

When I think about the combination of children and dogs I get a big smile on my face because these are the two things I am most passionate about. This research paper will be about therapy dogs. I will be discussing the different types of service dogs, the history, how these dogs become certified, the story about my therapy dog, the benefits from dog therapy, and how a dog will be potentially used in your classroom.

There are three basic types of service dogs that are most likely to be used with individuals with special needs. They are therapy dogs, a companion dog, or a safety dog. A therapy dog is owned by a teacher or therapist and is used during lessons to facilitate learning. A companion dog lives with the family and spends most of its day interacting with the individual with special needs. The dog can assist with social, emotional, behavioral and sensory challenges in the child. These dogs also serve as a “social ice breaker” because other people are often attracted to a dog and will interact more readily with the child. Some individuals with autism really open up and interact with a dog. (Grandin, 2005, pg. 25)

There are differences between a service dog and a therapy dog. Service dogs are considered legal and have certain rights. According to the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) defines a service animal as any guide dog, signal dog, or other animal individually trained to provide assistance to an individual with a disability. If they meet this definition, animals are considered service animals under the ADA regardless of whether they have been licensed or certified by a state or local government. (Grandin, 2011, pg 48)

Service animals perform some of the functions and tasks that the individual with a disability cannot perform for him or herself. Guide dogs are one type of service

animal, used by some individuals who are blind. This is the type of service animal with which most people are familiar. But there are service animals that assist persons with other kinds of disabilities in their day-to-day activities. Some examples include: Alerting persons with hearing impairments to sounds, pulling wheelchairs or carrying and picking up things for persons with mobility impairments. Assisting persons with mobility impairments with balance. A service animal is not a pet. (Grandin, 2011, pg. 49)

A therapy dog is trained to provide affection, play, and comfort to those in need of it. Therapy dogs often visit nursing homes, schools, retirement homes, and hospitals. On occasion, some therapy dogs can visit people in their own homes. These dogs assist people that have physical disabilities, learning disabilities, or any kind of special need.

A therapy dog can be any kind of breed. The most popular ones are Golden retrievers and Labradors. The most important characteristic for a therapy dog to have is temperament. The temperament needs to be the same with people as well as other animals. Other characteristics that therapy dog needs to display are being friendly, gentle, confident, and at ease in any situation.

A therapy dog's primary job is to allow unfamiliar people to make physical contact with it and to enjoy that contact. Children in particular enjoy hugging animals; adults usually enjoy simply petting the dog. The dog might need to be lifted onto, or climb onto, an individual's lap or bed and sit or lie comfortably there. Many dogs contribute to the visiting experience by performing small tricks for their audience or by playing carefully structured games. (Therapy Dog International, 2012)

“The top 5 dog breeds are Golden retriever, Labrador retriever, German Shephard, Setters, and Samoyeds. 1) Golden Retriever – often used as guide and hearing dogs, seizure alert dogs, and physical assistance dogs as well as therapy dogs. They are loyal, intelligent, and calm, three traits that make them most suited to be therapy and assistance dogs.

2) Labrador Retriever -The Labrador Retriever was bred to be both a friendly companion and a useful working dog, which makes him an excellent choice as a therapy or assistance dog. One of the most popular breeds used. One of the more unique programs that Labrador Retrievers have been used in lately is Library dogs – dogs that are allowed into the childrens’ section of the local library to foster reading and excitement about reading in children.

3) German Shepherd -one of the most popular breeds used as a service or therapy dog. He is loyal, intelligent and a capable working dog. His devotion and courage are unmatched. And he’s amazingly versatile, excelling at most anything he’s trained to do: guide and assistance work for the handicapped, police and military service, herding, search and rescue, drug detection, competitive obedience and faithful companions.

4) Setters and Setter crosses – The Setter’s love of people and easygoing nature can make him a super friend as well as a fine working dog. Gentle, kind, and affectionate, he’s devoted, sociable with strangers, and this makes him a plus as a therapy dog, a hearing dog or an assistance dog.

