Peace Starts Small:  
The Benefits of Animal Related Humane Education Efforts in the Classroom

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"I am sometimes asked 'Why do you spend so much of your time and money talking about kindness to animals when there is so much cruelty to men [sic]?' I answer: 'I am working at the roots.'"

George T. Angell, 1823-1909

**Introduction**

Our world today faces many challenges, many of which are having dire effects on the living organisms that share this planet. Expanding population, global warming, species loss, distribution of resources, factory farming, deforestation, pollution, and human rights are just some of the broad issues that our world faces today. Often it seems that there is no way of solving these problems. While the point of this paper is not to describe in detail all of the challenges that lay before us, it is necessary to highlight them in order to show that a solution is not only necessary, but possible. Many believe that the answers lie within education, specifically *humane education*.

Humane education can be defined as an effort to teach and inspire compassion towards all living things. In this paper, I will argue that our world suffers many great socio-environmental problems and that these problems can be improved, prevented and even rectified by implementing animal related humane education efforts within our schools. Our educational institutions provide a perfect place for implementation of humane education, as this is where we
can inspire the majority of those who will grow to be our future. I will discuss the significance of empathy development as well as the benefits of animal-human interactions both within and outside of educational settings. I will also highlight several examples of humane organizations that have successfully inspired compassion, empathy and respect for living things as well as other instances where such efforts have been successful. It is also necessary to highlight some of the challenges and risks associated with animal related humane educational efforts, such as zoonotic diseases, as a better understanding of its entirety is important to the development, acceptance and implementation of all that is humane education. Finally, I will provide resources for teachers and parents so that they can implement basic humane education elements within their home and classroom environments.

THE PROBLEM(S)

The socio-environmental challenges that face our world are many, and they are interconnected and complex. These issues are having significant impact on the health of our planet and its inhabitants. Such challenges include: biophilia (or lack their of), our respect for life as well as the natural environment, bullying and domestic violence. These challenges indicate a serious and immediate need for change.

Biophilia… or lack their of

It is commonly known that today, children spend much of their time inside. This is due to many factors such as the development of a “culture of fear” of safety, as well as the structured, tightly
scheduled nature of our lifestyles (White, 2004). Malone (2007) describes this over-protective nature as “bubble wrapping”. By “bubble wrapping” our children, Malone (2007) argues that parents are actually failing to protect their children from such dangers because they are denying them the opportunity to engage and build reliance to their natural environment (p. 515).

Technological innovations also keep us sitting at computers, in front of televisions and video game consoles. Biophilia is the innate love and attraction to the natural world and the living things within it. The term “biophilia” was devised by E.O Wilson, a Harvard biologist, who believed that a love for living things (bio= life, philia= love) is built into our evolutionary roots and that children, given the opportunity, openly display this curiosity about nature (David Suzuki Foundation, 2012). It is probably not surprising that this connection to nature is diminishing within our population. White (2004) examined a recent study that found that 70% of mothers (in the United States) played outdoors as children, compared to only 32% of their own children. A study done by the David Suzuki Foundation (DSF) found that “70 per cent of youth spend about an hour or less outside each day” and that half of these kids could not make time for programs and activities that get them outside (DSF, 2012, para 4). Being outside is simply not a priority for our society. “The virtual is replacing the real (Pyle 2002)” (White, 2004, p. 3). Our society has become “so estranged from its natural origins, it has failed to recognize our species’ basic dependence on nature as a condition of growth and development” (Kellert, 2002, as cited in White, 2004, p. 2). The vast amount of media exposure is teaching children that nature and its living things are exotic and out of reach. “With the outside world presented as a dark, dangerous and high risk place, childhood for many Generation Z children [those born after 1991] is increasingly becoming an indoor activity (O’Leary, 1998)” (Malone, 2007). Because of this children are not growing to value nature like they used to and need to:
“Children are losing the understanding that nature exists in their own backyards and neighborhoods, which further disconnects them from knowledge and appreciation of the natural world” (White, 2004, p. 3).

Children are not the only ones suffering from this disconnect to nature. According to Walter (2013), adult learning is increasingly taking place indoors and on technological devices like computers, tablets and other communicative devices (p. 151). Some argue that by not including technological learning opportunities in student learning we would be doing students a disservice, and to some extent this might be true. But, as Walter (2013) points out, by detaching from our natural environment, we (adults and children alike) are suffering more mental, emotional and physical health problems (Walter, 2013, p. 152). Is this not also a disservice?

Outdoor education can promote many desirable and humane qualities in our students. Outdoor education offers learning that is transformative, spiritual, emotional, active and experiential (Walter, 2013). It is not to say that technological education experiences should be completely rejected, but that technology can complement outdoor education initiatives: “Outdoor adult learning can be an antidote and complement to the digital world, not only soothing tired computer eyes, aching backs and wrists, short attention spans and nervous bodies, but also offering holistic, mentally and physically challenging learning experiences” (Walter, 2013, p 155).

Outdoor education initiatives hold a lot of value and can help to curb this growing disconnect from nature that we are experiencing. This disconnect is having adverse affects on our attitudes and our planet and is negatively impacting the full, healthy development of children and their ability to explore, be inquisitive and to care for the planet that supports all life. We must encourage a positive, regular relationship with nature. Research is clear:
children’s love and appreciation for nature is directly related to the amount of time and interaction they have with it (White, 2004).

Value for life & Environmental depletion

Perhaps because we have become so disconnected from the natural world, it makes sense that we have also become disconnected from the resources we utilize, the food we eat, the ways by which we harvest it and the effects all of this has on our health: “Perhaps more than any other choice we make in our daily lives, diet has the most far-reaching consequences” (Weil, 2009, p. 105). In Zoe Weil’s (2009) book, Most Good, Least Harm she exemplifies the effects of our food choices with an example that is all too common in North American culture: the fast food hamburger. It is loaded with salt, cholesterol and unnecessary calories and most often has traces of hormones, pesticides and drug residues and when consumed regularly, often lead to weight gain, heart disease, diabetes, cancers and many other serious (and often preventable) health problems (Weil, 2009, p 106). In turn, doctors are busy testing new drugs to combat such self-imposed diseases. They are testing new drugs by drugging, imposing illness, dissection, genetically engineering, and eventually killing animals like rabbits, cats, dogs, cows, primates and many others (Weil, 2009). In essence, we are harming ourselves, the environment and other sentient beings in order to make production more efficient and profitable.

I could describe in detail the horrific conditions that animals raised for meat are kept in, and subjected to including: de-beaking, confinement, force feeding, antibiotic and hormone injections, purposefully being atrophied, having their young taken from them hours after birth,
diseases, toxin levels so high that they are unsafe to consume, and other painful conditions like mastitis. Simply acknowledging these horrors is enough to make most people cringe in disgust. The point is quickly made that often our harvesting methods are inhumane, cruel and exploitative (Weil, 2009). Additionally, our environment is suffering in a big way because of our harvesting methods. The “United Nation’s Food and Agriculture Organization, […] estimates that livestock production generates nearly a fifth of the world’s greenhouse gases — more than transportation” (Bittman, 2008, para 6). This is simply not conducive to a healthy, sustainable life system. “Agriculture in the United States — much of which now serves the demand for meat — contributes to nearly three-quarters of all water-quality problems in the nation’s rivers and streams, according to the Environmental Protection Agency” (Bittman, 2008, para 5). Furthermore, slaughterhouses are responsible for some of the highest rates of injury in the US and approximately 10 – 20 000 people are poisoned from pesticides every single year (Bittman, 2008). Michael Pollan’s In Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto (2008) exemplifies how the food that we are harvesting (and its health) is directly related to those that are consuming it (us!). He offers suggestions on how to get back to eating real food. “Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants” (Pollan, 2007, p. 1). Zoe Weil talks about the cost of not eating real food:

We can try to forget that pesticide-sprayed, genetically engineered, factory farmed, processed, over packaged food comes at an enormous expense to our health, animals and the environment, and farmers (and ultimately isn’t cheap at all if we factor in the taxes we have to pay to clean up the ecological mess and provide health care to the hundreds
of thousands succumbing to diet-related diseases every year)

(Weil, 2009, p. 113)

What are we doing to ourselves? The environment? Other living creatures? This indeed is an issue of global concern and is deserving of serious and immediate attention.

Bullying

Not only are we disconnected from our surroundings, we also seem to be disconnecting from each other. According to Bullying Statistics (2013), one in four children are bullied on a regular basis. Bullying is becoming a huge problem in the United States with approximately thirty percent of students becoming involved in bullying situations regularly (“Bullying Statistics”, 2013). Verbal bullying by way of spreading rumors, yelling rude and derogatory terms against another’s race, gender, sexual orientation, religion or other cultural variation is a common type of bullying with cyber (online) bullying becoming the most accessible and common form of bullying. Bullying has adverse effects including depression, poor self-esteem, and even suicidal thoughts and actions. In Canada, 47% of Canadian parents report having their children bullied. And it does not end there. 40% of adult workers report being bullied on a weekly basis (“Canadian Bullying Statistics”, 2012). Boys are more likely to exert dominance physically while girls do it more indirectly through verbal actions like spreading rumours or exclusion (“Bullying Statistics”, 2013). Violence and bullying are connected and need to be taken seriously as “both bullies and their victims are more likely to engage in other violent behavior” (“Bullying Statistics”, 2013).
Animal abuse and domestic violence

Animals provide an outlet where dominance can be played out, as power can be exerted over them with relative ease. Kelly Thompson and Eleonora Gullone (2003) advocate for the significance of empathy development and its association with human-animal interaction. In their work, Thompson and Gullone (2003) argue that by fostering empathy towards animals, empathy can and will translate towards humans. They also argue that the opposite is true. Those who abuse animals are more likely to abuse people. “It is a widely held proposal, particularly by animal welfare organizations, that childhood violence directed toward animals is related to later violence directed towards humans” (Thompson & Gullone, 2003, p. 176). Hazard (2013) supports this further: “the American Psychological Association, the National School Safety Center, the National Crime Prevention Council, and the U.S Department of Education all list early acts of cruelty to animals as indicators that a child may be in imminent danger of directing his or her violent impulses toward human victims” (p. 286). According to Linzey (2013), Ascione (as cited in Thompson and Gullone, 2003), and the American Humane Association (2013), animal abuse can be an indication of family dysfunction and a precursor of worse things to come.

