

“It’s not just about the horses at Equine!”

**Exploring perceptions of Equine Assisted therapy with
adolescents with autism, their staff and therapy providers.**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor
of Educational Psychology in the School of Psychology**

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WENDY RYDZKOWSKI

ABSTRACT

While there are established traditional interventions to help develop language and social skills in young people with autism (Anderson, 2016; White, Oswald, Ollendick & Scahill, 2009), empirical support for interventions to help with behavioural, social and emotional skills in adolescents with autism are less well supported (Williams-White, 2007) . Less orthodox interventions can include Equine Assisted therapy (Borgi, Loliva, Cerino, Chiarotti, Venerosi, Bramini, Nonnis, Marcelli, Vinit, Santis, Bisacco, Fagerlie, Frascarelli, & Cirulli, 2016). In this small-scale study, Equine Assisted therapy was defined as the deliberate inclusion of a horse in a treatment plan, as recommended by (Endenburg & van Lith, 2011).

This study explored perceptions of Equine Assisted therapy with three different groups; adolescent participants, staff from the school, and the therapists who designed and delivered the intervention. Using Thematic Analysis, fourteen participants were interviewed on an individual basis. Themes were created from the data on an individual, group and whole data- set basis.

The global themes regarding this particular Equine Assisted therapy were that rather than providing clinical, within-child interventions, the therapy worked via the context of a group. The Equine Assisted therapy gave a context for experiential learning; it promoted emotional regulation, and it enhanced emotional wellbeing. Instead of asking why the benefits of such therapy do not necessarily extend to other settings, the researcher poses the question of how it might be possible to apply points made about Equine Assisted therapy to school -based, and general life experiences.

Key words: Equine Assisted therapy, adolescents, autism, educational and child psychologist, Thematic Analysis.

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CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION.

1.1 Context and rationale for the study.

At the time of conducting this study, the researcher was employed on a full-time basis as an educational and child psychologist in a residential specialist setting for young men with autism. Various interventions were delivered in the school, including Equine Assisted therapy. The researcher had not encountered such therapy previously, and after being asked for an opinion about how it may work, and how it may or may not benefit the young men, the researcher concluded that more insight and knowledge about its theoretical background and its actual practice needed to be gained. This study aimed to address these questions, and therefore set out to explore perceptions about the Equine Assisted therapy which was delivered to the residential pupils. Three groups of people were interviewed in order to explore their perceptions. The groups of interviewees included staff, therapy providers and the adolescent young men who attended the therapy. The interviews were analysed using Thematic Analysis. Following the creation of themes, the researcher poses the question how the findings can be applied to the practice of an educational and child psychologist.

There is some debate about the definition of Equine Assisted Therapy. It can range from being any intervention in which there is a

horse present (O'Haire, 2013), or the deliberate inclusion of a horse in a treatment plan (Endenburg & van Lith, 2011; Macauley & Gutierrez 2004; Nimer & Lundahl, 2003) to a specific intervention in which a horse is used to facilitate discussions (Anestis, 2014). It can also denote an intervention to develop skills of horsemanship (Fine, 2006). Fine writes that the Delta Society defines it as being a 'goal-directed intervention', in which a horse is an integral part of the treatment process.

It is, in part, the confusion about the definition of Equine Assisted therapy which makes it difficult to carry out empirical investigations into its effectiveness. This is a point made by Davis, Scalzo, Butler, Stauffer, Farah, Perez, Coviello,(2015); Kendall, Maujean, Pepping, Downes, Lakhani, Byrne and Macfarlane,(2015); May, Seivert, Cano, Casey and Johnson, (2016) and O'Haire, (2013) in their systematic review of the effectiveness of Animal Assisted Interventions.

There has also been criticism that using animals as part of therapy has not been empirically proven via the use of large sample sizes, randomised control groups and measurable outcomes; (Kruger, Trachtenberg & Serpell, 2004; Macauley & Gutierrez, 2004, Stern & Chur-Hansen, 2013). A review of the literature and studies of Equine Assisted therapy thus far has suggested that not only do practitioners and participants in such studies lack a shared agreement of what Equine Assisted therapy entails, there is also a lack of clarity between

theoretical underpinnings of psychological theory behind the therapy and its practice. Therefore, it could be argued that until there is clearer understanding of the process and mechanisms of such therapies, it is not possible to test the interventions empirically. In addition, each intervention appears to be individually tailored, so that it is hard to compare sample populations and outcomes. This belief forms the basis for the rationale behind the current study, namely that it is imperative to conduct more studies which will explore and clarify perceptions, and consequently build new knowledge to be further explored and consolidated.

In qualitative research, the context of the researcher is seen as being a necessary element (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The proponents of Thematic Analysis, for example Braun and Clarke, argue that it is essential to make explicit both the context of the research, and the researcher's epistemological stance, in order to help the readers to judge whether or not the research has congruence and trustworthiness, a point made by Lincoln, (2011). At the time of conducting this study, the researcher had moved from a post in a Local Authority to work for a group of independent residential schools for young people with autism and social, emotional and mental health difficulties. It became clear that there was an urgent need to address the main question in this research, that is, to find

more about the perceptions of Equine Assisted Therapy, what kind of activities take place in such therapy, and how people understand the mechanisms of the therapy, and, as O'Haire, (2013) points out, there is a need to determine which individuals may benefit from such therapy.

1.2 Outline of the research

Chapter Two reviews and evaluates the current findings in the literature both from a theoretical point of view, about around how humans interact with nature; how animals and humans interact, and how Equine Assisted therapy was developed.

The literature review reflects on claims made for and against the use of Equine Assisted therapy, the problems around definitions and methodologies in the studies thus far, and how this led to the formulation of the research aims and questions.

In **Chapter Three** the researcher's epistemological stance is discussed, with an explanation and rationale of the methodology, methods and techniques used in this study. The sampling and tools and methods of analysis are described.

Chapter Four summarises the study in terms of its findings regarding Equine Assisted therapy and reflections on the research process per se. There is a discussion of the methodology and its

strengths and weaknesses, and consideration is given about what could have been done differently. Ethical considerations are discussed, and there is an overall judgement about whether or not the research was congruent, trustworthy and useful.

Chapter Five considers the limitations of the research and discusses the findings with these limitations in mind. The findings are compared with those of the literature.

Chapter Six discusses the findings and identifies future areas of research. The application of the new knowledge to the work of educational and child psychologists is discussed.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to examine both the theoretical rationale behind Equine Assisted therapy, and to critique the research articles which have been published on the subject.

The review of the literature led to a formulation for the research aims of this study.

A search of the literature was carried out by using the key terms Animal Assisted therapy, Equine Assisted therapy, Equine Facilitated therapy, Equine therapy, combined with Adolescents, using PSYInfo, PsycARTICLES, Google Scholar, and following up references used in the published studies.

Most of the research articles on the topic of Equine Assisted therapy focus on the use of horses to help with physical difficulties. Such therapy can also be called ‘Hippotherapy’ Inclusion criteria for the review included adolescent participants, and, if possible, autistic participants. Studies which focussed on efficacy of interventions with adults were excluded from the review.

There is no manual or script to follow per se in Equine Assisted therapy, (Esbjörn, 2006) however, according to descriptions given in the studies, the general guidelines of EAGALA (Equine Assisted

Growth and Learning Association) and the Delta Society, Equine Assisted therapy is a term used to describe the integration of the horse into goal-directed treatment and it should be provided by licensed therapists (Macauley & Gutierrez, 2004; Nimer, 2003).

At the conference held by the Center for the Interaction of Animals and Society (CIAS) entitled ‘Can Animals help Humans Heal?’ (2004) there was an agreed definition of Equine Assisted therapy:

“EFP is an experiential psychotherapy that includes equine(s). It may include, but is not limited to, a number of mutually respectful equine activities such as handling, grooming, longeing (or lunging), riding, driving, and vaulting. EFP is facilitated by a licensed, credentialed mental health professional working with an appropriately credentialed equine professional. EFP may be facilitated by a mental health professional that is dually credentialed as an equine professional. (p.4, Kruger, Trachtenberg & Serpell, 2004).

The therapist could, in theory, include an educational and child psychologist, together with a trained horse professional, who makes observations of the participants alongside, and in, their interactions with the horse, and who discusses their observations in conjunction with the participants in order to bring about positive changes in the participants’ lives.

In this literature review, in order to try to understand how Equine Assisted therapy might work, there will be a description of the broader context of our human position in nature; how humans and

animals bond and interact; the similarities and differences in human and animal emotional systems, and how this affected the theory of Attachment with its impact on clinical applications for Animal, and in particular, Equine Assisted therapy. The literature review will highlight findings from previous studies and examine perceptions of therapists of their Equine Assisted therapy.

2.2 The concept and definitions of Animal Assisted Therapy and Equine Assisted therapy

There are various ways to interpret what people mean when they use the term ‘Animal Assisted Therapy’, ‘Equine Assisted therapy’ or ‘pet facilitated therapy’ (Blackshaw, 1996). The tightest definition would seem to be given by Nimer and Lundahl (2007) and Endenburg and van Lith, (2011). They write that Animal Assisted Therapy is different to Animal Assisted Activities when there is “deliberate inclusion of an animal in a treatment plan to realize specific goals.”

They emphasise the point that Animal or Equine Assisted therapy should only be undertaken by a ‘credentialed treatment provider’

According to the website of EAGALA (2015) (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association) Equine Assisted Psychotherapy can be used to address a variety of needs, including behavioural

difficulties, ADHD, PTSD, substance abuse, eating disorders, depression, anxiety, relationship problems and communication needs.

A difficulty arises through the lack of consensus about what Equine Assisted Therapy actually entails, because if there is a large discrepancy between what is regarded as 'intervention' then the result is that different studies measure different outcomes and as a consequence it is hard to judge a cumulative effect size and to arrive at a firm conclusion as to whether or not 'Equine Assisted Therapy' is effective as an 'intervention' per se.

It is difficult to replicate one particular study as there is no 'intervention manual' as such to follow, and each individual receiving Equine Assisted Therapy brings to it their own unique mix of complex problems. While some psychologists, such as Selman, (2016) believe that interventions can be creative and flexible, as long as the therapist is reflective, others, such as Odendaal, (2000) are critical of the use of animals in psychotherapy, because such therapies could be seen to be 'non-specific'.

In addition to the issue of non-specificity, the individuals may or may not be receiving adjunct therapies, further complicating an experimental approach to evaluation. Equine Assisted therapy is not generally viewed as a stand-alone treatment, rather, horses are used

as a supplement or in conjunction with other interventions (Endenburg & van Lith, 2011).

This makes it difficult to complete a convincing meta-analysis of the studies, and some of the claims that are made can be exaggerated, for example Nimer and Lundahl (2003) report that evidence does not support the use of Equine Assisted Therapy with adolescents, although this inference is based on only two studies. It is clear that further research needs to be carried out before such conclusions can be drawn.

2.3 The broader context: Biophilia, Anthrozoology, and the interface between humans and animals.

Biophilia is a term first used by Wilson in 1984 (Kellert & Wilson, 1993). Wilson defines it as:

“The innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes...to the degrees that we come to understand other organisms, we will place greater value on them, and on ourselves.” (p.5)

It is useful to review some of the key ideas behind the biophilia hypothesis (Kellert & Wilson, 1993) and the science of Anthrozoology, the official name for the study of human-animal interactions. The latter is a point supported by Hurn, (2015). It is also important to illustrate how the relatively modern concept of Animal Assisted Therapy has emerged, and its position in relation to the

broader context of our culture and heritage. This is important, for, as Harper, (2016) and the current president of the British Psychological Society, Kinderman, (in Harper) point out, if educational psychologists are to intervene psychologically, they need to understand what Harper calls the social patterning of distress. They need to look beyond only the individual approach, so that psychologists can understand and help people within the context of groups and society.

Wilson (1993) argues that our understanding of human- animal interactions is ‘woefully scant’ and that we need to develop such understanding in order to be able to develop insights into our place in nature, both in terms of the environment and landscape, as well as in our relationships and interactions with animals, in order to develop in all domains of our lives. Understanding this hypothesis gives us greater insight into how the relatively new ways of regarding Animal Assisted Therapies have come about, and it also forms the basis of a critique of the concept of, and theories which may guide such therapies.

Wilson (1993) puts forward a case for his biophilia hypothesis, proposing that our need to affiliate to nature and animals is: inherent; it gives us an evolutionary heritage; it gives us a competitive advantage as a species and, ultimately, it leads to individual and

personal fulfilment. Kaplan, (1983, cited in Kellert & Wilson, 1993)

writes:

“Nature matters to people. Big trees and small trees, glistening water, chirping birds, budding bushes, colourful flowers – these are important ingredients in a good life.” (p. 46).

It is the latter which is of interest in the context of Animal Assisted Therapy, for the proponents of the biophilia hypothesis argue that our observations of, and interactions with both the natural environment and with animals allow us to grow cognitively and emotionally.

Shepard, (1993) expresses the idea thus:

“Human intelligence is bound to the presence of animals. They are the means by which cognition takes its first shape and they are the instruments for imagining abstract ideas and qualities....They are the code images by which language retrieves ideas...and traits...Animals are used in the growth and the development of the human person, in those priceless qualities we lump together as ‘mind’.”

(p.51, Kellert & Wilson, 1993).

A life without biophilia would, according to this hypothesis, leave us stunted and unfulfilled. Orr, (1993) writes:

“Affiliation to nature is the key to our species’ most fundamental yearnings for a meaningful and fulfilling existence.” (p. 26).

The relationship is so deep that some regard it as part of a genetic drive to respond to nature (Ulrich, 2012).

2.3.1 Interacting with animals helps us to develop self-reflection and self-actualisation

Kellert and Wilson (1993) believe that our relationship with nature, including animals, can be divided into different categories, for example utilitarian (we eat animals, use their skins, hunt with them etc.); aesthetic (the realization of beauty through aroused curiosity which leads you to imagine, discover and learn); naturalistic (we develop a heightened awareness and a sense of wonder and awe around nature and animals); symbolic,(how animals symbolise various traits and our own fears, hopes and beliefs) moralistic,(development of ethical responsibility, reverence for the natural world) and negativistic valuations of nature.

According to the biophilia hypothesis, there is a degree of countertransference by humans onto animals so that eventually humans seek their own identity by contrasting themselves to animals. Shepard (1993) believes that animals provide “‘concrete reference’ for sorrow, pain and temper”. This is a view supported by Atwood Lawrence, (1993) who writes:

“In a chaotic world, human beings seek their own identity through reference to the alternate domain of the beasts.” (p. 335)

The proponents of the idea that animals help us to develop cognitively explain that humans learn to distinguish themselves from other animals. Humans learn how to visualise the other species and how to make categories, a skill needed firstly for our own survival in the wild. The process of categorization helps language to develop: according to Atwood Lawrence (1993), we observe how children look at pictures or at real animals, and learn to make their noises. This helps to develop imagination and symbolic thought. In the earlier stages of development, a child can look at external features of animals, whether in pictures or by seeing live animals, and from this they can compare their own physical features. In later stages of human cognitive development, animals come to symbolise personality traits and behaviours which are then turned into symbolic representations, myths and stories, eventually becoming part of our culture. Atwood Lawrence describes how feelings and fears about animals such as snakes and spiders become part of our collective dreams and narratives. This is important in the context of Animal Assisted therapy, because a participant will have their own pre-conceived notions about the animal which may affect their relationship and interactions, an aspect of the therapy which will be explored in greater depth in a later section.

2.3.2 Animals help us to develop emotionally as well as cognitively

Atwood Lawrence (1993) concludes that:

“The power of biophilia is manifest not only in direct interactions between people and animals but also through the process of symbolizing through animals.” (p.326).

She believes that reference to the animal kingdom helps humans to fulfil their need for ‘metaphorical expression’. Her chapter sets out the case that animal symbolism can be viewed as a form of ‘cognitive biophilia’. Her examples include the symbolism of different animals, in this case a bee, bat and pig to transform behavioural traits of animals into cultural constructs in different societies, and how this arose through civilisations and religions.

Seen in broad terms, then, the biophilia hypothesis is that humans interact with animals as part of nature, in what could be seen as a dynamic process. From a psychological perspective, interaction with animals can be viewed as a mediation tool towards self-realisation, as a species, culturally, and through individual fulfilment. This begs the question how Equine Assisted therapy could help in these processes.

Shepard (1993) warns of the dangers of not being emotionally involved in biophilia. He purports that people who live in a world which is cut off from nature and animals may become at risk of developing poor mental health. His arguments lend support to the

idea that guided interactions with animals would help to redress one's emotional balance, and promote well-being.

2.4 Anthrozoology

Anthrozoology has a narrower focus than biophilia, in that it concentrates on one aspect of human's interaction with Nature, specifically the human-animal interaction. Records show that the subject of human-animal interaction has interested people since ancient times, for example in Ancient Rome, Egypt or Greece, and across cultures, from Amerindians, Australians, Chinese (All, 1999; Walsh, 2009a). Across these cultures, animals were given human characteristics, and were portrayed in statues and stories, and works of Art.

How humans and animals live together in the environment, competing for resources is a topic of global significance according to Bekoff (2000). Animals have been used by humans for food, warmth and clothing; to assist with work; to test drugs and carry out psychological experiments, and to offer protection and give companionship (Walsh, 2009; Amiot, 2015). Human–animal relations hence represent an important and complex domain of human activity that merits theoretical and empirical attention in its own right (Amiot, 2015).

Conferences take place to discuss issues of human animal interaction and the benefits and disadvantages of this. There are three organisations which promote research specifically into the issue, for example CENSHARE, (the Center for Animal Human Relationships), the Delta society, and the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organization.

While Anthrozoology is seen as an interdisciplinary subject, with contributions from philosophy, sociology, and cultural geographers (Hurn, 2015), and from the veterinary, medical and neuro sciences (Amiot & Bastion, 2015), it is becoming increasingly recognised that human-animal relations should merit attention from psychologists (Amiot, 2015). Educational and child psychologists could contribute to this modern discipline, and derive benefits by applying knowledge of the theories of biophilia to child development. Furthermore they are ideally placed to observe and evaluate the effects of using animals specifically for psychological therapies.

It is currently the case in Western society that animals are not kept solely for pragmatic use, and that there are other reasons why humans keep animals and pets. According to the Pet Food Manufacturing Association, (2015), 46% of households in the UK own a pet. Kellert and Walsh (1993) argue that the wish to keep an animal usually arises from a longing for a bond with nature, in line with the biophilia

hypothesis. The psychological and emotional motivations to keep a pet are important. All (1999) writes:

“The human companion animal bond can be affectionate and friendly and can provide interaction between a human and animal which can provide a focus for caring feelings and decrease feelings of loneliness.” (p.54).

Braun, Oetting, and Bergstrom, (1991) discuss the human-companion animal bond in terms of its relational and emotional aspects and also defined it as an attachment that can be ‘friendly and affectionate’.

Bennett (2012) argues as an anthrozoologist, that people should avoid focussing on Animal Assisted Therapy as a means to compensate for human deficiencies. The study she presents emphasises the point that people no longer live in extended families, and so the reasons they own dogs are because they are seen as compensating for missing ‘family members’ who give unconditional love. This begs the question whether owning a pet or attending Animal Assisted therapy is useful for people who need to compensate for attachment and/or relationship difficulties, an aspect which will be explored in the context of the aims of Equine Assisted therapy.

An outline of the development of the interest in the Human Animal Bond (HAB) is given by Hines (2003). The HAB Organisation has grown from one organisation in the UK in the 1970s to one which

now encompasses interest by universities and veterinary organisations to the International Association of Human-Animal Interaction Organization. Hines is interested in the evolution of interest from shared environments to emotionally bonding and the complex relationships between humans and animals. She writes how the society for the Guide Dogs for the Blind was founded in 1942, after Seeing Dogs was established in 1929. Therapy Dogs International was founded in New Jersey in 1976. In the 1980s there was a surge in public interest in service dogs: dogs to help people with hearing impairments were introduced in 1982.

The 1980s saw the introduction of the practice of taking rescue animals into nursing homes, primary schools and prisons. This programme was called the Pet a Pet Program, and was originally called Pet Therapy. In 1984 the Delta Society held its first International Conference in Seattle on the Interactions of Animals and People.

The suggestion that animals could help humans in a more 'therapeutic' manner seemed to capture the imagination of the public, and research into ways that this could happen was funded by the pet food industry. In 1991 an entire issue of Holistic Nursing Practice was devoted to HAB (Hines, 2003).

While much of the research thus far into the use of animals has been focussed on the more ‘utilitarian’ assistance work started with dogs, the use of horses in therapeutic interactions began officially in the USA in the 20th century.

Riding for the Disabled, also known as Therapeutic Riding Programs, was first introduced in North America in 1969 (Hines, 2003).

Following this, more psychological benefits were observed, and psychological interventions using animals were introduced.

2.4.1 Psychological relationships with animals

While the use of animals to assist with specific tasks for the sensory impaired and physically disabled has been established, there is a growing amount of literature around the psychological and mental health benefits that relationships with animals can bring.

It has been widely acknowledged that it was Levinson, a child psychotherapist, who first publicised and promoted that idea of using animals in a psychotherapeutic way in 1960 (Hines, 2003). Levinson found that when anxious children came to see him, they were more likely to relax if his dog was present. Such an effect was recently demonstrated in a BBC documentary ‘How to Stay Young’ (2016).

Drawing on theoretical and empirical work conducted in sociology, anthropology, neuroscience, medicine, veterinary studies, zoology,

animal welfare, public health, psychiatry, criminology, and psychology, Amiot and Bastion (2015) build a case as to why the relations between humans and animals should be studied more seriously, and in a more integrated way, as part of mainstream psychology. They argue that if we can understand where we stand as a species, and how we relate to other species, as well as other groups of people and their cultures, we may learn to develop more self-insight and more empathy towards people and animals.

With their interest in child and adolescent development across cognitive, social and emotional domains, and in the search to find new ways to reach children who do not respond well to established, traditional methods of therapy, it can be argued that educational and child psychologists are well positioned to work in multi-disciplinary context and they can contribute to the developing field of insights into human–animal relations.

2.4.2 Animals and emotions

In order to use animals in a therapeutic way to help with emotional development or emotional problems, it is important to be able to understand more about the complexities of emotions both in animals and humans. Atwood Lawrence (1993) writes that there is:

“A growing realisation of the ways in which other species seem to share human characteristics may enhance empathic responses that

make animals more prominent in the thought processes of people who are otherwise remote from them.” (p. 337).

Some proponents of Animal Assisted Therapy explain that it uses the human-animal emotional bond as an integral part of the therapeutic process, (Maujean, Kendall, Lillan, Sharp, & Pringle, 2013) but the theory behind how this could happen is not fully explored. It is argued that a person can form an affectionate and friendly attachment with an animal (Braun, Oetting, & Bergstrom, N., 1991).

While some researchers, such as Amiot and Bastion (2015) may argue that using animals could help a person to develop an affective relationship, an alternative position is argued by Kruger, Trachtenberg and Serpell, 2004; Fine, 2006 and Beck, 2003. They purport that animals help in a different way, not via making ‘attachments’. Indeed, Kruger et al. warn that companion animals are inferior replacements for human social interactions. This view was supported by a study which examined why people hoard animals, for it was found that people who hoarded animals over- relied on them for emotional comfort (Steketee, 2011,). While it seems reasonable to agree that it is not recommended to promote the idea of forming an ‘attachment’ with an animal instead of another person, using animals for interaction, which would then lead to interactions with other

humans, may be beneficial. This was a point made by O’Haire (2013) and Wilson (2003) and it may be this element that is of value.

2.4.3 Is attachment the same as interaction?

One issue for research would be to find out whether participants and therapists feel that it is an ‘attachment’ formed with an animal that is important, or whether it is the facilitation of human -human interaction which brings about the most benefits.

Bekoff (2000) discusses the question of whether or not animals and humans share the same emotional systems. It has been reported that animal lovers believe this to be the case, whereas scientists and psychologists such as Tinbergen (cited in Bekoff, 2000) describe the idea as ‘an excellent example of fictitious causes to which we commonly attribute behaviour’. Tinbergen, in Bekoff, believes that:

‘emotions are subjective phenomena which cannot be observed objectively in animals, it is idle to claim or deny their existence.’ (p.4).

Descartes, too, believed that animals were ‘red blooded machines without thoughts or wishes’ (Harris, 2014). It can be counterclaimed, however, that learning about animal emotion can lead to further discoveries about human and animal emotional systems, a theory promoted by Panksepp, (2003), and that using Animal Assisted

therapy to help young people learn about animal emotions can eventually help them learn about their own human emotions.

2.5 Ethology and emotions in animals

2.5.1 Emotions in humans and animals

According to Bekoff, (2000) Darwin in his seminal work *The Expression of Emotion* (1872) argued that there is continuity between the emotional lives of humans and those of other animals, and that the differences are in degree rather than in kind. Convergence of opinion would currently indicate that different emotions are experienced by different creatures according to their context and environment (Cosmides, 2000). This conclusion was based on the framework of ethology, which holds that that behaviour can be observed and interpreted over time in natural settings.

Our beliefs about, and interpretations of the emotional lives of animals are, it seems, influenced by our culture and current context.

An illustration of the division of public opinion is the aftermath of the killing in August 2015 of Cecil the lion, who was shot for pleasure on a safari as a leisure activity; some people view hunting rare animals as a legitimate leisure pursuit, while others view this as barbaric, presumably in part for conservation reasons, but also perhaps in part because they believe that animals have emotional lives as we do.

Further examples at the time of writing this research include the protests at the killing of a lion after it had been goaded into attacking a human intruder into its compound in a Chilean zoo in May 2016, and the killing of a gorilla in Cincinnati zoo after a child fell into its space, also in May 2016. In each of these cases, human empathy towards the animals is a theme in the news reports.

There are differing approaches to examining the question of emotions in animals. These include: evolutionary, comparative, developmental and neurobiological.

“We are obliged to acknowledge that all psychic interpretation of animal behaviour must be an analogy of human experience...whether we will or no, we must be anthropomorphic in the notions we form of what takes place in the mind of an animal.”

(Washburn, 1909, cited in Bekoff, 2000, p.13).

This is an example of a comparative approach. An evolutionary approach would lead us to question the functionality of a certain behaviour for the survival of the species, for example why horses are hypervigilant, particularly when eating, (they are animals of prey) and why they have specific roles to play within the herd, such as leader or protector. Understanding behaviours in horses may help the participants at Equine assisted therapy gain a greater degree of understanding of their own behaviours.

The theory that emotions underpin our behaviour to survive in our environment guides the research into emotions in animals, including humans; such research examines the way animals make choices; for example they continue to interact with a stimulus which gives them pleasure, while they avoid a stimulus which leads to negative affect (Panksepp, 2003). The theory is that the recognition that non-human animals can make choices proves that they are sentient beings, and that they must therefore have emotional experiences, a view supported by Balcombe, (2010). Animals can show signs of optimism or pessimism in environments which are stimulating and enriched, or impoverished.

Balcombe exemplifies the work instigated by Panksepp, who believes that animals have emotional 'systems' to enable them to survive.

Other studies have found that dogs display feelings of jealousy (Harris, 2014; Morris, 2008) and it was concluded that the emotion of jealousy in dogs was not an anthropomorphic projection, but an interpersonal, shared emotion between dog and human, supporting the themes of the study presented by Bennett, (2012). Whether or not such an emotion exists in horses is yet to be documented.

A biological approach to the research of emotions in both animals and humans has focussed on the premise that each emotion in humans involves altered activity of several brain regions (LeDoux,

1996). This is an elaboration on the triune brain theory of MacLean (1985) cited in LeDoux. MacLean's theory purports that all animals have 'reptilian reactions', mammals have a 'limbic system' and mammals and primates share neo cortical systems which allow us to vary our behaviours by making connections between feelings and actions. MacLean believes that emotions in all animals serve to preserve the self and the species.

From an evolutionary perspective, such functions involve the use of emotions to guide adaptations such as cooperative relations with members of the group, mating, and avoiding predators (Duchaine, 2001). Emotional systems of animals are the result of an adaptation to their environment; animals of prey will have slightly different systems to hunters.

The conclusion from this paradigm would be that the more complex the environment and social context for the animal, the more sophisticated their emotional systems would be. This is an interesting contention, and one which would be fruitful to explore with reference to animal or Equine Assisted therapies: it begs the question why might it be the case that some people find one particular animal more responsive to their emotions and interactions than another.

It raises the question of whether or not understanding that the social world of a horse is different to that of the world of dogs has some

bearing upon the participants' 'chosen' animal and whether or not the horses' emotional systems are different than those of dogs.

2.5.2 Ethology, Bowlby's theory of Attachment and its clinical application

According to Hinde, (2005), ethology is an approach to the study of animal behaviour. It was initiated by Lorenz and Tinbergen in the 1950s and both were awarded Nobel prizes for their work. The premises of ethology, according to Hinde, are that: description and classification of behaviour are essential to its understanding; behaviour cannot be studied without some knowledge of the environment, and questions about the evolution and function of behaviour are as important as the questions about its development. Hinde explains how Bowlby assimilated these concepts to form his ideas on human attachment behaviours.

One of Bowlby's most significant contributions was to grasp the relevance of ethological concepts and methods for the study of human social development, to reformulate psychoanalytical theory in the light of these concepts (Hinde, 2005; Bowlby, 1988).

Bowlby used observation and classification of behaviours which were subsequently elaborated by Ainsworth, (2015). Lorenz and Tinbergen developed ideas of 'fixed action patterns', such as rooting, grasping

or crying, and Bowlby took this idea into the realm of human behaviour, concluding that emotions drove the baby and toddler towards the goal of maintaining proximity to the caregiver.

According to Hinde, Bowlby also assimilated the idea that animals and humans needed a 'secure base', and that the drive for this led to 'pan-cultural responses' of clinging, following and crying. Hinde believes that humans and animals share 'systems' of behaviour, such as 'caregiving behaviour system' and that the infant attachment system interacts with other behaviour systems, such as fear and exploratory systems. This idea is also central to the work of Panksepp (2003). Their theories postulate that if the fear system is activated, this increases attachment behaviour, whereas attachment behaviour decreases when the exploratory system is activated. The separation response is similar in many different animals.

Bowlby believed that, from an ethological perspective, attachment behaviours were to protect from predators (Bowlby, 1988). He explored the clinical applications of Attachment theory from the context of psychoanalytical models. He postulated that proximity to the caregiver allowed for the development of a sense of self and 'otherness' and that mentalization could be seen as an extension of internal working models, so that understanding another person could lead to greater sense of self. Bowlby believed that the therapist

should be a companion in the exploration of himself and his experiences, rather than the therapist interpreting things to the patient. The ideas of self -reflection and developing of the sense of self are explored in the section regarding theoretical groundings of Equine Assisted therapy.

Bowlby concluded that therapists should provide a ‘safe base’ so that people could explore their ideas and problems in an environment that is sensitive and responsive. The interactions between the therapist and the participant in the therapy are seen as crucial.

As Bowlby writes:

“The quality of the therapy and probably ultimately its outcome, is a function not of each alone, but of the interaction or fit that exists between them”. (p. xi).

It is important to understand this concept, and how it might be applied to Equine Assisted therapy; for example, whether the animal is used as a co- therapist, or as an object to fill the ‘psychological space’ between the therapist and the therapy recipient, or to provide a ‘safe base’ in which the therapy can take place.

