

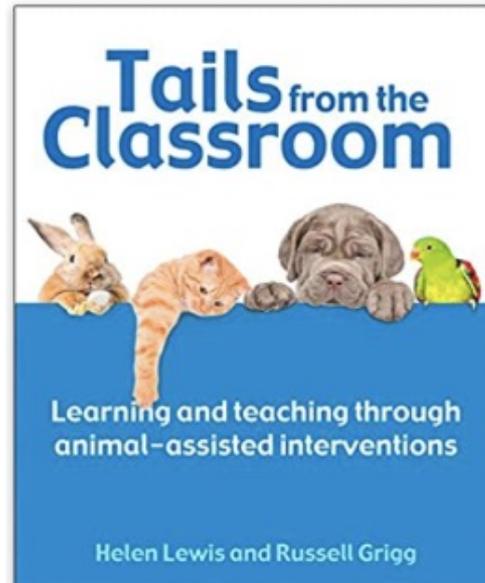
Source: Burns By Your Side

Dogs in
schools:
taking the lead
towards well-
being for all



Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

**The
British
Academy**



Dr Helen Lewis
helen.e.lewis@Swansea.ac.uk
@HEL71_

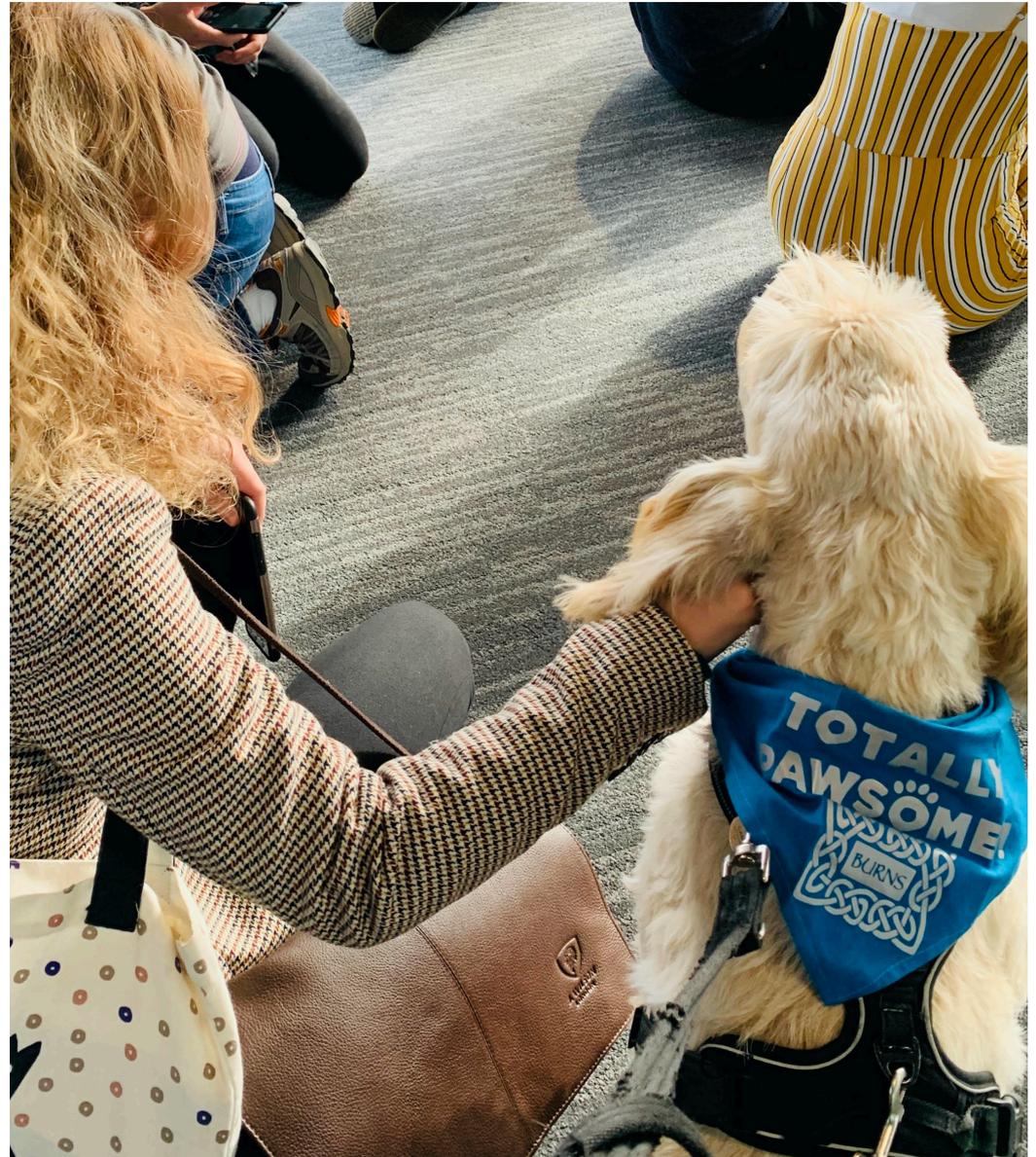
Dr Janet Oostendorp-Godfrey
j.oostendorpgodfrey@swansea.ac.uk



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Aims

- Explore the rationale behind involving dogs in schools
- Outline our position with regard to pedagogical implications
- Introduce our study and explore the key findings of our research
- Consider implications for best practice and future directions for research





1. Dogs in schools

Why might this work?



Biophilia and beyond eg Wilson, 1984; Olmert, 2010.

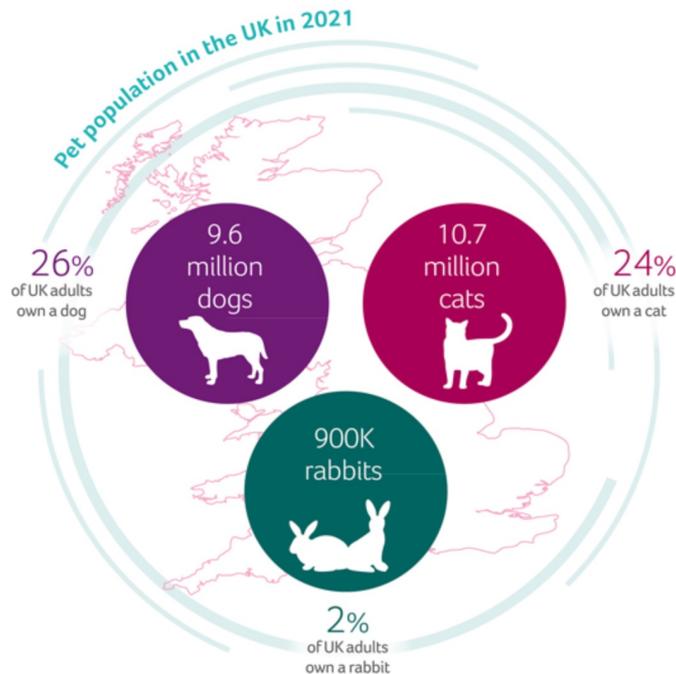
All therapeutic interventions involving animals rest on a powerful assumption: there is something about animals that powerfully attracts and motivates humans. This assumption becomes especially compelling when children are involved. Melson and Fine (2015)

Sources: Shakara/Kara and Sarah Clements (with permission)