5) Samoyed and Samoyed mixes – A working breed, the Samoyed can be strong-willed at times, but above all they remain friendly, gentle, and devoted dogs.

A Samoyed cross is ideal as a grief therapy dog and as a physical assistance dog. They are often used in Dogs for Diabetics, a program that trains animals to recognize hypoglycemic shock in their owners and call for attention.” (Top Ten Therapy Dogs, 2010)

These dogs are selected because of their dispositions. They are also selected because they are bred to have work ethic, companionship and a high level of intelligence. Not all therapy dogs have to be a one of these breeds. In fact, my dog, is a cross breed (German shepherd/Rottweiler) and he is a therapy dog.

My dog, Hogan, has only been a therapy dog for a short while. He weighs 85 lbs and stands at 29 inches high. He is considered a large dog. I discovered him at Hilton Head Humane Society while I was living in South Carolina. He always kept my attention while I was volunteering. He had a very sweet disposition, he loved to be petted and hugged. After volunteering for about three weeks I realized I had to have him as my dog.

I knew that training a rescue dog was going to be very difficult but I was amazed at Hogan’s progress! Within two months he was social with people and other dogs. He wasn’t at all timid, he actually became more curious and confident. He learned to sit, shake hands, give a high five, sit pretty, and lay down.

It wasn’t until I had Hogan around children when I knew that there was something special about him. He was gentle, loving, and playful around many different children. I asked my dad about how I could get my dog the training that he needed to be a therapy dog since he used to train dogs for the military. He told me that he did not know of anyone in northeast Ohio.

I did my own research and came across a trainer who specializes in dog therapy. He taught me many things that I did not know about when it came to dog training. In most instances it is the human that needs trained because most dogs will do whatever you ask of them. The trainer worked with Hogan and I over a course of 8 weeks. He told me after the training Hogan will need to take the CGC test.

CGC stands for Canine Good Citizen. It is a 10 step performance test that all therapy dogs are required to take. The ten steps for CGC certification are:

1. Accepts a friendly stranger
2. Sits politely for petting
3. Appearance and Grooming
4. Out for a walk
5. Walking through a crowd
6. Performs sit, down, and stay in place
7. Coming when called
8. Reaction to another dog
9. Reaction to distractions
10. Supervised separation

Dogs must remain calm in all of these steps.

This is a test administered by the AKC (American Kennel Club). Many dog owners complete CGC training and testing as a prerequisite to therapy dog certification. While the AKC does not certify therapy dogs, we are very proud that so many CGC dogs and their owners volunteer their time to improve the lives of other people. There are national therapy dog groups (and in some cities local groups) that certify therapy

dogs. Therapy Dogs International (TDI) uses the AKC Canine Good Citizen test as a key component of its therapy dog assessment. It is considered to be a key component because all places that will allow therapy dogs will request the dog's certifications because most facilities have their own requirements and tests. Hospitals have the most rigorous tests. They usually require you take their training program before taking their test. (American Kennel Club, 2012)

According to TDI (Therapy Dogs International), they require you to take their test as well. It has the same steps as the CGC test plus a few extras. Their additional steps require:

REACTION TO MEDICAL EQUIPMENT-The dog must be tested around medical equipment (such as wheelchairs, crutches, canes, walkers, or other devices which would ordinarily be found in a facility) to judge the dog's reactions to common health care equipment.

LEAVE-IT- The handler with the dog on a loose leash walks over food on the ground and, upon command, the dog should ignore the food.

ACCLIMATION TO INFIRMITIES- This test demonstrates the dog's confidence when exposed to people walking with an uneven gait, shuffling, breathing heavily, coughing, wheezing, or other distractions which may be encountered in a facility

SAY HELLO- The TDI Certified Evaluator will test the willingness of each dog to visit a person and that the dog can be made readily accessible for petting (i.e., small dogs can be placed on a person's lap or can be held; medium and larger dogs can sit on a chair or stand close to the patient to be easily reached.)

