

Humane Education, the Inner Worlds of Animals and Animal Assisted Therapy

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Abstract

This paper will explore humane education, the inner worlds of nonhuman animals and animal assisted therapy. Humane education must include the study of relations between nonhuman animals and human animals. In order to understand these relations scholars must acknowledge that nonhuman animals do indeed have inner worlds. Those who engage in what is called AAT or animal assisted therapy would benefit from the study of the inner worlds of animals. The literature on the inner worlds of animals (which is called ethology) is usually separate and apart from the literature on AAT or animal assisted therapy. Scholars should consider studying these two literatures side by side so as to flesh out in depth what humane education should be. We argue in this paper that nonhuman animals are not merely co-helpers but are therapists in their own right.

Keywords: humane education, inner worlds, nonhuman animals, animal assisted therapy

This paper will explore humane education, the inner worlds of nonhuman animals and animal assisted therapy. Humane education must include the study of relations between nonhuman animals and human animals. In order to understand these relations scholars must acknowledge that nonhuman animals do indeed have inner worlds. In fact, there may be an unconscious connection between companion animals and human animals. This unconscious relation is deep and even perhaps beyond language. Those who engage in what is called AAT or animal assisted therapy would benefit from the study of the inner worlds of animals. The literature on the inner worlds of animals (ethology) is usually separate and apart from the literature on AAT. The suggestion here is that these literatures should be studied together.

Most people who are involved in animal assisted therapy feel that nonhuman animals are co-helpers in the therapy process. We argue here that animals are more than that. We make the radical claim that nonhuman animals are therapists in their own right.

Some animal rights activists claim that AAT is unethical because it uses nonhuman animals for the benefit of human animals. In contradistinction to this claim we argue that as therapy dogs (or any other kind of animal) help human animals, human animals help therapy dogs as well. As we love nonhuman animals they love us in return. Animal assisted therapy is not a form of abuse. Rather, AAT—as conservation psychologists (Bekoff, 2013) might put it-- is about developing “reciprocal relationships” (p. 9).

1. Humane Education

Ethologist Marc Bekoff (2013) calls for humane education (p.11). For Bekoff, a humane education must include “respect, compassion, and love” for nonhuman animals (p.11). But there is more to it than this. Humane education is about the *inter-relations* between human animals and nonhuman animals.

In the field of education when thinking about humane education—in the context of relationships-- Paulo Freire (1996) comes to mind. Although Freire (1996) does not discuss nonhuman animals, he does discuss humane aspects of education. When studying Freire (1996), students might also think about how his ideas about education relate to nonhuman animals. Let us think about nonhuman animals in encounter with Freire (1996).

Freire suggests that humane education includes “profound contemplation” (p. 14), that both students and teachers are “producers of knowledge” (p. 15), that teaching is an “ethical” profession (p. 85), that teaching involves “responsibility” (p. 111), that teaching, reading and writing are “obligations” (p. 113), and that education generally speaking should be about an “awakening of conscience” (p. 126). Like people, nonhuman animals experience “profound contemplation” and are “producers of knowledge”; nonhuman animals behave in “ethical” ways and have certain “obligations” toward their kin; and nonhuman animals have “consciences.” This might seem absurd but if one consults especially literature on ethology findings suggest that these kinds of behaviors and attitudes in nonhuman animals are not uncommon. One of the reasons that many scholars do not know these things is because, as Paul Waldau (2013) points out,

“Western cultural heritage is weak on animal issues, and contemporary education, business, public policy, and the practice of scientific research are rooted in human-centered habits and traditions” (p. 12).

It is difficult to unmoor ourselves and move outside of humanist “traditions.” Certainly Freire’s (1996) ideas spring from a humanist position. A (post) humanist education must take into account other beings than ourselves. There are movements a foot (or a paw), however, that take the study of nonhuman animals seriously. Waldau (2013) tells us that

“Animal studies goes under a variety of other names today, including human-animal studies, animal humanities, animality studies, the human-animal bond, companion animal studies, anthrozoology, post humanism, critical animal studies, species critique, biopolitics and more” (p. 13).

Educationists must begin to think through our relations with nonhuman animals because we share the world with them. Education as a field must not remain stuck in the humanist paradigm or the field will not advance.

