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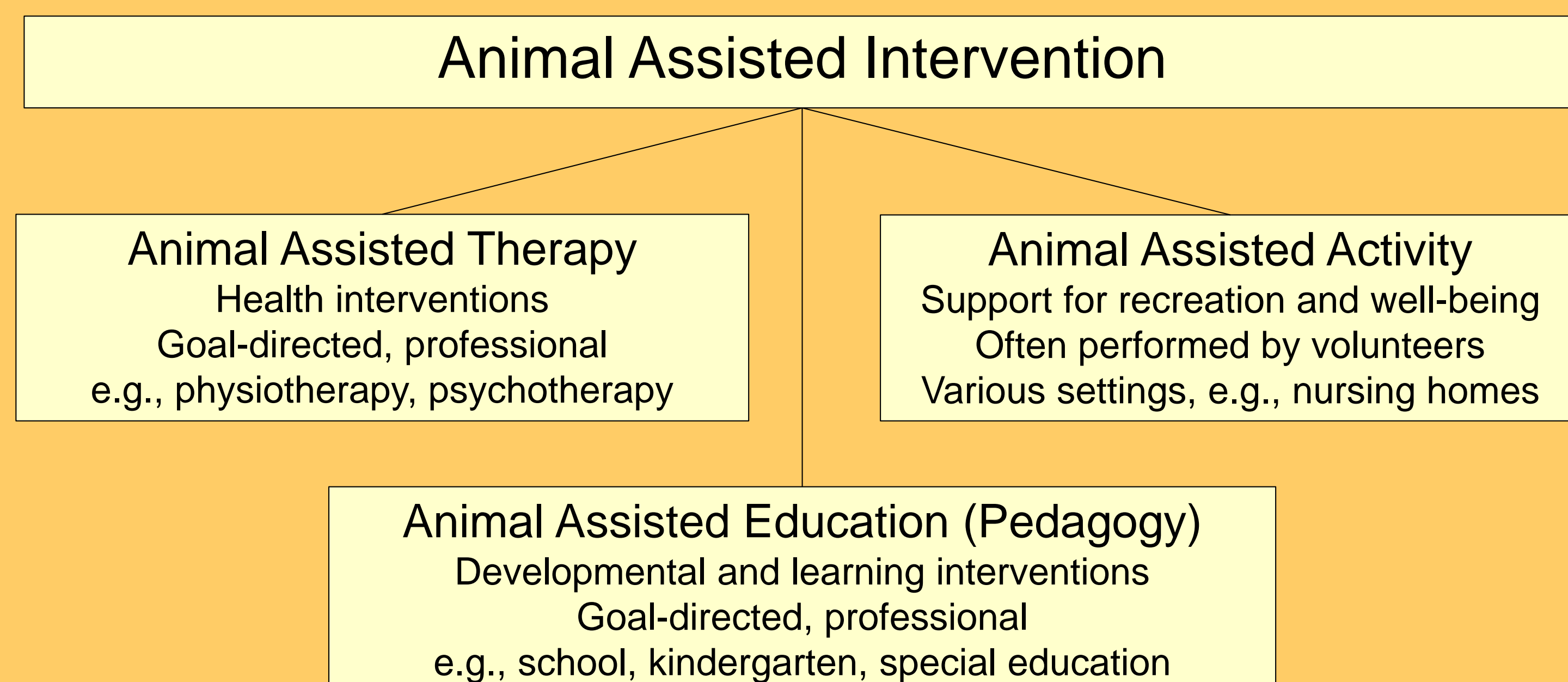
Animal Assisted Education - or just “hygge”-dogs in Danish primary schools

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WHAT IS ANIMAL ASSISTED EDUCATION?

Animal Assisted Intervention was traditionally divided into Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) and Animal Assisted Activities (AAA), but Animal Assisted Education/ Pedagogy (AAE) is a third distinct type (e.g., IAHAIO, 2014).



STATE OF THE EVIDENCE FOR DOG-ASSISTED EDUCATION

Too few solid studies yet but

- *Reading Dog* programmes have empirical support (Hall et al., 2016)
- A few other programmes are somewhat supported, e.g., *PACK* for children with ADHD (Schuck et al, 2015), *Sozialtraining in der Schule* for inclusive classrooms (Tissen et al, 2007), *Manualized responsiveness-training* for children with severe developmental disabilities (Esteves & Stokes, 2008), and some *Humane Education* programmes (e.g., Samuels et al., 2016).
- Continuous, unstructured presence of a teacher's dog in the classroom (“*hyggehund*”) has limited empirical support (but see Beetz et al, 2013) and risks for dog and children may go unnoticed (cf. Demirbas et al, 2016).