Animals might be involved directly and/or indirectly in abusive circumstances: “71% of pet-owning women entering women’s shelters reported that their batterer had injured, maimed, killed or threatened family pets for revenge or to psychologically control victims. 32% reported their children had hurt or killed animals” (“Animal Cruelty”, 2013). The link between animal abuse and domestic violence is significant and often cyclical. Those who are exposed to such
abuse are more likely to engage in it and at the very least become desensitized to it (Thompson and Gullone, 2003; Linzey, 2013). Exposure to such abuse can have long lasting effects, especially on psychologically distressed children, as there is often a lack of self-confidence and assurance. While it is admitted that the development of violent behaviours is often very involved and complicated, empathy (or lack their of) does play an important role in its evolution (Thompson & Gullone, 2003).

Such violence and abuse does not stop in the home. Thompson and Gullone (2003), Linzey (2013) and others, highlight various studies that identify correlations between criminal behaviours (including heinous acts of violence) and animal cruelty. In one study: “25% of aggressive criminals reported five or more acts of childhood animal cruelty, compared to less than 6% reported by the moderately aggressive and non aggressive criminal group” (Thompson & Gullone, 2003, p. 178). Akhtar (2013) points out that a significant number of serial killers and school shooters have had experience with animal abuse: “up to two-thirds of those who commit cruelty against other animals also commit at least one other criminal offense, including violence towards other humans, particularly women and children” (p. 258). Thompson and Gullone (2003) went a step further and identified one particular study that focused on a random sample of University students. One in three male participants identified at least one childhood experience with animal cruelty (Thompson & Gullone, 2003). It is not to say that anyone who has ever engaged in a form of abuse will necessarily engage in abusive tendencies later, but that the experience of abuse is still significant. The participants of the study who admitted to experience with animal cruelty were more inclined to be in favour of domestic violence and corporal punishment compared to those who did not experience animal cruelty (Thompson & Gullone, 2003). These findings support the claim that empathy and aggression are related
inversely. And so, the basis of my argument: if we can foster empathy, we can diminish cruelty towards other living things, our environment and each other.

The development of empathy is an important part of moral reasoning. “Empathy functions as a social emotion, effectively bridging the affective states of one individual with those of another (Hastings, Zahn-Waxler, Robinson, Usher, &Bridges, 2000)” (Thompson & Gullone, 2003, p 175). While there is no national reporting system for animal abuse, the Humane Society of the United States estimates that close to one million animals are abused or killed every year in relation to domestic violence (“Animal Cruelty”, 2011). These numbers reflect a serious and immediate need for change.

A Need for Change

Human welfare and animal welfare are intimately connected; we cannot avoid this truth any longer (Linzey, 2013, Esposito et al., 2011, Weil, 2009, Thompson & Gullone, 2003). Linzey (2013) and Weil (2009) argue that indeed, a large-scale intervention is necessary. Government needs to be held accountable for their part in animal cruelty and laws need to be created and upheld in order to minimize cruelty around the world (Linzey, 2013). Our educational basis needs to move away from “global competitiveness” to fostering themes of compassion and respect (Weil, 2009). But such grand interventions will not happen over night and waiting for our world leaders to make big changes is not sufficient. It is not within the scope of this paper to divulge the political and economic complexities that make up our interconnected, dynamic world. So what can we do? We can start small. Even if it seems hopeless, there is much that can be done through Education. “In the face of war, bigotry, cruelty,
and the destruction of our environment, humane education may be the most important subject we teach” (Weil, 2004, p. 5).

A SOLUTION

Weil (2004), among many others, advocate for the effectiveness of Humane Education as a solution to many of the challenges that we face. Appreciation, respect and interaction with animals are an important part of Humane Education. Human-animal relationships have been a significant part of our history and have had and continue to hold value in our development and growth. The human-animal relationship can and should be used to foster a respect for our natural environment as well as all of the living creatures within it.

Humane Education in a Globalized World

In my search to understand the essence of Human Education, I kept coming across works by Zoe Weil. Weil plays a significant role in the advancement of humane education as she is considered a pioneer in the field. Not only is Weil a humane educator herself, she is also president and cofounder of the Institute for Humane Education. She has created M.Ed. and degree programs in humane education and continues to lead workshops throughout the U.S. and Canada. Humane education is gaining ground and its importance is becoming widely known.

What does humane education mean?

Living humanely means bringing out the best qualities in ourselves, such as compassion and empathy, and to use appropriate tools to live accordingly. It is not enough to teach children
what values are important, but to give them the tools to actually utilize and live by these values. A young boy might know that being kind is a good thing, but when he goes out at recess to play and causes harm by name calling or pushing after he looses a soccer match, he is not demonstrating this knowledge. Knowing what kindness means is not the same as *being* kind. Weil (2004) argues that without knowledge and tools, students will not be able to put these values into practice in a meaningful and long lasting way. Some of the most powerful learning opportunities come from experience. Students need an opportunity to *be* in situations and to develop, understand and live their values.

Humane education encompasses a lot of things. Its main premise is “to create a more just, humane and sustainable world through education” (Institute for Humane Education Annual Report, 2013). I believe, along with many other humane educators, that we have it in our ability to change the course of this world and it starts with something small. Compassion, empathy and respect for ourselves, each other and the environment starts with learning to be kind to the smallest of creatures.

**Human Animal Connection**

For thousands of years we have been drawn to animals. According to James Serpell (2011), an ethnologist in a school of veterinary medicine, attachment to animals can be dated back as far as 11 000- 14 000 years ago. He traces the oldest known archaeological remains of domestic wolf-dogs buried together with humans “in a manner that is indicative of strong mutual bonds of attachment” (Serpell, 2011, p. 12). According to the International Guide Dog Federation, domestication of dogs happened 150 000 years ago (“History of Guide Dogs”,
2014). The idea that animals could serve in a therapeutic sense came about in the early modern works of John Locke. In Locke’s writings (as cited in Serpell, 2011) from 1699 he encouraged giving children “dogs, squirrels, birds or any such things” to look after as a means of encouraging them to develop tender feelings and a sense of responsibility for others (Locke, 1699/1964, p. 154)” (p. 13). The human-animal connection is not a new concept in any way. What is new, however, is the way in which this connection has recently been given credibility and attention in many university faculties such as education, psychology and other sciences.

We Love our Pets!

As already stated, there is a natural human-animal connection. Children in particular, are naturally drawn to animals and are more often motivated to learn when animals are involved (Esposito et al., 2011). Animals play a big role in their imaginary lives as animal characters and animal protagonists are featured in most best selling children’s books (Beck, 2011). They are also displayed on children’s clothing and are cherished and named as stuffed animals and bath toys.

Today, pet ownership in the United States and Canada is at an all time high. According to the Humane Society of the United States, pet ownership has tripled since the 1970’s (“Pets by Numbers”, 2013). In 2012, 62% of households had a least one companion animal (“Pets by Numbers”, 2013). Canadians spent 6.5 billions dollars on their pets in 2012 and this number has been rising every year (Hanes, 2013). Why so many pets? Serpell (2011) argues what he calls a “Social buffering hypothesis.” Since the 60’s, traditional support systems have become fragmented in the United States, meaning that more people are living alone, choosing not to
have children (or less children), there are higher divorce rates, less time is spent socializing, and family members are moving further from each other (Serpell, 2011). Serpell (2011) theorizes that the rise of pet population correlates with people’s attempt to substitute comfort when others fail to provide. “Current statistics suggest that there may be more pets than children in the Unites States and that a child is more likely to grow up in a household with a pet present than with a father” (Esposito et al, 2011, p. 1). What are companion animals providing that humans are not? Companion animals offer their owners consistent comfort, support, friendship and love. Many parents credit animals with giving their children a sense of responsibility and companionship. “Animals are credited with contributing to the development of a range of life skills, helping children develop empathy, learn to care and nurture, take on responsibility, and deal with grief and death (Serpell, 1999; Thompson & Gullone, 2003)” (Wood, 2011, p. 30). These are important qualities that we need to instill in our children, and if our children had more of these qualities we would certainly see less of the problems described above. It is clear that we have a fascination with our pets. People and animals are connected. We ought to embrace and utilize these valuable relationships to the fullest so that our children and our world can live together in a healthy, compassionate and cooperative way. By enhancing these already present relationships, we can develop a healthier, strong connection to living things and that natural environment.

**WHERE TO START?**

We know that our world is riddled with difficult problems and we know that although it may not always be obvious, we do have a natural curiosity and connection to animals. We also
know that a change in attitudes, values and actions are imperative to a sustainable future. A new philosophy of education called *humane education* is gaining ground and credibility because it fosters positive, responsible and meaningful relationships amongst ourselves, between each other, fellow creatures and the environment. How does all of this fit together? Where and how can we utilize this in the best way possible? First we need to understand optimal learning conditions and opportunity.

