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Laura A. Carino

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Exploring the Influence of a School-Based Therapy Dog Reading Program on Reluctant Readers'
Motivation to Read and Reading Fluency in the K-4 Setting.

by

Laura A. Carino

Dissertation

Submitted to the Department of Leadership and Counseling
Eastern Michigan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Educational Leadership

Dissertation Committee:

James Berry, Ed.D., Chair

David Anderson, Ed.D.

Imandeep Grewal, Ph.D.

Carmen McCallum, Ph.D.

June 7, 2022

Ypsilanti, Michigan

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. To my wonderful husband, Chris, words cannot express how grateful I am for your unconditional love and unwavering support. You have been by my side every step of this journey. From offering help, support, suggestions, reading, and rereading my writing, many times late at night, I thank you. Your words of encouragement meant the world to me. I love you today, tomorrow, and always.

To my three amazing children, Carter, Catelyn, and Courtney, nothing makes me prouder than being your mom. I know that each of you made sacrifices and were so understanding when I couldn't be at one of your events or activities because I had class or had to write. I hope that watching me navigate through this process shows you that with hard work, anything is possible. The sky is the limit for each of you. I love you more than you will ever know.

To my parents, who both shaped who I am today. The advice to “eat the elephant one nibble at a time” definitely inspired me to continue to keep making progress and put one foot in front of the other. Thank you for reading, rereading, and sharing your educational expertise. I couldn't ask for two more loving parents. I love you both.

To my sister, Meg, who offered words of encouragement and cheered me on from “across the pond”. I love you. To my best friend, Nancy, who always believed that I would finish and kept encouraging me along the way. I will forever be grateful for our friendship.

Collectively, all of you are my village. I wouldn't be standing where I am today without your love and support. Thank you for inspiring me to be better, work harder, and accomplish this goal. I am thrilled to be able to share it with each of you.

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I also would like to thank my committee members, Dr. David Anderson, Dr. Imandeep Grewal, and Dr. Carmen McCallum for their thoughtful suggestions, questions, and feedback related to the theoretical framework, qualitative questions, and positionality, which collectively helped me improve my study. I am so thankful to have had the opportunity to work with each of them.

I would also like to thank my Superintendent, Dr. Steve Matthews, and Assistant Superintendent of Academics, Dr. RJ Webber, for encouraging me to study something I was passionate about. That advice helped me narrow the focus of my dissertation. Thank you for being models of what lifelong learners look like.

This study would not have been possible without Karen Wilkinson agreeing to allow “Max” to work with me and ultimately with our students. I am certain that the memories these children have of reading to “Max” will stay with them for a long, long time and that hopefully their experience reading to him will serve as a turning point in their development as readers. Thank you for letting me utilize “Max” in this capacity. I adored my time getting lots of “dog kisses” and watching the joy he brought to the kids.

I also must thank each of the classroom teachers and our literacy interventionist, who gave their time to administer surveys, conduct fluency assessments, and provide their perceptions. Their insight was invaluable and provided me with classroom and intervention data that made this study richer. Additionally, the parents/guardians of our students helped provide insight from home to help

this study extend beyond school. I am thankful for their perspective and for sharing their children with me.

Most importantly, I would like to thank the eight students who shared their thoughts with me and allowed me to observe their time with “Max”. I enjoyed my time getting to know each of them better. It was truly a privilege to work with each of them. It is my hope that they remember the positive experiences they had while reading to “Max” and keep those feelings in mind as they read in the future.

Finally, I need to acknowledge how my own dogs, Lucy and Lexi, helped make me feel calm on many stressful days. Understanding the love that our family has for both of them and seeing their ability to bring smiles to our faces and happiness to our hearts, undoubtedly led me to design this study.

Abstract

This mixed-methods research study focuses on students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of the influence therapy dogs in schools can have on reluctant readers' attitudes about reading and motivation to read at school and at home as well as exploring changes in the participants' oral fluency. Eight student participants read to our school therapy dog in a 1:1 setting two times each week throughout a six-week period. Before beginning the sessions, each student completed a reading perception survey to serve as a baseline for each child's motivation to read. Each student was also interviewed, seeking information about each child's feelings about reading as well as thoughts that reflect how each child perceived themselves as a reader. Surveys were administered to the student participants' teachers in order to gain information regarding their perceptions about their students' reading motivation prior to and after the therapy dog reading sessions. Surveys were also given to the student participants' parents/guardians after the reading pilot to gain their perception about their children's reading motivation. Additionally, the researcher reviewed fluency assessment scores administered both before and after the reading pilot as part of their literacy intervention program to compare scores. Each child's motivation to read both before and after they read to the therapy dog were explored through the lens of the student, their teacher, their parent/guardian, and their literacy interventionist. The researcher examined their perceptions to determine if using therapy dogs in schools to supplement literacy intervention could be a worthwhile endeavor.

Overwhelmingly, the students shared how reading to the therapy dog made them feel happier and more comfortable. The majority of parents/guardians observed increases in their child's interest in reading. The students' classroom teachers shared that the majority of their students were more motivated at the end of the pilot. The overall fluency data did not demonstrate a significant change for the majority of students.

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Chapter 1: Introduction & Background

There are many elementary students who struggle to meet grade level reading expectations across the country. In order to put them on a path toward future academic achievement and success, routine benchmarks serve as guideposts to monitor academic growth and reading progress. Unfortunately, there are a high number of students who struggle to meet these established proficiency goals. For example, according to the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 65% of fourth graders tested within the United States performed below proficiency in reading. As shared by Chambers (2019) in *The Detroit News*, the Michigan Department of Education reported that 54.9% of third graders did not earn a proficient rating on the English language arts portion of the Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (MSTEP). Hernandez (2012) observed that children who do not reach reading proficiency levels by the third grade are four times more likely not to graduate from high school when compared to their peers who have demonstrated proficiency. These are just a few of many statistics that reflect the prevalent struggle that many elementary students have with regard to reading.

The relationship between reading attitude, reading motivation, and reading ability has previously been examined. Baker and Wigfield (1999) noted that students who exhibited a more positive attitude toward reading had a higher tendency to be motivated to read. Guthrie et al. (2006) found that readers who were motivated to read were more likely to persevere in reading if the content became difficult. This perseverance can help boost student reading growth as a result. McKenna et al. (1995) suggested that it is valuable to keep the importance of a student's attitude toward reading in mind, as it can directly impact that child's reading ability as a result of his or her willingness to practice and engage in reading. As elementary

students develop as pre-emergent and emergent readers, the early elementary years are a critical time period in which a positive reading attitude must be nurtured.

In the elementary school setting, it is common for struggling readers to receive tiered intervention support in addition to their daily classroom literacy instruction. However, according to McNeil (2017), there has not been a great deal of attention spent on identifying literacy interventions focused on improving students' reading attitudes. Schmitt (2009) further posits that typical literacy supports are not effective because they do not address how students actually feel about reading. These findings are important because they help identify that literacy intervention, in its current form, may not be sufficient to meet the needs of all of our struggling readers. As a result, it may be time to think outside of the box, such as adding a therapy dog into intervention programming.

Studies have shown that animals, specifically dogs, have been used consistently in medical settings and therapy sessions to support the psychological needs of patients (Jalongo et al., 2004). Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) was first studied by Boris Levinson, a clinical psychologist who documented how his patients interacted with his dog, Jingles. He found that when Jingles took part in their therapy sessions, his clients, who typically would not communicate, were able to instead respond favorably (Levinson, 1969). He observed that children would communicate with Jingles much more than they previously did alone with him. As a result, he concluded that including dogs in future therapy sessions may offer a feeling of friendship, support, and security for children. Jalongo et al. (2004) stated that "the physiological as well as psychosocial benefits of positive interactions between young children and therapy dogs are not purely anecdotal; rather, there is a growing body of research to support the existence of a human-animal bond" (p. 10).

There are an increasing number of research studies focusing on the psychological and social value that animal-assisted therapy can have in the school setting (Walsh, 2009). Friedmann et al. (1983) found that through their interactions with therapy dogs, the children who work with them have decreased stress levels. This is consistent with Jalongo et al. (2004), who also noted that when a child is reading and is in the presence of a calm dog, typical stress responses are regulated to a greater degree than when compared to being with an adult or close friend. Friesen (2010) also noted that students who engaged in animal-assisted therapy demonstrated substantially lower behavioral and emotional stress when involved in a slightly stressful activity. Friesen further claimed that children who participated in AAT sessions demonstrated an overall improvement in attentiveness and alertness.

Canine-assisted reading programs are a form of animal-assisted therapy (AAT), which provides students an opportunity to read aloud to a dog that has been formally trained as a therapy dog. (Lane & Zavada, 2013). There is not an abundance of literature related to AAT and its influence on reading. According to Friesen (2010), the relationship between AAT and reading is a developing area of study. Reading to dogs builds an environment in which children are able to take risks in a non-threatening manner as they practice their oral reading skills. Repetitive reading practice is an important aspect of improving reading proficiency (Hudson et al., 2005). When children encounter an academic challenge, such as reading proficiently, it is very common for them to try and avoid it altogether. Thus, the struggling students who need the most practice are the ones who steer away from it.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Literacy intervention programs in our elementary schools attempt to address the academic struggle that many students experience as they learn to read. However, these

intervention programs often primarily only focus on reading achievement through the lens of instruction on reading strategies instead of also attending to improving reading attitudes, motivation, or self-confidence while reading. It is not well known how therapy dogs might influence student attitudes toward reading. Canine-assisted literacy programs are a relatively new method to engage students in a calm, judgment-free zone to read aloud in. Using therapy dogs as a means of literacy intervention has not become a common method, possibly due to the lack of an abundance of current and persuasive research associated with this topic.

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the literature about supporting reluctant elementary readers in the K-4 public school setting. Specifically, this study focused on students', teachers', and parents' perceptions of the influence that therapy dogs in schools can have on reluctant readers' attitudes about reading and motivation to read at school and at home, as well as explored changes in the participants' oral fluency. In addition, this study examined how the use of therapy dogs could possibly be integrated with literacy intervention programs in order to best prepare our elementary students to become confident, fully-literate individuals who love reading.

Research Questions

In order to learn more about how reading to a therapy dog influenced reluctant readers' attitudes about reading, motivation toward reading, and the effect on reading fluency, this mixed methods study addressed the following qualitative and quantitative research questions:

1. How do first through fourth grade elementary students who have been identified by their teachers as reluctant, struggling readers perceive the influence of regularly reading aloud to a school therapy dog on their motivation toward reading?

2. How do elementary classroom teachers of first through fourth graders describe the influence of reluctant, struggling readers regularly reading aloud to a school therapy dog on their motivation to read at school?
3. How do parents/guardians of first through fourth grade elementary students who have been identified by their teachers as reluctant, struggling readers perceive the influence of their child regularly reading aloud to a school therapy dog on their motivation to read at home?
4. How does reading aloud to a therapy dog impact the reading fluency of reluctant readers?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Attempting to better understand the role that motivation plays in children's abilities to learn has been an important area of research for quite some time. According to Ames (1990), a decrease in students' motivation to read has been one of the most concerning issues in education. Saeed and Zyngier (2012) explained that motivation is an absolute necessity for student engagement. Arnold and Colburn (2004) concluded that in order for students to develop as readers, they must be motivated.

The theoretical framework for this study is based on three motivational theories including self-determination theory, self-efficacy theory, and expectancy-value theory. The premise of self-determination theory focuses on what people need in order to experience feelings of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Bandura's self-efficacy theory posited that when a student believes they can reach a certain level of academic success, they are more willing to put forth the effort to meet that level of achievement and even attempt to surpass it (Bandura, 1997). The expectancy-value theory, established by Atkinson (1957), proposed that "an

individual's expectancy for success and the value they have for succeeding are important determinants of their motivation to perform different achievement tasks" (Wigfield, 1994, p. 50).

Scope and Delimitations

The goal of this research study was not to compare variables or make comparisons between students who would or would not have opportunities to read to the school therapy dog. Instead, this study focused on exploring and describing how a therapy dog can influence a reluctant reader from the lens of the students directly, classroom teachers' perceptions at school, and parents'/guardians' perceptions at home. The researcher also analyzed changes in pre and post oral fluency scores to examine reading growth. As a result, a mixed-methods research approach utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research designs was used in order to give voice to the student, teacher, and parent/guardian perceptions while also comparing reading fluency scores both before and after the six-week period in which the students had the opportunity to read to the therapy dog.

Collecting perspectives from only one school building in one school district could be viewed as a potential delimitation. Although examining various perspectives from different buildings or even different districts may have provided a broader scope, it is important to remember that one school may differ greatly from another, simply based on the make-up of students and staff.

Summary

Ensuring that our young learners become successful readers is a primary responsibility of elementary educators. Literacy intervention is not enough to help all students experience success. If students experience challenges as they learn to read, they may

lose interest, motivation, and self-esteem over time as a result. This can lead to a reluctance to read aloud or, even in some cases, at all. The therapy dog reading pilot that was used in this study may offer an opportunity to apply what students typically learn during literacy intervention. Students can put the reading strategies into action with a trusted confidante, the therapy dog. This may be enough to break the frequent negative behavioral cycle of reluctant, struggling readers feeling down about themselves about the overall process of reading. The therapy dog program is a method that can be used to restore interest, motivation, and confidence by providing an environment in which students feel more comfortable to productively struggle and practice. As the selected students engage in an opportunity to read in an entirely new way than they have previously experienced at school, they may respond differently and begin to feel motivated to continue reading. If the students felt connected to the school therapy dog and experienced reading in a setting that had a low-risk of failure, their levels of relatedness and competence had the potential to increase. It is through this process that they may have begun to experience success as a reader and, as a result, their self-efficacy may also increase. If the selected students became motivated through this canine-assisted therapy dog reading program and began to answer yes to the questions “Can I be a good reader?” and “Do I want to be a good reader?” their expectancy that they have to succeed and the value that they placed on actually succeeding as a reader may have risen, benefitting them long-term with the potential to shift their outlook as they develop as readers. The researcher anticipated that as the students began to internalize this reading motivation, their reading attitude may be positively influenced and they would experience continued reading success in an intrinsically motivated manner, simply for their own benefit. By providing them an opportunity that they were eager to participate in, reading aloud may have

become a more preferred activity. As a result, they may have been more willing to engage in reading aloud, which had the potential to build and develop their fluency.

As a K-4 elementary principal of a building which was in the process of beginning a therapy dog program, the researcher wanted to find the most effective way to utilize our therapy dog to support students. Through this mixed-methods study, it was the researcher's hope to further contribute to providing information about how best to support and engage reluctant readers, raising their self-confidence as readers, improving their reading attitude, increasing their motivation to want to read, developing their reading fluency, and putting them on a path to reading success. By giving students, classroom teachers, and parents/guardians a voice to share their experiences and feelings, the researcher was able to better understand how the therapy dog could influence their development as a reader. This information was used to guide the school's therapy dog program and shared with other educators who may be exploring animal-assisted therapy in their schools as well.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review presents existing research and theoretical background information in preparation for this study. Specifically, it provides information regarding struggling readers and student attitudes about reading, reading motivation, and reading fluency. Additionally, it addresses the history of animal-assisted therapy; theories of motivation, including Bandura's self-efficacy theory, self-determination theory, Atkinson's expectancy value theory; and how animal-assisted therapy has previously played a role in schools and education.

Reading Attitude

The relationship between reading attitude, reading motivation, and reading ability is one that has been researched for many years. Martinez et al. (2008) defined reading attitude as the internal feeling one has about reading that either leads to the implementation of or abstention of positive reading habits. They further stated that favorable student attitudes about reading are associated with an increased amount of time that the student is likely to engage in reading activities. Alexander and Filler (1976) defined reading attitude as "a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation" (p. 1).

Many of our elementary students across the United States struggle as they learn to read. In classrooms across the country, there are an increasing number of students who have little to no interest in reading. There have been numerous studies that examine reading pedagogy focused on interventions used to support struggling readers. An important question to ask is "What qualifies a student as a struggling reader?" Allington (2006) proposed that a

struggling reader is a student who has basic, consistent difficulties throughout the process of learning to read. Taylor (2012) concluded that there is not one sole definition of a “struggling reader,” but that instead, struggling readers share common traits, including a reluctance to engage in the act of reading, having a negative attitude toward reading, being unwilling to read, having a low level of confidence as a reader, and lacking fluency when actually reading. Lapp and Flood (2003) further identified struggling readers as students who are reading academic content that have been identified below their grade-level, who lack fluency, and experience difficulties with reading comprehension.

When students do not develop reading fluency, their interest and motivation to read may be negatively impacted (Meyer & Felton, 1999). Cox and Guthrie (2001) researched whether motivation to read increased time children spent reading. They discovered that the students who had higher levels of motivation to read were the ones who read more often as compared to those who were reluctant readers. Hwang (2018) believed that promoting higher levels of student reading motivation may ultimately impact the students in a positive manner, spurring them to have the desire to someday become lifelong readers. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2009), “Emotion and motivation play a vital role in struggling readers’ ability to become deeply engaged in texts” (p. 470). As a student’s level of motivation to read increases, their interest and willingness to read rises as well.

Love and Hamston (2004) identified differences between the attitudes of girls and boys toward reading, noting that overall girls’ attitudes are more positive. Marzano et al. (2001) found that after a student experiences repeated failed attempts as they read, they may even start to doubt whether they can ever be successful and instead readily give up without even putting forth any effort to improve.

Elementary educators understand and research supports the critical importance of a child's reading attitude on their reading success. As a result, it is essential that school systems find creative ways to reach their most reluctant readers to help them develop a positive reading attitude. One such way may be through the use of a therapy dog to motivate students to develop as readers.