CONCERNS AND GUIDELINES FOR GOOD PRACTICE

At least four issues should be addressed (e.g., Gee et al, 2015):

- Health: Zoonoses; allergy
- Respect for diversity: Do not marginalize children who do not want the dog
- Dog welfare: Limited working hours; educated handler, attention to signals
- Bite risk: Teach the children how to respect dogs; and cf. dog welfare

AAE as professional activity also entails (Gee et al., 2015; IAHAIO, 2014):

- Permission is granted by school authorities and parents
- Goals and implementation are guided by professional knowledge of children's development, learning and needs
- Dog welfare is ensured by handler knowledge, training, and certification
- Outcome is evaluated

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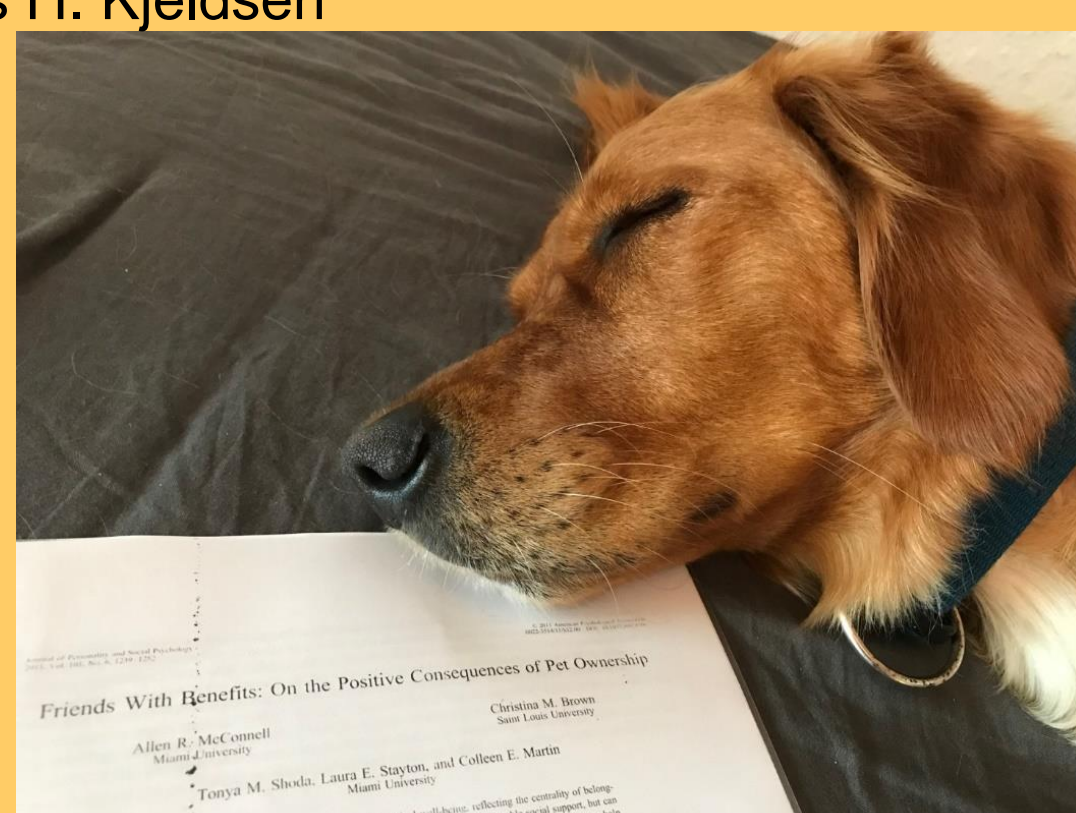
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Acknowledgements

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“**Hygge** ...is a Norwegian and Danish word for a mood of coziness and comfortable conviviality with feelings of wellness and contentment” (Wikipedia).



WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

In Denmark (as probably elsewhere) using dogs in schools may sit well with popular media, but the prevalence of such practices was unknown and the correspondence to research findings and best practice standards went undiscussed.

AIM OF STUDY

To start addressing this gap, we contacted about 400 primary schools to achieve a rough estimate of prevalence of dog use, types of use, and dissemination of the idea; and we discussed findings in the context of international research literature and standards (Hansen & Torpe, 2017).

