

Dogs that are being trained help kids' behavior to improve as well

Required Annotations		Student-Created Annotations		Summary / Questions / Reflection	
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When Thobani Gasa took his puppy for obedience training a few years ago it was just for fun, but soon his own behavior started to change. Gasa lives in a small town in South Africa called Mpophomeni. Many townships in South Africa are **notorious** for gang-related violence, but in Mpophomeni pet dogs are helping lead children to a more peaceful future.

On a hot Friday afternoon, children bring their dogs to the Zamuthule primary school where they participate in the weekly training session.

"I was part of the gangs, but this program changed my life," said Gasa, age 20, now a trainer. "When I started learning about dogs, I started to focus on the dogs and abandoned gangster life."

Adrienne Olivier is a volunteer dog trainer and retired teacher who started teaching children how to treat pet dogs eight years ago. Now, she holds a weekly dog-training class for 100 children between the ages of 8 and 15 and their pets.

The project is called "Funda Nenja," which means "learn with the dog" in Zulu. Zulu is one of the official languages of South Africa and it is also the name of the largest tribe of people in South Africa. It has helped **nurture** respect and **kinship**, the feeling of family and togetherness, between humans and their dogs.

Children Learn To Understand Their Own Behavior

"Coming here has taught me to treat dogs with respect," Sihle Dubazane, age 13, said, while caressing his 4-year-old crossbreed named Lion. "A dog has to be treated nicely, it has blood, it can feel."

In a classroom nearby, children and their puppies sit quietly on cream-colored rubber mats, listening closely to a tutor. Meanwhile, on the playgrounds outside, children and their dogs are grouped into three classes. The classes range from beginners to seniors, depending on the dog's level of obedience.

By learning how animals behave, the youngsters are better able to understand their own behavior. Violence against or involving children in South Africa is alarmingly common, according to several children's charities.

A 2016 study revealed that in some parts of South Africa more than half of children are abused by caregivers, teachers or relatives. This treatment gets passed on through the kids to others. Children who experience or witness violence are more likely to become abusers themselves later in life, a local report titled "Out of Harm's Way" said.

Vuyani Dube, age 11, has been taking his dogs to Funda Nenja for just three months, and his family has already noticed the change in his behavior. "He wasn't this disciplined and he wasn't this responsible," said Siphesihle Dube, who spoke about his nephew as he walked back home from the school with one of the family's three dogs.

Project Keeps Kids Off The Streets

"Because of the history of violence involving the kids, (the project) is very, very good," said Dube. "It keeps them away from the street corners where they end up smoking."

There has been no scientific study of the psychological **impact** of the dog training. A psychological study would look at how and to what extent the behavior of the Mpophomeni children changes by working with the dogs. Despite this lack

of scientific evidence, volunteers and social workers say parents generally give positive feedback.

"I think it is because we are teaching the children that ... they can communicate with the animal without resorting to violence or force ... (and) it is rippling over into their everyday interactions with other people," said Olivier. "If you can get a dog to do something without hitting it, surely you can get another human to cooperate through **negotiation**," she said.

The children look forward to the Friday afternoon classes and start lining up outside the school gate long before the lessons begin. As soon as they are let in, both children and their dogs are treated to a snack and something to drink. A veterinary nurse is also there to check the health of all of the dogs.

"People are now telling me that violence is coming down. The children have forgotten about **whoonga**," said Winnie Sangcosi who works with the community to coordinate the project. Whoonga is a powerful local street drug that kids were getting involved with. Sangcosi says having responsibility for a dog has inspired the kids to stay away from drugs and getting involved with gangs, and "now they play with their dogs or study."

Questions

1. Which of these statements would be MOST important to include in an objective summary of the article?
 - a) Further scientific studies are needed to determine the full psychological impact of the dog training on the behavior of Mpophomeni children.
 - b) The Zulu phrase Funda Nenja is a beautiful and fitting name for the program that is changing the lives of so many children in South Africa.
 - c) A surprising study revealed that in some parts of South Africa more than half of the children are abused by people supposed to care for them.
 - d) Learning to work with dogs in the program has helped children make better choices by teaching them communication and self-control.
2. The central idea of the article is developed by _____.
 - a) outlining the role of local reports and social workers in documenting and supporting Funda Nenja.
 - b) describing the program as well the reactions and observations of those involved in Mpophomeni.
 - c) comparing school attendance and grades before and after Funda Nenja opened in Mpophomeni.
 - d) explaining the types of activities the Mpophomeni children typically teach their dogs in Funda Nenja.
3. According to the article, which of the following people would be MOST likely to agree with the following idea? *The primary benefit of the program is that children can mirror the behaviors they learn with their dogs when communicating with other people.*
 - a) Thobani Gasia
 - b) Adrienne Olivier
 - c) Sihle Dubazane
 - d) Winnie Sangcosi
4. According to the article, how has Mpophomeni changed due to Funda Nenja?
 - a) Before, children in the town witnessed or experienced violence early in life, but now they are less likely to experience early violence.
 - b) Before, children in the town were frightened by gangs and violence, but now they can walk around town because they have their dogs.
 - c) Before, children in the town were getting involved in drugs and gangs, but now they are busy working with their dogs or studying.
 - d) Before, children in the town did not interact with each other often, but now they work with each other at all ages in the program.
5. What might be some challenges for completing a psychological study of the impact of the dog training in the article?
6. In what ways might the dogs' lives be similar to the children's lives? Could this help explain the effectiveness of the program? How?
7. Could such a program have the same results in America? Why or why not?