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Humane Education

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Oct 29, 2019 Humane Education

By Andrew Rowan, DPhil

There is widespread support for humane and environmental education as a means of improving the treatment of animals. However, there are no academic reports that conclude that humane education leads to *significant* improvement in the treatment of animals. The few studies that attempt to evaluate the impact of humane education report that such education leads to an increase (usually modest) in knowledge and attitudes about animal welfare but **have not documented an increase in behaviors** that point towards an improved treatment of animals. One of the reasons why there are so few studies of the issue is that there is very limited funding supporting research into human education's impact. Without funding, it is very difficult to identify the best ways to design and implement humane education to produce the results that would then lead to greater attention to the issue. Humane education is locked into a vicious circle of limited funding, no results, limited data on impact that brings us back to limited funding.

There is a general consensus that humane education is very important but there is also little indication that animal advocacy organizations are willing to devote much in the way of resources to the issue. In one study (the only one to my knowledge)

of humane education programs supported by animal protection organizations in the USA, Jaime Olin reported that the average amount budgeted for humane education was a paltry \$5,000 a year (Olin, J. 2002. Humane Education in the 21st Century. Tufts Center for Animals and Public Policy, N. Grafton, Massachusetts). Olin sent out surveys to 600 randomly selected animal shelters from a list of 2,800 and received 203 (35%) valid responses. The median annual organizational budget for the respondents was \$200,000. While three-quarters of the respondents reported having an humane education program, of those, most had annual humane education budgets of \$5,000 or less. Only 11% of the respondents had annual humane education budgets of more than \$25,000. In other words, despite the general belief that humane education is very important, few US animal sheltering organizations were devoting more than 2.5% of their annual budgets to the topic.

There are glimpses of what humane education might accomplish from other areas of human-animal studies. At the One Welfare conference in Sydney, Australia in October 2019, Dr. David Fraser gave a keynote talk on the development of the One Welfare concept. Simply put, the One Welfare approach complements the One Health and Eco Health approaches and promotes the full integration of animal welfare in efforts to improve human wellbeing, environmental protection and animal welfare while supporting worldwide sustainable development goals. One of the examples of One Welfare that he discussed was the research by Australian scientist Paul Hemsworth whose results showed that better treatment of farm animals by handlers was associated with the increased productivity of those animals. Hemsworth's research is an intriguing example that could support the importance of humane education in general by showing that animal handlers who treat farm animals gently could lead to important beneficial outcomes for both the animals and their human caretakers. In a sense, encouraging animal handlers to be more considerate to the animals in their charge, is another aspect of humane education.

Humane education is very important despite the lack of impact data and is present explicitly or implicitly in many outreach activities that should be supported (see, for example, story on [Marshall Rinquest in Tales of WellBeing](#)). But we do need more funding and more innovative thinking to document its importance and impact for people, animals and the environment.