2.6 Why people own horses or dogs

A study by Keaveney, (2008) explored the reasons why people spent time and money on non-working horses. The goal of the study was

clear: the researcher wanted to find out more about horse ownership from a business point of view, in other words, to be in a stronger position to be able to advertise and market horse products. A possible limitation was that the themes were a priori, and so the researcher may have missed some themes that may have arisen from unstructured interview questions to complement the semi-structured approach. However, the study was true to its aims and as such can be treated as trustworthy and useful. Keaveney concluded that people owned horses because of physicality, partnership, bonding through adversity, flow experience, as conceptualised by (Nakamura, 2014.)

A PhD project to find out why professional people own dogs was undertaken in Australia by a PhD student of Bennett, (2012). Bennett's student, Schaan, carried out loosely structured interviews with 37 dog owners using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

The interviewees were asked to tell the interviewer about owning a dog. After the interviews, answers and ideas were tagged, categories were made, using nVivo software, after which the interviewer returned to the literature to see if similar themes had previously emerged. Bennett and Shaan produced three overarching categories around why professional people owned dogs. They were that: dogs make intimate companions; they enhance the quality of life, and they give unconditional love.

Each theme was subsequently divided into dimensions, or subthemes, exploring each overarching category in more depth. It could be argued that each category might have formed a part of one global theme of 'enhancing the quality of life'.

It is interesting to see that there is more similarity than difference between these two studies, particularly regarding the idea of happiness and the 'flow experience'. Both the horse owners and the dog owners reported that their animals do not judge/hold grudges and would be consistent in their response to them. They reported that it made them feel positive as people to need to care for an animal and that it led to authentic happiness to have commitment to another living creature.

Both horse and dog owners reported that their animals cooperated because they wanted to, and so there was a positive feeling about being creative in joint activities. The theme of trust and stability arose with the dog owners, as well as with the horse owners.

Both studies were about why people own animals, and the conclusion was unequivocal: if you choose to share time with an animal this can elicit feelings of enrichment and positive emotions. Attending Equine Assisted therapy may be useful for those people who cannot afford to own such a large, expensive animal.

2.7 Studies which explore psychological theories behind Equine

Assisted therapies

2.7.1 Therapists' views of Equine Assisted Therapy

Frame, (2006) interviewed fifteen therapists about the role of the horse in Equine Assisted therapy, and how the therapists' psychological theories were used to give possible reasons to answer the question how Equine Assisted therapy might work.

In line with Bowlby's assertion (1988) that it is the interaction between the therapists and their clients which underpins success of the therapy, Frame found that the overarching theme in the responses given was that it was 'the process of developing 'attunement' and 'respect' that is believed to be the foundation for therapeutic change through the use of Equine Assisted therapy'.

The psychological models given as the basis of Equine Assisted therapy in Frame's study were varied, and included frameworks of Cognitive Behavioural therapy, Experiential therapy, Gestalt therapy or Object Relations theory.

In each of the fifteen cases, it seemed that the therapist took an eclectic view, and that each form of Equine Assisted therapy seemed unique. In conclusion, it would seem that the linking of theory to practice had not been particularly clear. One example was that the

therapist explained that the therapy was based on Experiential theory because it was:

‘a synthesis of non-directive, client-centred therapy with an emphasis on the here and now’ (p.30).

It was not made explicit to the reader in that particular study how there might be a link between the use of Experiential therapy and the use of a horse.

However, one example in the study of how horses could be used in therapy was that the horses could act as an ‘affect mirror’. As one therapist put it:

‘The horse starts bouncing back to the client all their crap’. (p.79) and

‘We allow the child to take what he’s learning with the animal back into his human-being relationship’. (p.88)

The horse was seen as a non-judgemental, forgiving creature which could be used as a means to positively role- model behaviours, such as how to give a person personal space and boundaries. The horse was seen in terms of capturing attention of the clients, and as a means to facilitate engagement.

The therapists describe how the young people ‘project their inner lives’ onto the horse by interpreting the horse behaviour, for example

when asked why they think the horse behaves in a particular way, the reasons given show some possible insight into why the young person is behaving as they are. They explained that the young people are asked if the horses remind them of any people, and this is seen as a 'trigger for exploration'. This way of working deploys a Freudian, psychoanalytical framework in which the interpretations of the therapist are paramount. The implication of this is that the success of an Equine Assisted therapy programme would be, in part, contingent upon the skill base of the therapist.

Using horses to teach skills such as taking risks, or asking for help, could form a tenuous link with CBT, if these issues had been discussed openly with the young person. Talking about the horses' behaviours could be used to identify thoughts and beliefs and cognitions in the young person.

It serves as a projection to help identify maladaptive behaviours which the young people want to change. In this case, Milton's description of Cognitive Analytical Therapy would seem to underpin the process.

According to Frame's study (2006) the therapists believed that horses:

'facilitated the representation of a holding environment in which the client could regress'. (p.91)

These therapists attributed this concept to the psychology of object relations, whereas it could be argued that regression and projection are ideas that also arise from Gestalt therapy.

Equine Assisted therapy is based on the notion that animals have unique attributes that contribute to the therapy, according to Kruger, Trachtenberg and Serpell (2004). The greatest weakness in the documented research is that by not making explicit the theoretical underpinnings, it does appear to be the case that Equine Assisted therapy is, as Kruger et al. put it:

‘struggling to define itself and gain credibility as a form of complementary medicine.’ (p.5).

Their use of the word ‘medicine’ highlights their belief that psychological studies and interventions should be empirically based, whereas it can be argued that it is important to work out perceptions about the process of such therapies first.

Esbjörn, (2006) questioned 35 therapists as to why they would choose to use Equine Assisted therapy. It was found that reasons for referral included diverse problems such as Domestic Abuse, confidence issues and poor self-expression.

The therapists reported that they would use Equine Assisted therapy when other, conventional types of therapy had failed. The reasons

cited for using horses rather than other animals included: the ability to make connections with horses; their 'honesty'; predictable and clear body language; the ability to 'mirror' human mood; the fact that they are prey animals; their size and their 'magic'. (Esbjörn, 2006) reported that there was a great variety of opinion, perceptions and theoretical foundations amongst the 35 therapists. The theoretical frameworks included: attachment work; psychodynamic; transpersonal; Gestalt; biophilia and developmental. It would seem that each therapist works in an eclectic way, according to the individual or group needs of their clients.

2.7.2 Horses as 'objects of mediation'.

The representatives of the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) explain that deploying a model of Equine Assisted psychotherapy helps the participants to use the horses as 'objects of mediation' thus allowing the participants to make representations of what is happening in their lives. The therapists help the participants to explore possible interpretations of these, and they are then discussed in the therapy. The participants are thereafter encouraged to come up with their own solutions to their problems (Hunter, 2012.). This links in with the attachment work proposed by Bowlby as outlined earlier, which espouses the idea that the therapist

is a 'companion' in the exploration of problems and that horses could fill a 'psychological space' between the therapist and client

Since each participant will raise their own highly personal and individual issues, it is hard to test 'efficacy' of all the interventions under one universal outcome; what is important is that each individual, or group, will feel that a) their troubling issues have been recognised by the therapists and themselves, and b) that they have been helped to find a solution to their individual problems or c) that interacting with horses has enabled the participants to further develop positive achievement.

2.7.3 Gestalt therapy

The idea of self-reflection, and finding oneself through another 'different' person in order to ultimately fulfil the goal of becoming an 'integrated' person, underpins the core feature of Gestalt therapy.

This is a form of therapy which came out of the clinical work of Fritz and Lore Perls in the 1920s, according to Nevis, (2009), Gestalt therapy is a person-centred approach which emphasises the importance of experiencing life in the present moment. Nevis explains:

'The present moment, should we be fully attuned to it and absorbed in it, is sufficient. It will allow us to make lives the best they can be lived in the circumstances.'(p.17).

The aims of Gestalt therapy are to organise one's experiences against a backdrop of interactions, with other people, other objects and the environment. Contact with this backdrop allows a person to flourish by changing and growing, creating a synthesis so that one's self of self can become stronger. Nevis describes this as 'boundary disturbance relocation'.

He writes how the organised self comes about by asking awareness raising questions such as 'What is this? What is the experience of this? How is this for me?' and it is the shared awareness and shared construction of meaning with the therapist which leads to positive change. The role of the therapist in Gestalt therapy is to observe affect and mood, and to attune to the expression of emotion in the person receiving the therapy (Ebest & Homeyer, 2015).

According to Gestalt therapy theory, there can be a 'disconnect' between mind and body, and being present or withdrawn from other people, and the aim is to make the person in therapy aware of this, so that eventually the fragmented parts of their core self can be integrated. The therapy is described by Ebest and Homeyer as being 'experiential, non-directive and facilitating'. The person in therapy projects feelings from their inner life onto an object and makes use of metaphors and symbols so that the therapist and person receiving the therapy can jointly understand the depth of emotion and reflect upon

it. Ebest and Homeyer describe how the person receiving the therapy goes through the process of being able to ‘affirm, shift and integrate’.

This approach seems to fall under a psychoanalytical umbrella, and resembles the rationale of using horses as objects of mediation. Ebest and Homeyer’s portrayal would suggest that the rationale behind the link with Gestalt theory and Equine Assisted therapy seems to be that the Equine Assisted therapy involved the use of non-verbal language, and a focus on the way the adolescent interacts with the horse as a reflection of the experiences they had in their lives, a position outlined by Frame, (2006).

2.7.4 Experiential therapy

Along with Gestalt therapy and using horses as objects of mediation, experiential therapy can be seen as a ‘psychotherapy paradigm’ (Gleiser, 2008), a view proposed by Greenberg, (1998), who believe that Equine Assisted therapy has its roots in experiential therapy. The goal of experiential therapy is to help the client process emotions in order to help to become a fully coherent functioning person, accepting of themselves and others.

“The primary objective in process-experiential therapy is to help clients integrate information from their emotional and cognitive systems to facilitate a more satisfactory adjustment to their environment.” (p.7, Greenberg et al.).

They use their experience as a means to reflect and to evaluate things for themselves and guide for future action. Growth comes about via the relationship as well as clients' reformulation of their own intrapsychic processes.

Experiential therapy is used as an approach when there are 'non-specific' problems to be worked through, such as dysfunctional relationships, as opposed to specific presenting problems, for example arachnophobia. As in Gestalt therapy, experiential therapy makes use of a guided portrayal of emotional expression and action, deepen and transfer awareness of emotional experiences (Gleiser et al, 2008; Greenberg et al.,1998). Gleiser et al. explain that, in order to 'heal', the client needs to be able to engage with 'emotionally-laden' material alongside a therapist. The therapist provides an attachment-based therapeutic context within which the client can experience strong emotions safely. The emotions are expressed and come to the awareness of both the therapist and the client before the therapist encourages the client to experience the core affect through 'somatic focussing, affective mirroring and evocative portrayals'. The therapist uses 'evocative' words, images and imaginary dialogue with other people across three states in the process: access to emotional experiences, working through of intense emotions and integrating affect and cognition.

It could be argued that talking about horses, particularly the rescue horses, and their background and needs, could serve as a mechanism, a way to encourage self-disclosure, and participants could begin to talk about issues troubling the client within in safe environment.

2.7.5 Object relations theory

Object relations theory developed from the study of the therapist-patient relationship as it reflects the caregiver-infant dyad. One of its tenets is that there is internalisation of childhood experience into unconscious forms that are carried by the unconscious into adulthood. According to Scharff and Scharff (2011) it stems from the work of Fairbairn, Winnicott and Klein, who argue that it is the relationship between the therapist and patient, and the skill of the therapist, which lie at the heart of the therapy. The therapist needs to ‘tune in’ to what is being communicated by the troubled clients/patients, by noting the resonance in themselves. The therapist needs to interpret, develop insight, understand what is happening, and then help growth in the client. In some ways, the horse could act as a facilitator for this, helping to bridge the gap between the client and the therapist, and also acting as a calm co-regulator, as a parent would (Kruger, Trachtenberg & Serpell, 2004).

Scharff and Scharff (2011) maintain that latent themes are as important as what is said; it is not only the spoken words, it is the

interpretation of the words, the gestures, body language and silences that is important in this therapy.

“We do not try to get things done, create exercises, give instruction, or ask too many questions.” (p.9, Scharff & Scharff)

Scharff and Scharff assert that ‘meaning’ emerges from shared experience rather than being imposed in an intellectual or oracular way. This seems to share a similar psychological paradigm as Gestalt and Experiential therapy in that horses are used as an object of mediation or an ‘affect mirror’. Interpretations of emotions are made by the therapist and shared with the client in order to arrive at shared understandings and ideas for ways to move on from problems.

A survey of educational and child psychologists revealed that such forms of psychotherapy are rarely deployed in their practice (Atkinson, 2011). However, it could be argued that educational and child psychologists need to gain some basic awareness of the rationale behind unfamiliar therapies if there is to be understanding and judgement of interventions such as Equine Assisted therapy.

It could also be argued that it should be possible for educational and child psychologists to deliver more clinically-based therapies, should they feel this would help the young person and their situation.

However, according to Atkinson et al., reasons given by educational

psychologists for not delivering such therapy can include: lack of training; not seeing it as part of the role of working systemically; rejecting 'within-child', intrapsychic approaches; a belief that direct intervention is inequitable, and time constraints due to the commissioning of advice for Education, Health and Care plans.

2.7.6 Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

In contrast, according to the same study by Atkinson et al., (2011) educational and child psychologists do use Cognitive Behavioural therapy, (CBT). (Milton, 2001) considers the ways in which psychoanalysis and CBT could share a common ground, or whether they are 'rival paradigms'.

She explains that in psychoanalysis, a person is encouraged to project feelings, and to talk about things they would prefer to remain hidden, in order to reveal troubling dynamics and emotional experiences. She explains that in CBT sessions, in contrast to psychotherapy, the emphasis is on using rational thinking to develop skills in order to deal with presenting symptoms. She believes that the latter approach lends itself to simpler forms of measuring outcomes, and is therefore more likely to be viewed as successful, whereas in psychoanalysis it is hard to use randomised control trials because the multiple variables are individualised and 'intra psychic'. This latter point would pertain to Equine Assisted Therapy. It may be the case

then, that using techniques of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, rather than CBT in Equine Assisted Therapy, has resulted in fewer Randomised Control Tests, which, as a consequence, has prevented the development of ‘empirical’ support for Equine Assisted therapy.

Milton (2001) suggests that therapists might use a mixture of approaches, based on the choice of the person who comes to therapy. She explains that this is ‘Cognitive Analytical Therapy’, which is a recognised approach in itself. It involves early collaboration and formulation between the therapist and participant, and exploration of ideas and sharing suggestions for skills to improve a particular situation. This could arguably be used in Equine Assisted therapy, although the search of the current literature did not find documentation of such an approach.

2.8 Equine Assisted Therapy, or the benefits of spending time in outdoor settings

2.8.1 Connections with Nature

Ulrich, (2012) outlines the reasons for the belief that being closely connected to nature gave us survival advantages in physical and physiological ways. He presents evidence that there is ‘stress restoration’ among humans who are closer to trees and nature, and that this is demonstrated in empirical studies that show: faster

recovery of energy; lowered blood pressure; a faster shift to positive emotional states, and less pain in recuperating patients who were able to see natural environments rather than bare walls in a recovery ward.

One study showed a link between noise from the environment with various psychological and physiological negative effects in preschool children, for example high blood pressure and risk of heart disease (Belojevic, 2008). It is a factor to consider in this current study of Equine Assisted therapy whether or not, or to what extent, it is the outdoor location that influences the mood of the person taking part in the programme and whether or not the therapy benefits the young person in terms of feeling relaxed and experiencing feelings of 'awe'.

2.9 Preferences for dogs or horses in therapy

One study to investigate the differences between dog and horse ownership was undertaken by Keaveney (2008). The study involved ethnographic methods in addition to conducting interviews with twelve horse owners. A priori themes were identified following observations. Horse owners explained that the relationship with a horse is qualitatively different to the relationship with a dog, the fundamental differences arising because dogs are domesticated, and have evolved to form a more mutual bond with its owner, whereas horses are animals of prey, are herd animals, and spend more time with other horses rather than with humans. The interviewees felt that

dogs are more capable of unconditional affection, whereas horses' interest is more materialistically conditional:

'To my horse I look like one big carrot.' (p. 447).

Dogs will interact in play with their owners, whereas it is more difficult, partly due to size, and partly due to herd mentality, to engage in human-horse play. The interviewees attributed fewer physical signs of affection from horses than from dogs. This might have ramifications for the choice of dog or horse in Animal Assisted therapy, for example if the young person is hoping to gain some clear indicators of affection from the animal.

Another theme which was reported in Keaveney's study was that of having to earn trust and 'respect' from the horse, whereas a dog is usually more amenable to training due to its desire to please its owner. This has implications for the use of a horse in therapy; using a horse to help build communication and assertive skills, for example.

Grooming the horse was seen as a display of affection towards the horse. If one of the goals or benefits of Animal Assisted therapy is to learn how to look outwards and care for another creature, this would be an overlap. However, it was not mentioned in the study that horses are probably more reliant on humans for their safekeeping, and that the difference in size must surely have an impact on the client.

The horse owners in Keaveney's study did not mention using the horses as a means to project human emotional issues, although, interestingly, and possibly as a contradiction, they did feel that the horses felt 'pride' in their joint accomplishments. Nor did they feel that going out to the horses would strengthen family bonds; in fact, some mentioned that time spent by one family member with the horse led to heightened tension in the home.

Carrying out horse –based tasks which needed cooperation led to feelings of camaraderie with other people. The skills based tasks with the horses also necessitated the use of creative persuasion, patience and emotional regulation skills.

The horse owners commented that there was a feeling that their relationship with horses was more of a working relationship, and that it was this that led to a sense of pride and achievement.

2.10 Research Studies into outcomes of Equine Assisted Therapy

Research studies into the effects of Equine Assisted therapy which have been published thus far report beneficial outcomes in terms of: the development of greater attention, participation and motivation (Macauley & Gutierrez, 2004; Umbarger, 2007); development of communication skills (Garrigue, 1994.); improved outcomes in terms of externalised and internalised behaviours, (Trotter, 2008);

development of a respecting and caring attitude, (Granger, 2006); improved relationships and self-esteem (Bowers & MacDonald, 2001); greater understanding of Theory of Mind (Katcher, 2004) and greater regulation of arousal, (Trotter, 2008).

2.10.1 Language skills, greater attention, participation and motivation

Garrigue, Moutiez and Galland (1994) claimed that language skills improved after six weeks of hippotherapy (therapeutic horse riding). A questionnaire was given to three boys and their parents before and after the sessions.

The aims of the hippotherapy described in the study were described in very broad and generalised terms, for example ‘to improve speech and language abilities’. It was also to be done in two hour long sessions over six weeks, which is an ambitious timeframe considering that the boys had been attending speech and language therapy for at least four years each. Questions on the questionnaire were to give an approval rating of very general statements, for example ‘My talking and understanding in everyday life is better.’ This is difficult to judge, especially for those with learning difficulties such as the boys in the study. Talking and understanding are usually differentiated by speech and language therapists, and broken down further into specific skills. The targets could have been measurable, for example the boys could now repeat four words in a sentence rather than three.

The activities were described in an appendix to the study. It would seem that the tasks were the same as would have been given in a traditional therapy session, with the only difference being that the boys were sitting on a horse when taking part. It could be argued that the different setting may have been a distraction.

The scores given at the end of the six weeks were on a ten point Likert scale. Two of the boys rated their skills as being the same, but they were averaged in with the scores the parents gave, which resulted in a higher overall rating. The number of participants would need to be higher in order to draw strong conclusions, and there would need to be greater specificity of the skills to be acquired. On the same questionnaire, there was unanimity regarding their motivation to attend the sessions, with a score of 10.

The outcome of greater motivation was not discussed, but one explanation could be that the novelty of being with horses encouraged the boys and their parents to say that they would now feel more motivated to go to speech and language therapy. This study could be revised, with greater numbers and greater specificity of research and intervention design.

Lockwood (2013) found that there was greater curiosity, interest and participation in children with autism who attended a Horse Boy Camp. She attributed improved communication skills to the

interactions within families when they were with their children at the camp, but these skills did not seem to generalise to settings outside the therapy context.

2.10.2 Communication and social interaction

One study in which specific examples of how Animal Assisted therapy can lead to an increased speech and language ability was carried out by Granger and Kogan, (2006). In this study, the aim was to increase the use of present-tense verbs ending in “ing”, increased comprehension of prepositional phrases, and an improvement in following multitask directions that could help in more complicated classroom tasks. Another student improved listening skills that were initially creating difficulty for her academically. Granger and Kogan conclude that the study suggests that giving autistic students individual attention, individualized goals, and the opportunity to interact with animals improves language and communication skills. The skills seemed to be context- based, and did not generalise to another setting.

In contrast, the results of a study by Anderson and Meints,(2016) suggest that Equine therapy may have an effect on improving aspects of social functioning, rather than for language skills specifically in children and adolescents with autism. Findings in the study showed that there was a positive reduction in challenging

behaviours and an improvement in empathising. However, attending Equine therapy did not result in demonstrable significant improvements in overall adaptive behaviours, and more specifically, there were no improvements in communication skills. This finding was replicated by Hyman, (2012).

Temple Grandin has autism and she has lectured and written books about her experiences with animals from her personal perspective (Grandin, 2006). She describes how she can better conceptualise emotions when she physically touches cattle because, she explains, if she can feel and see the effects of their reactions in their body language, she can make sense of their emotional responses to her actions. Using horses could be a mechanism for promoting understanding of non-verbal language or even emotional responses.

Anderson and Meints (2016) reported that there was no increase in communication skills following a five -week riding intervention, but there was an increase in social understanding and awareness. This was attributed to the predictability and ‘logic’ of horse behaviour for young people with autism. Lockwood (2013) concluded that Equine Assisted therapy ‘fosters a child’s curiosity, interest and intrinsic motivation through reciprocal social interactions.’

In summary, the claims made that Equine Assisted therapy may help to improve communication skills may need to be reframed; it seems

that while focussed in the setting, some specific language goals are achieved, but not outside the setting, however, it is in the domain of empathy and social understanding, skills which underpin language and communication, that small improvements can be found.

2.10.3 Externalised and internalised behaviours

Trotter, (2008) used a comparison design to see if there were more positive outcomes as the result of an established social skills/counselling programme, as opposed to Equine Assisted Counselling. They used random allocation to either group, and measured outcomes on self-reports, and reports by parents, on two behaviour rating scales with multiple t tests. The finding was that after 12 sessions, the young people receiving Equine Assisted Counselling had improved across seven behavioural areas in comparison with the traditional intervention (Rainbow Days). The list on the scales is very comprehensive, with a range of 17 scales, including, for example, depressive symptoms, sleep or anxiety. It could be argued that the measures were too broad. It could also be argued that the participants may have been motivated to exaggerate their own improvements in order to continue going to the Equine centre. It might have been useful to have mixed qualitative and quantitative measures as well as observations by people who did not know which pupils attended which interventions. This serves to

illustrate some of the complexities in designing empirical research into the effects of Equine Assisted therapy.

2.10.4 Development of emotional regulation

If adolescents feel that they have little or no control over their emotional responses, and this leads to problems associated with anger or depression, as it is reported to do (Paul, 2013) it would be useful to examine whether or not adolescent participants themselves feel that Equine Assisted therapy is a helpful way to develop self-regulation. Poldrack, (2008) posits that people can learn through the therapy to modulate the extent to which a perceived threat impacts on cognitive resources, resulting in greater emotional regulation. (MacLure, 2010) believes that as language develops, with the help of a caregiver, so too does emotional regulation. It could be proposed that an intervention in which a therapist acts as a co-regulator, using horses as a means to demonstrate and describe emotions, could provide a plausible mechanism for so called ‘co-regulation’ in adolescence.

Another explanation, offered by Kruger et al. (2004) is that the relaxed behaviour of therapy horses helps to model relaxed behaviour to the participants, in much the same way that a parent co-regulates affect with their young child.

2.11 Summary of the literature, and formulation of the research questions.

It is important to look at the context of how the notion of using animals and, in particular, horses as a therapy has arisen. This should be seen in the context of a Western-based view of biophilia, Anthrozoology, and the Human Animal Bond.

Psychological theories of Attachment emanated from ethology, and understanding the emotional systems and behaviours of animals is important when trying to understand how working with horses could be part of a psychological intervention with young people.

Equine Assisted Therapy is still in its infancy, and there are different explanations and claims offered around its mechanisms and outcomes.

There appear to be different ways of using horses in psychological therapy. The therapy can be in response to broad issues such as lack of confidence or poor self-esteem, or it could be designed to develop particular skills, for example cognitive skills, assertive skills, emotional regulation, patience and an outward-looking attitude based on respect. These outcomes could be the result of: learning to understand emotions and behaviour in horses; developing a commitment to the care of the horses, and developing language both verbally and non-verbally in order to better understand emotions.

Equine Assisted therapy can either form part of a psychotherapeutic based intervention, possibly more in line with an Experiential or Cognitive Analytical approach, or be part of a complementary approach, teaching horsemanship skills in addition to more traditional psychological interventions.

The studies available in the published literature have focussed on the perceptions and views of the therapists, and it could be contended that as such, the therapists argue from a position of having prior knowledge about the therapy, and that they are biased in their opinions regarding its benefits.

The few studies which attempt to measure outcomes use self-reports in pre -and post test scores, have not been able to pinpoint particular behaviours, or determine the mechanisms of how such therapies may work (Kruger, Trachtenberg & Serpell, 2004).

Qualitative studies which explore the perceptions of young participants, and in particular adolescents with autism, have not been published thus far. This study set out to explore perceptions of adolescent participants who have autism, their staff (who have no training in the delivery of the intervention) and the therapists who design and deliver the intervention.

2.12 Systematic reviews of the studies into the effectiveness of Equine Assisted therapy

The current reviews of the studies into the effectiveness of Equine Assisted therapy underline the point that Animal Assisted Interventions lack a ‘unified, empirically supported theoretical framework from which practices are derived’ (Kruger, Serpell and Trachtenberg, 2004).

(Davis et al.,(2015) reviewed studies which evaluated the effectiveness of animal assisted interventions for children with autism. They found that although it is imperative to examine the effectiveness of such interventions particularly in relation to the symptoms which are specific to autism, the methodological weaknesses of studies make this very difficult to determine. They cite the problem that as yet, there is no one standardized intervention with a manual, which would enable comparisons with other interventions. They also highlight the issue that therapists are from a range of backgrounds, such as speech and language therapists, occupational therapists or cognitive therapists, each bringing their own skill set and their own goals.

Davis et al. reviewed 20 studies, whose sample sizes ranged from one to 64 participants. The way outcomes were determined and measured varied greatly, for example in one study the Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scales and the Aberrant Behaviour Checklist were used,

while in other studies direct observations, anecdotal accounts and researcher created questionnaires were used. The interventions used different animals, which is an additional factor in the difficulties faced when comparing studies. However, they were able to confidently conclude that, in order for an intervention to be effective, there would need to be a professional trainer who had a recognised form of accreditation. They found that the majority of the studies which they looked at did not provide evidence of effectiveness.

Kendall, Maujean, Pepping, Downes, Lakhani, Myren and Macfarlane (2015) support this conclusion, writing that ‘it is difficult to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of these interventions.’

They describe weaknesses in design as being: small sample sizes; lack of control groups; different underlying principles, methods and proposed outcomes. Methods to assess progress towards outcomes included the Childhood Autism Rating Scale and the Autism Treatment Evaluation Checklist. They wrote that equine activities seemed to be used in order to facilitate relationship building and bonding skills which could be transferred to home life. They found that the studies by Gabriels (2012) and Memishevikj (2010) showed improvements in symptoms of autism, such as expressive language skills, motor skills, motor planning skills and self-regulation skills.

Another review of interventions was undertaken by May, Seivert, Cano, Casey & Johnson (2016).

They too criticised the quality control of efficacy studies, repeating the message of previous reviews that there need to be clear descriptions of procedures (in order for clinical replication) and fidelity of treatment. There would also need to be a control group, post-treatment follow-up time points and testable dependant variables such as blood pressure and respiratory and pulse rates. Qualitative studies were excluded from their review.

They quoted the need for standardised assessments, multiple methods of assessment, such as observer ratings, self-reports, and statistical tests to strengthen support for the conclusions made by the study.

O'Haire (2013) had found that although most studies were limited by methodological weaknesses, there was 'preliminary proof of concept' of the use of Animal Assisted Interventions for people with autism.

O' Haire quoted a study by Esposito (2011) which found that children with autism reacted in positive ways to the horses due to their calmness and the feelings that the children had that the horses were non-judgemental and acted as a source of support. O'Haire found results of a study using physiological measurements to be the most compelling, as they showed reduced cortisol in children taking part in the intervention with horses. Her findings from the literature

were that horses and other animals could promote social interaction, give focus, allow the children to feel a sense of freedom and safety, and feelings of well-being. She concluded that the most commonly cited benefit was that the children increased their social interaction in the presence of an animal. The summary of the review was that:

“Preliminary findings suggest that AAI may be related to reduced stress and increased well-being through enhanced mood, motivation and energy.” (p1615).

O’Haire cited Martin and Farnum (2002) who reported on the theorized benefits of animal interactions. They, like Keaveney (2008) were interested in exploring the possible mechanisms in the interventions that could lead to benefits found in empirical studies.

They wrote:

“Although some proposed theories of the benefits of AAI are shared by authors in varying degrees of detail, the exact processes in which these benefits are realized remain unclear among studies in this review”. (p 670)

2.13 Formulation of the research questions for this study.

It became clear after reviewing the available literature regarding theories and outcomes of AAI that there was a need to address these main questions in this study: ‘What do the participants, staff and therapists mean by the term Equine Assisted therapy?’; ‘What do the young people learn from it?’ and ‘In what ways, and how does

Equine Assisted therapy help them, if at all?’ and ‘What framework is used to underpin such therapy?’

The main research aims in this qualitative small-scale study were therefore:

- To explore perceptions of Equine Assisted therapy with adolescents with autism, their staff and therapists;
- To seek for commonalities and differences in and between the three groups;
- To explore ideas around the process of Equine Assisted Therapy, and the theoretical framework and possible mechanisms for such interventions.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will give a description of the rationale behind the choice of methodology, the epistemology, research position and model of research, the methods used, and the rationale for the specific type of Thematic Analysis adopted.

The aim of the research is to explore perceptions and to construct new knowledge with young people with autism who attend the Equine Assisted therapy, their care staff and the therapists who design and deliver the programme. With the research questions in mind, the process outlined by (Silverman,1993) was chosen as a framework to guide the research.

3.2 The model and epistemology

This small-scale research was carried out using a qualitative approach. In the journey to find new knowledge, the researcher needs to be aware of their own epistemological stance and how this influences the research process (Parker, 2005). Qualitative research needs to be trustworthy and credible, and the researcher's perspectives and beliefs therefore needed to be made clear (Stern, 2013). A social constructivist model was chosen as a consequence of the epistemological stance. This is a belief that individuals construct

their own knowledge in dynamic interplay with a priori knowledge, and through interactions with other people.

Epistemology is a specific area of philosophy which concerns itself with belief systems about knowledge and truth.

Epistemologists such as Quine (O'Brien, 2006) believe that we have a duty to question all that we believe and that we should have a scientific account of how we come to have the beliefs that we have. Researchers and applied psychologists should have an awareness of their own beliefs in as far as this is possible, and the ability to reflect on: how these beliefs came to be, why one set of beliefs was chosen above another, and therefore whether or not the belief system is 'justified'. Ethically, educational and child psychologists need to work within their own justified belief system. Research needs to be ethical, and part of this includes creating congruence between one's belief systems and one's actions and method (Stern, 2013).

