

- Because attachment to pets is a gender-neutral expression of caring, pets may be especially important for the development of empathy among young boys (Melson, 1988).

V. SHIFTING A PARADIGM: THREE KEY ELEMENTS

What these findings tell us is that we must take cruelty to animals and humane education out of their Victorian-era context and reframe violence against animals into a 21st-century context with which contemporary legislators, educators, and courts are more comfortable. The three key elements of this shift can be summarized as follows.

A. ANIMAL ABUSE IS FAMILY VIOLENCE

Traditionally, we have thought of acts of violence against animals as isolated acts, but animal abuse rarely occurs in a vacuum. It frequently indicates other emotional, familial, economic, or social problems. In today's society, 98% of Americans see pets as "companions" or as "members of the family" (AVMA, 2002). As pets come to be seen less as "property" and more as "members of the family," acts of animal abuse often intersect acts of child abuse and/or domestic violence. We must redefine animal abuse as family violence.

B. ANIMAL ABUSE IS A HUMAN WELFARE CONCERN

American antircruelty laws are the oldest in the world and date to 1641 (Animal Welfare Institute, 1990). These statutes have been enacted because animal maltreatment is perceived primarily as an affront to a civilized society's mores or as a threat to others' private property-human welfare concerns. We should expand the legal concept of "cruelty to animals" as a human welfare issue by reclassifying it as a more contemporary "animal abuse" where it is not necessary to prove criminal intent in order to obtain convictions.

C. COMMUNITY CAREGIVERS MUST BE CROSS-TRAINED

The network of humane and human social service agencies must learn to recognize telltale warning signs of all forms of family violence outside their immediate purview and to cross-report to their counterparts in other agencies. A multidisciplinary approach to family violence, rather than "silos" of

bureaucratic isolationism, holds greater promise in making earlier identifications, timelier interventions, and more effective preventions of animal abuse, child abuse, domestic violence, and elder abuse.

VI. HUMANE EDUCATION INNOVATIONS

The mere presence of pets is neither necessary nor sufficient for children to develop empathy (Arluke, 2003). However, if animals are present, especially if there is attachment to those animals, there is an opportunity for children to develop a healthy sense of compassion for others (Ascione, 2004), higher measures of social competence and empathy (Poresky, 1990), greater orientation toward social values and greater likelihood of entering a helping profession (Vizek-Vidovic *et al.*, 2001), greater empathy toward people (Ascione and Weber, 1996), higher self-esteem (Bierer, 2001), and less aggression (Hegrovich *et al.*, 2002).

Consequently, educational programs in traditional classrooms, schools for emotionally disturbed and behaviorally challenged students, youthful offender programs, classes for at-risk youth, and numerous other venues are achieving breakthroughs by using animals to soften harsh environments, to remind us of our universal kinships, and to inspire empathy. The newest and most promising of these animal-assisted interventions are implementing humane education programs based on links between animal abuse and human violence (San Diego Humane Society and SPCA, 2005; Soltow and Shepherd, 1992).

A. A NATIONAL HUMANE EDUCATION CURRICULUM

In South Africa, whose constitution requires the inclusion of environmental education in schools, widespread awareness of the animal abuse/family violence connections resulted in the Humane Education Trust developing a national multilingual humane education component that will comprise 9% of this environmental instruction. Link training will also be available to every police station in the country (Humane Education Trust, 2003; L. Van der Merwe, personal communication, 2004).

B. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EDUCATORS

In Canada, the Alberta SPCA obtained federal funding to publish a guide for teachers based on the link between animal abuse and other violent behaviors. This guide to resources and curriculum design is used in the Alberta

Teachers' Association's Safe and Caring Schools Project. The guide includes the symbiotic relationship between children and animals and offers recommendations for teachers whose students disclose incidents of animal abuse (Bartle, 2003).

In Pennsylvania, the extensive Humane Education Guidebook is predicated on the animal abuse/child abuse connection (Federated Humane Societies of Pennsylvania, 2000).

The Association of Professional Humane Educators (2004) has published a directory of humane education resources in keeping with its development and networking activities for educators.

In response to opposition from the American Lung Association and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals against the use of classroom animals due to the absence of veterinary, humane, science, or health protocols, the Pet Care Trust, a nonprofit foundation established by pet food and supply companies, offers workshops to help teachers select and manage classroom animals using veterinary technicians as mentors. The Pet Care Trust estimates that 25% of teachers use pets in their classrooms.

C. REVITALIZATION OF KINDNESS CLUBS

Long after the Bands of Mercy and Jack London White Fang clubs disappeared, there is renewed interest in organizing groups of youngsters dedicated to protecting animals. In Bloemfontein, South Africa, an area described as "a rural area with a Wild West mentality," "Ubuntur" clubs to promote "better life for all living beings" are being launched with the enthusiastic support of the provincial department of education, based on the inseparable link between violence toward women and children and violence toward animals. The head boy of one school wrote, "During Apartheid, whites treated animals better than they treated blacks because whites thought animals were better than blacks. As black people became aware of that, some of them started having pets such as dogs and cats" (B. Willshire, personal communication, 2004).