Educational institutions provide access to the future citizens and leaders of the world. It is in educational institutions where we can utilize current learning theories and optimal learning environments to engage and motivate students to live desirable, humane qualities like compassion and empathy. The development of empathy (and other social emotional learning) is critical to child development and has been found to link to other important emotional and cognitive abilities as demonstrated by successful programs like CISV and The Roots of Empathy (discussed below).

i) **Why children?**

It is widely believed that peace starts with children. Child psychologist, Dr. Doris Allen believed so strongly that “the ultimate source for peace, long range, lay with the children” (CISV Canada, 2013). Dr. Allen founded Children’s International Summer Villages (CISV), the world’s largest children’s peace organization which provides local and international opportunity for children to live and learn in multicultural, active environments. Children are the key to developing peace because they do not yet have negative stereotypes ingrained in them and are receptive and willing to welcome new ideas and perspectives. Dr. Allen believed that given the
opportunity children would embrace global friendships, regardless of race, gender or religion through experiential learning. Doris Allen is not alone in her thinking. “Children who learn to live with genuine kindness towards others, to think critically about their choices and their lives, and to make wise decisions, help prevent future suffering and disaster” (Weil, 2004, p. 12).

From my own CISV experience I can attest to the validity of Allen’s convictions. I have witnessed the transformation of my own delegates when I travelled with four fourteen-year old children to an international peace camp in Cairo, Egypt in 2006. They actively participated and led experience-based activities with children from nine different countries from around the world. They have since returned to Canada with an open mind and enthusiasm to make positive change in the world that surrounds them.

ii) Learning Theories & Environments

A well-known learning approach, the constructivist theory, comes from the works of Jean Piaget who focused on the meaning-making process of individuals. Learning is the process where an individual creates meaning for himself. This meaning, created by an individual is what the individual would consider knowledge. Piaget’s philosophies developed around the idea that learners are active in creating meaning and knowledge from one’s own experience. Activities based on Piaget’s philosophy are hands-on and meant to give students opportunity to develop ideas and thinking pathways (Bainbridge & Malicky, 2004). It is not a structured process but is a way of thinking that is always changing, growing and adapting. According to Doolittle (1999), social constructivism is based on the idea that “truth is born between people collectively” (p. 4) and that it is through social experience that knowledge is constructed. It is not enough to provide
children with information; they need to experience it in order to fully understand it and to make meaning out of it. “As valuable as information is, information by itself is meaningless—as are the sounds of an unknown foreign language. Information only takes meaning in the context of the social practices of the communities that give it cultural life” (Wenger, n.d, p. 3). According to these, and many other prominent educational leaders and theorists, first hand experience within a social setting is critical to a meaningful and long lasting education. “People learn more effectively by doing things themselves. Experiences should be direct, not second-hand” (CISV Canada, 2013). CISV prides itself on creating supportive, welcoming and engaging learning environments where a “village” or community is created. Hundreds of these communities are created every year in different locations around the world. Each community is unique as it hosts nine to twelve delegations, consisting of four children and one adult leader, from around the world and is built around a specific theme related to a global issue. CISV, its premise and goals are directly related to humane education initiatives. These environments have been found to be very effective at fostering friendship, tolerance and peace.

Schools and other educational institutes play an important role in socialization as they are given opportunity to make meaning through experience. This meaning is what children will draw upon in future interaction. For example, by interacting and living with a delegation from Brasil at a CISV Village, a child will be able to reflect upon and use their experience with the Brasilian delegation to negotiate meaning in future instances related to Brasil, its culture and its people. Much can be learnt different culture as well as ones own through direct experience with others. “Socialization is an identity shaping process with the purpose of fitting the individual to the existing societal order, its culture, and norm system” (Pederson, 2010, p. 33). School is where children formally and informally learn specified curriculum and socialization skills under
the guidance of a teacher and other educational professionals. These individuals are key to development of the whole child: “Although parents are particularly important models for children’s social emotional development, the child’s inclination to empathize may be enhanced by exposure to other sensitive and caring role models, such as teachers, siblings, or playmates” (Thompson & Gullone, 2003, p. 176). Animals can also help enhance a child’s ability to empathize. Because children spend at least half their waking hours at school, we ought to utilize these environments, educators and other resources to make them conducive to successful learning theories of hands-on, direct experience.

iii) The Development of Empathy

According to the Doris Day Animal Foundation (DDAF) (2004) and Cain and Carnellor (2008), Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has been associated with success in social, academic and personal development. Within SEL is the development of empathy. Empathy is a cognitive and emotional skill that needs to be developed, as it is the best prevention for bullying, aggression and violence (DDAF, 2004). It can be considered a thinking and/or a feeling response to an experience of another being (animal or person) (DDAF, 2004). “When a child expresses empathy, she shows self awareness, the ability to manage emotions and delay gratification” (DDAF, 2004, p. 1). Empathy is not an isolated trait. People who express empathy are more likely to show other positive psychological traits like: confidence, motivation, resilience, self-determination and are more academically successful. Kids who are empathetic are better able to distinguish the difference between right and wrong and are more likely to be socially accepted, as they are able to put themselves in another’s place (DDAF, 2004).
Additionally, it is now known that leadership is associated with ones emotional intelligence and skills (DDAF, 2004). According to experts (as cited in Thompson & Gullone, 2003 and the DDAF, 2004), in order for one to respond to another’s emotional needs, their emotional needs must first be met. We know these needs are not always met at home. Educational institutes and other programs can be effective at creating caring, empathetic environments in which children can have such needs met or at least fostered. This is important, as Social Emotional Learning including empathy development, is critical to becoming a successful and compassionate citizen. CISV is one example of an educational program that provides this kind of environment. “Roots of Empathy” is another.

An example: The Roots of Empathy

A Canadian founded, school-based, mental health promotion and violence prevention program called Roots of Empathy (ROE) has been widely implemented around the world. Its purpose is to “build caring, peaceful, and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults” by teaching emotional literacy to children in Kindergarten through Grade Eight (“Roots of Empathy”, 2014). ROE “is an evidence-based classroom program that has shown significant effect in reducing levels of aggression among school children while raising social/emotional competence and increasing empathy” (“Roots of Empathy”, 2014). A local parent and baby are the basis of the program as they visit the classroom every three weeks over the course of a year. A trained ROE coach leads students in observation of the baby, its feelings, needs and overall development. In this process students can reflect on their own feelings and needs, as well as those of other people. The main idea is that if a child can identify and learn to
work with their feelings (experience emotional literacy) they will be less likely to hurt others physically or emotionally (“Roots of Empathy”, 2014).

Recently, studies have taken an interest away from programs that focus on repairing violent behaviours and are focused more towards programs that support preemptive measures against violence and aggression, such as ROE. According to two studies by Santos, Chartier, Whalen, Chateau and Boyd (2011) and Schonert-Reichl, Smith, Zaidman-Zait and Hertzman (2011), the ROE program has been evaluated in regards to promoting prosocial behaviours (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2011) and “real-world” practicality of preventing violence (Santos et al., 2011). Studies show that these programs are found to be effective in fostering humane qualities as well as cost-effective (Schonert-Reichl, 2011). Santos et al. (2011) exemplify this point. The ROE program costs $108 per child per year, while conduct disorder costs $7,944 per child per year (age 10 to 28) (Santos et al., 2011, p. 88). In their findings, they found that the ROE program “substantially improves children’s cooperative and kind behavior to one another and decreases their aggression” (Schonert-Reichl, 2011, p. 18). In another systemic review by Santos et al. (2011), “compared with other systematic reviews, [their] results show that ROE appears to be as effective as, or more effective than, similar programs that have targeted high-risk students (Mytton et al. 2002) or employed curricula, school wide approaches or social skills training (Vreeman and Carroll, 2007).” Santos et al. (2011) found that physical fighting was reduced by half, from 15% of schoolchildren engaging in fights to 8%. “Our evaluation suggests that ROE is effective and worthy of consideration in emerging evidence-based mental health strategies for children and youth across Canada” (Santos et al, 2011, p. 88).

The findings of another study by Cain and Carnellor (2008) suggested that ROE was very effective in promoting Social Emotional Learning. Their main premise is that SEL is as
important as any other learning, and in terms of creating cooperative, confident and peaceful citizen SEL can be considered more important. They refer to The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child’s claim that, “If we really want to build a strong platform for healthy development and effective learning in the early childhood years… then we must pay as much attention to children’s emotional wellbeing and social capacities as we do to their cognitive abilities and academic skills” (Cain & Carnellor, 2008, p. 53). According to Cain and Carnellor (2008), there is growing research to support the idea that social emotional ability is related and compliments cognitive ability and that social emotional ability can be fostered by programs like the ROE that promote emotional literacy. Emotional literacy includes understanding one’s own emotions and how to express them effectively, as well as having the ability to empathize with another. Those that have better emotional literacy are much less likely to be aggressive and more likely to have healthy relationships. Neuroscience theories also support claims that “children’s experience and relationships affect the children’s brain organization, structuralization and development’ (Chi-Ming et al., 2004: 74), therefore, Social Emotional Learning and experience is significant to a healthy development of the whole child” (Cain & Carnellor, 2008, p. 55). Additionally, “the emotional centers of the brain are intricately interwoven with the neocortical areas involved in cognitive learning’ (Goleman, 2004: vii)” (Cain & Carnellor, 2008, p. 55). To exemplify this, Cain and Carnellor (2008) point out that secondary schools that adopted SEL programs have had fewer dropouts, and better attendance records.