Now, humane education has been around for a long time but we are so human-centric that animals rarely make it into conversations in education or curriculum studies. But Anthony Podberscek, Elizabeth Paul and James Serpell (2000) argue that

“Attitudes to animals have changed, and, during the past three decades, the subject of relations between people and other animals has become a respectable area of research. The field of “anthrozoology”, art and literature, education, ethology, history, psychology, sociology, philosophy, and human and veterinary medicine [all take the study of animals seriously]” (p. 1).

After reading this lengthy list of disciplines that take discussions of nonhuman animals seriously, one might wonder why curriculum studies scholars have not dealt with the subject of nonhuman animals in any depth? Is curriculum studies stuck in a humanist paradigm? Scholars who work in post humanism and curriculum studies like Nathan Snaza and John Weaver (in press) are the few who do take the study of nonhuman animals seriously. But we need more sustained research on the subject at hand.

Scholars who work in the intersections between humane education and curriculum studies might re-work William Pinar’s (1994) method of *currere*. *Currere* is about subjectivity in relation to psychic movements which Pinar (1994) calls regression, progression, analysis and synthesis. Can we broaden the method of *currere* to include nonhuman animal subjectivity? Nonhuman animals have memories (regression), they understand the notion of the future when hunting for food or giving birth (progression); nonhuman animals analyze situations (working with tools) and synthesize their experiences (through teaching their young how to survive). Nonhuman animals experience subjectivity and in fact have “rich inner lives” (Pierce, 2012, p. 9). We will discuss this more in the next section. But it is enough to say for now that scholars must make room for nonhuman animals in their writings on curriculum. However, curriculum scholars must avoid the Disney-fication of animals in their work. Helen Pederson (2011) warns against the representation of nonhuman animals as symbols for a “compulsory heteroreproductive future” (p. 13) as is done in many Disney films. Likewise, Pederson (2011) argues that nonhuman animals should not be “sites of sentimentality” (p. 12). Pederson (2011) tells us that

“Animals as sites of sentimentality is a familiar topic in, primarily, early childhood education. Children’s books, animated media, and other modes of storytelling . . . are often imbued with more or less anthropomorphic representations of animals. In this context animals themselves are not the primary focus of interest; rather, they become carriers of normative messages connected to moralising or socializing processes. . .” (p. 13).

Humane education is certainly not about “moralizing” or “socializing.” Humane education is about our complex relations with other sentient beings.

These relations are uneasy—especially when thinking about wild animals—because at the end of the day we do not understand animality and yet human animals have many of the same psychic experiences that nonhuman animals have. Nonhuman animals share many of the same kind of emotions that we have, they are like us in more ways than we might think.

Teaching young children about nonhuman animals is no easy task. There are a few basic principles, though, that teachers should know when engaging in humane education. Nonhuman animals are not to be teased, bullied, laughed at, tortured. Disturbed children do in fact sometimes get pleasure out of torturing animals (Lockwood & Ascione, 1998). Animals are to be loved, taken care of and nourished. Animals are not like Christmas toys to be played with and later discarded out of boredom. Buying a puppy means making a serious commitment to and taking responsibility for the life of the dog. Adults need to know that taking care of a companion animal takes time, effort and involves frustration, joy, love, time and money. Lots of money. Some people spend more at the vet's office than they do for their own health care.

Raising a puppy becomes part of a child's education. The relationship the child builds with the puppy will have profound implications for how he/she will relate not only to other nonhuman animals in the future but also to human animals. It is well known in the literature on animal abuse that children who torture animals might grow up to be serial killers (Lockwood & Ascione, 1998). Much of our education about animals begins at home so it is the parents' responsibility to make clear to children that they must be kind and loving to their companions.

These questions about companion animals or even wild nonhuman animals are indeed educational questions. Helen Pederson (2011) argues that “[t]he attention to animals and animality in conceptualization of pedagogy, knowledge production and knowledge use requires us to seriously rework notions of humanity, animality, and interspecies entanglements as educational questions” (p. 21). However, much of public schooling in the United States has little to do with “interspecies entanglements.” Public schooling in the USA is all about standardized testing and has nothing to do with how children relate humanely to other creatures. And yet Marc Bekoff and Jessica Pierce (2009) claim that “[w]e're in an “animal moment.” “Cornell University historian Dominick LaCapra has claimed that the twenty-first century will be the century of the animal” (x).