METHOD

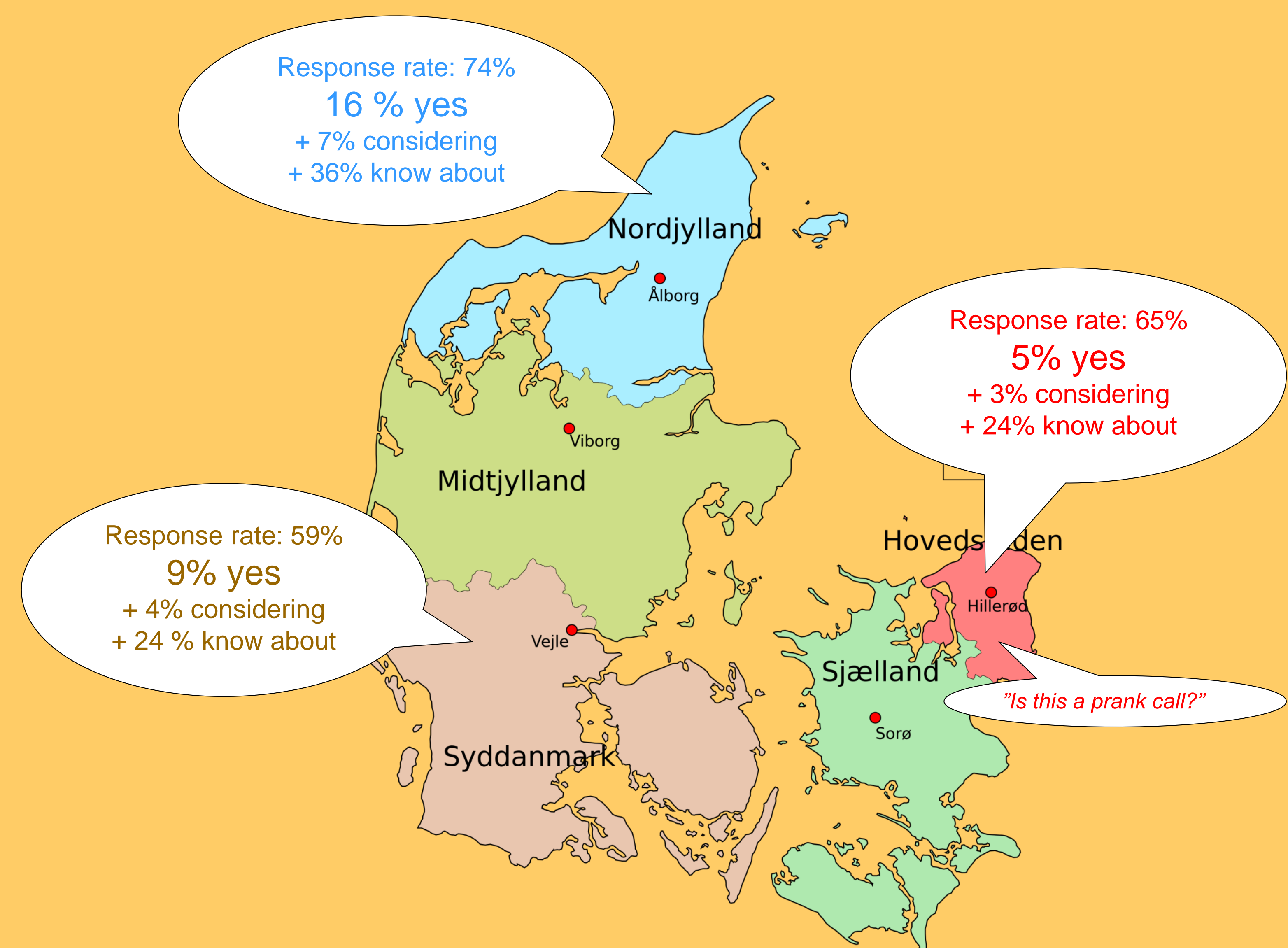
Brief, structured telephone interviews ($N=392$) with random schools from three of Denmark's five regions:

- Nordjylland ($n=137$) in which a school dog has elicited positive media attention
- Capitol area ($n=121$) including Copenhagen
- Syddanmark ($n=134$) intermediate

Does your school use dogs for anything?

- If no: Have you heard about/considered it?
- If yes:
 - standard and/or special education classes?
 - Reading Dogs, other specific programme/purpose (what?), or unspecified?
 - Dog/handler's origin (external or not) and education?

“Does your school use dogs?”



TYPE OF USE AND HANDLER

A total of 27 schools confirmed to use dogs.

- 12 schools used in standard classes, 10 in special ed, 2 in both; 7 undisclosed
- External equipages were mostly mentioned for standard classes and these visits were often one-time events regarding a particular topic.
- Regular use was mostly mentioned for special education classes.
- 4 schools used Reading Dogs and none used other programmes.
- Caveat small numbers and incomplete information.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

- Animal assisted education is rare in Danish schools.
- We see potential for improvement in both quantity (dissemination of use) and quality (Reading Dogs and other programmes, educated equipages, reference to research and guidelines).
- Nordjylland's higher frequencies may reflect media attention to a school dog in this region. Albeit speculative, this suggests a need for promoting AAE research and best practice standards in popular media, too. Maybe this way, rather than becoming a hype – which will typically increase quantity at the expense of quality – it might promote both.