Reading Motivation

Gambrell (1996) identified that as students begin to develop into proficient readers, it is critical that they acquire not only the academic skills to read, but also equally important, foster the drive to read. Without true motivation toward reading, the depth of learning is limited. Gambrell et al. (2007) emphasized that "teachers can provide instruction in the most essential literacy skills, but if our students are not motivated to read, they will never reach their full literacy potential" (p. 19). Terrel H. Bell, the former U.S. Secretary of Education under President Reagan, once said, "there are three things to remember about education. The first one is motivation. The second one is motivation. The third one is motivation" (as cited in Maehr & Meyer, 1997). It is critical that we find ways to motivate our students to help them find ways to experience academic success.

Greany and Heagerty (1987) found that students who read for pleasure for a minimum of 10 minutes each day demonstrated an increase on reading test scores. Guthrie (1996) proposed that when students read because they are motivated by a driving force, they actually build an investment in their personal growth as a reader. Yamashita (2004) supported this claim, noting that when children have favorable feelings toward reading, they are more motivated to do so. As a result, educators have the responsibility of finding ways to motivate young readers.

Reading Fluency

Reading fluency can be defined as the ability to read with speed while maintaining accuracy and apt expression (Savage, 2007). Rasinski (2004) added that “reading fluently is the ability to read accurately, quickly, effortlessly, and with appropriate expression and meaning” (p. 126). Reading fluency is essential for students to develop into successful readers. For quite some time, school systems focused their primary effort on teaching decoding and comprehension skills and not fluency instruction (Therrien & Kubina, 2006). As a result, there are quite a few students who experience difficulty with fluency.

When readers struggle with fluency, they often also encounter comprehension difficulties as well because they read in a slow, interrupted, often choppy, manner disrupting their ability to decode and comprehend simultaneously (Hudson et al., 2005). Samuels (2002) noted that repeated reading is a successful strategy to help students improve their reading fluency. This consists of rereading the same reading passage multiple times. This assists with decreasing the number of errors, increasing the reading speed, and building expression.

Instructional Leadership and Academic Success

The correlation between successful instructional leadership and academic success has been studied for many years (Murphy et al., 2006). Ensuring that our young learners become successful readers is a core responsibility of all elementary educators, including administrators, as they serve as instructional leaders. Hallinger (2011) asserted that the role a principal fulfills as an instructional leader has a tremendous effect on student learning. Caldwell (2006) claimed that principals have a significant role in student reading success in their buildings. Leithwood et al. (2004) emphasized that “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among in-school influences that contribute to what students learn at

school” (p. 5). Hallinger (2011) suggested that a principal has the ability to make an indirect impact, which can be accomplished as a result of their influence on instructional programming that supports the educational culture of a school. Robinson et al. (2008) determined that as principals become more intimately involved in actual teaching and learning opportunities afforded to students, they are more likely to ensure that student outcomes improve. According to the International Literacy Association (2019), “Principals who establish learning-centered climates model curiosity and vulnerability signaling to others that they do not have all of the answers but are eager to learn” (p. 3). Principals can indirectly influence the achievement of their students by establishing an organizational culture in which academic success is a predominant focus across the entire school. Educational leaders understand the critical importance of a child’s motivation to read and overall reading attitude on their reading success. If students experience challenges as they learn to read, they may lose motivation, interest, and self-confidence over time as a result. This can lead to a reluctance to read aloud or, even in some cases, at all. As a result, it is essential that school systems find creative ways to reach their most reluctant readers to help them increase their reading motivation and develop a positive reading attitude.

Leithwood and Duke (1999) stated that the foundation of instructional leadership focuses on the process of educational leaders creating and implementing activities and programs that will positively impact student growth. Transformational leaders are innovative and creative as they question past practices, approach situations with new perspectives, brainstorm new ideas, and try to implement new programs to support their students (Bass & Avolio, 1994). One such program may involve the use of a therapy dog to motivate students to develop as readers. A canine-assisted literacy program is a method that can be used to

restore interest, motivation, and confidence by providing an environment in which students feel more comfortable to productively struggle and practice. By providing students an opportunity that they are more willing to participate in as a result of their interest in the therapy dog, reading aloud may become a more preferred activity. As a result, they may be more cooperative to engage in reading aloud, which has the potential to build and develop their fluency. Additionally, when a student needs to focus on an academic area that they are struggling in, anxiety levels may increase when they experience difficulty. By reading to the therapy dog and developing a relationship with it, the students' physiological response to stress may decrease stress levels and help the student tackle the work with minimal anxiety.

History of Animal-Assisted Therapy

Animal-assisted therapy was defined by Jalongo (2005) as an activity involving animals, when acting as a support, to assist people in attaining a specific treatment goal. Friesen (2009) further added that in animal-assisted therapy, documentation about the progress of those specific goals is maintained. Pet Partners, previously named The Delta Society (1996), a global, non-profit organization focused on developing human-animal companionships, defined animal-assisted therapy as a goal-oriented intervention designed to improve the physical, social-emotional, and cognitive performance of people. Animal-assisted therapy has been used across multiple settings with many different animals, including dogs, cats, horses, rabbits, birds, and dolphins (Granger & Kogan, 2000). The animal selected for the therapy session is determined based on the needs of the individual and their personalized therapy goals.

The first record of animal-assisted therapy in the United States was noted at an Air Force Hospital in New York in 1942 (Altschiller, 2011). A soldier who had been injured

asked for a dog to stay with him as he recovered in the hospital. Following this request, many other patients made similar appeals as they too recovered from physical and mental ailments. Some even kept the dogs as personal pets after they were discharged from the hospital.

Boris Levinson (1969) inadvertently identified the concept of “pet therapy” back in 1961, after one of his patients unexpectedly, but positively, responded to his dog in their sessions together. His observations reflected that children viewed the dog as a friend, instead of just a dog.

Benefits of Animal-Assisted Therapy

There have been documented psychological and physiological benefits attributed to animal-assisted therapy. Sable (1995) determined that people who spend a frequent amount of time with animals demonstrate a higher level of emotional health. Anderson and Olson (2006) concluded that because of relationships built between children and a therapy dog, the children who participated in their study were more readily able to de-escalate from being in emotional crisis. Friedmann (2000) demonstrated that the act of petting and simply interacting with a familiar dog can result in positive physiological changes including lowered blood pressure and enhanced cardiovascular metrics. Velde et al. (2005) noted that hospitalized patients benefitted from AAT by feeling calmer as a result of experiencing decreased stress levels and an increase in overall morale. Children who engaged in animal-assisted therapy sessions were recorded as being more alert and having an increased attention span (Friesen, 2010).

Theories of Self-Determination, Self-Efficacy, & Expectancy-Value

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) contends that people must feel autonomy, competence, and relatedness before they can experience feelings of self-

motivation. Self-determination theory can speak to the question “Do I want to be a good reader?” Often times when a student does not believe that they can be successful, they just give up (Sweet, 1997). A student’s level of competence reflects how effective and successful they believe that they will be with regard to a given task. Competency leads to an increase in motivation when a student believes that they may be able to demonstrate mastery and experience success with a given task. Deci and Ryan (2000) suggested that the belief an individual can reach a certain level of competence in a particular task is a basic psychological need in order to experience success with more complex assignments.

Self-determination theory focuses on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). The lowest level of self-determination is external regulation, which is most akin to extrinsic motivation (Stipek, 1996). When relating this to reading at the elementary level, extrinsic motivators reflect reading for a separate outcome, such as the purpose of earning an academic grade, working toward a reward, or being awarded a prize while intrinsic motivators can include simply reading for fun and enjoyment. Saeed and Zyngier (2012) suggested that the efficacy of extrinsic motivators is dependent upon the time, context, and relevance to the situation they are being used in. Having teachers who are able to understand whether students are motivated by either intrinsic or extrinsic motivators is helpful, as the teachers can then better adapt their instructional practices to work with these students. The second level of self-determination is introjected regulation, which results from a person’s actions due to experiencing guilt. The highest level of self-determination is integrated regulation. This is most like intrinsic motivation because it integrates regulation and involves a person engaging in a particular activity “for its own sake” (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Relatedness represents the idea that people need to feel a connection to others throughout the learning process in order to build a connection to the learning (Niemic et al., 2009). In terms of reading, this connection may be established between the student and their teacher, but in the case of a canine-assisted reading program, that connection may instead be formed directly with the therapy dog. Finding ways to provide opportunities that a child may find as low-risk for failure can help them to develop their self-confidence. Reading to a therapy dog in an individual, private setting may minimize the risk of failing in front of a child's teacher and peers.

Finally, giving students autonomy over their learning can also increase motivation because there is a bigger buy-in and the freedom to make some of their own academically related choices (Sweet, 1997). With relation to literacy, this involves the opportunity for students to select which books to read to the therapy dog. Cordova and Lepper (1996) determined that when elementary school aged students were given the ability to make even a minor, inconsequential choice, their learning and ensuing interest in their task was higher.

A second theory, the self-efficacy theory, highlighted that one's perception about themselves directly correlates to their level of motivation. Pajares (2002) stated that a student must demonstrate confidence in their ability to be successful in order to truly want to be successful. Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as "people's judgments of their capability to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances (p. 391). Ferrara (2005) shared that reading self-efficacy is an individual's own assessment of their perception that they can complete a specific reading assignment in a successful manner. Self-efficacy theory addresses the question "Can I be a good reader? (Stipek, 1996). When a student experiences low self-efficacy and does not view themselves as a reader, they are

more likely to avoid reading altogether (Guthrie, 2001). Worthy (2002) also noted this, identifying that unmotivated students are less likely to become engaged readers. For this reason, it is critical to find ways to change this narrative in school and increase students' motivation toward reading. As self-efficacy increases when a task is completed successfully, this process can naturally occur if a student feels successful reading to the therapy dog. A student who believes that he or she is capable of meeting their goals is more likely to tackle difficult tasks and demonstrate perseverance despite challenges and difficulties along the way. Eccles and Wigfield (2002) noted that a person's self-efficacy affects which tasks he or she will choose to engage in, how much effort that person will put forth, and whether the individual will persevere despite encountering challenges along the way.

A third theory, the expectancy-value theory, established by Atkinson in 1957, proposed that a child's previous achievement increases future self-efficacy, emotional engagement, behavioral engagement, and achievement (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). The expectancy-value theory addresses both questions: "Can I be a good reader?" and "Do I want to be a good reader?" Eccles and Wigfield (2002) determined that a student's motivation can be estimated by the student's expectancy about his or her overall performance and the value that the student assigns to the activity. If a child deems the task that he or she is working on or the content they are learning about is valuable, they will likely be more invested and will develop stronger feelings of competency related to the task. According to Atkinson (1957), a child's motivation to read is influenced by their expectancy for success as well as the value that they assign to reading. If that child believes that they will be unsuccessful in their attempt to read and that reading is simply not important, their motivation to actually engage in reading will be diminished or even in some instances, missing altogether.

Edmunds and Tancock (2003) observed that the most marked decrease in reading motivation occurs at the elementary level at some point between first through fourth grades. Since these are formative years in a young student's school experience, it is imperative to find ways to turn this around and explore ways to counter this decline and reignite their passion for reading. There have been many attempts to increase reading motivation by teachers across countless classrooms, some successful, others not. As each child is unique based on varying interest, attitudes, and skill levels, there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. Marinak and Gambrell (2008) stressed the importance of matching the reward to the desired task in order to build a culture centered on reading motivation. This is done in the hopes of building long-term motivation. The implementation of a therapy dog reading program has the potential to try something new in schools. This can ultimately provide a different experience for unmotivated, reluctant readers to experience success and cause a spark to boost reading enthusiasm and motivation.

Animal-Assisted Therapy in Schools

Animal-assisted therapy has often been used with many non-verbal students with individualized education plans (IEPs), as well as students who struggle with social-emotional interactions and need support with making positive choices at school (Chandler, 2001). Beetz et al. (2012) suggested that animals can play a pivotal role in fostering an optimal learning environment because they help motivate, increase the ability to concentrate, and decrease stress levels. Baumgartner and Cho (2014) found that there were improvements in children's willingness to comply to behavioral demands within the classroom as a result of a therapy dog being present. A study carried out by Svensson (2014) demonstrated that having a

therapy dog in the classroom helps students develop empathy toward not only the therapy dog itself, but also the students' classmates.

Canine-Assisted Reading Programs

Although there is not a great deal of previously conducted research focusing on the influence that animal-assisted therapy has had on students' reading abilities and attitudes, there are several programs that have been created to utilize therapy dogs as a form of reading support. One of the most recognized animal-assisted therapy programs focused on therapy within the school setting to support student-reading initiatives is the Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D.) program which was created over two decades ago in 1999 by Sandi Martin in Salt Lake City, Utah. Jalongo et al. (2004) shared that R.E.A.D. is a visitation-based program, which travels to specific public libraries and school buildings. The goal of the R.E.A.D. program is to support children with their literacy skills. In this study, 10 children between the ages of 5 and 9, read once a week to a dog for twenty minutes. According to a review of initial data, all students who took part in the R.E.A.D. program for 13 months or more gained a minimum of two grade levels in reading.

Bassette and Taber-Doughty (2013) studied the effects of a different literacy based therapy dog program in which the students read aloud to the dog on a consistent basis each day. Student on-task behavior was monitored, and their findings reflected an increase in time on-task for all three of the student participants. Friedmann et al. (1983) conducted an innovative study which examined the physiological impact that occurred from children reading to dogs. They concluded that these children experienced a drop in blood pressure. Lynch (2000) similarly documented a decrease in blood pressure for students who were reading out loud in the presence of a dog. Jalongo et al. (2004) shared that the effects of a

child reading to a therapy dog resulted in a more controlled, dampened stress response than compared to reading to a friend or an adult.

There has been some research conducted on literacy based therapy dog programs, but certainly not in an extensive manner. Newlin (2003) carried out a quantitative study of a small group of second grade students who had difficulty with reading fluency. These students read to dogs for 20 minutes each week throughout the study. Results indicated that most of the students increased by two grade levels in reading in the school year, but due to a lack of a control group, the results could not be generalized.

Paradise (2007) established that the students who were assigned to work with the therapy dogs exhibited greater amounts of reading progress than their classmates who were not part of the therapy dog program. Paradise also found that those students who worked with the dogs displayed a better attitude about school, wanted to more readily participate in school-related activities, demonstrated more overall self-confidence, and were able to think more critically.

Fisher and Cozens (2014) evaluated the Building Reading Confidence of Kids Program (BaRK) with regard to a reluctant readers' reading progress. After a period of eight weeks, they were able to conclude that the child significantly improved in both reading accuracy and comprehension. Smith (2010) conducted a study focused on how animal-assisted therapy impacted homeschooled third graders' Gray Oral Reading Test (GORT4) scores. During the six-week study, the experimental group engaged in a half hour each week of reading aloud to a dog compared to the control group, which simply read aloud to themselves. While both groups had significant increases in scores, they summarized that the experimental group exceeded the control group in reading rate, fluency, comprehension, and

percentile difference. LeRoux et al. (2014) investigated how a canine literacy program impacted the selected third grade participants' reading rate, reading accuracy, and reading comprehension. They found that reading comprehension scores increased. Kirnan et al. (2016) analyzed standardized reading test scores of over 100 K-4 students and interviewed educators and dog owners. They concluded that kindergarten students who were placed in the dog reading group had statistically significant higher scores at the end of the year. Themes from interview analysis reflected improved attitude and greater interest for reading, especially for students with IEPs, English Language Learners, and struggling readers. Linder et al. (2018) explored the effects of a six-week canine literacy program, in which second graders read to a therapy dog for a thirty-minute session each week. Reading growth was monitored throughout the course of the six-week study on a bi-weekly basis as well as reading attitude through the analysis of a pre and post-intervention assessment. Reading scores did not improve significantly, but reading attitude did reflect a significant improvement in the group of students assigned to read to the therapy dog when compared to the control group, which did not.

Planning for Animal-Assisted Therapy

All animal-assisted therapy programs must be planned with intentionality in a thorough manner to address potential concerns. One of the main concerns related to animal-assisted therapy involves allergies of involved individuals, potential for disease, cost, legal accountability, and participant's fear of dogs (McCulloch, 1985). Many of these issues can be avoided or preemptively addressed through thorough planning. Lane and Zavada (2013) noted that it is essential to establish goals, involve all stakeholders, especially by communicating with parents when children are involved, and choosing dogs who have had

their temperament, behavior, and health appropriately evaluated by a professional. They also stressed the importance of preparing students so that they are cognizant of the expectations for their behavior when interacting with the therapy dog. To minimize allergy related concerns, the dog handler can ensure that the dog is properly bathed and suitable handwashing techniques are followed by all who come in contact with the dog in their environment.

Cultural Considerations

Sheade and Chandler (2012) explored cultural differences in relation to attitudes toward animals based on race and ethnicity. They found that it is more common for Caucasians to have pets, as they find them to provide emotional support, love, and even view them as if they were a family member. They also noted that typically in Asian culture, animals possess an important symbolic status, yet Asians are the least likely to have dogs as pets because they have concerns about their cleanliness. Brown (2002) identified that African American students were less attached to their companion animals as compared to their Caucasian peers. They also experienced more negative feelings about these animals.

Given the high level of diversity in the elementary building where this research was conducted, it was important to keep the cultures of the student participants in mind, as this may have impacted their ability to connect with our therapy dog, as a result of their previous experiences outside of school and their family upbringing and beliefs. It is important to keep in mind that the student participants selected were native English speakers, not English language learners, as the English language learners receive tiered support directly from the English language development teachers and not the building literacy interventionist. In order

to avoid adding another variable to this study, only literacy intervention students were selected.

