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An Exploration of an Equine-Facilitated Learning Intervention with Young Offenders

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Abstract

This research reports a qualitative study to explore the behavioral responses and reflections from Young Offenders undertaking an Equine-Facilitated Learning (EFL) Intervention in prison in the United Kingdom. Learning was facilitated by an instructor, and the participants were taught introductory natural horsemanship skills. Establishments holding young adult prisoners are typically characterized by increased disruption to the regime, and by greater incidents of violence, bullying, and conflict than in other types of prison. A resulting challenge for those working with young prisoners is the need to respond to increased levels of social isolation, and difficulties in managing impulsivity, problem solving, temper, and conduct. It is hoped that this research will provide some initial evidence to contribute to ideas around the nature of learning practical, positive skills and knowledge through inter-species interactions.

Keywords

equine-facilitated learning – natural horsemanship – young offenders – animal-assisted intervention – human-animal bond

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Establishments holding young adult prisoners are typically characterized by greater incidents of violence, bullying, and conflict than in other types of prison (Edgar, O'Donnell, & Martin, 2003; Ireland, 1999). The direct annual cost per year for each prisoner held in a Young Offender Institution (under 21 years of age) is £30,755 (Ministry of Justice, 2011). Young adults have a higher reoffending rate than older adults. Based on reoffending data for prisoners released in the 12 months ending September 2011, 18 to 20 year olds have a reoffending rate of 56.1% compared to a rate of 45.6% for prisoners aged 21 and over (Ministry of Justice, 2011). A challenge for those working with young prisoners is the need to respond to increased levels of social isolation, and difficulties in managing impulsivity, problem solving, temper, and conduct.

Those who support the rehabilitative function of prison have drawn attention to the benefits of educational and psychological programs where offenders are provided with practical skills they are thought to be lacking (National Offender Management Service, 2012). This whole-person approach, where emotional and practical skills and knowledge, and alternative pro-social identities and roles are developed, is now recognized as a key factor in an offender's journey away from criminal behavior (Farrall, 2002).

Building on historical and current practices of keeping animals in prison—particularly farm, nonhuman animals (Ministry of Justice, 2014)—there is now increasing positivity surrounding working with nonhuman animals in a therapeutic capacity within prisons, particularly in attempts to promote psychological well-being and support rehabilitative efforts. Techniques with dogs and horses (Davis, 2007; Furst, 2006) relating to effective communication and developing trust have been recognized as promoting positive interaction, whereby individuals learn that respect and compassion yield more rewarding experiences and cooperation than dominance and aggression.

To inform this review, the literature was searched from 1990 to 2014 using the search terms, equine facilitated learning, equine assisted learning, equine assisted intervention, equine assisted psychotherapy, equine assisted therapy, equine assisted experiential therapy, and equine assisted counselling; with the terms young people, young vulnerable adults, and young offenders. All papers published in English were considered; only those focused on an intervention of relevance to young people were included in the review.

Despite numerous descriptive reports of prison-based programs involving horses (Taylor, 2001; Tramutt, 2003; Tyler, 1995; Virdine, Owen-Smith, & Faulkner, 2002), there are very few robust studies in this area. Some programs are long-running and anecdotally have achieved considerable success with participants such as the Nevada prison rehoming equines program that teaches inmates natural horsemanship techniques with horses who are then rehomed following the program (Miller, 2012; Prison Education, 2012).

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In the broader equine-intervention literature, there have been individual studies on equine-assisted therapy with individuals suffering with disabilities (Benda, McGibbon, & Grant, 2003; Brogen, Hadders-Algra, & Forssberg, 1996; Haehl, 1996; MacPhail, Edwards, Golding, Miller, Mosier, & Zwiers, 1998; McGibbon, Andrade, Widener, & Cintas, 1998), physical or mental chronic illness (Hakanson, Moller, Lindstrom, & Mattsson, 2009; Araujo, Silva, Costa, Pereira, & Safons, 2011), or eating disorders (Christian, 2005; Haumery, 2010; Hakansan, 2009). In addition, the potential benefits of equine-assisted psychotherapy or experiential therapy have also been studied, although the outcomes have been mixed in terms of the effectiveness of the interventions with some studies showing positive results and some no effect (Rothe, Vega, Torres, Soler, & Pazos; Schultz, Remick-Barlow, & Robbins, 2007; Klontz, Bivens, Leinart, & Klontz, 2007; Shambo, 2008; Selby & Smith-Osborne, 2012; De Villers, Ansorge, & Boissin, 2013).

The key difference emerging from the literature between equine-facilitated learning (EFL) and equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP) seems to be that EFL focuses on participants learning key social and communication skills, with EAP focusing on finding ways to solve participants' emotional problems. However, the evidence base is not well developed or defined at this stage.

