



## Behavior Education for Pet Parents and Pet Professionals

Animal Behavior Associates Newsletter

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**Dear Suzanne,**

We simply cannot believe it is August already and fall is just around the corner. Summer weather whizzes by all too quickly for Suzanne, but Dan is tired of the summer heat. If you haven't already, finish out your summer by joining our affiliate program. Details in this ezine issue!

Suzanne and Dan

- **Cat Piece:**  
**Should You Buy Your Cat a Video?**

### **Dog Piece:** **Practice Makes Perfect?**



Suzanne has been taking steel pan drum lessons now for about 2 ½ years. Lately, she's been quite frustrated because she hasn't been able to devote

as much time to practicing as she'd like. Some weeks, she's lucky if she can spend a few hours practicing on Sunday before her rehearsal with the class on Monday night, rather than being able to practice everyday.

Intuitively it makes sense that the more Suzanne practices the better

Environmental enrichment for cats -whether they live in private homes or are temporarily residing in animal shelters has become an important topic. Obesity is a problem for indoor cats, and many shelters seem to focus more on enrichment and training programs for dogs than they do cats.



In an attempt to meet the concerns of pet owners who leave their cats alone for long hours, and to address the enrichment concerns regarding cats in captive environments, various companies have created DVDs for cats to watch on television.

These typically have moving images or videos of birds, "bugs" and other animals. One company

**pan player she'll become. We don't think there's any research that reveals what kind of practice schedule produces the fastest improvement in pan playing skill, but we did come across new research in the Journal of Applied Animal Behavior Science about training schedules for dogs.**

**For many years psychologists and behaviorists have been interested in the effects of what are called massed versus spaced training schedules. For example, Suzanne's dissertation research involved subjecting puppies to either one, one hour period of social isolation each week or six, 10 minute sessions per week to see how these two different patterns of experiences affected the puppies' response to a subsequent 4 hour period of social isolation.**

**In the research recently reported in AABS, Dutch researchers, using the click-treat method, shaped two groups of 9 Beagles to touch a mouse pad on the floor that was placed 1m away from them. One group of Beagles had once/week training sessions, while the other was trained 5 days/week. One person trained all the dogs and each training session ended when the dog had met pre-determined criteria.**

**The dogs trained once/week learned the task in fewer sessions than did the five times/week group (6.6 sessions versus 9 sessions). Seems somewhat counter intuitive doesn't it? The researchers suggested several possible reasons for their results, including that the weekly trained dogs were more likely to offer more variable responses than the more frequently trained dogs, who may have been more likely to get "locked in" to a particular response (these data were not collected as part of the study)**

claims their DVD provides cats with "entertainment, exercise, mental stimuli and companionship when home alone".

Does any objective evidence exist to help us determine whether a cat owner should spend their money on these home alone videos for cats? A recent study published in [Applied Animal Behavior Science](#) compared cats' responses to a blank television screen, and televisions showing one of the following: moving images of people, moving images of inanimate objects (namely billiard balls on a table), and moving images of prey animals and other cats. To avoid confounding results, the sound was turned off on the televisions.

Overall, the cats spent about 6% of their time making eye contact with the TV monitors. This is considerably less than what has been observed primates (as much as 75%) and dogs (11%) doing in other studies. The cats watched the billiard balls and animals more than they did the people or the blank TV screen. And the cats showed the most interest in the videos during the first hour they were exposed to them, and watched them less as time went on.

Interestingly, cats without televisions spent more time moving around than those with TVs (regardless of what was being viewed) and less time sleeping than cats watching moving billiard balls. So maybe watching television turns even cats into couch potatoes!

A paper (by E. Rajapaksha et al.) presented this year at the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior annual meeting in New Orleans investigated using olfaction as an enrichment technique. Cats were given gauze with catnip spray, feline facial pheromone, and catnip leaves to smell. Cats in the enriched conditions rested less, and groomed and walked around more than those without olfactory enrichment. The significance of those results is difficult to interpret. Is it better for cats to groom and walk more and rest less? We would need a more comprehensive study to know.

What these studies point out is that deciding what

making the shaping process more difficult.

Bottom line is, more research is needed to explain the "why" of the results. It's important however that we not generalize these results to dogs and training in general without more research. The dogs in this study were laboratory Beagles that were all raised and kept under the same standardized conditions which eliminated breed, housing and husbandry as sources of variation (something that would be virtually impossible to do if the subjects were owned, pet dogs). Different results might be likely with a different learning task, different breeds, and different training methods.

[Click on this link](#) to view an abstract or purchase the article if you are not a subscriber to AABS

If you want to learn more about learning theory and how dogs learn, we'd suggest our program "[How Fido Learns Best](#)" which is a recommended resource to prepare for the CCPDT certification exam.

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***ANNOUNCING THE DEBUT OF  
THE MUCH REQUESTED  
"OFFERING [How To Teach  
'Introducing Your Dog To Your  
Baby'](#) CLASSES': THE  
COMPLETE TEACHING  
PACKAGE"***

***When pet parents are "expecting", they have questions and concerns about how to help their 4-legged, "first baby" adjust to their new baby. You know how vulnerable pet parents are to mis-information about***

improves the welfare of cats and other animals is often not intuitive. Years ago Suzanne was part of a study that examined the effects of cage size and exercise on the welfare of laboratory Beagles. The results showed that social isolation was a more important welfare factor than either size of enclosure or opportunities for exercise - a factor that wasn't even the original focus of the study.