Summary

Evidence from research-based studies has demonstrated that animal-assisted therapy has benefitted students and others in multiple environments. This study dove deeper and explored student, teacher, and parent/guardian perceptions of reluctant readers' on the influence that reading aloud to a therapy dog had on students' reading attitude, motivation, and reading fluency. Further, the study contributed to the research related to animal-assisted therapy and reluctant readers within the classroom.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine how students, teachers, and parents/guardians perceived the influence that reading aloud to a therapy dog had on reluctant readers' attitudes toward reading, motivation to read, and reading fluency. The research questions studied were created after a comprehensive literature review and were used to guide the methods utilized in the research design. The research design that was carried out was a mixed methods study to better understand how a therapy dog reading pilot program could benefit reluctant readers. Specific details regarding the participants, setting, and data collection methods are detailed in the remainder of this chapter.

Research Questions

The methods utilized in this study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do first through fourth grade elementary students who have been identified by their teachers as reluctant, struggling readers perceive the influence of regularly reading aloud to a school therapy dog on their motivation toward reading?
2. How do elementary classroom teachers of first through fourth graders describe the influence of reluctant, struggling readers regularly reading aloud to a school therapy dog on their motivation to read at school?
3. How do parents/guardians of first through fourth grade elementary students who have been identified by their teachers as reluctant, struggling readers perceive the influence of their child regularly reading aloud to a school therapy dog on their motivation to read at home?
4. How does reading aloud to a therapy dog impact the reading fluency of reluctant readers?

By obtaining data from the student, teacher, and parent/guardian perspectives, the data was triangulated in order to better understand the participants' experiences and feelings. Pre- and post- fluency assessment scores were analyzed.

Research Design

After thoughtful deliberation, the researcher selected a convergent parallel mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2014) to address the research questions utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research designs. This allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the reluctant readers' motivation and attitudes toward reading, their teachers' impressions about the students, and their parents/guardians' perceptions about the children, while also obtaining quantitative data on reading fluency. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) suggested that a mixed-methods research design provides the researcher with an opportunity to gather and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data, while integrating the information learned from both methods in order to better understand and thoroughly answer the research question. While a solely quantitative or qualitative study could have been selected, the researcher anticipated that both methods would make for a richer study, providing a deeper investigation. (Green et al., 1989). The quantitative data consisted of the fluency pre- and post-assessment scores. Qualitative research, as described by Merriam (2009), allows the researcher to better understand how the participants perceived their experience and to what extent their perceptions changed as a result of that experience. In this particular study, the perceptions of the identified reluctant readers, their teachers, and their parents/guardians each collectively supported the researcher in better understanding their experience. Qualitative data has the potential to explain the quantitative results, offering insight into the "why" behind the "what."

Setting and Participants

This study was conducted at a suburban K-4 public elementary school, located in Southeast Michigan, approximately 30 miles west of Detroit. The building was comprised of approximately 458 students. At the time of the study, 62.7% of the student population was Asian, followed by 26.8% Caucasian. In addition, 6.1% of the students qualified for Free and Reduced lunch. Patton (2015) explained that in a qualitative study, the sample size is relatively small, with purposeful sampling. Maxwell (2005) added that purposeful selection is a “selection strategy in which particular settings, persons or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 88). Although the qualitative design comprises only part of this study, this method of sampling was still used in order to identify participants. Specifically, participants for this study were purposely selected by reviewing the literacy intervention caseload, as these students had already been identified as struggling readers. Students already had an established relationship with the literacy interventionist, as they meet regularly for an average of 90-150 minutes per week together, focused on improving their reading accuracy and comprehension. From this caseload list, first through fourth grade students who were more specifically identified as reluctant readers by their classroom teachers and the building’s literacy interventionist were recruited as student participants. It is important to note that a struggling reader does not necessarily equate to a reluctant reader and likewise, a reluctant reader is not always a struggling reader. In this study, selected students were identified as both. The researcher’s goal was to have eight student participants in first through fourth grades. There were seven classroom teachers, as two of the selected eight students were in the same classroom. Kindergarten students were not included in the study,

as they are typically pre-emergent readers for the majority of the year and it would have been difficult to identify them as a reluctant reader this early in their educational journey.

The therapy dog, Max, who has been given a fictitious name, was certified as a therapy dog in the spring of 2021 through formal training with the Michigan Dog Training Program. He was first introduced to students in June 2021 but only through indirect interactions in the hallway. He was more formally introduced to all of the classrooms beginning in September 2021 but was not used in the canine-assisted literacy pilot program until the implementation of this study. Prior to that time, he served as a social-emotional support for students on the school social worker's caseload and routinely visited classrooms to develop relationships with the entire student body.

Procedures

Selected student participants had opportunities to engage with the school therapy dog in a 1:1 setting two times each week throughout a six-week period. The individual reading sessions took place at the elementary school with the certified school therapy dog, in an empty classroom, used solely for the read aloud sessions to minimize distractions. Before beginning the sessions, each student completed a reading perception survey to serve as a baseline for each child's motivation to read at home, read in class, read independently, and read aloud with Likert-type scaled questions. (See Appendix A.) Questions such as "I think reading is: very important, a little bit important, or not important" and "I think that I am a: great reader, good reader, OK reader, or bad reader" were selected in order to relate back to the expectancy value theory and better understand the value that the student had assigned to reading before the reading pilot. Each student was interviewed by the researcher who asked open-ended, semi-structured questions (Fontana & Frey, 2000) seeking information about

each child's feelings about reading as well as thoughts that reflected how each child perceived themselves as a reader. (See Appendix B.) The researcher asked each child how important they thought reading was and to explain why they answered the way they did in order to compare their responses to the written survey administered by their teacher. This gave the researcher additional insight into the value that the students assigned to reading, which was essential information when referring to the expectancy-value theory. Asking students directly if they thought they could be a good reader related directly to the self-efficacy theory. The interviews were audio recorded, which afforded the researcher the opportunity to go back and listen to the participants' comments again, making the transcription process more accurate in preparation of analyzing the participants' responses for common themes (Seidman, 1998). Follow-up questions were created for the purpose of clarifying participants' responses when necessary. A survey was also administered to the student participants' teachers in order to gain initial information from them regarding their perceptions about their students' reading motivation prior to beginning the therapy dog reading pilot program. (See Appendix C.) Additionally, the building literacy interventionist administered a reading fluency assessment to each student to obtain a baseline score. This assessment consisted of a leveled reading passage, in which the student read aloud for a one-minute timed session while the interventionist documented errors. The score was calculated by subtracting the errors from the number of words read correctly.

Following these initial interviews, surveys, and fluency assessments, each student engaged with the therapy dog for an initial ten-minute session, in which they were permitted to pet the dog and get to know him better in a 1:1 setting. The goal of this opening session was to allow the student to become comfortable with the dog prior to the initial reading

session. After this, individual reading sessions began with each child reading aloud to the school therapy dog for 12 ten-minute sessions over the course of a six-week period.

Typically, students participated twice a week, however, in the event of a student absence, a third time may have been added the subsequent week in order to ensure all students completed the study within the same week. Students were permitted to self-select individual texts from a pre-selected group of books to read to the therapy dog that had been leveled in the literacy intervention classroom, matching their Fountas and Pinnell independent and instructional reading levels, which were regularly assessed by their classroom teacher and/or literacy interventionist throughout the school year. Rasinski et al. (2017) noted that in order to make reading fluency gains, one must practice reading texts that are at different levels of difficulty while also being interesting to the reader. Additionally, rereading familiar texts helps support reading fluency development, so using the pre-selected group of books ensured that books were reread throughout this reading pilot. A book log was maintained to record which books the child selected each session. The researcher personally observed each reading session and took detailed notes during the session, documenting the students' comments, actions, and demonstrated behaviors.

After 12 reading sessions, a similar student reading perception survey was administered. (See Appendix D.) Additionally, a second set of open-ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted (see Appendix E) to learn if there were any changes in the students' motivation and attitude compared to their initial responses. This assisted the researcher in better understanding the perceived influence that reading to the therapy dog had on their motivation toward reading. The researcher additionally administered a survey which was self-created (see Appendix F) to the students' classroom teachers to obtain their

perceptions about their students' motivation toward reading after the 12 therapy dog reading sessions. Similarly, a survey was also given to the student participants' parents and/or guardians in order to gain information from them regarding their perceptions about their child's motivation to read at home as well as their reading attitude. (See Appendix G.) Finally, the building literacy interventionist conducted a post reading fluency assessment to each student, identical in process to the pre-assessment, with the exception that it was a different reading passage. Post-fluency scores were collected for comparative purposes.

Data Collection

Before any data collection occurred from the participants in this study, the Institutional Review Board approval process was followed through Eastern Michigan University. As this study also involved an animal, IACUC approval was also obtained. Prior to any work with students and their teachers, permission was formally requested and granted. (See Appendix H.) Additionally, approval was sought and obtained from the Superintendent of the school district through a written request. (See Appendix I.) Parents/guardians of each selected student received written communication providing an overview of the study. The researcher requested their consent to allow their child to participate through a parent consent form. (See Appendix J.) As they were also asked to serve as parent/guardian participants, their consent was also required through an informed consent form. (See Appendix K.) The students' classroom teachers served as the teacher participants and were also provided information about the study. Request for consent was sought through an informed consent form. (See Appendix L.) The literacy interventionist conducted the fluency assessments and was also requested to provide consent through an individual informed consent form. (See Appendix M.) Finally, consent was sought from parents/guardians to allow the researcher to

capture and use images taken during the therapy dog reading sessions in this study through an additional informed consent form. (See Appendix N.) The interview questions were developed by the researcher to adequately address the research questions of this study in a conversational format. In an effort to maintain student, staff, and parent/guardian confidentiality, pseudonyms were given to all participants. All data and copies of the fluency assessments, perception surveys, interview transcripts, and observation notes were secured in a file only accessible to the researcher and will be kept for a period of five years.

Instrumentation

The fluency assessments that were utilized for this study consisted of leveled reading passages that were part of the i-Ready Oral Reading Fluency Assessment the school district had access to as part of the i-Ready Diagnostic for Reading district license. Students had one minute to read the assigned passage aloud to the school's literacy interventionist. The fluency score was calculated by measuring the total number of words read within the one-minute period and subtracting the total number of reading errors made within that time. This final fluency score reflected the total number of words correctly read per minute. A different reading selection was given for the post-test, but the same method for score calculation was conducted. Pre- and post- scores were compared for analysis.

The Oral Reading Fluency Target (ORF) Rate Norms (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2017) were referenced to allow the student's performance on the oral reading fluency assessment to be analyzed. First, the literacy interventionist identified how many words each student read correctly in a minute. The score was calculated after subtracting errors. This information was then compared to the number of words the student should be reading correctly per minute. For example, according to their 2017 published norms, first grade students performing in the

ninetieth percentile should be reading at 97 words per minute (wpm), second graders at 131 wpm, third graders at 161 wpm, and fourth graders at 168 wpm, respectively, during the winter administration period, in which this study was conducted.

The parent/guardian perception surveys were not normed, as they were self-created by the researcher. As a result of this, a check for student's consistency included a comparison of responses on the student perception surveys and the interview questions, which were answered at different times and settings. The survey was administered by the classroom teacher, while the researcher conducted the interview herself.

Positionality of the Researcher

As an elementary principal, I am deeply committed to the success of all of the students in our building and continually try to identify ways in which my staff and I can provide support to the students in our elementary school when they experience difficulty. One of the areas in which we often have observed some students struggle is in the content area of reading. I have witnessed firsthand that many times when students experience difficulty as they develop as a reader, they often become frustrated, disinterested, and can even develop an aversion to reading. With the opportunity to welcome a therapy dog to our school building, I had the ability to evaluate how our therapy dog could most effectively be utilized to benefit our students and share this information with other educators. With a combined passion to help elementary students develop as readers who have a positive attitude toward reading, along with an eagerness to build a therapy dog program that can potentially support reading growth, I must acknowledge that I entered into this study with a positive outlook about the possibility of canine-assisted literacy initiatives and that this bias had the potential to impact this study. With that said, I did not allow this bias to alter or

misrepresent the results of this study and acted with integrity, accurately conducting this study in a purely ethical manner. I proactively implemented practices to address my bias by first acknowledging the potential bias existed, ensuring that my data was not influenced by honoring the authentic responses from my student, teacher, and parent/guardian perception data, guiding my analysis without steering the participants' responses in any way.

Additionally, I realized that the embedded positional power within my role as the building principal had the potential to impact students' responses to my study, as the students may have responded to questions about their motivation to read more favorably simply because they thought that is what I wanted to hear from them. In our building and district, we strongly value and promote student voice. Students are regularly asked for input about their perceptions on a variety of topics, including their own learning, so it was my hope that just like other opportunities that they have had to provide feedback and input, that the student participants would respond honestly. To allow for an additional check for consistency, students were given the written perception survey in a more casual setting by their classroom teacher instead of individually with me. I compared their responses to the survey and their responses to my interview questions to check for consistency in responses. While I realized that my presence as a non-participant observer may somewhat have altered student behavior during my observations of the therapy dog reading sessions, I am certain that meaningful information was still obtained from these observations.

Summary

By collecting and analyzing information obtained through the observations and the responses to the student perception surveys, semi-structured student interviews, teacher perception surveys, and parent/guardian perception surveys, the researcher gained an

understanding of how students, teachers, and parents/guardians perceived potential changes in the reluctant readers' motivation to read after reading to our school therapy dog. The researcher also identified how fluency scores were impacted after each student had the opportunity to practice reading aloud to the therapy dog through pre- and post- data. All of the information that the participants shared was analyzed to look for common themes regarding the students' experiences reading to the therapy dog and their level of motivation toward reading afterward.

As an educational leader, it was the researcher's goal to contribute to the literature by providing a deeper understanding of how students, teachers, and parents/guardians perceive the influence that reading to therapy dogs has on reluctant readers' attitudes and motivation to read. Goldring, et al. (2009) wrote, "Leaders must hold themselves and others responsible for realizing high standards of student performance" (p. 35). If reluctant readers' attitudes can be positively shifted so the student is more willing and motivated to read in school and at home, the potential to better support readers and supplement literacy intervention programs has significant implications. Additionally, if the participating students are more motivated to read and as a result practice the physical act of reading aloud more, their fluency also has the potential to improve.

Canine-assisted literacy programs have the potential to create meaningful change in today's schools. If having students who have previously been identified as reluctant readers read aloud to a therapy dog in an elementary school results in an improvement in their motivation to read, attitude toward reading, and their overall oral reading fluency, educational leaders will have an additional option to better prepare our elementary students to become confident, fully-literate individuals who love reading. As it is our professional

responsibility to think innovatively and creatively to help our students achieve academic success, this may be a program that we want to consider implementing on a broader basis going forward. It was the researcher's hope that through the data collected in this study and subsequent analysis, information learned in this study would be able to be shared with fellow educators to inform future therapy dog programs and ultimately provide some insight into motivating reluctant readers in their schools.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of a school-based therapy dog reading program on reluctant readers' attitudes about reading and motivation to read at school and at home as well as exploring changes in the participants' oral fluency. In addition, this study examined how the use of therapy dogs could possibly be integrated with literacy intervention support in order to help students develop into authentic readers who genuinely love reading.

The data presented in this chapter was collected from eight first through fourth grade students, their teachers, their parents/guardians, and the school's literacy interventionist. For each student, the data was triangulated and studied collectively in order to paint a broad picture of each participant's comprehensive experience throughout the therapy dog pilot from a variety of different perspectives. Each child's experience was an integral part of a larger collective whole. Analyzing each child's experience from the different perceptions and then looking collectively at all eight students' experiences allowed the findings to be examined holistically, contributing to the identification of overall common themes and trends. This chapter will detail the findings for each of the eight student participants from the lens of the student, parent/guardian, teacher, and literacy interventionist. Pseudonyms were given for each child and the therapy dog to protect confidentiality.

Molly

Molly, a 6-year-old Caucasian first grader, was selected by her teacher because she had been very hesitant to read in school, both in a small group setting and as a whole class. Prior to the therapy dog reading pilot, her mother expressed concerns to the classroom teacher about Molly's reluctance to read at home. Her teacher reported in the pre-pilot

perception survey that Molly had previously demonstrated avoidance behaviors, such as spending too much time picking out a book, walking around the classroom rather than sitting in one spot, and talking with classmates instead of reading. When asked by her teacher to read in class, Molly often responded by saying, “I don’t want to,” or by simply sitting quietly. Molly’s teacher believed that Molly thought she was not very good at reading prior to the therapy dog reading pilot and that she did not seem internally motivated to read. Molly shared in her pre-pilot perception survey that reading books at home and school made her scared, that she only liked to read in her classroom “once in a while,” and that she thought she was an “OK reader.” If she was given the choice, she would prefer to read in her head by herself. She indicated that she was “scared to read” to Max, the therapy dog, and that “he may run away or get bored.” During her initial interview, Molly reported that reading was a little bit hard for her and that she “gets shy because [she] is afraid [she] will forget a word.” She also indicated that she wanted to be a good reader like her friends. When asked how she thought reading to Max would make her feel, she responded, “Fine.” In response to the given perception survey, Molly’s mom shared that prior to reading to the therapy dog, she would have described Molly as “not focused and not interested” in reading.

During Molly’s sessions with Max, the researcher observed that she typically came in the room and gave Max a big hug making comments such as “He is so cute.” She often chose to sit in or lay on a comfy chair on the floor next to Max’s dog bed. She would share thoughts during the sessions, including “I like this book because Max likes it. It has easy words that I can read” and “I think Max’s favorite book is *Pets*. I think he doesn’t like *Up in a Tree* because it has a cat, so I am not going to read that one.” She often asked to reread books that she had previously read in other sessions and even reread them multiple times

within the same session. Molly frequently opted to continue reading, even after the timer went off, so that she could finish the book that she was in the middle of at the end of the 10-minute session.

