3-5-year-old children were presented with pet care curriculum centering on the physical and emotional needs of, Riley, a live dog. Children interacted with the researcher/teachers and Riley twice per week; and they were given open-ended opportunities to engage with pet-themed props allowing them to “play out their internal dialogs”.

“It’s not that he tells us, it’s just that he ‘tells’ us.”

Children’s social and emotional behavior was assessed using the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment© (DECA) both before and after the 6 week research period. Children were also asked pre and post assessment questions about a fictional dog “Daisy” and what she would need or want to be happy and healthy.

Pre: “Snacks and drinks napping”
Post: "a leash, a dog collar with her name and Miss Rachel's name"

Interview data showed gains in the number and complexity of children’s answers about what “Daisy” would need or want to be happy and healthy; direct observation of children’s play behavior provided anecdotal evidence of enhanced “humane” behavior with their pet care props; no significant difference was seen through the DECA assessment (which was expected as no children were determined to be “at risk” regarding social and emotional development).