D. ADVANCED DEGREES IN HUMANE EDUCATION

The International Institute for Humane Education launched the first Humane Education Certificate Program in the United States and later affiliated with Cambridge College to offer a distance learning master of education degree program in humane education. Animal protection is one of five modules in the five-semester course, along with human rights, environmental ethics, cultural issues, and education and communication.

Humane Society University (HSU), a program of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), in conjunction with Webster University, offers an online master of arts in teaching degree with a focus on character development and humane education. The fully accredited program teaches teachers to develop, implement, and evaluate educational programs that emphasize character development and respect for animals and the environment. HSU also offers online professional development coursework in humane education and character development, nonprofit organizational management, shelter operations, shelter animal health and behavior, and humane community solutions (Humane Society University, 2004).

In conjunction with HSUS's National Association for Humane and Environmental Education (NAHEE) division, HSU also offers a certified humane education specialist program and numerous other distance learning courses to help humane educators reach teachers and to create service learning opportunities. This trend toward credentialization may be part of a larger pattern of certification and training programs now available, although not mandated, for other professionals in the animal field, including AAT specialists, animal welfare administrators, cruelty investigators, euthanasia technicians, kennel technicians, and animal control officers using chemical immobilization, disaster response, and technical rescue techniques.

E. SPECIALIZED HUMANE EDUCATION SCHOOLS

The world's first humane education charter school has opened in Harmony Florida, with a second one planned in Citrus Heights, California. These schools feature humane education-based learning environments that foster the development of ethical children who conduct service learning programs (Wishnik, 2004). The goals of these schools include promoting community involvement and activism; rejecting all forms of cruelty, exploitation, and oppression; developing critical thinking skills; respecting human rights; and appreciating the natural community. Students are expected to learn compassion from their relationships with nonhuman animals and to transfer these skills to their human relationships (Wishnik, 2003).

F. PROFESSIONAL CLASSROOM MATERIALS

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals publishes an annual "Learning to Care Catalog" featuring videos, bilingual programs, handouts, activities sheets, resource guides, pet care flyers, and books. NAHEE publishes *KIND News*, a monthly classroom newspaper with articles, puzzles,

and celebrity interviews that teach children the value of showing kindness and respect to animals, the environment, and one another. NAHFE's numerous other resources include books and online reviews of children's literature and movies.

G. TARGETED HUMANE EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS

In 1987, the American Psychiatric Association added cruelty to animals to the list of indicators for a diagnosis of conduct disorder to the "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders." The median age of onset of animal abuse is 6.5 years, is often noticed before other indicators of conduct disorder are manifest, and may forecast major dysfunction in adulthood. Identifying animal abuse early and intervening before a child is seven years of age may be a way to stop maladaptive behavior. Elementary school programs in the United States, Japan, and elsewhere are introducing animals into curricula to help solve social problems, including animal abuse and neglect (Matoba and Coultis, 2004).

Preliminary evidence indicates that animal-based interventions in mental health settings for adolescents have many potential benefits (Kruger *et al.*, 2004). Humane organizations are augmenting traditional broad-spectrum classroom presentations with specialized animal-assisted interventions for at-risk youth. In Los Angeles, SPICALA developed TLC (Teaching Love and Compassion) for at-risk youths with histories of disruptive or violent behavior. The youths attend a four-week workshop during the prime-risk after-school hours. Boys and girls work together learning nonviolent resolution of conflicts as they make shelter dogs more adoptable through obedience training based on positive reinforcement techniques and humane animal husbandry (Yao, 2003). East Coast Assistance Dogs' Pet Assisted Learning Services (PAIS) in New York teaches at-risk youth in four residential schools to train service dogs. Similar programs include the Wisconsin Humane Society's Project PAL, Project Pooch in Oregon, and Project Second Chance in New Mexico (Arkow, 2003).

In Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, the Humane Society of Broward County created Pet Clubs in nine Boys and Girls Clubs in high-risk neighborhoods where children are regularly exposed to feral cats and dogs who are chained and trained to be dangerous. Because few of these children have had positive experiences with animals and many are terrified of dogs, the Pet Clubs provide AAT/AAA visits that allow children to interact in positive ways while learning the correct ways to approach, handle, and care for pets. The Humane Society also developed a "No Bones About It" badge for local Girl Scouts (Katz, 2004).

19. "Old Wine in a New Bottle"

The South African Red Cross Society has launched the first program in Africa, if not the world, that trains school dropouts in first aid skills for animals to become part of an animal ambulance service. The program in Strandfontein, Western Cape province, takes at-risk youths off the streets and away from crime, drugs, and dog fighting. The program rescues animals in distress and provides transportation for economically disadvantaged families taking their pets to veterinarians (Animal Voice, 2005).

