

2015-9

## Just Jocking? An Exploration of how 10-12 year old Children Experience an Equine Assisted Learning Programme, in a DEIS School, in Limerick city.

Kate Bronwyn Jones  
*Technological University Dublin*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/aaschssldis>



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Jones, Kate Bronwyn (2015) Just Jocking? An exploration of how 10-12 year old children experience an Equine Assisted Learning Programme, in a DEIS School, in Limerick city. Masters Dissertation, Technological University Dublin.

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Sciences at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact [yvonne.desmond@tudublin.ie](mailto:yvonne.desmond@tudublin.ie), [arrow.admin@tudublin.ie](mailto:arrow.admin@tudublin.ie), [brian.widdis@tudublin.ie](mailto:brian.widdis@tudublin.ie).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License](#)

## **Just Jocking?**

### **An exploration of how 10-12 year old children experience an Equine Assisted Learning Programme, in a DEIS School, in Limerick city.**

A Thesis submitted to the Dublin Institute of Technology in part fulfilment of the requirements for award of Masters (M.A.) in Child, Family and Community Studies

By

**Kate Bronwyn Jones**

**Supervisor: Anne Marie Shier**

M.A. in Child, Family and Community Studies

Department of Social Sciences, Dublin Institute of Technology

September 2015

**Word Count: 14,990**

## **DECLARATION OF OWNERSHIP**

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards the award of the Masters in Child, Family and Community Studies is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part fulfilment of the award named above.

**Signed:**

---

**Kate Bronwyn Jones**

**Date:**

---

## **ABSTRACT**

Throughout Irish history, the horse has had many uses. In modern Ireland, some communities have harnessed the power of the horse to deliver a range of social interventions. However, at present, there is little published research about equine assisted programmes in Ireland. The main intention of this research project is to explore how 10-12 year old children, from a DEIS primary school in Limerick city, experience an Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) programme facilitated by the local Garda Youth Diversion Project (GYDP). The project aims to be child centred, emergent and participatory, in keeping with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1986. The research methods deemed most relevant for the participants were micro ethnographic observation and children's photography, followed by semi-structured interviews, where the children's photography was used as an elicitation technique. Although it is recognised that this study is on a small scale, and is not generalizable, the findings for this sample support EAL as a positive intervention which promotes learning, self-efficacy, relaxation, relationship-building, social support and self-awareness. In the same way, the programme offers children the opportunity to provide gender neutral care and develop empathy. Equally, EAL appears to give children a space to engage in culturally-significant activities in a safe environment. In sum, the findings suggest that EAL may be a successful programme for engaging young people with an interest, but not necessarily a background, in horses. These findings could be relevant to other DEIS schools and GYDP's in Ireland, especially in areas with strong ties to horses.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank the research participants who allowed me to research their experience. Without their participation, this study would not have been possible. Thank you so much for being so helpful in teaching me all about your experience of Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) and accepting me into your group. I wish you all the best for the future.

Likewise, I would like to thank the DEIS school for their help and cooperation. In particular, I must thank the school's principal and the school's family liaison officer who were both of great help to me in accessing the participants and their guardians and throughout the research process. I must also thank the local Garda Youth Diversion Project (GYDP), their coordinator and their staff, who continually supported this study. My heartfelt thanks also go out the EAL project facilitator for allowing me to access this project and for pointing me in the right direction. All of these people, in the school and the GYDP, do amazing work on a daily basis and I was privileged to work alongside them.

To my supervisor, Anne Marie Shier, I would like to offer my sincere thanks for your time, assistance and guidance. I greatly appreciate it.

My wonderful family, Stephen, Lesley, Joe and Nana, thanks for your patience and support.

I also need to thank all the lecturers in DIT who advised me about this project and inspired me with their own interests. Similarly, I would like to thank my friends, all of whom supported me throughout the recent months.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my partner, Mick, who has definitely made this process easier for me in many ways.

## GLOSSARY

### Terminology

Jocking.....Used to refer to riding a horse in Limerick city area.

To Jock.....To ride a horse.

Tacking up.....Putting a saddle and bridle onto the horse.

Mucking out.....Taking the droppings out of the horse's stable.

Grooming.....Brushing and cleaning the horse.

### Acronyms

AAA.....Animal Assisted Activities.

DEIS.....Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools.

DIT.....Dublin Institute of Technology.

EAL.....Equine Assisted Learning.

EFL.....Equine Facilitated Learning.

EFP.....Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy.

EAP.....Equine Assisted Psychotherapy.

GYDP.....Garda Youth Diversion Project.

NARHA.....North American Riding for the Handicapped  
Association.

THR.....Therapeutic Riding

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION OF OWNERSHIP.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
GLOSSARY.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 The Study.....	1
1.3 Research Aims.....	1
1.4. Research Objectives.....	1
1.5 Rationale for the Study.....	2
1.6 Definition of Key Terms.....	3
1.7 Outline of the Research.....	4
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
2.1 Introduction.....	5
2.2 Animal Assisted Activities.....	5
2.3 The Human Animal Bond.....	5
2.3.1 Anthropomorphism.....	6
2.4 The Horse.....	6
2.4.1 The Horse’s Natural Instincts.....	7
2.4.2 Mindfulness and Relaxation.....	7
2.4.3 The Horse as an Attachment Object.....	8
2.4.4 Caregiving.....	8
2.4.5 Nature.....	9
2.4.6 Physical Activity.....	9
2.5 The Personal Experience of Equine Assisted Learning.....	10
2.5.1 Themes Identified in the Experience of EAL.....	11
2.6 The Local Environment.....	12
2.7 The Cultural Environment.....	13
2.8 Limitations.....	14

2.9 Conclusion .....	15
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....	16
3.1 Introduction .....	16
3.2 Research Approach .....	16
3.2.1 Qualitative Research .....	16
3.2.2 Phenomenology .....	17
3.3 Conceptual Framework: Researching Children’s Experiences.....	17
3.4 Research Methods .....	18
3.4.1 Micro-ethnographic Observation .....	18
3.4.2 Photography .....	19
3.4.3 Semi Structured Interviews .....	19
3.4.4 Piloting .....	20
3.5 The Sample.....	20
3.6 Data Analysis .....	20
3.7 Ethical Considerations .....	21
3.7.1 Informed Consent.....	21
3.7.2 Confidentiality .....	22
3.7.3 Reflexivity.....	22
3.8 Limitations .....	23
3.8.1 Research Method Limitations .....	23
3.9 Conclusion .....	24
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.....	25
4.1 Introduction .....	25
4.2 Personal Experience .....	25
4.2.1 Positivity .....	25
4.2.2 Learning .....	26
4.2.3 Relaxation .....	27
4.2.4 Fear.....	28
4.3 The Horse .....	28
4.3.1 The Physicality of the Horse .....	29
4.3.2 Mirroring .....	29
4.3.3 The Human Horse Bond .....	30
4.3.4 The Cultural Meaning of the Horse .....	31



4.3.5 The Environment of the Horse .....	32
4.4 Caregiving .....	32
4.5 Conclusion .....	33
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	34
5.1 Introduction .....	34
5.2 Personal Experience .....	34
5.2.1 Positivity .....	34
5.2.2 Learning .....	35
5.2.3 Relaxation .....	35
5.2.4 Fear.....	36
5.3 The Horse .....	36
5.3.1 Natural Instincts of the Horse .....	37
5.3.2 Relationships.....	37
5.3.3 Cultural Environment.....	38
5.3.4 Local Environment.....	39
5.4 Caregiving .....	39
5.5 Summary .....	40
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS.....	42
6.1 Introduction .....	42
6.2 Conclusions .....	42
6.3 Implications of this study .....	44
6.4 Recommendations for Future Study .....	44
REFERENCES.....	45
APPENDICIES.....	52

## LIST OF APPENDICES

- Appendix A.....Semi-structured Interview Schedule.
- Appendix B.....Information Sheet for Guardians.
- Appendix C.....Information Sheet for Children.
- Appendix D.....Guardian Consent Form.
- Appendix E..... Children’s Consent Form.
- Appendix F.....Letter to Gatekeepers.
- Appendix G.....Sample Interview Transcript.
- Appendix H.....Sample Ethnographic Observation.

# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This dissertation seeks to explore how 10 to 12-year-old children experience an equine assisted learning (EAL) programme within a Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) primary school in Limerick city. Chapter 1 focuses on the study, its aims and objectives, and the rationale for the research. It then continues to define the key terms used throughout the dissertation, and outline the format of the paper.

## **1.2 The Study**

This study examines the experiences of seven children participating in an EAL programme. The programme, organised by the local Garda Youth Diversion Project (GYDP), was facilitated within primary school hours with a group of children selected by the primary school's principal. The research followed a multi-method, qualitative, approach. Micro ethnographic observation and children's photography were employed in the first phase of the research. This was followed by semi-structured interviews with the programme participants, where the children's photography was used for elicitation. These methods were selected as the most relevant approach to facilitate the aims and objectives of the study.

## **1.3 Research Aims**

The main aim of this study is to explore the subjective experiences of children participating within the EAL programme. In doing this, the study intends to be both exploratory and child centred, in order to accurately depict these experiences.

## **1.4. Research Objectives**

The objective of this research is to answer three key research questions scientifically

- What do children experience while participating in the EAL programme?
- Which parts of the programme are meaningful for the children?
- Are there any commonalities within the children's experiences?

## **1.5 Rationale for the Study**

Some children are lucky enough to spend their childhood with the best vantage point imaginable: on horseback. I was fortunate to be one of those children. Upon the sofa-like seat of Lady Luck's back, I felt confident to take on any adventure. Unbeknownst to me, I gained a lot from the animals, which were always considered part of our family, warm and familiar. I became involved with EAL through my mother's participation in the area. Having pre-existing knowledge of horses, and a passion for social science, EAL is a natural blending of my two interests. Previous EAL programmes, and my familiarity with their participants, together with the inspiring work carried out by the primary school and the GYDP in Limerick, have motivated me to carry out this research project. My background, together with my knowledge of, and familiarity with, horses influenced me to undertake this particular project; and my acquaintance with the school and many of its pupils no doubt put me at an advantage to access a greater depth of information. Nonetheless, I was mindful of the need to adopt an objective role as researcher, in order to make a scientific contribution to the existing body of EAL research.

There is currently a distinct lack of global research on all equine assisted practices (Burgon, 2011). In addition, some of the worldwide literature on the topic has been criticised for being largely anecdotal (Smith-Osbourne & Selby, 2010). What is more, within this limited body of research, there are few studies that specifically research participation in EAL programmes (Dell, Chalmers, Bresette, Swain, Rankin & Hopkins, 2011), with the majority of the current research projects focussing on equine facilitated psychotherapy (EFP), therapeutic riding (THR) and hippotherapy (Ewing, MacDonald, Taylor & Bowers, 2007). In particular, the experiences of children under 12, especially those living in disadvantaged areas, are significantly underrepresented in EAL. The present research aims to explore EAL designed for, and implemented with, children under 12, in order to address, in some small way, the gap in this area of knowledge.

The horse has been shown to have great cultural prevalence in Irish society (Collins, Hanlon, Moore, Wall & Duggan, 2010), and EAL has been found to be particularly relevant to groups where horses are culturally significant (Dell *et al.*, 2011). This may suggest that equine-based projects are well received in Ireland. Currently, there is very little published research reflecting any group's experiences of EAL in Ireland. At present two unpublished studies, carried out by employees of Festina Lente, an equestrian centre in Bray, Co Wicklow, have been identified (Carey, personal communication, 2015). Horses

have been found to have great importance within individual and community narratives in this study's location in inner city Limerick (Griffin & Kelleher, 2010). This raises the question of whether the cultural significance of the horse might increase the success of EAL programmes in Limerick, and the longevity of the EAL programmes in this area is another reason to research them. Consequently, this study may contribute to a greater awareness of EAL; lead to an understanding of why such programmes have been continually implemented in the area; and reveal their possible outcomes and potential for their replication elsewhere.

## **1.6 Definition of Key Terms**

Before entering the main body of the research, it is essential to provide definitions of the key terms EAL, EFP and EAA. These terms are often used interchangeably (Burgon, 2011 and Ewing *et al.*, 2007) and there is some inconsistency in the literature (Frieson, 2010). This causes confusion, and the imprecise use serves to disempower the individuality of the practices themselves. The definitions to be used as a reference point within this study are examined here. Firstly, Smith-Osbourne & Selby (2010) summarise their interpretation of NARHA's (North American Riding for the Handicapped Association) definition of EAL succinctly:

*Equine facilitated learning or assisted learning (EFL/EAL) involves unmounted and mounted lessons or equine/human interaction in an educational format (Smith-Osbourne & Selby, 2010, p.293).*

This definition emphasises the educational and learning outcomes specific to EAL. In contrast, EFP or EAP involves the planned use of an animal in a treatment plan (Eagala, 2009-2010). EFP or EAP must be carried out by a mental health professional (Eagala, 2009-2010). However, EAL practitioners may have a variety of backgrounds (Human Equine Alliance for Learning [Heals], 2015). Finally, Equine Assisted Activities (EAA), a term also referred to in the literature, encompasses a wide range of horse-based activities and again is characterised mainly by the lack of specific treatment objectives (Frieson, 2010).

The following section outlines how the research will be presented.

## **1.7 Outline of the Research**

Chapter 1, the current chapter, introduces the study, its aims and research questions, the rationale for undertaking it, and the definition of key terms relevant to the research.

Chapter 2 reviews the current literature thematically and analyses the most comparable research studies. The chapter begins by reviewing the wider area of animal assisted activities (AAA), referencing the human and animal bond. The focus then narrows to the use of the horse specifically, and its relevance to EAL. The personal experience of EAL, and the themes that are relevant to this experience, are then analysed. Finally, the local and cultural environments of the school in question are discussed.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology of the research. Within this chapter, the motivation behind the selection of each individual method is discoursed, together with its relevance to the aims of the study. Particular reference is given to the influences of the ‘mosaic approach’. In addition, the chapter outlines the research strategy, piloting, the sample and recruitment, data analyses techniques and finally the ethical considerations for the research design.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the micro ethnographic observation and the semi-structured interviews. The findings from both the methods are presented interchangeably under three main headings and multiple subheadings. The principle headings used are: Personal Experience, The Horse, and Caregiving.

Chapter 5 discusses the research findings in the context of the literature review. This chapter gives due regard to the aims and objectives of the study. It also analyses the main themes presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 6 concludes this paper by making a number of final conclusions and discussing the implications of the research findings. The chapter also analyses the findings comparatively, with the study’s original research aims and questions and makes recommendations.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter summarises, compares and contrasts the literature most relevant to how 10 to 12- year-old children, from a DEIS school in Limerick, experience an EAL programme. As the scope of EAL literature is limited, it is necessary, in this chapter, to review a broad base of material. The chapter begins with an introduction to the field of AAA, which aims to lay the foundation necessary for an appreciation of the more specific aspects of EAL. The unique contribution made by the horse is explored in depth, before the existing research relevant to the personal experience is thematically analysed. Thus, the EAL programme is framed within the micro and macro perspectives in which it exists (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Finally, to complete the chapter, the limitations of EAL are explored.