Whether or not one accepts that a belief can be seen as the result of cognitive evaluations (in the light of probability) or emotional acceptance, or in terms of 'obligations', rather than evidence, forms the essence of the debate amongst epistemologists such as (Alston, 1989).

'You need to voluntarily perform those mental actions that tend to bring about a self-reflective stance in the agent, which in turn

increases that likelihood that the agent's doxastic state properly connects back to her evidence' (p.246 Alston).

Alston posits that we exercise a 'deontological' judgement towards our beliefs. In other words, justification of belief is within our consciousness. However, this is hotly contested, with many current philosophers of science arguing that not many of our mental actions come to light in our consciousness, indeed language, for example, should be seen as 'fragments' of our thoughts that come to light (Chomsky in Alston).

This debate is important when viewed in the light of how researchers make decisions about which model to choose, and their interpretations of what other people say, for example when constructing codes and themes in Thematic Analysis.

Quine (O'Brien, 2006) claims that we should aim to give a 'scientific' account of how we came to have the beliefs that we have, and this is attempted in some aspects of theoretical Thematic Analysis.

However, if mental processes are mainly subconscious, (a theory posited by Chomsky), then it would hold true that having a conscious 'scientific' account of our beliefs would not be possible. Therefore, it could be argued that the interpretation stage of Thematic Analysis could indeed be carried out 'intuitively'. This belief guided the

decision of whether or not to choose theoretical or inductive

Thematic Analysis.

Audi (Hendricks,2008) proposes that a belief is more like a response to external grounds than as a result of an ‘internal volitive thrust’. If this is the case, then the concept that beliefs and knowledge are formed as the result of a process of dynamic interaction with others should be accepted. In other words, beliefs and knowledge are formed through a process of evaluating, connecting and reflecting between what the researcher and the participants say.

In summary, epistemology is a specific branch of philosophy which debates the nature of belief systems. It can be argued that our beliefs and concepts and what we hold to be ‘true’ are formed via social phenomenon and the way we use an individual framework to interpret the phenomenon.

As Lincoln and Guba (2011) write:

“Knowledge accumulates only in relative sense through the formation of ever more informed and sophisticated constructions via the hermeneutical/dialectic process, as varying constructions are brought into juxtaposition.” (p.115)

It is necessary to look at the historical and social context of prevailing beliefs in groups as well as in individuals. The guiding model for this research was that meaning and knowledge is socially

constructed, through dialectic interactions with others, using language, and that individuals form their own constructs within those interactions. The research is therefore carried out from a social constructivist stance.

3.3 Hermeneutics

Thematic Analysis involves the description and interpretation of the data (Braun, & Clarke, 2006) and the process of interpretation and deciding on truth and knowledge is called hermeneutics.

It is important for researchers when interpreting the data to be aware of how this judgement is made and how to adjudicate and evaluate. (Caputo, 2013) argues against an extreme relativist position, which, he explains, concludes that the truth is whatever truth means to an individual. Interpretation needs insight, judgement, discernment, dynamics, dialogue and debate (Caputo, 2013). A discussion about how the interpretations were made is detailed in the section on analysis.

3.4 Researcher position

In qualitative research the context of the researcher and their culture is important, (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Willig, 2008) since interpretation of the data will necessarily be context driven. One criticism of such a stance is that researcher subjectivity leads to bias

in the interpretation of other people's constructed meaning. It is to be recognised that a white, middle aged, heterosexual British female researcher will have to interpret meaning and 'truth' from young men from a different culture, or with autism, bearing this difference in mind, and it would therefore probably not be authentic, trustworthy or credible unless this was taken into account and made explicit for the reader to judge.

The researcher stance in this study is to be viewed within the personal and social context of life at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century in Western Europe, heavily influenced by undergraduate study of German language and philosophy. The researcher's beliefs around research and applied practice are justified within a framework of hermeneutics influenced predominantly by Nietzsche's premise that: 'belief is a fact that is a constructed interpretation'; (Blackburn, 2005), and by the idea of 'language games', or 'multiple truths', proposed by Wittgenstein (O'Grady, 2004).

According to Wittgenstein, (Ayer, 1973) our beliefs are not formed as the result of a single philosophical proposition, instead they are formed via a whole system of propositions. Our values and theories, memories and expectation determine how the observations 'speak'. Wittgenstein proposed that we have a 'web of beliefs'. He argued for polarities, that is, in order to have a belief, we have to doubt. It is

likely that this has influenced the work of Kelly and his theory of Personal Constructs, (Kelly, 1955). The argument for polarities could also have influenced constructivism, in that individuals listen to other people in groups and in society, and take on or reject beliefs and constructs. Constructs, according to Kelly, can be personal, shared in a group, or shared as a social construct.

In conclusion, it seems that the nature and purpose of 'truth' means different things to different people, as proposed by Wittgenstein and supported by Willig, (2008) who states:

'The problem with the social constructionist and the realist positions is that they are mutually exclusive. One way to solve this dilemma is to say that both positions are necessary for specific purposes and must co-exist'. (p.52).

It would not be justifiable in a research study about perceptions to use the language of the 'natural science game' of physics. A social constructivist stance was adopted, using qualitative research methods, in a creative, reflective way, with the purpose of jointly discussing and constructing new knowledge around what people think happens during Equine Assisted therapy. Thematic Analysis was used, adopting a mixture of inductive and deductive approaches, as will be explained in this chapter.

3.5 The model and methodology of the research

3.5.1 Concept of research

The author's concept of research is that it can be a process whereby either a) a new hypothesis is formed following a set 'naturalist' 'reductionist' framework, and that this hypothesis is further tested in a cycle. The truth of the findings is agreed by following the same methods and standing up to the critique of other scientists, or b) that perceptions can be explored, interpreted and subsequently lead to the formulation of new insights and new knowledge. This research follows the latter concept and therefore uses a qualitative approach. The decision was made according to whether or not the qualitative research was exploratory or confirmatory, as illustrated in table 1 below.

Table 1: An illustration of the different forms of qualitative research.

| Exploratory | Confirmatory |
|---|--|
| <p>Aims to find out what people think about a topic, eg Equine Assisted therapy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do young people, their staff and therapists think about Equine Assisted Therapy and how it might work.• Codes are not predetermined – semi structured interviews will not have codes set before the interviews | <p>Aims to test a hypothesis e.g. 'Equine Assisted Therapy will help increase self- confidence.'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Specific codes would be predetermined before conducting interviews which ask all the participants the same questions in the same order• Codes will have been generated from the hypothesis |

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Codes and themes are derived from the data • Data is generated – not looking at historical documents, but could be compared with literature. • Purposive sampling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could use existing data and predetermine the questions. • Random sampling |
|---|--|

The aim of this small-scale research was to explore perceptions of three groups of people about the same topic, Equine Assisted therapy. It was therefore an exploratory study rather than a confirmatory study. The focus of the research was not to confirm a hypothesis, although there were some broad ideas to be considered from the literature base.

The next step was to decide which exploratory techniques and methods of analysis to use with these aims and research questions.

The choice of methodology in qualitative research includes:

Grounded Theory, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Discourse Analysis or Thematic Analysis. This is illustrated below in table 2.

Table 2. Table to illustrate different qualitative methodologies.

| Grounded Theory | Thematic Analysis |
|---|--|
| <p>Aims to build theory (either for applied or pure research purposes)</p> <p>Work with transcripts. Read and re read transcripts.</p> <p>Identify structure in the transcripts</p> <p>Build theoretical models from the data</p> <p>Check them against the data</p> <p>There will be emergent theory</p> <p>Themes will be elaborated and constantly evolving</p> <p>Techniques are inductive</p> <p>Works with small groups</p> <p>Main proponents: Corbin and Strauss.</p> | <p>Aims to describe and interpret, arriving at some understanding how people think about a certain topic within a particular context and to work out how the finding could be relevant to applied practice.</p> <p>The researcher works with transcripts. Read and re read transcripts.</p> <p>Develop a list of codes which is iterative and not finalised until all the transcripts have been initially coded.</p> <p>Identify possible themes once the list is in place. Compare and contrast – within each transcript, across groups, against the literature.</p> <p>Build a model, usually visually, check, go back. Build a consensus with co coders.</p> <p>Implicit and explicit ideas are identified within the data through the process of analysis</p> <p>There can be some numerical representation, for example code frequencies and the code occurrences but this would not be used in a parametrical way, rather, to illustrate, describe and help to make sense of the data for interpretation.</p> <p>Techniques can be both inductive and deductive</p> <p>Works with larger groups, but also when the aim is to</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| | <p>compare themes across groups.</p> <p>No main proponents of thematic analysis as one pure theory bound methodology, as it is more eclectic, adaptable and used in ways that are dependent on context. Articles and a book about applied thematic analysis have been written by: Attride-Sterling, Braun and Clark; Guest, MacQueen and Namey.</p> |
| <p>Phenomenological (or Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis)</p> | <p>Thematic Analysis and Hermeneutics</p> |
| <p>Aims to find out more about lived experiences, feelings and perceptions.</p> <p>Open ended questions</p> <p>Conversational inquiry</p> <p>Dynamic conversations between the researcher and the interviewees.</p> <p>Inductive probing – clarify meanings and expressions</p> <p>Encourage the participants to tell their own narratives and share their experiences.</p> <p>Works with a group of people with similar issues, eg. what is it like to be a mother of a child with autism.</p> <p>Main proponents: Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, and Smith, Flowers and Larkin.</p> | <p>The aim is to use interpretive techniques in order to answer the research questions; what do people think about Equine Assisted Therapy, how does it help them (or not).</p> <p>In addition, the researcher is looking to interpret what could lie beyond the spoken word, ie. ‘manifest’ and ‘latent’ themes, and to come to some new ideas about the Equine Assisted Therapy.</p> <p>The researcher needs to be aware of subjective bias in the interpretation, hence the iterative discussions with co-coders.</p> |

Discourse Analysis

The aim is to look for meaning via structure and meaning within the transcripts and articles, books or films.

The data could be seen as being 'proxy for experience' – meaning is expressed through language in action.

Perceptions, feeling and knowledge are expressed in the transcripts.

The transcripts are generated through co construction of meaning through language, with the researcher.

Works with social psychology. Topics include social cognitions; stereotyping and prejudice, language and power

Main proponents: Foucault, Derrida.

3.5.2 Theory and the justification for the choice of Thematic Analysis

There is a lot of overlap between the different forms of qualitative research frameworks, each with their own merits. It took some time to consider which approach to adopt, using the comparisons outlined in diagram 3, and the reasons for choosing Thematic Analysis are now explained.

3.5.3 Thematic Analysis

According to Braun and Clarke (2013), Thematic Analysis is a named approach which was first developed by Gerald Holton in the 1970s. However, over the years since then, Thematic Analysis has been used and refined, so that it is now regarded as being a ‘category of approaches’.

In its broadest sense, Thematic Analysis is a term used to denote the qualitative approach of creating themes (or some people argue ‘searching for themes’), and attributing meaning to themes found in the data so that new knowledge or theory can be constructed, or, depending on the standpoint of the researcher, discovered.

Gibson, (2009) writes that the general set of aims in Thematic Analysis is to examine commonalities and differences, and to move from description of data to an explanatory analysis. This can sound deceptively simple, and the process itself will be discussed in this section.

“Thematic Analysis is not a particular approach in and of itself; rather, it is a broad category of approaches to qualitative analysis that seek to define themes within the data and organise these themes with some type of structure to aid interpretation “

(p.206, Brooks, (2015).

Some researchers believe that themes and patterns are to be ‘found’, for example Aronson, (1995) writes that the researcher using Thematic Analysis ‘looks for’ identifiable themes and patterns which the researcher pieces together to form a ‘comprehensive picture of their collective experience, while Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) oppose the use of the expression ‘emerging themes’ explaining that this lends support to the idea that themes are to there to be discovered rather than created.

In the case of this research, it was preferable to say that themes were created by the researcher.

3.5.4 Flexibility of approach and different types of Thematic Analysis

Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) report that Thematic Analysis is the most commonly used method of analysis in qualitative research. Part of its appeal may lie in its flexibility (Brooks et al, 2015) and the way that it can be used from a range of epistemological positions.

While other methods used, such as those in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and Grounded Theory have become explicitly and intricately linked with their own stance and methodology, researchers using a more generic approach such as

‘Thematic Analysis’, need to justify explicitly their epistemological position and the consequent approach towards analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Guest et al., 2012).

It is the analysis of the data set that is the key, and various researchers choose slightly different ways to carry out, and illustrate, the process of moving from the description and depiction of the data to the attribution of meaning to the data.

In Thematic Analysis, the choice of how to set about and carry out the analysis of the data rests with the researcher. Attride-Stirling, (2001) emphasises that the analytic stage can be both highly intuitive and ‘theoretically driven’.

Aronson, (1995) writes from a constructivist position; she believes that constructivism as an epistemology requires flexibility and consideration of different ways of interpreting any results of the research. There is a dialectic process, synthesising a priori and new themes (Brooks, 2015) A constructivist researcher approaches the inquiry in a way that will ‘yield multiple perspectives of the same data’ (p128, Lincoln et al., 2011).

The researcher position in this study maintains that insight into the meaning of data goes beyond the surface level of the words themselves. In other words, there can both manifest and latent

themes. As Wittgenstein (in Ayer, 1973) put it, the meaning of words is best understood as their use within a given ‘language game.’

This means that words need to be interpreted in different lights according to context. Madil, Jordan and Shirley call this ‘contextual constructivism’ (in Brooks et al, 2015). During the construction of meaning, interpretation will lead the researcher to go beyond the words themselves, at the so called ‘semantic level’ to a more abstract level, and this can be done across cases as well as individual cases.

“Thematic analyses move beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focus on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes.” (p.65, Guest et al., 2012)

Words, then, are used and interpreted by individuals differently and by individuals interacting, to arrive at a common understanding at that point.

The process of how the researcher decides to interpret the meaning of words is discussed below.

Table 3 Different approaches of Thematic Analysis (TA)

| <u>TA with Constant Comparison</u> | <u>TA with Theoretical Analysis</u> |
|---|---|
| Data are analysed while collected. | Predetermined themes are used to categorise the data collected. |
| The first participant’s data are analysed each subsequent | The researcher has pre-conceptions and theories to explore. |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>participant's data is compared with that of the previous.</p> <p>Analysis moves back and forth between current data and previous data.</p> <p>Patterns and themes grow as analysis continues.</p> <p>Use of <i>Template Analysis</i>. The first interviews form a template for coding, and the template is revised constantly.</p> <p>(Aronson)</p> | <p>New themes can arise, but usually the data fits the pre-existing categories.</p> <p>Use of <i>Thematic Networks</i>. Progression made from accepted data to theoretical interpretation.</p> <p>(Attride-Stirling)</p> <p><i>Concept Maps</i>. Kerwin-Boudreau and Luttner-Miller.</p> |
| <p><u>Inductive and deductive TA</u></p> <p>Makes use of ideas that have previously been created and are found in the literature.</p> <p>Compares literature with patterns seen in the data.</p> <p>New knowledge is formed.</p> <p>Seven stages of Analysis.</p> <p>(Braun & Clarke)</p> | <p><u>Inductive TA</u></p> <p>Researcher must set aside pre-conceptions.</p> <p>Analyse the data individually.</p> <p>Repeating patterns are synthesised to form a composite synthesis.</p> <p>The synthesis helps the researcher to interpret the question under investigation.</p> |

3.5.5 The approach chosen for this study: Inductive and Deductive

Thematic Analysis

The choice of approach thus varies according to the researcher's epistemological stance and the nature of the research question. The process of creating themes varies in its sequencing and the justification for the themes, depending on one's epistemological beliefs.

When using Inductive Analysis, the researcher codes all the data and works from what is empirically available and uses the data to go back and forth in constant comparison between the data in order to construct the new knowledge. It is theoretical and interpretative in that themes are defined on a more abstract level by the researcher at a later stage.

This approach is closely aligned to the approach used in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). In IPA, group level themes are taken from individuals.

According to Smith Flowers and Larkin, there is:

“ ..no clear right of wrong way of conducting this sort of analysis, and we encourage IPA researchers to be innovative in the ways that they approach it.” (p 80).

Flexibility is given to the researcher to decide on the weighting of detail of analysis between what is analysed on an individual level in comparison to on a group level:

“Great variety is possible in terms of the detail of the particular analysis and the relative weighting to group and individual.” (p106)

They write that analysis has an iterative and inductive cycle which progresses from a line by line analysis to a more interpretative account for the group as a whole. The interpretation of what is said by the participant can be carried out on different levels, and the interpretation can be informed by general psychological interest, but without being influenced by a ‘pre-existing formal theoretical position.’

Using both inductive and deductive analysis means that the researcher synthesises ideas which have been previously created with new ideas which arise, leading to formation of a new synthesis of knowledge. This aligns with the epistemological position of social constructivism, and therefore this approach was adopted in this study.

3.5.6 The tools used for the analysis

In Thematic Networks, the full process of analysis is split into three broad stages; the reduction or breakdown of the text; the exploration of the text, and the integration of the exploration. Each stage involves

interpretation and is hierarchical in that each stage becomes more abstract.

Attride-Stirling, (2001) names the themes as 'Basic themes, organizing themes and global themes'. The organizing themes are interpreted in the light of basic themes, and global themes have a concluding tenet, or present an argument (or this could be called 'new knowledge').

Attride-Stirling's concept is applied in this research, as the argument is accepted that each decision made in each stage of the coding, whether choosing to include or exclude, or whether to group into a theme is made by the researcher, who will have previous knowledge from reading the literature.

Attride-Stirling is keen to point out that the Thematic Networks are a tool in the analysis, not the analysis itself. The point made here is that reasons for deciding on themes are made explicit, and this gives a framework for the process as a researcher. The use of Thematic Networks was adopted.

The decision was made to use both the practical approach of Braun & Clarke (2013) and the theoretical concepts of Attride-Stirling (2001).

3.6 Thematic Analysis using Braun and Clarke’s seven stages (2013). A mix of inductive analysis, analysis with constant comparison, and theoretical analysis, with adaptations to incorporate ideas by Attride-Stirling.

Braun and Clarke’s seven stage procedure outlines how one might approach the analysis in a step by step manner. While Attride-Stirling (2001) presents a theoretical rationale, and describes the thinking process behind each stage, Braun and Clarke give more detailed practical guidance below:

1 Transcription

Turn the audio data into written text (or transcripts) by writing down what was said and how it was said, so the data can be systematically coded and analysed. Transcription will need to be verbatim, but not at the level of discourse analysis. In this study, the transcriptions were carried out by the researcher, to aid so called ‘immersion’ into the data set.

2 Reading & Familiarization Read and re-read the transcripts in order to become intimately familiar with the content.

In this research the analysis began by noticing and noting things of interest and relevance to the research questions. Notes were written on the margins of the transcripts. (see Appendix 1, Initial coding of a

transcript). These two steps form a parallel to the Reduction stage described by Attride- Stirling.

3 Selective Coding

Aspects of the data that related to the research questions were noted, and initial coding was made, for example in this study the concept of ‘trust’. This is akin to the Basic themes of Attride -Stirling. Counting the words alone, via the navigation tool, did not give an accurate reflection of the strength of the concept, for example counting the word ‘trust’ would show that all the therapists used the word, three of the five young people used the word, but only two of the staff used the word (See Appendix 2, occurrence of specific words) However, the concept was strong, because even when the staff had not used the word, they gave examples of behaviours showing trust, such as the way the young people were allowed to take horses out without reins, or carry out tasks without direct supervision.

4 Identify Themes

Features that captured something important about the data in relation to the research question were found, for example ‘Picking up on and reflecting our mood.’ This runs in parallel to the idea of ‘Organising themes’ in Attride -Stirling.

5 Review Themes

Candidate themes were categorised with the coded data and the decision was made whether or not themes formed a narrative that corresponded with the data; this added quality control in relation to the analysis, for example the use of the word 'energy' and how this is used in relation to the theme of 'Reflecting our mood.'

This was seen as a form of the integration of themes, as conceptualised by Attride-Stirling.

6 Define and name Themes

Themes were made by stating what was unique and specific about each one; this helped to define the focus and boundaries of the themes. The themes were colour coded (see Appendix 3, colour coding). One example was the theme of Trust.

This is to make explicit the justification for the creation and integration of the themes, (Basic, Organising and Global) as seen in Attride-Stirling.

7 Write the Report

Braun and Clarke (2013) explain that the report should be written by selecting compelling, vivid examples of data extracts, (verbatim quotes) and relating them back to the research question and literature.

This was done, adding new literature in the light of the new themes in Chapter Five.

The overlap between Attride-Stirling and Braun and Clarke's description of the process served to complement the approach chosen for this study, and this led to the decision to use both the practical guidance set out in the seven steps, and to use some of the ways to make explicit the choices on how to create the themes at the three levels, ie code/Basic theme; Organising theme and overarching/Global theme.

In order to be credible and trustworthy, the researcher aimed to be congruent, and to make explicit the decisions around their epistemological position, the context, the decisions on how the themes were constructed and the links with the research questions.

3.7 Pilot study

The interview format was trialled with a horse owner who was about to begin a course to become trained in delivering Equine Assisted therapist. Although she did not have much experience of delivering Equine Assisted therapy, unlike the therapists in the main research, she did have some theoretical knowledge, and a keen interest in how Equine Assisted therapy may work. The pilot interview took place approximately two weeks before the data collection for this study, to

allow for time for adjustments if necessary. It became clear that the use of a Dictaphone was daunting for the researcher, and there was anxiety about it not working. Two Dictaphones were used during each interview, and the interviews took place in the room was next to the IT consultant in the setting. There was also a temptation to prompt during pauses. A conscious effort was made to address these two issues during the data gathering. There was a temptation to adjust some of the questions so that if there were pauses and hesitations, some questions could be used to prompt and develop rapport. An explanation was given about taking photographs at random to be discussed in an interview.

3.8 Participants and recruiting the participants

3.8.1 Adolescents with autism in a residential setting

The participants were taken from an opportunity sample: they included five adolescent males in Key Stages 3 and 4 of their education in a residential school for young men with Autism and challenging behaviour. The other participants included the four therapists who deliver the Equine Assisted therapy, and five adults who support the young people in the residential setting and who have experience of going to the Equine Centre. All the participants were already familiar with the researcher, who was based in the setting as a full time educational and child psychologist, which could be seen as

both a strength and weakness in the design. Pupils with autism sometimes find it difficult to talk to unfamiliar people, yet on the other hand, it might be suggested that they may find it hard to separate a general conversation with the researcher with a research interview, and they may also seek to give answers which they think will please the researcher.

All potential participants for the study were provided with an information sheet outlining the expectations of the research (see Appendix 4). More young people volunteered to take part than was necessary, and so it was explained that the inclusion criteria stated that the participants would be those who were taking part in the intervention at the time of the data gathering.

An informed consent form including research rationale (see Appendices 4 & 5) was given to all the fourteen participants, and the young people's parents or guardian signed the form in addition to the young person (see Appendix 6).

3.8.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria. Pupils, staff and therapists

The young people who took part were those who were attending Equine Assisted therapy at the time of the data collection period.

The young people in this setting attend the Equine Assisted therapy usually one afternoon per week, and usually for two terms. However, if they are working towards an externally accredited qualification, such as Equido, they can attend for three terms or even longer. Their attendance is voluntary, and the permission for them to go is granted after consideration by the school's 'intervention meetings' which take place with the Senior Management Team and members of the therapy team, which consists of psychologists, a speech and language therapist and an occupational therapist. Some of the young people in the setting are not able to go to the Equine Centre because they have allergies. Consideration is also given to the animals' welfare, so that if it is felt that a young person may harm a horse, the young person is not given permission to attend.

There were no female adolescents in the sample because the residential school is only for young men with a diagnosis of autism. Although one female attended the Equine Centre from another setting, the decision was made that it would not be helpful to interview her, because the researcher did not have the same background knowledge on her as on the young men, and the context of the participants' background was to be explained to the reader. It would also have been difficult logistically to find a member of staff at her school to take part in the study.

The project did not include pupils who are non-verbal or who have significant sensory impairments because such pupils do not attend this school. The research sample for this study was therefore an opportunity sample of participants who were able to understand and respond to the research questions verbally, and who fully understood the information provided on the informed consent forms.

A notice was put up in the residential homes on the school site, and in the staffroom asking for any volunteers to take part in the study. The main criterion was that they had experience of taking the young men to the Equine Therapy centre.

Parents were not invited to take part in the interviews as none of them had been to the Equine Therapy centre (unlike the staff who accompany the young men). Logistically it would have been difficult, as the parents of these participants live at great distances away from the school.

The adults who run the Equine Therapy centre were asked verbally if they would like to take part in the study. They have varying levels of training to deliver Equine Assisted Therapy. One of the therapists is also a trained and experienced psychotherapist. All the therapists at the centre are keen and able horse riders and are competent in horse management.

They all have some training in teaching communication skills, in particular to young people with autism, while the lead therapist also has twenty years' experience as a speech and language therapist.

3.8.3 What happens during the Equine Assisted Therapy sessions

The young people travel together by minibus from the setting to the Equine Centre, which is in a rural setting.

They arrive at the yard and the therapists ensure that everyone is greeted.

They get together in the converted stable, which has a large table and facilities to have drinks and to complete worksheets. They ask each other how they are, and discuss what they did last time.

They are given visual schedules of the tasks to be done in the session.

They discuss a point of horse behaviour/psychology, such as body language or herd mentality, and how this can relate to human body language and behaviours, linking it with some incidents which may have occurred in the setting. They learn about horse anatomy.

The young people carry out specific tasks, sometimes in pairs with other young people, sometimes with an adult. These tasks can be related to looking after the horses' physical needs, such as grooming, massaging, preparing the stables, preparing food, or tasks which involve relationship building with the horse, such as long lining and

lunging, or getting the horse to follow you at different speeds. Time alone with a horse of choice is given, as in some cases the young people like to talk to the horse on their own. The therapist can then discuss that conversation if the young person so wishes.

The salient information is taken from the young people's Individual Care Plans (which include educational information).

Table 4. An overview of pertinent details of the participants.

A) Pupils with autism who took part in the therapy

| <u>Pseudonym</u> | <u>Age, gender, ethnicity</u> | <u>Salient information</u> |
|------------------|---|--|
| Simon | 17. Male pupil. Diagnosis of ASD and Attachment disorder. Adopted but living away from adoptive parents, in the residential setting. White British. | Had been at the school for a year and facing a tribunal to continue the placement into sixth form. Very keen to please any member of staff. Some social anxiety and feelings of despair. Receives |

| | | |
|--------|--|---|
| | | <p>additional CBT from a clinical psychologist.</p> |
| Edward | <p>14. Male pupil. Diagnosis of ASD. White British.</p> | <p>Had been at the school since year 7. Had difficulties with social interactions and has a need to be 'in control' of other young people. Very keen to please adults. Sometimes can be violent, followed by remorse.</p> |
| Johnny | <p>15. Male pupil. Diagnosis of autism. White British.</p> | <p>The arrival of a new baby at his home in the previous year was at the forefront of his mind during the data gathering period. Had started to self-harm and become distressed in</p> |

| | | |
|--------|--|--|
| | | <p>school.</p> <p>Had started to attack staff and other young people. Social services involvement.</p> |
| Adrian | <p>13. Male pupil.</p> <p>Diagnosis of autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Dual heritage.</p> | <p>Very poor attention and will act impulsively. He is often hyper-aroused and has self-harmed. Had been on Child Protection for neglect issues.</p> |
| Alan | <p>12. Male pupil.</p> <p>Diagnosis of autism. White British.</p> | <p>Very capable intellectually. He lacks empathy and can take language very literally.</p> |

B) Members of staff who accompany the pupils

| | | |
|--------|---|--|
| Esther | 25-35. Female member of staff in the residential setting, overlapping with school. White British. | Has worked for several years in the setting. A keen horse rider in the past. Has a sister with autism. |
| Susan | 25-35. Female member of non- teaching staff. White British. | Has worked for two years in the setting. Helps to evaluate interventions for the setting. Has a degree in psychology. |
| Joan | 50-60 Female member of staff. White British. | Has worked for ten years in the setting. |
| Jan | 35-45 Male member of non- teaching staff. White British. | Has a very keen interest in outdoor education. |
| Dustin | 35-45. Male member of non- teaching staff. | Has a very keen interest in outdoor education and |

| | | |
|--|----------------|-------------------------------|
| | White British. | extra- curricular activities. |
|--|----------------|-------------------------------|

C) Therapists who design and deliver the intervention

| | | |
|---------|---|---|
| Alison | 35-45. Female. White British. Accredited in Equine therapy. Trained and experienced speech and language therapist. | The lead therapist at the centre. At the time of the data gathering she was very ill, but wanted to take part in the study |
| Malcolm | 45-55 Male. White British. Psychotherapist. Accredited Equine therapist. | Designs and delivers Equine therapy to individuals and groups. Psychotherapy trained. Delivers speech and language therapy on the school site. |
| Dorothy | 25-35. Female. White British. | Experienced in looking after |

| | | |
|-----------|---|--|
| | Stable manager. | horses (all her life). Delivers speech and language therapy on the school site. |
| Ellie-May | 45-55. Female. White American. Volunteer at the centre. | On an internship as a therapist, to learn how to deliver Equine Therapy. |

The adolescents and their parents/carers gave written consent for them to take part in the research project in line with guidance from the British Psychological Society and Cardiff University Ethics committees (see Appendix 5).

3.9 Research procedure

Interviews were used which were semi-structured in that factual, ‘warm up’ questions were used, and certain prompt questions if the interviewee needed help in finding things to say. As Punch (2002) points out, it is necessary to take into account the competencies of the research subjects.

3.9.1 Interview model

(Banister, 2001) conceptualise four models of interviews, namely: ethnographic (spending time with the people in their context before the interview); post- modernist (concentrating on the differences in agendas between the researcher and interviewees); feminist (concentrating on power shifts during the interviews) and the ‘new paradigm’ approach in which the interviewer is seen as a co-researcher. The aims of this research were to explore perceptions of the various participants, and so although some time had been spent with the participants before the interview, the time spent had not been in relationship with the study. It was not, therefore, an ethnographic study. The initial paradigm was to reshape and build new knowledge as a co-researcher but it also became clear that the focus shifted to a more post-modernist approach. The interviews made it clear that there were no right or wrong answers, and that the participants had more knowledge than the researcher in terms of the processes of Equine Assisted therapy, but each participant had their own agenda, as did the researcher.

Parker (2005) describes interviews as being a ‘conversation with a purpose’. Some researchers, who analyse data from a position of pragmatism, for example (Corbin, 1990), who believe that knowledge is formed only at that specific time, in the interactions, while others

would argue from a contextual constructivist stance, that the knowledge constructed at interview is partly based on previous knowledge and pre-conceptions. This is a view put forward by (King, 2012). The stance of the researcher in this study is that of a contextual, social constructivist.

It is the researcher's belief that the traditional interview encounter is neither one way nor static. Sometimes the researcher has to make judgements during the process of the interviews. As (Spyrou, 2016) warns, we come across silences and resistances, and she advises us to reflect on them. In other words, during the interview, the researcher makes judgements about whether or not the participants feel discomfort, or fear or anxiety, or whether the participants are putting on a front, hiding their real opinions out of motivations unknown to the researcher. The interview, then, is not a standardised and mechanical approach, but one where the unique relation between human beings determines the result, a point also made by (Brinkman, 2015).