<https://twitter.com/AgEntoGirl/status/1362240639417647105>

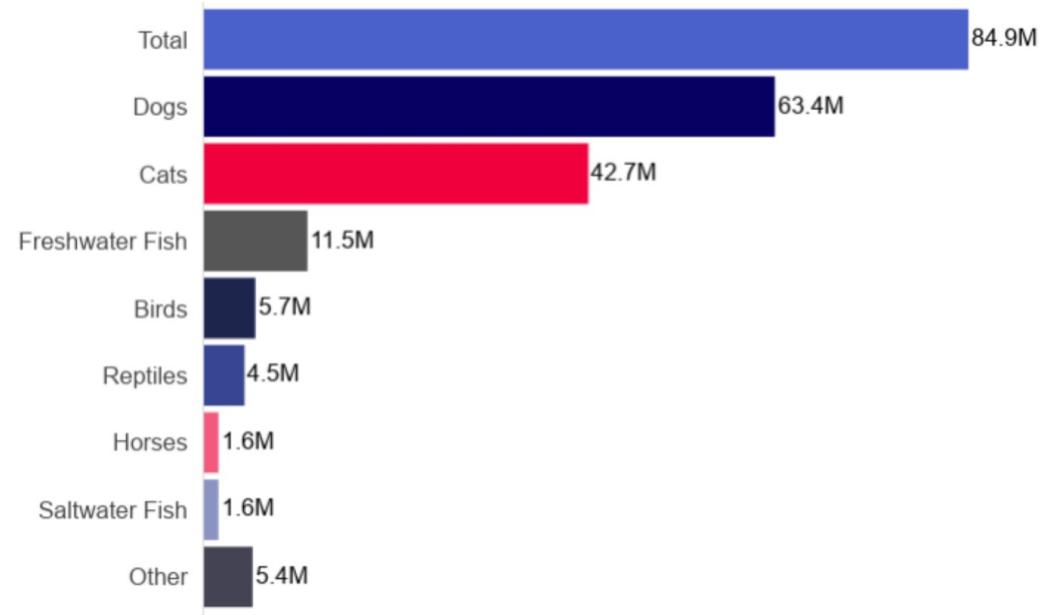
Pet ownership in the UK and USA 2020/21

The number of pets in the UK in 2021



These figures are not significantly different from February or August 2020.

Number of U.S. Households Keeping Pets



(Image Source: Spots.com)



‘Animals constitute more than 90% of the characters employed in language acquisition and counting in pre-school books’



Creative Commons

Human-dog bond for thousands of years

If you don't own a dog, at least one, there is not necessarily anything wrong with you, but there may be something wrong with your life.'

Caras (in Garfield, 2020:ix)



Dogs are popular and highly visible within many cultures

<https://www.business2community.com/travel-leisure/23-most-famous-dogs-of-all-time-01290339>

Why are the bonds with dogs so strong?

- Humans find puppies around 7-8 weeks old particularly attractive - neotony
- Pet dogs are dependent on humans - nurture
- Dogs synchronise behaviour with humans (Duranton et al, 2017) which promotes relationships eg dogs move when owners move, maintain proximity, gaze in same direction.
- Duncan and Cobb (2014) – calming effect – ‘hearts align’
- Dogs love us as least as much as food
- Oxytocin levels in humans and dogs raise when they gaze into each other’s eyes





Source: worldunited.com



Source :12 tomatoes.com



Promoting social interactions

- Animals as catalysts for conversation
- Animals as 'social lubricants' (eg Wells, 2009)
- Animals as 'social others'
- The presence of an animal changes the environment (eg Fine, 2018)

Attachment and Friendship



Source: reddit

- Humans are capable of, and motivated to form relationships with animals.
- For secure attachment, Ainsworth (1991) suggests the animal must:
 - ✓ Be a reliable source of comfort – a secure base
 - ✓ Be approachable in the case of emotional stress – a safe haven
 - ✓ Create positive emotions when close to – maintenance of proximity
 - ✓ Be something missed when it isn't there
- Animal is not a caregiver but may act in a similar way to a sibling (Carr & Rockett, 2017).

'Securely attached children feel a consistent, responsive, and supportive relation to their mothers even during times of significant stress. Children with insecure attachment feel inconsistent, punishing, unresponsive emotions from their caregivers and feel threatened during times of stress' (Perry, 2013, p.4)

- Secure attachment: prosocial behaviour, empathy, 'protected' function

Responsive,
engaging and
attuned





Part 2
Our studies

Our position



Respect everyone's
feelings, space and
thoughts



Build positive
relationships



Create opportunities for
playful interaction



Ensure that the
environment is safe for
all

Pedagogical principles for AAI

(Lewis and Grigg, 2021)



Creative commons

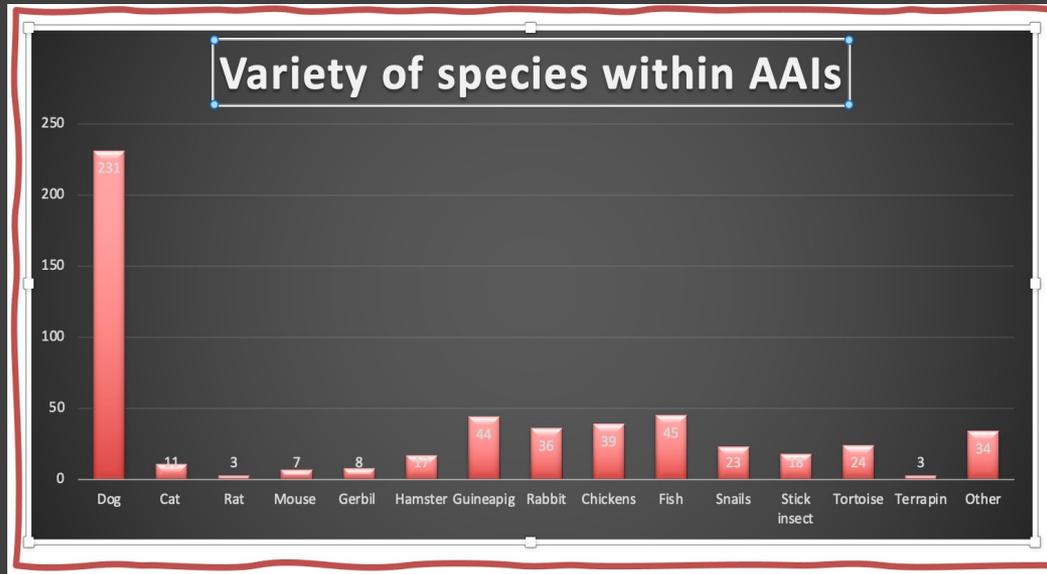
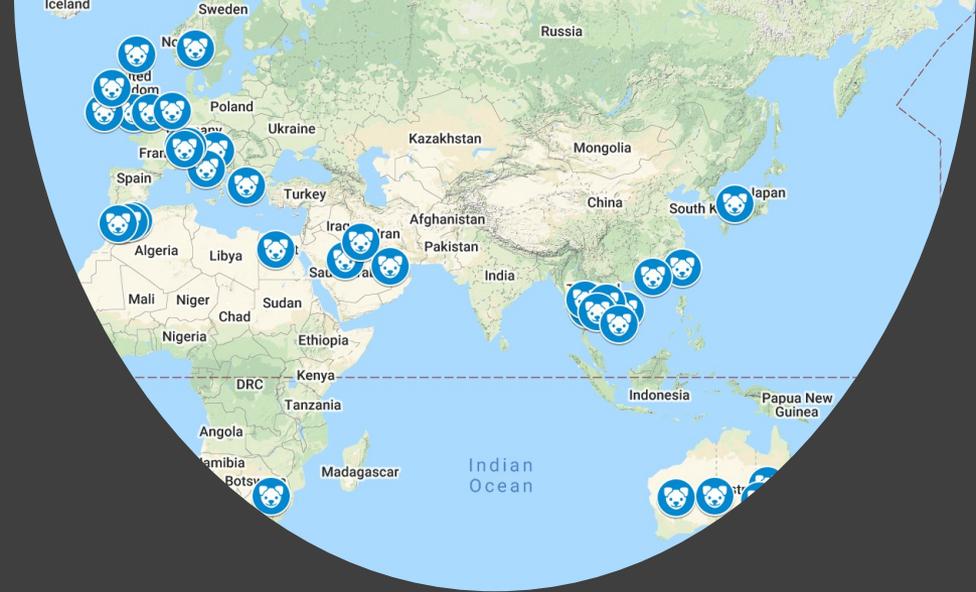
Research design