### **2.2 Animal Assisted Activities**

Before analysing equine assisted interventions, it is important to first examine the field of animal assisted learning more generally. Research within the area of animal assisted initiatives is more plentiful, especially in the case of canine interventions (Fine & Beck, 2010, Beetz, Kotrschal, Turner, Hediger, Uvnäs-Moberg & Julius, 2011; Calcaterra, Veggiotti, Palestrini, De Giorgis, Raschetti, Tumminelli & Pelizzo, 2015; Porter, 2005). However, even though much of this research focuses on smaller domestic animals, both the discourse on the animal and human bond (Fine & Beck, 2010) and the similarities within the literature, which exist irrespective of species (Friedmann, Son & Tsai, 2010), are pertinent to this research. The kinship between animals and humans, and in particular children, is discussed before the role of anthropomorphism in this relationship is examined.

### **2.3 The Human Animal Bond**

The terms connected to AAA are underdeveloped, but the recognition of the role of animals in the lives of humans has advanced well beyond infancy (Serpell, 2010). Indeed, the historical importance of animals in the lives of humans has been acknowledged since classical and medieval periods (Serpell, 2010). Numerous psychological and physiological benefits have been associated with the 'human/animal bond' in recent years (Fine & Beck, 2010; Lentini & Knox, 2009; Kruger & Serpell; 2010; Arluke, 2010). This connection to animals appears to be particularly strong for children (Ascione, McCabe, Phillips &

Tedeschi, 2010). Without doubt, animals are ubiquitous in the lives of children, and images of animals proliferate within children's books, clothes, toys and television (Ascione *et al.* 2010; Serpell, 2010). Following on from this apparent phenomenon, theorists have attempted to decipher the role that animals may play in the lives of children (Melson & Fine, 2010). Research has examined the possibility that animals can influence many areas of the child's life, such as caring and nurturing, coping with stressful situations, regulating emotions and increasing physical activity (Melson & Fine, 2010). Correspondingly, taking an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), animals can be seen as a core part of many children's micro systems, due to their ability to provide non-judgemental, available support (Melson & Fine, 2010). Having said this, it is recognised that not all children have positive associations with animals. Nevertheless, one cannot doubt the potential that animals have to be meaningful in children's lives. Within this animal and human relationship, it is important to point out a particular tendency of humans.

### **2.3.1 Anthropomorphism**

The propensity for anthropomorphism, or thinking of animals in human terms, is essential to consider when studying AAA (Serpell, 2002). It has been argued that interpreting animal behaviour in this way is inappropriate (Fine & Beck, 2010). However, Serpell (2003) believes that this practice is central to the interspecies relationship. Indeed, even though the practice of anthropomorphism has been continuously discouraged by animal behaviourists, humans continue to think of animals with human characteristics, despite being unaware of doing so (Beckoff & Horowitz, 2007). Serpell (2003) argues that the practice of anthropomorphism affects animal welfare no more than farming animals does, and that the activity can lead to great benefits for humans. Indeed, Serpell (2003) suggests that humans can find social support in animals through this discouraged activity. Due to its prevalence in society, anthropomorphism could be relevant to the experiences of children within EAL. Having examined AAA more broadly, it is now important to narrow the focus to the horse.

## **2.4 The Horse**

This section explores why the horse is so integral to the practice and experience of EAL. Apart from particular cultural considerations, which are discussed at a later point, there are many reasons why the horse is central to the experience. Burgon (2011) describes horses



as the metaphoric ‘glue’ that motivated adolescents in her longitudinal study of EAL and equine assisted therapy. This piece of the literature review seeks to explore why this is so.

#### **2.4.1 The Horse’s Natural Instincts**

As a prey animal, the horse has finely attuned senses that monitor human’s intentions and regulate their reactions accordingly (Rashid, 2004; Lentini & Knox, 2009). The instinctual reactions of horses can provide feedback to individuals about their behaviour and social actions, known as mirroring (Rees, personal communication, as cited in Burgon, 2014). The horse has well-developed communication techniques (Burgon, 2011), where body language through the ears, eyes, and tail provide instinctual messages to humans (Rashid, 2006). These messages create a feeling of mutual understanding, and allow individuals to draw similarities and awareness to their own body language signals through anthropomorphism (Horowitz & Bekoff, 2003). Like humans, horses are natural herd animals that select leaders (Rashid, 2004) and create subgroups within the herd (Rashid, 2006). These are all behaviours humans can identify with (Myers & Saunders, 2002). Building upon this knowledge, there are other characteristics of the horse that allow for certain types of experiences.

#### **2.4.2 Mindfulness and Relaxation**

Links have been made between EAL and the practice of mindfulness and relaxation (Burgon, 2014). As the horse has great size and power, it is essential for humans to monitor their own breathing, movements and demeanour in order to maintain safety around the potentially dangerous flight animal (Lentini & Knox, 2009; Burgon, 2014). Burgon (2014) draws similarities between this necessity and the practice of mindfulness, where one must become ‘mindfully embodied’ and aware in order to work effectively with the horse (p.162). This leads to a calmness and presence in the here and now, which are characterised as central tenets of mindfulness (Arch & Craske, 2006). It has also been suggested that the horse can provide biofeedback, or information on body functions, such as heart rate variability, during EFP (Lentini & Knox, 2009). Biofeedback, where individuals develop understanding and control over bodily functions for therapeutic reasons (Reyes, 2014), is mentioned in many EFP studies (Lentini & Knox, 2009; Roberts, Bradberry & Williams, 2004; Karol, 2007). Roberts, Bradberry & Williams (2004) argue that the horse is a natural biofeedback machine, as ‘Horses respond to the internal state of the person, no matter how much the person tries to disguise it’ (p.33). This is similar to the

concept of mirroring, except in mirroring horses reflect behaviour as opposed to bodily function. The rhythmic beat of the horse's movements has also been argued to contribute to a feeling of relaxation and calmness (Lentini & Knox, 2009; Game, 2001). These findings are associated with EFP not EAL, with the exception of Burgon (2011), but, it cannot be ruled out that these experiences of relaxation may also be found in EAL. Similarly, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) informs EFP, which could be transferable to EAL.

### **2.4.3 The Horse as an Attachment Object**

It is argued that the horse could function as an attachment object for individuals (Melson, 2001). Throughout her research, Burgon (2014) identifies high levels of trust between research participants and the horse. What is more, Burgon's (2014) research highlights the belief that horses have an understanding of the young people involved in the study. Within the perceived relationship, the group felt free to express affection towards the horse in a tactile and verbal way (Burgon, 2014). Through this interaction, Yorke, Adams & Coady (2008) argue how the animal can provide a meaningful relationship, an unconditional bond that may otherwise be absent in the lives of young people at risk. An example of this is found in a study carried out by Dell *et al.* (2011) on an EAL programme within an Inuit tribe. In this study, horses were identified as close friends by the participants (Dell *et al.*, 2011). As attachment security is known to be a factor in buffering risk and building resilience (Stroufe & Siegal, 2011), it could be argued that the opportunity to experience secure relationships with horses could contribute to resilience. The time required to care for the animal could lead to more opportunity to develop this relationship.

### **2.4.4 Caregiving**

Caregiving activities are required for the horse's wellbeing and are important to mention. Dell *et al.* (2011) note, with surprise, that young people were so agreeable to cleaning up droppings and dirt within the horse's stables. However, caregiving is a central part of experiencing EAL, and participants rarely object to it. Research carried out by Melson & Fogel (1996) outlines how the role of nurturer is often taken on by children with their pets. This demonstration of care is closely linked to the child's sense of empathy (Myers & Saunders, 2002). Myers & Saunders (2002) draw similarities to animal care provision and Nodding's (1984) 'natural caring' that is carried out, without question, as a necessity for

something or someone the individual loves. This is similar to Lynch & Lyon's (2008) 'love labour', where an individual nurtures another to enhance his/her general wellbeing. Interestingly, the often gendered nature of human care (Lynch & Lyons, 2008) does not appear to affect animal caregiving in the same way (Melson & Fogel, 1989). Indeed, Melson & Fogel (1989) found that gender had less of an influence on children who were caring for animals, as opposed to providing care for babies. Accordingly, this suggests that EAL may provide experiences of a nurturing relationship for children of both genders, which may not otherwise be possible. EAL also provides an opportunity to experience the natural world.

#### **2.4.5 Nature**

Nature has been found to have numerous effects on the lives of children (Corraliza, Collado & Bethelmy, 2012). EAA is unique, in that one must travel to the horse, as opposed to other AAA which can be facilitated in a classroom or office, and participants often benefit from this (Hague, Kvalem, Berget, Enders-Slegers & Braastad, 2014). Wilson (1984) coined human's natural gravitation towards other living things, and the natural environment, as the biophilia hypothesis (Chen, Tu & Ho, 2013). Wilson believes that this interaction with the natural world is essential for human wellbeing (Tu & Chen, 2013). Corraliza *et al.* (2012) not only believe that nature can positively impact children, but that the natural environment can also moderate feelings of stress. Burgon (2014) identifies the clear association between the areas of EAT/EAL and meeting the biophilic need (Tu & Chen, 2013), and Burgon (2014) believes that experiencing the natural environment is an organic addition to the existing benefits of EAT/EAL. Furthermore, this experience of nature, and being outside, is closely related to the physical element of working with horses, which also brings its own benefits (Burgon, 2014).

#### **2.4.6 Physical Activity**

Physical activity has been found to influence both children's physical and mental wellbeing (Brockman, Jago & Fox, 2011). In spite of this, childhood obesity and the lack of exercise in children is a modern dilemma (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2012). There are numerous physical activities associated with caring for a horse which are included in many EAL programmes (Burgon, 2014). Additionally, horse riding is itself a sport and has been found to increase energy expenditure (Devienne & Guezennec, 2000) at a moderate intensity (British Horse Society [BHS], n.d.). It is possible that children may

enjoy the sporting aspect of the experience. Furthermore, horse riding has been found to have positive effects on the reduction of feelings of anxiety and depression (BHS, n.d).

Through the discussion of equine activities more broadly, the relevance of the horse to the experience of EAL has been outlined, with particular reference to the horse's natural instincts, mindfulness and relaxation, attachment, caregiving, nature and physical activity. The chapter now examines the EAL research exclusively, searching for themes which are common to the personal experience of EAL.

## **2.5 The Personal Experience of Equine Assisted Learning**

The majority of academic research into equine practices focuses on the therapeutic outcomes of EFP and EAT. A limited amount of this research has been carried out with groups of children (Smith-Osbourne & Selby, 2010), for example children with autism (Bass, Duchowny & Llabre, 2009), children who have been sexually abused (Kemp, Signal, Botros, Taylor & Prentice, 2013) and children who have experienced violence (Schultz, Remick-Barlow & Robbins, 2007). An extensive literature search on numerous search engines revealed little relevant research on EAL published in Ireland. It is known that research has been carried out on EAL related topics by employees of Festina Lente in Bray, Co, Wicklow (Carey, personal communication, 2015). This research would be relevant to the present study, but it has not been published, and unfortunately access was not possible.

Worldwide, it can be observed that the main body of research has been carried out with adolescents, as opposed to younger primary school children (Dell *et al.*, 2011, Hague et al, 2014 and Ewing *et al.*, 2007 and Holmes, Goodwin, Redhead & Goymour, 2011). Indeed, even when younger children are included in research studies, they are in mixed groups with older children, as for an example in Burgon's (2011) study of 11 to 15-year-olds. This type of grouping does not allow for developmental factors which may influence the experience (Weisz & Kazdin, 2003). However, due to the lack of equivalent research into 10 to 12 year-old children's experiences of EAL exclusively, it is necessary to explore the personal experiences of children and adolescents in this review. Several research projects have been selected as the most relevant examples of empirical investigation. These studies vary greatly in location, perspective and methods, but many common themes emerge through their comparison.

### **2.5.1 Themes Identified in the Experience of EAL**

The five themes of relationship-building, self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-awareness and empathy are commonly associated with the experience of EAL. As mentioned above, the importance and relevance of the use of the horse and horse behaviour is also very important within the literature (Dell *et al.*, 2011; Burgon, 2011; Hague *et al.*, 2014). Returning to the themes, not all of those observed are consistently represented in the literature. Indeed, some of them are more disputed than others, with results varying in accordance with research methods. Despite these inconsistencies, these themes have been deemed relatable due to the richness of the data and their frequency throughout the studies.

Firstly, the development of self-esteem and self-confidence has been identified by qualitative studies such as Burgon (2011). However, quantitative analysis does not reflect the development of self-esteem (Hague *et al.*, 2014; Ewing *et al.*, 2007). A reason for this discrepancy could be the difficulty in measurement and the high level of low self-esteem within subject groups (Ewing *et al.*, 2007). Despite these inconsistencies, self-esteem is a common theme both within the AAA (Kruger & Serpell, 2010) and EAA literature. This is perhaps because EAL brings the opportunity of learning skills expertly (Arluke, 2010), and has therefore been included as applicable to the experience. Interestingly, this sense of self-efficacy is closely related to the cultural value of the skills being acquired (Newman & Newman, 2012). This suggests that certain types of AAA may be more culturally attractive and successful in encouraging self-efficacy in cultures that place a high value on the knowledge of animals. This is further explored in relation to Limerick later in the chapter.

In contrast to self-esteem, the concept of relationship-building is less contested, with evidence found in the majority of the research. Examples of this include the development of relationships between staff and clients (Carlsson *et al.*, 2014), among participants (Dell *et al.*, 2011; Hague *et al.*, 2014), between facilitator and participants (Dell *et al.*, 2011; Ewing *et al.*, 2007) and lastly between participants and the horse (Hague *et al.*, 2014). Likewise, a sense of mastery and self-efficacy is also evident within the findings of Burgon (2011) and Dell *et al.* (2011), and is of relevance as a general theme. In the same way, communication and self-awareness are identified as key findings in Carlsson *et al.* (2014) and Dell *et al.* (2011). This follows on from the concept of mirroring, previously discussed in relation to the horse's natural instincts. Finally, empathy emerges as a key part of the experience of EAL. The link between empathy and animals is explored within the literature

and has been supported by Burgon (2011). Burgon (2014) suggests that empathy may also be related to the building of trust and relationships with the horse, which she argues could be a contributing factor to secure attachments. However, other studies, such as Ewing *et al.* (2007) have not found any evidence of increased empathy within the experience of EAL.

As previously mentioned, the main aim of this study is to explore the subjective and individual experiences that 10 to 12-year-old primary school children have of an EAL programme. Due to the emergent nature of the research, no initial hypothesis was made about the relevance of these themes to the present study. However, it is expected that some aspects of the personal experience of the programme may have similarities to the literature discussed. Before concluding this chapter, it is essential to explore the significance of the local environment where the programme was situated, as well as the cultural setting in which the children live. These topics are examined in detail before the possible limitations of group EAL are acknowledged.