2. Nonhuman Animal Inner Worlds

Marc Bekoff and Jessica Pierce (2009) claim that “[a]nimals not only have a sense of justice, but also a sense of empathy, forgiveness, trust, reciprocity, and much more as well” (xi). Nonhuman animals have complicated relations with other creatures and all is not “red in tooth and claw” (Bekoff & Pierce, (2009, xii). People who live with companion animals might be more sympathetic to these claims. Dogs might get into fights with one another but seem to get over it and move on. Is this forgiveness? When a companion animal is sick, others in his pack tend to him and take care of him. Is this empathy? Companion animals willingly allow vets to administer vaccines. Is this trust? Companion animals love human animals as human animals love companion animals. Is this reciprocity? Nonhuman animals are not merely objects but rather they are subjects with highly complex subjectivities and highly complex inner worlds. Nonhuman animals also inter-relate not only with their species specific partners but they also inter-relate with human animals. These relationships are built over time and are sometimes lasting beyond death (Pierce, 2013). Pierce (2013) points out that dogs will sometimes wait for their human companion to come home even though the human companion might be dead. Still dogs will wait—sometimes for years. This is perhaps a Beckettian moment. Companion animals can also sometimes sense when death is near. Pierce (2013) reports that a certain cat in a nursing home would always visit a dying person and somehow know that the person was in fact dying. When that person died the cat moved on to the next room and eerily predicted when the next nursing home patient would die. Is this called “animal wisdom” (Doll, 2013)? Frans De Waal (2013) tells us that there actually is an “emerging field of animal empathy, which deals not only with primates but also with canines, elephants, and even rodents” (p. 5). The notion of empathy implies that creatures are always already in-relationship. Nonhuman animals have an uncanny sense of the Other. Nonhuman animals do not live in a vacuum but live in complicated inner worlds that involve Others.

Studying the inner worlds of nonhuman animals is not a new endeavor. It is important to point out that Darwin wrote about this year ago (Allen & Bekoff, 1997). Today scientists who study animal behavior and the inner worlds of animals in the wild are called cognitive ethologists.

Allen and Bekoff (1997) tell us that

“Defined briefly, cognitive ethology refers to the comparative, evolutionary and ecological study of animal thought processes, beliefs, rationality, information processing, and consciousness. Cognitive ethology can trace its beginnings to the writings of Charles Darwin. . .” (ix).

Cognitive ethologists are interested in “the mental worlds of animals” (Allen & Bekoff, 1997, ix). Animal subjectivity--or what we call the inner worlds of companion animals-- might be more familiar to people than, say, wild animals like tigers or bears. It is not hard to see that our companion animals have subjectivities; they have feelings, emotions, thoughts and so forth. But some in the scientific community until rather recently thought these claims to be absurd. It might be easier for lay persons to see that companion animals have complex inner worlds because they are not bound to the logics that rule the discipline of science. But today the field of cognitive ethology has opened up many avenues of thought that were once thought to be outrageous. For example, Eileen Crist (2002) tells us that according to Darwin earthworms have inner lives. Crist (2002) reports that

“In Darwin’s portrayal, the inner life of worms is indeed a cognitive world—a world about which worms form judgments. The inner life of worms also includes their subjective world—a world of perception and work that they experience. . .” (p. 3).

This passage is striking because it does seem so absurd. But it is not absurd. Sentient beings have a way of moving through the world. We might not understand how creatures like worms navigate a life but they do—in more complex ways than meets the eye. Perhaps not all scientists are in agreement with Darwin on earthworms. Still the point of this conversation is to help educationists of all sorts to be more sympathetic to Other creatures and to teach children to be kind to all life forms. This is the heart of a humane education.

Marc Bekoff (2010) explains that many nonhuman animals experience inner worlds in ways that might surprise us. Bekoff tells us that

“We also now know that fish have distinct personalities; birds plan future meals and are more sophisticated in making and using tools than chimpanzees; whales have spindle neurons that are important in processing emotions; turtles mourn the loss of their friends; and mice feel pain” (p. 15).