- 2 online surveys
- Promoted on social media eg teacher and school dog Facebook groups, Instagram, twitter
- Existing contacts and charities directly contacted.
- Networking and snowballing
- Open to all in schools and educational settings

- Follow up interviews and observations

Survey 1 'Proof of concept'

- 610 responses
- 23 countries
- Variety of species
- Mainly to support wellbeing
- Varied practices
- Dogs by far most popular species



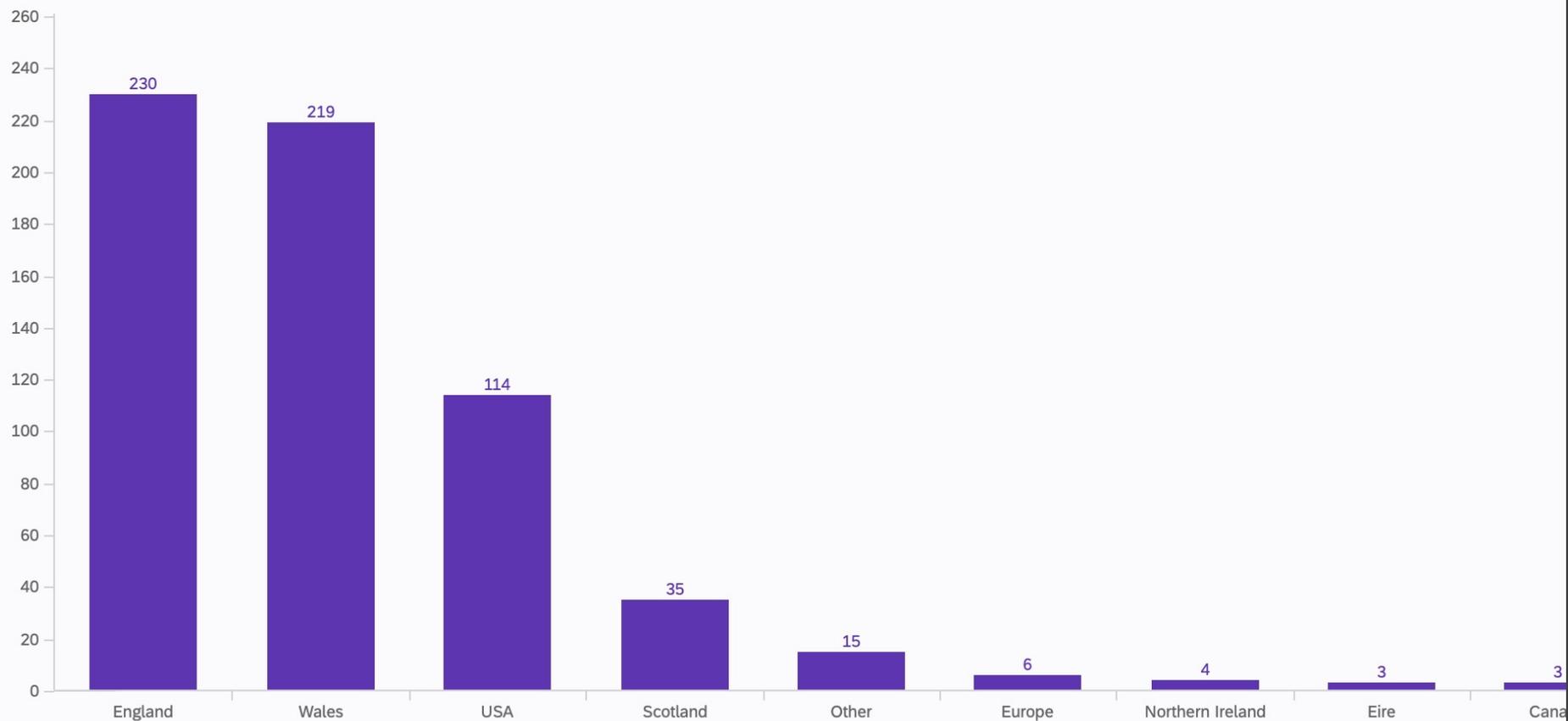


Source Grace Vobe

Survey 2 – classroom realities and practices

- Funded study
- Online questionnaire
- Promoted on social media eg teacher and school dog Facebook groups, Instagram, twitter
- Existing contacts and charities directly contacted.
- Networking and snowballing
- Open to all in schools and educational settings
- 800+ responses

- Follow up interviews and observations



Where did our respondents come from?

- Reflects in part our networks
- 'Other' included Thailand, NZ, Australia, UAE
- **75% of respondents involved dogs in their practice**



What was main reason
for involving dogs?

Improve pupil
wellbeing

38%

Personal interest in
dogs

17%

Read some research
about benefits

10%

Improve pupil
confidence eg in
reading

9%



What was main reason
for NOT involving dogs?