## **2.6 The Local Environment**

The primary school attended by the children is situated in an urban area of Limerick city, and is involved in the DEIS programme. The DEIS programme currently involves 657 primary schools in Ireland (Department of Education and Skills, 2014), and aims to encourage educational equality in areas around the country that are socially disadvantaged (Department of Education and Science, 2005). Hourigan (2011) maps the social geography of Limerick and describes the school's location as belonging to an area type in which there is predominantly local authority estate housing. Furthermore, low educational achievement and high unemployment are characteristics of the social area type, as described by Hourigan (2011). This information is important to acknowledge, in order to appreciate the possible difficulties experienced by pupils of the primary school. However, this is not the focus of the current research. The school works closely with the local GYDP to facilitate the EAL programme and other projects. GYDP's were set up by the Irish Youth Justice Service [IYJS], with an aim to directly influence youth crime in areas around Ireland (IYJS, 2011). A 2011 examination of GYDP risk assessments shows that positive peer groups and positive social activities decrease risk of offending in young people (IYJS, 2011). The staff from the GYDP and the school use the young people's interest in horses

to build positive relationships and encourage positive pastimes. In doing so, they also recognise the cultural importance of the horse in the area.

## **2.7 The Cultural Environment**

In their research, Griffin and Kelleher (2010) describe the passion that exists for horses in many inner city areas in Limerick. Upon entering the area where the DEIS primary school is located, one can often observe a number of horses grazing on the estates. Sulky or horse cart races are also sometimes found in the area's roads. Undoubtedly, horses have a very visible presence in the area, and are part of the macro system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) of many of the children who attend the primary school. This horse culture has long been a part of the social geography of the area (Hourigan, 2011), and a shared interest in horses has been positively harnessed by a number of social initiatives in Limerick, such as the Limerick Horse Project 2014, which used art as a medium to celebrate horse culture (Learning hub, 2014, design project). Likewise, the Probation and Linkage in Limerick Scheme (PALLS) delivered an artistic initiative based on the horse in 2015 (Walsh, 2015, July 06). Horse projects have also been associated with promoting horse and animal welfare and education in Limerick (Irish Horse Welfare Trust). Indeed, a number of young people have gained employment in equestrianism and have become successful race jockeys as a result of education and diversion projects in Limerick (Irish Horse Welfare Trust, 2011). In addition, the primary school and the GYD project have used horses to promote engagement for a number of years. Gilligan (2000) argues that positive school experiences, and being involved in positive spare time activities, can help build resilience. It is possible that the young people's interest in the horse contributes to the popularity of such resilience-building experiences, designed by the school and the GYD project, and inadvertently influencing resiliency.

However, horses are often associated with negativity, despite being a positive pastime and social resource (Kelleher & O'Connor, 2011). Indeed, in her exploration of Limerick, Hourigan (2011) identifies horse trading and sulky race betting as the link between the beginnings of both international and national drug trading. What is more, The Control of Horses Act (1996), which calls for licencing of horses, and prohibits the keeping of horses in certain areas (Government of Ireland, 1996) often, leads to punishment for owning horses. Griffin & Kelleher (2010) describe the strains that this act has caused between the local authorities and the horse owners in the area. In 2015, €600,000 was allocated by

Limerick city and county council to collecting and impounding horses that were kept in areas in breach of the Control of Horses Act (1996) (Raleigh, 2015). These ‘wandering horses’ have also been used as a negative visual stereotype that has frustrated residents of these areas (Devereux, Haynes & Power, 2011). In sum, all this negativity is unfortunate, given that horses have been described as a major resource in the area (Kelleher & O’Connor, 2011).

Nevertheless, irrespective of these negativities, positive horse culture is part of the social fabric of the area and is particularly relevant to the studied primary school’s cultural perspective. The final section of the literature review is devoted to reviewing the limitations involved in EAL, which could also influence the experiences of the children participating in this research.

## **2.8 Limitations**

Any review would be incomplete without referencing the possible barriers to the practice of EAL. This section looks broadly at the limitations of the practice itself, as opposed to the drawbacks of this particular research project, which will also be addressed in Chapter 3. The welfare of animals has been raised as a potential issue for the practice of AAA (Serpell, Coppinger, Fine & Perlata, 2010). Indeed, in the effort to provide positive experiences for humans, it is also important to be conscious of the animals’ needs simultaneously (Serpell *et al.*, 2010). Despite the necessity of this mindfulness, it has been found that cortisol increases in canines were not associated with participation in AAA (Glenk *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, equine welfare and care is often promoted throughout programmes, and would therefore serve to educate participants about an animal’s welfare requirements. In the Irish policy context, the use of animals in schools is governed by the Animal Health and Welfare Act, 2013, which safeguards the best interests of animals (The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine [DAFM], 2013).

It is also recognised that the safety of children participating in EAL is paramount. Hygiene and health and safety have been highlighted as areas that require attention, and may be barriers to some individuals’ experiences of AAA (Fine, 2010). Another possible limitation of EAL is that programmes have high costs. This leads to short-term group sessions. Melson & Fine (2010) highlight that, ideally, longer programmes are more desirable. However, this results in fewer children having the opportunity to participate in these kinds of programmes. Likewise, individual work has been found to be more



successful (Friedmann, Son & Tsai, 2010), though this also limits participant numbers and increases costs.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored a number of areas which may be relevant to, or may influence, how children from a DEIS primary school in Limerick city may experience an EAL programme. The role of the horse was examined and it was highlighted that the horse may be particularly important to the participants due to the cultural value of horses in the area. Themes such as relationship-building, self-efficacy, self-esteem, communication, self-awareness and empathy have been discussed, in relation to the experience of EAL. In addition, the practice of mindfulness, forming attachments and trust-building, spending time in the natural world, and the carrying out of physical activity, have also been explored as topics that might be relevant to children's experience of EAL. Similarly, the possible shortcomings and potential negative influences of the experience have been dually noted. It has been identified that there is a significant gap in the research of 10 to 12-year-old children's experiences of EAL worldwide. It is hoped that this study will build on the existing literature of adolescents' experiences of EAL, and address, in some small way, the gaps in the research of younger children's experiences.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodology used to explore how 10 to 12-year-old children experience an EAL programme. The research approach, the conceptual framework involved in researching children's experiences, and the research methods are outlined in this section. Following this, the sample and the process of data analysis are examined. Attention is also paid to the limitations of the current study, and the specific ethical concerns regarding the chosen research methods and participants.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

It is known that the research approach taken influences the methods and research aims (Punch, 2005). Before discussing the chosen qualitative design, philosophical assumptions and their influence on the methodology must be acknowledged (Mills & Birks, 2014). Within this study, the constructivist world-view of the researcher, which defines reality and truth as having multiple subjective actualities, have influenced both the research question and the methodology used to answer it (Mills & Birks, 2014). The constructivist world-view acknowledges that participants' views of an experience or phenomenon are central to research and therefore research questions are kept broad and general to allow for the participants' construction of meaning (Creswell, 2009). This study has aimed to ask open-ended research questions and to include a flexible methodology that facilitates this construction of meaning, which can later be interpreted by the researcher (Creswell, 2009). Beyond constructivist world-views, a phenomenological, qualitative approach has been deemed the most appropriate to answer the research questions.

#### **3.2.1 Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research designs seek to explore understanding instead of empirically testing theories (Creswell, 2009). Indeed, qualitative research is understood to be most concerned with the words of the research participant, as opposed to numbers (Denscombe, 2014). By nature, qualitative research is inductive rather than deductive (Creswell, 2009). In this way, qualitative research allows participants to have increased opportunities for self-determination of the results of a study. A qualitative strategy champions the importance of the subjective, rather than objective meaning (Bryman, 2012). This freedom associated

with a qualitative design can give a greater insight into the world of the participant (Sarantakos, 1998). As this study is primarily concerned with inductively researching the subjective experiences of children, a research methodology that adequately creates a realistic understanding of the lived experience is essential. More practically, it was also known that a small sample size was available because of the low number of participants in the EAL programme. Therefore, a methodology that facilitated a greater depth of understanding with a smaller number of participants was appropriate (Denscombe, 2014).

### **3.2.2 Phenomenology**

A phenomenological approach has been identified on account of its focus on the lived experience (Usher & Jackson, 2014). Phenomenology, which can be a philosophical approach and a methodology, aims to gain a greater understanding of individual's experiences in the world (Usher & Jackson, 2014). As this study largely focuses on the lived experiences of 10 and 12-year-old children involved in an EAL programme, it can be said that it is also influenced by phenomenological philosophy. However, caution must be taken with this claim, as phenomenology is a somewhat contested term, and multiple versions of the idea exist (Denscombe, 2014). In spite of this, both the European idea of phenomenology associated with Edmund Husserl and the newer North American phenomenology of Alfred Schutz, emphasise the importance of the lived experience, which is central to this particular research project (Denscombe, 2014). Moving forward, it is now necessary to reference the conceptual framework behind researching a child's experience.

### **3.3 Conceptual Framework: Researching Children's Experiences**

It is important to acknowledge the reasons why children's experiences were chosen as a central aspect within this research. Children have often been given the role of research subjects, as opposed to research participants (Greene & Hill, 2005). This type of research diminishes the personhood of children, who are agents of their own life (Greene & Hill, 2005). Article 12 and 13 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) details the importance of listening to the opinions of children and facilitating their freedom of expression (Children's Rights, 2010). In order to meet these rights, it is vital to design research that aims to listen carefully to the child's voice (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000). Equally, giving primacy to the experience of the child respects the individuality and difference of each young person (Greene & Hill, 2005). Ideally children should be co-researchers, involved in all aspects of the research process (Alderson, 2008). Although

children were not involved in the design of this research project, the researcher viewed the participants as equal parties or partners within the process, and was committed to continuous consultation and discussion of the research and to piloting and amending the methods as necessary. Throughout the method selection, the researcher was mindful of the necessity to include child-centred research techniques which have been shown to be more enjoyable for children (Wyness, 2006). However, it is important to recognise that this child-centred approach did not develop from a belief that the child is any less capable to participate in other research methods, but advanced from a commitment to finding participative methods which were suited to the child's interests while also answering the research question (Grenne & Hill, 2005). The research methods selected to explore these experiences of the child are outlined below.

### **3.4 Research Methods**

A multi-method design was chosen to answer the research question. The Italian Reggio Emilia Approach recognises that children have multiple languages of expression (Veechi, 2010). Clark and Moss (2011), infer that a combination of methods, or the Mosaic Approach, is preferable when attempting to understand this multiplicity within children's lives. The research strategy is largely influenced by these concepts. Micro-ethnographic participant observation and semi-structured interviews, with the use of photo elicitation from auto-driven children's photography, were used to collect data and explore the child's multiple languages (Veechi, 2010).

#### **3.4.1 Micro-ethnographic Observation**

Overt and participatory, micro-ethnographic observation was the first method to be carried out (Bryman, 2012). Ethnographic methods were traditionally based within the field of anthropology (Robson, 2002). Classical ethnography involves the in-depth study of a culture over a period of years (Robson, 2002). Such participatory methods are thought to give the researcher an 'insider' view of an experience (Wyness, 2006) and rich, detailed, holistic data (Dutta, 2014). Due to timeframe limitations, it was not possible to observe the EAL programme for such a lengthy period of time. Instead, micro-ethnography more accurately denotes the methods used in this research as casual conversations, informal interviews and an immersion in the setting (Bryman, 2012). An overt research position was taken in order to observe research ethics. What is more, the researcher was a full participatory member of the group, in order to minimise the 'master status' often adopted

by adults in relation to children (Wyness, 2006). The researcher attended a total of 12 hours of session time for the EAL programme. Extensive field notes were taken via voice recordings during each session to ensure accuracy, and additional written notes were taken in a reflective journal post session (Bryman, 2012).

### **3.4.2 Photography**

Photography was chosen in a conscious effort to include children as co-researchers and active participants in the research (Roberts-Holmes, 2005). Each participant was given a disposable camera and asked to take 10 photographs that described their experience of the EAL programme in the final session. For confidentiality reasons, copies of these photos were not included within the research, and were instead returned to the children. This gave them freedom to photograph all aspects of the EAL programme, including other participants. The primary use of these photographs was as a discussion point within the semi-structured interviews. It was important that the photographs used for photo elicitation in the interviews were auto driven (taken by the participants), in order to give priority to the participant's ownership of their lived experience (Stanczak, 2007). The photographs were used to validate the children's interests which were observed within the micro ethnographic observation phase. However, a separate analysis of the photos was not carried out, in order to avoid speculation and assumptions about the children's experience.

### **3.4.3 Semi Structured Interviews**

The last phase of the data-collection process consisted of seven digitally-recorded, semi-structured qualitative interviews. Interviews are best suited to the exploration of multifaceted and elusive phenomena (Denscombe, 2014). The semi-structured or focused interview was selected on the basis that this method can provide an opportunity for the interviewees to voice their subjective experiences and elaborate on particular areas that are important to them (Punch, 2005). This flexibility was deemed suitable for exploring the experiences of children (Lewis & Lyndsay, 2000).

The interviews were carried out at the children's school, two weeks after the last EAL session. The first interview was carried out as a pilot. The interviews took place in an activity room in the school and lasted between 10 and 12 minutes each. Every interview was digitally recorded with a Dictaphone which children had the opportunity to test. A familiar GYDP youth worker was present during the interviews, in order to adhere to child protection guidelines. As the researcher had spent a great deal of time with the children

during the micro-ethnographic observation, the children were also familiar and comfortable with the researcher before the interview process commenced.

An interview guide and an information sheet were prepared based on Creswell's (2009) interview protocol. All language used was developmentally appropriate and the interview was loosely scripted to ensure replication and comprehension. The phrasing and format of Burgon's (2011) EAL research, interview questions substantially influenced the formation of the interview schedule. The interview began with a number of icebreakers (Creswell, 2009). Participants' photographs were then explored in terms of what was significant about them for the individuals (Bryman, 2011). At the end of the interview, participants were thanked and given the opportunity to ask questions.

#### **3.4.4 Piloting**

To ensure that the methods of micro ethnographic observation, photography and semi structured interviews were appropriate to the participants, and to the study, it was important to pilot these methods (Greene and Hill, 2005). The data collection tools were firstly discussed with the programme facilitator. The three methods were then tested with one of the participants of the research. Furthermore, feedback was sought from youth workers from the GYDP. As a result of this process, interview questions were revised.