REACTION TO CHILDREN- The dog must be able to work well around all types of

populations, including children. The dog's behavior around children must be evaluated during testing. It is important that during the testing the potential Therapy Dog and the children are not in direct contact. This means the dog can only be observed for a reaction toward children playing, running, or present in general at the testing site. Any negative reaction by the dog will result in automatic failure. Negative reaction means a dog showing signs of aggression. (Therapy Dogs International, 2012)

How did dogs become a type of therapy? “During World War II, under combat operations against Japanese forces on the island of New Guinea, Corporal William Wynne came into possession of a young adult Yorkshire Terrier abandoned on the battlefield. He named the female dog Smoky.

Smoky accompanied Wynne on numerous combat missions, provided comfort and entertainment for troops, and even assisted the Signal Corps in running a telegraph cable through an underground pipe, completing in minutes what might have been a dangerous, three-day construction job which would have exposed men and equipment to enemy bombers. (Jones, 2010)

Smoky's service as a therapy dog began when Corporal Wynne was hospitalized for a jungle disease. As Wynne recovered, Wynne's Army pals brought Smoky to the hospital for a visit and to cheer the soldier up. Smoky immediately became a hit with the other wounded soldiers. Dr. Charles Mayo, of the famed Mayo Clinic, was the commanding officer who allowed Smoky to go on rounds and also permitted her to sleep with Wynne in his hospital bed for five nights. Smoky's work as a therapy dog continued for 12 years, during and after World War II. (Jones, 2010)

“The establishment of a systematic approach to the use of therapy dogs is attributed to Elaine Smith, an American who worked as a registered nurse for a time in England. Smith noticed how well patients responded to visits by a certain chaplain and his canine companion, a Golden Retriever. Upon returning to the United States in 1976, Smith started a program for training dogs to visit institutions. Over the years other health care professionals have noticed the therapeutic effect of animal companionship, such as relieving stress, lowering blood pressure, and raising spirits, and the demand for therapy dogs continues to grow. In recent years, therapy dogs have been enlisted to help children overcome speech and emotional disorders.” (Jones, pg. F10, 2010)

“Elaine Smith, the Founder of Therapy Dogs International (1976) passed away peacefully in her home surrounded by her three dogs. Since our first visit to a nursing home in New Jersey in 1976, millions of people around the World are benefiting from Therapy Dog visitations because of Elaine Smith's idea. She had the persistency to realize her vision that dogs should be allowed to visit with the patients in hospitals, nursing homes and other institutions to bring comfort and companionship and increasing emotional well-being, promoting healing and improving the quality of life for the people being visited and the staff that cares for these people.” (<http://www.tdi-dog.org/>)

“In 1982, Nancy Stanley founded Tender Loving Zoo (TLZ), a nonprofit organization that introduced animal therapy to severely handicapped children and to convalescent hospitals for the elderly. She got the idea while working at the Los Angeles Zoo, where she noticed how handicapped visitors responded eagerly to animals. She researched the beneficial effects that animals can have on patients and

soon thereafter, Ms. Stanley began taking her pet miniature poodle, Freeway, to the Revere Developmental Center for the severely handicapped.

Inspired by the response of the patients and the encouragement of the staff, she took \$7,500 of her own money, bought a van, recruited helpers, and persuaded a pet store to lend baby animals. Soon requests for TLZ were coming from schools, hospitals and convalescent homes all over the county. Partly as a result of Ms. Stanley's work, the concept of dog-therapy has broadened to "animal-assisted therapy" or "pet therapy", including many other species, such as therapy cats, therapy rabbits, therapy birds and so on." (Jones, pg. F10, 2010)

Before you have a therapy dog come into your classroom you need to interview the owner/handler of the dog. Ask the owner/handler to come into your classroom without the dog for an interview. This will give you a chance to ask the questions you may have and it also gives the dog handler a chance to see the classroom. It is always important to ask questions based upon the needs of the students.

Some good questions to ask are:

- What if some students are scared?
- What if some students are allergic?
- What happens if a student mistreats the dog?