After the conclusion of the therapy dog reading pilot, Molly shared in her perception survey that reading books at home made her happy, compared to her pre-pilot survey initial response of making her feel scared. She further indicated on her post-pilot survey that reading books at school still made her nervous because she “doesn’t like reading to other people because [she] may get a word wrong.” She still viewed herself as an “OK reader” and still preferred reading in her head by herself. She shared that she liked reading to Max “because [she] liked how he sat next to [her] and he’s a really good listener.” She also reported that Max made her feel “happy as [she] read aloud because he sometimes licks [her] a lot.” She identified the “reading part” as the best part of the entire experience of reading to Max and her least favorite part was “not going anymore” after the pilot concluded. She shared similar responses during her post reading pilot interview. She stated that she felt “good about reading to Max because he always liked to listen to what she read.” She indicated that Max made her feel “happy and that he helped [her] read a little more, but that [she] still doesn’t want to read in front of other people.” She still indicated that reading was a little bit hard because she sometimes gets stuck on a word.

In the parent/guardian perception survey, Molly’s mom described Molly as “more confident and willing to sound out new words” after the pilot concluded. She perceived that “Molly has more confidence and is becoming more interested in reading.” She also noted that Molly “does not dread reading anymore.” In her post reading pilot perception survey, Molly’s teacher reported that she had seen Molly “attempt to read more often and persevere

more through challenging words than she had prior.” She added that Molly still does not like to read aloud to a whole group but was participating more in general to answer questions. She also stated that Molly became shy and reserved when she was unsure about a word, but that she was much more willing to try to read it after the pilot. Molly’s teacher believed that “Molly is starting to see herself more as a reader and is slowly gaining confidence.” She added that Molly enjoyed reading to herself a little bit more after the pilot because she saw her sit by herself and read, whereas she would avoid it before. During the face-to-face interview with the researcher, the literacy interventionist shared that after the therapy dog reading pilot, “Molly has been trying harder, putting in more effort to be independent, and is feeling more confident about her strategies.” The interventionist also shared that although Molly’s words correct per minute (WCPM) score increased from 30 to 43 from the pre- to the post-fluency assessment, her grade-level percentile range remained between 50 and 75%, indicating that there was not a significant difference in her fluency levels from the start to the end of the pilot.

Chloe

The second participant, named Chloe, was also in the first grade. Like the first subject, she was a 6-year-old female, Caucasian student. Her teacher explained in her pre-pilot perception survey that the reason she identified Chloe as a reluctant reader for this literacy pilot was because “Chloe had shown a lack of confidence in her reading abilities and demonstrated avoidance behaviors when asked to read.” She further added that “Chloe will attempt to read aloud in a whole group setting, but when she comes across a word she does not know, she gets very quiet and does not want to continue on.” Her teacher identified that Chloe’s “motivation to read seems to center around completing a book or reading for a

certain number of minutes, rather than reading for enjoyment or for understanding.” Chloe’s responses to her pre-pilot perception survey reflected that she identified herself as an “OK reader” and liked to read in her classroom “a few times a week.” She responded that reading books at school made her “sometimes excited, sometimes not.” She thought it would be “exciting and fun” to read to Max. In her initial interview, Chloe stated that reading is a “little bit hard because it is hard to read the words” and that she wanted to be a good reader “so [she] can read other stuff, like words [she doesn’t] know.” She thought she could be a good reader “because [she] is going to learn.” She felt excited about reading to Max and thought that he would make her feel happy. Chloe’s mom reported in her perception survey responses that prior to the pilot, Chloe “struggled with reading.” She thought “the biggest issue was [Chloe’s] confidence in reading.”

The researcher observed that Chloe waited to enter the room during each of the 12 sessions until she was confident that the researcher was holding Max on his leash and that there was no chance he would approach her. She would choose to sit in the furthest chair from Max’s bed and chose not to interact with him in any of the 12 sessions. She declined the opportunity to pet him or give him a treat throughout the entire pilot. In seven of the 12 reading sessions, Chloe made at least one request to the researcher to tell her an unknown word and would typically make a comment such as “I don’t know this word.” She often looked at the researcher for verification that a word was correct when it was difficult for her.

After the completion of the six-week pilot period, Chloe completed the post-reading pilot perception survey. Her responses indicated that reading books at school made her “excited” and that there was no change in the amount of time she liked to read in her classroom. She still viewed herself as an “OK reader” but shared that as opposed to her initial

response of preferring to read aloud for others to hear her at the start of the pilot, she would now prefer to read in her head by herself. She stated that it was “fun reading to Max because she liked the books” and that “Max made her feel happy as she read aloud because it was fun to see him.” Her favorite part of the experience was “getting to read the books to him” and that she did not have a least favorite part. She still thought that reading was a little bit hard. Her interview responses were almost identical to those provided in her perception survey.

Chloe’s mom described her perception at the end of the pilot that “Chloe became a more confident reader when reading aloud, resulting in being a better reader.” She also wrote that Chloe “is excited to pick up a book at home to read on her own. She enjoys it!” Chloe’s mom also added that she believed that Chloe’s perceptions of herself as a reader changed, specifically that “Chloe became a more confident reader!” She also indicated that Chloe “liked reading for a purpose.” Chloe’s mom observed that Chloe “showed excitement the days she would read to Max, that she had gained confidence in reading, and most importantly, had fun.”

Chloe’s teacher reported in the perception survey after the pilot was complete, that she noted an “overall increase in Chloe’s confidence as a reader.” She shared that Chloe would sit with a book for a few minutes longer during independent reading time and was much more eager to volunteer to read aloud. She added that Chloe “still checks with her if unsure what a word is, but she has become more comfortable sitting down with a book and understands more about the purpose of reading- for enjoyment or to tell a story.”

Chloe’s literacy interventionist reported that she still “seems apprehensive, is pretty quiet, and still appeals for help.” She thought she may be “a little more independent.” She did not really notice any additional observable changes in Chloe during their intervention times.

She did report that Chloe would tell her if she read to Max each day, and although was not as enthusiastic as the other participants, still seemed to like it. When the literacy interventionist assessed Chloe's fluency, she noted that Chloe only had a minimal increase of two WCPM, from 24 to 26, on the pre- to post-fluency assessment. Her grade-level percentile range remained between 25% and 49%.

Sam

Sam is a 7-year-old, African American boy in second grade. His teacher selected him for this reading pilot because, as she noted in her initial perception survey, Sam “needs a boost of confidence and continued practice to become a fluent reader. He often avoids reading and needs lots of reminders to continue reading.” She also noted that he “gets distracted easily and therefore his reading stamina needs to be strengthened.”

In his initial student perception survey, Sam noted that reading books at home and school made him “happy” and that he liked to read in his classroom every day. He perceived himself as an “OK reader,” and if given the choice, he would want to read in his head by himself. He responded that it would be “weird” to read to Max and he was “not sure” how Max could help him as a reader. In his pre-pilot interview with the researcher, Sam elaborated that he “felt kinda good about reading in school but was a little bit shy” because when he said a wrong word he may be laughed at. He responded that he wanted to be a good reader “because then [he] can read hard words” and that he thinks he could be a good reader “because when [he] practices more, practice gets [him] better.” He was “a little bit nervous” about starting to read to Max, but thought Max would make him feel “happy.”

Sam opted to sit in a comfortable cushion chair on the floor next to Max's dog bed for each of the 12 reading sessions. He typically petted Max with one hand while he held the

book with the other. Max would often paw at Sam when he stopped petting him, looking for attention. Max repeatedly laid his head on Sam's foot and often fell asleep as Sam read. Sam was always eager to participate in the reading sessions and made comments such as "I was wondering when you were going to come get me. Were you busy?" Sam preferred to read new books. As he was about to read one of the books he had read during a previous session, he realized there were other books he had not yet read. He ultimately chose one of those instead. During a different session, Sam stated, "Wait, I already read this one." Sam also shared details about his own personal dog during the sessions. He would share comments such as "My dog is less furry than Max" and "Yesterday, my dog tried to get a bone under the couch and got stuck. I had to help him out." During the final reading session, Sam asked, "Will we get to do this next year?"

At the conclusion of the therapy dog reading pilot, Sam shared in his student perception survey that reading books at home made him feel "excited" and that reading books at school still made him feel "happy." His perception of himself as a reader improved, as he noted on his post reading pilot perception survey that he now thought of himself as a "good reader" as opposed to an "OK reader" at the start. He responded that he liked reading to Max because "it was really, really fun" and that Max made him feel "happy" as he read out loud. In the post-pilot interview, Sam confirmed that he felt "really, really good" about reading to Max and that Max made him feel "really happy" as he read. He also shared that he wanted to be a good reader "because [he] can learn more and get a good grade" and that he thought he could be a good reader "because [he] can read a lot of words." Finally, he shared that before he read to Max, he felt that "reading was boring," but that afterward, "it is kind of fun."

Sam's mother indicated on her parent perception survey that an observable change was that "Sam's confidence increased" since the start of the therapy dog reading pilot and that he has "always gotten better each day." Sam's teacher agreed, responding to her perception survey by noting that "he is more excited to read." She shared that Sam's mom even sent her a picture of him wanting to read at home to his sister. His teacher added that Sam is "still a little nervous, but more confident and fluent. He is excited to try new books, moved up an instructional level, and this was great additional support."

The literacy interventionist also commented on similar progress observed during her sessions with Sam. During the face-to-face interview, she shared that she "noticed a change—the speed of reading is noticeably different and that just in the past two weeks, there was a significant improvement in Sam's fluency." She also noted that she believed Sam's reading motivation changed for the better and that prior to reading to Max, Sam "never felt comfortable to read aloud." Despite the literacy interventionist observing that Sam's fluency had improved during their literacy intervention sessions, his WCPM score remained the same at 36, putting his score in the 11-24% grade-level percentile range.

Oliver

Oliver, an 8-year-old Caucasian boy in second grade, was the fourth student participant. His teacher chose him for this reading pilot because as she explained on the initial teacher perception survey, Oliver "typically needs redirection to stay focused during a read aloud. He is easily distracted and will use escape tactics to avoid reading, including going to the bathroom, sharpening pencils, etc." She further added that "he is a high energy student, who likes to be 'done.'" She believed that Oliver saw himself as an "OK reader" and

typically asked “if he ‘has’ to read.” She also noted that he “reaches a frustrational level quickly.”

In Oliver’s pre-pilot perception survey, he noted that reading books at home and school made him “happy.” He shared that he liked to read in his classroom “once in a while” and that he thought of himself as an “OK reader.” If given the option, he would prefer to read in his head by himself. He thought that reading to Max would be “good and happy for Max.” He believed that Max may help him as a reader and stated that Max can “help [him] stay calm when [he is] reading. He can help [him] focus.” During the interview with the researcher, Oliver shared that he felt “good and nervous” about reading in school. He noted that reading was a little bit easy because “sometimes you get in the moment and get distracted.” He offered that he wanted to be a good reader “because it is important to read a lot to learn a lot of words” and that he thought he could be a good reader because “normally [he reads] really well to [his] dad and feel like [he is] doing a good job.” He also noted that he felt “very good” about starting to read to Max: “He is really going to make me focus and calm and sit.” He shared that sometimes he has read to his own dog at home. Oliver’s mom described Oliver as being “not very interested” as a reader prior to the therapy dog pilot.

Oliver often interacted with Max at the start of each reading session, prior to reading. One example of his comments included “Hey Max. I know you missed me. I can say hi for a few seconds and then I have to read to you.” Another time he stated, “I know you want to see me, but I have to read to you. I know you love me, but you need to sit.” During the reading sessions with Max, Oliver typically chose to sit in a student sized chair near Max’s dog bed. In all but one of the sessions, when Oliver finished the text on a pair of pages, he showed Max the pictures, similar to what a teacher would do for their students. He would often say,

“Look at... See.” He would then summarize the text on the pages he had just read. An example included the following comments about a book about bugs: “I’m sure you like to catch bugs. Look at the bees. They may sting you sometimes, but it’s ok. Look at the grasshopper jumping. You can jump pretty far, I bet.” Another two examples during a different reading session included “Look. They are having fun, but Mom said she is too little to work on the roof” and “Oh, I forgot to show you the pictures. Here is the popcorn popping and they are getting back to the game.” There were a few occasions in which Max fell asleep while Oliver was reading to him, but Oliver did not seem to realize and continued showing him the pictures and talking to him. Oliver did occasionally prompt the researcher to provide him with a word he may have been struggling with by saying, “I’m having trouble with this word.”

In the post-pilot student perception survey, Oliver responded that reading books at home and school made him feel “excited.” His response to the question regarding how often he liked to read in the classroom changed from the pre-pilot survey, specifically increasing from “once in a while” to “a few times a week.” His perception of himself as a reader also improved, from his response of being an “OK reader” in the pre-pilot survey to a “great reader” in his post-pilot survey response. His response to his preferred method of reading also changed from pre- to post-pilot, as he now indicated that he would prefer to “read aloud for others to hear me” on the post-pilot survey. Oliver reported that he liked reading to Max through comments such as: “He makes me happy when I see him.” and “[Max makes me feel] happy as I read aloud because I read to my dog at my house, too.” He responded that reading was very important because “it helps you gain knowledge.” He indicated that the best

part of the reading pilot was “everything” and the least favorite part was that he “missed out on some things sometimes.”

Similarly, in the interview with the researcher, Oliver detailed that he felt “really good reading to Max ---[Max makes him] calm down and sit nicely.” He also shared that reading to Max helped him by “making [him] feel happy about reading to somebody.” He explained why he wanted to be a good reader: “When I grow up, I want to be someone who reads lots of interesting stuff.” He believed he could be a good reader because he “started reading two chapter books and [he] finished reading both in one day.” He commented that the best thing about reading to Max was when Max was “comforting [him], making [him] relaxed, and making [him] have joy inside of [his] heart.”

Oliver’s mother responded to the parent perception survey after the 12 weeks had passed, noting that Oliver “enjoys reading a little more than before” and “seems to be reading more and feeling confident.” She believed that his reading attitude changed as she “watched him read longer books and understanding what he was reading.” His teacher also noted on her post-pilot perception survey that Oliver “seems to have a slight increase of motivation to read, as he asks to read more often.” She also observed a slight improvement in Oliver’s fluency and an increase in confidence. The building’s literacy interventionist also observed this increase in confidence and shared her observations during the interview with the researcher. She stressed Oliver’s love of reading to Max. She also believed that his perceptions of himself as a reader changed, and stated that “he really believes he is a great reader. He loves to talk about books and is more confident.” Oliver’s WCPM score minimally improved by two, from 49 to 51, but his grade-level percentile range remained the same between 11% and 24%.

AJ

AJ, an 8-year-old Caucasian student, was selected by his teacher to be one of the two third graders in this study. His teacher shared in her pre-pilot teacher perception survey that AJ “is a reluctant reader, but has a huge heart for dogs.” She reported that AJ “does not like decoding, word strategies, or being corrected.” She also noted that “AJ has been through a lot this year and at times reading is far from his mind. He does not finish many books.” His teacher was referring to the fact that AJ tragically lost his mom a few months prior to the beginning of the reading pilot.

In his pre-pilot perception survey, AJ responded that he liked to read “a few times a week” in his classroom and that he viewed himself as “between an OK and good reader.” He thought that “it will be good and nice” to read to Max and that Max would “help [him] be calm and encourage [him].” AJ previously had an established relationship with Max because AJ was also on the school social worker’s caseload, and because the social worker was Max’s handler, her caseload students interacted with Max on a weekly basis.

AJ articulated during his pre-pilot interview with the researcher that reading is “a little bit hard for [him]” because he “struggles on a lot of words.” He indicated that not only did he want to be a good reader, but he also wanted to be a good writer. He thought that if he tried hard enough, he thought he could be a good reader. When asked how he felt about starting to read to Max soon, he responded, “It’s going to be amazing. I love dogs.” He anticipated that Max would make him feel “good and calm.” His grandmother, who recently was awarded custody of AJ after his mother’s death, detailed in her parent/guardian perception survey that AJ was a “below grade level” reader prior to beginning to read to Max. She noted that AJ “has improved his reading skills” since the start of the therapy dog

reading pilot and that he is now “more motivated to read.” She added that “he has more confidence in himself and is not embarrassed to read out loud.” Two significant changes she observed in AJ were his “motivation and enthusiasm.”

AJ often chose the comfortable, cushion chair on the floor near Max’s dog bed, but typically laid down next to Max. After AJ finished his books for the day, AJ would talk to Max when he gave him a treat. He would often make statements such as “Who wants a treat? You want the treat?” Before he left the room during most sessions, AJ would say something to Max such as “I love you, Maxie, or Bye Maxie. Have a good time.” He would also frequently tell the researcher, “Take care of Max for me.” One time, he shared, “Dogs are the smartest person in the family. Did you know that?” He told the researcher, “I think he likes me more than your other kids.” He snuggled up with Max and put his face against his fur. AJ consistently pet Max with one hand while reading. Max frequently snuggled into AJ and often licked his hands. On the day that his books were exchanged for new texts, AJ declared, “Oh, new books!” On a different occasion, he asked Max, “Do you want to read about cats, Max? Did you know that some cats and dogs like each other?” AJ also gave Max a kiss on two different occasions before he ran out the door.