### **3.5 The Sample**

This research project encompassed non-probability, typical case, purposive sampling, as the children from the DEIS primary school were already participating in the EAL programme (Neuman, 2011). The principal of the primary school, the co-ordinator of the GYDP, and the EAL facilitator were important gatekeepers. The sample included seven children, four males and three females, aged between 10 and 12 from fifth and sixth class of the same DEIS school. All eight children involved in the programme gave informed consent and received informed consent from their guardians. However, it was only possible to interview and observe seven children, as one child was absent from school for the final session of the EAL programme and for the interviews.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

Neuman (2011) describes data analysis as the systematic organisation, integration, examination and division of data into categories. Data analysis often begins during the data-collection phase, but it was not until the field notes, the reflective ethnographic

journal and interviews were all meticulously transcribed that the systematic data analysis could begin (Neuman, 2011). Careful attention was paid to reading and rereading the data and authentically representing the voice, accent and laughter of the participants within the transcripts (Punch, 2005). The data was then prepared for analysis by triangulating and conceptualising the findings from the micro- ethnographic observation and the semi-structured interviews (Neuman, 2011). Themes were identified and the data was coded using an open-coding technique (Punch, 2005). Memoing was used to record relationships and ideas identified whilst organising and coding the data (Punch, 2005). The codes were then grouped thematically with three main themes and several subthemes emerging.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations**

The issue of research ethics is of paramount importance for all research projects (Creswell, 2009). However, when researching ‘less powerful’ individuals under the age of 18, consideration of ethics is even more important (Whyte, 2006). This statement does not intend to demean the ability of the child, but instead to make reference to the status differences that are apparent on account of adults’ attributed authority over children in many societies and systems (Hill, 2005). Indeed, children may follow adult direction or amend answers because of this difference in power (Hill, 2005).

This study received ethical approval from the Head of the School of Languages, Law and Social Sciences, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). The researcher took careful consideration of the ESRI’s four principles of research and the DIT Research Ethics Committee Guidelines. Efforts were also made to be ethically compliant throughout the study. Children were consulted about the location of the interviews, and a spacious private room at the school was chosen (Wyness, 2006). Rapport was built slowly with each individual child during the observation period. Similarly, the potential impact of the research on the participants was monitored during discussions with the children (Hill, 2005). With regard to safety, child protection guidelines were adhered to and the researcher received Garda Vetting from the school (Hill, 2005). Furthermore, informed consent, confidentiality and reflexivity were identified as being particularly important at the offset of this study, and these areas are now discussed separately.

#### **3.7.1 Informed Consent**

Informed consent from guardians and participants was of upmost importance. In order to gain informed consent, the researcher communicated information about the research

purpose and design both verbally and in simple written language documents given to the guardians and children (see Appendix 1 and 2). The participants gave both verbal and written consent and were invited to ask questions about the research process. It was emphasised that consent was ongoing and that participants could withdraw at any time, and during any phase of the research (Miller, Birch, Mauthner & Jessop, 2012). During the research process, the participants were reminded that they did not have to answer any questions that they did not wish to answer, and could still remain part of the project if they chose to (Hill, 2005). Moreover, participants and their guardians were aware that their decision to consent to participate in the research project would have no consequences on their participation in the EAL programme (Hill, 2005).

### **3.7.2 Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is acknowledged as being of utmost importance for recordings, transcripts, field notes, photographs and within the dissertation itself. However, the need to follow child protection reporting guidelines were also explained (Whyte, 2006). The children and their guardians were informed that the data collected would be used in a dissertation that at some point might become public. Any identifying information was omitted from the thesis and the data collected was not used for any other purpose. During the research, great care was taken to keep the data confidential. The participants were assigned numbers that were used in any ethnographic notes made. All electronic data was stored on a password protected laptop and the Dictaphone and reflective journal were stored in a locked drawer. At the end of the research process this data was destroyed.

### **3.7.3 Reflexivity**

Lastly, the issue of reflexivity is also an ethical concern. As discussed in Chapter 1, the rationale for the study is based on my previous experience of similar EAL programmes organised by the school and the GYDP. From this work, I have existing relationships with children at the school and the EAL facilitator. Consistently reflecting upon my objectivity as a researcher helped me to ensure that I could use this closeness to EAL, the participants and the facilitator to gain a greater depth of understanding of the children's experiences without being impartial or breaking the code of ethics (Creswell, 2009). I consistently made these personal reflections about the reflexivity of my work and discussed this during supervision with my DIT supervisor. Moreover, interviews were used as an opportunity to validate the data that had been collected during observation, to prevent the influence of



bias (Neuman, 2011). I was also mindful that different ideologies and cultural differences may emerge between my own outlook and that of the participants (Wisker, 2008). This matter, and its potential impact on the research, were consistently reviewed.

### **3.8 Limitations**

The limitations of this study must be acknowledged. Firstly, the findings of this research cannot be deemed representative or generalisable because of the small sample size. Furthermore, a longitudinal study would be more appropriate for ethnographic research and capturing the on-going experience of the programme and any progression or change which may take place within the experience. The ideology of the researcher could also produce some bias in how the research is interpreted, despite efforts towards reflexivity being taken; and this subjectivity should be recognised as a possible limitation (Creswell, 2009).

#### **3.8.1 Research Method Limitations**

More specifically, there are also limitations for each of the research methods. Ethnography can be criticised because of the possibility of the ‘observer effect or paradox’ causing participants to alter their behaviour as they are aware they are being observed (Aubrey, David, Godfrey & Thompson, 2000). However, the researcher attempted to disturb the ‘naturalness’ of the setting as little as possible during observation (Punch, 2005). Moreover, the method can become non-analytical due to the descriptive nature of ethnography itself (Dutta, 2014). Every effort was made to avoid this, and data was triangulated from more than one source in order to verify observations (Neuman, 2011).

Photography and photo elicitation also has its limitations, as photography does not necessarily lead to better quality of interviews or meaningful images (Bryman, 2012). However, photographs were not analysed independently of the participants, and therefore the possibility for inaccuracy of interpretation was decreased. Likewise, semi-structured interviews can lead to the ‘interviewer effect’, whereby differing responses are generated depending on the interviewer’s characteristics, such as gender, race and class (Neuman, 2011). Children in particular may be influenced by an older person interviewing them, on account of a perceived difference in status (Wyness, 2006). As the children in this study were familiar with the researcher from the ethnographic observation, it was likely that these status issues were reduced and the interview process was less invasive. In sum,

having awareness of these various limitations, and being mindful about reflexivity, contributes to minimising the effects of these restrictions (Robson, 2002).

### **3.9 Conclusion**

Chapter 3 has discussed the research approach, including the choice of qualitative methodology, the relevance of phenomenology, and the researcher's constructivist views. Researching children's experiences and the personhood of the child has also been linked to the research design. The multi-method research strategy has been delineated and the sample and data analysis method involved in the study have been referenced. Lastly, the limitations of this study and the importance of ethical considerations have been stressed. The data that emerged from this process reflected many individual experiences. These findings are presented in Chapter 4.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the key findings that emerged from the seven interviews and the 12 hours of micro-ethnographic observation. The main findings from each method are presented together under thematic headings. During data analysis the three major themes of Personal Experience, The Horse, and Caregiving were identified as core aspects of the participants' experience of the EAL programme. These broad headings were not exhaustive, but constraints of the current study prevented additional themes being added.

Personal Experience refers to the four common threads identified between each individual's subjective experiences: positivity, learning, fear and relaxation. The Horse was also prominent within the research and its significance to the experience warranted its own section. Under this heading, the relevance of the horse's physicality, personal meaning, environment and cultural significance are presented in the findings. In addition, the horse's natural instinct to mirror behaviour, and the human/horse bond, were recognised. Finally, Caregiving and the non-gendered desire to care for the horse and its link to empathy were also noteworthy. Quotes are used extensively throughout the chapter to accurately represent the participants' voices and give weight to their words. Some quotes are taken from observation field notes however; the majority are transcribed from interview recordings.

### **4.2 Personal Experience**

A number of commonalities were found within the broad heading of Personal Experience. The similarities identified include: shared positivity about the programme, and the common experience of learning, fear and relaxation during the EAL programme. These subheadings are now explored in further detail.

#### **4.2.1 Positivity**

All seven participants expressed feelings of positivity about their experience of the programme. During observation, it was evident that children appeared to be enjoying their experience. This was confirmed in the interviews. Overall, the children used optimistic

adjectives like “Brilliant”, “Fantastic”, “Fun” “Exciting” and “Very, very good” when asked to describe their experience in one word.

Similarly, when questioned about what it felt like to experience the EAL programme the participants used affirmative words like “Happy”, “Excited” and “Feels good” to describe their emotions:

The eagerness to participate in subsequent programmes also indicated that children felt positively about their experience. Indeed, when asked if they had any questions for the researcher, two participants asked about the possibility of future horse projects:

*Is it going to be back on next year? (Participant 4)*

*When is the next project? (Participant 7)*

#### **4.2.2 Learning**

The learning of new information and skills was an important part of the experience. Six of the seven participants believed they had learned something new, and all seven participants felt that they had improved and progressed in skills previously learnt. The majority of participants named specific skills in relation to the horse when asked about learning:

*I learned how to clean their hoofs. (Participant 3)*

*Yeah how to put the saddle on and fix it up. (Participant 4)*

*That you have to clean out the horses every day. (Participant 5)*

*You learn how to feed them and brush them and clean out stables and jump and all. (Participant 7)*

In addition, participants expressed a belief that they had improved in certain areas:

*It makes you get better. (Participant 4)*

*When I was out there I got to do everything that I didn't know how to do, and you all learnt me stuff. (Participant 3)*

Interestingly, for many participants a sense of self-efficacy or pride appeared to be associated with the learning of these new skills:

*Like you know what you are doing and it feels good (Participant 1)*

*I couldn't do it the whole time but now I can. (Participant 2)*

In one particular example, this self-efficacy was linked to the transferability of the skills to the home environment.

*It felt good cause when I go back home ... I can groom her like I learned.*

(Participant 3)

#### **4.2.3 Relaxation**

All of the participants described experiencing relaxation. Relaxation was strongly associated with lying over the horse's back. This exercise involves lying on your stomach across the bare back of the horse. In theory, the person can experience the sensations of the horse breathing, the horse's heartbeat and sometimes the digestive sounds inside the horse's stomach. While observing this exercise, the researcher noted the change in atmosphere. The children became very quiet while they were participating in the exercise and also whilst they were watching others participating. One child described feeling particularly relaxed.

*It's cosy and warm like my bed, I could go asleep up here. (Participant 5)*

During the interviews the participants gave similar answers about being comfortable laying over the horse. Many participants also said they felt calm or relaxed

*It's relaxing; you can feel like when it's breathing. (Participant 3)*

*It relaxes me, I feel comfortable on him. (Participant 6)*

Participants associated this experience with the horse's breathing and the sound and sensation of the horse's heart beating:

*Like you can feel their heart beat and like you can feel them breathing in and out. (Participant 2)*

*It's cool the way it is, you can feel it going up and down. (Participant 6)*

One participant also described the movement of the horse when asked why he felt relaxed with the horse:

*When they move they don't jump all over they just go calmly. (Participant 5)*

#### 4.2.4 Fear

During the ethnographic observation period, it was observed that some children experienced what was expressed as fear or nervousness about the horse at the beginning of the programme. At the start of the programme, the sheer size of these unfamiliar horses sometimes appeared to be intimidating for participants:

*When you are beside them it's bad, but then when you are on them it's worse.* (Participant 1)

*When was the last time this one was jocked? I'm a bit nervous of him.*  
(Participant 7)

In order to confirm these observations, the participants were asked, during the interviews, about their feelings of fear. The participants agreed that fear was a part of their experience, but this was mainly confined to the start of the programme:

*I was like scared at the start.* (Participant 1)

*Yeah a little bit. The horse that my sister has is small, but these horses were tall.* (Participant 3)

*At first I felt scared.* (Participant 4)

What is more, the participants described overcoming this fear.

*When you get used to it, it's grand.* (Participant 1)

One participant who had very little experience of horses, and who exhibited the most anxiety about the horse's size, expressed what it was like to overcome this fear during the last session of the observation.

Researcher: *Sometimes I've noticed that you say you are scared of doing something but then you do it. What does that feel like?*

Participant 1: *Freedom ... It feels like freedom*

This quote suggests that although fear has a negative connotation, the overcoming of that fear had positive effects on the individual's experience.

#### 4.3 The Horse

The Horse was identified as a central point within the participants' experiences. The physicality of the horse, the environment of the horse, and the dynamics of the personal

relationship with the horse are equally noteworthy. Moreover, the concepts of mirroring, and the dynamics of the personal relationship with the horse, were also important elements of the experience of EAL for the participants.

#### **4.3.1 The Physicality of the Horse**

The size and height of the horse was relevant to some participants' experience of EAL. This is evident in this excerpt from an interview transcript:

Researcher: *So what does it feel like if you are sitting on a horse bareback or on a saddle? What does it feel like sitting up there?*

Participant 2: *Feels like you are the King of the World.*

Researcher: *Feels like you are King of the World?*

Participant 2: *Yeah 'cause you are taller than everyone.*

In addition, for some participants, being able to ride the horse was an important part of the experience. One participant identified the horse riding aspect as the best part of the programme, because of the speed attained when on horseback:

Researcher: *So why jocking the horse – why do you like it?*

Participant 2: *'Cause you get places faster.*

#### **4.3.2 Mirroring**

Mirroring, the concept that the horse's natural instincts provide a reflection of the participant's own behaviour appeared to be present in the experiences of five of the participants. When asked if human behaviour affects the horse, the participant's gave examples of angry and aggressive behaviour, and the horse's typical reaction:

*If you go into the stable bad, then he'll go mad and try to kick you.*  
(Participant 6)

*He would turn away from you ... if you were angry* (Participant 7)

Furthermore, participants compared two different behaviours and the horse's most likely reaction to each, showing their in-depth understanding of horse behaviour and instincts, and the idea of mirroring:

*If you went into the stable and slammed the door, like you know, if you were in a mood or something they would turn their arse to you; and if you go in quiet they know you are in a good mood and stand for you. (Participant 4)*

*'Cause if you go quietly they will feel a lot happier, and if you go in running then they will be scared. (Participant 5)*

### **4.3.3 The Human Horse Bond**

The horse had significant personal meaning for some of the participants, who were very vocal about their love of the animal throughout the programme. This was evident during the micro- ethnographic observation, throughout the photographs and within the interviews:

*The best feeling is being with the horses, 'cause I love horses so much. (Participant 3)*

*I loved horses since I was born. (Participant 4)*

Through the process of anthropomorphism, or giving animals human traits, the participants appeared to form close relationships with the animals:

*He has watery eyes or something ... 'cause no one was jocking him or feeding him or something. (Participant 5)*

*She was always trying to cuddle with her neck. (Participant 2)*

These bonds were reciprocal for the participants who believed that there was a mutual understanding between themselves and their favourite horse:

*When I was worried like ... she knew like what way I was. (Participant 1)*

*She understands me. (Participant 1)*

Many participants took photographs of their favourite horses as they felt it was important to remember them. Interestingly, this personal relationship between the children and their favourite horse proved to be a source of social support for some participants. This is



especially true for two participants, who believed the horse had attempted to comfort them when they were feeling sad:

*I was feeling sad ... He [the horse] just walked over and started to hug, and I don't know why. (Participant 2)*

*When I wasn't feeling good one day, she started moving her head and touching my face. (Participant 3)*

#### **4.3.4 The Cultural Meaning of the Horse**

For some participants, the cultural significance of the horse was central to their experience of the EAL programme. When asked to describe the programme in one word Participant 1 outlines how horses are part of her world.

Researcher: Can you choose one word to describe the horse programme?