After studying much in the field of cognitive ethology the argument for vegetarianism makes perfect sense. How can you eat a fish if it has feelings, for example? How can you eat turtle soup if turtles “mourn the loss of their friends” ? We don’t much think about these things when sitting down at the dinner table. But perhaps we should re-think our grocery lists.

Donald Griffin (2001) points out that the study of “animal minds” was dismissed during the fin de siecle by behaviorists. Griffin (2001) claims that “[t]he nature of animal minds was a major subject of investigation until it was repressed by behaviorism. . . . Darwin, Romanes, Lloyd Morgan, von Uxkull and many other scientists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were deeply interested in animal mentality” (p. 4). The mistaken idea that animals are little more than machines can be traced back to Descartes. Today there are still those who think that animals are nothing more than beasts to be tamed and used for human purposes. Certainly if we think about circuses, Sea World and zoos we know that animals who are caged or whipped and used to do stupid tricks for humans are thought of as nothing more than money making objects (not subjects). These practices must stop. Sea World has gotten a lot of negative attention after one of the trainers was killed by one of their whales recently. The fight for animal rights must continue. We must stop the unethical use of primates for human research, we must stop poaching, killing animals for furs or using animals like pitbulls to win money by training them to fight and kill one another. Animal rights is an entire subject and field of study that goes beyond the scope of this paper. But for now it is enough to mention these horrible things about the way in which people who see animals as objects use them and destroy them. Crist (2013) argues that people treat nonhuman animals as objects primarily because of “the erasure of animal minds” (p. 48). Crist (2013) explains that

“By the erasure of animal minds (or animal subjectivity), I refer to the historically dominant, discursively elaborated . . . attenuated regard of animals as merely existing and reacting, as opposed to acting meaningfully and experiencing being-in-the-world. With concepts like “mind,” “awareness,” “subjectivity,” “numinous” and “inner life,” . . . I am invoking a phenomenological understanding of mind. . .” (p. 48).

Nonhuman animals are indeed beings that experience the world in complex ways. Crist (2013) uses the term “numinous” to describe animal minds.

This is a spiritual term. Indeed nonhuman animals are creatures we should be in awe of because of their beauty, mysteriousness and wonderousness. Companion animals whom we share our lives with should never be taken for granted. They are spiritual creatures.

Nonhuman animals express a wide variety of emotions. These emotions reflect complex inner workings of mind. Marc Bekoff (2013) points out that dogs and other nonhuman animals laugh. Bekoff (2013) says

“Consider, for example, the research of the late Patricia Simonet, whose work on dog laughter has been well accepted. . . . Consider also that Charles Darwin, Jane Goodall, and others have described laughter in nonhuman animals. Laughter has also been documented by the renowned neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp. . .” (p. 46).

Perhaps laughing dogs comes as a surprise to some. It might be easier to understand that dogs cry. If they cry when in pain for instance then why can't they also laugh? We watch our companion animals play games with their friends—other dogs or cats.. And we also watch them fight, for example, over food or bones. Bekoff (2013) has done much research on nonhuman animal play. He has written quite extensively in this area. If we pay attention to our companion animals we know too that they suffer from depression, separation anxiety and even posttraumatic stress disorder (Bekoff, 2013). Alan Schoen (2001) tells us that chimpanzees “grieve, they experience joy and anger, they medicate themselves, and, sadly enough, they seem to wage war” (p. 43). After studying literature on nonhuman animals one might come to the conclusion that they are more like human animals than not. Their inner worlds are very similar to ours. Their pain is very much like ours, even though not all veterinarians agree on this (Pierce, 2012). Mark Rowlands (2012) argues that nonhuman animals demonstrate “*concern or solicitude*” (p. 8). He goes on to argue that nonhuman animals “act by moral considerations. . .” (p. 8). We can see this behavior in our own companion animals as they take care of one another especially when one is sick. Nonhuman animals are “moral” creatures; companion animals want to do the right thing. They reason. Rowlands (2012) says that they also “care” (p. 8). Of course they can also do the wrong thing. A companion animal with a lot of aggression can attack his friends, say, over a bone. But later on we might notice that our companion animal feels guilty for attacking his furry friend. Our companion animal might try to make up by playing a game of hide and seek, for example. Marc Bekoff (2013) tells us that dogs “share the same neural bases for emotions” that we have and thus can display emotions such as “guilt, pride, shame. . .” (p. 86). After a dog has had surgery and gets shaved he might hide in a corner because he feels ashamed to have been shaved. After a cat has had a terrible accident, say, like having to have one of his legs amputated, he might even hide in a closet because he is ashamed that he lost his leg. Veterinarian Vint Virga (2013) tells us that “animals live intensely thoughtful lives. . . . I have no doubt that animals’ neurons are very much the same as ours, constantly generating images, emotions, memories, and thoughts—some trivial, others profound” (p. 61). What “profound thoughts” are “generated” by companion animals? Do they think about death, the future, their future? Jessica Pierce (2012) thinks so. Cats drag themselves off into the woods when they know they are about to die. Some veterinarians suggest that animals who know they are going to die wait until their human companions are gone (i.e. off to work or on vacation away from home) (personal communication, Stephanie Hazlett DVM). Jeffrey Masson (1995) tells us that some scientists are skeptical of the supposed vast array of emotions that are displayed by nonhuman animals. They chalk it up to anthropomorphizing. However, Masson (1995) reports that everyday people seem to get it, while some scientists do not. Masson (1995) reports on some “surprising” findings on emotions and behaviors of nonhuman animals. He states that