Some evidence about therapeutic interventions has been produced that indicates the potential of working with young, vulnerable adults. Trotter, Chandler, Goodwin-Bond, and Casey's (2008) analysis of the role of horses in group, equine-assisted counseling with younger participants found improvements in disruptive behavior, relationships with others, and self-esteem. Burgon (2011) explored the experiences of "at-risk" young people who participated in a therapeutic horsemanship program and found improved self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, and a sense of mastery and empathy.

Dell (2011) focused on equine-assisted education (as opposed to psychotherapy) in young people and through a qualitative study, captured the enhanced communication skills and sense of pride that the young participants experienced through their ability to communicate with the horses. More recently, Pendry and Roeter (2013) published a randomized, controlled trial (undertaken in the US) focused on evaluating the effectiveness of EFL using natural horsemanship techniques to improve child social competence. Their findings showed moderately significant improvements in the social competence of 5th to 8th graders following the intervention. However, further research is required to try to illuminate which elements of the program caused the effect recorded.

In a recent systematic review, the authors commented that the published studies so far examining the effectiveness of interventions involving horses lack detail of the horse's role and the type of horsemanship development offered to the participants (Selby, & Smith-Osborne, 2012). Overall the papers

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included in this review have been primarily from a psychological or sociological perspective focused on either psychological changes in mood or behavior, or they capture the emotions and responses of participants and have been primarily qualitative in nature.

This paper reports a qualitative study to explore the behavioral responses and reflections of learning from Young Offenders undertaking an EFL intervention in the United Kingdom. The intervention involved seven 2.5-hr sessions over a four-day time period where young offenders used a natural horsemanship approach to interact with the horses on a prison sports field. The participant learning was facilitated by an instructor, and the young offenders were taught introductory natural horsemanship skills (Parelli & Parelli, 2011). It was hoped that this paper would provide some initial insights into the nature of learning through inter-species interactions and the possible role of horses in this process.

The first two authors were involved in data collection: Dr. Ann Hemingway is a public health academic and registered nurse, and Dr. Rosie Meek is a criminal psychologist focusing on young offenders and sports-based interventions. The third author, Dr. Caroline Ellis Hill, an occupational therapist and researcher, was involved in data analysis. All the authors were involved in preparing this paper. The instructor of the program was Harriet Laurie, who established TheHorseCourse Charity in 2010 (TheHorseCourse, 2014). She is a level 4 Parelli Natural Horsemanship student (Parelli & Parelli, 2011) and her own horses, Flower and Stormy, developed to level 3+, were used in this intervention. A law graduate, designer, communications consultant, and innovator, she devised the program from a horsemanship perspective—using high-level horses to provide clear feedback and reliable performance, while also using natural horsemanship principles and techniques to shape human behavior.

The aim of this study was to explore an EFL Intervention with male Young Offenders, with the goal of assessing its impact and developing future methodologies to assess this emerging area of practice. Participants are referred to as students throughout.

An objective of the study were to observe two days (first day and last day) of the course in order to identify the potential process of learning and development through analysis of the behavior of the students and the horses. Another objective was to explore the experiences and perceived learning of the students using semi-structured interviews.

The EFL Intervention

The intervention has the principles of the Parelli Natural Horsemanship program as its philosophical basis and structure (Parelli & Parelli, 2011). The

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basis of this program has existed for 30 years and was developed by American Natural Horseman Pat Parelli; it is available to students online as a set of home study resources. The teachings of other natural horsemanship proponents such as Monty Roberts in the United Kingdom and Ray Hunt in the United States were not used directly to inform this intervention, although Pat Parelli widely acknowledges the inspiration and education he received in early life from Ray Hunt (Parelli & Parelli, 2011). The principles involve action-based, experiential learning, with a non-judgemental approach. The Parelli program uses an approach based on cooperation and partnership development (Savvides, 2012). The term partnership in this context means mutual respect and effective communication, rather than a "master-slave" relationship between the human and horse, respectively (Brandt, 2004; Birke, 2007).

At the introductory level, this program involves "playing" with horses: inviting them to respond to requests with the person working from the ground and the horse on a loose rope and halter. All the learning was carried out on the prison sports field with the horses, and no prison officers were present on the field during the program. The overall program consisted of seven 2.5-hr sessions over four days with two students, with two horses and the instructor being present on the field at any one time. Each student was paired with a horse, and for the whole session, they learned with and hung out with that horse on a loose rope.

The course consisted of short periods of tasked activity supervised by the instructor interspersed with observation of the other student and horse, and discussion/reflection time with a focus on enabling the student and horse to both work together and relax together. The horses were able to graze as they were stroked, scratched, and hugged by participants during the observation of the program. The learning of each student was facilitated by the course instructor, and they were taught how to play the seven "games" (Parelli & Parelli, 2011) with the horses.