Not an educational
priority

40%

Not sure how to
find a suitable dog

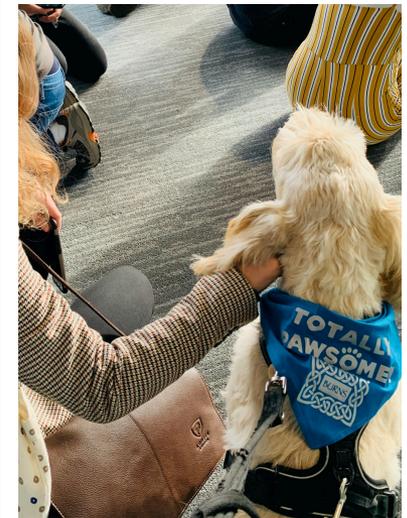
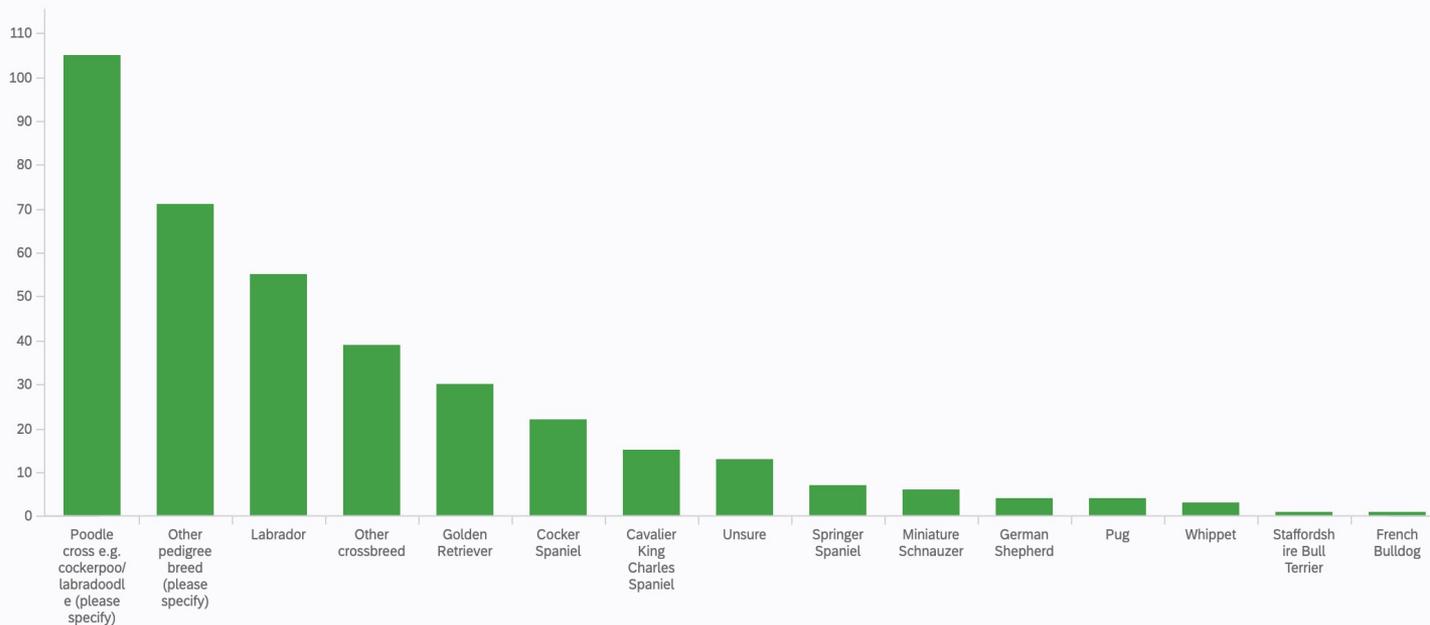
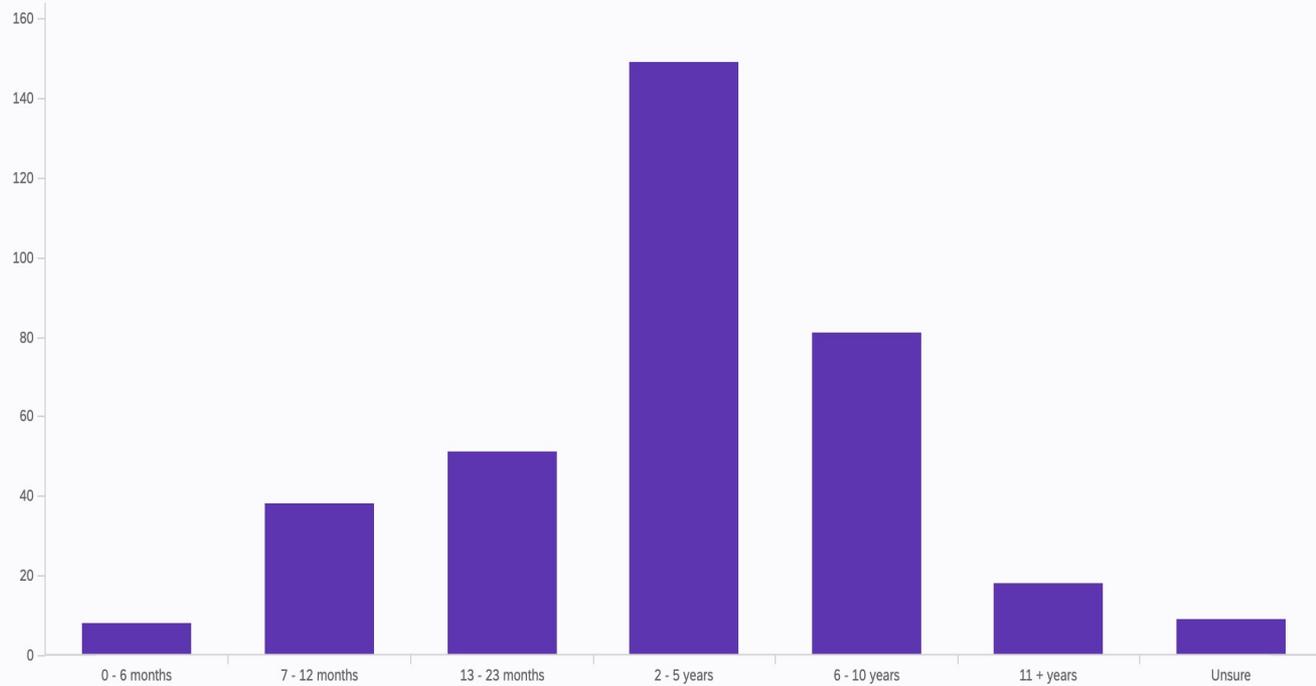
17%

Concern re: health
and safety

16%

BUT 59% would
consider a dog in
future

What do we know about the dogs?





57% had completed some training

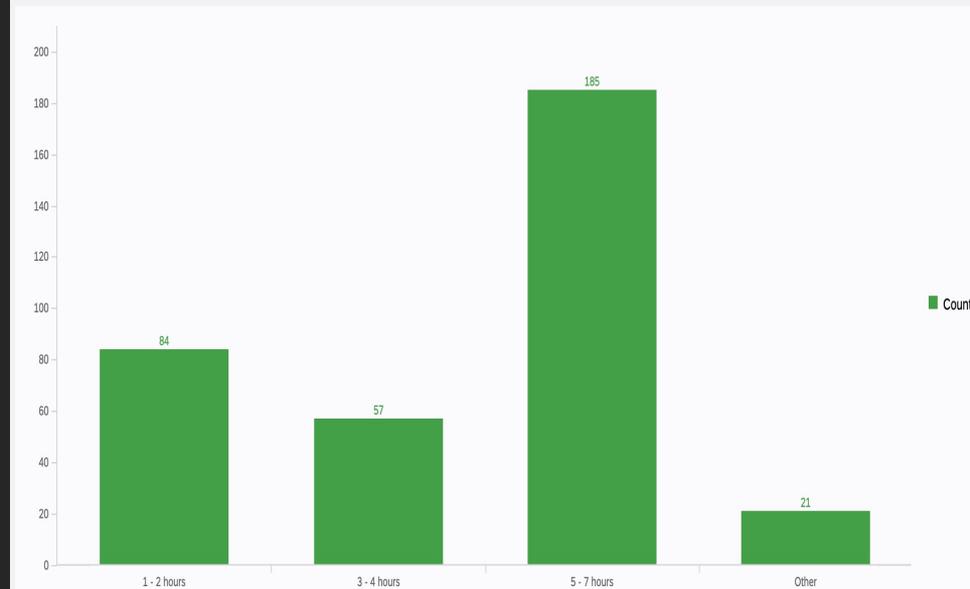
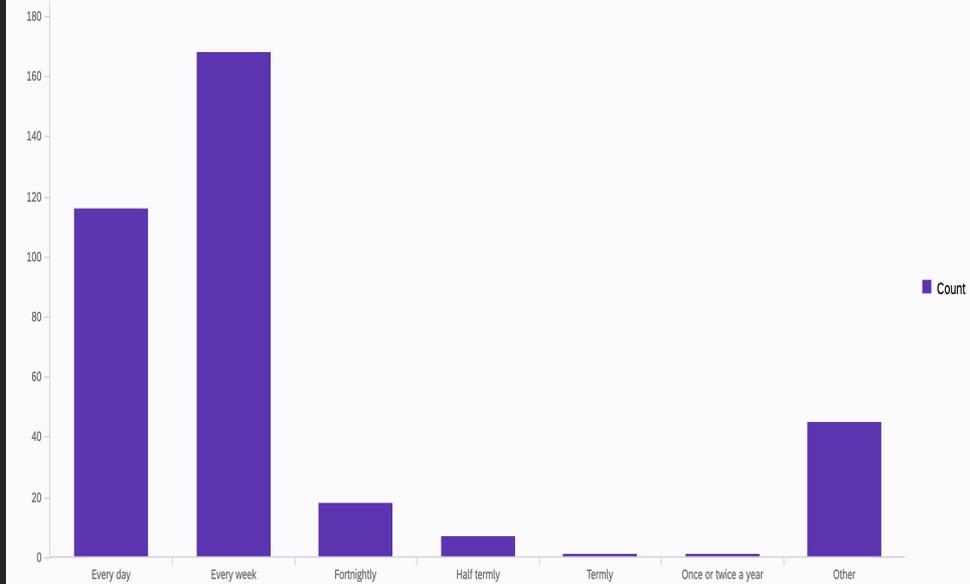
35% had not undergone any training

8% were unsure about amount of training

How much training have the dogs had?