3.9.2 Power asymmetry

The researcher has to constantly reflect and judge, and consider for example that the attempt to turn silences into speech could be unethical – the participants might find answering questions painful, or embarrassing, and they might feel a need to protect people they

know. This is a point highlighted by Spyrou (2016). These were factors borne in mind by the researcher during all the interviews, and the judgements were indeed called upon.

In interviews there is also a ‘monopoly of interpretation’ because, as Brinkman, (2015) and Kvale, (2007) point out, it is the researcher who determines the topic, poses the questions and decides which answers to follow up.

The researcher aimed to be flexible and broad minded so that unusual points could be made in a relaxed atmosphere. Percy, Koster and Kostere (2015) make the point that the best interviews allow for surprising answers. In the case of this research, as will be shown in the discussion section, there were some surprising answers, despite the broad acceptance of the idea that it has school children often say what is expected of them, a point made by Percy et al. (2015).

In order to redress the issue of power asymmetry, the researcher made a conscious decision to avoid jargon or leading questions or questions that had more than one piece of information at a time.

These points are made by Brinkman and Kvale (2015) and are raised in the discussion section about interviewing young people with autism.

In further attempts to redress the power asymmetry, the researcher felt it necessary to go beyond a merely verbal interview. This was because the young participants have autism and associated language problems, albeit subtle in these participants.

The use of drawings and photographs as part of a combination of traditional research was considered. Developing rapport in an interview is needed, and using visual methods could be seen as one way of doing so.

It was not to be taken for granted that the young people would be able to express themselves in interview form, bearing in mind their autism. Questions which would act as 'ice breakers' were therefore purposely designed but the use of photographs to elicit opinions was used in order to add another dimension, alongside using traditional interview techniques. The photographs were used at stage three of the interview. This was because it was a semi-structured interview which began with the same, factual questions as ice breakers, gradually moving to more open ended questions, and finally using photographs to elicit participants' personal constructs.

3.9.3 The interview questions and the shape of the interview

Questionnaires and predetermined questions, with set categories for subsequent coding were not used. From a social constructivist

position the decision was made to respond to the participants' lead, and to jointly construct knowledge. However, as Braun and Clarke (2013) and Horrocks and King (2012) point out, the researcher does not come to an interview without presuppositions, assumptions and knowledge of the topic.

It therefore adds to trustworthiness of the study to show the reader explicitly how the questions were designed, and that they were based on the knowledge I had gained from the literature review. This led to the design of a semi -structured interview. The responses to the questions would be flexible and be led by the participant, and the sequence of the questions would not be rigid.

A mixture of open ended and some closed questions were therefore designed (see Appendix 8).

During the first stage of the interview, all the participants across the three groups were asked some simple 'introductory' questions to help them feel at ease and gain confidence, and to add context and background information along with themes that arose in the literature review. They were factually based questions, such as how long they had been going to the Equine Centre/ accompanying the young men to the Equine Centre/working at therapists with the horses.

In the second stage of the interview, questions were designed to elicit opinions and more open-ended questions which could be expanded on. The expectation was to be able to explore issues or themes which had either come arisen or not arisen in the literature search. The overarching question, underpinning the other questions was:

“So, could you tell me about what it is like going to Equine (Assisted) therapy?”

For the staff and therapists, the prompt questions were the same, except they were phrased in a way that encouraged them to explain what they saw the participants do, so for example “What normally happens at Equine therapy?” or ‘Do you think the boys have a favourite horse?/ do you have a favourite horse”

3.9.4 The use of photographs – prompts and projection

The decision was made to use photographs taken by the all three groups of participants themselves at the Equine therapy setting. This was with a dual purpose in mind. Firstly, the use of photographs could serve as a prompt to elicit views. Secondly, the taking of photographs could serve as a more oblique, ‘projective’ technique, in order to ask what the participant thought it was that had led them to take that particular picture. In projective techniques, one person will represent a thought or a feeling in symbolic ways, but thereafter, more importantly, a discussion took place about the photos and their

attributed meanings. These ideas are taken from personal construct psychology Kelly, (1955) and Punch, (2002).

Research using photographs has already been carried out with young people with autism (Hergenrather, Rhodes, Cowan, Bardhashi and Pula (2009) They describe Photovoice as a qualitative research methodology founded on the principles of constructivism. They are of the opinion that using photographs with research participants enables the participants to record and reflect their strengths and concerns through photographs.

According to Carnahan (2006) Photovoice was developed by Kroeger in 2004. Hergenrather et al. describe how photo discussions begin with a review of previous findings in the form of qualitative themes from previous photo assignments and photo discussions. Photo discussions allow participants to share and talk about the photographs they took for each photo assignment. Participants present their photos during a discussion with the researcher. The data of photo discussions are analysed like other qualitative data, through codifying data, and exploring, formulating, and interpreting themes.

The use of photography and using the methods prescribed in Photovoice can help elicit views firstly because it can help establish a rapport, and secondly, visual images can prompt memories, especially in people who have difficulties with recalling autobiographical events verbally (Hergenrather et al., 2009;

Carnaham, 2006). Eliciting views verbally is a problem often seen in autistic people (Tanweer, 2010) and one which needed to be taken into account in particular with the young participants.

Radley and Taylor (2010) explain that the use of photography to help research interviews is not new. They highlight the idea that using photographs can be seen as a way of establishing rapport with the interviewee, who comments on the images that they have produced. In talking about the photographs rather than having to answer questions directly, the respondent might feel more at ease, because the photographs provide contexts of their choice. This technique is adapted by Calam, Cox, Glasgow, Jimmieson and Groth Larsen (2000) for their 'In My Shoes' programme, a programme which had been used in professional practice by the researcher and which is designed to elicit views from children and young people using pictures on a computer screen.

Using photographs, especially with autistic participants, may well enhance motivational aspects, possibly due to the participant feeling more in control, because the choice of scene is theirs. Punch, (2002) had commented that the main benefit of using photographs was that the children enjoyed taking the photographs and learning how to use a camera. She reflected that the photographic technique did not depend on the children's ability, or their perceived ability, to depict

an image. This presumably helped with rapport building, partly by way of developing positive associations between the researcher and the participant.

Some participants may well have felt embarrassed about their drawing ability, had they been asked to draw pictures, a point also made by Punch (2002). This is true of adults as well as young participants. Photography can avoid the potential for such embarrassment.

The aim of the research in this study was to construct new knowledge and meaning. In projective techniques, symbols such as toys or pictures can be used to help discuss shared meanings. The reasons why some scenes (or horses) are photographed is a topic to share, along with the meanings behind the photographs.

“What photographs mean— what they come to mean—is, therefore, dependent on the readings that are made of them by patients and researchers together (Becker, 1998). Photographic images do not have a meaning independent of the contexts in which they are produced, displayed, and understood.”

(Wells, 2000, in Radley & Taylor, 2003, p79)

Punch (2002) concluded that it is important to discuss the meaning for the photograph with the young person:

“Spontaneous images of an event occurring at that moment were more likely to be captured than depicted in a drawing. This may have led to an overemphasis of importance for that event. For example, a photograph taken of boys fighting in the village square shows a

particular moment in time, but does not necessarily mean that fighting is a very important aspect of their lives. Also, the children might have been more tempted to take pictures of what they wanted to keep as a photograph afterwards. Alternatively, they may have taken pictures of what they considered makes a 'good' photograph. Such issues were important to bear in mind during the analysis stage, and highlight the importance of children describing their own reasons for taking the photographs" (p.333)

Another advantage of using visual methods she mentions is that it:

'may lessen the problems of an unequal power relationship between the adult researcher and the child participant, where the child may feel under pressure to respond relatively quickly in the 'correct' manner.' (p.335)

The photographs were taken by all the participants, that is, the young men with autism, their staff and the therapists. They were initially asked to go around the Equine Therapy centre and take whatever sprang to mind, no matter how random it would seem, five times. The photographs were then printed out on A4 paper and displayed together at the same time, with the participant being given a choice about which photograph to discuss first.

The participants were asked to describe each photograph, to explain what had led them to take the photograph, and to explain what feelings it gave them. They were asked to do this for all five photographs. The participants were then given the option to have their favourite photograph framed as a thank you gift for taking part in the study.

It was made clear to the participants that there were no right or wrong answers, and that it was a chance for them to think about their time at Equine therapy. There would be no set time limit on the interviews, but in effect there was an average time which was similar for all but one of the participants, that is, about 40 minutes.

Following the completion of their participation in the research, all participants received debrief forms (see Appendix 8) and the chance to discuss the interviews.

3.9.5 Research materials and environment

An audio recording device was used to record the interviews with prior consent of all participants. Two Dictaphones were used at the same time in case the battery ran out, or the audio file became full. I also asked the IT technician in the next room to check both the Dictaphones before the interviews.

In order to make the interview process seem relaxed, a soft light was used instead of using the fluorescent light, and ensured that there was a 'do not disturb' sign on the door. The Dictaphones were placed between the researcher and participant on a coffee table and sofas were used, rather than chairs. The room was in the main administration block of the building, so it was quiet there was no danger of being interrupted.

3.10 Ethical issues

3.10.1 A qualitative approach and power dynamics

The researcher was aware of power dynamics while conducting the research and to discuss this openly. This is an important aspect of the work of an educational psychologist, and will be discussed throughout the various stages of the research.

The research process itself may act as a means of empowering the participants by developing awareness of their own feelings and insights, for, as Spinoza (1986) states:

‘The more an emotion becomes known to us, the more it is within our power and the less the mind is passive to it.’ (p 215)

Rorty (Walsh, 2009b) believes that our awareness comes about by conceptualising sensory information by using language. Making the research a shared language experience with the participants should lead to joint insights about both the research process itself and its conclusions.

3.10.2 The differences and similarities between researching with children and adults

This research aimed to form new knowledge from interviews with adolescents, their care staff and the therapists. It was of interest to find out more about the differences in interactions on various levels

between the researcher and the different groups of participants, and it was important to realise that during the interactions in the interviews reflections would need to be made on the researcher's position and to respond with sensitivity and awareness. Researcher assumptions about child and adolescent development and the possibility of a difference in power dynamic when interviewing young people, as opposed to adults, needed to be considered.

In addition, the young people have autism, which would necessitate extra care when phrasing questions, responding to questions and understanding the meaning behind their answers.

Punch (2002) points out that there is an inherent danger in over-emphasising the differences between children and adult research, and that we should look at the diversity among children. This would extend to the research with adults and their differences too.

“It should be recognized that not all the research issues mentioned will be problematic with all children as a plurality of childhoods exists (Qvortrup,1994). It should also be acknowledged that it is misleading to talk about ‘child’ and ‘adult’ research methods, since the suitability of particular methods depends as much on the research context as on the research subject's stage in the life course.” (P 339)

On reflection, it seemed to be important as a researcher not to influence answers or impose researcher views, and that this would be all the more important when interviewing young people. This is a point raised by Punch, (2002). Punch writes about the danger of the

researcher imposing adult views because, she writes, we have our own perceptions of our own childhood and so we think we know about childhood, but in reality, we are making assumptions about childhood.

While it could also hold true for the adults in this research, due to pressures which will be explored in the discussion of context, it is likely to be the case that children and young people are used to having to try to please adults, and there was a possibility to bear in mind, both during the interviews and during the analysis stage, that young people may be exaggerating or telling lies during the unequal power relationships in research. Punch also makes the point that young people may fear adult reactions and hence try to please the researcher. In the case of this research, this could be held true of some of the adults, as will be discussed.

3.10.3 Adapting language when interviewing different participants.

The issue of language was to be considered, especially as the young people all had a diagnosis of autism. Superficially the young people appear to be quite articulate, but it was to be borne in mind that all the young participants had subtle language difficulties, such as understanding complex sentences, or finding the right words to express their views. The decision was taken to exercise extra 'care', to use basic, jargon free, clear language with all three groups, but to

respond with different language stylistics or ‘register’ according to each participant’s needs.

3.10.4 The physical location for the interviews

The context of the physical environment is also a factor to be considered when interviewing both adults and young people. According to Punch (2002), many research environments are designed for adults and adult spaces dominate in society so it can be the case that this lends support to the young people’s perspective that they are spaces where they as young people will have less control. At the same time some adults assume that children would prefer their own spaces. After consideration, it was decided that the room in which all the interviews would take place would be in the administration block of the school, so it was not a classroom with connotations of teacher- pupil dynamics, nor was it in the context of their care homes, in which case it could be seen as a) an imposition, b) less ‘special’ and c) there would be opportunities for tension due to other young people or even adults interrupting the flow and destroying the dynamics of the interview.

3.10.5 Building rapport.

There was an awareness of the need for rapport with the young people, but perhaps in this research project the need for rapport was

even greater with the adults, for reasons explained in the context section. Reflections were made on the need to make sure the approach was not patronising, and that there would be an ‘authentic’ approach.

The analysis stage of the research process would in all likelihood be different between the conversations with the young people or adults: Again, Punch (2002) warns of the danger of imposing adult interpretations because of researchers’ assumptions about childhood. This would hold true of research with autistic young people too.

3.10.6 Transcripts and confidentiality

After the interviews, the MP3 files were transferred onto an encrypted memory stick, with pseudonyms and dates. The files were then loaded onto a personal computer at the researcher’s home and stored in an encrypted folder. The MP3 and transcribed files will be kept on an encrypted memory stick for five years.

The photographs were copied; there were photographs for the researcher’s file, with the participants’ pseudonyms on them, and the other copies were given to the participants.

3.10.7 Ethical aims of the study

The aim of the study was ethical in that it set out to develop new insights which could potentially help other people. It was explained

that confidentiality would be assured; the school, all the participants and the therapy providers were anonymised by way of pseudonyms so that they would only be known to the researcher). Two parents asked for, and were given, reassurance on this matter. While a description of the setting and the participants has been given as a necessary part of the research, it was done in a way that ensures that nobody can be identified. The materials will be kept securely, with written work on an encrypted computer and password protected. The voice recordings were password protected, and will be kept in encrypted files on the researcher's personal computer and on an encrypted memory stick.

3.10.8 Consent

All participants gave informed consent, and they were informed of their right to withdraw and to have a debrief session, if they so wished. It was made clear to the participants both before and during the research that the information they gave could be withdrawn at any time, had they wanted to do so.

All participants were required to sign the informed consent forms before participating in any stage of the research. The parental/guardian consent form and the informed consent forms provided participants and parents/guardians with a clear appreciation

and understanding of the facts, implications, and consequences of the research, and what was expected.

3.10.9 Ethical approval

In order to conduct this research, ethical approval was given from Cardiff University (see Appendix 9). This was to ensure that the research was conducted with ethical integrity and was compliant with the standard ethical principles of the university, British Psychological Society (BPS) and Healthcare Professionals Council (HCPC). Once the necessary approval and permissions were obtained, the sampling procedure started.

3.11 The process of analysis

The interview transcripts were read in the chronological sequence, that is, in the order in which they were recorded. The procedure recommended by Braun and Clarke (2013) and Attride-Sterling (2001) was followed. The transcripts were annotated on an individual basis and then re-read firstly as groups, then as one data set weekly over ten months. See Appendix 1 to see how one of the individual transcripts was annotated.

Three Assistant Educational Psychologists volunteered to co-code on three occasions over the ten months, once after there were three transcripts, once after there were sufficient transcripts to make a group, and finally, when all the transcripts had been annotated, to make

comments on the organising and global themes. Two of the Assistant Psychologists worked in the same setting as the researcher, and the third worked in one of the other schools in the group. One of them was also from a different country. Two of them had experience in experimental design, for which one of them had received a national prize, and the other had gained first class honours for her dissertation using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Before starting out on the analysis of the data, a ‘training exercise’ was carried out, using the example given by Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) in chapter three. This involved coding a transcript of an interview. What was interesting in the training exercise was that although coding had been undertaken on an individual basis in silence at first, there was agreement between the co-coders about the way in which meaning had been created from the text. Furthermore, the co-coder agreement did not tally entirely with the interpretation offered by Guest, MacQueen and Namey. Possible reasons for this were discussed.

After the initial transcripts were read, it was agreed that initial names and colour coding would be used for items which seemed to be of note and/or which related to the research objectives. One example was the idea of ‘anthropomorphising’, in which the interviewees attributed human characteristics to the horses (see Appendix 1).

The role of the co-coder in this research was not to create codes for the researcher; it was to help the researcher discuss and clarify the research process to other people, and, later on, to discuss the extent to which interpretation could be taken from data, making sure that the researcher was able to constantly justify the creation of the themes.

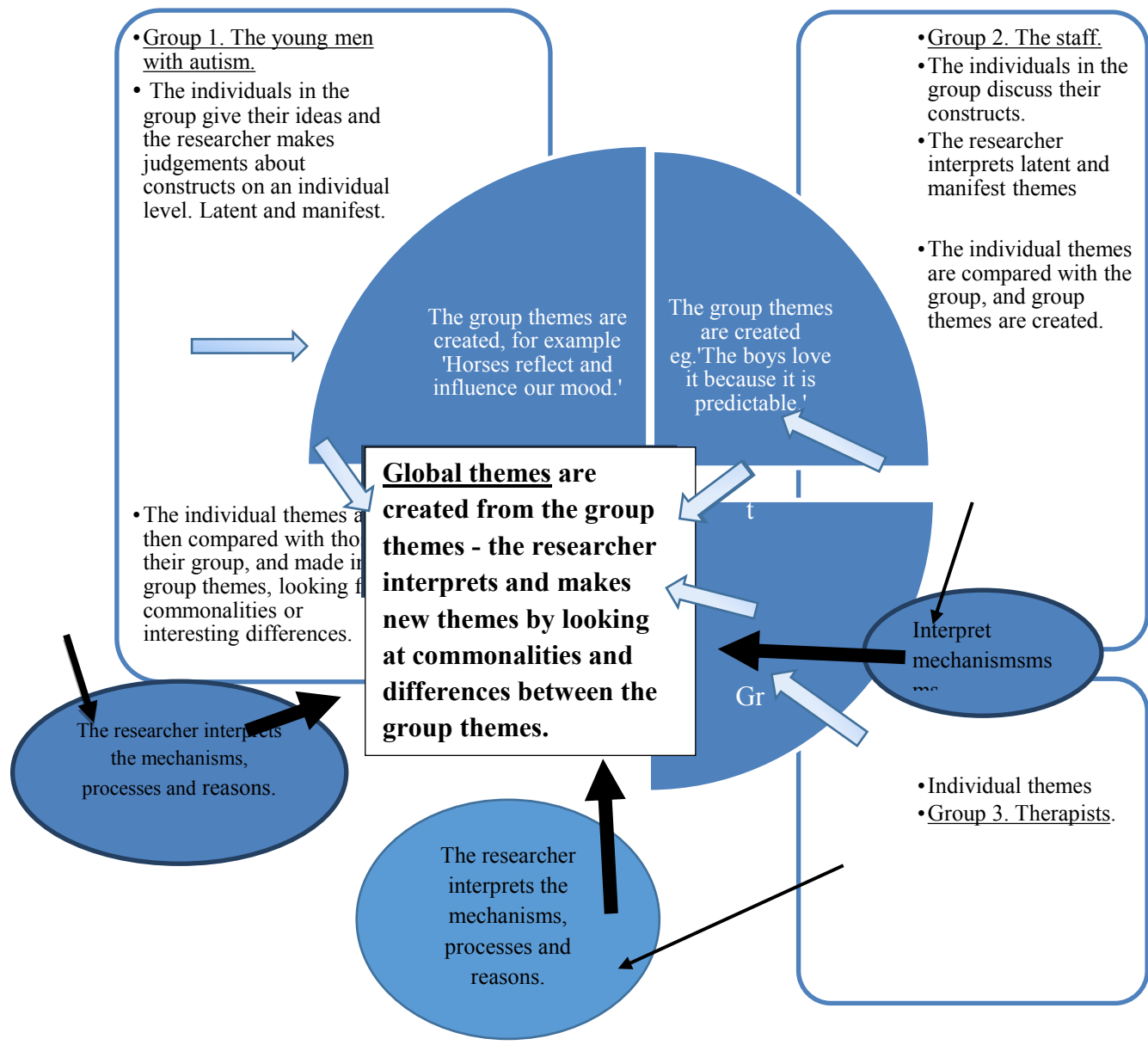
Eventually, Basic, Organising and Global themes were created, which were adapted and changed. A thematic summary was made for each individual, then for each of the three groups, and eventually a thematic map was made across all the data set.

Diagram 2, on page 79, illustrates how common themes were taken from individuals (blue arrows) to groups, to Global themes. The arrows in black illustrate how possible mechanisms were analysed, for example in order to create the Global theme of Emotional Regulation, the individuals mentioned that the horses calmed the young men down.

Some of the young men said that they had to ‘lower their energy’, while others said that they had to be calm for their own safety.

Amongst the staff, the belief was that the young men needed to keep calm for their own safety, but also that they kept calm because there was no pressure, and that there was an external focus. The therapists mentioned that the horses calmed the young men for these reasons, and for possible sensory reasons. See next page for the diagram.

Diagram 1. An illustration of how individual themes are analysed into group themes and then themes for the whole dataset (see next page)



CHAPTER FOUR. RESULTS.

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will look at the aims of the research, and the results from each individual perspective. This moves on to group themes, and finally, how global themes were created from across the whole data set, in order to address the research questions.

4.2 The aims of the research

The research aimed to explore individual themes, which were both latent or manifest, then to find commonalities or differences as groups, and commonalities across the three different groups of participants, to eventually create global, socially constructed themes across the whole of the data set. This was done in order to address the research questions, namely:

- ‘What is meant by the term Equine Assisted therapy?’
- ‘What do the young people learn from it?’
- ‘What is it about Equine Assisted therapy that helps them, if at all?’
- ‘What mechanisms are used to underpin such therapy?’

The individual perceptions, thoughts and beliefs expressed by all the participants were explored, compared and contrasted, individually, as groups, (see Appendix 3). The themes were compared across groups

to form global themes, and compared with the body of knowledge from the literature.

One young participant said: “It’s not just about horses at Equine!” and, indeed, the perceptions around Equine Assisted therapy were more complex than anticipated.

The global themes created from the whole data set were:

- Theme A: Equine Assisted therapy provides the context for Experiential learning
- Theme B: Equine Assisted therapy promotes Emotional Regulation
- Theme C: Equine Assisted therapy leads to Empathising and Connectedness

4.3 Individual themes and personal constructs.

The individual interviews showed that talking about Equine therapy could also be used as a way to reveal some of the individual participants’ personal constructs, ‘latent themes’ as well as using their manifest views in constant comparison with the literature and the views of the other participants.

4.3.1 The young people with autism.

Simon

Simon used the interview about Equine Assisted therapy to try to gain sympathy from the researcher, and to try to then rationalise out loud why he should not perhaps gain this sympathy, showing a degree of confusion in his thoughts about himself. For example, he began by saying that he had been deeply affected by the death of his pet cats, and the fact that he had not been told about it, but then he immediately added that it would not have been a good idea to have told him at that time, because he had always been volatile in his reactions. Simon revealed that he was a 'softy' who would 'spoil' the horses:

YPS: 'I'm a bit of a wimp when it comes to horses, I'm afraid.'

L180.

And this is a theme he seems to have about himself, wanting to push boundaries, yet knowing he needs them, as do the horses. He compared the horses to 'grumpy teenagers' and laughed when asked if that reminded him of anybody. By saying that the horses should be calm and easy to manage, he admitted that this was a problem he himself had. He also mentioned that the Equine therapy had taught him to be patient as this was an area of difficulty for him.

The other main theme for Simon was that of being part of a community at Equine. He said that you get a sense of community there, taking it in turns, and having a shared interest. He also revealed his love for horses and their acceptance of him, almost as if the horses were taking on the role of a person who accepts him.

His photographs prompted him to say that the horses ‘look right into your soul’, that they give you the satisfaction of looking after them, and that you can have intimacy with them. This photograph illustrates his thoughts in that the muzzle is a vital part of its body, ‘you can feel its breath and it grows hair so it is like a human.’ L278.

A strong latent theme during Simon’s interview, as seen by the researcher, would be that he would like to belong, and to be accepted.

Photograph 1. Simon’s photograph of the muzzle.



Jonny

Jonny, like Simon, used the interview to reveal a latent theme of feeling rejected by his family since the recent birth of a sibling. He was strongly opposed to the idea of preferring one animal over another, or one horse over another, and throughout the interview the latent theme was that of his siblings being preferred over him. He referred to his pet dogs and the horses as his only friends. He said that the ‘adult horses learn to love you and be friendly towards you.’ L165. He also has a theme that talks about ‘going back to the good old days’ (before his baby sibling was born).

He said: ‘The horses want to feel the good old days basically.’ L134.

Jonny also revealed his wishful thinking around his own identity, talking about the horse he liked, because this horse is ‘impressive and powerful, quite like me.’ L263.

His photographs reveal his thought that an animal cares for him and can ‘transfer’ its positive emotion. He too took a picture of a horse’s face and muzzle and said:

‘It’s the bit that shows that the horse understands how the human being feels...the horse’s chin transfers the horse’s emotion to you.’ L291.

His other photographs revealed his theme of friendship and connectedness with the horses. Jonny's most powerful latent theme was one of loneliness and longing for intimacy.

Photograph 2. Jonny's photograph of the horse's face and chin



Adrian

Adrian too showed a theme of wanting to be accepted. He talked about the horses being 'really kind' and that 'it is just the best feeling to know that a horse likes you.' L173.

He talked about the enjoyment of being part of a group, and he protested at the idea put to him that the horses should go to school. This was manifestly because the horses would not be safe, but latently because the special group at the Equine stables would not be special in that case. He used the talk about the horses to talk about

himself. He said: 'The horses are really kind, just like me. I'm too kind.' L181.

His photographs revealed his theme of being social:

'It's about being social towards other people. They are talking to the horses, but the people are talking to other people.' L207.

Adrian's photographs have not been shown for reasons of confidentiality.

Simon, Jonny and Adrian revealed their need to be part of a group.

Alan and Edward, on the other hand, had needs similar to each other, slightly different to those of Simon, Jonny and Adrian.

Alan

The extent of Alan's autism was illustrated by his language needs during the interview, as well as his literal way of viewing the topic, and his lack of empathy. Alan was very factual about the horses, for example he talked about the amount of 'faecal matter' produced, and its destination.

He mentioned an incident when the stable manager had fallen into a pile of manure. He was not emotional about this, saying that 'She then had to put her outer garments into the wash basket.' He does not feel sorry for the old horses, for example their stories of being

rescued, or the fact that one horse is ostracised for being old. He said this was not important, as she had ‘had a good life.’ The themes were around his need to control, and his frustrations when he tried in vain to force the horse to do as he told him. He said that he likes the horses who respond to his instructions.

One of his photographs reveals, via his talk of horses, his latent theme of needing to boss the horses around, in that it shows a horse ‘telling the others to get out of the way.’ His photographs were very factual. One depicts a horse ‘eating hay’, the remaining two show the equipment needed at the stables. He took two photographs of the equipment, from different angles. Alan’s themes were about knowing biological facts and getting the horses to do as he said.

Photograph 3. Alan’s photograph, showing one horse telling another horse to move.



Edward

Edward's concepts were very similar to those shared by Alan, and the extent of his autism became clear during the interview. However, unlike the other participants, Edward went into more details about times of the sessions, and costs of the upkeep of the horses, for example he said that he leaves school at 12 40 and returns at 15 30. He was intrigued by small details, such as the sharpness of the horses' teeth. Edward was very repetitive. He too was very enthusiastic about the rules, particularly the health and safety rules. The expression of his theme was reiterated in his photographic illustrations:

'It's not all about the horses at Equine. If there is a broken tree, there is the health and safety of it, for example does it need repairing, can it be moved, is it endangering anybody?' L302.

His constructs were about the need for rules of health and safety, and for precise routine, the need to be listened to, and while you look after horses, 'you need to make sure you are safe as well.'

Photograph 4. Edward's picture of health and safety equipment.



Diagram 3 Individual and group themes in group 1, Adolescent participants with autism (see next page)

Edward showed the extent of his autism. He was factual and interested in his own health and safety, the cost of the upkeep of the horses and the rules. You need time to get to know the rules, familiarise yourself and learn that you are in charge.

The horse must listen to you.

Satisfaction of control.

'Equine is not just about horses.' The health and safety rules are important.

Alan was very factual and took in verbatim what he had been told by adults at Equine.

He was not really able to verbalise his emotions towards his time at Equine Assisted therapy, except by the way he

could talk about facts of equine body language and his annoyance when he did not feel in control.

Satisfaction at taming a horse.

'If the horse does not do as you say, it's simple; force it.'

Community.
Connectedness.
Control.
Learning a lot of facts.
Learning in context.

Jonny revealed his emotional issues through talking about the horses.

It is all about connections, trust, being relaxed and not scared.

Adrian revealed his need for connectedness and the importance of the social aspects of learning down at the Equine therapy stables.

'The horses are social to each other and we are social to each other at Equine.'

Simon talked about his need for community, taking it in turns and helping each other out. Having connections with other people too.

His need for boundaries and control, his issues of accepting boundaries as well as showing them to the horses. The need for rules to keep everyone safe.

His feeling that you learn a lot.

'You get satisfaction from looking after it.'

4.3.2 The non-teaching staff who accompany the young men

Two of the non-teaching staff, Dustin and Jan, have worked together for a few years and they both share a passion about outdoor education. The other three were women who come from very different backgrounds: Esther has a sister with autism, Susan has an interest in psychology, and Jan has a very pragmatic outlook on life, which, she said, was as a result of having been brought up in a military family. It was perhaps not surprising to see how the themes are more in parallel between the two men who share the same passion for outdoor education, and the physical time they spend working together.

Dustin

Dustin was keen to highlight the importance of making sure that the pupils are ‘chilled and relaxed.’ for their all-round development. He saw the horse as being a point of ‘external focus’, and his main point, which he reiterated, was that he saw a difference in behaviour in ‘every single boy that goes to Equine Assisted therapy’. He said that in school the young men are unsettled in class, whereas they are ‘calm, happy and stress free’ at the stables. He also said that some young men achieve more at the Equine Centre, where they can focus, and he took a photograph of a young man cleaning out a horse’s hoof, which takes patience and needs focus, and the trust of the therapists.

These points were made by all the other non-teaching staff. Dustin, however, referred to biophilia, and the idea that the boys should be afforded opportunities which were more natural than being in the classroom environment, in which unrealistic expectations dominate. His constructs and themes were quite fixed, and it was difficult as a researcher to explore alternatives, or to discuss in other terms. On occasions, prompt questions were posed as a means to expand on what he had said, for example whether or not he thought biophilia was calming because it meant that humans were acting in line with evolutionary programming. He was honest in his answers, saying that he did not know, or had not got an opinion on the matter.

He did not anthropomorphise and was pragmatic about animals: 'You can't trust an animal, full stop.' It emerged in the interview that he had spent time with horses in South Africa, in a culture that has a different outlook towards animals than in the West.

Dustin talked about five different photographs, but each one had the same theme of 'relaxed, calm and natural' and 'achieving'.

Photograph 5. Dustin's photograph of a young person cleaning a horse's hoof. The face is blacked out for confidentiality.



Jan

When asked if he could sum up in a phrase what Equine Assisted therapy means to him, Jan said: 'You see the boys in a completely different light.' He and Dustin are both called upon to carry out physical restraints in the school setting, and it is not surprising perhaps that they prefer to take the pupils to outdoor education or Equine Assisted therapy, where the pupils never need restraining.

Jan was very passionate about Equine Assisted therapy, and he often takes photographs to show the staff and parents, saying that the people who do not go themselves to the stables need to witness the difference in behaviour. He emphasised his point that 'the outdoors is the best classroom that there could possibly be.' He explained that he

got a sense of purpose because ‘I’m actually witnessing the boys achieving where they would not otherwise in a different environment.’