When a child is a scared of the dog, we turn the dog so it's back is facing the child. In most cases, children fear the mouth or the teeth of the animal. The child is then encouraged to feel the dog and pet the dog's back, letting the child know that the dog is soft and will not hurt him or her. When a student is allergic, the child might need to be removed from the classroom depending on the severity of the allergy. If the

allergy is not that severe perhaps the child can pet the dog immediately followed by hand washing or in most cases the child can attend the therapy dog session. If a student mistreats the dog, the child will be educated on how we treat animals that are our pets. When I bring Hogan into a classroom the students are not allowed to interact with him until I teach them how we pet him, love him, brush him, etc. I don't expect every child to know how we treat animals so before we get started I demonstrate it for them.

There are many reasons to use therapy dogs. In 1998, Therapy Dogs International (TDI), conducted a study based on 200 people about the benefits of therapy dogs. This study was conducted to determine the perceptions of contact staff regarding benefits of the programs to clients, residents, patients, and/or staff. Data indicated an overwhelming perception that patients benefited in a variety of ways, including increased socialization, verbalization, alertness, and positive mood alterations. Staff were reported to benefit by increased morale, using dog visits as a break in their work, and being able to observe patients interacting with the dogs. The majority of facilities desired more and/or longer visits. Few facilities expressed negative effects of the programs, or had experienced any barriers in starting them. (Jones, pg. 3, 1998)

“ Question five specifically asked about benefits to clients from therapy dog visits, as noted by the respondent. A category of “No benefits noted” was included as the tenth response; however, none of the respondents chose this as an answer. All two hundred respondents answered this question, most with multiple answers. Out of the 200 respondents 127 of them answered that it increased physical movement and mobility, 75 answered that it decreased their blood pressure, 160 reported that it

increased alertness, 172 answered that it increased verbalization, 173 reported that it increased socialization, and 184 answered that they had positive mood alterations.” (Jones, pg. 9, 1998)

Question seven asked the respondents to indicate whether there were any benefits to staff from therapy dog visits, and to explain what these might be. Out of the two hundred that responded one hundred ninety nine replied that there were benefits, while only one responded in the negative. On all the questions there was a section for comments. There were many comments given on question number seven. These comments were as follows:

- Cheers staff; gives a lift; happier, better morale.
- Reduces stress; breaks routine.
- Release time for staff/a break; occupies residents
- Increased communication/socialization between staff and patients.
- Creates therapeutic opportunities for staff.
- Staff can enjoy and observe client/patient reactions.

In question eight respondents were asked if they would recommend the therapy dog program to other facilities, and if so, why. All of the respondents answered in the affirmative. The comments left on this question were summed up as follows:

- Could have positive effects on patients, clients, residents, increased responsiveness and socialization.
- Dogs offer unconditional love, allow residents to feel and express love.
- Can elevate facility mood, affect everyone positively, including staff.

(Jones, pg. 13, 1998)

Question ten refers to unexpected or negative effects of the therapy dog program at the respondents' facility. Out of the one hundred ninety one respondents, one hundred fifty three reported none. The remaining 19.9 % reported that there had been unexpected or negative effects. The majority mentioned residents/patients who were afraid of dogs. A few mentioned allergies, staff fear of dogs, and that "a hospital is no place for animals." Four respondents mentioned that patients either wanted to keep the dog or had delusions about the dog belonging to them. (Jones, pg. 15, 1998)

"The study certainly supports the use of dogs to enhance the quality of life of individuals in health care and/or restrictive settings, and demonstrates the need for further research to determine how therapy dog programs provide specific benefits to humans." (Jones, pg. 18, 1998)

There can be many reasons and benefits from the use of dog therapy. The most popular benefits from dog therapy are as follows:

- Sparks memory; helps residents reminisce; pleasant memories.
- Reduces focus on pain.
- Dogs give unconditional love to all.
- Something to look forward to.
- Combats loneliness; fills a need; new experience.
- Provides visual and tactile stimulation.
- Children learn how to treat animals.
- Reduces anxiety, confusion.

- Reduces aggressive, hostile behavior.
- Offers comfort.

