

Bergin U Is Ahead of the Curve ...

Thoughtful Training Results In Thinking Dogs

By Pamela S. Hogle

An avid reader, I devour several dog books a month, eagerly awaiting the delivery of each new book, hot off the press. Often, I am disappointed in the more-of-the-same prescriptions for people to show “leadership” by dominating, punishing, physically manipulating or otherwise manhandling their dogs and abusing their partnership potential. But 2013 was been a banner year. Dog writers, dog researchers, and even regular old non-dog-focused scientists are all, it seems, discovering a new idea: Dogs can think. This idea is taking hold in the dog community and beyond.

Particularly wonderful books that touch on the idea of dogs as cognitive beings and that encourage readers to use a cognitive approach in educating their dogs are *The Genius of Dogs* by the head of Duke University’s Canine Cognition Center, Brian Hare, *Chaser: Unlocking the Genius of the Dog Who Knows a Thousand Words* by John W. Pilley, and *How Dogs Love Us* by neuroeconomist Gregory Berns, of Emory University.

We here at Bergin University of Canine Studies know that this is not a new idea. It’s at least as old as our institution; it’s an idea that Bonnie Bergin had more than 20 years ago. We’ve been using and teaching this newfangled cognitive training for years.

The premise is that dogs can think and plan. That dogs’ cognitive abilities go far beyond learning simple cues and commands, beyond even basic concepts like “open” or “quiet.” This idea promises to revolutionize the way American society and, ultimately, the world, thinks about, teaches, and treats dogs.

The idea of dogs as cognitive beings, as creatures able to understand humans and perhaps even to anticipate and even shape our future behavior seems obvious to anyone who’s studied at Bergin University of Canine Studies. The first time I put a four-week-old puppy on a table and began teaching her to sit, lie down, come, look at me, and do dozens of other things, I got it. Puppies think and learn and study.

What Berns found in his innovative study — he trained dogs to lie still in an MRI machine, obtaining the first-ever scans of a non-anesthetized dog’s brain — was that dogs think about what **we** are thinking about. That’s right. Our puppies and dogs think about and learn about and study **us**. They think about what we want; they learn how

to get us to give them treats and what will make us squeal a delighted “yes” and tell them how wonderful they are. They study our movements, our facial expressions, our scent, our sighs — seeking clues to what will happen next. They learn to recognize the subtle cues that indicate Good Things For Dogs. From the obvious — putting on the walking shoes means a walk — to the more subtle — a certain cadence as I exhale and

education and development.

The idea of educating dogs in a way that recognizes, celebrates — and actually enhances their cognitive abilities is what we do here at Bergin University of Canine Studies, every day. It’s possible to train dogs in hundreds of ways. Some trainers focus on the behaviorist aspects of behavior and consequence; others use compulsion and punishment. But only at Bergin University

of Canine Studies do aspiring dog trainers learn to put themselves into the dog’s paws, attempt to actually get inside the dog’s mind. What makes dogs tick? What makes each **individual** dog tick? Our students learn to find what motivates each dog, create a shared goal, and work toward that goal as a team. Our students learn about dogs from a unique starting point: at Bergin University of Canine Studies, dogs are, even at four weeks of age, our partners. Partnership implies mutual respect; coercion is absolutely inappropriate and is not used here. We see dogs as partners who must willingly agree to learn, to engage, to work, ultimately to serve as a capable assistant for a person with PTSD or MS or autism.

That is where cognitive training leads. When our students graduate, they’ll enter the world of dog professionals where they will encounter old-style trainers who insist that compulsion is necessary; they will meet people who insist that the human has to show the dog who is in charge, must be the “alpha.” They will have clients who insist that the dog’s problem is that it is trying to take charge or that the dog is aggressive. Our graduates will meet these challenges equipped with the knowledge that leadership does not require force. They will teach each doubter that dogs can be — want to be — full partners with their beloved humans.

I am excited to welcome Dr. Hare, Dr. Pilley, Dr. Berns and countless other researchers and dog experts to the fold. While their idea of thinking dogs is not new, it is absolutely correct. Our graduates are already carrying this “new” idea, this certainty that dogs are cognitive beings, to the rest of the country and around the world. One by one, our graduates are already teaching people a new way to see dogs, understand dogs, and treat dogs. As supporters of Bergin University of Canine Studies or members of the Bergin University of Canine Studies family, you, too, are part of changing the way we all think about dogs.



Queenie, only 6 weeks old, reads “sit”

push my chair back means I am taking a real break from work, not just refilling my water glass or checking the laundry, but a real, playing-with-dogs break.

At Bergin University of Canine Studies, students learn to teach puppies to think, analyze, and problem solve from the day they are born. We teach young puppies to accept handling and small amounts of stress so that they learn to deal with stress and frustration. They learn to accept handling, even when it is a little bit uncomfortable. They learn to communicate with the humans who handle and teach them — and they learn to become full partners in their own