

Accessing the Arts Through Animal Therapy: How animal therapy can assist in successful inclusionary practices

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This case study focused on the addition of a therapy dog in an Art I level class at a public high school level that included students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The purpose of this study is to determine how Animal Assisted Therapy may benefit autism support students in the art classroom. The students participated in lessons that focused on representation of feelings through the use of color and combined realistic and abstract subject matters. Qualitative methods of research were used to conduct this study through use of observations, formal and informal interviews of students and teachers, student artifacts/artwork, and student questionnaires. The study focused on 2 students with ASD as well as the classroom as a whole. The data collected was analyzed to gain an understanding of how the inclusion of a therapy dog could assist in successful inclusion, assist students with ASD with socialization, and affect student choice within their artwork.

Bio:

Karen has been teaching art for over 21 years. She received her BS in Art Education from Kutztown University and an MA in Art Education with an Emphasis in Special Populations from Moore College of Art and Design. In addition to teaching students of all needs and backgrounds from ages 4 to 84, she also is a mother to 10 year old triplets, one of which is diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. She lives in Newtown, Pennsylvania, USA, with her husband, three children, and a dog.