If you want to learn more about environmental enrichment for cats, watch for future notices about when we'll next be offering our [telecourse on the subject](#). Make sure you are on our [Telecourse Priority Notification list](#) for first notice of upcoming courses.

• **Our Piece:**  
**Don't Believe Everything You Think**

The title of this article was inspired by a bumper sticker we saw this week. It reminded us of a comment we heard recently about an owner who complained her dog was "hyper" and couldn't focus while training. She attributed the dog's "hyperness" to a diet that was "too high" in protein. This got us to thinking about the process of how we come to believe something is "fact" or true, what leads people to mentally exclude other possible explanations, or said another way, jump to conclusions about explanations for their observations.



If you've put on your critical thinking cap, you should be asking what was meant by the dog being "hyper" and not able to "focus"? You should also be asking why this person believed these conditions are due to a "high" protein diet rather than a myriad of other possible reasons?

Ignoring the problem of definitions for now, let's focus on how we come to "know" things. Many of us have lots of experience living and/or working with animals. We may even read lots of articles (which may or may not be based on scientific research), and attend workshops and seminars. But do these experiences make us experts in "all things animal"?

***introducing dogs to babies, including "dominance" myths and just a lack of awareness about the importance of preparation. Many expectant families are willing to do what it takes to prepare their dogs if they just knew WHAT to do.***

***Now - YOU can teach them! If you've wanted to be more visible in your community and in preventing behavior problems, this [Teaching Package](#) gives you everything you need to teach an "Introducing Your Dog to Your Baby" class in your area.***

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***And don't forget to have plenty of our ["Helping Fido Welcome Your Baby"](#) DVDs on hand to not only supplement what you teach but as a take home reference for people who attend your class. Contact us about [Quantity Discounts](#) OR [join our affiliate program](#).***

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***Just to remind you - if you are looking to help new puppy parents get off on the right foot with methods to encourage and reward good puppy behaviors rather than too much of "No Puppy No", and protect owners from the "be dominant over your puppy" messages they will inevitably hear, we have a supply of ["gently used" puppy books](#) at 50% off regular price to make it cost effective for you to put them in the hands of ALL the new puppy parents you encounter.***

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There are good psychological reasons why people tend to think they are experts in a particular area. First is the belief that personal experience gives us expert status and that personal experience is equivalent to or superior to scientific training.

For example, all of us get sick from time to time, and with a little experience with the health care system, reading a few articles, and watching TV doctor shows, we think we're experts in human medicine. We all give advice to each other about health conditions daily! (Dan had a sore throat last week and Suzanne had all kinds of advice for him).

The problem is that if our advice is based only on personal experience, "common sense" and what we've read in the popular literature, it doesn't make us experts in areas of knowledge that depend on empirical observation. In the sciences of psychology, human medicine, animal behavior and veterinary medicine, we depend instead on systematically collected information to develop explanations for diseases and behavior and to make predictions about future events.

Two reasons we shouldn't rely solely on our individual experiences to "believe what we think" is that 1) one person's experiences are unavoidably biased and not representative of all possible experiences, and 2) our memories of our experiences are also biased. Psychologists call this the "vividness" effect. Experiences that are particularly meaningful in some way (they fit with our theory of the world) tend to be given more weight than those that aren't. The way to deal with our biases is to complement our experiences with scientific training or enlist the aid of people who have such training. (That's why Dan called his health care provider rather than listening to Suzanne!)

We aren't sure where our acquaintance came up with the theory of high protein and "hyperness", but to the best of our knowledge there is no scientific data supporting that claim.

If you want to learn more about the science of ethology as it applies to dogs, we recommend our 4 CD program ["Shining the Light of Science"](#)

[on Canine Behavior](#)", a recommended resource in preparing for the CCPDT exam.

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## Quick Links...

- [Our Website](#)
- [Products](#)
- [Services](#)
- [More About Us](#)
- [Archives](#)

## • What's New at ABA

In case you haven't heard, last week we launched our Affiliate program and already we are overjoyed to welcome 60 new affiliates from all over the country plus Australia and Canada, almost ¼ of whom already have their affiliate link "live" on their websites.

We are so proud to be associated with such a wonderful group of professionals and businesses, all of whom are clearly dedicated to helping people and pets have better lives together.

We'd LOVE to have YOU join us too! If you aren't familiar with affiliate programs, go to our [Affiliate Sign-Up page](#) to learn more and see how by joining you can benefit pets and people as well as your business.

Suzanne was in New Orleans in July attending the AVMA Annual Conference as well as that of the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB). It was time well spent as she connected with colleagues, heard about new research and ideas, and partook of chicory coffee, beignets and many other "goodies" in the French Quarter.

Be sure and read about our new product in another part of this ezine ["Offering 'Introducing Your Dog to Your Baby' Classes: The Complete Teaching Package"](#).

We were privileged to be asked to do two in-service trainings at Wheat Ridge Animal Hospital, here in Denver, with whom we've long had a great relationship. Topics were behavior wellness strategies for the veterinary practice and lowering stress and arousal for pets by using behavioral knowledge. We'll be speaking to the local Portuguese Water Dog breed club on "Myths about Dominance" later this month. Please contact us at **info@AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com**, if you are interested in a custom workshop or telecourse for your group, or visit our [Workshop Page](#) for initial information.

:: [info@animalbehaviorassociates.com](mailto:info@animalbehaviorassociates.com)

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<http://www.AnimalBehaviorAssociates.com>

:: 303-932-9095

And if you can get to San Francisco by boat, bike, or plane we'd LOVE to see you at our [Behavior Wellness Weekend Workshop at SFSPCA](#), Sept 27th and 28th.