These studies show that preventative programs like the Roots of Empathy are effective and worthwhile as their benefits are becoming more commonly recognized as imperative to cognitive, emotional and social development of the whole child. Specifically, the development
of empathy can contribute to overall well-being and successful interactions with others as well as academic success. Such programs align with the goals of humane educators who aim to foster kindness and respect to all living things. If programs like Roots of Empathy encourage social and emotional development in children, then surely the implementation of animal related programs that utilize our natural connection with animals will garner the same effect with students.

**Creating Solutionaries**

Schools are an important social context where children learn and spend much of their time, thus we are investing the future leaders of the world in these institutions. In Weil’s (2013) keynote speech that was given at the Humane Education Conference in September 2013, she noted that the United States department of Education’s current mission statement is “to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness.” A foreseeable change in the way we treat each other, is doubtful when our focus remains on economic success. Educational institutes and environments ought to be fostering values that will enrich all life on our planet, rather than an individual economic success. Our individual values need to change and then our collective values will follow. “The goals of schools must change if we hope to see change. The goals of schools should be to provide all students with the knowledge, tools and motivation to be solutionaries for a better world for all people, all species and the ecosystems that sustain all life” (Weil, 2013).

Knowing what we know about the benefits of experiential and Social Emotional Learning (as exemplified by CISV and Roots of Empathy), we have an incredible opportunity to
utilize educational institutes to inspire a movement of global citizenry. If we can provide our children with passionate leaders; creative and flexible environments; unique, hands-on experiences that help to develop desirable qualities like empathy and compassion; and give them the skills to use these qualities in their lives, we will be able to develop kind, caring and compassionate members of society. School is a perfect opportunity as it offers guidance, support and a social world in which students are constantly engaged. Animals are a source of excitement and engagement and can promote compassion, empathy, responsibility and numerous other desirable humane qualities in our children. The rest of this paper will highlight the benefits of utilizing animals in the classroom to develop our children’s fullest potential to be the peaceful, cooperative and empathetic members that our world so desperately needs.

ANIMALS IN THE CLASSROOM

As we have seen, there are examples of programs that have been successful at fostering humane qualities in our children through education. It is my argument that animals can and should be used in the classroom to foster empathy development and other important humane qualities. While I have discussed the historical significance and current fascination we have with companion animals, it would also be useful to highlight the ways that we currently utilize animals to improve the emotional wellbeing of people, not only in the classroom, but in other fields like medicine and psychology as well. As you will see, the benefits that animals provide in such fields are not limited to the individual, but extend to the surrounding community.

i) Traditional Roles
Animals have been used in the classroom in many ways and for many years. They have been used for dissection in biology classes in elementary and high school and have been the subjects of phycology programs as well. Balcombe (2013) argues that the practice of in-school dissections promotes cruelty, not only in the way the animals are harvested, trapped, transported, and eventually killed but that the very act of dissecting can “corrupt young people’s attitudes towards animals and nature. Insisting that children cut up dead animals and then put their dead bodies in a dustbin or a hazardous waste repository is thought by many to undermine the developmental attitudes of caring for others and stewardship towards nature” (p. 271). Desensitization is a common observation throughout the dissection process. Initially students are hesitant to cut into a once living being, but as they continue, their confidence grows and eventually mutilation, jokes and play with the animal takes place demonstrating a lack of respect or sensitivity toward the animal (Balcombe, 2013). While fostering caring and compassionate attitudes towards animals is optimal, we must at the very least, encourage a basic respect for life, not a dismissive attitude and insensitive behavior. Today, technology by way of animations and simulations, have replaced in-class dissection to some extent. In fact, the use of animals in medical training and other life science labs has been banned in many parts of the world (Balcombe, 2013). Uses of animals in instances like dissection are not fostering a respect for life that is so desperately needed. It seems unnecessary for school-aged children to pull apart a once living creature in the pursuit of education, when technology today allows us to cause little to no harm to living creatures.

Human-animal studies (HAS) have had a place in educational institutes for a long time but have recently become more popular for students across many disciplines around the world.
Courses in animal ethics, philosophy, behavior, as well as critical evaluations of animals in religion are being integrated into disciplines and programs (Donaldson, 2013). “Dog” and “Cat” are the first and second most common subjects that children look up in encyclopedias, so it is not surprising that teachers make use of such subjects (Beck, 2011, p. 44). More appealing animals like hamsters, rabbits and birds are used as class pets. Classroom teachers do this in hopes that a classroom pet can teach responsibility and empathy, and can provide engagement and relevancy to other curriculum standards. Other ways of traditionally incorporating animals into formal education include Zoo observations, behavioral training (demonstrated in dogs), and in drama classes used in skits and plays (Esposito et al., 2011).

Today, utilizing animals in the classroom continues to hold value, but in a more holistic, emotive way. Animals have a way of teaching lessons in a neutral way in regard to race, culture, age, and gender. They can provide valuable relationships, comfort and security for students, giving them a stronger sense of confidence and identity. Because classrooms today are full of children with different learning, social, emotional and physical needs, by first highlighting how animals are used outside of the classroom we can get a better idea of how they could also be utilized inside of a classroom.

ii) What do animals offer us?

Working Companions

More and more, animals are involved in all aspects of our lives. As exemplified earlier, companionship found in animals is at an all time high. We recognize the value of seeing-eye
dogs as they have helped many people with disabilities live independently. Rescue dogs, and other working dogs involved in police and fire efforts contribute to keeping our communities safe and crime free. There are also new and exciting roles where dogs can detect chemical imbalances in diabetic children, or oncoming seizures, potentially protecting them from hospitalization or fatality (Esposito et al., 2011). Additionally, veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder use dogs to help detect and lower anxiety and offer regular comfort, love and support. Perhaps one of the most popular and growing uses of animals today is in different kinds of therapies.

**Therapy**

Animals have, in fact, been used in various therapies for many years and their benefits are documented. According to Serpell (2011), the earliest well-documented animal assisted therapy took place in England at a retreat for mental illness patients in the 1800’s. The retreat was described as having:

- a number of animals; such as rabbits, sea-gulls, hawks, and poultry. These creatures are generally familiar with the patients: and it is believed they are not only the means of innocent pleasure; but that the intercourse with them, sometimes tends to awaken the social and benevolent feelings

(Serpell, 2011, p. 13)

Florence Nightingale noted that a small pet is “often an excellent companion for the sick, for long chronic cases especially” (Nightingale, 1860, p. 103)” (Serpell, 2011, p. 14). Animal assisted interventions slowed in the century following as zoonotic disease became a focus of
concern. Zoonotic diseases are those that are passed between animals to humans. Today this continues to be a cause for some concern, but not to an extent that should impede such relationships from forming and being fully utilized (this will be discussed in more detail later).

Pet facilitated therapy has been found to be useful in drawing out physical, psychosocial and emotional responses (Copley, 1992). As already exemplified, pets can act as a neutral means of support and encouragement. “The Maples Project” was designed by Erica Copley (1992) to test the effectiveness of pet-facilitated therapy (dogs specifically) amongst twelve to seventeen year olds at a psychiatric resident care facility in Burnaby, BC. In Copley’s (1992) own literature review she explains the value of dogs in therapy:

Dogs are generally thought of as open, honest, and without ulterior motive. In therapy, the dog co-therapist is seen as a partner who helps generate the crucial non-verbal communication process. This type of communication creates trust, confidence, assurance, and enhances self-esteem, thereby diminishing the suspicion, shyness, social isolation and lack of self-respect. (Copley, 1992, p. 9)

Interaction with the dogs seemed to be self-healing. “As the children nurtured the dogs, they also appeared to nurture themselves (via the dogs). This dog-child bond appeared reciprocal in nature” (Copley, 1992, p. 98).

The Maples project was reflected upon as being an overall beneficial project as the participants felt a sense of security when engaging with dogs. The dogs also provided unconditional love, attentiveness, affection and an outlet to project and express feelings. They encouraged social interaction and empathy development. They lowered anxiety levels, and were motivation for good behavior (Copley, 1992). Copley (1992) acknowledges how significant
these interactions were for the troubled youth:

The animals seemed to provide some of the largely unmet emotional needs for these youth. The children appeared more sensitive and vulnerable when interacting with the dogs, as if the weight of their protective shields had been lifted, and the 'real' person was allowed to surface (Copley, 1992, p. 105)

Esposito et al. (2011) have evaluated a substantial amount of research related to Animal Assisted Interactions and admit that there is limited amount of research done in the field and that more needs to be done to confirm the benefits of interactions, therapy and appropriate and optimal ways of utilizing such interactions for patients and staff alike. According to Esposito et al. (2011) such studies face common problems like small sample sizes, or non-random assignments of treatments. Studies need to cover larger sample sizes across more socioeconomic classes. Even so, the research that has been done shows that Animal Assisted Interactions to be valuable to all involved.

Another example of such success is Healing HEART Sanctuary in Kanab, Utah where physically disabled dogs, and emotionally troubled youth from at-risk facilities or mental health departments come together. The dogs serve as true inspiration as they do not let their disabilities get in the way of their enjoyment for life (even those that are in wheels chairs). “We get upset about circumstances but dogs just deal with it and move on. They are such an inspiration” (Van't Haaff, 2013, p. 84). They inspire youth to look beyond what they can’t control and to realize that no matter what has happened, it is possible to move forward and enjoy life, just as the dogs at the shelter have done after experiencing tragedy, abuse and serious physical limitations. Examples like these highlight the potential and possibility that lay within the field. The evidence that exists suggests that Animal Assisted Interactions can provide psychological and physical
health benefits to people, including those with physical, emotional and social disabilities as exemplified by Copley (1992) and supported by Esposito et al., 2011. These studies are useful as they justify further research. “The field has great promise and relevance to people’s lives, and a focus on quality is vital to ensure that the theoretical work can be applied to greatest effect” (Esposito et al., 2011, p. 2).