Jan used the interview about Equine Assisted therapy to discuss his belief that the boys in this residential setting should have a more flexible curriculum. The points he made about the therapy all stemmed from this belief. His photographs were around: achievements not witnessed in school; confidence to deal with new situations; behaviours not witnessed in school; the difference in expectations, and the ability to work independently out of school.

Photograph 6. Jan’s photograph of a boy working independently out of school.



Susan

As was the case with Jan, Susan is used to dealing with the physical restraints and behaviour management in the school setting, and she prefers to see the young people relaxed rather than stressed. Susan needed to justify the alternative interventions to Ofsted, and her participation in the research was to some extent motivated by this.

Susan used the interview partly to talk through points about its impact. Susan's brief in school was to find measurable outcomes interventions, and this seemed to be at the back of her mind throughout the interview.

Susan also had the psychological framework of meeting unmet needs behind her answers in the interview. Her constructs were around the young participants' needs for affection and intimacy; a recurring theme was that the young men were able to hug horses, and receive affection from the horses and therapists.

Susan felt that the young participants also had a need for confidence and autonomy, and she felt that by knowing exactly what to do at Equine, by making things concrete and practical within a routine-based context, promoted their confidence and autonomy.

Her photographs depicted the young participants hugging the horses, and one showed a horse in the rain. She said:

“This shows the coat glistening in the rain, and despite this, they boys are working hard. They are choosing to do this. It’s lovely. I think it’s just lovely.” L216

Susan arrived at the same overall conclusion as Jan and Dustin, namely that:

“You see a completely different person at Equine than in school.” L227.

Photograph 7. Susan’s photograph of a young person hugging a horse.



Esther

Like Susan, Esther was emotional and animated in her tone throughout the interview, using language such as ‘oh my God!’ or ‘Miss, Miss, look, just look!’ She seemed to take a personal pride in the achievements of the young men, and said: ‘They like it, it’s

lovely.’ She too said that it was nice to see them calm, in contrast to their behaviour in school.

Esther treated the interview as a discussion, and would sometimes be flexible, saying that she did not know, and that she would like to think about the ideas, using words such as ‘hmm, yeah...possibly...ooh, I don’t know, let me think.’ She, like Susan, responded more to the ideas of projection and relationships to the horses than the men did.

Her photographs depicted horses going out in the rain (the same theme as Susan); calmly talking to the horses, a sense of pride in their achievements, how nice it was to see the horses nuzzling up to each other and how the young men were able to lead the horses. She felt that the young men did feel sorry for the horses, and that they did disclose their worries to the horses, in contrast to Dustin, Jan and Joan.

Photograph 8. Esther’s photograph of a boy talking with the horse.



Joan

Joan was very matter of fact in her tone throughout the interview, and disclosed her pragmatic approach, which she said after the interview, had come from a military upbringing. Animals are there to be functional, for example she was going to get a cat at home simply so it could catch mice. She said that horses were 'hard work, but functional.' Her views concurred with those of the others in the staff group, namely:

'I don't understand it, but I have never been there (to Equine Assisted therapy) with a boy who has not enjoyed it and come away calmer.' L94.

She felt that the young men do not talk to the horses about emotional issues. This may well be a perception coloured by her own attitude to animals, whereas, in contrast, the therapists, Esther and Susan feel that the young men do talk to the horses. Joan's themes were around pressure of Ofsted, and the pressure of expectations in school academically and behaviourally.

She said that the young men were able to relax, just be themselves and therefore stay calmer during the sessions at the stables.

Her photographs all led to her talking about the contrasts between what the young men were like at the stables as opposed to in school, especially in terms of their cooperation.

Photograph 9. Joan's photograph of people carrying out cooperative tasks.



Diagram 4. Overview of the individual and group themes of group 2, the staff who accompany the pupils to the Equine Centre.

Please see next page

Dustin felt that there is a difference in behaviour between school and Equine.

It is natural to be outdoors.

The therapists are calm, relaxed and are confident to let the boys be independent.

Realistic expectations.

There is an external focus. It is linked with Biophilia.

'There is a difference in behaviour in every single boy that goes.'

Jan felt that Outdoor Education is more relevant to these boys, who have been excluded from multiple traditionally based schools.

There is no pressure, they choose, and the work and therapy is based on their need and their interests.

'You see boys in a completely different light.'

Completely different boys at Equine to in school.

The boys are relaxed.

Less pressure.

A natural environment.

Need for security is met at Equine.

Joan feels that this is the only option that is different to the formal education, which does not suit the need of the boys.

The boys achieve - they are calm, can moderate their behaviour and are safe.

'You see different boys at Equine than in school. There is less pressure and they enjoy and achieve.'

Susan feels that relationships between the therapists and boys are good. Tasks help to build relationship. At Equine, as opposed to school, the boys are calm and can moderate their behaviour.

It builds confidence and the boys can practise communication skills for when they are in school.

They get affection, which they do not get elsewhere.

Esther feels that the boys like it at Equine. They are calm, and they achieve.

They show empathy, feel sorry for the horses and talk to the horses about their problems. This was not a common theme.

4.3.3 The therapists

Alison

Alison is the lead therapist who set up the Equine Assisted therapy and the Equine Centre in its rural setting. Alison was quite emotional during the interview, which may in part have been due to her undergoing treatment for a serious illness. Her very strong main theme was her 'team', which included both people, and different animals in addition to the horses. She returned to the theme of the animals choosing to be with her, for example 'the cat walked here and decided he was staying. He is a member of the team' and 'Deo (the horse) just walked in onto the yard' L696.

She anthropomorphised, and admitted to doing so herself, for example claiming that a horse used to pretend to be a human, standing up and walking around on its hind legs.

Her world was given a romantic portrayal, with her descriptions of a fantastic childhood in which she would ride on the back of her uncle's sow, and 'drop onto' a cow there. She talks about horse riding as 'the most beautiful thing in the world.' Alison used the word 'precious' to describe her team and the animals and the stables as a 'precious place of learning.'

Alison said that the horses can read intent, and can distinguish between a hit and an accidental hit, and that they were ‘kind, generous, forgiving creatures, more so than humans.’

Her photographs included a picture of Thomas the cat, and one of the horses’ manes, which she likened to a footballer’s hair, as he was ‘just gorgeous.’ and photographs of ‘two best friends’ (horses). The first two photographs were of the human team, as this was the most important thing, and another team showed the ‘gang’ of horse members of the team. Alison spoke for nearly two hours, and she took seven photographs. She seemed to want to show her extensive knowledge, but the theme that came through was one of wanting to live in a sheltered, ‘precious’, simple world, in a community which was peaceful.

Photograph 10. Alison’s photograph of Thomas the cat.



Malcolm

Malcolm is a qualified psychotherapist, which he alluded to during the interview. There was a slight tension at first, and Malcolm started by clarifying the questions, as though pointing out that he knew what it was like to be a psychologist.

Malcolm gave the impression that he too was an escapist who liked to be in a peaceful setting. He said:

‘I’m quite gregarious but I’m not that keen on people.’ L48.

Malcolm mentioned the team, as did Alison, saying that they all work together there, and that the horses are part of the team.

When talking about the horses, it could be that he too was using them as a projection for his own needs and desires. He said the horses had a ‘peace’ about them, and that they ‘take you in and give you trust.’ Horses, he said, can be ‘comforting’ and ‘they choose to be with you.’

The main theme in the photographs was of the team, the social aspect of the horses being together, and the people being together. Two of the photographs showed the horse who was described by Malcolm as ‘a real gentleman. He goes out of his way to be nice’ and ‘he’s a really gentle horse.’ It was as though Malcolm’s latent theme was one

of being in a sheltered community amongst people and animals who were kind, gentle and trusting

Photograph 11. Malcolm's photograph of 'real gentleman' horse.



Dorothy

Dorothy gave the impression during the interview that she was quite defensive, and on her guard, in case questions were there to trick her. This impression was given by her tone of voice and by the shortness of answers. She emphasised the point several times that she was not an expert, and that her skills were in horsemanship rather than as a psychological therapist. She was more pragmatic and factual than Malcolm and Alison, and she believes that the horse techniques can be learned, and that the natural ways are effective. She sees the

horses as being different animals to humans, with no anthropomorphisms.

‘We are a more civilised animal than the horse, we are human beings. It doesn’t make sense to try to get them to understand us.’ L103.

She said that the way to manage horses is to learn about their psychology, to work out what makes them behave in the ways they are behaving, and to be able to work out ways to change unwanted behaviours so that everyone could be happy. ‘It’s natural conditioning that the horses do.’ Dorothy emphasised the need for boundaries and respect, and learning how to communicate using body language. She said that there is enormous satisfaction that the horse has ‘chosen to be with you’, a theme that concurred with the other therapists.

Her photographs reflected the themes in her interview; they showed horses in the field, where the young people learn about horse behaviour and the young men learning about how to put the equipment on, hay in a barrow, as the young men needed to learn how to look after the horses.

Dorothy’s themes were pragmatic and quite manifest. It felt like a ‘disclosure’ to hear that she had been brought up in a caravan and had always been surrounded by horses. It is possible that her

defensiveness and pragmatic attitude has been shaped by her traveller's background, which is very different to that of the researcher.

Photograph 12. Dorothy's photograph of the field in which the work is done.



Ellie-May

Ellie-May had come to the stables on an internship. She was very enthusiastic, possibly because she felt a need to repay her hosts by being very positive.

Ellie-May's speech was quite effusive, for example instead of 'asking', she 'begged and begged', and instead of 'cats' they were 'big pussy cats'. She talked metaphorically, about the horses letting you into their 'universe' and that being with them was like 'walking into a warm house from the cold.'

The horses were seen as trusting and 'not fussing'. They were seen as less emotional animals who 'don't care about us the way a dog does.'

Ellie-May was very clear about the aims of the Equine sessions; for her it was about developing the young men's confidence and communication and interaction.

This was to be a welcoming environment which allowed the young men to relax, and know what to do, leading to more confidence and calm. She believed that the therapist was there to facilitate the process between the horses and the young men and that this started with getting the young men to care for the horses.

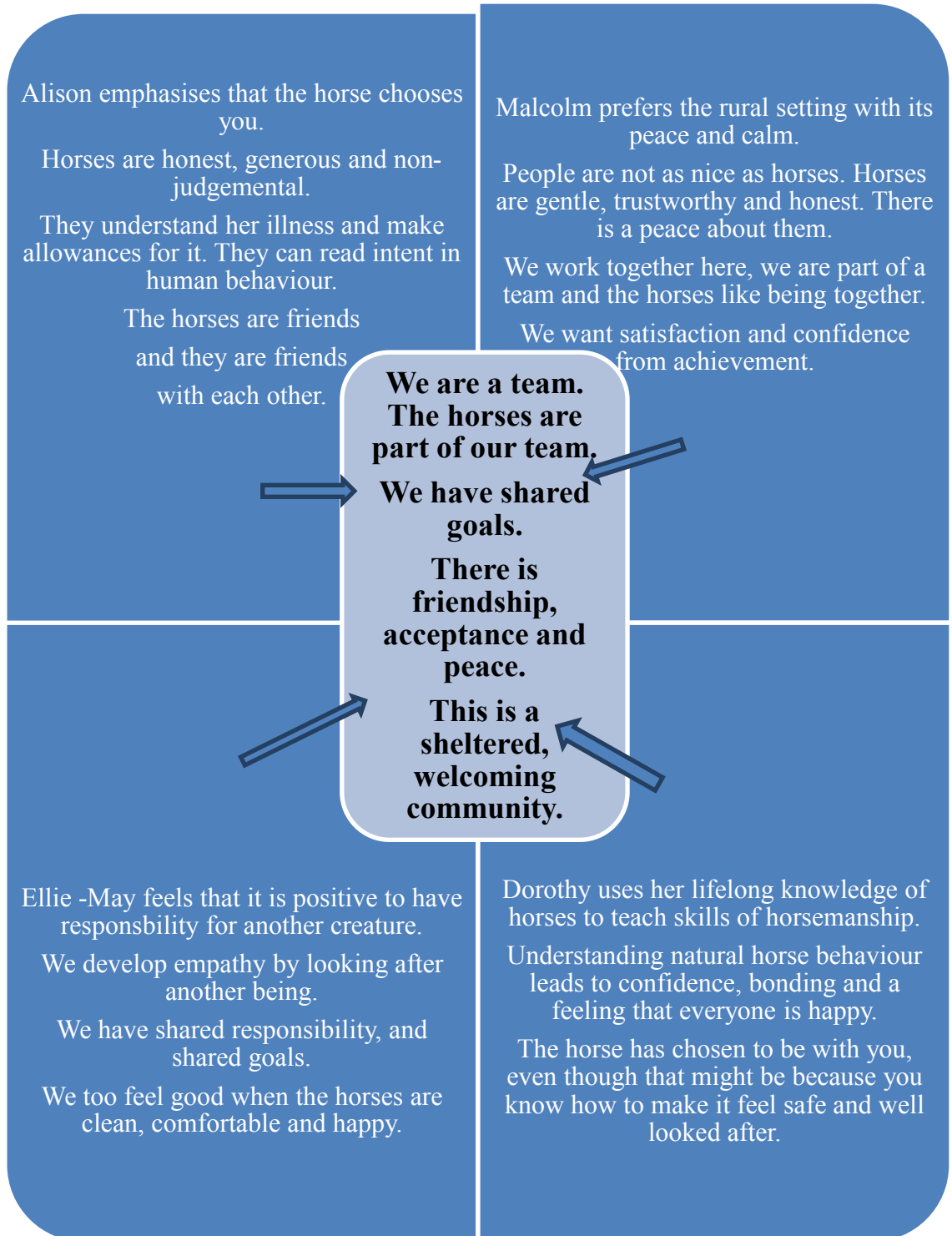
Ellie-May was very engaged in the interview, and said ‘oh, that’s a good question’ three times. She said that she had enjoyed reflecting on what she had been doing.

Her photographs had the theme of responsibility and caring, so that the horses were happy, leading to bonding. ‘We love our horses and want them to be well.’ The words ‘clean, comfortable and happy’ were used for each photograph.

Photograph 13. Ellie-May’s photograph of ‘happy horses’



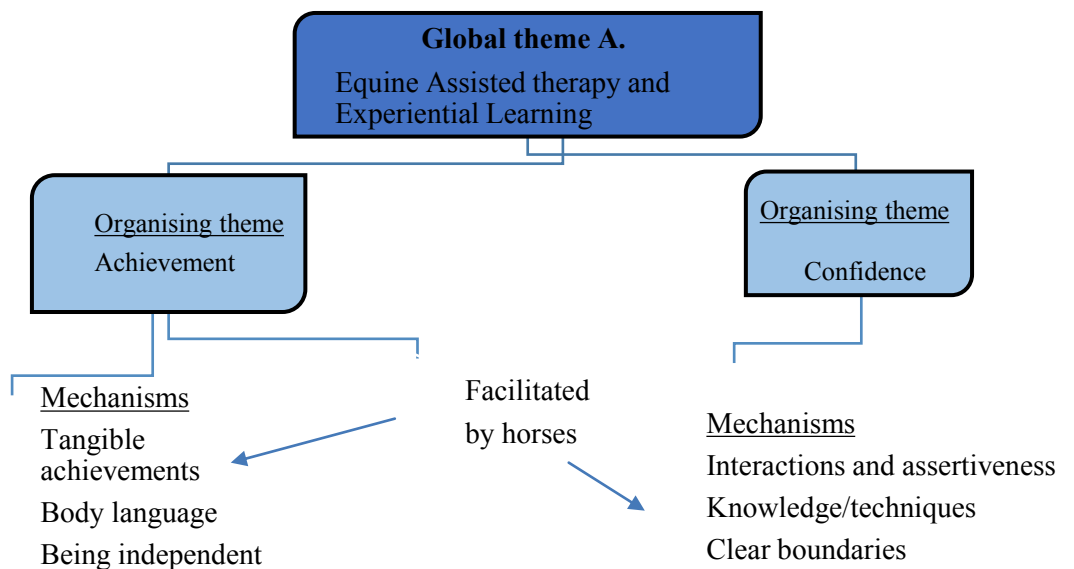
Diagram 5 Overview of the individual and group themes in the therapists' group



4.4 Organising and Global Themes

4.4.1 Global Theme A. Equine Assisted therapy and Experiential Learning.

Diagram 6. Theme A: Equine Assisted therapy and Experiential Learning.



The global theme in the dark blue box was created by taking ideas rather than the words that the participants had expressed, to form a commonality across the data set, for example the ideas of

‘communication’ or ‘being independent’ ‘clear boundaries.’ (See Appendices 2 and 3).

The mechanisms of how horses facilitated experiential learning were interpreted by the researcher, for example through the ways in which they made achievements visible and tangible; they illustrated visibly responses to communication, and they formed a bond with participants, which led to feelings of independence. The use of horses led to visible responses to how to interact assertively and safely, by being skilled in using the right techniques, and keeping consistent boundaries.

The participants’ names are abbreviated:

YP (Young person):

YP Ad (Adrian); YP Al (Alan); YP J (Jonny); YP S (Simon) and YP E (Edward).

CS (Care Staff):

CS S (Susan); CS D (Dustin); CS E (Esther); CS J (Jan) and CS Jo (Joan).

T (Therapist):

T A (Alison); T M (Malcolm) T EM (Ellie-May) and T D (Dorothy)

R (Researcher):

4.4.1.1 Tangible achievements

Participants in the young people's groups stated that horsemanship skills and gaining qualifications were an important factor in Equine Assisted therapy, although the latter was not as important intrinsically to the young people. The importance of the achievement seemed mainly to relate to a sense of pride, and having something tangible to show to somebody else. This had not been such a strong theme throughout the literature.

There was a sense during the interviews that the young people enjoyed 'showing off' their factual knowledge, which, interestingly, was alluded to by Dustin, one of the care staff:

CS D: "They do seem to like what they know." L50.

Joan thought that the young people at Equine therapy were 'always successful and achieved things.' (L254) which, she pointed out, was not always the case in the school setting.

The therapists discussed the process of how the young people achieved, rather than what had been achieved, and although they had instigated the qualification aspect in the therapy, it was interesting that they did not bring this issue to the fore. This could possibly have been because they were more focused on discussing 'therapy' per se during the interviews. However, what they said about how the young people learned led to the idea that, for young people with autism, it

was important to have tangible tasks and immediate feedback within a supportive community.

Alison made that point that the more visible the outcome, the more successful the feedback will be, and that using large animals helped:

T A: “They need that stimulus and that big response to what they do.”

L173.

Edward clearly enjoyed reeling off factual information about the horses, which was encouraged throughout the interview to enable him to feel at ease and therefore to share his thoughts and perceptions. He explained that achievement made him feel positive:

YP E: “It’s like a proud feeling, it makes me feel like I’m actually learning something and makes me feel like I’ve actually achieved.”
L108.

For Edward, his sense of achievement was bound up with some visible achievement, for example if he could get the horse to follow him round, a point also made by Jonny:

YP J: “Equine’s about taming them.” L211.

Simon was working towards a GCSE qualification in horsemanship, and it would have been less surprising had he been the most vocal amongst the young participants about his achievements.

However, although he was clearly pleased that he was aiming for a qualification, he was also keen to point out that it was being in the company of horses which gave him the most pleasure:

YP S: “I think Equido level one is GCSE or something, and I’m at pre -entry level, so just below level one. And then there is two and three.

R: “What was explained to you, why are you doing Equido?”

YP S: “Well, some people go ‘oh, you lucky thing, getting out of school, and I go: ‘actually, I’m learning quite a bit down there’. I could use that when I’m looking for a job, and I could probably put it on my CV and stuff, which is quite nice, but also, I love horses.” L239-244.

Alan, too, said in the interview that he was ‘doing Equido’. When asked about what this meant, he did not seem to be overly enthusiastic:

YP Al: “Erm ,what does that mean? So basically, it is a qualification which says you can look after horses, bla bla bla. There are different levels to it.” L 204-206.

This led to further exploration about their enjoyment about being with the horses, rather than discussing the qualifications and attainments. However, there was also a hint of a latent theme, that there was a sense of camaraderie, that one’s achievements at the Equine centre led to bonding not only with horses, but also being part

of a 'special group'. Malcolm, one of the therapists, alluded to this link between achievement and belonging:

T M: "There's that sense of achievement, that you have achieved something quite difficult, there is that sense of belonging in a way...sort of 'look what I've been able to do' and that bond, you get a bond that you feel has developed." L 107-109.

All the young participants talked about being able to gain a sense of achievement by 'taming' the horse. Jonny for example, was working towards GCSE Bushcraft, but he said he preferred to be with the horses.

YP J: "Erm, it's more of an enjoyable time, sometimes Bushcraft can, it's more about survival, it can be more fun and then Equine is how to cope with horses and how to tame them and basically tame them." L211.

The idea of taming a horse had imbued Adrian with a sense of enthusiasm L177, as well as Alan, L56, Edward, L229 and Simon L52.

Promoting qualifications and external accreditation during Equine Assisted therapy was possibly driven by the contextual pressure of needing to satisfy Ofsted and the Local Authorities who place the young people in this residential school, but this was not openly discussed during the interviews. There was also a possibility that talking about qualifications was driven by a desire to 'prove the

worth' of Equine Assisted therapy to the researcher, parents and sceptical staff.

That the participants believe that learning is learner-led is an interesting perspective from a constructivist stance. Constructivists believe that learning is experiential, and is developed through interactions, from the point where the learner is, into a zone of proximal development, rather than imposing a curriculum which is externally driven.

Although the young participants did mention qualifications, it would seem that this was secondary to their feelings of accomplishment in other ways, such as 'taming' a horse. Tangible achievements, facilitated via activities with the horse, led to feelings of pride and confidence, which in turn seemed to lead to greater motivation and greater feelings of wellbeing, and this is linked dynamically with yet more achievement.

4.4.1.2 Communication

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) 5 criteria, one of the difficulties people with autism face lies in the domain of language and communication (APA, 2013). The lead therapist at the Equine Assisted therapy is a qualified speech and language therapist and the assumption of external agencies, staff and parents seemed to be that the Equine Assisted therapy would overtly aim to develop

communication skills. Alison explained that her aim was to promote social interaction, partly by making explicit the ways to communicate with a horse, partly by trying to ‘shift from the concrete and literal, to be able to think about analogies.’ (L 322-323) and ‘by giving the participants chance to discuss what they had done with the horse, and teaching someone else how to do so.’

Ellie-May, another therapist, explained that using horses for practical activities facilitated communication skills because, in her opinion, it is not effective to ask the young people with autism to sit and explain; when they have communication difficulties the learning takes place in context, with a person to talk through each step (L53-54).

Dustin, a member of the care staff, felt that the use of horses, who, he said, are ‘simple creatures’, meant that communication between the young participants and the horses was easier, because it was ‘much simpler communication’ L200. When asked to expand on this, he explained:

CS D: “ ...some of the boys are very literal, so they will take an absolute literal meaning of whatever I say, which means that there will be, or can be HUGE misunderstandings...er, they don’t do body language often, and some of them can’t do facial expressions and so if they don’t have to worry about facial expressions, and it’s all about this ‘if I do this and this, the horse will run around in a circle round me’, well, then they have completed something. They have achieved it. It’s much simpler.” L194-200.

This point about simplicity of language was discussed during the interview with Dorothy, a therapist, who was clear about how communicating with the horses can help the young people with autism develop their language skills:

T D: “They (the horses) can’t learn our language so we are going to learn a lot more if we speak their language naturally.” L106-107.

Adaptation of language is needed, and learning that there are different forms of language for example how to talk to a horse, as opposed to how to talk to people, makes learning about communication simple, clear and explicit.

Social communication and interaction was mentioned in an oblique way by Edward, who explained that being at Equine Assisted therapy helped him to cooperate with other young people:

YP E: “When you are around the horses you cooperate with people more.” L147.

Adrian, too, mentioned the interactions during his description of a photograph he had taken:

YP Ad: “It’s about being social with other people.” L205.

Jonny was able to clearly express how the sessions at the stables were designed to facilitate interaction:

YPJ: “We get down there, have a chat and talk about the weekend and what we have done as well then look at what we need to do.” L42.

Joan, one of the care staff, felt that one of the biggest positives of being at Equine therapy was that the young participants were socializing (L73), a point made strongly by Jan when showing his chosen photograph, depicting teamwork. Another member of the care staff pointed out that the young people learned a mix of verbal and non-verbal language.

Dorothy made the point that the young participants need to see how their language is effective or not with the horses, a point which was picked up by all the young participants as they all brought up the idea of communication through body language.

Alan explained how to get a horse to move about in a field:

YP A1: “It’s all about body language, so if you’re flailing your arms about, which I don’t recommend doing for any horse, or a horse like Deo, it’s, he’s not going to want to stay in the centre...” L49.

Alison was clear about the need to explicitly teach the young men how to use body language, with animals such as horses:

T A: “There is something about learning about our body language and what we can do with our body language. I said to a young person, ‘look, if you want Teddy the horse to run with you, you are going to have to look happy’. He said: ‘I can’t look happy if I don’t feel happy.’ So I explained that was OK, you don’t have to feel happy to look happy, all you have to do is look the part and the horse will understand it; stand up a little bit more, breathe a little slower, look at what you are going to do and how you exciting it will be, then if you manage that, and manage to smile, you will end up feeling a little bit happier.” L 189-195.

Communicating by body language, which is explicitly taught, results in the horse doing what the participant wants it to do, thereby gaining immediate feedback.

It could be argued that Equine Assisted therapy helps to develop communication skills because language used with the horses needs to be simple, and body language needs to be clear, so that the horse will respond, and that having something ‘special’ in common with the other young people creates a bond which encourages interaction between the participants.

4.4.1.3 Being independent in learning

Adrian had explained in his interview that he liked the sessions at the Equine Assisted therapy because the sessions were focused on his particular likes and needs, unlike in school and Forest school.

This was a point highlighted by Jan, who explained that the staff find out what the young men’s interests are, and tailor those tasks to meet the boys’ needs.” L 139.

Once the suitable tasks are set up, the young participants are encouraged to do as much as they can independently. Simon explained that the therapists draw up the tasks for each session, which quite often are repetitive and predictable, and the tasks are set out on a visual timetable. The young people make a choice by deciding on the sequence in which they will carry out the task. Simon also

explained that, in his case, the tasks were linked with his mood, and that if he did feel down, he would work with the 'easier' horses:

YP S: "...it depends whether I'm up for a challenge cos it's harder to manage them (the horses) but if I'm not up for that...I think I like the horses that are nice and calm." L120-121.

Jan and Dustin, care staff, commented on the trust factor on the side of the therapists, and how they gave the impression to the young people that they were trusted. Jan chose to take a picture to illustrate this aspect:

YP J: "This boy is cleaning out one of the hooves of one the little horses. It is a skill that he will have only learnt through the expertise of the staff at Equine. He is not supervised; he has taken this horse out of the stable of his own accord, which is part of the task, taken him into a pen and now he is actually caring for the animal...." L276-280.

Esther explained that when she discusses the sessions with the young people on their journey back to school, they often feel exuberant about being able to do things by themselves and they will say:

"Miss, Miss, I can do it on my own, I can do it on my own!" L 160.

Joan made the point that being at Equine gave the young participants a break from being 'cared for and watched all the time.'" L61.

The therapists had deliberately designed the sessions in such a way as to promote independence.

4.4.1.4 Knowledge and techniques

Adrian felt that he was acquiring knowledge at the stables, more so that at Forest school, which has a structured taught curriculum:

YP Ad: “Well Equine therapy shows you how you can do your own thing. In Equine therapy it teaches you how to act around animals and horses. It teaches you, instead of Forest school where it teaches you something you might already know, like the farrier course takes seven years and you still have to go back every year just to renew.” L168-171.

While Adrian did reveal spontaneously later that he learnt on a modular basis ‘so it’s just easier’ (L44) and that he had a distinction and a merit so far in his modules, this was not something that particularly captured his attention; he preferred instead to talk about how he could make horses start and stop. It is likely that this achievement is satisfying for him then, because it is on his terms (do your own thing) and that it is visible and immediate. It might also be linked with the feeling of achievement that a much bigger creature than him has followed his instructions.

4.4.1.5 Clear boundaries

The young participants explained that it is important to show the horses ‘boundaries’ assertively. While the horses are less complex than humans, there is a potential for accidents, and the need to be absolutely clear about health and safety is emphasized as a constant. Edward was so taken with this idea that his photographs were about brushes, helmets and safety equipment.

The idea of boundaries was completely assimilated by the young people, who could see the importance of it visibly, and by the therapists and staff. The therapists also emphasized the health and safety aspects, because in addition to avoiding accidents, being able to give clear boundaries to the horses helps the bonding process. Being able to set boundaries can facilitate practice in concrete ways of how to be assertive with humans, before trying to transfer this to a real- life situation.

4.4.1.6 Confidence and assertiveness skills

In addition to being comfortable about setting boundaries, having the knowledge of what to do in horse-led situations seemed to give the young people a sense of empowerment. This involved knowing how to communicate, how to establish boundaries and facts about the horses' behaviours. As Adrian said, if you learn about the horses' behaviour, you can understand their fears, and how to act towards them to get them to do as you want (L103)

YP J: "You've got to be confident to get the horse to..." L98.

YP S: "It teaches you to be assertive really, you learn little techniques." L170.

Gaining knowledge about horses, and being able to apply such knowledge seems to lead to greater confidence, which may explain

the observations that the young people are calmer down at Equine therapy.

Dustin explained why he had taken one of the photos, in which the young people are with the horses and the therapists are looking away from them. In his opinion, the role of the therapists inspired confidence.

CS D: “The instructor is incredibly relaxed. It’s confidence inspiring.” L247.

Jan felt that the way the therapists gradually built up the level of difficulty in the tasks with the horses helped them to develop confidence:

CS J: “Over time you start to see this confidence and the boys’ self-esteem starts to rise up and they will start doing things of their own accord.” L83.

The idea that building confidence is therapeutic was mentioned by Dorothy, who said that building a skill set with horse-related tasks helped the boys to develop confidence.

In her opinion the knowledge and confidence leads to feelings of empowerment.

4.5 Summary of Global Theme A, Experiential Learning

The Equine facilitated therapy in this centre is based on Vygotskian theory of constructivism, with learning taking place within a social context, in this case including horses. The participants in the three groups had started to pick up, and assimilate language from each other, for example the use of the words ‘bonding’, ‘energy levels’, ‘responses’ and ‘boundaries’.

The learning which takes place during the Equine therapy sessions is based on experience, and discussion of the experience, is student-led, and gives constant, ongoing feedback in a meaningful way.

One difference between groups was that the care staff were pre-occupied with comparing the time spent at Equine therapy with time in school. It was perhaps not particularly surprising, given the pressure of repeated Ofsted inspections.

The therapists and the care staff mentioned how the horses, and the tasks involving the horses, helped to develop autonomy and child-centred learning; how the therapists and horses gave encouragement and praise; how being with horses in this setting provided novelty; clarity of what was expected was achieved via demonstration and concrete examples rather than verbally; sharing information with other people both at the centre and with care staff, therapists and

parents; predictability of tasks and behaviour from the horses, and a fresh start, with tangible achievements away from the school settings in which the young people had experienced repeated failure.

The therapists had set out to design an inclusive, welcoming setting in which the young people felt safe to carry out their tasks, to communicate and cooperate with horses and humans alike.

The young people spontaneously mentioned that they preferred experiential learning, to the traditional methods used in school. They preferred to go at their own pace, follow their own interests, and to be allowed to choose the order in which they did the tasks.

