



Reading is Ruff: Therapy Dogs and L2 Reading Engagement

Presented by

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Presentation Abstract:

Developing literacy in English is vital to English language learners' (ELLs) success in all academic arenas in today's schools and beyond, especially given that lower levels of literacy proficiency correlate to poor testing performance, increased grade retention, decreased graduation rates, and diminished access to better wages and jobs (August & Shanahan, 2006; Wrigley, Chen, White, & Soroui, 2009). With less than a quarter of ELLs scoring above the norm on high-stakes reading tests (August & Shanahan, 2006) and roughly 10% of students in schools in the United States designated as ELLs, it has never been more important to explore ways in which literacy development can be facilitated in second language (L2) learners. For ELLs, early reading intervention in elementary school to develop reading skills and proficiency may prove critical to fostering long-term academic success (Gyovai, Cartledge, Kourea, Yurick, & Gibson, 2009; Lonigan, Farver, Nakamoto, & Eppe, 2013; Rivera, Moughamian, Lesaux, & Francis, 2008). Research has revealed that instruction must go beyond discrete skills so that ELLs become engaged and motivated readers, and may more fully realize the benefits of reading intervention (Cummins, 2012; Taboada, Tonks, Wigfield, & Guthrie, 2009). Struggling readers greatly benefit from interventions that provide extensive, engaged guided reading practice where students are actively involved in their developmental processes (Denton, 2012). Alternative reading intervention programs that go beyond the traditional classroom may provide ELLs who are struggling readers greater opportunities for extensive practice in an environment that is both engaging and pedagogically sound. One such intervention approach is found with canine-assisted reading programs (CARPs). CARPs employ a one-on-one guided reading approach that focuses on reading aloud to a therapy dog, and target K-3 learners who typically struggle with engaging in reading (Intermountain Therapy Animals, 2014). Since their inception in 1999, research into CARPs has highlighted a pattern of physiological, psychological, cognitive, and educational benefits, and improvements in discrete and text-level skills in tandem with increases in motivation and reading engagement (Fisher & Cozens, 2014; Friesen, 2009; Jalongo, Astorino, & Bomboy, 2004; Lane & Zavada, 2013; le Roux, Swartz, & Swart, 2014). This session aims to introduce to the audience reading education assistance dogs. The presenter will then discuss the findings of her mixed method single subject study examining the impact of this alternative intervention on the affective and behavioral reading engagement of an English language learner. Session attendees will have the unique opportunity to explore a creative, alternative approach to literacy education with one of the few experts in canine-assisted reading. The session will involve authentic, multiple media and active participation so that the audience can experience the affective boost and "magic" characteristic of animal-assisted intervention in education.

Keywords: English language learner, reading engagement, therapy dogs, canine-assisted reading, reading intervention, research

Target Instructional Levels: K-3



Learn more about these programs by visiting the Reading Education Assistance Dogs [website!](#)

Audiovisual Protocols

Both observation protocols below have been adapted from Lutz, Guthrie, and Davies (2006).

Affective Engagement

Rating	Description	Behavior
1	Clearly not engaged	Displays negative emotion; sighs; looks very bored; prolonged yawn; head completely down on desk or in hands
2	Difficult to tell	Even expression; head partially down but may still be looking toward teacher; responds in monotone
3	Engaged	Smiling (perhaps just briefly); looks pleased; appears interested; tone suggests some pride/interest
4	Highly engaged	Grins broadly or suddenly; tone suggests great excitement or interest; makes noises (e.g., "ooh") which suggest great interest

Behavioral Engagement

Rating	Description	Behavior
1	Clearly not engaged	Distracted by something unrelated to task; head completely down on desk or in hands (i.e., not participating in task); teacher has to tell student to get to work; prolonged yawn
2	Difficult to tell	Hard to judge whether student is truly behaviorally engaged; not off task, but does not appear particularly involved; eyes may or not be on teacher, but does not seem to really be following discussion or actively engaged in activity; may be slouching
3	Engaged	Clearly on-task, as suggested by eye movement and posture toward speaker; raising hand (perhaps just briefly) or showing desire to participate; writing; speaking; clearly listening (suggesting that student is attentive at least behaviorally)
4	Highly engaged	Waving hand; hand "shoots" into air to answer question; making noises that suggest great enthusiasm and eagerness to participate; otherwise seems "super-engaged"

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