Participant 1: *Life.*

Researcher: *Why life?*

Participant 1: *'Cause it's what I like to do, and a lot of people around here like to do it.*

The participants recognised the importance of horses in their lives, which perhaps made the EAL programme a more enjoyable experience for them:

*People like them and like, if we didn't have horses like, we would be always getting into trouble. (Participant 6)*

*You feel happy like you have something to do every day. (Participant 7)*

However, despite this, the restrictions to the access of horses in the area were also referenced by some participants. These references were unsolicited by the researcher and were not the focus of the research however, they appeared to be connected to the children's experience. For example Participant 6 and 7 mention the pound (local authorities) seizing horses.

*In the horse project you can jock them and all, and out here you can't, 'cause the pound will come in and take them off you. (Participant 6)*

*If they get pounded they are going to die like. (Participant 7)*

### **4.3.5 The Environment of the Horse**

Having to travel to the horse's environment seemed important to the participants, mainly because they experienced a new and different place:

*There's no point in being stuck in the same place the whole time...I like being in different places. (Participant 1)*

*It's different when you go around here and then you go different places. (Participant 7)*

One participant also mentioned the facilities that were available at the equestrian centre, which were not a part of their usual environment:

*When we go around here we see all people just jocking horses, and you never see them like in stables or nothing. We have no stables properly out here. (Participant 2)*

These facilities were also prominent within the children's photographs.

## **4.4 Caregiving**

Providing care for the horse was considered a central part of the experience for the participants. When describing the experience, caregiving as opposed to jocking or riding the horses, was mentioned more often. When asked about their favourite part of the EAL project, five out of the seven participants named caregiving or caregiving activities:

*Taking care of the animals. (Participant 1)*

*Helping cleaning out the stables and grooming the horses. (Participant 4)*

*Mucking out the stables. (Participant 5)*

*Feed[ing] them. (Participant 6)*

*Mucking out (Participant 7)*

Photographs of caregiving and the tools used for caregiving were also plentiful. This caregiving was likened to the care of other people in the interviews, and was significant for both male and female participants equally:

*You have to take care of them like you would with a person. (Participant 3)*

Furthermore, findings suggest that the want to provide care was often an altruistic activity, based upon the participant's empathy for the horse:

*If you didn't clean them, the horses would be sleeping in their own dumping.*  
(Participant 5)

*My favourite is to feed them, 'cause I see horses out there [points to the window] and they are boney and all, and I don't like that.* (Participant 6)

However, some participants also liked the physical activity involved in caregiving:

*'Cause you get to pull down all the shavings and all.* (Participant 7)

Despite this, at the beginning some children were overwhelmed by the different smells involved in the caregiving activities, particularly mucking out. However, these smells did not appear to be off putting for the children.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the findings from seven qualitative, semi-structured interviews using auto driven photography elicitation techniques and 12 hours of micro-ethnographic observation. The findings indicate that similarities can be drawn between each individual's subjective experiences. These commonalities are made, to strengthen the evidence for each theme and explore the shared, common experience as a whole. Overall, the findings suggest that the EAL programme was a positive, learning and sometimes relaxing experience that was frightening for some participants at the start. It became clear that the horse was important within each young person's experience for different reasons. Furthermore, caregiving was also shown to be the most favourable activity among the children. The following chapter analyses these findings and discusses their meaning in the context of the existing body of literature.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the three major themes presented in the findings are discussed. The findings from the interviews, which were influenced by the photographs, and the micro-ethnographic observation, are interwoven within the discussion. The analysis is structured under the three main headings of Personal Experience, The Horse, and Caregiving. Where appropriate, any relevant literature on the topics is compared and contrasted. However, it is important to note that the small sample size means that these results are not generalizable to all EAL programmes.

### **5.2 Personal Experience**

#### **5.2.1 Positivity**

Personal Experience refers to the common themes of positivity, learning, fear and relaxation. No programme is guaranteed to produce beneficial outcomes and it is therefore important to research interventions to ensure they yield positive results (Scott, 2010). Each participant described his/her experience of the EAL programme in positive terms. Within the interviews, the children conveyed a sense of excitement, happiness and fun when recounting their experience of the EAL programme. The participants used encouraging adjectives like 'brilliant' and 'fantastic' to convey their positivity about their experiences. What is more, two children conveyed enthusiasm for the programme by enquiring when the next horse project would take place. The findings from this study suggest that, in sum, the children enjoyed their experience of the EAL programme. In contrast, much of the EAL research fails to explicitly measure participants' enjoyment of the overall programme (Burgon, 2011, Dell *et al.*, 2011, Ewing *et al.*, 2007). However, positive feelings have been identified in the micro analysis of EAL programmes (Dell *et al.*, 2011). None of the limitations associated with the practice of EAL in short term (Melson and Fine, 2010), group sessions (Friedmann, Son & Tsai, 2010) were mentioned by the participants. The children did, however, comment on learning a great deal.

### **5.2.2 Learning**

The literature discussing learning is plentiful. Arluke (2010) describes the opportunity for mastery in the learning of new skills afforded to EAL participants. All seven children in the present study felt that they had learned something new as part of their experience. The majority felt they had learnt practical skills such as tacking up the horse (fitting the saddle and bridle), and many believed that they had improved their skill base (e.g. Participant 4: 'It makes you get better'). As predicted, education about animal care and welfare was a large part of the children's learning which promotes animal welfare rather than causing animal health issues (Serpell, Coppinger, Fine & Perlata, 2010). Much of the AAL and EAL literature explores themes of self-esteem and self-efficacy associated with this learning (Kruger & Serpell, 2010; Burgon, 2011; Hague *et al.*; 2014; Ewing *et al.*, 2007). Findings from the present study also suggest that self-efficacy could be identified in relation to the learning and mastering of skills. This is expressed by Participant 1: 'Like you know what you are doing and it feels good'. In previous studies, it has been suggested that the level of self-efficacy relates to the cultural value of the acquired skills (Newman & Newman, 2012). This appeared to be relevant to some of the children, who conveyed their pride due to skill transferability (Participant 3, Interview).

### **5.2.3 Relaxation**

Equally, relaxation and calmness was a common thread throughout all of the children's experiences of the programme, particularly when lying over the horse's back. This finding is consistent with other studies, which have found the horse to have relaxing and therapeutic benefits (Burgon, 2014; Lentini & Knox, 2009; Roberts, Bradberry & Williams, 2004; Karol, 2007). One participant felt so comfortable on the horse's back that the experience was likened to being in his own bed (Participant 5, Observation). Game (2001) suggests that the rhythmic beat of the horse's movements contributes to this feeling of relaxation. In the present study, one participant did associate the horse's movement with the reason for his (the participant's) relaxation. However, the majority of children in this study associated the deep and slow breath of the horse with becoming more relaxed: 'It's relaxing; you can feel like when it's breathing' (Participant 3). Burgon (2014) compares the experience of relaxation on the horse to the practice of mindfulness, and mindfulness theory emphasises the importance of the breath (Arche & Craske, 2006; Burg & Michalak, 2011; Ameli, 2014). Within some mindfulness practice, the breath is described as being 'an anchor for one's attention' (Burg & Michalak, 2011, p.180). It is

possible that the children in this study may have used the horse's rhythmic breath as their own anchors for relaxation; and it is also possible that the horse provided some kind of biofeedback for the children on their own breath and heart rate in comparison to that of the horse (Roberts, Bradberry & Williams, 2004). Interestingly, Burgon (2014) links the experience of mindfulness to the awareness of the danger of the horse. This is significant, as fear was also represented in the findings of this study.

#### **5.2.4 Fear**

Some of the children experienced fear from the potential dangers of horse riding. This appeared to be mainly confined to the start of the programme, but after the fear decreased, children continued to respect the horse's strength and size. All of the children who expressed fear of the horse believed that they had overcome their fears towards the end of the programme. For many of the children, overcoming fear had positive outcomes. Some interactions suggested that although fear has negative connotations, not everything associated with experiencing fear was perceived as such by the participants. Burgon (2011) also describes the participants' ability to overcome fear as being significant in her research, and suggests that this may have contributed to increased self-confidence for participants in her study. In the same way, Ball *et al.* (2008) believe that it is often necessary to undertake some level of risk in order to build self-efficacy. In addition, the awareness of the size and potential danger of the horse may have contributed to participants' experience of relaxation. This proposal is based upon Burgon's (2014) theory, which suggests that this necessary self-consciousness is similar to the mindfulness practice of becoming 'mindfully embodied' (p.162).

### **5.3 The Horse**

The Horse was found to be a very meaningful part of the participants' experience of EAL, and this section examines the physical, personal and cultural relevance of the horse to the young people's experience of the programme. The horse's size and strength has been mentioned when describing the experience of fear. However, the physicality of the horse had other impacts on the individuals' experience. Participant 2, for example, likened the experience of sitting on horseback to being 'King of the world' because he/she was 'taller than everyone'. One of Burgon's (2011) participants describes her experience of being on the horse as follows: 'I'm the queen of the world kind of thing because I was higher up (p.171). This finding is remarkably similar to the words of Participant 2 in the current

study. Burgon (2011) believes that this child felt empowered by her experience of being taller than everyone else and that this may be linked to increases in her self-confidence and self-esteem. As the terminology used by both young people is identical, it is possible that Participant 2 also felt empowered by the horse's height. In addition, the fact that you can ride the horse was central to the participant's experiences. Participant 2 enjoyed horse riding the most, as this enabled her to 'get places faster'. Being able to engage in horse riding, which is a sporting and physical activity, is unique to equine programmes, as opposed to other AAA programmes (Deviene & Guezennec, 2000), and this was meaningful to the experiences of some participants in the current study.

### **5.3.1 Natural Instincts of the Horse**

The horse's natural instincts also distinguish EAL from other AAA experiences (Burgon, 2011). This finding is consistent with the present study, where understanding a horse's instinctual behaviour was central to the children's experiences of EAL. All of the participants demonstrated that they had experienced mirroring, or feedback, about their behaviour from the horse (Rees, personal communication, as cited in Burgon, 2014). The children explained that behaving aggressively or angrily would have adverse effects on their ability to work with the horse. Participant 4 compared two different types of behaviour and the horse's reaction to this: 'If you went into the stable and slammed the door, like, you know if you were in a mood or something, they would turn their arse to you and if you go in quiet they know you are in a good mood and stand for you.' The experience of mirroring appeared to make the children more aware of their actions and behaviours, which could possibly be transferable to other areas of their lives. This finding was similar to that of Carlsson *et al.* (2014) and Dell *et al.* (2011). Mirroring also seemed to make the participants more conscious of their relationship with the animals.

### **5.3.2 Relationships**

References to the human horse bond were plentiful within the observation and interview transcripts. In addition, relationships between the staff and participants were also evident as in Carlsson *et al.* (2014), though the constraints of this study prevents further analysis of this. With reference to the human and horse relationship, it was clear that many of the participants had an existing love of horses, and all identified a favourite horse. This relationship between the horse and the human was described by the children as being

reciprocal, and these findings are similar to that of Hague *et al.* (2014). Serpell (2002) believes that referencing anthropomorphism, or the thinking of animals in human terms, is essential in all AAA research. The findings reveal that anthropomorphism was central within the participant's experience of building a relationship with the horse. Participant 5 suggested that his favourite horse would sometimes look as if he was crying; while Participant 2 thought that her favourite horse 'was always trying to cuddle with her neck'. Serpell (2002) suggests that anthropomorphism leads to an increased likelihood for the transfer of social support from animals. Two of the participants from the current study demonstrated this with examples from their experience:

*I was feeling sad ... He [the horse] just walked over and started to hug, and I don't know why. (Participant 2)*

These findings suggest that the participants may not only have built relationships with the horses during their experience of EAL, but they may also have received social support from these bonds. This raises the question of whether horses could become attachment objects for the children over time (Melson, 2001), and perhaps be positive factors in promoting the resilience of children at risk. (Stroufe & Siegal, 2011; Gilligan, 1999). The likelihood of this may also have been strengthened due to the cultural meaning of the horse in this particular area.

### **5.3.3 Cultural Environment**

As predicted in the literature review, the cultural significance of the horse mediated the experience of the EAL programme for some of the participants (Griffin & Kelleher, 2010). During the observation, many children recounted stories of sulky horse racing and the famous trotting horses in the area. During the interviews, Participant 1 used the word 'Life' to describe the horse project because 'it's what I like to do and a lot of people around here like to do it'. The participants felt that horses were a positive part of their culture and everyday life, and this could have affected how they experienced the EAL programme. Participants 6 and 7 spoke positively about horses in their community. However, the children also referenced the more negative aspects of owning a horse in the area, which have already been identified in other Irish research (Griffin & Kelleher, 2010). Some of the children feared that the local authorities ('the pound') would take the horses



and euthanize them, if they were not paid a release fee<sup>1</sup>. Traveling outside their own localities, to an official equestrian centre allowed the children to experience horse riding and care giving without having this concern. On the topic of culture, it should also be noted that some of the children involved in the programme had no previous involvement with horses. However, these children had similar experiences of the programme to those who had. This may question the weight of culture on the experience, or it may show that the power of cultural significance transcends the need for previous experience with horses in the area. The location where the programme took place (an equine centre) was also significant to the children.

### **5.3.4 Local Environment**

A distinctive aspect of EAL is the necessity to travel to the horse's environment. During the observation period, it was noted that children appeared to enjoy other animals (both wild and domestic), and spending time outside at the two different EAL locations. However, the findings from the interviews suggested that experiencing new places as opposed to experiencing nature was important for participants. Participant 1 expressed frustration at not experiencing many new places: 'there's no point in being stuck in the same place the whole time', and therefore enjoyed exploring the horse's environment. This was similar to Participant 7's views: 'It's different when you go around here and then you go different places'. Correspondingly, Participant 2 enjoyed experiencing the different kinds of facilities available. It is possible that, generally, children living in an area with some level of social exclusion may have less opportunity to travel outside their own areas, owing to a lack of resources and reduced social networks (Crow, 2004). This could be a contributing factor to the children's enjoyment of a new place.

## **5.4 Caregiving**

Caregiving had a prominent place in the children's experience of EAL. Caring for the horse and promoting animal welfare is a core component of many EAL programmes (Burgon, 2014). Dell *et al.* (2011) found that participants were enthusiastic about cleaning out horse's stables and engaging in care activities. Similarly, the children involved in this

---

<sup>1</sup> This practice is in accordance with the Control of Horses Act 1996, where horses in control areas must be licensed and can be seized by An Garda Síochána or by the local authorities for a number of reasons including straying. If seized horses remain unclaimed they can ultimately be euthanized (Government of Ireland, 1996).

EAL programme were very willing to care. However, six out of seven children in this research project enjoyed caregiving immensely and even named caregiving activities as their favourite part of the experience. Melson and Fogel (1996) describe how children often take on, and enjoy, the role of nurturer with their pets. The participants appeared to embrace this role of nurturer. This helped to promote learning about care and preventing possible limitations for animal's welfare within EAL (Serpell, Coppinger, Fine & Perlata, 2010). It is possible that, as in Burgon's (2014) study, the children enjoyed the physical activity involved in caregiving. However, it seemed that caregiving was more closely related to empathy in the current study as the children said they enjoyed caregiving as it met the horse's needs rather than their own needs.