Following the therapy dog pilot, AJ’s responses to the student perception survey did not change a great deal. He still indicated that he liked to read in his classroom a few times a week and viewed himself as an OK reader. He responded that he liked reading to Max “because [he likes] dogs and he was a good dog to read with.” He stated that Max made him “feel good” when he read out loud and that his favorite part was “when [Max] snuggled when [he] read.” AJ shared that his least favorite part was “when [he] was done.” The researcher obtained similar responses during the in-person interview with AJ. He again shared, “[He]

loved reading to Max because [he] got to snuggle with him” and that Max “made [him] feel good.” He articulated that Max helped him because “it helped [him] get into reading more.” AJ explained his rationale for wanting to be a good reader: “I really want to be like where my classmates are at.” He explained that he thought it would be possible for him to be a good reader: “If I try hard enough.”

In the teacher perception survey after the pilot was complete, AJ’s teacher indicated that AJ “looked forward to reading and spending time with Max.” She shared that in some cases, AJ “will resist an intervention, but Max time was on top of his list each day.” She noted that AJ “had much more confidence when reading aloud, even with miscues.” She also shared that he volunteered to read more in the whole group setting. His teacher stated that “AJ has become more confident, lacks hesitation now, and is more eager to do and learn more.” She added that “AJ will take on more reading challenges.” She commented that “AJ is absolutely excited to read and is finishing chapter books.” She also believed that she was “certain his reading attitude has changed because he asks to read, asks for more reading time, and more books to read.” She summarized his progress by sharing that since the start of the pilot, AJ had completed three chapter books and his level was growing. Prior to the pilot, he had only completed one book in class in over six months.

AJ’s literacy interventionist did not necessarily observe the same changes. She expressed that AJ “does not really enjoy reading with [her]” and sometimes lost his cool during their time together. She added that “if he is not into a book, he is not going to do it.” AJ’s fluency scores decreased a bit from the pre- to the post-fluency assessment. His WCPM score decreased from 122 to 110, but his grade-level percentile range remained the same between 50 and 75%.

Maggie

Maggie, a female, 9-year-old, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, was the final third grade student participant. Her long-term guest teacher selected her to participate because, as she wrote in her initial perception survey, Maggie “is a great student who loves school and loves to learn. She is excited and energetic about almost everything, except for when it comes to reading.” She observed during her time working with Maggie that she “disengages during silent reading or group read and is often consumed with other activities” and “will never volunteer to read aloud.” Maggie’s mom also indicated on her perception survey that prior to beginning to read to Max, Maggie was a “reluctant” reader.

Maggie shared in her pre-pilot perception survey that reading books at home made her “happy,” but reading books at school made her “scared.” She perceived that she was an “OK” reader and, if given the choice, would want to read “in [her] head by [herself].” She anticipated that “it would be fun” to read to Max and that she thought that Max could help her as a reader by motivating her to read more. Similarly, in her interview with the researcher prior to the beginning of the pilot, Maggie indicated that she felt “nervous” about reading in school and did not like to read in front of other people. She responded that reading was “a little bit hard” because “some words just seem too big.” She indicated that although she tried to chunk the words, it “just doesn’t work.” Maggie commented that she wanted to be a good reader, especially when she “sees everyone else having an easy time” and that she ultimately thought that she could be a good reader. She was “excited” to start to read to Max, but that Max may make her feel “a tiny bit nervous.”

During the reading sessions, Maggie typically opted to sit in the student-sized chair while Max laid in his dog bed. She did not usually engage with Max while she was reading.

During the fourth session, Maggie showed Max the pictures for two of the pages in her book, although he was asleep. When one of the 10-minute sessions had ended but Maggie was not quite finished with her text, the researcher gave her the choice of continuing or stopping. This occurred several more times and Maggie consistently chose to continue until she finished the book she was in the middle of at the time the timer went off.

In the post-pilot perception survey, Maggie still responded that reading books at home made her “happy” and shared that reading books at school made her “nervous.” She still indicated that she was an “OK” reader and that she would prefer to read in her head by herself. She wrote that she liked reading to Max because “it feels good.” She also reported that Max made her “feel comfortable” as she read out loud. She responded that the best part about reading to Max was “not hearing him correct [her].” She didn’t know what her least favorite part was.

Similarly, in the post-pilot interview with the researcher, Maggie articulated that she felt “good” about reading to Max, specifically that she “felt better to read with Max because [she gets] scared to read to actual people but reading to Max made [her] feel better.” She added that Max made her “feel comfortable” as she read. Maggie explained why she wanted to be a good reader: “I always feel that I stick out since I can’t read as many of the books that the kids in my class can read.” She believed that it was possible to become a good reader “if [she practices] a lot.” She explained that the best thing about reading to Max was that Max: “made me feel better that I didn’t get embarrassed if I got a word wrong.”

Maggie’s mother reported in her perception survey that she observed that Maggie read on her own more since the start of the therapy dog reading pilot and that she has “found her curled up on the couch with a book reading more than prior to the program.” Her teacher

also observed a change in the classroom. She noticed that Maggie “loved reading with the therapy dog and couldn’t say enough good things about it after she would return.” Her teacher shared that Maggie “still does not volunteer to read during our class read alouds” but that Maggie “is more engaged in the discussions after we read and volunteers to answer questions related to what we read.” She also noted that Maggie “will read aloud with a group of three friends.” Finally, she commented that she believed that Maggie “is more excited in general about reading. She stays engaged in lessons longer and is excited to tell me about books she reads on Epic.”

In the post-pilot interview with the literacy interventionist, she shared her perception that Maggie “did benefit from reading to Max” and that she seems “a bit more positive.” She reported that she is now “able to decode more difficult words, which is a significant change.” Maggie demonstrated a growth in fluency, with an increase from 37 WCPM before the pilot to 79 WCPM afterward. Her grade-level percentile range also increased from 0-10% to 25-49%.

Kennedy

The seventh student in the pilot, a girl named Kennedy, was 9 years old when she started the therapy dog reading pilot, but turned 10 years old a few weeks into the pilot. She was a Caucasian fourth grader. Her teacher explained in her teacher perception survey prior to the start of the pilot that she selected Kennedy because she received reading intervention services and was reading below grade level. She believed that Kennedy did not read much at home outside of school and observed that she needed prompting to use reading strategies. She responded that she thought Kennedy believed she was a good reader.

Kennedy completed the student perception survey before beginning the pilot and responded that as her teacher had thought, she perceived herself to be a good reader. She also shared that she thought it would be “fun and exciting” to read to Max. She noted that she thought Max could help her as a reader because he would listen to her as she read and keep her calm, because when she got stuck on a word, she got mad. During the pre-pilot interview with the researcher, Kennedy voiced that reading was “a little bit hard” for her because when she got stuck on a word, she tried sounding it out but had a hard time figuring it out. She shared that she wanted to be a good reader so she could easily read to her grandma, mom and dad, and sometimes her pets. She perceived that she could be a good reader as she kept encouraging herself. She thought that Max would make her feel “good and calm because [she] always wanted a dog since it was [her] favorite animal.”

During the reading sessions, Kennedy typically would choose to sit in a chair while Max laid down in his dog bed. Kennedy would often pet him with her left hand on his head while she read. Max jumped up to welcome Kennedy into the room as she entered. Kennedy selected the same book for the first four sessions. On Day 7, Kennedy stopped the researcher in the hallway and asked, “Am I going to see Max today?” She also commented, “I am excited to see Max again.” Max cuddled right up next to Kennedy on the floor. On Day 9, Kennedy told the researcher that she wished she had a dog like Max and asked Max, “Can I just take you?” In the final reading session, Kennedy told Max, “I just want a dog like you. I just want to take you home.” As the session came to a close, Kennedy also said, “There we go. My doggie.”

At the conclusion of the therapy dog reading pilot, Kennedy noted that she liked reading to Max because “he was a good listener.” She responded that Max made her feel

“calm and happy to read” as she read out loud. She said that the best thing about reading to Max was “when he would lay next to me.” She was unable to identify the least favorite part. During the interview with the researcher, Kennedy shared that she felt that reading to Max was “calming for her.” She stated why she wanted to be a good reader: “Maybe when I grow up and have siblings, I could read bedtime stories.” She further noted that she thought she could be a good reader because she keeps “practicing and not giving up.” She added that reading to Max changed how she felt about reading because it “definitely made [her] more confident and strong in reading.”

In Kennedy’s mom’s perception survey, she articulated that Kennedy “seems to like to read more” and that she has “become more confident in her reading.” She also stated that Kennedy has “become so independent and more confident in herself.” Kennedy’s teacher also noted this increase in confidence. In her post-pilot perception survey, her teacher reported that Kennedy “was more confident and shared ideas from her book that she liked.” She also shared that she believes Kennedy “became more eager to read. Normally she might take time to get started reading, but when she would read to Max, she wanted to begin right away.” The literacy interventionist explained that her reading accuracy had increased measurably in the two months of the pilot. The interventionist thought that Kennedy’s reading motivation slightly increased. She also communicated that Kennedy’s “confidence increased.” Kennedy’s WCPM score increased from 92 to 121 and her grade-level percentile range increased from 11-24% to 50-75%. This data confirmed the literacy interventionist’s observation that Kennedy’s reading accuracy measurably improved.

Stella

Stella, a 9-year-old African American fourth grader was the final student participant. Her teacher responded to the initial teacher perception survey that she selected her to participate in the therapy dog reading pilot because “she is a reluctant reader who is well below grade level in her scores.” She added that “she doesn’t read by choice and will find ways to avoid reading during independent reading” and that “she does not volunteer to read in class in whole group settings.” Her teacher did not believe that she perceives herself as a reader, as she did not enjoy reading. She also wrote that Stella’s motivation to read “was not very strong --- she has said that she doesn’t like reading and does not choose books on her own that would interest her.” Stella’s mother noted in her perception survey that prior to beginning the reading sessions with Max, Stella was “very shy, second guessing words.”

In Stella’s initial student perception survey, her responses contradicted her teacher’s perceptions. Stella indicated that reading books at school “made her excited” and that she thought she was a “good reader.” She also noted that if she could choose, she would want to read “aloud for others to hear me.” She indicated that she thought “it will be fun to read to Max” and that she thought Max would help her as a reader: “When I read I will see if any reading is good from Max’s face so I can tell how my reading is.” During the pre-pilot interview with the researcher, Stella responded that she felt “good” about reading in school: “It is best for me because at home we don’t have good books; we still have baby books.” She noted that she wanted to be a good reader and thought that she could be a good reader. She did not provide much detail beyond answering the direct question.

Stella typically opted to sit in a student sized chair next to Max’s dog bed. For the majority of the sessions, Stella was in the middle of a book when the 10-minute timer rang,

signaling the end of the reading session. The researcher always gave her a choice to continue reading or stop at that time. Stella always chose to continue until she finished the book she was reading and would make remarks, including “I’ll keep going because these pages are short” or “I’m almost done.” Stella usually read at a louder volume than her peers, almost sounding as if she was shouting at times. When she came to a word she struggled with and was unable to decode the word, she would read it very quietly. Stella preferred to read books that were new to her and usually avoided rereading a text. She would make comments such as “I read this one already last week. I’ll pick this one.”

After the therapy dog pilot concluded, Stella marked that she was an “OK” reader on the post-pilot perception survey. This was a change from her original selection of being a “good” reader. She noted why she liked reading to Max: “I never read to a dog but I try to read to my little sister as she is like a dog.” She also commented that Max made her feel “happy because when [she] read to Max, it was much better than reading to [her] little sister.” She explained the best part about reading to Max: “I loved it all.” Stella then added further details: “I don’t have a least favorite part. Every part was my favorite.”

In her post pilot interview with the researcher, Stella articulated that reading to Max helped her: “Now I can read big books. I’m reading a book that has seven chapters in it.” She noted that reading is still “a little bit hard” because she still gets stopped on some words and that reading to Max changed how she felt about reading: “Before I used to ask a lot of questions about big words I didn’t know. Now I can pronounce it. I can sound it out.”

Stella’s mom indicated that since the start of the pilot, Stella is “willing to read without having to tell her to read” and that “she has more confidence in herself.” She also stated that she believed there had been a change in Stella’s motivation to read because “she

talked about the dog sitting and listening to her and she reads to her younger siblings to see if they'll listen to her." She summarized that the significant change that she had seen in Stella was that "she really seemed like she enjoyed reading to the dog and it has motivated her to want to read."

Stella's classroom teacher "didn't notice a huge shift overall," but commented that Stella "enjoyed going to read with Max and was excited to go." She observed that Stella "is still hesitant to read aloud in a whole group and is not yet comfortable reading to a whole class." She did note that Stella "is more comfortable in small group but still uses a soft tone and is hesitant with new words." Although her teacher did not believe that Stella's reading attitude changed as a result of the pilot, she did share that Stella "enjoys reading one-on-one so she enjoyed this time."

Stella's literacy interventionist shared similar observations to Stella's classroom teacher, specifically that she "did not notice any changes with her" and that she is "so down on herself as a reader and is getting more negative because she knows she is behind her class." She also noted that Stella is very self-conscious and doesn't seem to enjoy reading, as it is very stressful for her. Overall, she did not believe that Stella's reading motivation changed, but did say that she "may be a bit more motivated to read easier text." Finally, Stella's interventionist shared that the results of the fluency pre- and post-assessments did not reflect improvement. Her WCPM score actually decreased from 26 to 23, and the grade-level percentile range remained between 0% and 10%.

Conclusion

The results demonstrated that there were differences in perceptions related to motivational changes in the student participants as a result of the therapy dog reading

program. All eight of the students indicated that reading to Max was a preferred activity and enjoyed their sessions with him. Of the eight student participants, 87.5% shared that reading to Max made them a better reader. Seventy-five percent of the student participants indicated that they felt better about reading and wanted to read more. Likewise, 75% of the students' classroom teachers indicated that their students were more eager to read after the therapy dog pilot. The teacher perception survey responses suggested that 87.5% of the teachers believed their students demonstrated an increase in reading motivation. Comparably, 87.5% of the student participants' parents/guardians indicated that they felt their children were more confident after reading to Max. Similarly, 87.5% stated that their children were more motivated after the therapy dog reading pilot concluded. The literacy interventionist noted a positive change in 75% of the student participants. The fluency assessments revealed that only two of the eight students, or 25%, demonstrated an improvement in their fluency from the pre- to the post-pilot assessment. Common themes among all stakeholders' perceptions included an increase in motivation to read and improved confidence as a reader. There was a universal perception from parents/guardians, teachers, the literacy interventionist, and students, who were all in agreement that this was a positive experience for each student participant.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter presents both a summary and discussion of the purpose of the study, the methodology, an analysis of the common themes, implications of the study, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how students, teachers, and parents/guardians perceived the influence that reading aloud to a therapy dog had on reluctant readers' attitudes toward reading, their motivation to read, and their reading fluency. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do first through fourth grade elementary students who have been identified by their teachers as reluctant, struggling readers perceive the influence of regularly reading aloud to a school therapy dog on their motivation toward reading?
2. How do elementary classroom teachers of first through fourth graders describe the influence of reluctant, struggling readers regularly reading aloud to a school therapy dog on their motivation to read at school?
3. How do parents/guardians of first through fourth grade elementary students who have been identified by their teachers as reluctant, struggling readers perceive the influence of their child regularly reading aloud to a school therapy dog on their motivation to read at home?
4. How does reading aloud to a therapy dog impact the reading fluency of reluctant readers?

The qualitative perceptions of the students, their classroom teachers, the building literacy interventionist, and parents/guardians were categorized and coded in order to identify common themes. These common themes included enjoyment and enthusiasm during the reading sessions, motivation toward reading, and confidence as readers. The quantitative fluency data was also analyzed in order to determine if students had made fluency growth after participating in the therapy dog reading program.

Methodology

This mixed-methods research study was conducted in a suburban elementary school in Southeast Michigan. Eight students in first through fourth grades who were identified as reluctant, struggling readers receiving literacy intervention were selected to participate. Students read to the school therapy dog for a total of 12 reading sessions throughout a six-week period. The researcher conducted observations during each therapy dog reading session, specifically documenting the verbal and non-verbal interactions between the student participants and the therapy dog. Additional data sources included perception data from the students, their classroom teachers, and parent/guardian perspectives through written perception surveys. Additionally, the students and the literacy interventionist were interviewed by the researcher to provide them an opportunity to share their thoughts. The reason that students were interviewed in addition to completing a written survey was because the researcher was aware that due to her position as the building principal, students may share an answer that they thought she wanted to hear, as opposed to their true perception. By responding to similar questions in a written survey administered by their classroom teacher and the interview with the researcher, their responses were able to be compared to confirm that the students were responding similarly in both settings. Additionally, the researcher

opted to interview the literacy interventionist as opposed to seeking her perception through a written perception survey, as the literacy interventionist works with all eight of the student participants. The researcher determined that the data provided through an interview may be more rich than simply having the literacy interventionist respond to a survey for each of the eight students. Additionally, pre- and post-fluency assessments were administered by the literacy interventionist in order to determine if any improvement in reading fluency was made. All of this data was then triangulated to better understand the student experience of reading to the therapy dog and how this may have influenced the students' motivation to read in school and at home.

Findings and Exploration of Common Themes

The researcher thoroughly reviewed the student perception survey responses and student interview transcripts, reading session observation notes, classroom teacher perception survey responses, parent/guardian perception survey responses, and the literacy interventionist interview transcript with the goal of identifying common themes. Responses between boys and girls were reviewed for differences, but many of their responses were very similar, or even at times identical. This reflected that this particular group of students did not report significant differences based on their gender.

Since this pilot included students in first through fourth grade, the age of the student participants fell in the range between 6 and 10. The older students definitely provided more articulate responses about their experience reading to Max based on their age, as the fourth graders were able to more clearly voice how reading to Max actually helped them as readers. For example, one of the fourth grade students verbalized, "Before I used to ask a lot of questions about big words I didn't know. Now I can pronounce it. I can sound it out"

compared to a first grader who said that Max made her feel “happy and that he helped [her] read a little more” but without much more explanation as to how he helped. Even though the first graders were not able to go into as much depth as the fourth graders, they still were able to provide enough detail for the researcher to determine that they enjoyed and were enthusiastic about their time reading to Max.