This is pertinent to our educational system as our classrooms are filled with students with diverse emotional, physical and psychological needs. Children with such needs are not always identified or “designated”, and even if so, do not always receive additional support. Additionally, even if a child does not qualify for “therapy” or extra support, it does not mean they would not benefit from interactions with animals. All people can, and deserve to benefit from loving, patient and inspiring interactions from humans and animals alike.

iii) Empathy and Animals

As already discussed, the development of empathy is important to wholesome development and is key in prevention of aggression and violence. Empathy can be fostered through positive interactions with animals. The Doris Day Animal Foundation (DDAF, 2004) is a national nonprofit organization that works to create caring communities. In their publication “The Empathy Connection” they highlight the significance of developing empathy in youth. The mission of creating such communities relies on the tenant that “the protection of, and respect for, animals is closely linked to human welfare” (DDAF, 2004, p. 1). Studies examined by Esposito et al. (2011), Thompson and Gullone (2003), and the Doris Day Animal Foundation all support the notion that interactions with animals can promote empathy in children and this in
turn can be translated to people. “Children who have increased empathy scores because of their relationship with their pet also showed greater empathy toward people” (p. 4). Empathy towards other living beings, including people, will also lead to care and attention to the environment in which we all live. Empathy development is therefore essential to child development and for the betterment of our world. While the research done in the field of human-animal interactions is limited, the relationship between empathy development and human-animal relationships is one of the most studied areas in this field (Thompson & Gullone, 2003).

Thompson and Gullone (2003), and Esposito et al. (2011) suggest many reasons as to why animal related humane education is so valuable. Animals provide a relationship that is unique. They provide an emotional investment that is free of judgment or fear of rejection (as highlighted by Copley (1992) earlier). The results include positive feelings, and promotion of a strong identity including confidence, security, cooperation, positive self-esteem and socialization skills. Alan M. Beck (2011) is a professor of animal ecology. He describes the benefits of animals in relation to children’s health. He argues that animals are a perfect way to encourage nurturing and care as boys and girls are equally as interested in animals. This is not necessarily true in regards to the care for human infants.

Young boys’ interest in caring for human infants reportedly decreases as they grow, but their interest in the care for animals does not decline, perhaps because pet care is not associated with gender, unlike the care of human infants (Melson & Forgel, 1989) (Beck, 2011, p. 43)
Childhood is an important time where children form their views on similarities and differences between themselves and others. Animals can help children develop healthy associations and bonds in this regard (Esposito et al., 2011).

Having pets alone, does not necessarily guarantee a strong empathetic nature. Some studies show that the presence of an animal was not enough to promote empathy, but that the strength of the bond that was created made the difference. “Children who were more attached to their pets were more empathetic than children who were less attached” (Gee, 2011, p. 122). The Doris Day Animal Foundation (2004) also supports this claim: “Ten year old children who has established strong bonds with their dog has significantly higher self-esteem, as well as greater empathy” (DDAF, 2004, p.4). Copley (1992) admits that her study, The Maples Project, could have been strengthened by extending the length of time from 8 weeks to a minimum of 12 weeks, in order to develop stronger bonds with the animal. She argues,

If one loves a pet and wishes to 'read' its feelings, one must place oneself in the pet's position (i.e., become empathic). Constant association with a pet shows the child how the behavior they employ affects the animal and vice versa. The child comes to understand what it means to co-exist in a state of mutual dependency.

(Copley 1992, p. 13)

This supports claims by others that a consistent, regular relationship is important in order to create a stronger bond with more beneficial results. Children need the opportunity to be around animals regularly in order to develop a healthy, long lasting bond. This can be fostered by teaching children how to interact appropriately with animals and how to encourage and
discourages particular behaviours in animals. Linzey (2013) and Haverkos et al. (2011) point out that pet mismatches is a common problem between owners and animals and that pet selection is an important aspect of pet ownership and healthy, beneficial relationships. Certainly those that are naturally empathetic will have an advantage in developing such relationships, but that does not exclude those that are not as naturally empathetic, as empathy is a trait that can be taught and fostered (DDAF, 2004).

The timing of when children should engage in animal related activities and relationships requires further research. Gee (2011) describe a study done in the 80’s where researchers examine the attitudes of parents and children in regards to pets. Results showed that although most children already owned pets (53%-94% across various grades), “almost all the children desired a pet (97%-98%)” (p. 121). This is probably not surprising considering the earlier discussion on our fascination with companion animals. What is significant is that children’s perceptions of animals changed as they grew (Gee, 2011, p. 121):

The younger groups of children did not appear to notice that pets feel pain, and they demonstrated an egocentric approach to the animals, relishing in the cuddly tactile qualities of the pets’ soft, fury coats. By contrast, the 7 year olds frequently demonstrated awareness that pets had feelings. They showed empathy and concern about pets’ fear of pain and about the actual pain that the pet might endure during visits to the veterinarian. The 7 year olds spoke in mutual rather than unilateral affection, although they were aware that pets and humans demonstrate affection differently.

(Gee, 2011, p. 121)
This is valuable as it is important to know what kinds of interactions are appropriate for children at specific ages as an understanding of pain and fear is more difficult to grasp at a young age.

Some might argue that animals are not deserving of compassion and empathy as they are not sentient beings, or at least they are not commonly perceived this way. While current research does show that animals are capable of experiencing emotion, pain and suffering (Linzey, 2013, Weil, 2009, Esposito et al., 2011) the fact that human and animal welfare is so connected is something that we cannot ignore as pet ownership is at an all time high. Additionally, pet overpopulation is a serious cause for concern for communities around the globe as strays animals can carry disease and behave aggressively. “The Blue Dog” organization maintains that, “it is clear we can no longer consider animal health and welfare in isolation of human health and welfare” (The Blue Dog, 2014). By investing in empathy development towards animals, we will also be investing in empathy, interaction and kindness towards each other and our community.

Interactions with Others

Creating healthy relationships means learning how to interact with others in a civil, respectful way and in order to do this, people need to practice. Interacting with others can be an intimidating, awkward and difficult experience for some. Animals can help smooth this process. “Companion animals are a great leveler, transcending racial, cultural, geographic, age and socioeconomic boundaries in terms of their ownership and impact” (Wood, 2011, p. 30). Children who show anti-social behaviours or disabilities can particularly benefit from bonding with animals as it encourages interaction, observation and responsibility (Esposito et al., 2011).
“Pet-owning children, presumably from watching their animals, demonstrate improved sensitivity to subtle nuances of nonverbal communication and a willingness to establish social contacts (Guttmann, Predovic, & Zemanek, 1985; Millot, Filatre, Gagnon, Eckerlin, & Montager, 1986) (Beck, 2011, p. 45).

There have been numerous testimonies of experiences where uncomfortable and often difficult situations had been made achievable and even enjoyable for parents of autistic children by having positive social interactions with dogs. In one example, “Mazie” the family dog allowed a mother and her autistic twin boys the ability to go to the grocery store without meltdowns: “They were focused on Mazie, who kept them from getting anxious around others. If someone got too close to them, Mazie intervened, coming to their side, making a space between them and the stranger” (Skiff, 2012, p. 112). The mother had witnessed her one son in particular, struggle constantly with befriending other children. She says, “if no human ever touches Adrian’s heart, my only hope is that he will always have a “Mazie” in his life” (Skiff, 2012, p. 114). If nothing else, animals can provide a kind of bond that some may never be able to find in people. “Damona,” a rescued Siberian husky exemplifies this further when she went into a fourth grade class and inspired an autistic boy, who rarely spoke or moved from his chair, to stand up, greet the handler, smile and allow the dog to smell and lick his hand. He then proceeded to pick up the leash and walk the dog around the classroom, stopping to greet each child (Skiff, 2012). Such interactions prove to be very powerful and meaningful. They are opportunities for children with social difficulties to interact not only with another living creature, but also with those in which they struggle to interact with most-- people. They give these children a sense of security and trust that they cannot easily get from people.
Within the classroom, animals can encourage interaction. According to the “The Empathy Connection” (DDAF, 2004) children are much more likely to interact with a disabled child when an animal is present. The presence of a pet seems to ”normalize” social situations, getting everyone through the icebreaker stage to the point where they can risk directly engaging with each other. Animals are found to be great conversation starters between people: “When a dog was present in the classroom of first graders, they showed higher social integration and less aggression compared to children in a classroom without an animal” (DDAF, 2004, p. 4).

Responsibility and Companionship

There is a reason dogs are known as “(hu)man’s best friend.” According to Esposito et al. (2011), 70% of young people confide in their pet: “A child can talk to and share with a pet without worrying about confidentiality, reprisal, or judgment, and without needing to meet any expectations (Melson, 2001)” (Beck, 2011, p. 44). Having a pet teaches responsibility as pets have physical and emotional needs that need to be met in order for them to be healthy. As the Doris Day Animal Foundation (2004) exemplifies, a child who decides to walk her or his dog rather than catch up on her favourite show, demonstrates both self-awareness and the ability to manage emotions, delay gratification and enact responsible behaviours. The child recognizes the dogs needs and wants and postpones his own wants for the dogs. By doing this for the dog she is developing his emotional intelligence and empathy (DDAF, 2004, p. 3). “Pets are our children’s children” (Beck & Katcher, 1996)” (Beck, 2011, p. 45). As described earlier, more and more adults choose not to have children, but find solace in their pets: “they were our kids, our family and our gifts. Because of them we are better people” (Skiff, 2012, p. 341)
iv) In Classrooms today

As already described above, interaction with animals provides a plethora of benefits and to that end it is not surprising that animals are utilized in classrooms today. While little research has been done in supporting the practice of using animals in classrooms and other educational settings there are numerous successful examples of programs and organizations that have had success in the area every day. One example of such success is the Roxy Reading Therapy Dogs program (RRTD).