Myers and Saunders (2002) connect children's desire to care for animals with their sense of empathy. Likewise, the children in the programme appeared to enjoy caregiving for altruistic reasons. Interestingly, Participant 6 relished the opportunity to care because of the poor welfare of other horses in the area. Empathy has also been evident in other studies of EAL (Burgon, 2011; 2014). In this study, the children engaged in a labour of love, without expecting any reward in return. For example Participant 5 enjoyed cleaning out the stables because he wanted the horse to be comfortable. This is reminiscent of Nodding's 'natural caring' (as cited in Myers & Saunders, 2002) and Lynch and Lyons' (2008) 'love labour'. However, as with all AAA, it is difficult to discern whether EAL programmes increase empathy, or merely give participants with existing empathy a chance to exhibit or develop their empathising skills (Melson & Fine, 2010). Remarkably, participation in, and enthusiasm for, care were not affected by the children's gender. This supports Melson & Fogel's (1989) findings, that gender is less of an issue in animal care. As care provision is usually such a gendered task (Lynch & Lyons, 2008), the findings suggest that programmes like this may offer children a gender neutral opportunity to care.

## **5.5 Summary**

To conclude, this chapter discussed the commonalities in the personal experiences of the participants. The findings suggested that the EAL programme was experienced positively by all of the children. The participants characterised the programme as a learning experience which appeared to contribute to their feelings of self-efficacy – a feeling also associated with confidence gained by overcoming fear and learning skills with a high cultural value. Moreover, the children experienced feelings of relaxation, linked to the

rhythm and sensations of the horse's breath and heartbeat. The importance of the horse within the children's experiences was also discussed more generally. Within this, the height of the horse was identified as being a possible empowering feature. The ability to ride the horse was also suggested as being significant, and furthermore, the relevance of the horse's instincts, and the presence of mirroring within the child's experience, was discussed. In the same way, the tendency towards anthropomorphism and the potential social support provided by horses within the EAL experience were explored. The cultural significance of the horse, and the necessity to visit the horse's environment, were also discussed in the context of the children's experiences. The gender neutral opportunity to provide love labour was also analysed. Finally, references to existing theory and research, which were identified within the literature review, were made throughout the discussion, with many comparisons and contrasts being made.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this research was to explore how 10 to 12-year-old children, from a DEIS primary school in Limerick city, experienced an EAL programme. The research aimed to determine and understand the range of experiences for children participating in this programme; identify what was meaningful for the children; and decipher if there were any commonalities within the children's subjective experiences. The findings chapter and the discussion of these findings have addressed these research questions, and the final conclusions will now be presented below.

### **6.2 Conclusions**

The central objective of this study was to explore the children's experience of the EAL programme. By listening carefully to the voice of the participants, the researcher tried, respectfully, to capture the essence of this experience. In order to give primacy to the views of the children, and actively involve the participants in the research, the author invited them to research their own experience through photography, and to explain their photo selection at interview. Throughout the research process, each child's subjective narrative was carefully interpreted and confirmed wherever possible. Every child's experience of the EAL project was unique, though the research findings presented many similarities within the children's individual experiences. This thematic analysis of the children's experiences does not aim to devalue the individuality of each participant, but was a technique chosen to strengthen the argument for the existence of certain elements, for example relaxation, within the children's experience of EAL.

The research project revealed much about the children's experience of the EAL programme, and in particular illustrated their enjoyment of it. The participants identified learning as being a core part of their experience of the programme. This aspect appeared to encourage the children's own self-efficacy, especially where the skills being learnt were associated with a high cultural value. Interestingly, relaxation and fear were also common among some of the children's experiences. Overcoming their fears was associated with feelings of autonomy and independence, which perhaps influenced self-confidence. Participants connected the sensation of the horse's breath and the horse's heartbeat with

feelings of relaxation and calm, indicating that the horse's rhythms affected their mood. Moreover, a sense of fear was potentially related to the participants' heightened senses and ability to become mindfully aware of their body and their actions (Burgon, 2011), something which is connected to mindfulness practice. In sum, this research supports the idea that similarities can be drawn between the practice of mindfulness and aspects of EAL.

The Horse was shown to be very important within the children's experiences. In one instance, the horse's size was suggested to be empowering, and many children enjoyed the horse riding aspect of the programme. The process of mirroring (Rees, personal communication, as cited in Burgon, 2014), or receiving feedback about one's own behaviour from the horse, was present in the participants' experiences. Children were more aware of their actions when taking into account the horse's instinctual reactions. This could be transferable to other parts of the child's life. Equally, the human horse bond was pivotal for the participants. A close, reciprocal relationship, with anthropomorphist tendencies, was described by the children, who seemed to form attachments with the horses in spite of the short timeframe of the programme. Furthermore, some of the participants appeared to receive social support from this close bond with the horse.

The cultural significance of the horse cannot be overlooked, and this aspect was shown to contribute to the meaningfulness of the programme for the children. However, despite this, children with no previous involvement of horses experienced the programme in the same way as those with strong family connections to horses. This may either mean that culture was not as important as originally thought, or that the culture was so strong that no direct previous horse experience was necessary. Still on the topic of place, the children with a background in equestrianism described relief about being able to experience their pastime, and explore a new environment, without fear of the local authorities. Finally, the importance of Caregiving within the children's experience of EAL should not be underestimated. For the majority of children, engaging in caregiving activities was their favourite part of the experience. This theme was closely connected to the children's feelings of empathy for the horse, which may have been due to the close bonds they had built. Children engaged in what could be likened to Lynch & Lyons' (2008) 'love labour', providing care unconditionally for the horse.

### **6.3 Implications of this study**

This study suggests that EAL may be a successful programme for engaging young people in DEIS primary schools in Limerick city. Although it is recognised that this study is on a small scale, and is not generalizable, the findings for this sample support EAL as a positive intervention which promotes learning, self-efficacy, relaxation, relationship-building, social support and self-awareness. In the same way, the programme offers children the opportunity to provide care and develop empathy. Equally, EAL appears to give children a space to engage in culturally-significant activities in a safe environment. These findings could also be relevant to other DEIS schools and GYDP's in Ireland, especially in areas with strong ties to horses.

### **6.4 Recommendations for Future Study**

This study was carried out over a short period of time, and a more longitudinal study would give a greater account of the experience of EAL. A longer-scale research project would reflect whether the relationship with the horse strengthens over time, as well as ascertain whether learning and relaxation are reflected longer term. Likewise, it would be prudent to replicate the study in a different DEIS school in Limerick city, to see if the findings are similar. Moreover, the research could be replicated in a DEIS school in another part of Ireland, to see if the programme is experienced differently on a national scale. It would also be interesting to compare the experiences of EAL with a younger or older group of children, to see if the intervention is positively experienced by children with different developmental stages.

## REFERENCES

- Alderson, P. (2008). *Young children's rights: Exploring beliefs, principles and practice*. (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Arch, J.J. & Craske, M.G. (2006). Mechanisms of mindfulness: Emotion regulation following a focused breathing induction [Online]. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 44 (2), 1849-1858. doi: 10.1016/j.brat.2005.12.007.
- Arluke, A. (2010). Animal assisted activities as a social experience. In Fine, A.H. (Ed.), *Animal assisted therapy. Theoretical foundations and guidelines for practice*. (3<sup>rd</sup> edn. pp. 401-421). London: Elsevier.
- Ascione, F.R., McCabe, M.S., Phillips, A. & Tesdeshi, P. (2010). Animal abuse and developmental psychopathology: recent research, programmatic and therapeutic issues and challenges for the future. In Fine, A.H. (Ed.), *Animal assisted therapy. Theoretical foundations and guidelines for practice*. (3<sup>rd</sup> edn. pp. 357-401). London: Elsevier.
- Aubrey, C., David, T., Godfrey, R. & Thompson, L. (2000). *Early childhood educational research: Issues in methodology and ethics*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Ball, D., Gill, T. & Spiegel, B. (2008) *Managing risk in play provision: implementation guide. Play England report*. Retrieved from <http://www.playengland.org.uk/resources/>.
- Bass, M.M., Duchowny, C.A., & Llabre, M., (2009). The effect of therapeutic horseback riding on social functioning in children with autism. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, 39, 9, 1261-1267. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.gov>.
- Beetz, A., Kotrschal, K., Turner, D., Hediger, K., Uvnäs-Moberg, K. & Julius, H., 2011. The effect of a real dog, toy dog and friendly person on insecurely attached children in a stressful task: an exploratory study [Online]. *Anthrozoös*, 24, 4, 349-368. doi: 10.2752/175303711X13159027359746.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss. Vol. I: Attachment*. London: Penguin Books.
- British Horse Society (n.d). The benefits of horse riding in the U.K. Brighton and Plumpton College, British Horse Society. Retrieved from <http://www.bhs.org.uk/~media/BHS/Files/PDF%20Documents/Health%20Benefits%20of%20Riding%20in%20the%20UK%20Full%20Report.ashx>.
- Brockman, R., Jago, R. & Fox, K.R. (2011). Children's active play: self-reported motivators, barriers and facilitators [Online]. *BMC Public Health*, 11, 461. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-11-461.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4<sup>th</sup> edn). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burg J. M. & Michalak J. (2011). The healthy quality of mindful breathing: Associations with rumination and depression [Online]. *Cognitive therapies*, 35 179-185. doi: 10.1007/s10608-010-9343-x.

- Burton, H.L. (2011). Queen of the world: Experiences of 'at risk' young people participating in equine assisted learning/therapy [Online]. *Journal of social work practice*, 25, 165-183. doi: 10.1080/02650533.2011.561304.
- Burton, H.L. (2014). *Equine assisted therapy and learning with at-risk young people*. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave.
- Calcaterra, V., Veggiotti, P., Palestini, C., De Giorgis, V., Raschetti, R., Tumminelli, M. & Pelizzo, G. (2015). Post-operative benefits of animal-assisted therapy in pediatric surgery: A randomised study [Online]. *Plos ONE*, 10 (6), 1-13. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0125813.
- Carlsson, C., Ranta Nilsson, D. & Traeen, B. (2014). Equine assisted social work as a mean for authentic relations between clients and staff. *Human-animal interaction bulletin*, 2, 1, 19-38. Retrieved from <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-33985>.
- Chen, H. M., Tu, H.M. & Ho, C.I. (2012). Understanding biophilia leisure as facilitating well-being and the environment: An examination of participants' attitudes toward horticultural activity [Online]. *Leisure Sciences: An interdisciplinary journal*, 35, 4. doi:10.1080/01490400.2013.797323.
- Children's Rights Alliance (2010). *The United Nations conventions on the rights of the child*. Dublin: Children's Rights Alliance.
- Clark, A. & Moss, P. (2011). *Listening to young children: The mosaic approach* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.). London: National Children's Bureau.
- Collins, J., Hanlon, A., More, S.J., Wall, P., Kennedy, J. & Duggan, V. (2010). Evaluation of current equine welfare issues in Ireland: Causes, desirability, feasibility and means of raising standards. *Equine veterinary journal*, 42, 2, 105-113. Retrieved from: <http://www.ucd.ie>.
- Corraliza, J.A., Collado, S. & Bethelmy, L. (2012). Nature as a moderator of stress in urban children. *Social and behavioral sciences*, 38, 253.263. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com>.
- Creswell, J.W. (2009). *Research design. Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. California: Sage Publications.
- Crow, G. (2004). Social networks and social exclusion: An overview of the debate. In Thompson, A. G. & Morgan, M. (Eds.), *Social networks and social exclusion: Sociological and policy perspectives* (pp.XXX). England: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- David Ferdon, C. & Kaslow, N.J. (2008). Evidence-based psychosocial treatments for child and adolescent depression [Online]. *Journal of clinical child and adolescent psychology*, 37, 1, 62-104. doi: 10.1080/15374410701817865.
- Dell, C.A., Chalmers, D., Brette, N., Swain, S., Rankin, D. & Hopkins, C. (2011). A healing space: The experiences of first nations and Inuit youth with equine-assisted learning (EAL) [Online]. *Child youth care forum*, 40, 319-336. doi: 10.1007/s10566-011-9140-z.
- Denscombe, M. (2014). *The good research guide for small-scale social research projects* (5<sup>th</sup> edn.). Berkshire: Open University Press.



- Department of Health, Education and Skills (2014). DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools. Retrieved from <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools/>
- Devereux, E., Haynes, A. & Power, M (2011). Behind the headlines: Media coverage of social exclusion in Limerick City - The case of Moyross. In N. Hourigan (Ed.), *Understanding Limerick* (pp 211-230). Cork: Cork University Press.
- Devienne, M.F. & Guezennec, C.Y. (2000). Energy expenditure of horse riding. *European Journal of Applied Physiology*, 82, 499-503. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com>.
- DIT Research Ethics Committee Guidelines. Retrieved from [www.dit.ie](http://www.dit.ie)
- Dutta, U. (2014) Critical ethnography. In Mills, J. & Birks M. (Eds.). *Qualitative methodology: A practical guide* (pp.89-107). London: Sage Publications.
- Eagala (2009-2010). What is EAP and EAL. Retrieved from [http://www.eagala.org/Information/What\\_Is\\_EAP\\_EAL](http://www.eagala.org/Information/What_Is_EAP_EAL)
- Ewing, C.A., MacDonald, P.M., Taylor, M. & Bowers, M.J. (2007). Equine-facilitated learning for youths with severe emotional disorders: A quantitative and qualitative study [Online]. *Child youth care forum*, 36, 59-72. doi: 10.1007/s10566-006-9031-x.
- Fine, A. H. (2010). Incorporating animal-assisted therapy into psychotherapy: guidelines and suggestions for therapists. In Fine, A.H. (Ed.), *Animal assisted therapy. Theoretical foundations and guidelines for practice*. (3<sup>rd</sup> edn. pp. 169-93). London: Elsevier.
- Fine, A.H. & Beck. A. (2010). Understanding our kinship with animals: input for health care professionals interested in the human/animal bond. . In Fine, A.H. (Ed.), *Animal assisted therapy. Theoretical foundations and guidelines for practice*. (3<sup>rd</sup> edn. pp. 3-17). London: Elsevier.
- Friedmann, E., Son, H., and Tsai, C., C. (2010). The animal/human bond: health and wellness. In Fine, A.H. (Ed.), *Animal assisted therapy. Theoretical foundations and guidelines for practice*. (3<sup>rd</sup> edn. pp. 85-111.) London: Elsevier.
- Frieson, L. (2010). Exploring animal-assisted programs with children in school and therapeutic contexts [Online]. *Early childhood education journal*, 37, 261-267. doi: 10.1007/s10643-009-0349-5.
- Game, A. (2001). Riding: Embodying the centaur. *Body and society*, 7, 4, 1-2. Retrieved from [www.sagepub.com](http://www.sagepub.com).
- Gilligan, R. (1999). Enhancing the resilience of children and young people public care by mentoring their talents and interests. *Child and family social work*, 4, pp. 187-196. Retrieved from <http://psychrights.org/research/Digest/CriticalThinkRxCites/gilligan.pdf>.
- Gilligan, R. (2000). Adversity, resilience and young people: The protective value of positive school and spare time experiences. *Children and society*, 14, 37-47. Retrieved from <http://0-web.a.ebscohost.com.ditlib.dit.ie/>.
- Glenk, L.M., Kothgassner, O.D., Stetina, B.U., Palmee, R., Kepplinger, B. & Baran, H. (2014). Salivary cortisol and behaviour in therapy dogs during animal-assisted interventions: A

pilot study [Online]. *Journal of veterinary behaviour*, 9, 98-106.  
doi: 10.1016/j.jveb.2014.02.005.

