Educational Value of Human-Animal Interactions

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Human-animal interactions are inherently multi-disciplinary. However, the influence of human-animal interactions on student learning and academic achievement has yet to be evaluated. Although it has been suggested that the presence of an animal creates a desire in humans to learn more about the animal, this theory has not been thoroughly tested. Using this theory, the objective of this study was to measure the effect of a live animal present in a learning situation on student learning. It is hypothesized that the presence of a live animal during a presentation will increase a student's knowledge about that animal. Sixty-seven college students were randomly assigned to one of three presentation formats: live presentation with a live animal present, recorded presentation with a live animal present, or recorded presentation with no live animal present. A pre-/post-test was used to measure the knowledge gained during the presentation. Results suggest that the presence of a live animal, as well as live presenter, in a learning situation yields higher average post-test scores. The student's area of study, identified through a demographics survey, served as a mediator of pre-existing knowledge as measured by the pre-test. Initial means comparison using SPSS indicate that the presence of a live animal yields a 41% increase in knowledge gain measured by average post-test scores. There were no differences in the average post-test scores of the three groups due to the presence of a live presentation. Both groups with a live animal present showed a 27% increase in post-test scores compared to the pre-test scores. In comparison, the group that did not include a live animal present during the presentation only demonstrated a 16% increase in knowledge gained. These results support the hypothesis that human-animal interaction in an educational setting improves student learning.