

The Impact of Dog-Assisted Wellbeing Interventions in the School Setting

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Purpose

- To understand the impact of dog-assisted wellbeing interventions on student motivation, and affective engagement in the primary and secondary school setting

Background

- There is a scarcity of research and evidence regarding the impact of dog-assisted wellbeing interventions on student motivation and affective engagement
- Perceived positive benefits of interventions have been acknowledged over time and shared in various contexts (Grajfoner et.al, 2017).
- There is limited evidence to support their efficacy in the educational context.

Dog-assisted Wellbeing Intervention

- Barker College** is a Co-educational day school in Sydney, NSW with an enrolment of 2100 students from PreKindergarten to Year 12. In addition it has three Indigenous campuses two in NSW and the third Dhupuma Barker, in North East Arnhem Land.
- Peachy** is a three year old Moodle (Maltese Terrier X Toy Poodle). She is based within the Junior School at Barker and has been training with *Therapy Animals Australia* since she was 14 weeks old. Peachy is an authorised Therapy Dog and continues to train.
- Peachy is part of the Barker Junior School Wellbeing program and is accessible to students, staff and the community. She has a designated play space, is around the School and playground and has a flexible timetable that staff can book for her to visit the classroom.
- An anonymous school-wide student survey was conducted in 2022 for evaluation and not the current research project comments from students included:
 - Seeing Peachy made me forget all the worries I had, all I could think of is how cute she was.*
 - I saw Peachy making others happy, it made me feel happier that Peachy was having an impact on someone else's day.*
 - Peachy sat on my lap and let me pat her, I felt calm and happy.*

Research Questions

- What are the social and emotional benefits of a school-wide dog-assisted wellbeing intervention for students?
- How does a dog-assisted wellbeing intervention influence students' motivation and affective engagement at school?

References

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Special thanks to

Special thanks to the students and staff at Barker College who share their love and care for Peachy and who are contributing to this developing research.

Proposed Methods

- Mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, through the partnership of the researcher (a teacher) and Peachy (therapy dog) working in a school.
- Quantitative surveys with standardised scales for measuring motivation and engagement, wellbeing, stress levels and attitudes can help track changes over time (Horn & McArdle, 2007).
- Qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews or focus groups with selected students, teachers and community members to gain data on their experiences with dog-assisted interventions.
- Cortisol and oxytocin levels and the effects on students' wellbeing with the intervention of a dog. Oxytocin is the feel good hormone. (Odendaal & Meintjes, 2003).

Intended Outcomes

- Findings from this research will contribute evidence-based insights, best practices, and practical guidelines for schools seeking to incorporate dog-assisted interventions, ultimately enhancing student wellbeing and improving educational outcomes.



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[@peachythetherapydog](https://www.instagram.com/peachythetherapydog)



Dogs in Schools Co-op

In 2021, in partnership with Therapy Animals Australia we launched the DISCO (Dogs in Schools Co-op) out of a need to establish a sharing community around Dogs in Schools. The DISCO collaborates to share ideas and the network is open to anyone.

