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Qualitative Analytic Memo

Methods

Two elementary teachers, Ms. DeLeon and Ms. Castro, were interviewed in-person. The researcher/interviewer was acquainted with these teachers through work, and knew they had experience with classroom pets. Ms. DeLeon previously kept a fish and Ms. Castro kept a black bear hamster.

A high school teacher, Ms. Merrell, was interviewed online by another researcher. This teacher was not known to the researcher but was referred by an instructional coach at Johnson High School, where the researcher frequently substitutes.

Three hours of classroom observations were conducted in Ms. Merrell's biomedical science class. Ms. Merrell currently has a ball python named Cleo as a class pet.

Qualitative research questions:

1. Do classroom pets affect students' behavior throughout different grade categories?

We expected to find a positive correlation between elementary student behavior and the presence of a classroom pet. Our initial research indicated there were ample studies conducted at the elementary level.

Ms. DeLeon's and Ms. Castro's interviews revealed both teachers could use the class pet to positively influence student behavior. Students earned the privilege of caring for and touching the pet when they exhibited good behavior. Ms. Castro even used the hamster as both a pre-corrective and de-escalation tool with one student.

Our initial research revealed few studies about the effect of a class pet on secondary students' behaviors. Based on our personal experience with pets, we expected to find a positive correlation between behavior and a class pet. However, this was only an assumption since there was little research on the matter.

The high school teacher we interviewed and observed used the class pet less directly than the elementary teachers, who had assigned rotating caregiving roles to students and intentionally incorporated their pets into class learning. However, the high school students assigned unique attributes to Cleo, including Cleo's imagined affinity for Harry Styles. While Ms. Merrell used the pet less to affect student behavior, the pet seemed to provide important SEL qualities, such as: giving some students something to care about outside of themselves, giving students another reason to attend class - to check on Cleo's wellbeing, giving students a common interest to discuss, and giving students a creative outlet.

Cleo also provided students with a concrete connection to two content areas: science and graphic design (photoshopping of Cleo and Harry Styles).

2. Do classroom pets offer any benefits to both the students and the teachers?

All interviews and observations revealed teachers benefited from using their classroom pets as classroom management tools. Our interviews and observations showed students on all levels benefited behaviorally and emotionally from having a class pet. One high school student stated that having a class pet made the class "feel nice." This indicates that having a class pet helps build a positive classroom environment that students feel connected to, even at the secondary level.

Teachers also used the pet, especially at the elementary level, to teach skills like animal care and responsibilities. Ms. DeLeon noted it is especially important to teach students rules about having a class pet, how to care for it, and how to appropriately interact with it. The classroom pets offered a tangible way for teachers to teach these skills and occasionally academic lessons that incorporated the pet.

While the pets offered these benefits, all three teachers noted several drawbacks to having a class pet, which our initial research question did not account for. Ms. DeLeon noted the fish could be a distraction and she did have to take the fish home over long breaks. Ms. Castro commented that her hamster "escaped a couple times." Ms. Merrell personally did not have a negative experience with Cleo, but stated, "the other teacher that owned her...got bit one time, but I do not think that she was handling Cleo properly." Based on this feedback, we suggest teachers consider the pros and cons of having a class pet, and the risk factors involved with certain types of class pets and how to mitigate those.

Quantitative Analytic Memo

Methods

An email was sent to the principal's secretary of Johnson High School to ask who in administration may need to approve the request to survey their students. Once approved, a survey was given out to high school students in Ms. Merrell's classes who had a ball python in their classroom. This was a Google form survey that was created by researchers with twenty questions carefully crafted to get balanced data using a Likert scale range of 1 - 5.

This Google form survey allowed us to keep the students information confidential, so it was not concerning for the school. This form of quantitative data collection allowed the participants to voice their opinions without feeling judged by the researchers because they remained anonymous.

Quantitative Research Questions:

1. Is any grade level most effective to initiate classroom pet engagements?

We initially expected the younger students to engage more with the classroom pet, but our results show that it was similar across grade levels in the high schools, even though we only had one student who was a senior complete the survey. We expected to see a positive correlation between the students initiating themselves with the classroom pet and their emotions. We found that 70.7% of the students were more than likely to interact with the classroom pet on a daily basis, compared to 29.3% not likely. According to the survey data, after playing with the classroom pet the individuals agreed to being happy or having a positive attitude. On average, 84.2% of the students enjoyed the lesson that they learned in the class while being able to interact freely with the classroom pet.

Initially we thought that having a classroom pet in the room might be a distraction to the younger students, but it did not seem to distract them at all, as more than 56.1% of them felt more motivated to do their homework while in that setting. The only unexpected finding was that the majority of students did not feel the need to lend a helping hand to their classmates after taking care of the class pet.

From our quantitative data, we can conclude that any grade level will initiate engagement with a classroom pet since it is an addition to the usual classroom environment and allows the mind some time away from the curriculum.

2. Is the affect for all grades notable (very positive/negative, or more neutral)?

After interacting with the classroom pet, results indicated that 68.7% of students want to get another class pet. This shows a very positive change in the engagement of students. We initially expected to see that a classroom pet might be a distraction to the

students while in the classroom during a lesson, but survey participants said that 80.7% of the time they were able to fully pay attention to the lesson.

Some categories yielded more neutral results. For instance, students wanting to participate more in class after holding the class pet resulted in 53.4%, it didn't seem to affect the students' decision making after holding the pet at 43.1%, and it didn't seem to affect how much they spoke to their peers (46.6% neutral), or them being on their best behavior (43.1%).

Overall, of those students who interacted with the classroom pet, the effects were recorded to be more positive and some neutral compared to no negative outcomes at all.