Enjoyment and Enthusiasm During Reading Sessions

All eight of the students agreed that reading to Max was enjoyable and they looked forward to their individual time with him. This was evident based on not only many of their positive verbal comments toward Max during the reading sessions, but also in their relaxed body language which demonstrated they were enjoying their time with Max. Some of the comments included “I think he wants a belly rub,” “He’s giving me kisses,” and “I know you love me, but I have to read to you.” The body language and physical actions that demonstrated their enthusiasm included the hugs that several of the students gave Max, the number of times that many of them petted Max while they read to him, and the manner in which they sat while reading. It was easy to identify that students felt very comfortable with him when multiple participants consistently chose to lay down on or next to his dog bed when reading to him. The researcher captured images of the student participants while reading in order to better reflect the positions in which they consistently sat or laid down during the sessions. (See Appendix S.)

Even though the reading was often challenging for the students, they persevered and never abandoned reading their texts. In fact, often when the timer went off at the conclusion of the ten-minute session, these reluctant readers actually wanted to continue reading to Max. Several comments from the participants when the timer went off included “Let’s read one

more page,” “I am almost done. I only have one more page,” “I’ll keep going because these pages are short. I’m almost done,” and “I’ll keep going” reflected that they wanted to continue even though their required time was finished. Considering that these students have been identified as reluctant readers, it is interesting to note that consistently, they elected to continue reading, even when not required to do so.

Additionally, the students’ post-pilot perception survey responses further supported that each of the eight students liked reading to Max. They responded with reasons such as “because he was a good listener,” “because I like dogs and he was a good dog to read with,” “because he makes me happy when I see him,” because it is really, really fun,” and “because I like how he sits next to me and he’s a really good listener.” One student verbalized to the researcher that reading to Max shifted his feelings from being scared when reading aloud to now feeling happy. Another reported that reading was boring at the beginning of the study and that reading was now fun at its conclusion. Collectively, these observations and student responses demonstrated that the student participants felt that this was a favorable experience. In fact, the majority of the students identified that their least favorite part about the overall experience was that their reading time with Max was over or that they had an inability to identify a least favorite part. This further supported their ongoing enthusiasm and positive experience with this pilot program.

Motivation Toward Reading

The first three research questions in this study sought to learn more about perceptions regarding changes in the motivation of reluctant, struggling readers as a result of reading aloud to the school therapy dog. Although the students did not specifically mention the word motivation directly in their perception surveys or interviews, their feedback did lead the

researcher to identify that many of them experienced an increase in motivation based on what they did share in their interview responses. Overwhelmingly, the students shared how reading to Max made them feel happier, more relaxed, and more comfortable. Perception survey responses about their feelings as they read aloud included “happy,” “It made me feel good,” “It made me feel comfortable to read to Max,” and “calm, happy to read.” Although the perception survey data only indicated that two students responded with an increase in frequency of time that they liked to read in their classroom, the students offered more detailed responses during the interview with the researcher, as they described how they felt about reading during the pilot. Responses included “I felt better to read with Max because I get scared to read to actual people, but reading to Max made me feel better,” “I felt really good. He makes me calm down and sit nicely,” “I felt good, maybe because he always likes to listen to what I read,” and “Reading to Max helped me by making me feel happy about reading to somebody.”

The researcher noted that the students were primarily able to articulate how reading to Max made them feel, but not necessarily identify how those feelings in turn related to their level of or a change in their motivation to read. However, their teachers and parents/guardians were able to make these observations and subsequently, perceptions about their levels of motivation. The students’ parents/guardians shared their observations and several of them detailed various instances in which their children were willing to initiate reading without being prompted or that their child agreed to engage in reading either independently or to a family member, which was not a typical experience prior to the pilot. The majority of parents/guardians observed increases in their child’s interest in reading, which supported an increase in the students’ motivation throughout the pilot. Their

perception data included responses such as “She seems to like to read more,” “She reads on her own more,” “He enjoys reading a little more than before,” “I think she learned that reading can be fun!” and “She’s willing to read without having to tell her to read.”

Additionally, the students’ classroom teachers specifically shared that the majority of their students were more motivated and ultimately more willing to engage in reading in the classroom at the end of the pilot. Perception data that supported this included survey responses from the classroom teachers such as “I believe that she is more excited in general about reading,” “I am certain his reading attitude has changed because he asks to read, asks for more reading time, and more books to read,” “He seems more eager to read,” and “I think she enjoys reading to herself a little bit more because I will see her sit by herself and read.”

Teachers that did not observe an increase in motivation in their classroom did note that the students were excited to go read with Max, which demonstrated that the reluctance to read was not present when the student was asked to go read to the therapy dog, but that the increased motivation was isolated to that particular student’s time with Max and that the motivation had not carried over into the classroom. The literacy interventionist did observe that motivation increased in a few of the students, but certainly not to the degree that the classroom teachers did. The researcher believed that this may be a result of the different expectations the literacy interventionist had for the students during their sessions. When in small group and working on reading skills that were challenging, these students no longer had the ability to blend in with their classmates and avoid doing the work. They were required to read aloud in front of peers and were prompted and corrected by the literacy interventionist. As much as literacy intervention is needed to support reluctant, struggling readers, this can cause literacy intervention to not be a preferred activity for these students,

including the student participants in this study. Although all of the students enjoyed reading aloud to Max and the majority showed an increase in motivation to read in their classrooms, the majority of them still did not demonstrate an increase in motivation during literacy intervention. The researcher believed this was a result of many of the students still not wanting to read in front of other people. Responses that supported this claim included “I get scared to read to actual people, but reading to Max made me feel better,” and “I feel scared when people hear me read.” Even after the pilot, these students, although in the minority of the participants, indicated that reading books at school still made them nervous because they do not like reading to other people. Other students shared that they did not feel judged by Max, but were still uncomfortable reading aloud in other settings within the building.

As the researcher reflected on the first three research questions in this study, she does not believe that the students were actually able to identify the influence that regularly reading aloud to Max had on their motivation toward reading. Instead, they were able to articulate how reading to Max made them feel, specifically that they felt happy, more comfortable, and more confident, but were not necessarily able to put into words whether or not these feelings made them want to read more. The researcher did conclude that elementary classroom teachers and parents/guardians of reluctant, struggling readers perceived that reading to a school therapy dog increased their motivation to read both in the classroom and at home.

Confidence as Readers

There was an overwhelming sense that the students’ parents/guardians perceived their child felt more confident when reading as increased confidence was consistently mentioned across the parent/guardian perception survey responses. Such responses included “Molly has more confidence and is becoming more interested in reading,” “She has more confidence in

herself,” “She has become so independent and more confident in herself,” “He has more confidence in himself and is not embarrassed to read out loud,” and “Chloe became a more confident reader when reading aloud, resulting in being a better reader.” Although the parents were consistent in their responses that the reading pilot helped give their child more confidence, the students did not articulate the same increase in their written perception survey. Two of the students indicated they improved from being “OK” to good readers, one student indicated they actually decreased from being a good to “OK” reader, while the others felt they had remained the same as “OK” readers from the start to the end of the pilot. However, once again, they were able to provide more detailed information during their interview with the researcher. Interview responses included “Now I can read big books,” “One day, I went to read a book at my house and got almost every single word correct,” and “It definitely made me more confident and strong in reading.”

As the researcher reflected on the theoretical framework, especially including the self-efficacy theory and Atkinson’s expectancy-value theory, the researcher confirmed that a student’s perception of themselves can be tied to their reading motivation. Although only a few students formally noted that they perceived themselves as being better readers after the six-week pilot in their written perception surveys, others explained in greater detail during the interviews that they were now able to sound words out that they weren’t able to before and that they were able to read longer and more complex chapter books. These were identifiable improvements in their minds.

According to Atkinson (1957), a child’s motivation to read is influenced by their expectancy for success as well as the value that they assign to reading. If that child believes that they cannot be successful as they read, their motivation to engage in the act of reading

will be extremely limited. As students become more confident as they begin to read aloud, their motivation to want to continue to read increases, in part because they can see themselves as readers and believe it is more important to try as they now believe their effort may help them be successful.

Guthrie (2001) suggested that when a student experiences low self-efficacy and is unable to view themselves as a reader, it is more likely that they will avoid reading. Each of the student participants experienced success as readers when they were with Max. Although they certainly did not read every word correctly, the researcher did not stop and correct them. At times, they prompted the researcher for a word when they knew they did not know it, which she then in turn shared with them, but they were never redirected, interrupted, or told they were wrong. Students demonstrated confidence during their reading sessions and often, this confidence carried over into the classroom. This increase in confidence was widely noted by parents/guardians at home as well.

Reading Fluency

Although two students did show growth in their pre-pilot to post-pilot reading fluency scores, the overall quantitative fluency data of comparing the students' pre-pilot scores to their post-pilot scores did not demonstrate a significant change for the majority of the students. As the students only read to the therapy dog for a period of six weeks, the researcher was unable to determine if the study was simply too brief for students to be able to demonstrate an improvement in reading fluency, or if lengthening the period between pre- and post-assessments still would not have resulted in an observable difference in reading fluency. The Oral Reading Fluency Target (ORF) Rate Norms (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2017) are scored based on the time of year, specifically in the fall, winter, and spring. These

intervals reflect the typical amount of time between fluency assessments in order to observe notable fluency progress, which is comprised of longer periods of time in between pre- and post- fluency assessments.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study. The first limitation was the generalizability of the results. Considering that this was a mixed methods study conducted in only one elementary school building, the sample size of participants was very low. Looking at multiple schools within the district or multiple districts would have provided additional data to analyze. It would have been beneficial to increase the number of student participants. Additionally, because this study did not use a control group for comparison purposes, it is possible that students' attitudes about reading may have changed and fluency scores may have improved as a result of typical growth and progress throughout the school year as students engaged with curriculum and received daily instruction from their classroom teacher and tiered support from their interventionist. Another limitation was the selected student participants were in different grades and had different classroom teachers. As a result, their daily classroom experiences were not uniform and could possibly have affected the results of this study because of variables such as the amount of time their classroom teacher spent on literacy each day and how many times they met in small group with their teacher to focus on guided reading. Finally, the length of this study was conducted during only a fraction of a typical school year. It is possible that the six-week duration was not adequate to provide students with enough opportunities to read aloud and improve their reading fluency.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on a new, emerging area of education that has not been previously researched in great depth. There are many opportunities to build upon this research, including increasing the sample size of student participants and extending the duration of the study in order to be able to explore long-term effects. This study was conducted over 12 reading sessions throughout a six-week period of time. Although the perceptions of the teachers and parents/guardians reported improvements in students' motivation to read from the beginning to the end of the therapy dog reading pilot, it would be beneficial to continue this study over a longer period of time within a school year. This would allow a researcher to better determine if students' fluency would be positively affected and if the observed increase in motivation to read was sustainable after participation for a greater amount of time. Future studies lasting six months to a full school year would be recommended in order to allow students to have more reading time with the therapy dog. Another important variable to research is whether perceived changes in motivation and confidence are able to endure after the reading sessions have concluded. Future research might include obtaining perceptions immediately at the conclusion of the reading sessions and again several months later, to better understand if the perceptions changed again after the reading sessions had stopped for a length of time.

Additionally, it would be valuable to determine if the benefit on students' motivation was truly due to reading to the therapy dog or simply reading aloud in a safe, private space in the absence of peers without being corrected by a teacher. Conducting this research with other groups, such as those who read aloud to a trusted adult volunteer, a stuffed animal, or even a different type of live animal, would allow a future researcher to delve deeper to study

the influence of a child reading aloud without being corrected and potentially identifying if there was a difference in that influence based on the audience the student read aloud to.

Implications for K-4 Practitioners and Educational Policy

The results of this study have the potential to indirectly impact the work of elementary building principals, teachers, and literacy interventionists. As further research is needed in order to determine the influence a longer study has on reading fluency as well as additional studies focused on evaluating if increases in motivation can endure long-term as a result of students reading to a therapy dog, it is premature to say that elementary school practitioners should implement canine literacy programs in schools in order to raise student reading achievement. However, as the goal of instructional leaders and educators is to reach all students and help foster a love of learning, implementing a therapy dog reading program focused on primarily improving student reading attitudes may be beneficial. It is important to note that the supervision of the interactions between the students and therapy dogs is time and staff intensive, so it would be critical for this type of a program to be embedded in classrooms in order to maximize the efficiency in a school building. Allowing the therapy dog to travel from class to class and allow students to read within a reading corner inside of the classroom instead of reading 1:1 in a separate setting would help minimize the additional need for individual supervision and maximize the number of students able to participate in such a program.

As additional research needs to be conducted to make school and district level decisions related to therapy dog reading programs, it is also premature to determine if policy decisions at the State level should be made regarding therapy dogs in classrooms to improve reading outcomes. Given that therapy dogs are only in a limited number of schools at this

time, it would be beneficial to study this on a broader scale in a more significant number of different communities before any policy is created.

Conclusion

Collectively, the observations made by the researcher, classroom teachers, and literacy interventionist reinforced the study's theoretical framework. Just as Ferrara (2005) shared, reading self-efficacy is comprised of an assessment of a student's individual perception that they can complete a specific reading assignment in a successful manner. Although each of the students in this study did not necessarily read with complete accuracy, they each experienced success when reading during their sessions with Max. They read with a purpose and experienced enjoyment. As a result, motivation to read was high during these sessions. The classroom teachers noted the beginning of similar changes in their classrooms, as did the students' parents/guardians. Self-efficacy theory addresses the question "Can I be a good reader?" (Stipek, 1996). Each student was able to answer yes, as they truly began to believe that they could be successful reading aloud. Similarly, Atkinson's expectancy-value theory explained that the degree to which an individual expected to be successful as well as the value they had for a specific task were directly tied to the level of motivation for that task. Students in this study first experienced success as readers with Max and valued their time reading to him. As their perception about reading began to change, observable improvements were noted in their level of motivation as well. Finally, the connections that each of the reluctant readers formed with Max represented the relatedness component of self-determination theory, specifically through a bond that created an environment that was low-risk for failure and ultimately supported them to develop their self-confidence.

Although the use of therapy dogs in schools is on the rise, school-based therapy dog reading programs are not very common. Based on the positive experiences that the eight students had while they read to Max and the perceptions that reading to him increased the majority of their motivation toward reading and strengthened their confidence as readers, the researcher believes that additional research is warranted to further evaluate the success of such a program. While motivation did increase from the start of the pilot, the researcher also noted that reading fluency, for the majority of the students, did not. Thus, additional research is recommended in order to allow for a longer period of time to further study the influence on motivation and fluency.

This study was unique as it not only explored the influence of therapy dogs on reluctant readers reading in the classroom and at home, but also in the literacy intervention setting. It is important to note that positive changes that were observable in the classroom after the therapy dog reading pilot were not necessarily observed by the literacy interventionist to the same degree and in a few cases, only to a minimal extent. I believe that this was because during literacy intervention, students were working individually or in groups smaller than three with the literacy interventionist, solely focusing on their deficit area. As Eccles and Wigfield (2002) suggested, each of these students' level of self-efficacy affected the extent of their engagement in literacy intervention, because most likely, they did not yet see themselves as readers in this setting and as a result, their motivation was limited. The perception of the literacy interventionist uniquely provided additional insight and shared information about how the influence of the therapy dog reading pilot affected students across multiple settings.

Based on the researcher's findings, she does believe that schools at a minimum need to provide a reading environment where students feel safe, not judged, and are able to make mistakes freely away from peers when reading aloud, as well as opportunities to simply read aloud without being corrected by an adult. By providing opportunities for students to engage in oral reading in a non-threatening and relaxing setting, the researcher believes that the potential exists for educators to attend to the needs of the whole child as a reader, helping them see that they can be successful and want to not only try, but persevere when things are challenging. It did not take long for students to bond with Max and to sincerely enjoy engaging in an activity that they previously avoided. It is the researcher's sincere hope that this study will in turn serve as an inspiration to other educators to critically examine and further study if reading to a therapy dog for a longer period of time can provide reluctant, struggling readers who dislike reading an opportunity to shift their mindset so that not only does reading bring them a sense of joy, but also that they experience an increase in reading outcomes.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Student Participant Reading Perception Survey (Prior to Reading Pilot)

1. Reading books at home makes me:

_____ happy _____ sad _____ scared _____ excited

2. Reading books at school makes me:

_____ happy _____ sad _____ scared _____ excited

3. I think reading is:

_____ very important _____ a little bit important _____ not important

4. I think that I am a:

_____ great reader _____ good reader _____ OK reader _____ bad reader

5. If I could choose, I would want to read:

_____ aloud for others to hear me _____ in my head by myself

6. What do you think it will be like to read to Max?

7. How do you think Max can help you as a reader?

Appendix B: Student Interview Protocol (Prior to Reading Pilot)

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

Interview Setting:

Interviewer Name:

Interviewee Pseudonym:

Interviewer: I want to learn more about how you feel about reading. I'm going to ask you a few questions. All you need to do is be honest and share your true feelings with me. There are no right or wrong answers. If it's ok with you, I'd like to begin recording so I can play back and listen to what you told me. Do you have any questions? If not, let's begin.

Interviewer asks the following questions:

1. Tell me about how you feel about reading in school.
2. How important do you think reading is? Tell me why.
3. Do you think reading is really easy, a little bit easy, a little bit hard, or really hard for you? Follow up: Can you tell me why you think that?
4. Do you want to be a good reader? Follow up: Can you tell me why you answered that way?
5. Do you think you can be a good reader? Follow up: Why do you (or do you not) think so?
6. How do you feel about starting to read to Max soon?
7. How do you think Max will make you feel?