The RRTD is a volunteer based, non-profit program aimed at encouraging a love for reading through the use of therapy dogs. Children read aloud to dogs, who sit patiently next to the child. “Our dogs deliver self-esteem, relief from anxiety and fear, and a sense of well-being. To a child who feels safe and relaxed, learning is accessible, and both physical and emotional healing is accelerated” (“Roxy Reading”, 2013). Reading aloud is an important skill and is one that is often very intimidating for even the best of readers. Children who struggle with reading have a very difficult time finding the courage to read aloud. One teacher commented, “I find it remarkable that every single child I asked said that they like reading to the therapy dogs because the dogs don’t make fun of them” (“Roxy Reading”, 2013). One volunteer commented, “for many children, reading out loud is scary. I’ve seen so many kids take this leap while reading to their trusted four-legged companion” (“Roxy Reading”, 2013). This program has grown in popularity as teachers across the state of Pennsylvania have requests Roxy Reading Therapy dogs. Today 1000 children per week receive this kind of therapy (“Roxy Reading”, 2013). Of course these programs are not limited to Pennsylvania! Locally, the Fraser Valley Regional
Library is offering “Paws 4 Stories”. This too is a therapy dog, reading program also meant to encourage confidence in reading (www.fvrl.ca).

Humane education programs do not always include direct interactions with animals. One such example is Operation Outreach USA (Golden, 2012). This school-based program offers humane education by way of books, lesson plans and guides for school and for personal use at home. The books provided are themed and connected with the Science, Language and Social Studies curriculum with animals and environment and focused on character education (compassion, respect, problem solving, bullying etc.).

Counseling

There are numerous examples of animals aiding in therapy and counseling sessions within schools. Copley (1992) argues that pet-facilitated therapies work because subjects project themselves onto the animal. In her study, “there were numerous examples of the subjects' speaking on two levels; as they addressed the dogs they also addressed their own issues. This type of interaction provides rich material for counseling” (Copley, 1992, p 101). Skiff (2012) highlights other examples of such experience. One high school administrator had so many positive interactions with his students and his dog “Gunny” that the dog virtually became a member of the staff. He recalls one moment with a student:

As she struggled to breathe, Gunny quietly got up, walked over to her, put his head in her lap, and looked up at her. The moment was magic- pure magic. She reached down and began stroking his head. Her crying stopped, and within minutes she was smiling. (Skiff, 2012, p. 43)
The administrator claims that Gunny changed the entire dynamic of the meeting. Another story includes a 12-year old boy who suffered from physical, mental and emotional abuse and as a result would not make eye contact or speak to anyone. The boy found solace in “Bruin” the dog. When Bruin approached the boy, “his body changed—he was no longer in the fetal position. He sat up and talked and was more interactive” (Skiff, 2012, p. 128). After these regular sessions with Bruin, he even started talking to people. Skiff (2012) shares numerous powerful and moving stories related to dogs and how they rescue people in every way possible. People are less afraid to open up to animals. They offer something that people do not. They are free of judgment and have the ability to forge onward even after traumatic experiences.

Minimizing Callousness

“By encouraging caring and compassionate interactions between children and nonhuman animals, humane education programs aim to foster empathy in individuals with compromised levels of concern for others, and by definition, to minimize callousness” (Thompson & Gullone, 2003, p. 179). Minimizing callousness is the goal of many programs. The Teaching Love and Compassion (TLC) program is just one example of such efforts (TLC, 2013). TLC is a four-week long violence prevention program aimed at instilling empathy in children. Lessons include dog training and grooming, empathy and compassion development, anger management and conflict resolution, discussions and practice. “Through the use of animals, children develop coping skills, increased self-esteem and empathy towards living beings. Through conflict resolution and writing exercises, also a part of the program, there have been increases in reading scores and decreases in detention times for participating students”
Students who participate in this program have an increased knowledge base of pet care, showed decreased fear of dogs and were less likely to respond to violence with violence (TLC, 2013). While this program is primarily offered in the United States it is also offered in Canada, Australia and England. Its main goal is to stop the cycle of violence by first preventing cruelty to animals.

Treatment Programs

Wikus Greese is the founder of one of the most successful criminal rehabilitation projects in the world today. He says we must “teach people to care” (Van der Merwe, 2013). Greese is stationed out of Cape Town, South Africa where some of the highest rates of murder and rape exist in our world today. While rehabilitation projects can be successful, Greese admits that teaching to care earlier would be even better: “If these people [the inmates], as youngsters had been given the chance of humane education, of learning how to care—some of them would most probably not be here today”(Van der Merwe, 2013, p. 281). Greese’s “Bird Project” enabled inmates to handle and raise specific birds for sale to future owners. Greese advocates for the therapeutic value in learning to care for another living creature and has had huge success in this project. As already noted, violence and aggression are all too common in North America. While my main argument (like Greese) is that preventative programs work best, that does not mean that “treatment” programs are ineffective. Indeed, learning is not restricted to only one environment, or age group, thus treatment and support is still necessary and worthwhile.
The Colorado Correctional Industries Prison Trained K-9 Companion Program provides the community with trained dogs (rescues in many cases). While the dogs are the ones being formally trained, the program offers new life skills, a sense of responsibility, opportunity to develop empathy and love for another animal for the offenders (Reeder, 2013 p. 41). One inmate commented, “I have become a better parent because I have learned parenting skills from having a dog and keeping a dog all the time” (Reeder, 2013, p. 42). The program is successful as both dog and offender are rehabilitated back into society. According to “The Empathy Connection” (2004) adults who engage in empathy training are better able to work as a team and expressed better job satisfaction. This is exemplified in the Correctional K-9 Program as the offenders found that they made strong bonds with the animals, their training peers and the lead trainer and that they took pride in their job and felt confident about making a career out of such training in the community in the future. These positive attributes not only benefit the individual but they also translate into the community.

vi) Our Community

It is probably not surprising that human-animal interactions also benefit the community as a whole. Australian sociologist Lisa Jane Wood (2011) argues that pets can facilitate social interaction within neighborhoods and communities by creating social capital. Social capital, according to Wood (2011), is “the glue that holds society together (Lang & Hornburg, 1998)” (p. 24). Social capital is directly related to health and well-being and is a recent focus in child development research. Social capital encompasses many qualities like helpfulness, civic engagement, trust, support and even physical health. While the “social capital” research
discussed below is related to pet ownership outside of the classroom, the findings can translate to potential benefits of teaching proper care, interaction and other opportunities within the classroom.

First, because children learn from experience, it is of no surprise that if they see adults helping each other, they will be more likely to help others as well and this will be reflected in their values. “The social capital study found that significantly more pet owners than non-owners reported giving and receiving neighborly favors (e.g. collecting mail, loaning a household item, minding a child), only one of which related to pets themselves (Wood. Et al, 2005)” (Wood, 2011, p. 31). Additionally, there is a sense of trust amongst pet-owners as they have a “love for animals” commonality that invokes a kind of trusting relationship (Wood, 2011). Wood (2011) claims that if a community exemplifies help, support and trust amongst each other, these same values will be fostered in the children that witness it in action. Companion animals provide an opportunity for children to take at least a partial responsibility for another life, and parents model this responsibility by also caring for the same companion animal (Wood, 2011, p. 31).

Secondly, people who own pets are more likely to be more involved and caring in the community as they have a vested interest in a healthy environment in which their pets can exist (Wood, 2011). According to Wood (2011), pet owners were 57% more likely to engage in civil engagements than non-pet owners. Volunteer efforts are associated with companion animal ownership such as hospital visits, therapies, and animal rescue/foster efforts (Wood, 2011). Research has shown volunteering to be good for individual mental health, as well as the community as a whole and it also helps build networks of trust and support (Wood, 2011). Social support plays a big role in psychological well-being, and poor social support has shown correlation to risk factors like cardiovascular disease (Wood, 2011). Again, animals encourage
people to interact and be social. “In an Australian Survey conducted in 1995, 58% of pet owners indicated that they had gotten to know people and made friends through having pets (McHarg, Baldock, Headey & Robinson, 1995)” (Wood, 2011, p. 33). From Wood’s (2011) studies we can see that those who own pets are much more likely to be engaged in the community, thus adding to a cooperative, supportive base.

Finally, animals encourage many positive physical health benefits. Walking is easy to do and is accessible anywhere. It is good for mental and physical health and is imperative to do in order to have a healthy, well-behaved pet. Walking around neighborhoods also contributes to community. Wood (2011) argues that,

As well as the health and well-being benefits of walking itself for both adults and children (and indeed, their dogs), it can also be argued that the visible presence of people walking dogs and the impetus that dogs provide for people to be out walking contribute to increased feelings of collective safety and have a positive effect on generalized sense of community (Wood et al. 2007) (Wood, 2011, p. 35).

People who own pets are in overall better health than non-pet owners. Studies in Germany and Australia showed that medium to longer-term pet-owners made the lowest number of doctor visits: “…pet ownership was correlated with improved medium-term health…” (Haverkos, Hurley, McCune, McCardle, 2011, p. 57). The most obvious health benefits included reduced stress, anxiety, decreased loneliness and depression and increased physical activity (Haverkos et al., 2011, p. 57). Haverkos et al. (2011) make one more point worth mentioning. They argue that companion animals can benefit those that are not directly involved or related to
animals as neighbourhoods that are friendly to pets would also be more likely to be friendly
towards children, meaning that there is likely space to walk and play and traffic is often slower
and more respectful of its community members (Haverkos, 2011). The overall physical health
of individuals and the environment is improved where ownership of animals is present.