How often are the dogs in the school, and for how long?



Which learners do the dogs work with and how is this arranged?

Individual pupils (34%)

Small groups up to 6 pupils (27%)

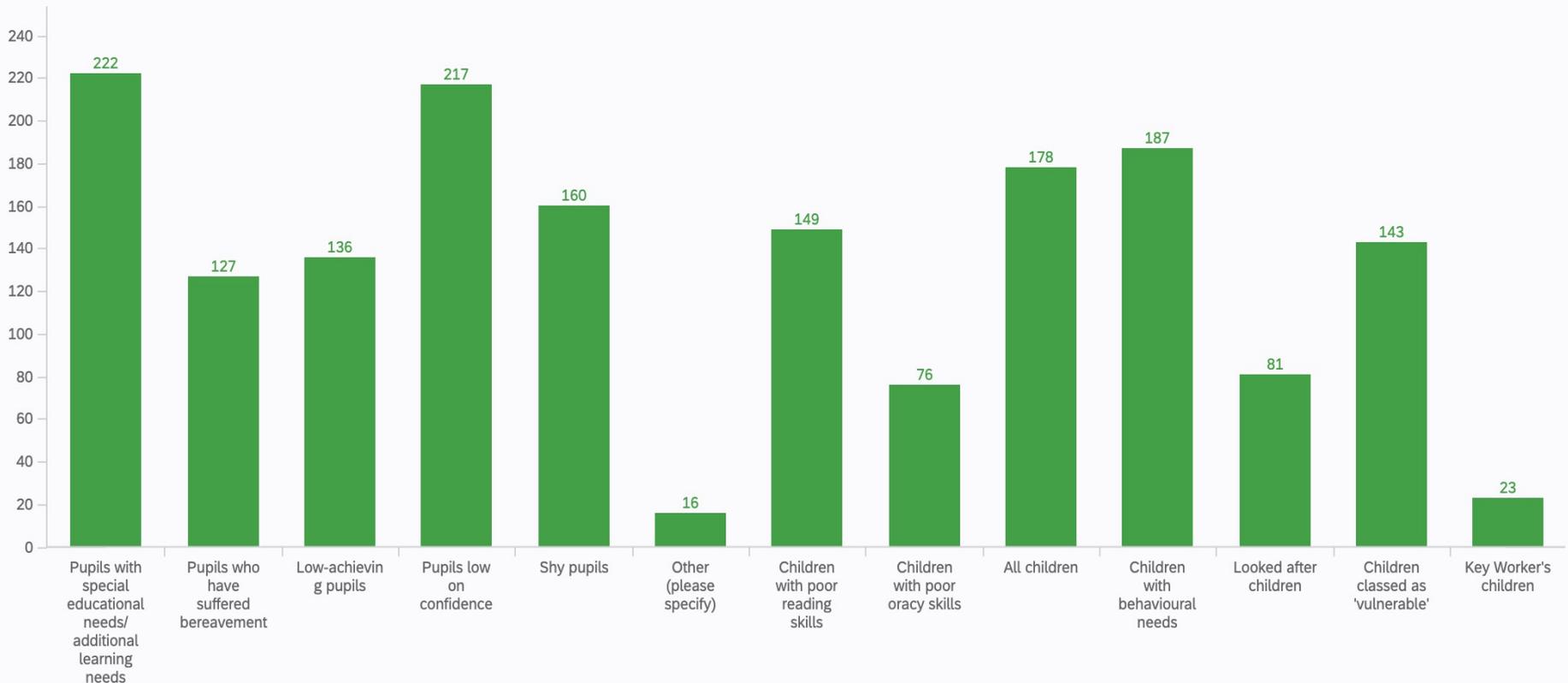
Whole class (12%)

Pairs of students (20%)

Pupils aged 5-7 (25%)

Pupils aged 8-11 (30%)

Pupils aged 12-15 (16%)





Health and Safety

53% risk
assessment
and insurance

18% risk
assessment
only

16%
insurance
only

3% neither
insurance or
RA

44% dogs
always on
leash

23% dogs
work off leash

33% dogs
work off leash
sometimes



Source Grace Vobe

What do teachers say about benefits?

- 'Watching challenged students work on controlling themselves to make the dog feel comfortable in their presence'
- 'Seeing the relationship between child and dog develop the child's confidence'
- 'Seeing children respond to a dog and the dog respond to the children. Smiling faces and a wagging tail'
- 'They change everything for the better!'
- 'Going from sad to happy with just a few pets'
- Dog walks are great for 'tricky' conversations!
- Social aspect, conversation starters, helping children learn empathy
- The joy my dog brings to the students is magical



Source Grace Vobe

Interim summary

- A wide range of dogs present in a wide range of educational context
- Predominantly to support wellbeing
- Involved with a wide variety of pupils
- Great deal of variety regarding training, working hours, locations etc
- Mainly very positive – but there are challenges
- Implications for play?
- Implications for dogs?



3.
Suggestions
for best
practices

Preparation



Respect everyone's feelings, space and thoughts



'Research breeds, discuss what training, arrange for visits, check staff are 'on board' introduce the dog slowly to the setting, praise and reward the dog'



'Understand the dog before being in school. Don't go in to school with a puppy and expect to do your job!'



'Consider cultural attitudes towards dogs'



Undertaking research

38% of schools had a specific 'Dog Policy'



Beyond thinking about a 'suitable' dog

- Calm, happy
- Polite body language
- Happy to be touched all over
- Enjoys being stroked
- Does not jump up
- Walks calmly on a lead
- Outgoing but not demanding (Ellis, in Lewis and Grigg, 2020:176)

We would add

- curious,
- empowered,
- adaptable,
- confident

- 'We ask a lot of our animal companions. In reality, we don't even ask, but rather expect them to enter unfamiliar environments, to be approached and touched by strangers ... we have to ask if the animal is benefiting ...' Ng (2019).

Partners

- AAI as an ongoing relationship, not an accidental one
- Benefit to both animal and human
- In some sense voluntary
- The involvement of the animal is not a means to an end

- We need to recognise the signals that the animal wants to be part of an interaction.



Respecting what the dog is telling us?

