what he read and was often off topic. During the other sessions, DJ was more

engaged and actively reading to Caydence. On those days, he scored at least a 2, sometimes a

three. Engaged behaviors included: attention is focused on reading; read aloud is more

interactive between DJ and Caydence; reading is taking place the majority of the time; reading is

enthusiastic. I created a data chart to better understand the correlation between engagement and

comprehension as seen in **Figure 4.4**.

Figure 4.4 Engagement/Comprehension Chart

Session	Engaged/Disengaged	Comprehension Score
2	Disengaged	0
3	Disengaged	0
4	Disengaged	1
5	Semi-Engaged	2
6	Engaged	2
7	Engaged	3
8	Engaged	2
9	Engaged	3
10	Engaged	3

The results indicated that the more engaged DJ was in the read-aloud, the higher his

comprehension of the text. In my observations, I noted how much more details and information

he gave Caydence when he was more active and engaged in the read-aloud portion of the

session.

Chapter V: Conclusions and Implications

Introduction

This study was conducted to answer the following questions: "How does the implementation of a Canine Reading Program impact the fluency and reading comprehension of a reluctant reader?" and "How does reading to a canine for ten 20 minute sessions impact a reluctant reader's attitude towards reading?" I used multiple research methods to form a conclusion. I found several themes when analyzing and coding my research. The themes include: 1) the participant is aware of his literacy abilities; 2) the participant's attitude impacts his literacy engagement; 3) confidence in reading grew while reading to canine; 4) the participant's engagement affects his reading comprehension. These themes helped to answer my research questions, as well as develop new understandings.

Conclusions

Through the analysis of my data, I found that reading to a canine can boost a student's self-confidence in reading. I also found that a positive attitude is a large piece of whether or not this intervention can be successful. When DJ did not believe that reading to the dog was purposeful, he was less engaged in the activity, and in his not scoring well in his retelling of the story was indicative of his limited engagement. When his attitude became more positive, he was more engaged in the read-aloud. His higher comprehension scores were a reflection of that positive, interactive read-aloud. His overall interest in reading was low, but when he was motivated by the task, he became interested in the reading. Researchers agree that a stimulating task can help struggling readers become more interested, (Guthrie, et al., 2006). This indicated to me that this type of intervention program would only be effective with students who were open to the idea of reading to a dog. A student that believes that a dog cannot comprehend what they

are reading would not be invested in this program. My research also demonstrated how a student's attitude affects student engagement and comprehension. It is imperative that students chosen for this program are open to the idea that dogs can be attentive listeners. They also must feel safe in the reading environment.

Implications for Teachers

There are many reading strategies and intervention programs that teachers can implement, in order to students' literacy learning needs. Sometimes, students are still reluctant to pick up a book. Canine-assisted reading programs can be a simple intervention for students to do in the comfort of their own home. The students can feel safe while their reading strategies are practiced and perfected. Researched show progress in student engagement, comprehension and fluency based on 20 minutes of reading each week. At home, this can be implemented on a nightly basis. As an educator, I have recommended this intervention for some of my students. If students are struggling with fluency, the best thing for them is to read out loud as often as possible. My students are required to read for 30 minutes a night; I have suggested to parents to have their child read to their dog instead of silently. Some of my students really love reading with their dog at night. Teachers should offer opportunities for non-traditional reading interventions strategies.

Implications for Student

DJ benefited from a non-judgmental, low stress level reading experience. When he shifted his attitude to a more positive outlook, he was more engaged in his reading. These 20 minutes of reading to a dog can continue at home with his family pet. DJ lacks confidence in himself as a reader and needs different opportunities to build his confidence. Reading aloud to his canine friend can help him practice his strategies and build up his confidence. DJ's

comprehension was higher when he was more invested in what he was reading. His parents and teachers can make sure his books are of interest to him.

Limitations

This study included some limitations including my sample size, only working with one participant. Therefore, the results are not generalizable to all struggling readers. Secondly, this case study is taking place outside of an academic environment. This may hinder the child's interest in reading during the sessions. Time is another limitation on this study. My research was inconsistent over a 20 week period; therefore my data will not show any long-term changes.

Another aspect of this limitation is that I am unable to observe if the student is participating in reading activities inside the classroom due to the participation in this program. The student was going to school during the sessions, I cannot accurately determine if the growth in comprehension is a direct result of the study, or from outside factors. The data collection methods I used may also include some limitations. DJ is my nephew; therefor some results may not be reliable and or valid.