Social capital also benefits children academically as it provides various resources and
networks of support (Haverkos, 2011). To put it simply, healthy intrapersonal communities
translate into healthy development of children (Wood, 2011). Fostering such capital would
surely be an investment in our future. While Wood (2011) admits that few studies have been
done in regards to companion animals and their relationship to social capital directly, the results
of the ones that have been done are relevant and meaningful. “Pets owners were 74% more
likely to have a high social capital score than non-pet owners” (Wood, 2011, p. 26).
Furthermore, these studies suggest that companion animals not only benefit their owners, but
these benefits extend out into the wider community as well. It is this potential “ripple effect”
that is of interest. If our relationships with animals can cause individual, social and even
environmental wellness, then these relationships are valuable to a changing, more peaceful
world, and should be utilized in our educational practices and curriculum.

**CHALLENGES**

The above discussion has argued for many positive benefits of human-animal
interactions. There are numerous stories of miraculous occurrences that have been happening
between people and animals for centuries. Yet, there are also numerous challenges that prevent
human-animal interactions from occurring in a regular, formalized way. Not all human-animal
interactions are positive or safe and this can be, with good reason, a cause for concern. Having animals interact with children within our formal education can pose numerous challenges. Safety in regards to transmission of disease, allergies, and bites as well as other aggressive behaviours are all reasons that we hesitate to have our children interact with animals, but with the right precautions, these risks are significantly minimized if not eliminated. Beck (2011) and Haverkos et al. (2011) highlight some areas of concern, but they also point out that, “there is little indication that animal programs are particularly dangerous, and there are few reports of adverse effects (Schantz, 1990; Walter-Toews, 1993)” (Beck, 2011, p. 46). Still, in order for human-animal interactions to be regarded seriously as an overall beneficial interaction, such risks must be acknowledged. Additionally, further research needs to be done in specific areas of human-animal interactions in order to gain a better understanding of how these interactions can be used optimally. Besides potential physical dangers like bites and zoonotic disease, other barriers include the constraints that educators face in regards to training, curriculum obligations, resources and support. Despite these challenges there have been numerous examples of successful programs and other educational efforts based on human-animal interactions. These programs demonstrate the value in assessing, and taking the necessary steps to eliminate risks associated with human-animal interactions.

i) **Bites**

Globally animal bites have been and continue to be a cause for concern. In the U.S., it is estimated that 1-2% of the population is bitten each year where children (boys specifically) are
bit more than adults. Haverkos et al., (2011) argue that this is related to age and behavior. Risk exists when there is misunderstanding (or lacking knowledge) of animal needs and cues given by an animal to express uneasiness. Other risk factors include: multi-dog/pet households; breed type(s); interactions with dogs that are unneutered, leashed or chained; medical conditions; lack of training; guarding of resources; attempting to separate fighting animals or helping injured animals (Haverkos et al., 2011). Often bites are provoked and can easily be avoided with the right knowledge. Haverkos et al. (2011) point out that studies done in relation to bite occurrences, have not taken into consideration socio-economic status, housing, or other pertinent information that would help to gain insight into these occurrences and that further studies should be done in this regard.

Preventative measures can be taken to avoid bites. Children must learn appropriate behaviour around animals. Even when animal behaviours appear to be welcoming, children must understand how to approach (or not approach!) and interact with animals in a manner that is safe for all involved. Pet selection and proper pet care are both significant factors that contribute to happy, healthy companions for children and adults as some breeds more suitable for particular needs (Haverkos et al., 2011). Furthermore, since animals are such a big part of our lives outside of school, learning how to properly interact with them in an important life skill that is currently neglected in our curriculum.

Children who have been abused emotionally, physically and sexually can benefit greatly from animal interactions, however, because children learn from personal experience, extreme caution must be taken when children work with animals, as abusive experiences are likely familiar to them and aggressive treatment to the animal could be a risk to both the person and the animal (Haverkos et al., 2011). Supervision, proper training and understanding of the
individuals’ needs and tendencies are necessary to safe and beneficial interactions with animals. In fact, according to Gee (2011) bringing a dog into the classroom and teaching dog safety will help prevent dog bites outside of the classroom.

There are many resources available for instructors, teachers and parents and anyone else interested in promoting safe interactions with animals. The Blue Dog organization has numerous resources to help teach children appropriate ways to interact with dogs. Kids can identify how to avoid dog bites by understanding dog behaviour and safe environments. It is very important that children learn how to behave around animals not only for their own safety, but also for that of the animals. One tragic example that Haverkos et al. (2011) use is of a well-behaved seven-year old Labrador that bit a toddler. The toddler had to receive emergency medical care and the dog was immediately euthanized. Later it was discovered that the dog has a punctured ear drum from pencil stub that had been pushed too far. Such sad examples are preventable with proper supervision and education. Educational efforts in this regard could provide an advantage: “Children who have been educated to behave in a humane and understanding way towards pets will have a distinct advantage in their interactions with all living beings” (Haverkos et al., 2011, p. 77). Another useful resource includes The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), which offers guidelines for human-animal interactions with people of varying abilities, including people with special needs and medical concerns (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2011). Andrew Linzey’s (2013) “Global Guide to animal Protection” as well as Esposito et al.’s “Animals in Our Lives,” offer insight and advice on pet selection and proper treatment of such animals.

ii) **Allergies**
Another concern is that of allergies. While “contact with dogs slightly increases the risk of asthma for children (Takkouche, Gonzalez-Barcala, Etminan, & FitzGerald, 2008), and dog-owning children with asthma may experience worsened symptoms when they are exposed to air pollutants” (Beck 2011, p. 47), early exposure to dogs and cats can actually prevent allergies from forming later in life (Beck, 2011). Furthermore, “exposure to dogs in infancy, especially at time of birth, is associated with reductions in wheezing and atopy (Bufford et al., 2008) and exposure to pets reduces the risk of developing atopy-related diseases in early childhood (Nafstad, Magnus, Gaarder, & Jaakkola, 2001)” (Beck, 2011, p. 47). It is worth noting that advice from allergists who owned pets as children versus those who did not, had differing opinions on the matter. Interestingly, allergists who owned pets as children are much less likely to suggest that patients with allergies get rid of their pets (Beck, 2011). As for school settings, hypoallergenic breeds would be ideal, but maybe not entirely practical. Communication with parents and family doctors would be necessary in order to have students with allergies work with animals directly. Otherwise, animals could be restricted to certain areas of schools and routines could be adjusted to accommodate interactions with the majority of students.

iii) **Zoonosis**

Zoonosis is the spread of disease from animals to humans when there is direct contact with urine, fecal matter or tissues of affected animals or indirect contact with contaminated soil or water (Haverkos et al., 2011). Viruses like rabies can be fatal to humans, but are easily prevented with vaccine. Some bacteria can be transferred to humans from animals, but it is more
commonly transmitted through contamination of water or food. Cooking meat fully, washing hands and vaccinations can help to prevent infections. Parasites can also be transmitted through contaminated soils or contact with host animals (ex. flea larvae) but can be prevented by avoiding contact, washing hands regularly, cooking vegetables fully, and by being up-to-date on medical treatment of pets (ex. flea medications). Haverkos et al. (2011) highlight research done that concluded that the majority of zoonotic disease carried by pets, do not pose risk to immunocompromised children, but that some people are a higher risk for zoonosis (i.e. cancer and HIV patients). Young children (under 5) are often at higher risk because they are known to put potentially contaminated objects in their mouths. Young children should be monitored when interacting with possible risks (Haverkos et al., 2011). Some general precautions include: hand washing (especially before eating); feeding cooked meats to animals and preventing them drinking from the toilet (or consuming other animal feces); avoiding touching stray or sick animals; pregnant women should avoid cat litter for risk to toxoplasmosis (Haverkos et al., 2011). Again, learning how to safely interact with animals in an important life skill. Children need to learn about hygienic risks associated with animals and how to avoid such risks.

iv) Worth the risk?

While there is some risk when working directly with animals, the value in human-animal relationships outweighs the risks particularly because proper precautions can be taken. A lot of animal incidences and cruelty such as neglect, abandonment, unsuitable environments occur because of ignorance (Linzey, 2013). This ignorance can be avoided with proper education and practice. Responsible and caring animal management reduces transmittable diseases, food
poisoning to people, climate change, pollution, habitat conservation and biodiversity (Madden, 2013). “Pets and children should be adequately prepared for each other and appropriately matched, and a proper choice of animal should be made, including breed, nutrition, training, and veterinary care” (Haverkos et al., 2011, p. 55). With appropriate support and information teachers and parents can make educated choices and implement animal-related education every day.

v) The Need for Research

While the benefits of human-animal interactions might seem obvious, the field still faces a lot of skepticism and criticism from researchers and thus many argue a greater need to research. Copley (1992) brings up a good point. Our history has demonstrated many instances of positive human-animal interactions. This paper has highlighted only a small fraction of them. “Rollin (1987) comments: Our relationships with animals are important--common sense, art and literature all attest to this. Animals are beneficial to humans--again this is unquestionable... I submit that the area of human/animal relationships needs less, not more, scientism (p.131)” (Copley, 1992, p. 28).