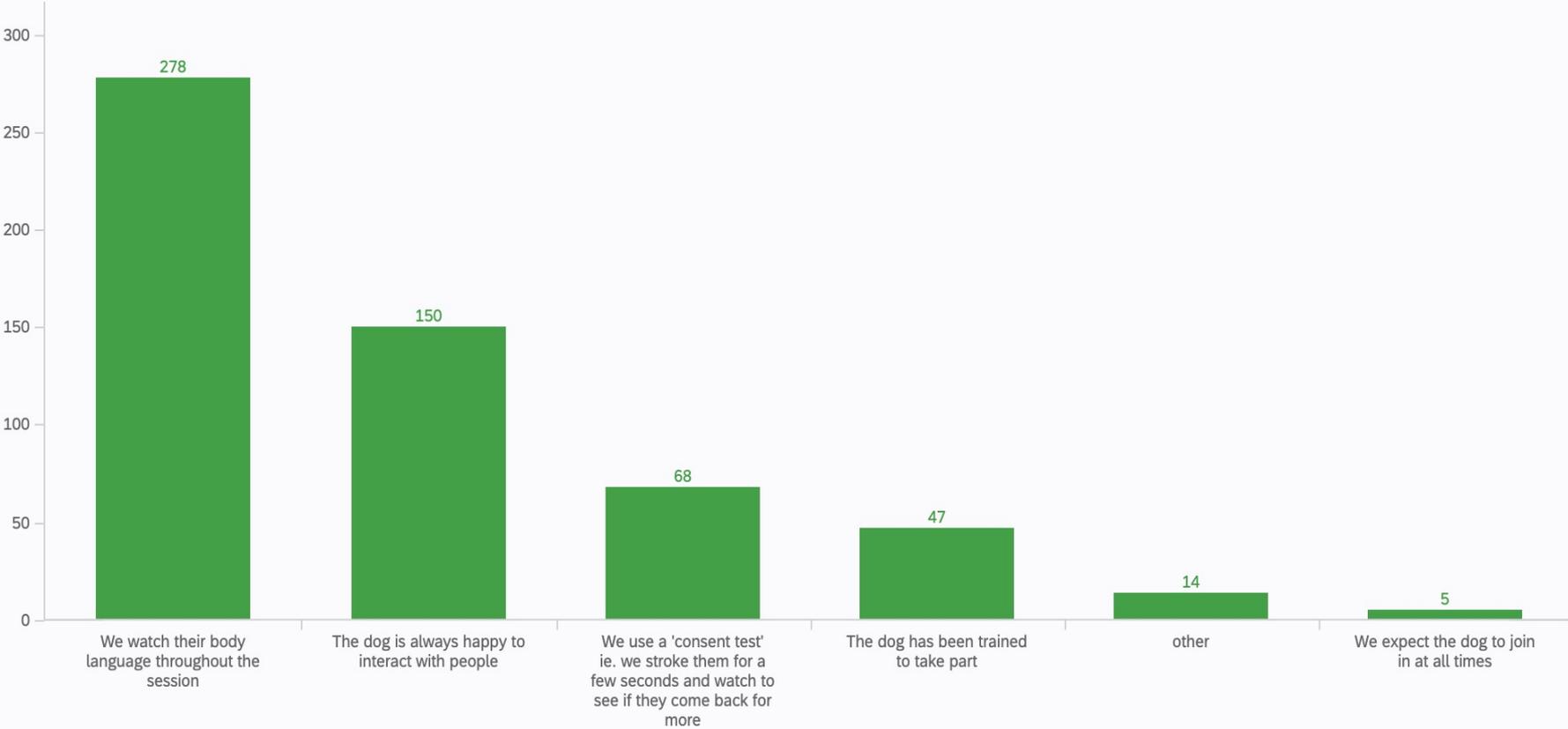
Teachers confident to recognise dog behaviours of being interested, happy, angry and tired than appeasement/ calming signals or anxiety.

Many teachers noted that their dogs also displayed over enthusiastic behaviours such as jumping up, barking or toileting inside the school

There are implication for specific teacher training to read dog body language for school settings



How do teachers decide if the dog wants to participate?