Government of Ireland (1996). Irish Statute Book, Control of Horses Act. Retrieved from <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1996/en/act/pub/0037/>

Greene, S. & Hogan, D. (2005). *Researching children's experience: Approaches and methods*. London: Sage.

Griffin, M. & Kelleher, P. (2010). Uncertain futures: Men on the margins in Limerick city. *Irish probation journal*, 7. Retrieved from <http://www.probation.ie/>.

Hague, H., Kvaalem, I.L., Berget, B., Enders-Slegers, M.J. & Braastad, B.O. (2014). Equine-assisted activities and the impact on perceived social support, self-esteem and self-efficacy among adolescents – an intervention study [Online]. *International journal of adolescence and youth*, 19, 1, 1-21. doi:10.1080/02673843.2013.779587.

Hill, M. (2005). Ethical considerations in researching children's experiences. In Green, S & Hogan, D. (Eds.), *Researching children's experiences: Approaches and methods* (pp.179-191). London. Sage Publications.

Holmes, C.M., Goodwin, D., Redhead, E.S. & Goymour, K.L. (2011). The benefits of equine-assisted activities: An exploratory study [Online]. *Child adolescent social work journal*, 29, 111–122. doi: 10.1007/s10560-011-0251.

Horowitz, A., C. & Beckoff, M. (2007). Naturalizing anthropomorphism: Behavioural prompts to our humanizing of animals. *Anthrozoos*, 20, 1, 23-35. Retrieved from [http://crl.ucsd.edu/~ahorowit/Horowitz\\_Bekoff.pdf](http://crl.ucsd.edu/~ahorowit/Horowitz_Bekoff.pdf).

Hourigan, N. (2011). *Understanding Limerick, social exclusion and change*. Cork: Cork University Press.

Human Equine Alliance for Learning (2015). Types of Equine Therapy. Retrieved from <http://humanequinealliance.com/the-heal-model/equine-therapy-types/>

Irish Horse Welfare Trust (2011). Education. Retrieved from <http://www.ihwt.ie/site2/education/>

Irish Youth Justice Service (2011). Progress report on Garda youth diversion project development 2009-2011. *Ireland, Department of Justice and Equality*. Retrieved from <http://www.iyjs.ie/en/IYJS/Progress%20Report%20Template%20FINAL%202014-1-13.pdf/Files/Progress%20Report%20Template%20FINAL%202014-1-13.pdf>.

Karol, J. (2007). Applying a traditional individual psychotherapy model to equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EFP): Theory and method. *Clinical child psychology and psychiatry*, 12 (1): 77-90. Retrieved from <http://0-web.a.ebscohost.com.ditlib.dit.ie/>

Kelleher, P. & O'Connor, P. (2011). Men on the margins: masculinities in disadvantaged areas in Limerick city. In N. Hourigan (Ed.), *Understanding Limerick* (pp. 169-185). Cork: Cork University Press.

Kemp, K., Signal, T., Botros, H., Taylor, N. & Prentice, K. (2013). Equine facilitated therapy with children and adolescents who have been sexually abused: A program evaluation study [Online]. *Journal of child and family studies*. doi: 10.1007/s10826-013-9718-1.

- Kruger, K.A & Serpell, J.A. (2010). Animal assisted interventions in mental health: definitions and theoretical foundations. . In Fine, A.H. (Ed.), *Animal assisted therapy. Theoretical foundations and guidelines for practice*. (3<sup>rd</sup> edn. pp. 33-49) London: Elsevier.
- Learning Hub (2014). The Horse Outside Project- design stage. Retrieved from <http://www.learninghub.ie/the-horse-outside-project-design-stage/>
- Lentini, J.A. & Knox, M. (2009). A qualitative and quantitative review of equine facilitated psychotherapy (EFP) with children and adolescents. *The open complementary medicine journal*, 1, 51-57. Retrieved from [http://www.horsevision.com.au/The\\_Chaff\\_Bag\\_files/Equine%20Facilitated%20Psychotherapy%20with%20Children%20and%20Adolescents.pdf](http://www.horsevision.com.au/The_Chaff_Bag_files/Equine%20Facilitated%20Psychotherapy%20with%20Children%20and%20Adolescents.pdf).
- Lewis, A. & Lindsay, G. (2000). *Researching Children's Perspectives*. UK: Open University Press.
- Lynch, K. & Lyons, M. (2008). The gendered order of caring. In U. Barry (Ed.), *Where are we now? New feminist perspectives on women in contemporary Ireland* (pp. 163-182). Dublin: New Island Press.
- Melson, G. F. & Fogel, A. (1989). Children's ideas about animal young and their care: A reassessment of gender differences in the development of nurturance. *Anthrozoos*, 2 (4), 265-273.
- Melson, G. F. & Fogel, A. (1996). Parental receptions of their children's involvement with household pets. *Anthrozoos*, 9 (2-3), 95-106.
- Melson, G.F. & Fine, A.H (2010). Animals in the lives of children. In Fine, A.H. (Ed.), *Animal assisted therapy. Theoretical foundations and guidelines for practice*. (3<sup>rd</sup> edn. pp. 223-47). London: Elsevier.
- Miller, T., Birch, M., Mauthner, M. & Jessop, J. (2012) *Ethics in qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Mills, J. & Birks, M. (2014). *Qualitative methodology: A practical guide*. London: Sage Publications.
- Myers, O.E. Jr. & C.D. Saunders (2002). Animals as links toward developing caring relationships with the natural world. In P.H. Kahn & S.R. Kellert (Eds.), *Children and nature* (pp. 153-178). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Retrieved from [www.stella.catalogue.tcd.ie](http://www.stella.catalogue.tcd.ie).
- Neuman, W.L. (2011). *Social research methods. Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Boston: Pearson.
- Newman, B. & Newman P. (2012). *Development through life: a psychosocial approach*. (11<sup>th</sup> edn). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Porter, L. J. (2005). The effects on dogs of animal-assisted activities/therapy visits to institutions: An exploratory study. *Dissertation abstracts international*, 66, 1768.
- Punch, Keith, F. (2005). *Introduction to social research quantitative and qualitative approaches*. London, Sage Publications.

- Raleigh, D. (2015, January 27). €1,000 to seize every illegal horse. *Irish examiner*. Retrieved from <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/1000-to-seize-every-illegal-horse-309077.html>.
- Rashid, M. (2004). *Horses never lie: the heart of passive leadership*. Devon: David and Charles.
- Reyes, F.J. (2014). Implementing heart rate variability biofeedback groups for veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder [Online]. *Biofeedback*, 42, 2, 137-142. doi: 10.5298/1081-5937-42.4.02.
- Roberts, F., Bradberry, J. & Williams C. (2004). Equine-facilitated psychotherapy benefits students and children. *Holistic nursing practice*, 18 (1):32-5. Retrieved from <http://0-web.a.ebscohost.com.ditlib.dit.ie/>.
- Roberts-Holmes, G. (2005). *Doing your early years' research project: a step by step guide*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Robson, C. (2002). *Real world research. A resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers*. (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.). Malden, Mass: Blackwell
- Sarantakos, S (1998) *Social Research*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Edn.) Hampshire and New York: Palgrave.
- Schultz, P.N., Remick-Barlow, A., & Robbins, L. (2007). Equine-assisted psychotherapy: a mental health promotion/intervention modality for children who have experienced intra-family violence. *Health and social care in the community*, 15, 3, 265-271. Retrieved from <http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org>.
- Scott, S. (2010). Nationwide dissemination of effective parenting interventions. In Weisz, J.R. & Kazdin, A.E. (Eds). *Evidence-based psychotherapies for children and adolescents* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn, pp. 500-519). New York: Guilford Press
- Serpell, J.A. (2002). Anthropomorphism and anthropomorphic selection – Beyond the ‘cute response’. *Society and animals* 10 (4):437-454. Retrieved from [www.philpapers.org](http://www.philpapers.org).
- Serpell, J.A. (2010). Animal-assisted interventions in historical perspective. In Fine, A.H. (Eds), *Animal assisted therapy. Theoretical foundations and guidelines for practice*. (3<sup>rd</sup> edn. pp. 17-33). London: Elsevier.
- Serpell, J.A., Coppinger, R., Fine, A.H. & Peralta, J.M. (2010). Welfare Considerations in Therapy and Assistance Animals. In Fine, A.H. (Eds), *Animal assisted therapy. Theoretical foundations and guidelines for practice*. (3<sup>rd</sup> edn. pp. 481-505). London: Elsevier.
- Smith-Osbourne, A. & Selby, A. (2010). Implications of the literature on equine-assisted activities for use as a complementary intervention in social work practice with children and adolescents [Online]. *International journal of adolescence and youth* 27, 291-307. doi: 10.1007/s10560-010-0201-1.
- Sroufe, L. A., & Siegel, D. (2011). The verdict is in: The case for attachment theory. *Psychotherapy networker*, 35 (34–39), 52–53. Retrieved from <http://0-web.a.ebscohost.com.ditlib.dit.ie/>.
- Stanczak, G.C. (2007). *Visual research methods: Image, society, and representation*. UK: Sage Publications.

- The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) 2013. *Animal health and welfare act*. Ireland: Government of Ireland.
- Usher, K. & Jackson, D. (2014). Phenomenology. In Mills, J. & Birks M. (eds) *Qualitative Methodology: A Practical Guide*. London: Sage Publications.
- Vecchi, V. (2010). *Art and creativity in Reggio Emilia: Exploring the role and potential of ateliers in early childhood education*. Oxford: Routledge.
- Walsh, F. (2015, July 06<sup>th</sup>). Urban Art Horse Project. *The Limerick Leader*. Retrieved from <http://www.limerickleader.ie/what-s-on/arts-entertainment/urban-art-horse-project-launched-in-limerick-park-1-6835314>
- Weisz, J.R. & Kazdin, A.E. (2003). *Evidence-based psychotherapies for children and adolescents*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Whyte, J. (2006). *Children's research centre, ethical guidelines*. Trinity College, Dublin. Retrieved from <http://www.tcd.ie>.
- Wisker, G. (2008) *The postgraduate research handbook* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn.). UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- World Health Organisation (2012). Childhood obesity prevention. Switzerland, WHO. Retrieved from [http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/childhood/WHO\\_new\\_childhoodobesity\\_PREVENTION\\_27nov\\_HR\\_PRINT\\_OK.pdf](http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/childhood/WHO_new_childhoodobesity_PREVENTION_27nov_HR_PRINT_OK.pdf).
- Wyness, M. (2006). *Childhood and society: An introduction to the sociology of childhood*. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- York, J., Adams, C. & Coady, N. (2008). Therapeutic value of equine-human bonding in recovery from trauma [Online]. *Anthrozoos*, 21, 1.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Semi Structured Interview Schedule

Script	Questions
<p>I want to thank you very much for agreeing to chat with me today. I am going to ask you a few questions about the horse project and we are going to look at the photos that you took on the last day.</p> <p>First of all, It's really important that you know that there are no right or wrong answers and I am really interested in everything you have to say.</p> <p>Before we get started on the questions about the horse project I just want to explain a few things to you about our chat today.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ I just want to remind you that anything that you say today will be <b>anonymous</b> so nobody will know that it was you who said it. Do you understand that?</li><li>➤ Are you happy to carry out the interview in <b>this room</b>, are you comfy here?</li><li>➤ This gadget is to record our chat today. Is it okay if I <b>record</b> our conversation?</li><li>➤ I might take some <b>notes</b> during out chat so I can remember what you have said is that okay?</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Lastly, do you understand that we can <b>stop the interview</b> at any time you like?</li> </ul> <p><b>Questions</b></p>
<p><b>Let's Start with some easy questions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Can you tell me your name please?</li> <li>➤ What age are you?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Introduction to the Horse Project</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Pretend that I don't know anything at all about the horse project and tell me all about it?</li> <li>➤ What kind of things do you do at the horse project?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Photographs</b></p> <p>Here are the photographs that you took at the last session.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Can you tell me a bit about these photos and why you took them?</li> <li>➤ If you had to choose one or two photos that showed people what's it's like to be in the horse project which ones would it be?</li> </ul>
<p><b>The Experience</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What is your favourite part of being in the horse project? What is the best thing about it?</li> <li>➤ Try and think back to being at X centre OR Y farm how did you feel when you were there?</li> <li>➤ If you had to choose one word to describe what it's like to experience the</li> </ul>

	<p>horse project what would that be?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Do you think you have learned anything new at the horse project?</li> </ul>
<b>The Horse</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Do you have a favourite horse?</li> <li>➤ Why are they your favourite?</li> <li>➤ Do you think that being around the horses ever makes you feel differently? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If so what is it about the horse that makes you feel like that?</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Do you think that the horses can notice your moods?</li> <li>➤ How do you know that?</li> <li>➤ Do you think how we behave affects the horse at all?</li> </ul>
<b>Observation Based Questions</b>	<p>Ask the child about specific experiences, activities or observations. Use opportunity to confirm that observations were accurate. (Specific for each child).</p>
<p><b>Review</b></p> <p>Okay so far we have talked about what you did at the horse project, the horse, your favourite part of the horse project and we had a look at the lovely photos</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your experience of the project?</li> </ul>



that you took.	➤ Are you happy with all the answers you have given me so far?
<b>Conclusion</b>	<p>So we have come to the end of our interview.</p> <p>I just want to remind you that you do not have to worry about anyone finding out about what you have said today and that you can still change your mind about being in my project anytime if you like.</p> <p>Thank you so much for being in my project. You have done a very important job of telling me what it's like to be in the horse project here at your school.</p> <p>Before you go back to class do you have any questions for me?</p>

## **Appendix B**

### **Information Sheet for Guardians**

Dear Parent/Guardian

My name is Kate Jones and I am a student in the Dublin Institute of Technology. I would like to research the experiences of children who participate in the horse programme that your son or daughter will be participating in at school. This project takes place during school hours. I am hoping that my research may help to create a better understanding of the horse programme, create awareness of programmes like this and perhaps help to get funding for projects like this in the future.

By signing this form you consent to your child participating in my research. As part of the research I will be observing the horse programme, asking your child to take photographs of the things they experience in the horse programme (I will provide disposable cameras for this) and asking your child questions about the horse programme in a sound recorded informal interview. You can later withdraw your child's taking part in the research at any time during the study, even if you sign this consent form. Please also note that your child can participate in the horse programme even if you do not give consent for them to be in the research part of it.