“. . . you may be surprised by the unexpected emotional behavior of some animals: an elephant who keeps a pet mouse; a chimpanzee awaiting the return of her dead baby; a bear lost in rapture as it watches the sunset; ice-skating buffalo; a parrot who means what he says; a dolphin inventing her own games. . .” (xxiii).

Nonhuman animals live incredibly complicated lives. They experience, they sense, they love, they feel, they keep pets and even ice-skate—as Masson points out above. Nonhuman animals have inner worlds and experience life in many ways that are similar to the way that we experience life. They are like us as Darwin pointed out long ago. And this is what terrifies some. What this points to is the fact that we too are animals, human animals. We are not special or different because we reason. Nonhuman animals reason too. We are not superior to nonhuman animals in any way. In fact, if anything our species has been responsible for all the damage done to the environment, for nuclear disasters, for destroying the eco-sphere, for poisoning ourselves with pesticides and herbicides, for doing the unthinkable: experimenting on nonhuman animals for our own benefit.

3. Animal Assisted Therapy

In the 1960s Boris Levinson (1997) founded what he called “pet-oriented” psychotherapy (p. 87). Gerald Mallon (1997) explains that

“Boris Levinson was the first professionally trained clinician to formally introduce and document the way that companion-animals could hasten the development of a rapport between therapist and patient. . . . Originally ridiculed by his colleagues for presenting such a “preposterous” technique, he continued to pursue his work nonetheless” (vii).

Today therapists refer to “pet-oriented” psychotherapy as animal assisted therapy. Animal assisted therapy is a well respected field today. Certainly it has some detractors. Levinson (1997) called his dog Jingles his “co-therapist” (n.p.). When Levinson introduced this kind of therapy at the American Psychological Association meeting in 1961 he states that some of his colleagues “guffawed” at him and “asked whether [his]. . . dog shared in the fees” (p. 83). Today it is a common practice for psychiatrists and psychotherapists to bring their dogs into therapy sessions. Levinson (1997) did not limit “pet-oriented” therapy to the clinical setting. Levinson (1997) states that

“There are four aspects for the use of animals in the treatment of children in residential settings. These are (a) the use of animals as treatment aides in residential treatment centers for emotionally disturbed children; (b) the use of animals with children in a hospital for somatic disorders; (c) the use of animals as children’s pets and pals in training schools for physically handicapped, deaf, blind and mentally handicapped children; (d) the use of animals in schools or classes for emotionally disturbed children” (p. 85).

Today animal assisted therapy happens not only in clinical or residential settings but anywhere where there is a relationship between a nonhuman animal and a human animal. We argue, unlike Levinson (1997), that nonhuman animals are not “co-therapists” but therapists in their own right.