Interviewer: Thank you so much for answering my questions. I can't wait for you to work with Max. Audio recording ends at this point.

Appendix C: Initial Teacher Perception Survey (Prior to Reading Pilot)

Teacher Name: _____ Teacher Grade Level: _____

Directions: Please respond to the statements listed below. Be as specific as possible.

1. Why did you select the student to participate in this therapy dog reading pilot program?

2. What made you identify this student as a reluctant reader?

3. Please describe your observations and perceptions of this student as a reader in your classroom when reading aloud in a whole group setting.

4. Please describe your observations and perceptions of this student as a reader in your classroom when reading in small group.

5. Please describe your observations and perceptions of this student as a reader in your classroom when reading individually with you.

6. How do you believe this child perceives him/herself as a reader?

7. How would you describe this child's overall motivation to read?

I greatly appreciate you taking the time to respond to the above questions. Please return your completed perception survey to Laura Carino.

Appendix D: Student Participant Reading Perception Survey (Post Reading Pilot)

1. Reading books at home makes me:

_____ happy _____ sad _____ nervous _____ excited

2. Reading books at school makes me:

_____ happy _____ sad _____ nervous _____ excited

3. I think reading is:

_____ very important _____ a little bit important _____ not important

4. I think that I am a:

_____ great reader _____ good reader _____ OK reader _____ bad reader

5. If I could choose, I would want to read:

_____ aloud for others to hear me _____ in my head by myself

6. Did you like reading to Max? Why or why not?

7. How did Max make you feel as you read out loud?

8. What was the best part about reading to Max? What was your least favorite part?

Appendix E: Student Interview Protocol (Post Reading Pilot)

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

Interview Setting:

Interviewer Name:

Interviewee Pseudonym:

Interviewer: Now that you have read to Max, I want to learn more about how you felt about reading with him. I'm going to ask you a few questions. All you need to do is be honest and share your true feelings with me. There are no right or wrong answers. If it's ok with you, I'd like to begin recording so I can play back and listen to what you told me. Do you have any questions? If not, let's begin.

Interviewer asks the following questions:

1. Tell me about how you feel about reading in school.
2. How did you feel about reading to Max?
3. How did Max make you feel as you read?
4. Did reading to Max help you? Follow up: If so, how did it help?
5. Do you want to be a good reader? Follow up: Can you tell me why you answered that way?
6. Do you think you can be a good reader? Follow up: Why do you (or do you not) think so?
7. Would you want to keep reading to Max? Follow up: If so, why?
8. Do you think reading is really easy, a little bit easy, a little bit hard, or really hard for you? Follow up: Can you tell me why you think that?
9. What was the best thing about reading to Max? What was the worst thing?
10. Do you think that reading to Max changed how you feel about reading? Follow up: If so, how?

Interviewer: Thank you so much for answering my questions. I hope you enjoyed reading with Max. Audio recording ends at this point.

Appendix F: Final Teacher Perception Survey (Post Reading Pilot)

Teacher Name: _____ Teacher Grade Level: _____

Directions: Please respond to the statements listed below. Be as specific as possible. If you did not notice any changes, please write “No change” as your answer.

1. Please describe your perceptions regarding any observable changes in this student’s overall motivation toward reading since the start of the therapy dog reading pilot.
2. Please describe your perceptions regarding any observable changes in this student when reading aloud in a whole group setting.
3. Please describe your perceptions regarding any observable changes in this student when reading aloud in a small group.
4. Please describe your perceptions regarding any observable changes in this student when reading individually with you.
5. Do you believe that this child’s perceptions of him/herself as a reader changed? If so, how?
6. Do you believe that this child’s reading attitude changed? What led you to this belief?
7. Please note any other significant observation or change in this student after the start of the therapy dog reading pilot.

I greatly appreciate you taking the time to respond to the above questions. Please return your completed perception survey to Laura Carino.

Appendix G: Parent/Guardian Perception Survey (Post Reading Pilot)

Child Name: _____ Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Directions: Please respond to the statements listed below. Be as specific as possible. If you did not notice any changes, please write “No change” as your answer.

1. How would you have described your child as a reader prior to beginning to read to our school therapy dog?
2. Please describe your perceptions regarding any observable changes in your child’s overall motivation toward reading since the start of the therapy dog reading pilot.
3. Please describe your perceptions regarding any observable changes in your child when reading aloud to you at home.
4. Please describe your perceptions regarding any observable changes in your child when reading independently at home.
5. Do you believe that your child’s perceptions of him/herself as a reader changed? If so, how?
6. Do you believe that your child’s reading attitude changed? What led you to this belief?
7. Do you believe there have been any changes in your child’s motivation to read? If so, what have you observed?
8. Please note any other significant observation or change in your child after the start of the therapy dog reading pilot.

I greatly appreciate you taking the time to respond to the above questions. Please return your completed perception survey to Laura Carino.

Appendix H: IRB Approval Letter

Mar 24, 2022 2:32:20 EDT

James Berry
Leadership and Counsel

Re: Modification – UHSRC-FY21-22-141 Exploring the Influence of a School-Based Therapy Dog Reading Program on Reluctant Readers' Motivation to Read and Reading Fluency in the K-4 Setting.

Dear Dr. James Berry:

The Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Board has rendered the decision below for Exploring the Influence of a School-Based Therapy Dog Reading Program on Reluctant Readers' Motivation to Read and Reading Fluency in the K-4 Setting.

Decision: Approved

You must use your stamped documents.

To access your stamped documents, follow these steps: 1. Open up the Dashboard; 2. Scroll down to the Approved Studies box; 3. Click on your study ID link; 4. Click on "Attachments" in the bottom box next to "Key Contacts"; 5. Click on the three dots next to the attachment filename; 6. Select Download.

Please contact human.subjects@emich.edu with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee

Appendix I: Letter to Superintendent of School District

Dear [Superintendent's Name]:

I am writing to share information with you about a mixed methods study I would like to conduct to explore the influence of a school-based therapy dog reading program on reluctant readers' motivation to read and reading fluency in the K-4 setting as part of my doctoral research. I am requesting permission to proceed with the participant recruitment process, which will begin with connecting with elementary classroom teachers and the literacy interventionist at [Name of School] to identify reluctant readers in their classrooms. Once students have been identified, permission to participate will be extended to their parents/guardians. Additionally, I have followed the Institutional Review Board and Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee approval process through Eastern Michigan University.

The purpose of my research study is to collect perception data from students, teachers, and parents/guardians to explore how reading to a therapy dog affects the students' motivation to read and their reading fluency. I will observe all therapy dog reading sessions. Data collection will consist of observation notes taken during the therapy dog reading sessions, interviews with students, perception surveys completed by students, teachers, and parents/guardians, as well as pre- and post-fluency assessment data. I plan on obtaining initial consent from all involved parties in January and subsequently conducting the research from January through March.

Should you have any questions, wish to discuss this study in further detail, or are willing to grant permission for me to begin the recruitment process in the [Name of School District], please contact me by email. I would be happy to meet with you to provide additional information.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

With appreciation,

Laura A. Carino, Ed.S.

[Phone number]

[Email address]

Appendix J: Parental Consent Form

Project Title: Exploring the Influence of a School-Based Therapy Dog Reading Program on Reluctant Readers' Motivation to Read and Reading Fluency in the K-4 Setting.

Principal Investigator: Dr. James Berry, Eastern Michigan University

Co-Investigator: Laura Carino, Eastern Michigan University

Invitation to participate in research

Your child is invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, your child must be a student at Parkview Elementary School receiving literacy intervention and be willing to participate in reading sessions to our school therapy dog. Participation in research is voluntary. Please ask any questions you have about participation in this study.

Important information about this study

- The purpose of the study is to explore the influence of our school-based therapy dog reading program on students' motivation to read and reading fluency in the K-4 setting. The study will help educators determine how a therapy dog reading program can best be utilized in elementary schools.
- Participation in this study involves your child completing a baseline perception survey about his/her motivation to read, being interviewed about their perceptions about reading, and being assessed in reading fluency. The interviews will be audio recorded to allow the researcher the opportunity to go back and review your child's comments. Your child will then engage in twelve sessions with our school therapy dog, during which they will read aloud to him. The reading sessions will take place during the school day for 10 minutes each, two times each week for a six-week period at Parkview Elementary School. Following the twelve sessions, your child will again complete a similar perception survey about their motivation to read, be interviewed to explore any changes in his/her motivation to read, and will take another fluency assessment for comparative purposes. The interview will again be audio recorded to allow the researcher the ability to go back and review your child's comments.
- There are minimal risks to those who participate in this study because our therapy dog has been trained and properly certified. However, there is always a chance that your child could experience allergies as a result of his/her interactions with the therapy dog. Additionally, although extremely unlikely due to the therapy dog training and certification process, there is a chance that the dog could act aggressively toward your child and even bite him/her. As your child's interview will be audio recorded, there is also a minimal risk that he/she could be identified by voice.

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141
Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022

- The investigator will protect your confidentiality by securing all documents only accessible by the researcher in a file on her computer which is password protected or in a secured filing cabinet in her office. The records of this study will remain confidential by removing all names and replacing them with a fictitious name, only identifiable by the researcher.
- Participation in this research is voluntary. Your child does not have to participate, and if you and your child decide to participate, you or your child can stop at any time.

What is this study about?

The purpose of the study is to determine if reading to a therapy dog at school has an effect on students' reading attitude and motivation to read, as well as their reading fluency.

What will happen if my child participates in this study?

Participation in this study involves

- Visit 1: Your child will complete a baseline perception survey in his/her classroom about his/her motivation to read. This will take approximately 10 minutes.
- Visit 2: Your child will be interviewed by the Primary Investigator about their perceptions about reading. This will take approximately 20 minutes.
- Visit 3: Your child will be assessed in reading fluency by our literacy interventionist. This will take approximately 3 minutes.
- Visit 4: Your child will have an introductory session with our therapy dog to become acquainted with him. This will take approximately 10 minutes.
- Visits 5 – 12: Your child will bring text(s) at his/her reading level to a designated classroom space to read to the therapy dog. This will take approximately 10 minutes.
- Visit 13: Your child will complete a perception survey in his/her classroom about his/her motivation to read. This will take approximately 10 minutes.
- Visit 14: Your child will be interviewed by the Primary Investigator about their perceptions about reading. This will take approximately 20 minutes.
- Visit 15: Your child will be assessed in reading fluency by our literacy interventionist. This will take approximately 3 minutes.
- Each reading session with the therapy dog will last ten minutes. Your child will participate two times a week for a total 6-week period.
- Each interview will be audio recorded to allow the researcher the ability to go back and review your child's comments.
- Additionally, as your child's parent/guardian, you will be asked to complete a survey about how you perceive your child as a reader before the therapy dog sessions.
- Finally, as your child's parent/guardian, you will be asked to complete a survey about how you perceive your child as a reader after the therapy dog sessions.

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| <p>Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141 Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022</p> |
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We would like to audio record your child for this study. If your child is audio recorded, it will be possible to identify him or her through his or her voice. If you agree to allow your child to be audio recorded, sign the appropriate line at the bottom of this form. If you do not agree to be audio recorded, your child may not be eligible to participate in this study.

What are the anticipated risks for participation?

There are no expected physical or psychological risks to participation. However, when working with animals such as a dog, there is always a chance that the dog acts aggressively toward your child. The primary risk of participation in this study is a potential loss of confidentiality.

Are there any benefits to participating?

A potential benefit to your child is an additional 120 minutes of time spent reading aloud and additional fluency assessments to analyze reading progress.

How will my child's information be kept confidential?

We plan to publish the results of this study. We will not publish any information that can identify your child.

We will keep your child's information confidential by using the following confidentiality measure: using a code to label your child's data with the code linked to identifiable information in a key stored separately from your child's data. Your child's information will be stored in a file on the primary investigator's computer which is password protected or in a secured filing cabinet in her office. The records of this study will remain confidential by removing all names and replacing them with a fictitious name, only identifiable by the researcher.

We will make every effort to keep your child's information confidential, however, we cannot guarantee confidentiality. Other groups may have access to your child's research information for quality control or safety purposes. These groups include the University Human Subjects Review Committee, the Office of Research Development, the sponsor of the research, or federal and state agencies that oversee the review of research, including the Office for Human Research Protections and the Food and Drug Administration. The University Human Subjects Review Committee reviews research for the safety and protection of people who participate in research studies.

If, during your participation in this study, we have reason to believe that elder abuse or child abuse is occurring, or if we have reason to believe that your child is at risk for being suicidal or otherwise harming him/herself or others, we must report this to authorities as required by law. We will make every effort to keep your research information confidential. However, it may be required by law that we have to release your research information. If this were to occur, we would not be able to protect your confidentiality.

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| <p>Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141 Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022</p> |
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Storing study information for future use

We will store your information to study in the future. Your child's information will be labeled with a code and not your child's name. Your child's information will be stored in a password-protected or locked file.

We may share your child's information with other researchers without asking for your permission, but the shared information will never contain information that could identify you or your child.

What are the alternatives to participation?

The alternative is not to participate.

Are there any costs to participation?

Participation will not cost you or your child anything.

Will my child be paid for participation?

Your child will not be paid to participate in this research study.

Study contact information

If you or your child has any questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. James Berry at jberry@emich.edu or 734-487-0255 or Laura Carino, at laura.carino@novik12.org or by phone at 248-449-1222.

For questions about your child's rights as a research subject, contact the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

Voluntary participation

Participation in this research study is your and your child's choice. Your child either will be asked independently for assent or his or her dissent will be respected. You and your child may refuse to participate at any time, even after signing this form, with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you and your child are otherwise entitled. You and your child may choose to leave the study at any time with no loss of benefits to which you and your child are otherwise entitled. If you and your child leave the study, the information your child provided will be kept confidential. You and your child may request, in writing, that your child's identifiable information be destroyed. However, we cannot destroy any information that has already been published.

Statement of Consent

I have read this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the answers I received. I give my consent to for my child to participate in this research study.

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141
Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022

Signatures

Name of Parent/Guardian

Name of Child Subject

Signature of Parent/Guardian of Child Subject

Date

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all their questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject.

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141
Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022

Appendix K: Informed Consent Form to Parents/Guardians of Identified Student Participants

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Invitation to participate in research

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, your child must be a student at Parkview Elementary receiving literacy intervention and participating in this research study as student subjects. Participation in research is voluntary. Please ask any questions you have about participation in this study.

Important information about this study

- The purpose of the study is to explore the influence of our school-based therapy dog reading program on students' motivation to read and reading fluency in the K-4 setting. The study will help educators determine how a therapy dog reading program can best be utilized in elementary schools.
- Participation in this study involves being asked to complete a survey about how you perceive your child as a reader after the therapy dog sessions.
- There are no expected physical or psychological risks as a result of your participation.
- The researcher will protect your confidentiality by securing all documents only accessible by the researcher in a file on her computer which is password protected or in a secured filing cabinet in her office. The records of this study will remain confidential by removing all names and replacing them with a fictitious name, only identifiable by the researcher.
- Participation in this research is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and if you decide to participate, you can stop at any time.

What is this study about?

The purpose of the study is to determine if reading to a therapy dog at school has an effect on students' reading attitude and motivation to read, as well as their reading fluency.

What will happen if I participate in this study?

Participation in this study involves completing a survey about how you perceive your child as a reader after the therapy dog reading sessions. This survey should be able to be completed in one sitting, taking no more than 30 minutes.

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141
Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022

What types of data will be collected?

We will collect data about your perceptions about your child as a reader and any changes that you may have observed after your child reads to the therapy dog.

What are the expected risks for participation?

There are no expected physical or psychological risks to participation.

Are there any benefits to participating?

An indirect benefit to you is that by participating, your child will engage in an additional 120 minutes of time spent reading aloud and additional fluency assessments to analyze reading progress.

How will my information be kept confidential?

We plan to publish the results of this study. We will not publish any information that can identify you.

We will keep your information confidential by using a code to label your data with the code linked to identifiable information in a key stored separately from your data. Your information will be stored in a file on the primary investigator's computer which is password protected or in a secured filing cabinet in her office. The records of this study will remain confidential by removing all names and replacing them with a fictitious name, only identifiable by the researcher. We will store your information for at least five years after this project ends, but we may store your information indefinitely.

We will make every effort to keep your information confidential, however, we cannot guarantee confidentiality. The researcher and the research team will have access to the information you provide for research purposes only. Other groups may have access to your research information for quality control or safety purposes. These groups include the University Human Subjects Review Committee, the Office of Research Development, the sponsor of the research, or federal and state agencies that oversee the review of research, including the Office for Human Research Protections and the Food and Drug Administration. The University Human Subjects Review Committee reviews research for the safety and protection of people who participate in research studies.

If, during your participation in this study, we have reason to believe that elder abuse or child abuse is occurring, or if we have reason to believe that you are at risk for being suicidal or otherwise harming yourself or others, we must report this to authorities as required by law. We will make every effort to keep your research information confidential. However, it may be required by law that we have to release your research information. If this were to occur, we would not be able to protect your confidentiality.

Storing study information for future use

We will store your information to study in the future. Your information will be labeled with a code and not your name. Your information will be stored in a password-protected or locked file and will be stored indefinitely.

We may share your information with other researchers without asking for your permission, but the shared information will never contain information that could identify you. We will send your de-identified information by email and only upon request.

What are the alternatives to participation?

The alternative is not to participate.

Are there any costs to participation?

Participation will not cost you anything.

Will I be paid for participation?

You will not be paid to participate in this research study.

Study contact information

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. James Berry at jberry@emich.edu or 734-487-0255 or Laura Carino, at laura.carino@novik12.org or by phone at 248-449-1222.