All the information that I collect will be confidential and your child will be anonymous. There is only one exception to this, which is, I must tell someone if your child is in danger. I will not use anybody's name in my research and the photographs taken will be returned to your child. These photographs will not be shown to any outside parties and will not be included in the printed research. You may see any of the information that is collected about your child if you chose to and you may see a copy of the research afterwards. Research may be available to view in the DIT library, online or in another source.

I will also be asking your child if they would like to participate in the research project and I need both your consent and your child's consent for their experiences to be included. Lastly, I will do my best to make sure that no part of the research process causes any distress or harm to anybody involved. If you have any questions or wish to contact me you can do so at this email address: [kate.jones@student.dit.ie](mailto:kate.jones@student.dit.ie) or on 087-7568166.

Yours Sincerely,

Kate Jones

## **Appendix C**

### **Information Sheet about my research project.**

*My name is Kate Jones and I am a student in the Dublin Institute of Technology.*

*I would like to do a project about your experiences of the horse programme. I am really interested in what it is like to do the horse programme. I will be making a research project all about it. I am hoping that my project may help people understand what the horse programme is all about and maybe even help there to be more horse programmes in the future.*

For my project, I will come to the horse programme and I will watch what happens there. One day I will also have disposable cameras that you can use to take pictures of what you experience and what is important to you. After the horse programme is finished I will come to the school and ask you some questions about what you thought about it and we will look at the photographs that you took. I will record what you say on a digital recording device so I can remember.

It is up to you if you want to be in my research project or not. You can do the horse programme even if you are not in my project. If you sign your name on the consent form, it means that you would like to be involved in the project. You can change your mind about being in the project anytime even if you write your name on this page. I need you and your parent to sign a form before you can be included in my project. My project may be in the DIT library on the internet or used for another purpose.

I will not use anyone's name so nobody will know who you are. I will also give you back your photographs after I have looked at them and I won't let anybody else from outside the project see them. The only time that I have to tell anybody something you have said is if you tell me that you are in danger. You can see the information you have given me if you like and you can see a copy of my research project at the end. Lastly, I promise to do my best to make sure that my research project doesn't cause any upset or harm for you when you are taking part.

**If you would like to be in my research project please sign your name on the consent form.**

## **Appendix D**

### **Guardian Consent Form**

#### **Research of the Horse Project**

This is a consent form for your child to participate in the research of the horse project by Kate Jones a student of Dublin Institute of Technology.

By signing this form you understand and agree to the following:

- I have been informed of and understand the purposes of the study.
- I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand I can withdraw at any time without prejudice.
- Any information which might potentially identify my child will not be used in published material unless I agree
- I agree for my child to participate in the study as outlined to me

<b>Signed:</b>
<b>Print Name:</b>
<b>Date:</b>

## **Appendix E**

### **Children's Consent Form**

#### **Research of the Horse Project**

This is a consent form to say that you agree to participate in the research of the horse project by Kate Jones a student of Dublin Institute of Technology.

*By signing this form you understand and agree to the following:*

- I have been told about this study and know why Kate is doing it.
- I have been given a chance to ask questions about the research project
- I understand that I can say that I don't want to be in the research at any time
- Anything that shows people who I am will not be included in the project
- I agree to participate in the study that Kate told me about

**If you understand all about my project and would like to take part please sign and write your name below.**

<b>Signed:</b>
<b>Print Name:</b>
<b>Date:</b>

## **Appendix F**

### **Letter to Gatekeepers**

Dear (Insert Name here),

My name is Kate Jones and I am a student in the Dublin Institute of Technology. As part of my Masters in Child Family and Community Studies I am required to carry out a research project and subsequently write a dissertation. I am writing to you about the possibility of researching the experiences of the participants in the Equine Assisted Learning Programme being delivered with your pupils. I am hoping that my research may help to create a better understanding of this programme, bring about awareness of programmes like it and perhaps assist in securing funding for projects like this in the future.

As part of the research I propose using three different methods in order to accurately capture the experiences of the children. Firstly, I would like to overtly observe the programme and make field notes after each session. Secondly, I propose the use of semi-structured interviews with the participants and the facilitator of the programme. I also would like to provide disposable cameras to the participants for a period during one session where they could subjectively capture their experiences visually.

If the research was to go ahead I would observe all ethical considerations and would need to obtain informed consent from both the children and their guardians. All the information that I collect would be confidential and anonymous. The only exception to this is where I must report child protection concerns to the relevant bodies. I will also make the transcripts of all interviews available to participants to ensure the accuracy of the information before its use.

During the course of the research participants would have the option of withdrawing from the research at any time. Furthermore, I will do my best to make sure that no part of the research process causes any distress or harm to anybody involved.

If you chose to permit this research to go ahead I will begin to contact the participants and their parents with the attached informed consent forms.

When the research is complete I can provide a copy of the research for your school if desired.

If you have any questions and wish to contact me you can do so at this email address: [kate.jones@student.dit.ie](mailto:kate.jones@student.dit.ie).

Yours Sincerely,

## **Appendix G**

### **Sample Interview Transcript**

#### **Transcript 6**

Researcher: This is just a quick interview to find out how you experienced the horse project so other people can see what it's like. It will only take about 15 mins max so it won't be long. Only (the youth worker's name) and I will know what you have said today so nobody will know what you have said so you don't have to worry about that. Also it's important for you to know that you don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to today so if I ask you a question and you think oh actually I don't feel like it that's fine. So I just want to remind you that anything you say today will be anonymous so nobody will know who said what, do you understand that?

Interviewee: Yeah

Researcher: So are you comfy in this room are you happy in here to talk?

Interviewee: Yeah I am

Researcher: Okay so we talked about this (picks up recording device), this is my little gadget here to record us, everything you say is very important so I want to remember what you have said and that's why I want to record today. You can listen to it at the end if you like. Is it okay if I record it?

Interviewee: Yeah

Researcher: So I might take some notes just to remind me of things at the end, is that okay if I do that?

Interviewee: Yeah

Researcher: So if you change your mind about being in the project or if you want to leave or stop the interview at any time you can. You can just say that you want to go back to class. And even after the interview if you don't want what you said to be in my project that's okay too. You can get a guardian or a parent to contact me and let me know.

Interviewee: Yeah I know that

Researcher: Great, firstly, thank you so much for coming to talk to me today. This how it will work today, we are going to do a few different questions about the horse project and look at the photos that you took. There are no right or wrong answers so don't worry about that. Let's start with some easy questions.

Researcher: Can you tell me your name please?

Interviewee: (States name)

Researcher: Okay and what age are you?

Interviewee: 11

Researcher: And what class are you in?

Interviewee: 5<sup>th</sup> Class

Researcher: Okay so pretend that we don't know anything about the horse project, will you tell us what it's all about?

Interviewee: We go out right on the bus, we feed the horses, we clean the stables, we groom them, we put shavings and feed them and then after about 15 or 20 minutes we jock the horses and then bring them back in.

Researcher: Okay great, so let's have a look at these photos you took, tell me about them

Interviewee: There is a horse in that one, that one has a filthy stable, I cleaned it, there's the arena thing with all the sand.

Researcher: So of all of these photos which do you think shows what you do at the horse project the most?

Interviewee: This one of the horse

Researcher: And which is your favourite photo?

Interviewee: The same one, it's a nice horse

Researcher: Okay and what is your favourite thing to do out there at the horse project?

Interviewee: Feed them

Researcher: Why is that your favourite?

Interviewee: Cause I see horses out there and they are all boney and all and I don't like that.

Researcher: Okay so try and think about when you are there feeding the horse. What is it like?

Interviewee: It's nice

Researcher: Does it make you sad, happy angry or anything?

Interviewee: Happy

Researcher: And if you had to choose one word to describe the horse project what would that be?



Interviewee: I don't know

Researcher: That's okay. So I remember you telling me that you liked mucking out too, tell me about that.

Interviewee: It's decent like there are all clean shavings and all

Researcher: And what's that like for the horse?

Interviewee: It makes it real comfortable for the horse.

Researcher: And do you have a favourite horse?

Interviewee: You know the one, the real palomino pony?

Researcher: Oh Chippy?

Interviewee: Yeah Chippy

Researcher: And why is he your favourite?

Interviewee: I like the way he looks, the way he stands. He's pure quiet too like.

Researcher: Do you think that riding the horse or being out at the horse project makes you feel a certain way or not?

Interviewee: It makes me feel better cause I'm out of work.

Researcher: Haha okay. Anything else?

Interviewee: Out there it's really quiet, you can jock them and all and out here you can't.

Researcher: Why not?

Interviewee: Cause the pound will come in and take them off you.

Researcher: So it's easier to get on with horse riding out there?

Interviewee: Yeah it is

Researcher: Do you think you have learnt anything out there?

Interviewee: Yeah I do.

Researcher: Like what?

Interviewee: Taking care of them right and riding good and all

Researcher: And do you think the horse can notice if you are in a happy or bad mood?

Interviewee: Yeah like if you are in a bad mood and you take it out on the horse the horse will go mad.

Researcher: Do you think what we do can affect the horse?

Interviewee: What do you mean affect?

Researcher: It means to change the horse, make a difference to the horse

Interviewee: Oh yeah, if you go into the stable bad then he'll go mad and try to kick you.

Researcher: So you were talking to me a lot during the horse project and you were telling me what is like to lie across the horse, can you talk a bit about that again?

Interviewee: His stomach, it's cool the way it is, you can feel it going up and down.

Researcher: And what is that like?

Interviewee: It relaxes me, I feel comfortable on him.

Researcher: Before you told me that you like to make a nice bed for a horse, how come you like that?

Interviewee: When you go in and it's all wrecked I hate looking at that, I don't like it. It's not comfortable for him.

Researcher: Yeah I know what you mean. Anything else you would like to tell me about the horse project?

Interviewee: It's good

Researcher: That's nice.

Researcher: Researcher: So we have come to the end of the interview now, I want to remind you that you don't have to worry about anyone finding out what you have said. Thank you so much for doing this interview today, all the answers that you have given are so important. Researcher: And do you have any questions for me?

Interviewee: Yeah how do you do it?

Researcher: Do what?

Interviewee: Like you come down from Dublin every single week like.

Researcher: I know yeah

Interviewee: You must be real tired when you are doing it

Researcher: Oh it's very important to me to come down here 'cause you guys are so great and I really want to learn all about your horse project.

Interviewee: You have a horse don't you?

Researcher: Yeah I do

Interviewee: Oh yeah he was in an accident wasn't he?

Researcher: Yes that's right, I told you about him at the first session.

Interviewee: You love him yeah?

Researcher: Yeah I do, what about your horse?

Interviewee: Yeah Rosie she is good, she's the black and white one. My family have about 13 horses.

Researcher: Do you think horses are important where you live?

Interviewee: Yeah cause people like them and like if we didn't have horses like we would be always getting into trouble.

Researcher: So it makes a difference?

Interviewee: Yeah cause it's something to do like

Researcher: So horses are really important for you

Interviewee: Yeah and for you?

Researcher: Yeah and for me too. So I think we will leave it there okay, well done. You did great.

## **Appendix H**

### **Sample Micro Ethnographic Observation**

#### **Field Notes and Reflective Journal**

##### **Session One**

##### **Transcribed Field Notes**

Participant 1: “when you’re beside them it’s bad but then when you are on them it’s worser, they are so high”.

Participant 7: “Who do you think was the best at trotting Kate?”

Participant 6: “I like all horses, mad ones too”.

Participant 2: “Look at this one, he loves me, he took it (an apple) from me right away.”

Participant 1: “I’m scared, I’m really nervous.”

Participant 4: “I could do this all day; it reminds me of doing work with my Dad.”

Participant 3: “I’m afraid, I saw my brother being bucked off a horse once.”

Participant 2: “I’d work here lads.”

Participant 7: “When was the last time this one was jocked, I’m a bit nervous of him.”

Participant 5: “Walking beside them is weird it feels funny.”

##### **Reflective Journal**

Participants arrived and were very excited, jumping around or rubbing their hands together. The facilitator introduced themselves and the equine centre. Each member of the group, including the adults, then introduced themselves and gave a description of their experience with horses. Some of the participants had quite a bit of experience but some had very little. One participant had no experience whatsoever with horses. The facilitator discussed health and safety necessary at the equine centre. The facilitator then discussed the horse’s natural instincts with the group. While they were talking about this the participants were asked to

balance on a long pole used for jumping on the ground. The facilitator said that this was to practice their multi-tasking skills. The facilitator explained that it was very important to be able to listen and ride the horse at the same time for safety reasons. This exercise prepared the children for this.

This discussion was followed by a tour of the grounds. The children were amazed at some of the facilities available that they had never seen before. They had a lot of questions for the facilitator and for me. The children instantly chose horses that they felt liked them. They continuously called me over to let me know that a horse liked them and that he was their new friend. The children observed a few horses in the stables to practice their new knowledge about horse instincts and behaviour. The facilitator drew their attention to various things. A lot of the children were quick to learn the horse's communication methods and were proud to demonstrate their abilities. In particular, Participant 6 stood at the door of a stable and silently watched a horse that was standing at the back of the stable. After standing there for some time, while the other children were running around, the horse moved closer to Participant 6. Participant 6 was proud of this as he felt the horse was getting used to him.

After the tour, the children began to muck out the stables. Some of the children, who were from the inner city, were not familiar with so much muck and dirt. Children also commented on the new smells at the equine centre, some good and some bad. Nevertheless, all the children get involved and some worked very hard, doing much more than was expected of them. The children were very eager to make the stables as clean as possible. The children then caught the horses in the pen, with the assistance of the adults. The children were shown how to groom and tack up the horses. While doing this, the facilitator moved around the group and gave each child some individual attention. Some of the children lay over the horses back. Some children looked very peaceful while doing this, they closed their eyes and some stroked the horse's coat. It was interesting that when one child was doing this all the other children were respectful of this and were silent. You could really notice the change in the noise levels and the energy when this practice was taking place. None of the children spoke to the person participating in the exercise while they were on the horse's back. Interestingly, they did not mock each other or discuss the experience afterwards either. The children were very vocal about all the other aspects of the experience. It appeared that this was seen as being private. I spoke to one of the

children about what it was like on the horses back after the experience and they described it as “pure relaxing”. It will be interesting to see if this is the same next week.

After this exercise, the children rode the horses. They were divided into groups based on experience for safety reasons. Some of the children had little or no experience of riding a horse and they appeared nervous. Some children vocally expressed being scared and apprehensive. Also some of the more experienced riders had never ridden a horse with a saddle and bridle which is a very different skill than riding a horse bareback. Despite this, all the children participated, even though they had a choice to opt out of the riding if they wanted. By the end of the session it was clear that some of the more experienced participants had grown in confidence. The participant with no experience with horses was very silent throughout the session but has visibly learnt a lot of the practical skills. He also began to smile broadly while on the horse for the first time, despite looking a little tense at first. All the participants seemed reluctant to leave and asked to repeat various exercises before going home. After removing their helmets and boots the children got on the bus and went back to school.