Nonhuman animals have deep and complex inner worlds. Most AAT literature does not explore these inner worlds where ethologists do. We suggest that AAT might be understood in the context of the findings of ethologists. Thus humane educationists might study the literatures of AAT and ethology side by side to better understand the complex inter-relations between, say, companion animals, and human animals. It is also imperative to note that we are not “using” animals as Levinson (1997) puts it. Nonhuman animals are not objects to be used, but rather are subjects in relation to us. Companion animals live in relationship with us and can give to us the gifts of love, kindness, understanding and help when we need it (whether that help is psychological or physical).

The literature on AAT has gone beyond the work of Levinson (1997). Here we offer a montage of the kinds of things that assistance nonhuman animals can do. Educationists might be surprised to know that dogs can help children who have trouble reading. Lynn Piper (2014) tells us that

“Many authors have reported the benefits of the Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D.) program for children with reading difficulties. The R.E.A.D. program was started in 1995 in Salt Lake City. According to the research conducted by the R.E.A.D. program. . . students . . . can increase their reading skill by two grade levels” (p. 30).

Children sometimes are intimidated by adults who try to teach them to read. When children read to dogs that intimidation is gone. Children improve their reading skills because the dog gives them the gift of relationship without being “judged” (Piper, 2014, p. 31). Children build rapport with dogs and dogs respond to this rapport. Could it be that dogs like being read to? We cannot get inside the mind of a dog but it seems that dogs like the attention and like being read to. Are we assuming too much here? Perhaps. But if dogs have complicated minds—as we have been arguing in this paper—perhaps they appreciate the sound of the human animal voice and enjoy the company of children. It is really remarkable that children do, in fact, improve their reading skills when they read to dogs. So there is a mutual relationship here: children help dogs to feel loved and dogs help children read better.

Seeing eye dogs for the blind are probably the most well known kind of assistance animals. Dogs who help blind people navigate the world are extraordinary. Many people who are not blind have never really given seeing eye dogs a second thought. We must never take for granted the amazing intelligence of seeing eye dogs. Seeing eyedogs have been around since 1929.

Philip Tedeschi, Aubrey Fine and Jana Helgeson (2010) report that

“On November 5, 1927, Dorothy Harrison Eustis introduced America to the concept of using dogs as guides for the blind in a historic article in *The Saturday Evening Post*. By 1929, she had founded The Seeing Eye, which became the first group in the USA to breed, raise, and train guide dogs” (p. 423).

Seeing eye dogs are not merely “used” as guides. These dogs have very special relations with people who are blind. These dogs are highly intelligent creatures who bond with people who have a disability. These dogs have a sense of responsibility. Seeing eye dogs are responsible for keeping blind persons safe. And blind persons rely on seeing eye dogs to help them walk through a complicated world full of cars, buses, sidewalks, curbs, steps, escalators and so forth. The relationship that is built between the blind and seeing eye dog is crucial. Again, these dogs are not simply “used” but rather are in relation with and responsible for the safety of blind persons.

Assistance dogs also help deaf people to navigate the world. Philip Tedeschi, Aubrey Fine and Jana Helgeson (2010) tell us that “[i]n 1977, Roy Kabat. . . founded Dogs for the Deaf, an organization which believed that dogs from shelters and humane society dogs could be trained to help the deaf” (p. 424). Dogs have a keener sense of hearing than we do. So it makes perfect sense to pair up someone who is deaf with a guide dog who can be the ears of the deaf. Here too dogs and people who are deaf form a special bond, a special relationship. It is this relationship that matters. Building relations takes commitment, love and care. The dogs are not simply “used” to help deaf people. Dogs are not objects to be used. Rather these dogs are companion animals, friends.

Cynthia Chandler (2005) tells us that dogs can help people who have autism. What is fascinating here is that autistic children do not easily relate to other people but in some instances they relate to dogs. Dogs share a special magic with autistic children that scientists really do not understand. Chandler (2005) reports that

“A repeated measure analysis of variance of animal assisted interventions with 12 children with autism demonstrated significant improvements in behaviors with fewer autistic behaviors (for example, hand-posturing, humming and clicking noises, spinning objects, repetitive jumping and roaming)” (p. 20).

Dogs help autistic children relate to the world, to get in touch with the world. This bond between the child and the dog helps the child to calm down (Arkow, 2010). It is interesting that autistic children have trouble looking people in the eye, but not so with assistance dogs.