The Latham Foundation has published "Teaching Empathy: Animal-Assisted Therapy Programs for Children and Families Exposed to Violence." This handbook for therapists, humane educators, and teachers uses the link as the keystone for humane education and AAT interventions (Loar and Colman, 2004).

H. NONCLASSROOM EDUCATION OUTREACH

A number of SPCAs conduct summer camps with curricula based on humane themes. The Animal Rescue League in Rhode Island designed a "Pets and People" exhibit at the Providence Children's Museum that teaches 120,000 children and their grown-ups each year about pet responsibility and kindness.

I. RECOGNITIONS

NAHFE issues annual awards for the Humane Teen of the Year, National KIND Teacher, Children's Book Award, and a national humane education achievement award. The Latham Foundation biennially recognizes outstanding humane education videos.

J. LITERACY PROGRAMS

Many animal welfare organizations have begun partnering with libraries to inspire children to read by having them read stories aloud to dogs. The Barks and Books reading enrichment program at the Pasadena Humane Society and SPCA offers children in southern California the opportunity to read animal-related short stories of their choice to dogs in the society's Companion Animal Program: the activity makes reading fun and builds children's confidence in reading aloud. A training video to teach therapy teams how to implement a reading education assistance dogs program is available from Inter-mountain Therapy Dogs (P.O. Box 17201, Salt Lake City, UT 84117) or www.therapyanimals.org.

K. ELECTRONIC LEARNING

An innovative educational web site called "Learning and Living Together: Building the Human-Animal Bond Online Curriculum" has been designed by the People Pet Partnership at the Center for the Study of Animal Well-Being at the College of Veterinary Medicine at Washington State University. The web site, with three grade-specific modules, promotes science and general education, encourages humane care of pets, and builds leadership skills through relationships with companion animals (Martin and Taunton, 2004).

VII. CONCLUSION

Mankind's earliest known works of art, dating back 32,000 years, are cave paintings of animals (Associated Press, 2001). Our earliest ancestors had primate affinities with the animals that shared their environment. Over the last 320 centuries, we have feared animals, partnered with them, worshiped them, domesticated them, and made some of them members of our families. In the future we may take them with us into outer space (Levinson, 1984).

Animals can capture children's attention, imagination, and emotions in ways that people-focused subject matter cannot. Teaching abstract concepts such as compassion can be easier, more engaging, and more fun when animals are the springboard for discussion. As animal-assisted therapists have long known, animals are catalysts for communication, and people often find it easier to talk about animals than about other topics, particularly if the other person is a stranger or an authority figure or if the subject is uncomfortable. Animals can be introduced more easily into curricula by using the growing evidence about AAT and interest in the links between animal abuse and human violence.

"When we show [kids] that they can help animals, they learn that they can make a real difference in the world," said Bill Samuels, former director of humane education at the ASPCA. "Humane education allows children to do more than learn about other animals—it helps children learn from them" (Samuels, 2004).

A confluence of federally funded mandates for character education to promote core moral values, coupled with widespread awareness of the human health benefits of animal-assisted therapy and the links between animal abuse and interpersonal violence, has created a unique opportunity to portray an age-old message in a new light. At least 28 states have adopted some form of character education law, and 21 others without specific legislation have indicated support for character education (Antoniec, 2003). The U.S. Department of Education tripled its budget for character education as part of the "No Child Left Behind" mandate (Lord, 2001). Faculty chairs in character education and

19. "Old Wine in a New Bottle"

447

centers for the advancement of ethics and character are proliferating at universities. Advocates for humane education, working with their counterparts in the animal-assisted therapy and violence prevention fields, should work together using these models to target at-risk individuals.

Although some may argue that the appropriate place for humane, character, morals, or values education is in the home, widespread concern about rates of violence, substance abuse, teen pregnancy dropout rates, and bullying is energizing efforts to introduce preventive measures through classroom instruction. Humane education should be an equal partner in this activity. Humane education is especially relevant at a time when the connection between childhood acts of cruelty to animals and interpersonal violence is widely known, and the perceived moral decline of our nation's youth is a common and increasingly fervent lament (Unti and DeRose, 2003).

Human-companion animal bond and link research should lead to a reassessment and renaissance of animal-assisted education programs based on concrete data rather than abstract moral philosophies. A greater understanding of the ambassadors from the natural world, and of the human implications of animal abuse using a 21st-century paradigm that other professions can accept, will protect animals better and reduce the violence harming the two- and four-legged members of our families.

Perhaps Alan Beck expressed our humane educational mandate as succinctly as anyone when he said, "Companion animals are our children's children, and the best thing we can do for our children is to help them be better parents" (Dickstein, 1999).

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