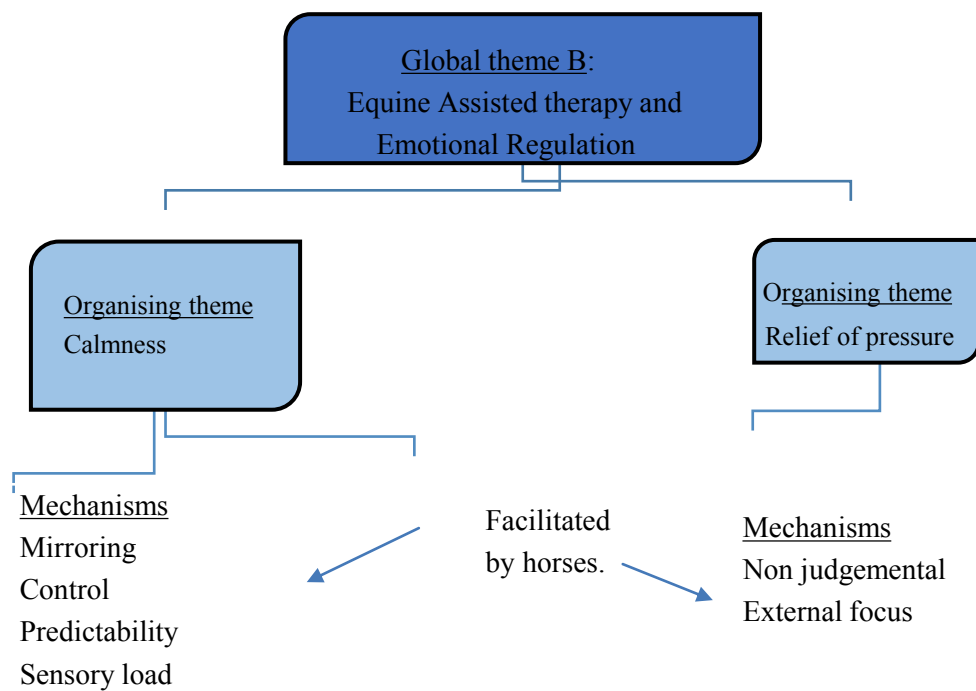
The skill of the therapists regarding their understanding of each young person's needs was mentioned by the care staff, and their confidence and non-judgemental approach was appreciated by the young participants

The theme of experiential learning was strong, but it forms only a part of Equine assisted therapy in this centre. Knowledge of horses equipped the young people with confidence, which in turn helped to develop the relationships with the horses. It also led to a spirit of camaraderie and a feeling that they were a select group.

See the next page for Theme B.

4.6 Organising themes and Global Theme B. Equine Assisted therapy and Emotional Regulation.

Diagram 7. Global Theme B. Equine Assisted therapy and Emotional Regulation



4.6.1 Calmness

A major theme mentioned by the care staff and therapists was that the young participants were ‘completely different boys’ in school and at the centre. By far the most emphatic point made about the difference was that at the stables they are calm.

As Dustin put it:

CS D: “They all calm down. They are chilled and relaxed.” L26.

Jan, one of the members of staff, describes how he observes the young men change from being physically aggressive in school to being calm and placid at the stables:

CS J: “I have to say, and the interesting thing is, most boys that we have who go to Equine are the ones who, more often than not, aren’t able to cope in school, so they need some sort of respite. There are ones that present challenging behaviour within school and in some cases extremely challenging and violent behaviour and yet, in the time that I’ve been to Equine, these boys seem to change completely and there has never been any indication of aggression or anger, they all seem very placid and just seem to get on with what needs to be done. I think it’s really special to that interaction between the boys and the horses.... You just see the boys in a completely different light.” L57 – 63.

This observation was also made by Esther:

CS E: “I think the boys are completely different boys when they are not at Equine, so it’s boys that are completely hyper and things like that, so at Equine their moods just completely change and they are a lot calmer, but then they are not like that at Forest school, they are still hyper there, so I think horses have something to do with it.” L20-23.

Esther’s idea is that it is the horses that somehow help calm the young men down. A presupposition by staff and by the researcher, based on literature, had been that it was the low sensory input from the setting, which is located in a very rural location, that was the

determining factor in helping the young people to stay calm. The theory is that being in a rural setting simplifies sensory input, a factor which was discussed in the research by Belojevic et al (2008) and it is seen as a component of biophilia.

Indeed, Malcolm, one of the therapists, mentioned this point:

T M: "I think the setting in itself is quite special, the activities are good anyway, but there is something about a quiet environment that adds to it.....it allows them to focus." L278-283.

Yet the participants did not seem to think of the rural setting, and they seemed to think that it was being with the horse, that calmed them down. The horses themselves are described as being quiet and passive at the stables, with the occasional sound of 'munching' (Alison's description) or a whinny, or the blow sound mentioned by Simon, a sound which denotes that all is well from the horse's point of view (Aronson, 2000)

Some may argue that the structure of the sessions, or having practical tasks is the reason why the young men are able to stay calm, rather than when they are in traditional school lessons. However, the young men have their own reasons why they are calm with the horses.

Edward explained that, from his point of view, when you are with the horses it is a necessary 'rule' to be calm. Edward's main interest is

about health and safety, almost to the point of an obsession. In most of his interview he tries to bring the questions back to his interests of control and health and safety. Staying calm is seen by the young men as a motivational factor.

The importance of staying safe is echoed by the other young men, who also reiterate the theme that they need to be calm for their own good:

YP S: "...if they bumped into anything they could be in pain or get a bit frightened and so they could hurt me if they were to run off or something, so it's about being careful, you have to be careful that no one gets hurt while having a nice time." L64.

There is also the possibility that the sensory activity of petting or grooming could help calm the young people down. Some may view this as a sensory activity, whereas others may link the grooming with relationship building with the horse.

Jonny explained how, when grooming, you need to do this slowly so as not to scare the horse:

YP J: "It needs trust and you mustn't scare it, so you have to stroke it slowly and that. And remember to do it down towards the tail and like on its neck and that. Maybe a bit further down, what is it, not the collar, where the body starts." L330.

Esther believes that the act of grooming is very calming and 'therapeutic', in her opinion possibly for sensory reasons:

CS E: "I think it (grooming) is really therapeutic for them. It was concentrating on where they had to rub and working out the points where they needed to do it, and the horses were so calm and the boys were so calm." L 100- 102.

The act of stroking and grooming has been shown in studies to lower blood pressure and enhance feelings of calmness, (Belojevica et al, 2008) although these acts were not mentioned specifically in such terms by the participants.

The act of grooming could also be perceived as a gesture of acceptance by a horse, which may also result in positive emotions for the groomer.

Although the word 'spirituality' was not used by any of the fourteen participants in this study, it is nevertheless a theme alluded to, for example Ellie-May, one of the therapists, speaks in romanticised terms when talking about the atmosphere at the stables, using the word 'aura' to describe the way the horses exude calm. A metaphor was used by Alan, a young person, to describe how he visualises himself as being the calm point of a storm, a place of safety for the horses to feel relaxed in, and therefore to approach you as a trainer:

YP A: "So basically you are in a circular pen and you get the horse to run around it, but then once its circles are getting smaller and his head and ears are facing you and you appear as the centre of a storm, so to speak, and it's a horse taming exercise really." L 41-44.

It would seem that, although the young men mentioned the need to be calm in order to keep themselves safe, this was made real for them via the horse, who may otherwise become frightened and/or possibly unpredictable.

The horses also seem to act as a visual aid to ‘reflect’ how the young men are feeling, akin to the explanation given by Grandin (2006). This is referred to by all the participants, and in the literature as ‘mirroring’, and it seems that this process helps the young participants to recognise and regulate their emotions.

4.6.2 Mirroring

This sub- theme was very strong across all groups. The young men did not use the word ‘mirroring’, instead they all referred to the idea of ‘raising or lowering energy’, which the horses would then respond to in their ‘energy level’. Whether or not the fact that all the participants mentioned the concept of mirroring, either by the concept or by the word, begs the question as to whether this is what makes the subtheme of mirroring so strong.

One member of staff, Esther, mentioned that the young men watch the calm behaviour of the lead therapist and try to copy her (L33).

The main theme was that if the young men were calm, the horses would be calm, and if the young men were agitated, the horses would be agitated too.

CS J: "The horses react to the boys' behaviour." L 51

T D: "Horses can be a really good mirror." L 155

Adrian explained the idea of mirroring from an ego-centric position:

YP A: "If we are jumpy, the horse will be jumpy." And: "If you are uncertain, the horse will be uncertain." L 94

Edward also sees it from his point of view:

YP E: "They pick up on body language and the energy that I use." L125

The therapists all mentioned the concept of mirroring. They saw it more in terms of the horses passively reflecting back the moods of the young men.

T A: "A horse will show you exactly how you are feeling, whether or not you realise."

And:

"Horses have the ability to reflect back what the children are giving out." L186.

A different perspective on the mirroring was given by Susan, a member of staff, and Simon and Edward, two of the young people, who thought that it was not just a case of the horses mirroring the young men's behaviour, and that it was more of a dynamic, interactive process:

YP S: "If you are upbeat, the horse will be upbeat. Our moods depend on each other." L127.

YP E: “I think horses can be quite therapeutic and they listen to you and they pick up your body senses, so when I’m sad, they will comfort you, they will nudge you to make sure you are all right. Same with a dog, but when you sort of raise your energy, they will raise their energy. So if the horse was walking around....and you raised your energy, and made yourself broad, the horse would start trotting.”

L 119-123.

For Sarah, a member of staff at the school, the outcome of emotional regulation is a plus point:

CS S: “They get to know the energy levels of the horse so then they can emotionally regulate by adjusting their own levels accordingly.” L31-32.

All the studies in the literature had included the concept of ‘mirroring’, in a belief among therapists that the horse would ‘reflect’ the mood or ‘energy levels’ of the clients, and this seems to be a particularly strong concept with Equine Assisted therapy. The idea of reciprocity was not a strong theme throughout the literature.

Although views were not expressed about this during the interviews, it would have been interesting to ask whether or not the young people had also tried computer based programmes to help with biofeedback and whether this would be as effective, given that the young people feel that the horse helps them as well as vice versa. This may be a possible future topic for research. The following subthemes can all be linked in with the outcome of emotional regulation.

4.6.3 Control

The young men who attend the Equine Assisted therapy all have a strong need for autonomy and control, a need which is often linked with ASD and anxiety based difficulties. All the young men talked about ‘boundaries’ and all of them used the word ‘control’ and gave examples of how they needed to be in control of the horse.

Dorothy, one of the therapists, believes that the boys’ need to control is linked with a positive feeling of empowerment:

T D: “Getting the horse to do as you want leads to feelings of power.” L150.

CS S: “He knew he had to stand still in order for that horse to stand still and that’s what he did.” L137.

This was an issue which the researcher tried to discuss in detail with the participants:

Question to Simon: “So you mentioned before the word assertive...well, how would you be assertive to a horse?” L97.

This question proved difficult for him to answer:

YP S: “Hmm, that’s a bad word really (although he had used it himself) but um, assertive means, um, I’m sorry I can’t think of another word to describe it, sorry.” L98.

When it was explained that it meant getting the horse to do as he wanted, he was able to relay the facts about how to gain control:

YP S: “Well, yes, it’s like for example if you want to move the horse.... so its feet align, but it’s a couple of feet too far forward, then you pull backwards to the chest area, uh, it might start pushing and you end up hurting yourself because there is a lot of pressure but then you have to keep going because they realise you are not going to give up.” L 101-104.

He seemed to have the knowledge to gain control of the horse, as he later explains:

YP S: “So you give them a boundary and you show them a physical boundary, so you would move your hand right next to their face.....they learn quite quickly ‘this is a boundary, do not cross that!’” L175.

During the interview with Alan, one question probed how the feeling of control made him feel:

YP A: “Pause.....Errmm how does that make me feel? (pause). Errrm, it feels like...well it feels like you’ve done a good job, but I suppose if I was doing it for real, I’d be like: ‘Great, I’ve tamed a horse, yay!’” L68.

When the same question was put to Adrian, he said that getting the horse to do as he wanted felt ‘amazing.’ L66.

Jonny found the questions around control hard to answer. He had brought up the topic of control in one of his photographs but when asked how it made him feel when he could do this, he said:

YP J: “Well, it’s like connecting...someone looking at that photo would say ‘wow, that kid has got some connection with that horse.’” L314.

Jonny construed the idea of control as a sense of mutual bonding rather than the horse passively accepting his commands. His need for connection is discussed in the section about projection and anthropomorphising.

The care staff and therapists felt that the quiet, simple surroundings contributed to feelings of calm and wellbeing. The young men themselves did not mention this.

4.6.4 Non- judgemental acceptance

The lead therapist certainly asserts this point. She set out her aim to have an inclusive, welcoming society at the Equine centre, and she views the horses as being facilitators in this. She explains that horses never ‘bear grudges’ (L 51) and ‘they give people the benefit of the doubt’ (L84) and they have ‘a remarkable ability to read intent.’”

T A: “ so they know the difference between a child with cerebral palsy, and we have kids here with profound cerebral palsy, who hit them (the horses) by accident and you’ll see the horse will slightly move their head quickly and out of the way but they’re straight back in there to say ‘hello’ again in a way that a human might not be so generous I suppose.” L 91-94.

Alison also went on to say that the horses are non- judgemental and make allowances for people, for example while she was seriously ill, the horses were more careful in their movements around her.

This is Alison's interpretation of the horses' behaviour. However, it could be seen as an anthropomorphism, and at other times the idea of horses being almost consciously non-judgmental is contradicted, because the explanations of horse behaviour given by Alison and the other therapists revolve around the simplicity of horses, and the idea that their behaviour is a response to their surroundings. It could be argued that the horse reads intent in so far as it recognises threat, but it could be argued that differentiating an accidental from a non-accidental hit may be an exaggeration of their ability to have a Theory of Mind. Yet, if the participants believe that by behaving in certain ways towards the horses they will always have trust and a positive response, this could be interpreted by them as acceptance and a non-judgemental approach. Ironically, calling the horses non-judgemental is possibly the greatest 'projection' throughout the interviews, and this is not from a young participant, but by a therapist onto the horse.

Building a non- judgemental community with the help of horses was one aim of the lead therapist. Simon mentioned the cooperative aspect (L232) as did Edward and Adrian.

YP S: “They are looking right into your soul, I know, I know. I love a horse.” L 284.

Although Jonny’s understanding of other people’s intent is affected by his autism, he did show some insight into the way that horses react, for example that their behaviour could be ethologically driven, rather than due to cognitive evaluations:

R: “And do you think if you accidentally hurt the horse it would forgive you?”

YP J: “Maybe, yes.”

R: “Or would it be angry with you?”

YP J: “Well sometimes horses don’t tell the difference, but I don’t think there are angry horses actually. Yes, if you start shooting and then it starts kicking up or something, like a war horse, but that’s a fear.” L396.

Ellie- May thinks that horses are huge and quiet, with an enormous calmness about them and that they have an ‘accepting’ presence. It is this, in her opinion, which allows the young participants to have relief from negative judgement.

Joan, Dustin and Susan from the care staff mentioned this point too:

CS Jo: “They don’t care what you look like, what you are wearing, whether you smell, just how you are with them.” L177.

CS D: “I don’t think the horses have any expectation of the child and therefore they don’t feel under any pressure whatsoever.” L 32 (mentioned 5 times)

CS S: “They are not being judged for the way they communicate here.” L112.

It would seem, through the researcher’s interpretation, that although the participants did not mention the word ‘judged’, they perhaps like being with the horses in part because there is no duplicitous behaviour to contend with, something which is hard for autistic people to contend with when in the company of other people.

4.6.5 External focus

Another way in which pressure is relieved is by focussing on something else other than oneself and one’s problems. Dustin explained that the horses helped the young people to focus:

CS D: “I think it (being with the horses) gives them an external focus more than anything else, so they don’t have to stress.” L 27 and “They are calm because they have the horse as a focus.” L30.

Joan felt that looking after the horses meant that there was respite from thinking about themselves.

4. 7 Summary of Global Theme B.

The therapists and care staff felt that the young people were not under pressure, and were not judged. They also felt that the young people enjoyed having some time to just be themselves, without the

complicated rules of human society. Another concept mentioned was that the horses co-regulated rather than ‘reflected’ feelings.

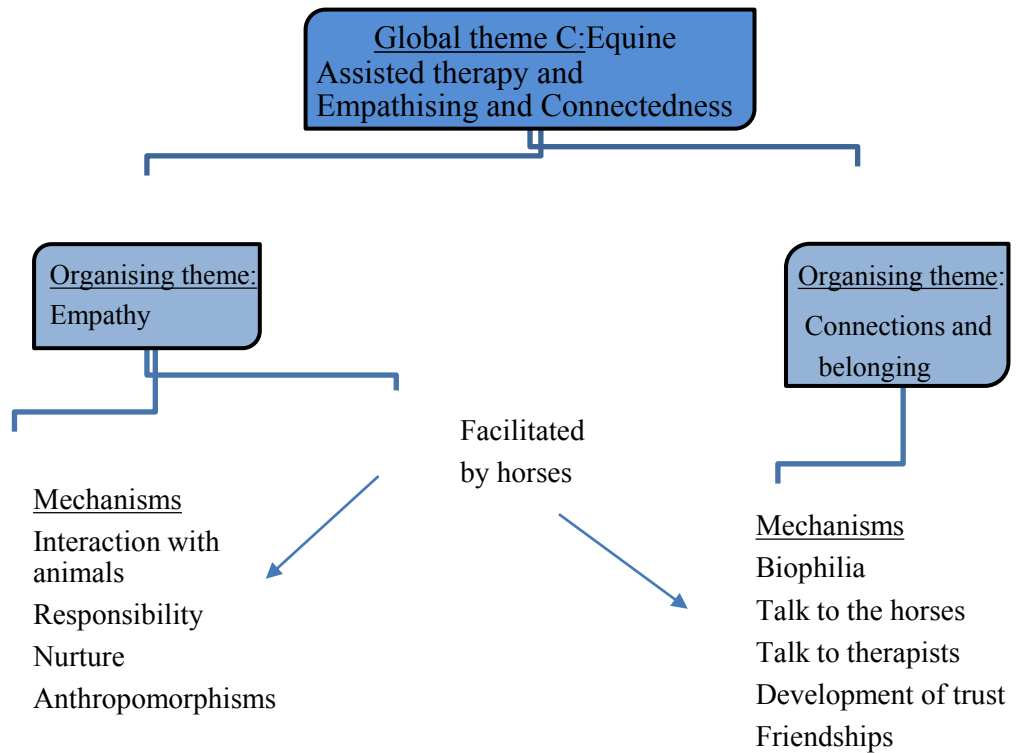
The idea of sensory load was not a strong theme in the study, and the young men pointed out that it was not about being outdoors, rather, it was about being with the horses that led to feelings of calmness.

Esther, for example, said that the young men were still ‘hyper’ at the Forest school, so that she attributed the emotional regulation to being with the horses. The idea of the therapy taking place in a rural setting was mentioned by Malcolm, but it there was still a predominant belief that it was the interaction with horses and the other animals that kept the young men calm.

Dustin and Joan mentioned the idea that having something other than themselves was a good way to enhance feelings of calm, by having ‘external focus.’

4.8 Organising and Global Theme C. Equine Assisted therapy and Empathising and Connectedness

Diagram 8: Theme C. Equine Assisted therapy and Empathising and Connectedness



4.8.1 Biophilia

In this particular Equine Assisted therapy, the young people spend time outside in the fields in a quiet, rural setting. This would initially lend support to the construct amongst staff that the young people prefer being outdoors to spending time in the classroom.

Previous research has highlighted the benefits of outdoor education and aspects of biophilia (Kellert & Wilson, 1993).

However, the views of the participants were not as closely aligned to this idea as might perhaps have been expected, and a more complex picture emerged about what it means to be with the horses in terms of physical, and psychological wellbeing.

The participants were asked whether or not there were similarities about being outside at the Forest school and being outside at Equine therapy. The response was unanimous and emphatic:

YP S: "I like being outside, but it's all about the *animals*." L322.

YP Al: "It's all about working with the animals." L151.

YP Ad: "There is nothing like working with the horses- it's amazing."
L66.

Two members of staff were firm advocates of the biophilia hypothesis:

CS D: "There is a connection between it all. It's natural. Most children like interacting with animals." L113.

CS J: "It's a kind of natural thing. Equine therapy is something they actually connect with." L10.

All the participants were keen to point out that while they did like being outside, or at least, partially; the point was that they were

interacting with animals. One of the therapists explained that she felt unable to express what it is about the presence of the horses, but it was indeed their presence, rather than an outdoor setting, that was special.

T EM: “You enter a lovely warm house from the cold. It’s the most beautiful thing in the world.” L159.

This description sets up an almost ‘magical’ image, which could be an important aspect of the way that the Equine assisted therapy, or for that matter many other therapies, work. In portraying the setting and the therapy in such a positive way, for the young people and other people who go there they may be encouraged to enter a realm of escapism, thus possibly suspending their everyday worries for a while.

The idea of being outside in the fresh air, does nonetheless evoke an image of wholesome, healthy living amongst some staff. One member of staff made the point when discussing a photograph of one young person that he in particular would not otherwise get physical exercise:

CS Jo: “I see him on his exercise bike – he can only go for ten minutes. Whereas at Equine, he is able to keep going, mucking out the stables and fetching water. Otherwise he would be stuck in his room on his computer.” L259.

The observation was also made by Ellie-May (L 334).

It was interesting that the aspect of physical exercise was not mentioned by the other participants, other than Ellie-May and Joan, even though two members of staff in particular are very physically active, and responsible for taking the young people on outdoor activities. It could be that this benefit was, in their eyes, taken for granted.

4.8.2 Interaction with animals

The young people had been unequivocal in their response that they were interested in being with the horses. All the participants were asked in the 'warm up' part of the interviews whether or not they had a pet. Four of the five young participants expressed positive feelings towards their pets, while one participant said that his family were against having pets. Four of the five members of staff owned pets, and all the therapists have pets. which led to further explorations of whether or not there are differences between being with a pet at home, being with animals, being with animals outside, and in particular being with horses in the fields and stables. This exploration led to some formulations about what it could be that is specific to Equine Assisted therapy. Kruger et al. (2003) are sceptical about the idea that therapy can be facilitated by animals, but this scepticism is not in line with the perceptions of the young men in this research.

This particular Equine Assisted therapy takes place in a rural setting with a variety of animals, the idea being that working with different species may help address the variety of experiences and personalities of the young people. Some young people may be afraid of horses, or dogs, for example. Cats may not be as popular as ‘co therapists’, although Alison alone described their cat in such terms. None of the young participants or staff members mentioned the cat, which matches the coverage in the literature about animal assisted therapies. The participants either owned or wanted to own dogs, but they also enjoyed being in the presence of horses.

When asked about the difference between being with dogs or horses, Dustin, a member of staff said:

CS D: “There is a slight difference, but not as much as we had thought.”

L55.

Malcom, one of the therapists, explained that dogs and horses were used in different ways in animal assisted therapy. Horses were seen by him as being simple, predictable, calm and accepting. It was the needs of the client that determined the animal with which to work:

T M: “ ‘Dog people’ want something and get something back from them, with cat people it’s almost more like you are serving the cat, and you know I think the cat might say you were their pet! I think horses come somewhere in between...I think it’s their size and they sort of take you in and they give you trust and there’s something

satisfying about that, and from such a large animal, and such a frightened animal...” L54-66.

Ellie-May felt that horses do not care about humans in the same way that dogs do, but that

“horses accept us into their universe.” L 203.

One young participant had a different view on the difference:

YP A1: “...dogs produce faecal matter everywhere and my mum’s lost too many cats, and birds are a bit squawky.” L6-7.

This young man was very interested in faecal matter and what it was made of. In his terms, the stable would be completely full of ‘faecal matter’ if he were not to clean it out. This illustrates the point that it is necessary to ‘expect the unexpected’ when working with young people with autism.

The framework of ethology was alluded to, although not mentioned using that term.

Staff and therapists thought that we need to take account of what can be observed with the animals (and the participants) and take note of what is ‘normal’ for the species. Cats were seen as being independent by Sarah, Joan, Malcolm and Simon, whereas dogs were seen as pack animals, and as being emotionally responsive to their owners (Adrian and Jonny).

Horses were seen in terms of being vulnerable animals of a prey who have a structure to their herd in order to survive. Knowing this enables the young participants to carry out tasks, and understanding equine behaviour leads to benefits in the young men such as confidence, assertiveness, feelings of acceptance and, ultimately, in terms of understanding some human behaviours. There was a romanticised portrayal of horses by one of the therapists:

T EM: “They have a big, solid, lovely warm presence.” L146.

From an ethological point of view, being able to understand the emotional system of a horse or other animal helps to understand the behaviours. Discussions about emotions of horses resulted in mixed responses, for example one young person said:

YP J: “They do have emotions but it’s totally different.” L381.

He reflected on his own behaviours and contrasted them with those of a horse in terms of emotions:

YP J: “They don’t feel embarrassed or guilty, because they just wee and poo everywhere.” L393.

Another young person, who anthropomorphises frequently said that:

YP S: “Horses can read your emotions and think.” L126 and

YP Ad: “The horses tend to try and understand our feelings.” L32.

The therapists explained how horses are ruled by fear because they are a prey species. This fact had been picked up by one young person who said:

YP Ad: “You need to know the fears that the horses have.” L103.

The young people recognised that if they could understand how the horse was feeling, in terms of happiness and fear, and they did so via body language, then this would help them to develop a bond with the horse and therefore control (and, using conjecture, possibly some feelings of power) for themselves.

However, it was unclear as to whether or not the young people had been able to generalise their understanding of horses’ emotions and behaviours to those of humans. At this point it remains a matter of surmise that their autism separates out their understanding of behaviour of one species to another.

4.8.3 Responsibility

One criticism commonly raised by teaching staff in the school was that the Equine Assisted therapy was a pretext for getting the young men to clean out the stables. One of the main activities at Equine Assisted therapy is to do this. The therapists explained that the participants must learn about its importance and relevance:

T EM: “You have to emphasise how important it is (to look after the horses) it’s not all about ‘let me pet the horse’ and it’s all about ‘we have to keep the horses healthy and fed.” L288.

An unexpected take on this was given by Jonny, in his pragmatic interpretation of the need to look after the horses:

YP J: “If you look after it, it makes them live longer, which is the whole point.” L152.

Some staff related the care giving to a sense of freedom, as the focus was on the horse rather than on themselves; Dustin, Jan, Joan, and Ellie-May the therapist.

4.8.4 Nurture

Taking responsibility for another living creature may promote empathy. However, some of the young people interviewed felt that it was their duty to care for another creature, and that in so doing, they would reap benefits for themselves in terms of gaining qualifications or gaining trust, power and control over the horse. Edward, for example, did not seem to have insight into the emotional issues of empathy and nurture:

YP E: “You’ve got to look after them. My horse costs £100 a month.” L270.

Jonny also has a pragmatic view on the care of animals:

YP J: “If you look after them it makes them live longer, which is the whole point.” L152.

Some young people were pragmatic, and practical, for example Alan said that if he did not clean the stable, the faecal matter produced by the horse would fill the stable:

YP Al: “...the amount of faeces that some of these horses produce...if you were to leave them overnight well, they would fill the whole stable up, so yeah, you have to muck their stables out twice a day.” L166.

Other members of staff felt that the actions of the young people in caring for the horses portrayed a caring side to the young people:

CS J: “You see a caring side come out down at Equine.” L50.

Adrian seemed to express care for the horse:

YP Ad: “How would you like to be covered in mud and leaves?” L53 and

“How would you like it if you had to travel around?” L136.

It is not entirely clear whether or not Adrian has learnt to say such things by rote, echoing the words of the therapists, since Alan had used the same term, or whether he genuinely feels the sentiments expressed. Such unresolved ambiguity is a point to be addressed in

the discussion section. What is clear is that Adrian does carry out the cleaning tasks without protest.

Another main task is to feed the horses. Horses can eat for hours (unlike dogs) and this may well be a benefit in terms of therapy activities.

Detailed explanations are given to the young men by the therapists about why the water needs to be clean and the hay fresh, and the need for different herbs or carrots. It is a point for debate whether or not the knowledge about this possibly interests the young men more than the feelings of nurture.

A point raised in one interview was that the young men had sensory issues in school, but not in the Equine stables, contrary to expectations. Sarah had noticed this and wondered aloud how this might be the case.

Alan proffered his own explanation:

YP A1: “Well it’s the smell of newly digested grass rather than like our poo, which has gone all the way through our digestive system with meat and fat and all sorta of things that are not as nice.” L257.

It may be the case that when caring for an animal there is greater tolerance of smells and temperature, as the need to be nurturing

overrides the distraction of sensory input, unlike in the classroom setting.

4.8.5 Anthropomorphisms

According to the Oxford English dictionary, anthropomorphism is a term used to denote the ‘attribution of a human form or personality to a god, animal or thing.’

On the whole, the anthropomorphizing was more frequent and more intense among the therapists than the two other groups. This is perhaps because they spend their waking and working hours in the company of their horses.

One therapist explained that:

T A: “Every horse has a different character.” L44.

One horse in particular was named and described in detail as:

T A, T D, T EM: “‘Elderly Babs’ ‘Great Aunty Babs’ ‘Catherine Tate’s Nan, Babs.’”

Another horse called Callum was named by both the people in the Therapists’ group and the Young People’s group.

T A: “Callum is utterly genuine.” L521.

T M: “Callum is a generous horse. A gentleman.” L285.

By the end of the fourteen interview sessions there was a sense of familiarity with the twelve horses and the attributes bestowed on them. Adjectives such as ‘kind’, ‘caring’, ‘moody’, ‘grumpy’ and ‘flighty’ came up in the discussions.

Two female members of staff felt that the horses were all ‘individuals’ whereas the male staff felt that the horses were distinguishable by their appearance, size in particular. The other, male member of staff, felt that the young people chose to be with certain horses due to their autism and preference for sameness and routine, a point mentioned previously.

One shared theme was that of trust, as seen in the overarching theme of Experiential learning (Theme A.)

4.8.6 Talking to the horses about their issues

While studies in the literature describe Equine Assisted therapy in terms of Psychotherapy in this particular Equine Assisted therapy while the focus was not specifically on encouraging the young people to talk to the horses, it was an idea that was mentioned by staff and therapists. However, it was of interest to note that the interviewees who did mention that the participants talk to the horses were female, and only one young person described how he would talk to his dog, not one to the horses:

YP J: “Well whenever I am at home and I get upset at home because it does happen occasionally, but not too often, then I go downstairs and talk to the dogs as if they were a real person. Like actually talk to them. They cuddle me and make me laugh and feel better.” L71.

There was a difference in perceptions, therefore; some of the adults believe that the young people talk to the horses about personal issues, whereas the young people do not say that they do so.

4.8.7 Self-disclosure

The interview process itself gave opportunities which the young participants took to talk about themselves, as illustrated by Jonny when he talked about being upset when he is home. Simon told me about how upset he had been when his cats had died. It had not been the deaths per se that had upset him; what had hurt him had been the way that it had been kept secret from him:

YP S: “We had cats but they died. This had a significant effect on me.” L5.

While on the one hand, this young man wanted to disclose that he had been hurt emotionally by this, on the other he then adopted a pattern of being apologetic, and blaming himself to cover up feelings of recrimination he might harbour.

YP S: “I would have overreacted at that time.” L19.