Esposito et al (2011), Thompson and Gullone (2003), Copley (1992) and many others that have been sourced in this paper suggest that more research needs to be done in specific areas related to the benefits of human-animal interaction. For example, according to Esposito et al. (2011) more work in the area of animal-stress and overwork needs to be done, as this can effect the effectiveness of therapy. Continuing studies need to be done on the best ways to have animals integrated into such settings, so that everyone benefits, therapist, animal and patient
(Esposito et al., 2011). Another example is of a study cited in Thompson and Gullone (2003) that animal-related interactions were more effective with older children (fourth and fifth graders). Understanding child development and at which age specific animal interactions are most beneficial and safe would, indeed, be a valuable contribution to the field.

vi) Successes in Humane Education

According to Thompson and Gullone (2003), actual empirical studies of the long-term effects of humane education are relatively few and deserve more attention as the field expands and grows. It is important that we improve theoretical understanding in order to enhance the practice of prevention of cruelty to animals, children and other victims of violence. While a need for research is recognized, there has been a mass amount of evidence to suggest that what has been done is worthwhile and worthy of further understanding and appreciation. One example, highlighted by Van der Merwe (2013) shows how a humane education pilot project took on eleven of the most troubled, violent schools in Western Cape, South Africa. The project lasted three months. Three specialized humane educators “set out to rekindle the spirit of care and respect for life of South African learners between the ages of 7-15” (Caring Classrooms). The first month was spent laying the foundations of Humane Education. Next, the students travelled on a field trip to a poultry farm where the students observed the conditions of the animals that they consumed, both battery caged and free range. A representative from the South African Guide Dog Association helped to change student’s perspective on the thousands of stray dogs and their potential value and capabilities. Responsibility and proper care of animals (including work horses) was also taught by having students directly practice bathing, feeding and learning about proper nutrition. The official results were overwhelmingly positive. “Even
before the official outcome of the project was released, educationists were already acclaiming it a resounding success and a vital component to modern day education” (Caring Classrooms, 2001). Teachers and principals who participated in the project fully supported the project and hoped for it to continue in the future. “At our school you could see the behavior of the children really changing, taking more respect for things that are alive, showing more respect to humane being, their peers and even to the teachers” (Caring Classrooms, 2001). Teachers also commented that it had changed their own views on education. The most obvious outcome was the sense of self-worth that the children generated. “In learning to care about the wellbeing of animals, they also learned to care more about each other, and most importantly they developed a sense of their own individual value” (Van der Merwe, 2013, p. 281). One participant commented, “Humane education program gave me a new pair of eyes. Everything I look at now, I see differently. Nowadays, I don’t throw stones at stray dogs anymore, and I give that cat, that always hangs at our door, our leftover food… I feel really proud about it” (p. 281). Another commented, “Now when I see an animal being abused, I feel its pain. Please don’t stop this programme until the world knows that animals must not be bullied” (Caring Classrooms, 2001)

Thompson and Gullone (2003) examined several studies on the effects of humane education programs. Hein (as cited in Thompson & Gullone, 2003) reported on the effects of humane education in regards to empathy levels and treatment of animals of participating children. “It was found that, compared to a control group, the children who participated in the human education program demonstrated statistically significant increase in humane attitudes towards animals” (Thompson & Gullone, 2003, p. 180). In another study examined by Thompson and Gullone (2003), it was found that there was a more significant impact of intermediate (fourth and fifth grade) students in regards to long lasting empathy towards animals
and humans (p. 180). “Animal-based humane attitudes, can generalize to human-directed empathy” (Thompson & Gullone, 2003, p. 180). More needs to be done in order to change behaviour, not just attitude. It is my argument that direct, positive experiences with animals can help change behaviours because it gives children a chance to practice and enact such behaviour.

vi) Classroom Teachers

As already discussed in several instances, the classroom is an ideal location for students to have regular, monitored, safe interactions and opportunity to bond with animals. Schools are a place where the majority of the population develops important life skills, and thus the benefits of animal related humane education could be most far reaching. “A companion animal gives a child practice in relating to someone different from him- or herself, gives the child an opportunity to show empathy, and teaches the child how to accommodate the needs of another” (Wood, 2011, p. 30). This practice is not something that every child is privileged to have at home. Furthermore, not every child is taught how to interact with animals in a safe and valuable way. Because children learn from observation and experience, educational classrooms could provide this knowledge and opportunity to develop empathy through interactions with animals. Empathy is considered a learned trait, as it can be encouraged and fostered from a young age (Esposito et al., 2011). “Empathy provides immediate proximal feedback that discourages aggressive acts by making the perpetrator aware of, and possibly sympathetic toward, the victim’s suffering” (Thompson & Gullone, 2003, p. 176). While empathy development is arguably the most important trait to combat violence, it also translates to other valuable prosocial behavior.
Challenges for Teachers

Challenges for teachers arise in relation to the prescribed learning outcomes set out by the Ministry of Education. It is difficult for teachers to meet all outcomes within certain time frames as it is, and when teachers are faced with the prospect of adding to this curriculum, often it is met with some opposition. I believe, however, if teachers see and understand the relevance and significance of humane education (which encompasses more than only animal-related education), they would be willing to integrate it into their classrooms. Humane education can fit easily into various outcomes of Science, Healthy Relationships (and Health and Careers), Social Studies and English Language Arts of British Columbia’s curriculum documents. It is my opinion that more professional development needs to be done in humane education in order to get a better understanding of what it is and what value it holds for our society. From what I see working in several local Elementary schools, teachers are simply not aware of it. Teaching humane education does not mean that teachers need to teach more. It means that teachers need the opportunity to develop themselves professionally, by having accessible, useful resources that integrate this important subject within the curriculum. Furthermore, if humane education were to be implemented successfully it would enhance classroom management for teachers. This aspect of teaching is often one of the most difficult, especially in schools with low socioeconomic status and higher rates of behavior designations. If classroom management can be improved, it would make the job of the teacher much easier in the long run, allowing for more quality instructional time and less time dealing with the stress of behavior and social issues within the classroom. As a teacher, I know it is easy to get bogged down with curriculum outcomes,
standardized tests, marking and planning. Teachers need to feel inspired by humane education. They need support in their classrooms from government and administration by way of finances as well as time allocation to collaborate and support each other in such endeavors. It is my hope that as humane education gains ground that administrators and other authorities will understand, appreciate and support such initiatives within their schools and offer support to the teachers who implement such valuable practices.

Additional Resources for Teachers:

Local and global initiatives are many. CISV, Roots of Empathy and Jane Goodall’s “Roots to Shoots” youth led community action program are all examples of programs that offer resources for parents and educators wanting to make a difference with a focus in humane education. Humane education efforts like these are taking place all over the world and are successful in many ways. We need to celebrate these successes because they are contributing to the development of cooperative, compassionate and contributive members of our interconnected, global society.

There are numerous additional resources that can help teachers implement animal related humane education efforts in their classrooms. The Blue Dog organization offers worksheets and tips on teaching Dog safety in classrooms (www.thebluedog.org). The BCSPCA offers online guidelines to successfully have a classroom pet. Zoe Weil offers lesson plans for teachers in her resource, “So, You Love Animals: An Action-packed, fun-filled book to help kids help animals” (Weil, 1994). The Humane Institute is a great resource for anyone interested in other humane education initiatives. They offer workshops, resources, online courses and graduate programs.
Dr. Edward Eadie has produced an animal welfare series called “Education for Animal Welfare” (2011) that is meant to help researchers, educators, students and other practitioners to develop a culture of respect towards animals and their welfare in regards to the relationships they have with people. Eadie (2011) argues that Education plays a prominent role in having people understand and implement caring, respectful attitudes towards the creatures that share our home.

CONCLUSION

As we can see, animals provide an incredible number of emotional, behavioural, physical and cognitive benefits for all kinds of people and at every stage in life. The human-animal relationship is not new. Through trials and research we are beginning to better understand these relationships and the potential they offer. According to Esposito et al. (2011) companion animals encourage us to “appreciate nature and wildlife; feel inspired and learn; be childlike and playful; be altruistic and engage in nurturing; experience companionship, caring and comfort; be a parent, strengthen bonds with other humans” (Esposito et al., 2011, p. 27). In a time where people, animals and the environment are suffering so desperately, and our connection to nature is arguable at its weakest, such experiences could be the answer to many of our worlds problems.

According to Weil (2004), “the world becomes what we teach”. If we continue to encourage a competitive, globalized, economically driven world at the expense of our environment, living creatures and each other then we should not be surprised at the outcome. We MUST innovate and change the way our children view the living world. By having our children develop strong, consistent bonds and relationships with other living beings, they will
develop a respect for life and this will translate to people and to our environment. “Education must include all the elements needed for success in school and must refocus to prepare children for the tests of life, not for a life of tests” (Elias et al. 2003: 304)’ (Cain and Carnellor, 2008, p. 55). We know that such “tests for life” include Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and application to the real world. Current research shows that SEL programs contribute to the academic success of students as well as to their health and well-being. This means schools must create an environment in which these skills are taught, modeled and practiced inside and outside the classroom. It is through education that we can foster the development of emotionally healthy, caring individuals. As the late Nelson Mandela said so famously and eloquently, “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Ideally, “there needs to be a massive, globally orientated program of humane education if we hope to see the possibility of a cruelty-free world” (Linzey, 2013, p. 3). For now, we can start small. Individual teachers, schools, parents and other educational institutes have it in their power to develop empathetic, compassionate students. “Through proper care and handling of their pets, children can learn to respect all living beings, which in turn can promote children’s understanding that limits and mutual respect are important aspects of relationships with others” (Thompson & Gullone, 2003, p. 177). When we teach children to be kind, we must teach them to extend this kindness beyond each other, their teachers and parents and to those that are most at their mercy. “We need to develop and nurture in children a feeling of empathy for all sentient individuals, including animals with whom we share this planet” (Hazard, 2013). If we can do this, we can have peace within ourselves, between each other and with the planet that gives us life.
REFERENCES


