

The Role of Therapy Dogs in Speed and Accuracy to Complete Motor Skills Tasks for Preschool Children. Gee, N. R., Harris S. L., Johnson, Kristina. *Anthrozoos*, 20 (4) 2007: 375-386.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the presence of a therapy dog would affect the performance of a set of gross motor tasks for a mixed group of language-impaired and typical pre-school children. The 14 children in the group were between four and six years old (four female and ten male); the two dogs were miniature poodles. The design was a two-way mixed model factorial, where a series of 10 gross motor skills tasks (e.g., long jump, high jump-labeled Type of Task) performed by the children served as one variable and the presence or absence of the therapy dog (labeled Dog Presence) served as the other variable. In the dog-presence conditions, the dog either formed the tasks immediately prior to, or at the same time as, the child. Time to complete each task and the accuracy of task performance as determined by a rating scale were determined from a review of experiment videotapes. The main effect of Dog Presence was significant ($F(1,36) = 7.471, p < 0.00959, R^2 = 0.17$). As predicted the children completed the tasks faster when the dog was present ($M = 10.86$ s, $SD = 9.84$) than when the dog was absent ($M = 13.86$ s, $SD = 12.64$), but this effect was not present in the ratings data. This indicates that the presence of a therapy dog served as an effective motivator for the children who performed faster, but without compromising accuracy, in all tasks but one. The interaction between dog presence and type of task was also significant ($F(9,71) = 3.67, p < 0.00905, R^2 = 0.32$) in the ratings data, indicating that the presence of the dog increased performance accuracy in some types of tasks, while decreasing it in others. Based on these results and the strong connection between motor skills and language development, the authors recommend a role for therapy dogs in speech and language development programs for pre-school children.