Simon talked about the difficulties which he sometimes has in maintaining the boundaries with the horses, which is a construct he has about himself:

YP S: "I am quite a softy, a bit of a wimp." L81.

He told me that boundaries can often be pushed or blurred:

YP S: "Being a teenager myself, you tend to try to break the rules, don't you?" L107

and

"They are clever. They are always trying to push the boundaries."

L94.

He would describe how although he rationally knew the reasons why not to give extra carrots to the horses, he would nevertheless not have the self-discipline to resist:

YP S: "I like my food, so they expect food to be brought to them, like I like food to be brought to me, so... L155.

Another young participant experiences issues of neglect and is reminded in the residential setting of the importance of personal hygiene. He transferred these thoughts onto the horse's thoughts:

YP J: "It probably thinks: 'oh he smells bad - I won't go near him.'"

L115.

This young man is open to the staff about his feelings of being rejected at home and his ambivalent feelings towards his baby brother. While he did not mention this theme directly, his confused descriptions of the horses seemed to allude to this issue:

YP J: "I probably prefer the little one actually, well actually the adult ones would be more knowing and learning to love you and, erm, be friendly towards you. They have done it throughout their entire lives whereas the ponies are like little kids. How do you explain it? Little kids behave in front of their mum and dads and then they behave in front of them. And as they get older they misbehave again." L164.

When encouraged to continue with his description of the horses, this young man may well have been thinking about his home situation, seeing the ponies as his young siblings and baby brother:

YP J: "Testing the boundaries, so that is what ponies do isn't it? So, I do like the adult ones more but they don't seem to do it as much. They have done it in their past lives but they don't seem to do it as much, not past lives but in the pas but wouldn't have got told off." L170.

Adrian used the description of a horse to explain:

YP Ad: "The horse is too kind....like me...too kind." L181.

'Incidental' self -disclosure comes on the young people's terms and is therefore relatively easy to respond to as a psychologist or therapist. Another route to disclosing feelings and issues that play on the mind

is through projection. Gleiser, Ford and Fosha (2008) asserted that Equine Assisted therapy could work in this way.

4.8.8 Projection and horses as ‘objects of mediation’.

‘Projection’ is defined in the Oxford English dictionary (1990) as:

“The unconscious transfer of one’s own impressions or feelings to external objects or persons.”

In the literature on Equine Assisted therapy, projective techniques are cited as a means to explore emotive or troubling issues (Hunter and Lytle, 2012; Frame, 2006). Sometimes the descriptions given by the young person about the horse’s personality could be used to explore their personal constructs. One example of the horse being a mediator between the client and the therapist was given by Alison, the lead therapist, who described how Callum the horse became impatient with a client who was rather passive. Through observing the interactions and talking to the client about the interaction, the client disclosed that she had been the victim of domestic abuse and that she did not know how to ‘please people.’ Alison went on:

T A: “Being with an animal you’ve made a bond with will bring out that and people can be quite surprised about themselves and they can then work on it.” L 210-211.

The idea is that the type of horse chosen by the participants reveals personality traits, so that the participant unconsciously transfers feelings onto the horse. This idea came through in the interviews.

CS S: “They relate to the sort of animal they choose, so they might choose an animal that has a similar sort of past to them, or one they feel has got a similar personality to them.” L18.

Sometimes the projection can reveal quite unrealistic self-perceptions and wishful thinking:

YP J: “The horse is like me, powerful, impressive.” L263.

When in reality he experiences loneliness and despair. Adrian has similar issues and he too chose to relate himself to a horse that he sees as:

YP Ad: “And my favourite horse is kind, and you can be kind too. We are both too kind.” L181.

One young man, Edward, seems to see himself as being in control.

He talks about his favourite horse:

YP E: “He was the boss and I got on quite well with him.” L113.

Edward’s choice of photograph is an example of using indirect, projective means to reveal what could be on a young person’s mind.

When asked to take photographs at random, Edward’s obsession with

health and safety was illustrated. His photographs included a big yellow brush, helmets and a fire extinguisher.

4.8.9 Development of friendships

The young men in this study have autism, and by definition have issues with social interaction and friendships. Some of the young men talked of bonding with, growing attached to, and having friendships with the horses, while others mentioned the way that being with the horses facilitated social cooperation.

Adrian's photograph was a picture of a group of horses and people together.

He said:

YP Ad: "It's about being social with other people." L205 and "It helps with friendship." L191.

Whereas Jonny and Edward talked about friendships in terms of the horses:

YP J: "They learn to love you and be friends with you." L165.

YP E: "When I'm sad...they will comfort me. It's a friendship, I can't explain." L120.

The sessions with the horses afforded opportunities for the young people to give and receive cuddles and affection, which in some cases was defined as an unmet need:

CS S: "...some of the boys here, well, a lot of them, struggle with closeness with humans so it's nice to see that they can get that closeness somewhere else." L181.

CS D: "He's giving the horse a cuddle but he would never give a person a cuddle." L 279.

YP J: "They (the dogs and horses) cuddle me, make me feel better and they comfort me." L71.

When the possibility is raised that the young men enjoy the cuddles because of an unmet sensory need, the probability is that instead, it is linked with friendship, understanding and comfort:

YP J: "The horse understands how the human being feels." L291.

Jonny gave his explanation how the animals could be in tune with human emotions:

YP J: "If you put your head touching a dog's head, you transfer your emotions." L296.

For Alan, the issue of friendship with the horse did not arise. For him, the horse was a means to exercise his own control, and if the horse did not do as it was supposed to do, Alan would describe it as 'evil' and in need of brute force to obey.

4.8.10 Social facilitation

Alison mentioned that the purpose behind the setting was to create a community:

T A: “It was very much about building a community that young people could come into and learn what it is to be social within that community.” L323-324.

This was to be achieved via an emphasis on communication, but there would appear to be other aspects which promote this aim. Using the specific vocabulary and phrases seemed to bring about a spirit of camaraderie, of being special, of being part of a clique outside school.

The phrases were used across all groups, particularly ‘lower your energy’ or ‘We’ve bonded.’

Adrian pointed out that he had met the other young men at Equine even though he had not known them at school (despite the school’s small size) and that they got on in the sessions.

One idea mentioned by Dustin was that in focussing on the tasks with the horses, the young men are imbued with a spirit of cooperation.

This was a view echoed by Edward:

YP E: “When you are around horses you cooperate with people more.” L147.

Joan chose to portray the social aspect in her photographs.

For Ellie-May on the therapy team, social inclusivity was a major part of what is positive at Equine Assisted therapy:

T EM: “When the students arrive with their teachers and drivers there is an effort to be in a welcoming committee. Everyone gets greeted, whether or not they greet back, everyone is greeted and acknowledged, and there is a getting together in the classroom and be together as a group...I guess it’s about we are together in a group, it’s not just ‘me, me, me.’” lines 107-111.

And:

“At the end of the session we wave goodbye and I think that is so powerful because it’s saying ‘we’ve acknowledged you from the start to the end of the session and your presence matters to us’” L119.

The therapy team view the combination of horses and therapists as one big team, with the aim of bringing people into that ‘magical’ world.

T EM: “They let you into their universe.” L203.

And:

“It’s just this big, solid, lovely warm presence that’s there.” L221.

4.9 Summary of Global Theme C. Equine Assisted therapy and Empathising and Connectedness

The third global theme was that Equine therapy could be linked with the promotion of Wellbeing. The young people, staff and therapists described how the horses were facilitators of interaction, and a sense of belonging, both in terms of communication, physical intimacy, and friendships.

Using the horses as facilitators seemed to help the young men to feel part of something special, to feel accepted and to be able to ‘be themselves’ without judgement. The young people were described by the adults as being ‘different boys’ while at Equine, and they themselves painted an of image of relaxation, calm and belonging, brought about via caring for the horses, forming their friendships with the horses, and using the time to be together with horses and other young people in a safe therapeutic environment. In some ways, it came as a surprise to the researcher that three of the young men in particular felt strongly about the aspect of socialisation. They could have picked up on the strong theme of the therapists about being a welcoming, inclusive community.

CHAPTER FIVE. DISCUSSION.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the limitations of the research and what could have been done differently. The findings will be discussed in relation to the research questions, and, finally, the findings will be discussed in relation to the literature and previous studies.

5.2 Limitations

5.2.1 Conducting the interviews: pitfalls and positives

(Brinkman, 2015) highlighted the different kinds of questions that can be asked in interviews, and there was a conscious effort made by the researcher to ask a mixture of factual, direct, and indirect questions, with time given for silent reflection, and times when probing was used, mainly as a means of encouragement and motivation.

The researcher had many years of experience talking with young people with autism. Despite this, however, there were still some moments of misunderstanding during the interviews. Some examples of such misunderstandings were: their literal interpretation of some questions; difficulties with inference, and using closed or rhetorical questions. Sometimes the participants went ‘off topic’ and it was necessary for the researcher to find ways to come back to the point.

It was useful for the researcher to transcribe the interviews because of the idiosyncratic speech in some of the young participants, which another transcriber might have misunderstood.

During one interview, in which Dustin had brought up the idea of biophilia, there was a temptation to discuss the researcher's idea with him, as this theory had been of interest during the literature search.

The researcher recognised the possibility that this could have led to an attempt to impose her own views, and it was a line of interviewing which was abruptly called to a halt. As Kvale (2007) warned, during interviews, the researcher must be prepared to hear surprising answers, and adapt their line of questioning and responses.

Using photographs across the groups seemed an effective way of eliciting views, as it gave a focus. The talk on the part of the young autistic participant was in inverse proportion to the talk given during the purely verbal exchanges. On average, with the young participants, their answers during the verbal exchanges were one to two lines long, whereas when they were talking about the photographs, their answers were up to four times longer.

The answers elicited via photographs with the therapists were equally long as with the verbal discussions.

The answers with the members of staff were usually seven lines longer on average during the photo elicitation, than in response to the direct verbal questions, roughly in line with the answers given to the more open questions. This illustrated the point made by Punch (2002) that it is not only children who benefit from using photographs. It also seemed to make the interviewees feel more at ease, as was found by Carnaham, (2006); Hergenrather et al., (2009) and Radley and Taylor (2010).

5.2.2 The sample and issues of bias

The sample was small, and the young participants were biased in favour of the use of Equine Assisted therapy. Pupils who had allergies, or who were afraid of horses, did not take part in the intervention. The young participants were therefore ones who had chosen to go to the Equine Centre, and were currently attending. The size of the sample was limited by time constraints, and by the number of participants attending therapy at the time of the data gathering

5.2.3 Bias and context

While it was helpful to be familiar with the autistic participants, in order to allay their anxiety, and to be able to work with their language difficulties, it could be argued that they wanted to please the researcher. To counter this, the research was conducted in a formal manner and in a different setting, with its aims stated very clearly, so

that the participants recognised that the role of the researcher was different to the everyday role.

It might have been interesting to interview some participants who had been to the intervention in the past, to see if their constructs had changed over time, or to interview some participants who had not enjoyed their time there, although such participants would have been difficult to find.

There was one young man who told me that he would have volunteered, but he was not attending anymore, and this was because he had become 'bored' over time. Another young man said that he might have liked the animals, but he simply hated being in the cold and damp.

The staff who took part in the interviews had not volunteered to go to the Equine Centre, but they nonetheless had an overwhelmingly positive view of it. However, it must be made clear that at the time of the interviews there was anger at the School Improvement partner's criticism of Equine therapy, and therefore some of the staff may have seen this as a chance to protest. Two of the members of staff are very strong advocates for the use of outdoor and alternative education. Their views of Equine therapy were perhaps partly driven by their passion for outdoor education. When researching, it is necessary to

bear in mind the context and background of the interviewees (Braun & Clark, 2013; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

Another member of staff needed to devise referral criteria for alternative education, and this person may have found the interview process useful in this regard.

The therapists wanted to paint the intervention in a good light, and may have exaggerated their claims regarding its benefits.

However, the study did not aim to evaluate efficacy; it was about perceptions of mechanisms, and joint reflections on what was unique about working with horses. Frame (2006) and Martin and Farnum (2002) set out to do this.

The researcher was genuinely interested in the topic, having come from an urban background, and never having been in the company of horses.

In order to counteract bias, three assistant educational psychologists helped to co-code at a meeting. One was from another school, which helped with objectivity. Sections of transcripts were given to each of the three co-coders, and a discussion took place to establish whether or not they would independently apply the same codes from the codebook. There was usually agreement; the only disagreement was on one point where one person believed the need to hug the horse

was driven by a sensory need, while the others believed it was a need for affection, in light of the rest of the interview.

This brought home the point that alternative explanations or understanding of the phenomena studied must always be considered (Robson, 2002).

5.3 Manifest and latent themes and the use of ‘interpretation’

One criticism of Thematic Analysis is that the researcher interprets what is said, and creates themes from their own perspective. As (Banister, 2001) point out:

“There will always be a gap between the meanings that appear in the research setting and the account written in the report, and that gap is the space for the reader to bring their own understanding of the issue to bear on the text.” (P12).

The themes in this study were created by looking at ideas, more than words or phrases mentioned repeatedly across groups, and if there was something novel or unusual. The decision on the balance between looking at words and the level of interpretation rests with the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The researcher had not expected, for example, that Edward would have been interested in the health and safety equipment, or that Alan would have been fascinated by the horses’ digestive system.

The themes from the interviewees were also compared with themes which had arisen in the literature. It is for the reader to judge whether or not these themes are credible, in the light of context and what was said during the interviews.

It was surprising, as a researcher, to see how the participants did sometimes use the topic of the horses to disclose constructs and issues about themselves. They gave examples of wishful thinking, and allusions to painful feelings, which could be followed up outside the research. However, in these cases, it was down to the researcher to interpret these latent themes. It would have been interesting to see if the researcher interpretations triangulated with the perceptions of care staff, teachers and parents.

Above all, it would have been useful to have spent time discussing the interpretations with the participants themselves.

Another criticism could be that it is not possible to create themes emanating from three different groups of people. It is the belief of the researcher that themes can be interpreted on different levels, as with Kelly's corollaries, a theory which asserts that individuals construct meaning via a personal system, but within a group and cultural context. The progression of analysis from individuals to groups and to larger groups is discussed in Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) and Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009).

5.4 What I would like to have done differently

It would have been interesting to have done observations during sessions at the Equine Centre, and to have been able to discuss my thoughts about the observations with the young people to see if there was agreement between the researcher's opinions and those of the young men, staff and therapists.

It would have been useful to have visited another Equine therapy intervention, and compared and contrasted their perceptions with those in this study.

It would have been interesting to share these themes and discuss them with the participants a year after the interviews, to see if perceptions had changed over time and in other circumstances.

It would also have been of interest to have conducted two interviews with each participant, one set with the researcher, another set with a different psychologist, to compare and contrast what was said and how it was interpreted.

5.5 Findings in relation to the research questions

- 'What is meant by the term by Equine Assisted therapy?'
- 'What do the young people learn from it and what benefits do they derive from it?'

- ‘How does Equine Assisted therapy help them, if at all?’
- ‘What framework is used to underpin the therapy?’

5.5.1 What is meant by Equine Assisted therapy?

It would seem that in this particular Equine Centre, Equine Assisted therapy is an intervention in which a horse, or in this case, more than one horse, is present, and that it is designed and delivered by professionals with knowledge of speech and language, psychotherapy and horsemanship. This point is mentioned by Davis et al., (2015); Kruger, Trachtenberg and Serpell (2004); Macauley & Gutierrez, (2004); Nimer and Lundahl (2003). The aim of this particular therapy was to build a community in which young people could: be themselves, feel accepted and included; learn to see things from perspectives other than their own, and learn to engage with other young people. The review by O’Haire (2013) concluded that one of the benefits of attending Animal Assisted Interventions was that it facilitated social bonding. The therapists in this setting designed the intervention so that the young people would also have the chance to disclose issues that may be troubling them via projections onto horses and through discussions when relaxed in the company of the horses and non-judgemental therapists. This was an objective which was described by the therapists in the study by Frame (2006). This latter aspect was not perceived to be a main idea amongst the participants.

The therapy also promoted confidence by offering tasks which showed visible achievements, whether or not they were accredited. Feeling proud of one's own achievements is one of the goals in Human Givens therapy (Andrews et al., 2013).

5.5.2 What benefits might Equine Assisted therapy bring?

This Equine Assisted therapy would appear to be multifaceted in its aims: to give the young people a calm, simple and predictable environment amongst 'accepting friends' (the staff, the other people and the horses); to promote interactions and communication, and to teach the young people demonstrable skills which lead to a sense of achievement.

The young people expressed their sense of pride in achievement and their confidence to assert themselves with the horses. They did not mention a development of language skills, in contrast to studies by Krskova in O'Haire (2013) or Gabriels (2012) in Davis et al., (2015). They learnt about health and safety for themselves and the horses, and the need to be responsible for another living creature. Above all, they learned to cooperate with other young people in an environment which was different to school.

Their satisfaction about attainments was mentioned overtly, but the theme of being accepted, and feeling relaxed and happy was stronger.

The time spent at the Equine Centre seemed to give them welcome relief from school pressure. This is a point made by the head teacher at the Henrietta Barnett school in London (Evening Standard, August 2010).

From the staff's point of view, the young participants were given a break from pressure, and a change to emotionally regulate. This led to better relationships, as the staff could see them in a different light.

From the therapists' point of view, the young participants could use the horses to make them feel special, and part of a welcoming, inclusive community. This theme came across in the interviews with the young people and the staff. This point is mentioned by Gabriels (2012) and Memishevity and Hodzhill (2010) in Kendall et al., (2015).

The improvements in emotional regulation seemed to be the strongest theme across the groups. This benefit seems to be the recurrent theme throughout the literature, with examples cited by Davis et al., (2015); Kendall et al., May, Seivert, Cano, Casey and Johnson (2016).

5.5.3 What mechanisms might bring about these outcomes?

The learning at the Equine Centre is experiential and embedded in context. The context is novel, and gives the autistic young people a

break away from a complex social setting. This is a way of working which is endorsed by the NAS (2016).

The Equine Centre has a 'magical' atmosphere which the young participants buy into, and the therapists take account of the needs of their autistic clients.

The participants' level of development both cognitively and emotionally is taken into account by the therapists to ascertain their zone of proximal development, so that the therapists can use mediation either through peers or through adults who are more knowledgeable. This relates to the Vygotskian theory of social learning (Vygotsky, 1978) in which he purports that learning takes place via interactions with other people.

5.5.4 What framework is used to underpin the therapy?

In the case of this particular study, the Equine Assisted therapy seemed to consist of activities which were within an experiential framework, and a Human Givens framework rather than a traditional Gestalt, CBT or Object Relations framework. This is in contrast to the study by Frame (2006). The therapists were not explicit about their framework, although the lead therapist comes from a speech and language background, and another therapist has training in psychoanalysis. There were claims made by the therapists about projective techniques, and the information

gained from the type of horse chosen by the participant, but this was not as obvious as the researcher had expected after the discussions with the young people and the non-therapy staff. A discussion could be had with the therapists about how they are probably using a humanistic framework such as Human Givens. This is a way of viewing psychological well-being in terms of people having a set of needs which have to be met in order to thrive. These needs include: security, attention, a sense of autonomy, emotional intimacy, feeling part of a wider community, privacy, have status within a social group, and having a sense of achievement, meaning and purpose. According to Andrews, Wislocki, Short, Chow and Minami (2013) Human Givens is:

“... an approach to the management and maintenance of emotional health and wellbeing that is predicated around a central organising idea that all living organisms have the potential to thrive when they inhabit a supportive environment, nourishment is available and the organisms’ internal guidance systems function optimally, allowing nourishment into the organism.” (p 166)

The idea of Winnicott, Fairbairn and Banks about resonance in the therapist seemed to have a part to play in the therapists’ concept of the Equine Assisted therapy, as explored in the study by Esposito (2011) in O’Haire (2013).

This Equine Assisted therapy seemed to help the young people to learn, build rapport, think imaginatively about the horses, problem solve (especially around the health and safety aspects) and to develop connections with the animals and other people, all of which are

strategies to build resilience and Wellbeing according to the Human Givens framework. These points have also been made by Kruger, Trachtenberg and Serpell (2004) and O’Haire (2013).

There was an overarching theme of ‘good teaching’ from what was said by all the participants in the interviews. The points mentioned by the participants in the research linked in with what is deemed good practice by the National Autistic Society.

The SPELL framework has been developed by The National Autistic Society’s schools and services to understand and respond to the needs of children and adults with autism (NAS, 2011). It recognises the individual and unique needs of each child and emphasises that all planning and intervention be organised on this basis. SPELL stands for Structure, Positive, Empathy, Low arousal, Links. The NAS advises that:

“• Structure makes the world a more predictable accessible and safer place and can aid personal autonomy and independence.

- Positive approaches and expectations seek to establish and reinforce self -confidence and self- esteem by building on natural strengths, interest and abilities.
- Empathy is essential to underpin any approach designed to develop communication and reduce anxiety.
- The approaches and environment need to be low arousal: calm and ordered in such a way so as to reduce anxiety and aid concentration.
- Strong links between the various components of the person’s life or therapeutic programme will promote and sustain essential consistency.”

(NAS website, January 2017)

Every one of these factors was mentioned as being part of this Equine Assisted therapy. This framework also aligns with the ideas from Human Givens, namely the need for empathy, attention and connection should be met in order to promote emotional health and well-being.

In summary, this therapy seemed to focus primarily on developing a cohesive group within a non-judgemental context via the care for and interactions with the horses. This, in terms of Human Givens, promotes the need for feeling part of a wider community.

5.6 Why use horses in a psychological intervention

5.6.1 Horses' unique psychology

It could be argued that the benefits mentioned above could be derived without going to an Equine Centre. However, the young participants and the staff and therapists were clear in their perceptions that there was something special about being in the company of horses. In order to maximise time spent in the company of horses, a knowledge of horses as a species is needed, a point highlighted by the review of the literature by Davis et al., (2015). The therapists use an ethological approach in order to be able to explain to the young people how being part of a vulnerable species of prey, such as horses, affects their natural, observable and predictable behaviours.

The horse psychology can be used to help the young people watch, discuss and understand the horses, and thereby gain some control and bonding, a point also made by Kern in Kendall et al., (2015). This consequently leads to a sense of mastery and calm, and a sense of pride. Discussing the horses' reactions can act as a springboard to discuss the understanding of human behaviours and reactions, using an ethological approach. It can help to promote empathy and mentalization skills, and form the basis of story-telling and narrative therapy. These benefits are discussed in the study by Memisheviky and Hodzhill (2010) in Kendall et al. (2015).

5.6.2 Biophilia and the human animal bond

It has been claimed that stress and hyperarousal in modern day life increases as our society becomes ever more sophisticated and moves away from a natural sense of being (Allen, 2008). They conclude that the modern world is accelerating faster than modern human evolution. It is claimed in their research that returning to a 'natural, slow and simple setting' in which humans interact with animals helps to alleviate hyperarousal. This may in part explain the way that being with horses helps to keep the young participants calm.

In summary, some of the findings and themes were not what the researcher had expected, for example the social aspect of attending

the therapy, while some of them were in line with previous studies and theories, above all, the development of emotional regulation.

5.7.1 Theme A. Experiential learning

In this particular study the participants related their idea that the learner was at the centre of planning rather than a curriculum-centred, ‘top-down’ approach.

All the participants mentioned that they learned tangible skills and that the horse made this possible for them. This was a point made by: Kemp, 2014; Hauge, Lundin and Kvalem in Porges (2011) and Kersten and Thomas in Maujean et al., (2003) who hypothesised that the learning of new skills with the horses led to feelings of empowerment. Human Givens therapy aims to promote a sense of autonomy and control, viewing this as a human need. Developing this via the horses could be regarded as a benefit as the result of the intervention.

The participants in those studies, and in this study, felt that the learning was tangible, visible, and at the pace of the learner. In line with the conclusions drawn by Kersten and Thomas, that the participants reported the enjoyment of receiving encouragement, structured tasks, and time to go at their own pace and reflect.

5.7.2 Language and communication

Learning verbal skills was not perceived as a major theme, other than by Alison, who felt that the young participants developed their receptive language skills from the concrete to the abstract. The participants did, however, mention the importance of body language. They also felt that communication improved in the sense that they talked to each other at the Equine Centre, which was in line with the findings of Anderson and Meints (2016).

5.7.3 Social facilitation

All the participants alluded to Social learning as a major theme. This is based on the Social Development Theory of Vygotsky (Leo, 1962) which contends that social interaction is needed for learning to take place. Moreover, it was the social interaction and the camaraderie which seemed to inspire the participants, with the exception of Alan. The therapists had set out to develop an inclusive community in which interaction and learning could take place, and this seems to have been picked up on as a theme by the staff and participants themselves.

(Vygotsky, 1978) wrote that:

“Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and with his peers.” (p 90)

Daniels, (2005) believes that from social constructivist perspectives, separating the individual from social influences is not regarded as possible and that the context in which teaching and learning occur are considered critical to learning itself.

Walsh, (2009a) described how children who have suffered neglect or abuse in human relationships can develop a closer connection with animals than with humans in their lives, which became apparent for two of the participants in this study. Walsh, Katcher and Teumer (2006) emphasise the benefits of using horses to promote human cooperation and interaction. Adrian, Simon, and Edward were very clear about this benefit. Frame (2006) wrote that the relationship between horses may also be transferred to humans, once dominance and mutual respect is achieved. Chandler (2005) concluded that using animals in therapy helped to reduce loneliness, either by using the animal as a surrogate friend, or by fostering human interaction.

The interaction with horses helped to give the participants a feeling of pride and achievement and, in most cases, a sense of control. One study, (Dismuke, 1984) found that children who interacted with horses during Equine Assisted therapy had a greater increase in scores on a measure of self-esteem than those receiving therapy without a horse. Edward, Simon and Alan stated openly that they

were proud of their achievements, while the theme was more latent than manifest with Adrian and Jonny.

The adults mentioned the positive modelling of interactions, both by the therapists, by peers and by the horses, a point made by Fine (2000).

5.7.4 Control

Tyler (cited in (Greenwald, 2001) concluded that the young ‘patients’ who benefited the most were the ones who need to control. This was particularly true in the case of Edward and Alan.

5.7.5 Different factors affecting the promotion of emotional regulation

There are claims that Equine Assisted therapy leads to greater calmness amongst its participants, and a development in their ability to regulate arousal or ‘de-arouse’ according to Kruger, Trachtenberg and Serpell (2004). The participants in this study all seemed to lend support to this concept, and gave some indicators of how this could come about, which seems to be as a result of many, possibly interconnected factors.

The concept of emotional regulation is the subject of intense debate amongst psychologists and neuroscientists.

While some contend that calmness is achieved through a low sensory setting (Belojevic et al., 2008; Wilson, 2003), or a predictable setting (Favre, 2015) others believe that emotional regulation is the result of cognitive reappraisals (Ochsner & Gross, 2007).

Other theorists purport that attachment to a therapy animal helps 'regulate affect' (Frewin & Gardiner, 2005; Greenwald, 2001; Porges, 2011; Shepard, 1993) by modelling and 'co-regulating', as outlined in the Object Relations theory. A different explanation offered was that talking about horses' emotions could lead to greater emotional literacy, counteracting 'alexthymia' researched by Paull (2013).

Another idea regarding emotional regulation was that horses help a person to visualise their own arousal levels (so called 'energy' levels), as described by Grandin (2006) and Lentini, (2009) or that horses provided an external focus, akin to the 'flow' experience described by Frewin, (2005) and Nakamura, (2014).

Kamioka et al., (2014) wrote that the feelings towards the animals resulted in the 'patient' feeling comfortable, pleasant and happy (p.387) but it is not clear whether this is due to individual bonding with the horse, or with the other people. Some psychologists propose that when people feel calmer and safe in their environment, oxytocin

strengthens the pro-sociality of the group (Olf, 2013). A future study could explore this calming mechanism further.

All these theories could be applied to the participants' perceptions in this study, apart from the theory around Alexithymia.

5.7.7 Predictability

People with autism need predictability, (Favre et al., 2015) and often need to know what is going to happen, and how they should react in given situations. Some horses' behaviour can be unpredictable, and the need to know how to handle them is emphasised as part of the practical side of the therapy sessions. Although it is not discussed explicitly, it is highly likely that the predictability underpins confidence, which in turn leads to creativity and risk taking and enjoyment through the ensuing relationship with the horses.

The perception of the young participants in this study was that the emotional regulation was as a result of a dynamic interplay between themselves and the horse. Unexpectedly, they showed an ego-centric perspective, saying that they needed to be calm for their own safety.

The concept of the horse being a 'mirror', so strong a theme in the research conducted with therapists, was not entirely in parallel with the views expressed by the participants.

This was not a theme which came to the fore, which surprised the researcher. However, one young person in particular felt that the horse could understand him by ‘transferring emotions’ via his chin.

5.7.8 Theme C Empathising and Connectedness

5.7.9. Acceptance

Adolescence is a period in which identity formation takes place (Dahl, 2004). The process of identity formation partly involves comparing oneself with peers. Self -evaluation can be more difficult for adolescents with autism. Spending time with the horses may possibly provide opportunities for the relief from the pressure of feeling judged by peers and lead to the feelings of safety alluded to in the study by Olff et al. (2013) and Holmes (in Kendall et al., 2015).

Bonding as one group can sometimes lead to feelings of being apart from another group (Dreu, 2010), and this seemed to be the case with the participants in this study, who clearly did not want to have the Equine Assisted intervention take place in the school grounds. They preferred to be part of a special group at the Equine Centre.

The participants who experienced issues of neglect felt that the horses accepted them and liked them. This theme was mentioned by Amiot and Bastion (2015).

5.7.10 Horses and self- disclosure

Gleiser et al. (2008) explain that, in order to ‘heal’, the client needs to be able to engage with ‘emotionally-laden’ material alongside a therapist. The therapist provides an attachment-based therapeutic context within which the client can experience strong emotions safely. The Equine Assisted therapy in this setting seems to partially do this, mainly by providing the safe setting, but only in a very minor way in regards to discussing some problematic feelings. Amiot and Bastion (2015) make the point that the tendency to anthropomorphise may be driven by a need to predict what other people are doing, and to ‘quell a sense of disconnectedness’. In this study, the researcher found that the participants did use their imagery around the horse to disclose self-concepts, but this was done in a latent way.

5.8 Summary of the findings in relation to the literature

While Nimer and Lundahl (2007) may have written that their assessments showed a ‘dearth of theories’ around the mechanisms through which animals influence interventions, this study can contribute new knowledge, ten years later by describing the perceptions of the participants in the study and highlighting the links with previous studies. O Haire (2013) calls this ‘proof of concept’ and some of the findings could be examined further in an empirical study of targeted outcomes.

Equine Assisted therapy may have its roots in client-centred, existential and Gestalt approaches to psychotherapy (Greenberg et al. 1998), in which case the young people would be expected to ‘symbolise inner experience into awareness’, understand their emotions and reflect on them (Ebest & Homeyer 2015), however these mechanisms were not strongly supported by the perceptions of the participants in this particular study. The participants in the study suggested, as did Martin and Farnum (2002) that the animals could serve as a means to facilitate individuals with autism to develop social bonds with the animal that then generalise to humans. The Equine Assisted therapy in this study took a multi-modal approach, although Lentini and Knox (2009) stated that such an approach is rare.

The findings which were closely aligned with the literature were: an increase in feeling accepted and connected; an increase in social interactions; an increase in the ability to emotionally regulate, and feelings of autonomy and pride.

Implications for future research and practice will be discussed in the conclusion.