Research Suggestions

I would like to continue research on canine-assisted reading programs as a source of intervention in school and at home. Struggling readers fill our classrooms, and sometimes traditional programs do not always work on those students. More research should be conducted, exploring the benefits of reading to a dog or any animal in a home setting. Although my participant's attitude towards reading changed, increasing his engagement and comprehension, more research is necessary in order to implement these programs.

Overall Significance

　　Reading, especially reading aloud, is a substantial part of everyday life; students should feel confident and successful at it. My study is significant because it focused on one struggling reader's literary experiences using a different approach to literacy intervention/instruction. We should consider using different literacy practices in order to meet the diverse literacy needs of students. With the right implementation plan, struggling/reluctant readings can find great success right in their own home. The goal would be for the students to gain confidence in themselves as readers, and bringing that confidence with them into the classroom. My study illustrates that reading to a canine may be beneficial literacy strategy to employ in facilitating the literacy learning of the participant.

Appendix A

Reading Interview/Survey (before)

1. Reading a book is something I like to do:
   ___ never
   ___ not very often
   ___ sometimes
   ___ often
2. I volunteer to read aloud in class:
   ___ never
   ___ not very often
   ___ sometimes
   ___ often

3. Do you like to read? Why or why not?

4. I think I am:
   ___ a poor reader
   ___ an OK reader
   ___ a good reader
   ___ a very good reader

5. Do you think it is important to read well? Why?

6. What do you like to read?

7. Do you think you will like to read to Caydence? Why or why not?

8. Do you think you will be comfortable when you read to Caydence?

9. How do you think reading to Caydence will help your overall reading skills?

Appendix B
Running Record Score Sheet (before and after)

Student: _____   Date: _____

Text/Number of words: _____ F / NF   Level: _____

__ Familiar   __ Unfamiliar

Errors: _____	Error Rate: _____	M- Meaning
Self-Corrections: _____	SC Rate: _____	S- Structure
Accuracy Rate: _____%	Accuracy Rate Analysis: ** Independent (95%-100%)	V- Visual
	** Instructional (90%- 94%) ** Frustration (89% or lower)	Fluency Score 1 2 3 4 5

Page/Line		Number		Analysis	
		Error	Self-Correction	Error	Self-Correction

		Number		Analysis	
Page/Line		Error	Self-Correction	Error	Self-Correction

Comprehension Responses

Characters:

Setting:

Main Idea:

Appendix C
Observation Notes

Date: _____   Session: _____

What I see:	What I hear:
Retell Score: 0 1 2 3	Fluency Score: 0 1 2 3

Appendix D

Fountas & Pinnell Comprehension Scoring Key

0 Reflects **no** understanding of the text. Either does not respond or talks off the topic.

1 Reflects **very limited** understanding of the text. Mentions a few facts or ideas but does not express the important information or ideas.

2 Reflects **partial** understanding of the text. Includes important information and ideas but neglects other key understandings.

3 Reflects **excellent** understanding of the text. Includes almost all important information and main ideas.

Fountas, I.C. & Pinnell, G.S. (2008). *Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2*.

Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Appendix E

Fountas & Pinnell Fluency Scoring Key

0 Reads primarily word-by-word with occasional but infrequent or inappropriate phrasing; no smooth or expressive interpretation, irregular pausing, and no attention to author's meaning or punctuation; no stress or inappropriate stress, and slow rate.

1 Reads primarily in two-word phrases with some three- and four-word groups and some word-by-word reading; almost no smooth, expressive interpretation or pausing guided by author's meaning and punctuation; almost no stress or inappropriate stress, with slow rate most of the time.

2 Reads primarily in three- or four-word phrase groups; some smooth, expressive interpretation and pausing guided by author's meaning and punctuation; mostly appropriate stress and rate with some slowdowns.

3 Reads primarily in larger, meaningful phrases or word groups; mostly smooth, expressive interpretation and pausing guided by author's meaning and punctuation; appropriate stress and rate with only a few slowdowns.

Fountas, I.C. & Pinnell, G.S. (2008). *Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System 2*.

Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Appendix F

Student Self-Reflection (after)

1. Did you like reading to Caydence? Why or why not?

2. Did you feel more confident in your reading skills when you read to Caydence?

3. Did you feel comfortable reading to Caydence?

4. Did reading to Caydence help you learn to read better?

5. Did you feel like you understood what you were reading more when you read to Caydence?

6. Would you want to read to Caydence more in the future?

7. Do you think you will volunteer to read more in class next year?

8. If you could change one thing about reading to Caydence, what would it be?

9. I think I am:
   ___ a poor reader
   ___ an OK reader
   ___ a good reader
   ___ a very good reader

10. Rank your experience of reading to Caydence on a scale of 1-10. (1 being a terrible experience and 10 being an amazing experience)

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

    Explain your rating:

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