For questions about your rights as a research subject, contact the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

Voluntary participation

Participation in this research study is your choice. You may refuse to participate at any time, even after signing this form, without repercussion. You may choose to leave the study at any time without repercussion. If you leave the study, the information you provided will be kept confidential. You may request, in writing, that your identifiable information be destroyed. However, we cannot destroy any information that has already been published.

Statement of Consent

I have read this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the answers I received. I give my consent to participate and to allow my child to participate in this research study.

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| <p>Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141 Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022</p> |
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Signatures

Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all their questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject.

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141
Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022

Appendix L: Informed Consent Form to Classroom Teacher of Identified Student Participants

Dear Teacher,

Invitation to participate in research

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a teacher at Parkview Elementary School and one (or more) of your students must be receiving literacy intervention and participating in this research study as student subjects. Participation in research is voluntary. Please ask any questions you have about participation in this study.

Important information about this study

- The purpose of the study is to explore the influence of our school-based therapy dog reading program on students' motivation to read and reading fluency in the K-4 setting. The study will help educators determine how a therapy dog reading program can best be utilized in elementary schools.
- Participation in this study involves being asked to complete 2 surveys, one about how you perceive your student as a reader before the therapy dog reading sessions and the second about how you perceive your student as a reader after the therapy dog sessions.
- There are no expected physical or psychological risks as a result of your participation.
- The investigator will protect your confidentiality by securing all documents only accessible by the researcher in a file on her computer which is password protected or in a secured filing cabinet in her office. The records of this study will remain confidential by removing all names and replacing them with a fictitious name, only identifiable by the researcher.
- Participation in this research is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and if you decide to participate, you can stop at any time.

What is this study about?

The purpose of the study is to determine if reading to a therapy dog at school has an effect on students' reading attitude and motivation to read, as well as their reading fluency.

What will happen if I participate in this study?

Participation in this study involves completing 2 surveys about how you perceive your student as a reader after the therapy dog reading sessions. These surveys should be able to be completed in two sittings, taking no more than 30 minutes each time.

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UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141
Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022

What types of data will be collected?

We will collect data about your perceptions about your student as a reader, his/her fluency assessment scores, and any changes that you may have observed as a result of your student reading to the therapy dog.

What are the expected risks for participation?

There are no expected physical or psychological risks to participation.

Are there any benefits to participating?

You will not directly benefit from participating in this research. However, there is the potential to contribute to the field of education if this research provides additional instructional tools to support struggling, reluctant readers in schools.

How will my information be kept confidential?

We plan to publish the results of this study. We will not publish any information that can identify you.

We will keep your information confidential by using a code to label your data with the code linked to identifiable information in a key stored separately from your data. Your information will be stored in a file on the primary investigator's computer which is password protected or in a secured filing cabinet in her office. The records of this study will remain confidential by removing all names and replacing them with a fictitious name, only identifiable by the researcher. We will store your information for at least five years after this project ends, but we may store your information indefinitely.

We will make every effort to keep your information confidential, however, we cannot guarantee confidentiality. The researcher and the research team will have access to the information you provide for research purposes only. Other groups may have access to your research information for quality control or safety purposes. These groups include the University Human Subjects Review Committee, the Office of Research Development, the sponsor of the research, or federal and state agencies that oversee the review of research, including the Office for Human Research Protections and the Food and Drug Administration. The University Human Subjects Review Committee reviews research for the safety and protection of people who participate in research studies.

If, during your participation in this study, we have reason to believe that elder abuse or child abuse is occurring, or if we have reason to believe that you are at risk for being suicidal or otherwise harming yourself or others, we must report this to authorities as required by law. We will make every effort to keep your research information confidential. However, it may be required by law that we have to release your research information. If this were to occur, we would not be able to protect your confidentiality.

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| <p>Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141 Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022</p> |
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Storing study information for future use

We will store your information to study in the future. Your information will be labeled with a code and not your name. Your information will be stored in a password-protected or locked file and will be stored indefinitely.

We may share your information with other researchers without asking for your permission, but the shared information will never contain information that could identify you. We will send your de-identified information by email and only upon request.

What are the alternatives to participation?

The alternative is not to participate.

Are there any costs to participation?

Participation will not cost you anything.

Will I be paid for participation?

You will not be paid to participate in this research study.

Study contact information

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. James Berry at jberry@emich.edu or 734-487-0255 or Laura Carino, at laura.carino@novik12.org or by phone at 248-449-1222.

For questions about your rights as a research subject, contact the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

Voluntary participation

Participation in this research study is your choice. You may refuse to participate at any time, even after signing this form, without repercussion. You may choose to leave the study at any time without repercussion. If you leave the study, the information you provided will be kept confidential. You may request, in writing, that your identifiable information be destroyed. However, we cannot destroy any information that has already been published.

Statement of Consent

I have read this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the answers I received. I give my consent to participate and to allow my child to participate in this research study.

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| <p>Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141 Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022</p> |
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Signatures

Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all their questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject.

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141
Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022

Appendix M: Informed Consent Form to Building Literacy Interventionist of Identified Student Participants

Dear Literacy Interventionist,

Invitation to participate in research

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a literacy interventionist at Parkview Elementary School providing literacy intervention to students participating in this research study as student subjects. Participation in research is voluntary. Please ask any questions you have about participation in this study.

Important information about this study

- The purpose of the study is to explore the influence of our school-based therapy dog reading program on students' motivation to read and reading fluency in the K-4 setting. The study will help educators determine how a therapy dog reading program can best be utilized in elementary schools.
- Participation in this study involves you administering a fluency assessment both before and after each student subject's twelve therapy dog reading sessions. Additionally, your participation includes being interviewed about each of the student subjects after the therapy dog reading sessions have concluded, specifically about your observations of their reading behaviors, your perceptions about their motivation to read, and observations of their oral fluency progress.
- There are no expected physical or psychological risks as a result of your participation.
- The investigator will protect your confidentiality by securing all documents only accessible by the researcher in a file on her computer which is password protected or in a secured filing cabinet in her office. The records of this study will remain confidential by removing all names and replacing them with a fictitious name, only identifiable by the researcher.
- Participation in this research is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and if you decide to participate, you can stop at any time.

What is this study about?

The purpose of the study is to determine if reading to a therapy dog at school has an effect on students' reading attitude and motivation to read, as well as their reading fluency.

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UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141
Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022

What will happen if I participate in this study?

Participation in this study involves you administering a fluency assessment both before and after each student subject's twelve therapy dog reading sessions. Each assessment can be conducted in one sitting per child, for a total of no more than 16. Each assessment takes approximately one minute to administer. Additionally, your participation includes being interviewed about each of the student subjects after the therapy dog reading sessions have concluded, specifically about your observations of their reading behaviors, your perceptions about their motivation to read, and observations of their oral fluency progress. These interviews should be able to be completed in one to two sessions, taking no more than 40 minutes each session.

What types of data will be collected?

We will collect data about your perceptions about your students as readers, their fluency assessment scores, and any changes that you may have observed as a result of your students reading to the therapy dog.

What are the expected risks for participation?

There are no expected physical or psychological risks to participation.

Are there any benefits to participating?

You will not directly benefit from participating in this research. However, there is the potential to contribute to the field of education if this research provides additional instructional tools to support struggling, reluctant readers in schools.

How will my information be kept confidential?

We plan to publish the results of this study. We will not publish any information that can identify you.

We will keep your information confidential by using a code to label your data with the code linked to identifiable information in a key stored separately from your data. Your information will be stored in a file on the primary investigator's computer which is password protected or in a secured filing cabinet in her office. The records of this study will remain confidential by removing all names and replacing them with a fictitious name, only identifiable by the researcher. We will store your information for at least five years after this project ends, but we may store your information indefinitely.

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141
Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022

We will make every effort to keep your information confidential, however, we cannot guarantee confidentiality. The researcher and the research team will have access to the information you provide for research purposes only. Other groups may have access to your research information for quality control or safety purposes. These groups include the University Human Subjects Review Committee, the Office of Research Development, the sponsor of the research, or federal and state agencies that oversee the review of research, including the Office for Human Research Protections and the Food and Drug Administration. The University Human Subjects Review

Committee reviews research for the safety and protection of people who participate in research studies.

If, during your participation in this study, we have reason to believe that elder abuse or child abuse is occurring, or if we have reason to believe that you are at risk for being suicidal or otherwise harming yourself or others, we must report this to authorities as required by law. We will make every effort to keep your research information confidential. However, it may be required by law that we have to release your research information. If this were to occur, we would not be able to protect your confidentiality.

Storing study information for future use

We will store your information to study in the future. Your information will be labeled with a code and not your name. Your information will be stored in a password-protected or locked file and will be stored indefinitely.

We may share your information with other researchers without asking for your permission, but the shared information will never contain information that could identify you. We will send your de-identified information by email and only upon request.

What are the alternatives to participation?

The alternative is not to participate.

Are there any costs to participation?

Participation will not cost you anything.

Will I be paid for participation?

You will not be paid to participate in this research study.

Study contact information

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. James Berry at jberry@emich.edu or 734-487-0255 or Laura Carino, at laura.carino@novik12.org or by phone at 248-449-1222.

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| <p>Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141 Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022</p> |
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For questions about your rights as a research subject, contact the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

Voluntary participation

Participation in this research study is your choice. You may refuse to participate at any time, even after signing this form, without repercussion. You may choose to leave the study at any time without repercussion. If you leave the study, the information you provided will be kept confidential. You may request, in writing, that your identifiable information be destroyed. However, we cannot destroy any information that has already been published.

Statement of Consent

I have read this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the answers I received. I give my consent to participate and to allow my child to participate in this research study.

Signatures

Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all their questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject.

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141
Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022

Appendix N: Informed Consent Image Use Form to Parents/Guardians of Identified Student Participants

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| Protocol Title: Exploring the Influence of a School-Based Therapy Dog Reading Program on Reluctant Readers' Motivation to Read and Reading Fluency in the K-4 Setting. |
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| Principal Investigator: Dr. Jim Berry (Laura Carino – Doctoral Student) |
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Image Use Consent Form

As part of this research study, we have made image recordings of your child (photographs). With your consent, we would like to be able to use your child's image recordings for different purposes. You are free to agree to any number of the purposes below from none to all. Agreeing to the use of your image is voluntary and will not affect your participation in the main study.

We will only use the image recordings in ways that you agree to. In any use of these image recordings, your child's name will not be identified. If you do not initial any of the spaces below, we will destroy the recordings.

Please indicate below what uses you agree to:

- The **photographs** can be studied by the research team for use in the research study.
Please initial: _____

- The **photographs** can be used for scientific publications.
Please initial: _____

- The **photographs** can be shown at meetings of scientists interested in the study of students reading to therapy dogs in school.
Please initial: _____

- The **photographs** can be shown in public presentations to non-scientific groups.
Please initial: _____

If at any time in the future, you change your mind about allowing us to use your recordings, please notify us by calling the numbers below.

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| <p>Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141 Study Approval Date: 03/24/2022</p> |
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Study Contact Information

You can call us with any concerns or questions. Our telephone numbers are listed below:

Laura Carino (248) 449-1222

Dr. James Berry (734) 487-0255

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or want to speak with someone independent of the research team, you may contact the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee at 734-487-3090 or human.subjects@emich.edu.

Statement of Consent

I have read the information in this consent form including risks and possible benefits. I have been given the chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree for the images of my child to be used as indicated above. I have been given a copy of this form.

SIGNATURE

Name of Parent/Guardian

Name of Child Subject

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all his/her questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject.

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141
Study Approval Date: 03/24/2022

Appendix O: Assent Script for Student Subjects

Introduction

- My name is Mrs. Carino and I am doing a research study to learn more about if reading to a therapy dog at school has an effect on students' reading attitude and motivation to read, as well as their reading fluency. Research studies help us answer questions and learn more about things we don't know.
- I'm going to tell you a little about my study. You can ask me questions about the study at any time. After I tell you about my study, you can let me know if you want to be in it.

Study Procedures

- If you want to be in the study, we will ask you to answer some questions in a survey and an interview about how you think about yourself as a reader. You will also read a fluency passage in literacy intervention. You will read to our therapy dog, Max, for 12 times over a 6-week period. Each time will be for 10 minutes. After those sessions are over, you will answer some more questions in a survey and an interview about how you think about yourself as a reader and how you feel about reading. You will also read another fluency passage.

Risks/Confidentiality

- I will do my best to make sure that the information you give me for this study is private, but people might find out some information about you.
- You might not want to answer some of the questions I ask you. This is ok. You do not have to answer any questions you don't like.
- Max, our therapy dog, is very well behaved, but there is always a chance that he could get scared or angry and act aggressively. He may also cause you to have allergies if you are allergic to dogs.
- If during our time together, you share anything that is dangerous or could hurt you or other people, I will need to report that information.

Voluntary Participation

- It is your choice to participate. You can say "Yes" or "No."
- No one will be mad or unhappy if you say "No."
- You can say "Yes" and then say "No" later if you want to stop.
- You can say "No" at any time.
- You can ask me any questions at any time about this study.

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141
Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022

Assent

- Do you have any questions right now?
- Would you like to be in this study?
- Is it ok if I record your voice for the study?

Appendix P: Recruitment Letter to Classroom Teacher

Dear Colleague,

As you know, I am currently working toward earning my doctoral degree in educational leadership and am in the process of writing my dissertation. I am studying the influence of a school-based therapy dog reading program on students' motivation to read and reading fluency in the K-4 setting. I will be selecting struggling, reluctant readers who are currently receiving literacy intervention as student subjects. Their fluency will be assessed through pre- and post- assessments both before and after their twelve therapy dog reading sessions. Students will complete a written survey and engage in an interview with me so I can gain more information about their perception of themselves as a reader and learn about their motivation to read. Our literacy interventionist will be interviewed to provide her perceptions about each students' reading behaviors and motivation to read. Additionally, the students' parents/guardians will complete a written survey to share their observations and any perceived potential changes that they saw in their child during the time in which they read to the therapy dog.

I am requesting your participation to gain your perception as their teacher. Your participation will consist of completing two written surveys, one before, and one after, your student(s) completes the therapy dog reading sessions.

I am attaching a formal informed consent form to more deeply explain the study and your participation. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would be happy to discuss the study in greater detail and answer any questions or address any concerns you may have. If you consent to participating in the study, I ask that you return the signed consent form within 7 days from the receipt of this letter. I sincerely appreciate your consideration.

Kind regards,

Laura A. Carino, Ed.S.

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141
Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022

Appendix Q: Recruitment Letter to Literacy Interventionist

Dear Colleague,

As you know, I am currently working toward earning my doctoral degree in educational leadership and am in the process of writing my dissertation. I am studying the influence of a school-based therapy dog reading program on students' motivation to read and reading fluency in the K-4 setting. I will be selecting struggling, reluctant readers who are currently receiving literacy intervention as student subjects. Their fluency will be assessed through pre- and post- assessments both before and after their twelve therapy dog reading sessions. Students will complete a written survey and engage in an interview with me so I can gain more information about their perception of themselves as a reader and learn about their motivation to read. Additionally, their classroom teachers and parents/guardians will complete written surveys to share their observations and any perceived potential changes that they saw in the students during the time in which they read to the therapy dog.

I am requesting your participation to gain your perception as their literacy interventionist. As you read with each of these students on a daily basis, you are very knowledgeable about their attitude toward reading, their motivation to read, and their overall ability. Your participation will consist of administering two fluency assessments to each student subject, one before and one after the therapy dog reading sessions and participating in an interview with me about each of the student participants after the therapy dog reading sessions in order for me to gain more information about your perceptions of the influence that reading to the therapy dog had on each child.

I am attaching a formal informed consent form to more deeply explain the study and your participation. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would be happy to discuss the study in greater detail and answer any questions or address any concerns you may have. If you consent to participating in the study, I ask that you return the signed consent form within 7 days from the receipt of this letter. I sincerely appreciate your consideration.

Kind regards,

Laura A. Carino, Ed.S.

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| <p>Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY21-22-141 Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022</p> |
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Appendix R: Recruitment Letter to Parent/Guardian of Potential Student Subject

Dear [Elementary School] Parent/Guardian,

As you may know, I am currently working toward earning my doctoral degree in educational leadership at Eastern Michigan University and am in the final process of writing my dissertation with the support of my adviser, Dr. James Berry. I am studying the influence of a school-based therapy dog reading program on students' motivation to read and reading fluency in the K-4 setting. I will be selecting students who are currently receiving literacy intervention and have been identified as reluctant readers as student subjects. Each student will read to the therapy dog for 12 ten-minute sessions over the course of 6 weeks. Their fluency will be assessed through pre- and post- assessments both before and after their twelve therapy dog reading sessions. Students will complete a written survey and engage in an interview with me so I can gain more information about their perception of themselves as a reader and learn about their motivation to read. Our literacy interventionist will be interviewed to provide her perceptions about each students' reading behaviors and motivation to read. Additionally, the students' teachers will complete a written survey to share their observations and any perceived potential changes that they saw in their student during the time in which they read to the therapy dog. Finally, each child's parents/guardians will complete a survey to provide their feedback about their perception of their child as a reader.

I am requesting your consent to allow your child to participate in this study and am also seeking your participation to better understand your perception of your child as a reader from a parent/guardian perspective. Your participation will consist of completing a written survey after your child completes the therapy dog reading sessions.

I am attaching an official informed consent form and parental consent form to more thoroughly explain the study and your participation. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I would be happy to discuss the study in greater detail and answer any questions or address any concerns you may have. If you provide consent for both you and your child to participate in the study, I ask that you return the signed consent forms within 7 days from the receipt of this letter. I sincerely appreciate your consideration.

Kind regards,

Laura A. Carino, Ed.S.

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
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Study Approval Date: 02/08/2022

Appendix S: Images Captured During Reading Sessions