Autistic children do better in school when they are accompanied by assistance dogs. But not all schools allow dogs to enter classrooms. In fact, Phil Arkow (2010) says that

“Families in Illinois, California and Pennsylvania have sued local school districts to allow their children’s autism service dogs to accompany them to class and serve as calming influences, familiar links in new circumstances, and safety barriers to keep the children from running off (Associated Press, 2009)” (p. 458).

John Ensminger (2010) tells us that autistic children tend to run into traffic or to run away from their parents. Assistance dogs help these children not carry out such dangerous behavior. School administrators should study the findings of psychologists and psychiatrists on the (paw)sitive impact these dogs have on autistic children. But all too often—because of the craze for standardization in the USA—administrators do not allow dogs in schools. It seems ludicrous that parents of autistic children have to sue schools in order to allow their children to bring their assistance dog to school.

Donald Altschiller (2011) points out that even before the advent of AAT, nonhuman animals in the 1800s helped epileptics. Today, as John Ensminger (2010) points out, dogs who work with epileptics are engaged in what is called “seizure-alert and seizure-response”. . . assistance (xi). Ensminger (2010) reports that dogs can actually intuit when their human companions are about to have a seizure. Ensminger (2010) tells us that “[s]ome dogs detect and alert to the onset of seizures in their handlers far enough in advance that there is time to take medication to stop the seizure from happening at all” (p. 8). When someone has a seizure there is not much one can do other than clearing the area and remaining calm. Perhaps the dogs help to calm witnesses to seizures.

Equine therapy, as Cynthia Chandler (2005) tells us, is used in cases of “physical disabilities [such as]. . . multiple sclerosis, closed head injury with concomitant physical impairments, spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, and scoliosis” (pp. 22-23). Chandler suggests that there are psychological benefits for people who engage in equine therapy. Chandler tells us that horses help people with various disabilities to gain “self-confidence” (p. 22). Taking care of horses and riding horses can even become a spiritual event because horses are majestic creatures.

They should never be used as race horses or for carting around tourists in 90 degree weather. Nonhuman animals should never be used to make money. This is unethical and abusive.

Therapy dogs, Ensminger (2010) tells us, can also be “cancer-sniffing” (p. 8). Ensminger (2010) explains that “Individuals who did not know they had melanoma, or breast cancer, found the dog constantly licking or nudging a place on the handler’s body. Through a complex training regimen, dogs have been taught to detect lung, breast, and bladder cancers. . .” (p. 8).

After studying AAT one cannot doubt the intelligence of dogs. There is more to a dog’s life than eating, drinking, playing and sleeping. Dogs think. Dogs feel. Dogs intuit—even cancer. This is truly astonishing. Dogs are also useful for Alzheimer’s disease as they can help Alzheimer patients find their way home if they get lost (Ensminger, 2010, p. 7). Teri Pichot (2012) reports that “AAT is used in health care by physical, occupational, and speech therapists. . .” (p. 13). Cynthia Chandler (2005) reports that therapy dogs can help children who have Down Syndrome.

Therapy dogs also help people who suffer from mental illness (Hart, 2010). Therapy dogs can help people who suffer from panic attacks and delusions (Ensminger, 2010). Lynn Piper (2014) tells us that assistance animals “. . . aid in the treatment of numerous different mental illnesses, such as depression, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, attachment disorder, autism spectrum disorders, and conduct disorders” (p. 40)

When a psychotherapist brings an animal into the consulting room the entire atmosphere changes for the patient. There is something about animals, especially dogs, that heal. Children especially benefit from AAT therapy when they show resistance to the therapy. The therapy dog helps children relax and not be defensive.

In Sum

We have argued in this paper that humane education must include the study of nonhuman animals *in relationship* with human animals. We also argued that the study of inner worlds of animals is necessary if AAT (Animal Assisted Therapy) is to work. Finally, we suggested that dogs especially can serve as therapists in their own right and are not simply add-ons to psychotherapists. Educationists might think about ways in which we could deepen even still our understandings of nonhuman animals. There is much work to be done on this topic. Hopefully this paper opens up a different kind of conversation useful to educationists and therapists alike.

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