CHAPTER SIX. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Educational Psychologists' opinions around Equine Assisted therapy.

One of the core functions of educational psychologists is to stay abreast of current initiatives and interventions, and to be able to give an informed, objective and critical opinion of such initiatives to staff and parents. Although a universal answer about efficacy and mechanisms of all Equine Assisted therapies is not possible, there are some conclusions that can be drawn about this particular intervention by listening to what the people involved said, and creating new knowledge around it.

In the case of Equine Assisted therapies, it is difficult, in the light of 'empirical evidence' to give a blanket answer as to whether or not such therapies are 'effective', and this was not the aim of this research. However, general advice could be that a discussion would need to take place about the reasons for the referral, the types of outcomes hoped for, and the credentials of the therapists.

Another question would be whether not the young person would benefit from interacting with a dog or a horse. While this study did not look at that debate, what became clear was that the young people in this study seemed to take pride in the idea that they had been able

to control a huge animal, and that they could spend hours cleaning up, grooming and feeding, and that horses are extremely clear in their body language, making it easy for autistic people in particular. They are a prey species who have a set social hierarchy. This lends itself to observations of horses in groups and how they interact with one another, as well as with people.

Horses do not seem to attach themselves to a particular person, unlike dogs. This could potentially avoid rivalry amongst a group of young people.

After reading previous studies, and after looking at the perceptions of the participants in this study, it could be argued that referrals made on the basis of the wish to improve specific speech and language skills would not be appropriate unless the interventions were of a different design. However, if the outcome is to develop a sense of community and belonging, and to improve socialisation skills, then Equine Assisted therapy would be useful.

Referrals to Equine Assisted therapy in order to help develop empathy would not seem to be particularly supported by this study. However, should the desired outcome be to practice caring for another creature, thereby fostering a sense of responsibility and outward focus, and learning how to cooperate with others, then such therapy would be of benefit.

Young people who express feelings of hopelessness, and feelings that they are failures, may well benefit from a fresh, novel experience, in which they feel accepted by the therapists and by the horses.

Development of emotional insight and emotional 'literacy' could be a reason for a referral to Equine Assisted therapy, especially for young people with autism. Using the horses as a means to discuss emotions, and behaviour in general, can be productive, and using the horses as a way to talk about one's own feelings using projective techniques could be helpful. This would need a skilful and creative therapist.

Referrals would also be appropriate for those young people who otherwise would not be motivated to take part in any physical activity, which is a serious issue in terms of both physical and mental health.

For those young people who find it difficult to cope with hyperarousal and sensory overload, spending time in a peaceful setting with calm horses gives them time to calm themselves.

The repetitive tasks of grooming, feeding, cleaning, putting the equipment on the horse and leading it in and out of the stables seem to help give young people feelings of calmness, confidence and achievement. In terms of resilience, it gives them a sense of mastery, and meets their need for control and autonomy.

6.2 Educational psychologists and joint delivery of Equine

Assisted therapy

It could be argued that Educational Psychologists' expertise could be applied in Equine therapy, alongside a trained horse handler.

Educational psychologists could use the setting and therapy sessions to observe how young people, or groups of young people, interact in a setting other than the traditional classroom. They could gain further insights into issues troubling the young people by helping them to either talk to the horse directly, or talk about the horse via 'latent' themes, and discuss whether or not the issues pertain to them. One example would have been when one young person in the research said that he was 'too soft.', or another young person felt he was 'too kind.'

Equines or other animals could be used to form part of a narrative therapy approach whereby stories about the animals provide a platform to elicit stories about the young person's life, or help to guide solution-focussed thinking (Amiot & Bastion, 2015; Evans and Gray, 2012; Hickey, 2001 in Lentini & Knox, 2009)

It is one of the most vital roles of the educational psychologist to listen to the voice of the child, and act in the child's best interest. Spending some time with horses could possibly be a way to engage with some of the more reticent young people, or using the horses as

metaphors to write stories to project some feelings might elicit views more easily than using verbal interviews or standardised questionnaires.

In addition, the use of photographs is motivating and enlightening. This could be used in complex cases, where the voice of the child needs to be gained, for example when joint working with health, social services or young offenders.

Making transcripts of the discussions with the young person and having the time to reflect later would be useful in sensitive or serious cases. The use of a DVD would add the extra dimension of body language. Throughout interviews, it is often difficult to focus on verbal and non-verbal at the same time.

It would be imperative to be aware of one's framework for this type of applied psychology, for example using a humanist framework, such as Human Givens, to help work out with a participant which needs were not being met, and how this could be achieved. Equine Assisted therapy could be seen as a basis for meeting needs, particularly in terms of the need to belong, to have fun, and to care for someone else.

An educational psychologist could be involved in designing and delivering such a novel therapy, however, the reasons for not

delivering such interventions have been cited: educational psychologists feel under pressure to carry out statutory assessments; there is time pressure; the new context of negotiating traded services with schools and they have the perception that they lack the prerequisite skills.

6.3 Dissemination of good practice, from therapy to the classroom context.

Educational psychologists are trained to work with children and young people in context, and to promote optimal learning situations, particularly following observations. They are also trained to find ways to gain the voice of the child.

Rather than concluding that the behaviours and skills learned in this Equine Assisted therapy may not ‘generalise’ to the classroom setting, it would be logical to look at what could be changed in the traditional classroom, especially in a specialist residential setting, according to what was said about Equine Assisted therapy. The young people said that they like predictability and routine, working at their own pace, being independent in learning, and learning in an experiential way with an accepting group alongside the horses.

6.4 Ideas for future research

Equine Assisted therapy is an exciting intervention in that the young people find it highly motivating and they feel that they learn from it. The staff and therapists observe calmer behaviour during the therapy than in school. There are some ideas from this study which could be built on, around clarification of possible mechanisms and clear outcomes.

It would be a fruitful area of research to carry out some comparison designs, alluded to in the interviews in this study, for example participating in Forest school/Outdoor Education as compared to Equine Assisted therapy.

It would also be useful to carry out a longitudinal design to see if improvements were embedded and long-lasting.

There could be an augmentation design, in which young people could take part in one intervention, for example a social skills group, and some of them could take part in the social skills group and the Equine Assisted therapy additionally.

One of the main outcomes is that the young people are calmer during Equine Assisted therapy. It may be fruitful to examine the difference between a bio-feedback intervention in comparison with bio-feedback and Equine Assisted therapy.

In addition, it would be useful to see what other 'client' groups say about Equine Assisted therapy, for example girls with autism, or younger children.

This was a small-scale study to examine perceptions of three groups of people around one Equine Assisted therapy intervention. There was agreement that horses and/or animals brought something special to an intervention.

The horses were seen as creatures that are able to give affection to the participants, especially in return for the participants understanding their psychology, and taking responsibility around their care. It was felt that the horses were able to pick up on mood and act as an affect 'mirror', enabling participants to visualise how they feel.

The young men were described as being much calmer, relaxed and sociable during the sessions at the stables.

Rather than criticising such interventions for not generalising their effects into the school setting, it could be argued that the school settings could learn from, and apply, some of the approaches and techniques that take place during Equine Assisted therapy.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Initial coding of an individual's transcript.

INITIAL CODING PARTICIPANT 4. (11)

1 Transcript 11: Wendy and Jonny 26th January 2016

2 W: Ok thank you very much for joining me to talk about equine therapy. Today is the 26th January?

3 J: Yes

4 W: Ok, Could you tell me before we start talking about the equine therapy, have you got any pets at

5 home?

6 J: I have got two dogs and one of them's a staffy, mixed breed and I'm not sure what the other

7 breed is though. And then I have got either American bulldogs or an American pitbull mixed breed

8 with a dog de Bordeaux

9 W: how long have you had those? *ASD Imparting facts*

10 J: I have had Ozzie for 6 years now, 5 maybe nearly, 5 in April I think and then Evie for about 4

11 months. She is only 5 months at the moment

12 W: 5 months?

13 J: We have had her since she was about a month old.

14 W: Awww! And who got to choose her?

15 J: Erm, well I went to see them with my mum and dad and my brother and sister were at school. I

16 think it was the holidays, just before the summer holidays I think, when we broke up a little bit

17 before and I went to see them and it was a manic house. The kids were upstairs, well those kids

18 were upstairs and they had about eleven puppies and two dogs. They were standing them up except

19 for like a couple

20 W: And what made you choose that puppy?

21 J: I don't know exactly why but erm and then I don't know why we came up with the name Evie. I

22 think it was because everyone wanted to name it after a pokemon. So, yeh

23 W: And have you got a favourite dog at home then?

24 J: Erm it would probably be... erm... no not really actually, I like them both equally. *same as fairness (at home) NOT favourites - sore point like Sam.*

25 W: That's great, OK. How long did you go to equine therapy for?

26 J: Erm, trying to think now, done it in year 6 as well and maybe year 7 so about I'm trying to think

27 now, I have done it for about a whole full term in year 6 I think maybe two full terms. I did a full term

28 in year 10 and maybe a bit in year 7, about two and a half terms maybe?

29 W: That's good, and at the moment you aren't going because of your study?

30 J: Yeh, because of my GCSEs and its Art the moment and I have missed half of them and if I do any

31 more I won't be able to do it so

32 W: If you could choose to do it at a weekend would you?

Wendy and Jonny Transcript 12

33 J: Maybe, yes, it depends if my mum and dad take me because I am at home at the weekends.
34 Unless someone comes to pick me up from school. That could be a possibility. Or XXX could pick me
35 up after it.

36 W: I can't promise anything, I am just sort of saying you like going, you would give up your free time

37 J: Yes, maybe once a week or something on a Sunday night, not a Sunday night but a Sunday. A
38 Saturday, no I can't do a Saturday so it would have to be Sunday. I have got something on on the
39 Saturday so... Routine. know what they are doing.

40 W: When you get there, what kind of things do you do at equine therapy?

41 J: Erm usually just look after the horses. First of all we get out of the bu. Get down there, have a
42 chat and talk about the weekend what we have done as well. And erm then we look at the list and
43 see what we have got to do from the checklist. And erm slowly tick them off one by one but we
44 don't know why but there is never time to do more sometimes. It's not very often we get them all
45 done but it is worth it, and erm then we get the boots on like the helmet and the steel toe caps,
46 whatever they are for safety really. And then we like first of all it is mostly for me and someone else
47 erm it's erm I think it was clean water and clean hay, it's usually what it is for me and it's the first
48 one which I normally do and then once we have done that we tick it off and move on to the next
49 one.

social facilitation
usual timetable tick off enough tasks

achievement
Take safety seriously

50 W: Why do you think you should be giving the horse the hay and the clean water rather than
51 someone else that is there?

52 J: For the purpose of if you had your own horse for example another boy here he has a horse here
53 and he has to look after it. And if he ever got stuck with a horse and you loved it but didn't want to
54 feed it yourself then what is the point in having it? So you have got to learn how to do it really.

pleasure from the responsibility but for you

55 W: So in order to enjoy being with the horse you have got to have the jobs that go with it?

56 J: Yes, basically, like feeding it, cleaning it, cleaning up the pens, or whatever they are called, stables,
57 erm and like make sure they are healthy and all that. And you have to learn about its like mane, and
58 how to groom it properly.

reput. Horsemanship achievement

59 W: How do you groom it properly?

PRIDE?

60 J: Erm, you never do it, like, ahhh, I am trying to think what the motion is, you do it like down the
61 back not like across it, not like up the back. Learnt simple facts experientially.

62 W: From the head to the tail?

63 J: Yes, from like to the head to the tail, from the mane to the tail. But not the other way around,
64 because it can actually damage the fur. Knowledge

65 W: Which part of that looking after them do you like best?

66 J: Probably the grooming bit because I do it a lot with my dogs anyway so, like just pat them on the
67 back and brush them a bit.

sensory?

Acceptance

Talk to animals
(Rejected, lonely)

Family care

68 W: How does that make you feel? Brushing away?

69 J: Well, whenever I am home and I get upset at home because it does happen occasionally, but not
70 too often, then I go downstairs and talk to the dogs as if they were a real person. Like actually talk to
71 them. They cuddle me and it makes me laugh and feel better. anthropomorphism. Friendship.

72 W: So then you wouldn't mind giving them food and taking them out for walks if they are going to be
73 like that. Which animals are easier to talk to about your problems? The horse or dogs?

74 J: I would say they are about equal I would say. — Dogs/horses: Equal.

75 W: And do the dogs ever pick up on your mood? — Anthro.

76 J: Occasionally, like if I have been upset before and I go to the kitchen gate I open it and both dogs
77 come around the corner because one of the dogs' beds is around the corner of the door and they
78 both usually sleep in there I don't know why but even though the other dog's got its own bed. They
79 come round the door and they comfort me basically. They always do it. Dog friendship. Friendship.

80 W: Like snuggling up?

81 J: Yep. And I end up getting on my knees with a puppy on my lap and the Ozzy my boy dog getting his
82 arm around his head and cuddling her like. sensory friendship.

83 W: You know when you are older and you might be living in a flat on your own, would you have dogs
84 then?

85 J: Well it depends, some flats actually don't allow you to have dogs or pets really so it depends if I
86 move into one that does allow me or not. I might do, I don't know.

87 W: Because to have that nice cuddle and snuggly feeling...

88 J: To have someone to comfort you basically. Friendship/acceptance/intimacy.

89 W: And do they make any noises like 'dog noises'?

90 J: Yes, one dog does sing a lot so, yes, he is quite vocal when he sings. anthro.

91 W: I know a little bit about dogs but I don't know anything about horses. They can't really cuddle
92 you, so what can they do?

93 J: They can, erm like, you can ride them, but we don't really tend to do that at equine, it's more like
94 looking after them and how to tame, not really tame them, but like make sure that they are your
95 friend and they can trust you basically. FRIENDSHIP Trust.

96 W: How do you get a horse to trust you?

97 J: Just like don't get nervous in front of it, don't scream in front of it, anything that would make it
98 upset or run away or possible, run away basically. If you exude confidence
it helps another living
creature.

99 W: What about your tone of voice?

- 100 J: You sometimes have to shout at it, if it gets too close to you then you nudge it like move it away
 101 with your hand and arm then you also if he does it again then you raise your voice higher and higher
 102 each time as well as move it away like nudge it away with your shoulder. Just push it so soft but not
 103 too hard that he thinks it is fair. *OUTWARD* *knowledge*
- 104 W: Are there any kind of noises that you make? Horse talk or?
- 105 J: No I don't tend to do that but I don't know if anyone else does. *Communication aspects.*
• Body language.
- 106 W: But then it was interesting because you were showing me with your hand you would nudge it and
 107 tell it where to go. How would you get it to turn left or turn right or go straight?
- 108 J: Erm that's what I didn't understand when I first went. I first went there in year 6. But I have slowly something
 109 got there like. Sometimes complicated but it erm to do with the... well I know how to get it to go *sense of learning*
 110 backwards *knowledge*
• GETTING IT TO DO
SOMETHING.
- 111 W: So go on how do you get it to go backwards?
- 112 J: Waiting in front of it. It doesn't always work, I have seen adults do it so they probably knew what
 113 they were doing. *anthropomorphism. - projecting*
thoughts onto
other being
- 114 W: Do you think they pick up on your smell as well?
- 115 J: Yeh it probably would. It probably thinks 'Ohh if he smells bad I probably won't go near him' *ANTHRO*
projection of what happens to him
- 116 W: Do the horses think?
- 117 J: Maybe, yes.
- 118 W: Do you think they recognise you? And they say 'Oh there is Jonny again?'
- 119 J: Well sometimes, probably yes. Because that is what I thought really, although they do see
 120 something totally different to us, it's like different colours. *It does pick up,*
but it's a
way
- 121 W: They see different colours don't they? But they might see your height or this is the person that
 122 comes to do my stable? How would you know which horses liked you and which ones didn't? *Theory of*
mind
- 123 J: Erm if it looks the same it's usually to do with the what are they called the erm marks and the fur is
 124 like... I'm trying to think of what they are called now *don't*
really get it!
- 125 W: Erm do they go up or down?
- 126 J: Sometimes they can be on their forehead, like marks on their forehead and sometimes they can be
 127 all over their body.
- 128 W: Like markings?
- 129 J: Yes *markings*, I think that is what they are called and that's how you can identify with it, if you
 130 have *bonded with one* then you can usually tell if it had markings or not by looking at its body before *friendship*
- 131 W: You used the word bonded there, how do you know when you have bonded with a horse?

- 132 J: Erm, well usually it's.....(20 sec pause) if it doesn't budge into you or stand in your way. Horses
 133 tend to do that but they don't usually if they know you a bit more. So they still do but not very often,
 134 just to get on your nerves because they want to feel the good old days basically. *ANTHRO. self disclosing*
- 135 W: So you would know it likes you if it would stand next to you still?
 136 J: Yes, pretty much. Most of the time anyway. *How do you know if a horse likes you? (doubt)*
- 137 W: So in the same way a dog would cock its head if it liked you, would a horse do something like
 138 that?
 139 J: Erm I don't know, I've never really seen if it does.
- 140 W: Do they make any noises, like a cat would purr or a dog would (unidentifiable dog noise)
 141 J: I don't think so.
- 142 W: When you went down (to equine) did you have a favourite horse? *Yes, did have a favourite*
- 143 J: There was one that died, I think it was Archie. That was my favourite one, the big one but he died
 144 when I stopped going for a bit, so I think it was last summer
- 145 W: How did you feel when you heard he had died?
 146 J: I was quite shocked actually
- 147 W: What was it about Archie?
 148 J: I used to always tame him, not tame him, groom him, clean his waters, pretty much all the time.
 149 He was one of my favourite horses.
- 150 W: So all that looking after him and he still died; were you a bit disappointed? *Achievement*
- 151 J: Yes it was worth it because otherwise he would have died sooner but so that is like the point of
 152 having pets because you make them live longer by looking after them. *Control. Power over them. Responsibility.*
- 153 W: And the point of having pets is that you make them live longer and they comfort you don't they?
 154 So that is great having the puppy Ozzie and Evie. *Leading? repeats what he's said.*
- 155 J: We were going to name Evie Sharon though because of Ozzy Osbourne, that's why we called
 156 Ozzy. (laughter)
- 157 W: Have a little black leather jacket on it. So how many horses are there down at the stables?
 158 J: Let me just count, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, either 9 or 11, one of those because there are two down
 159 at the bunker, little ponies. I don't know if they were there with the one with three horses or not I
 160 don't know. I don't know if they have been moved.
- 161 W: And do you like the bigger horses or the ponies?
 162 J: I don't really mind which one I go with basically *Contradicts. Doesn't really have a favourite.*

Wendy and Jonny Transcript 12

Appendix 2. Occurrence of specific words across all interviews

| You ng parti cipa nts | T r u s t | Relations hip/bond | Energy /respon d | N at ur al |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Edw ard | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |
| Alan | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |
| Sim on | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ |
| Jon y | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |
| Adri an | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |

| St af f | T r u s t | Relations hip/bond | Energy/ respond | N at ur al |
|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| | | | | |

| | | | | |
|--------------------|---|---|---|---|
| D u st in | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Ja n | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ |
| J o a n | ✗ | ✓ | ✗ | ✓ |
| S u sa n | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ | ✗ |
| E st h er | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

| | | | | |
|--------------------|-------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| The rapi sts | T r u | Relations hip/bond | Energy/ respond | N at ur |
|--------------------|-------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------|

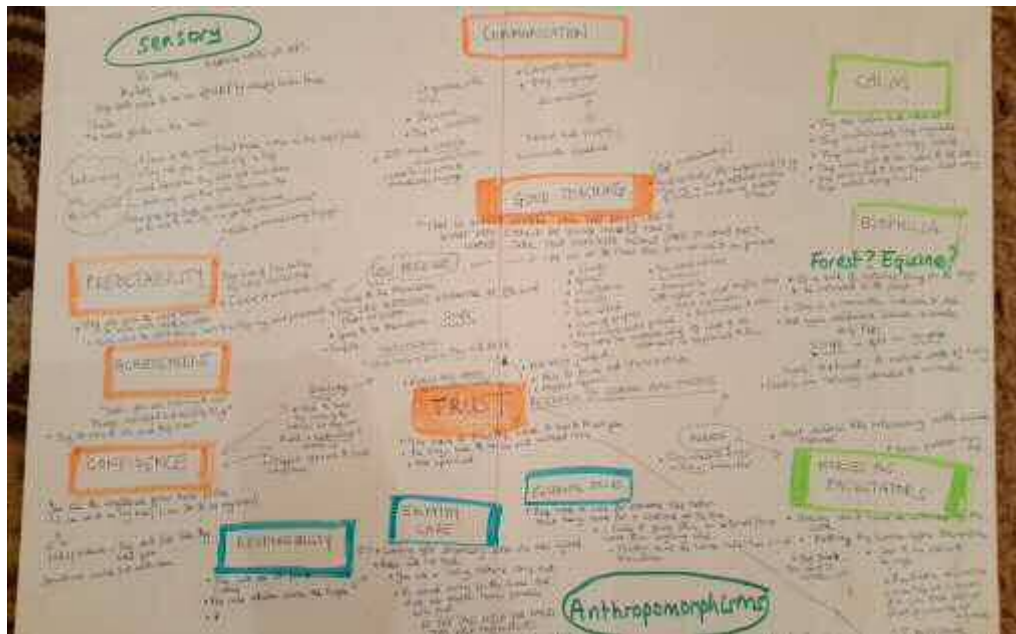
| | s t | | | al |
|-----------------------|--------|---|---|----|
| Mal col m | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Dor oth y | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Alis on | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Elli e- Ma y | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | x |

Appendix 3. Colour coding of potential themes in groups

3.1 Colour codes for Young Participants



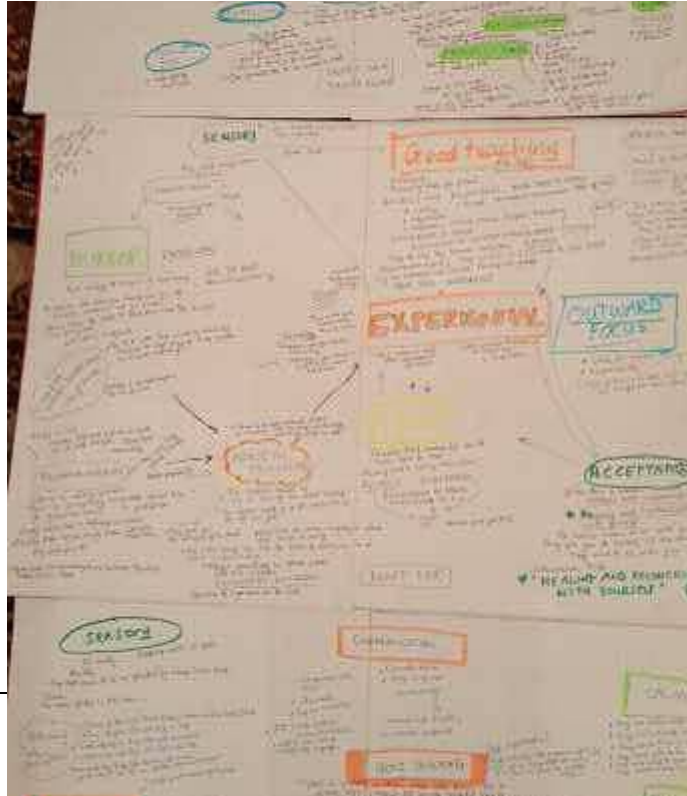
3.2 Colour codes for staff



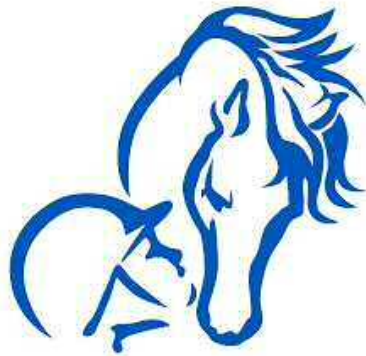
3.3. Colour codes for the therapists



3.4 Colour codes laid out together for further analysis



Appendix 4. Research rationale given to participants



Information Sheet

Why do this study?

I am interested in how young people view their experiences of Equine Therapy in particular what they find helpful and why.

I would also like to hear the views of carers and the therapists to find out how they think Equine Therapy works for young people.

Why have I been selected to do this study?

I have asked whether you would like to take part in this study because you are going to Equine therapy at the moment.

Do I have to take part?

No, this is entirely up to you. It is voluntary. You can withdraw at any time.

What are the benefits of taking part?

By listening to your views, we hope we can offer the best possible therapy sessions for you and for other young people in the future. This interview is a chance to talk about your experiences and it should be enjoyable for you.

What are the risks of taking part in the research?

You may feel a bit anxious about telling us about your experiences, but the aim is that the interview will be relaxed and enjoyable. If you feel uneasy about telling us anything bad about the therapy, this will be dealt with sensitively.

What will participation involve?

This research involves having a conversation with me as a researcher about your experiences of Equine Assisted therapy.

All information will be stored confidentially, which means no body will know what you have said in the interview. Of course, some people in school will know that you have taken part in this study.

How long will participation take? – The entire process should take about one hour of your time.

What will happen?

I will ask you about your experiences of receiving Equine Therapy. The session will be voice recorded. You will be able to see what you said in writing, and make comments on this if you would like to do so.

I will treat your participation in this study confidentially and that anything you say in the session will be treated confidentiality, unless it leads me to believe that your safety is in danger. In this case I will be unable to keep this information confidential. If this happens I will inform you that I will have to share that information with school because of my concern for your welfare.

What if I have a complaint?

You can let my research supervisor know. He is called Dr Ian Smillie, and his number is 02920 875 474 or you can contact the Ethics Committee at Cardiff University, (02928740070);psychethics@cf.ac.uk).

If you have any questions, please ask me.

Thank you

Wendy Reynolds

Appendix 5. Consent form Young People

Participant Consent Form Young People

Please read through the agreement and sign below

Participant Agreement

I, _____ agree to take part in the research that is exploring the views of young people, their carers and the therapists on Equine Therapy. The aim is that this research will identify the best possible ways to help young people through the use of horses.

I understand that I will have an interview which will ask me about my views on Equine Therapy.

I understand that all personal data will remain anonymous.

I understand that I can leave the study at any time.

All my questions about the study have been answered and I know what being involved means.

Signature _____ Date _____

Many thanks for helping me

Appendix 6. Consent form adult participants

Participant Consent Form (Carers and Therapists)

Please read through the agreement and sign below

Participant Agreement

I, _____ agree to take part in the research that is exploring the views of young people, their carers and the therapists on Equine Therapy. The aim is to examine perceptions of the therapy, and that this research will identify the best possible ways to help young people through the use of horses.

I understand that I will have an interview which will ask me about my views on Equine Therapy.

I understand that all personal data will remain confidential.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time.

All my questions about the study have been answered and I understand what my involvement entails.

Signature _____ Date _____

Many thanks for helping me



Wendy Rydzkowski

Appendix 7 Parental consent form

Parental/Guardian Consent Form

Please read through the agreement and sign below

Parental/Guardian Agreement

I agree to my son, _____ taking part in the research that is exploring young people's views on Equine Assisted Therapy. It is anticipated that this research will help to develop the Equine Assisted therapy approach for all the young people who receive it.

I understand that this will involve my son participating in an interview which will explore his views on the therapy he receives.

I understand that all personal information will remain confidential and that all personal data will remain confidential

I understand that my son can opt out of the study at any time.

Parental/Guardian signature _____

Date _____

Relationship to child _____

Many thanks for your participation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Wendy Rydman".

Appendix 8. Examples of the questions in stages one and two.

Stage one.

| |
|--|
| Have you an animal at home, if so what kind? |
| Can you tell me something about your pet, or about a pet that you would like to have? |
| What in your opinion is good, or not so good about a cat/dog/fish (whichever pet they mention) |
| How long have you been going to Equine therapy? |
| Did you have any interactions with horses before you went to Equine therapy? |

Prompt questions included:

| |
|---|
| What normally happens when you go to Equine therapy? |
| What happens when the boys go to Equine therapy? |
| Can you remember how many horses are down at the stables? |
| If you could choose, do you have a favourite horse to work with? (What is it about this horse?) Do you think the boys have a favourite horse? Do you have a favourite horse? |
| I'm really curious, how do you get a horse to do what you want it to do? |
| In your opinions, are there any parallels between how horses behave and how humans behave? |

| |
|---|
| |
| Do you think then, that a horse can read your emotions? |
| How would you work out whether or not the horse likes you? |
| How do you feel about 'mucking out' the stables? How do you feel the boys feel about 'mucking out'? |
| What does it feel like to groom a horse? What do you think the boys feel about grooming a horse? |
| Some people feel that it is the fact that you are outdoors, rather than the fact that you are with horses, how do you feel about that? Do you think there is a difference between outdoor education and Equine therapy for the boys? |

Appendix 9 Debrief form for the young people

Young Person's Research

Debrief Form

Thank you for taking part in my study.

It is important to talk to young people about their experiences in relation to the therapy they receive through horses.

The aim of this study was to gather information about how young people view their visits to Equine Therapy and how they would like their visits to be in the future.

I hope that this will help suggest new ways to provide the best support for young people in our school during Equine Assisted therapy.

The information you gave me will be held confidentially. This means that it will be impossible for people to know what you told me.

If you have any worries, or if you have anything to say about the study you can speak to me in school. If you would prefer, you could discuss your concerns with my professional supervisor, Dr Ian Smillie, at the School of Ethics Committee at Cardiff University directly using the email address – Smillie@cardiff.ac.uk or tel: 02920 875474 or the Cardiff University School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee (02928740070); psychethics@cf.ac.uk).

Many thanks for your help

Wendy Rydzkowski

Appendix 10. Gatekeeper letter

Gatekeeper letter

School of Psychology Cardiff University

Tower Building, Park Place

Cardiff, CF10 3YG

Tel no: 02920 876707

Email: RydzkowskiW@cardiff.ac.uk

Mr C

Director of Education,

High Street

Date....

Dear Mr C

I am an Educational and Child Psychologist in your company. I am currently studying part-time at Cardiff University and am interested in exploring the experiences of young people who receive Equine Assisted Therapy and their staff and therapists.

I aim to carry out a study exploring the views of young people and their staff and therapists. It will be anticipated that this research will help to identify the best possible support for your students who attend Equine therapy sessions.

The study involves inviting participants to take part in interviews, which would ideally take place during personalisation session time in school. This would be an in-depth discussion regarding their views of what works and possible reasons why the therapy works and what could be done to improve the sessions in future. The young people who volunteer to take part in this study will be under no obligation to disclose any personal information and will be informed of this before the discussion begins.

Before any young person can participate in the study they will be required to complete an informed consent form and a parental/guardian consent form. Carers and the therapists will also be asked about their views about the therapy.

All the data collected will be confidential. Your company will not be named and the data will be destroyed once the report has been completed. The report will be shared within the university. The report will be made available to you, which could be informative and helpful in meeting the needs of young people for the future.

If any participants have any concerns or complaints regarding the study, they can contact my professional supervisor, Dr Ian Smillie (Smillie@cardiff.ac.uk) tel 02920 875474 or the secretary of the Cardiff University School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee (02920 874007; psychethics@cf.ac.uk). If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me either in school or via email at RydzkowskiW@cardiff.ac.uk . I would be very grateful for your support in conducting this study.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Wendy Rydzkowski". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name.

Wendy Rydzkowski

Appendix 11. List of abbreviations

ADHD Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

CENSHARE The Center for Animal Human Relationships

CIAS The Center for Interaction of Animals and Society

EAGALA Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association

EFP Equine Assisted Psychotherapy

PTSD Post Traumatic Stress Disorder