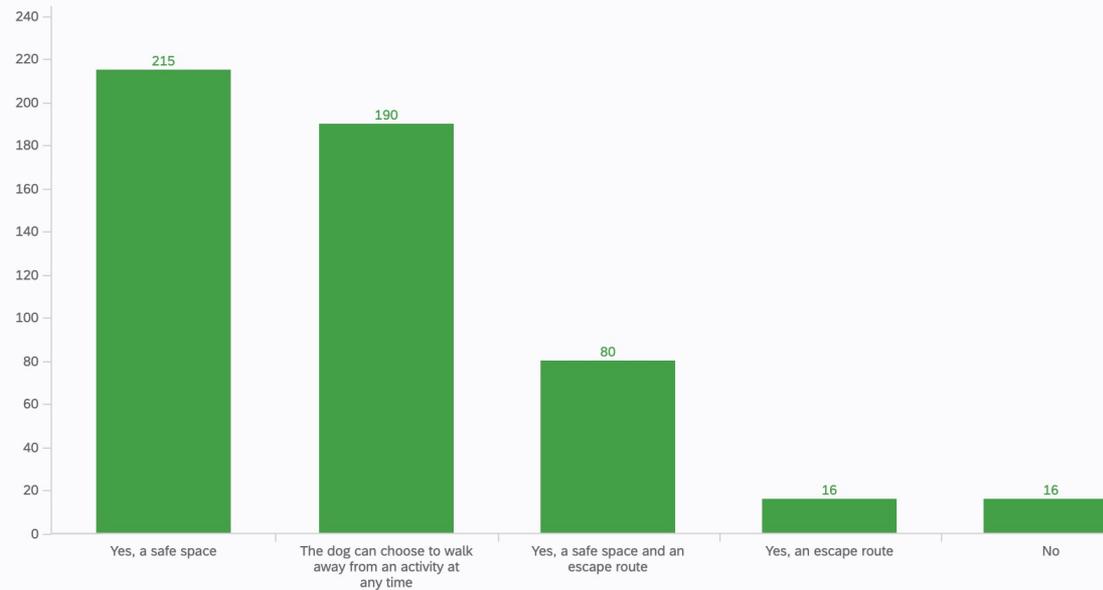
Planning for a safe environment



Ensure that the environment is safe for all



Risk assessment

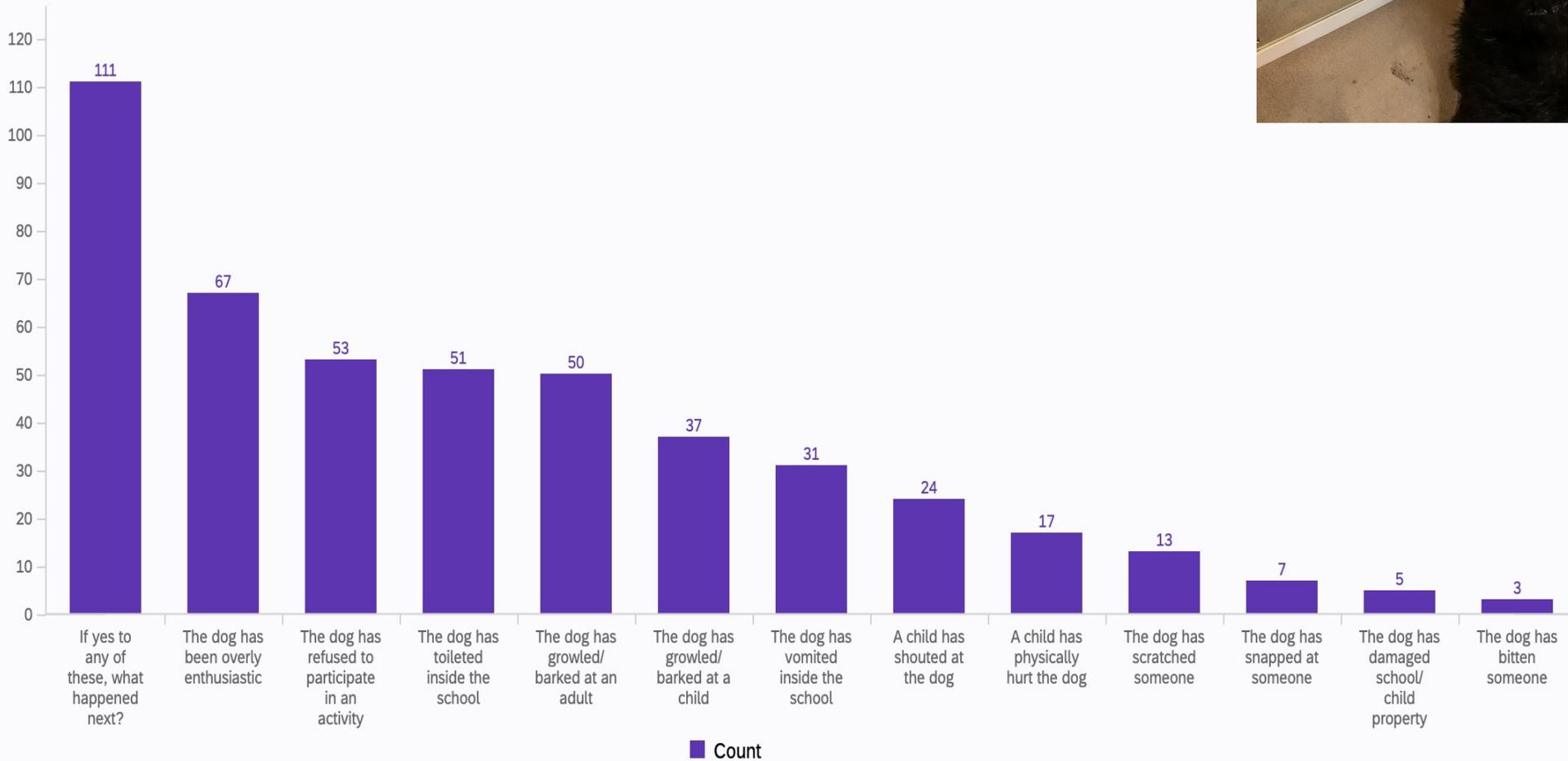




- A dog may need to be very flexible and adaptable
- Dogs tire quickly
- Dogs work both with children and adults when in the school environment
- A dog is a sentient being and as such requires full attention to wellbeing and care
- A dog is as much a member of the class as a student
- A dog may not have a fully trained handler
- A dog has needs, interests and wishes just like the pupils do
- Interacting with a dog is a privilege not a right

This is important because

Tails of the unexpected



Planning and learning

Currently there are many different ways of planning for the dog to be in sessions

26% of teachers simply plan their lesson and let the dog join in.
19% let the handler plan the sessions.

Over 75 % of schools did not allow specific time to train or work with the handler, nor did they offer to pay for training courses.



Task selection



Create opportunities for
playful interaction



Build positive
relationships

Playful learning

Robbie Richards
1,805 Tweets
Following

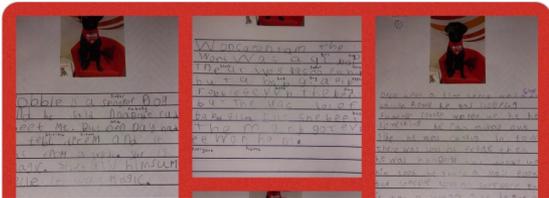
🐾📖 Enjoying some time in the reading corner after school 😊📖🐾
@Inspire_Ashton @Inspired_ToRead #schooldog



🗨️ 2 ❤️ 8 📤

Robbie Richards @Robbie_Inspire · Feb 1

📖🐾 I have LOVED reading these stories all about me! I have been a ballerina, a King, a Spider-dog and a footballer! 🐾📖👑🏈
@Inspire_Ashton @InspireEnglish #schooldog #proud #inspired @MissWrigley1



Robbie Richards
@Robbie_Inspire

😊🐾🐶 Lovely time spent with my friend. He set a game up for me using the cones and I had a great time sniffing out the treats 😊🐾
🐾 @Inspire_Ashton @MrsHepworth_KS2 #schooldog #caring #love

12:48 PM · Feb 14, 2022 · Twitter for iPad

3 Retweets 20 Likes

🗨️ ↺️ ❤️ 📤

Tom @YepGambit84 · Feb 14
Replying to @Robbie_Inspire @MrsHepworth_KS2 and @Inspire_Ashton
Oliver loved it, he's been telling me all about it nonstop tonight. Thank you @MissRichardsYR1 @Robbie_Inspire, Oliver will look forward to playing games again soon

🗨️ 1 ↺️ 1 ❤️ 6 📤

Robbie Richards @... · Feb 14



Dogs in the curriculum - Maths

Use	Use simple number cushions for the dog to sit on – can assist with number bonds to 10 or 20
Fetch	Fetch written number sentences (on gun dog dummies) to solve problems
Walk around	Walk around the perimeter of a shape or area in the playground
Assist	Assist with fractions, when dividing denominators into separate food bowls!
Create	Create a calm atmosphere for memory, confidence and self esteem

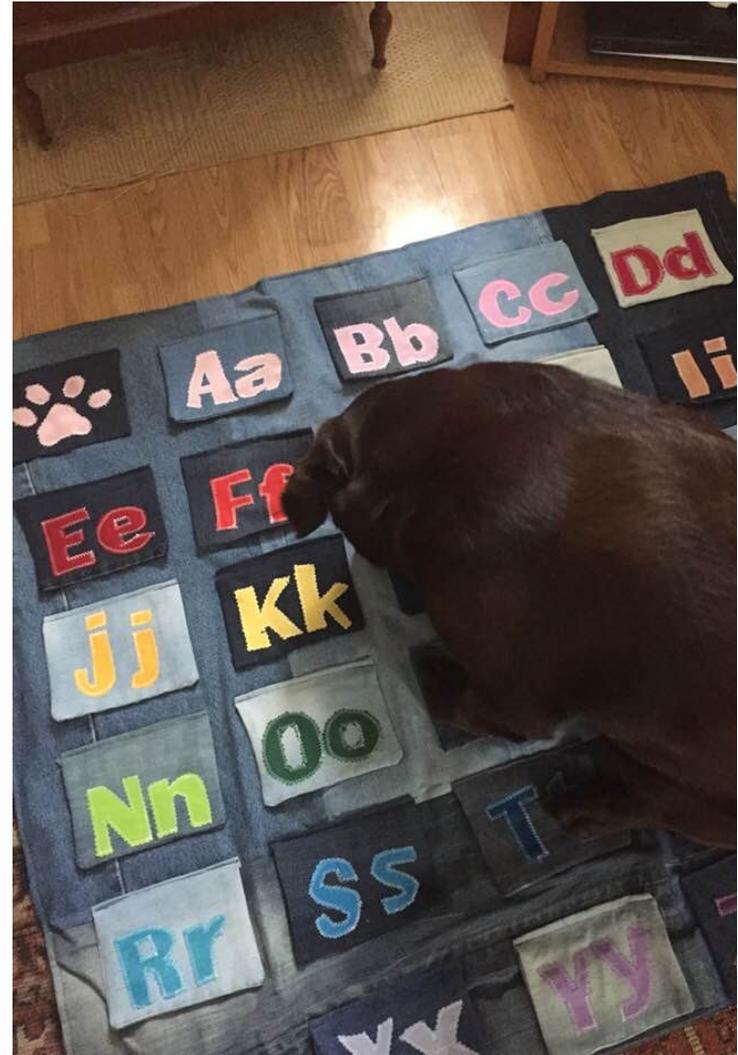
Aaron



- Year 4 (7-8. years old)
- Poor memory for recall, organisation and instructions in Maths
- Working at Year 1 while in Year 4 class – given different tasks
- Very low self esteem – often apologised for giving wrong answers
- Determined to improve
- Worked with dog under the table in 1:1 situation
- Worked with dog outside of classroom on activities
- Stronger memory and association when work completed with dog
- Made great leaps in number bonds, times tables and fractions
- Started to link work across concepts e.g. decimals, percentages