Different disabilities will have different benefits on each individual. People and especially children with Autism really respond well to dog therapy. In educating or providing therapy for children with autism, or any other student, the overarching challenge becomes how to connect with them in a way that makes sense to them. Students with autism are usually visual learners. Hearing and understanding verbal language for them can be like listening to a radio broadcast that is full of static. It's a struggle to make sense out of it, and it's irritating. Autistic students need visual directions, visual sequencing of tasks, and visual schedules. We need to communicate with them nonverbally as much or more than they need to learn how to communicate with us verbally.

Speech therapists lead us in helping students to develop verbal language. The entire staff has to focus on communicating nonverbally. This involves minimizing talking—probably the most difficult challenge for everyone the staff! Everyone, that is, except for the therapy dogs. To the students' relief, the dogs *never* talk. They are natural nonverbal communicators!

In her book, *Animals in Translation, Using the Mysteries of Autism to Decode Animal Behavior*, co-author and person with autism Temple Grandin, PhD, states, "Autism made school and social life hard, but it made animals easy." Dr. Grandin has a special connection with animals that she attributes to her autism. She believes that, "Autistic people are closer to animals than normal people are," (Temple Grandin,

2005, pg. 15)in terms of how they perceive the world.

So, fostering this special connection by partnering an intelligent dog makes sense when working with students with autism. It brings the potential for connection that may not occur without the animal. I have not only observed my Hogan prompt a student to continue an activity that was part of a sequence, I have seen him and the student maintain prolonged eye contact. Kids with autism seldom make eye contact with people, much less sustain it. I wonder how Hogan knew how to prompt the student appropriately? Why did the student choose to make and keep eye contact with her? The dog and child “get” each other in a way that I am not a part of, and when I observe it I feel privileged.

Reading and responding to other people’s behavior with social skill is, by definition, a challenge for students on the autism spectrum. In my opinion, it’s not that students with autism don’t want to connect with others. It’s that they don’t know how to go about it or they are overwhelmed in a situation or preoccupied internally. We teach social skills directly and try to provide opportunities for the students to use the skills. And, because our students are visual learners, teaching them has involved the construction of visual instructional materials.

Everytime I take Hogan into a classroom where the students have special needs, like autism, I make sure there is a visual card with our picture on it. This will prompt the child for the arrival of hogan and it can make the transition easier for the child. It can also have a calming effect, knowing that the dog will be arriving shortly. A particular child that Hogan works with has a laminated card with his picture on it. When the child is given the card he places it in either a yes or no pouch hanging from the wall. The

child has only picked “no” one time.

Many people with autism have to deal with unpleasant kinds of sensory experiences. They may differ in kind and degree, but sensory regulation problems tend to come with autism. Some students enjoy the feel of soft, clean dog hair, but some don't. Most students find walking the dogs calming. Sometimes it's stimulating. If a student has withdrawn into his autism, a walk can center and bring forth engagement. I have one child who sings when he walks dogs. We are still exploring the ways in which the dogs can help the students' sensory needs.

Behavior is another challenging part when facing children with Autism. When interaction occurs between child and dog, there is a sense that they need to take care of each other. It puts responsibility on the child, which in most cases, decreases behavior problems. Children really enjoy interacting with the dogs and they know the calming effect it the dog provides, also making it unlikely for behavior problems to occur.

“Many children with autism tend to create a private inner world, constructing a bridge to that world is essential and a therapy-dog program can do just that. Feeding, walking, and petting a dog will help bring children with autism out of their shell because they are interacting and stimulating their senses.” (Temple Grandin, 2005, pg. 17)

As future educators, I feel that we should always be looking for new interactive ways to educate our students. A therapy dog program can provide many benefits and learning experiences for all kinds of people, especially children. The dogs bring sparkle to a sterile day, provide a lively subject for conversation, and rekindle old memories of previously owned pets. Dogs come in all shapes and sizes; real dogs with real personalities and real love to share. So you have to ask yourself, what do I have to

lose? It can only help. Let's share this learning experience with our future students.

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