

Small Animals in the College Classroom: Student Reactions and Educator Recommendations

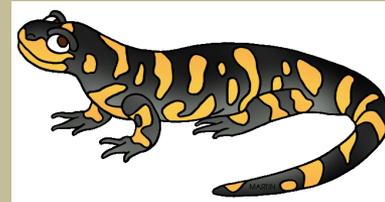
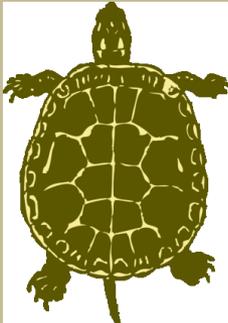
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Introduction

- Interacting with animals can...
 - Enhance learning (Daly & Suggs, 2010; Hummel & Randler, 2012)
 - Strengthen feelings of empathy (Fuhrman & Ladewig, 2008)
 - Decrease blood pressure, lower heartrate, and enhance one's outlook on life (Siegel, 2004; Von Bergen, 2015)
- Little evidence exists on the influence of using animals in a classroom on college students

The class: *Animals in Education*

- Using animals to teach about environmental and non-environmental issues
- Team teaching activities using animals (videotaped)
 - Part 1: Build presentation and deliver to classmates
 - Part 2: Deliver revised presentation to special needs youth
- Animal Ambassadors
 - Turtles, snakes, salamanders, and baby chicks



Objectives

1. Reveal historic trends in the use of animals in teaching
2. Describe student reactions to their use of animals during teaching demonstrations
3. Provide recommendations for using animals to enhance interaction in the college classroom

Objective #1: Literature Trends 2000 – 2015

- Animal ambassadors studied most often include...
 - Dogs
 - Guinea pigs
 - Fish
 - “Charismatic mega fauna”
- Length of exposure to animals was limited
 - Single class period to one week
- Learners at the 8th grade level or below

Objective #2: Student Reactions

- Semi-structured interviews and document analysis (student assignments) revealed...
 - **Animal ambassadors reduced classroom distractions**
 - “I've never seen a student engaged the whole entire time as when we brought in the turtles. They were all about it, and they wanted to see Mitsy [tortoise] walk and they just thought it was the coolest thing ever. I just feel like even the most difficult students can be reached by animals.”

Objective #2: Student Reactions

- Animal ambassadors encouraged students to interact with their instructor
 - “When I see Ranger Nick in his office, I always want to pop in and see if he has any animals with him today.”
 - “Hearing the way he [Nick Fuhrman] talks to his animals makes him really approachable...”
 - “I’ll never forget that day Sandy [hognose snake] crawled into your shirt...you [Nick Fuhrman] were just so, ‘oh no big deal’ about it and I respected that.”

Objective #2: Student Reactions

- Animal ambassadors promoted adaptability in the instructor and students
 - [teaching with animals is] “very different from public speaking just from the simple fact that there's that wild animal variable and you have to be able to be flexible and kind of roll with the punches rather than just having a speech memorized...”
 - “Seeing their faces when I took Snowy [corn snake] out of the pillowcase boosted my confidence...when she began crawling into my shirt, I had to remain calm...”

Objective #3: Recommendations

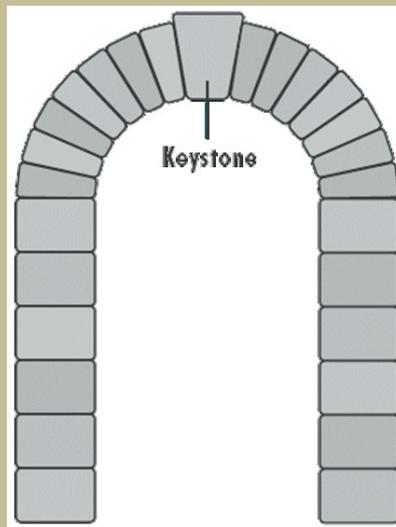
- Safely use small animals in college classrooms to...
 - ✓ Reduce student distractions
 - ✓ Enhance presenter confidence
 - ✓ Promote student engagement and curiosity
 - ✓ Encourage (and sometimes force) flexibility
- Consider using “unique” animals such as reptiles and amphibians because of the novelty effect (Daly & Suggs, 2010; Shiloh et al., 2003)

Objective #3: Recommendations

- Consider naming animal ambassadors
- Know the anxieties of students around animals (e.g., snakes) and address them
- Contact your state's Department of Natural Resources concerning an animal teaching permit
- When using animals, be willing to capitalize on “teachable moments” when they happen

Ideas for Using Animals in Your Course

- As an interest approach/hook to kick off a lesson
- As a teaching tool during a student presentation
- As an object to be observed for specific behaviors
- As a transition/mental shift between units
- As an ambassador for an environmental issue



Thanks so much!