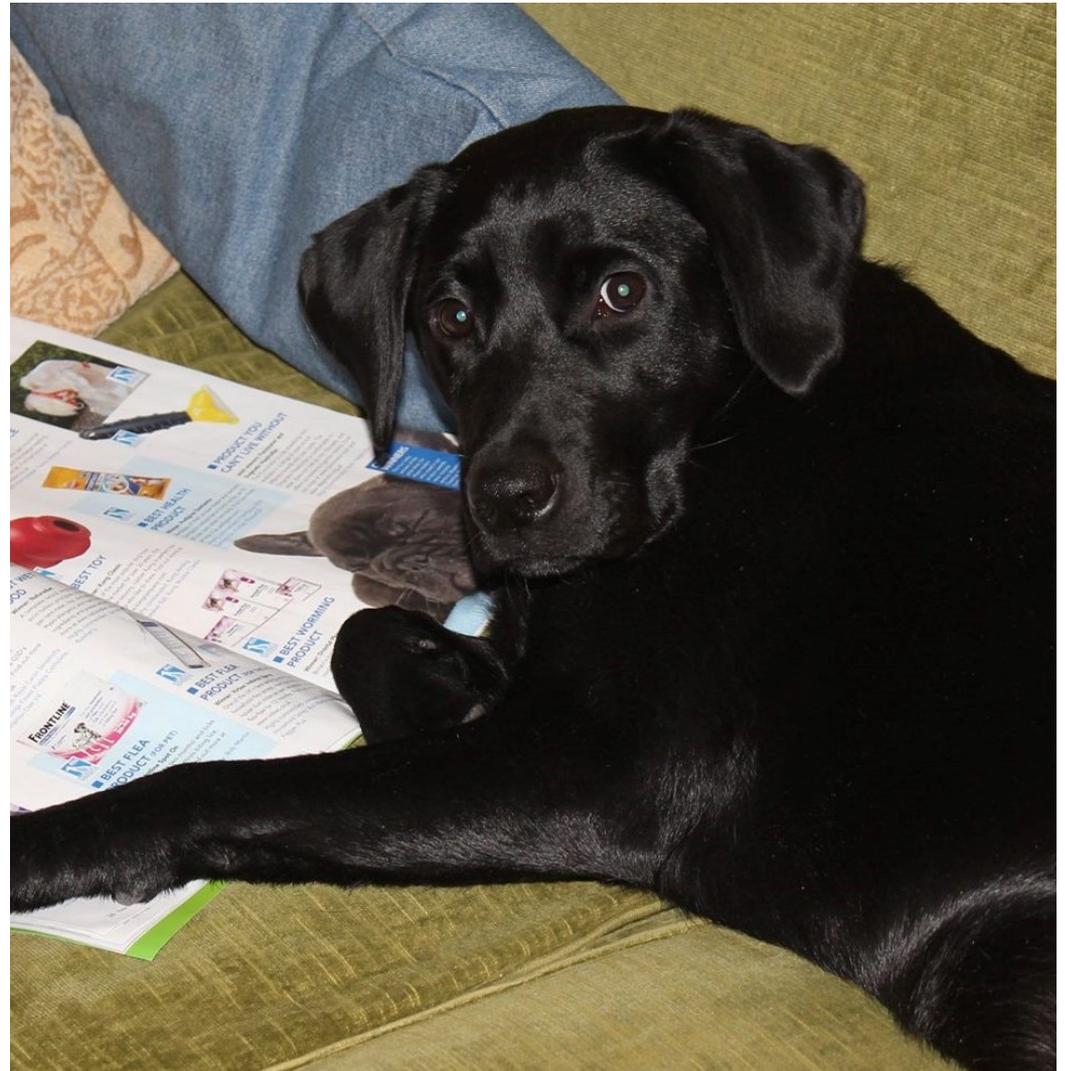
Dogs in the curriculum -English

- Talk about the dog
- Interview the dog!
- Include a dog in the writing journey – suddenly, ‘Scruffy did this..’
- Collect cards with phonemes / letters
- Hide tasks and treats in certain pockets
- Play scramble sounds
- Walk out large handwriting patterns in chalk on pavements
- Treasure hunts for clues



Aleyna

- Year 6 (age 10-11 years)
- Reluctant reader
- Minimal written work
- Great ideas
- Inconsistent spelling
- Worked 1:1 with dog – at first for confidence and encouragement
- Took part in 'seek' and 'find it' games with the dog to build up stories - photos
- Also used 'hidden' phonemes, syllables, puzzle words / jigsaws
- Read with the dog
- Wrote simple sentences and instructions for the dog to complete



Honey and the pre-school setting

Communication
'to/ about/ for'

Working together
and problem-solving

Care and empathy

Non-verbal skills eg
body language/ digital
recordings

Managing/regulating
behaviour

Parental engagement





4.
'Pawsing' for
thought

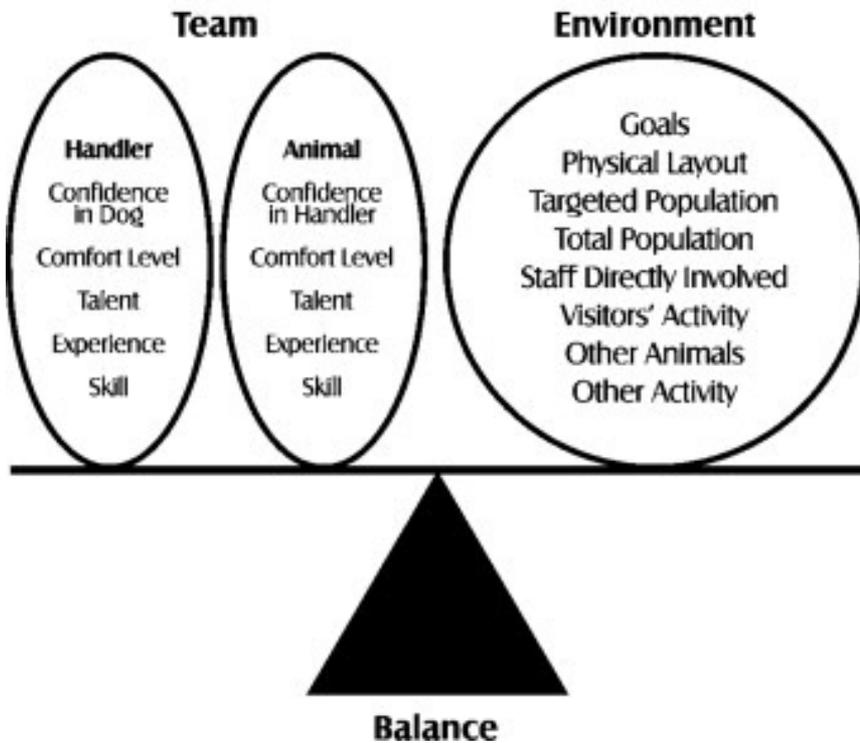
Partnerships

- AAls should be based on respect, empathy, attentiveness, playfulness, nurturing (Van Fleet and Faa-Thompson (2017))
- Kubiniyi et al (2009) - experienced owners report more trainable dogs
- Howie (2005) 'team with your therapy dog'
- Ongoing training for all
- 'Dogs play little part in choosing their caregiver, and still the person they end up with will have a profound influence on their life and the sort of individual they turn out to be.'
- Benz-Schwarzburg (2020:12).



Frederickson-Macnamara and Butler (2010:137)

The Balance Scale



Recommendations and future directions

- How can we support teachers to gain an understanding of nuanced behaviours?
- How can we support busy teachers to best manage children and dog interactions?
- What do managers and leaders need to consider to establish a playful learning environment?
- How can we move away from 'toleration' and promote enjoyment for all?



Starting points for further reading

Duranton, C., Bedossa, T., & Gaunet, F. (2017). Interspecific behavioural synchronization: dogs exhibit locomotor synchrony with humans. *Scientific Reports*, 7(1), 1-9.

Frederickson_MacNamara and Butler in Fine, A. H. (Ed.). (2015). *Handbook on animal-assisted therapy: Theoretical foundations and guidelines for practice*. academic press.

Lewis, H. and Grigg, R. (2021) *Pedagogical principles for successful animal-assisted interactions in the early years* available at <https://early-education.org.uk/guest-blog-pedagogical-principles-for-successful-animal-assisted-interactions-in-the-early-years/>

Olmert, M. D. (2009). *Made for each other: The biology of the human-animal bond*. Da Capo Press.

Wilson, E. O. (1984). *Biophilia*. Harvard University Press.