These games included (1) *The friendly game* (creating relaxation through touch, grazing, grooming, hanging out; building confidence through rhythm and retreat), (2) *The Porcupine game* (asking the horses to move their feet through using steady pressure, touching the horses), (3) *The Driving game* (asking the horses to move their feet through rhythmic pressure, not touching the horses), (4) *The Yo-yo game* (asking the horse to move backwards and forwards), (5) *The Circling game* (asking the horse to travel around you on the circle), (6) *The Sideways game* (asking the horse to move sideways), and (7) *The Squeeze game* (asking the horse to go through, between, under, or over something).

These games help to establish a communication method between horses and humans. However, in order to be effective, the human needed to use clear,

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phased communication (starting as gently as possible) and control their body language and energy in an assertive non-aggressive way. Horses who have been developed to communicate with humans using this process know the seven games and are able to be an active participant in the development of the human. They will respond appropriately only when the humans communicate calmly and assertively and maintain an empathic connection, as well as apply the correct technique.

Horses used in this intervention are developed to a minimum Parelli Level 3 Online (ground skills) out of 4 possible levels (1 = introductory to, 4 = competition ready), to ensure the quality of their responses and that if the humans behave appropriately, they will respond as partners and put effort into what they are being asked to do.

All 20 of the students included here achieved their level 1 Parelli natural horsemanship qualification, with some achieving elements of level 2 and one achieving components of level 3 of the Parelli (2011) program. One of the two returning participants who assisted on the course achieved level 2.

In the academic published literature, the Parelli method has been criticized for its potential to produce confusion in both human and horse when communication is poor (Hurn, 2012); and in the wider media, horse welfare concerns have been raised relating to this method (Mathieson, 2013). We observed care being taken to ensure that tasks were understood and achieved by both horse and human. Moments of confusion in the horses were quickly resolved through coaching the students to be calmer, clearer, more empathic or more assertive, as appropriate; or the activity would be paused to enable the student to practice a simulation or observe a demonstration before re-attempting the task with a horse. Indeed this is the very mechanism by which the students experienced the benefits of developing and practicing self-management skills.

When students showed signs of stress or anxiety, the task at hand would be paused while they were coached to manage their thoughts and emotions through simple mindfulness techniques to stay in the "here and now," or through moving their feet, much as the instructor would help a horse to regain a calm, connected, learning state of mind.

Materials and Methods

This evaluation aimed to understand the experience of participating in the course rather than to measure cause and effect in relation to the course outcomes (Quinn-Patton, 2002; Tashakori, & Teddlie, 2003). Data were collected as part of the course itself through reflective interviews undertaken with

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participants by the course facilitator at the end of the course. In addition, interviews and observations were undertaken by independent researchers to further explore emerging themes. Comments from the prison staff who referred the participants to the course are also included. The comments were captured during reflective discussions with the course facilitator in an attempt to explore their experiences with participants after the course was completed.

Participants

The participants in this study were all male, ages 18 to 21, and incarcerated in a young offenders prison in England. For the observational data collection, six participants were included. For the interview data collection, 20 participants were included (which included the six observed).

The inclusion criteria were young men (aged 18-21 years); individuals in custody in a prison in England; and violent offenders who were deemed to have a greater than 50% risk of reoffending within one year, and significant problems in the areas of thinking and behavior. Priority was given to those who were also disruptive or disengaged. Participants were referred to the course by their Offender Supervisor. Of the 20, two were referred who were lower risk. The exclusion criterion was a refusal to participate in the course. This did not occur during the evaluation.

We recruited a convenience sample of 20 participants referred to the course during the period of the evaluation. Three methods of data collection were undertaken to inform this study: observation of the behaviour of 6 students and horses by the researchers, 20 recorded qualitative interviews on completion of the course undertaken by the course facilitator, and 4 recorded qualitative interviews undertaken by an independent researcher to further explore and verify the themes that emerged from the students' reflective interviews undertaken with the course facilitator. All participants were asked to volunteer for these further interviews, and four agreed. Three independent researchers were involved in collecting the data and offering independent verification of the findings.

Observations

One researcher observed a course session of 2.5 hr on two occasions: one at the start of the course and one at the end (for four students, at the start and end of the course; and for two additional students, when they helped on a course following completion of their own; six students altogether). Each session included two students and one facilitator. The researcher did not take part after being introduced to the students and horses, and stood outside the arena and charted student and horse behaviors. In addition, each student with

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their equine partner was videoed from outside the arena for 30 min of each of these sessions to allow another researcher to independently verify the observations of the attending researcher. Both used the chart in Table 1 to record observations.

Analysis

Specifically, the students and their effectiveness in the games with the horses were observed and charted (Table 1). This allowed the researcher to map the observed behaviors of the human and equine participants. Each time the student interacted with the horse, the researcher recorded where the participant's behavior appeared to place them on the chart.

The observation chart was adapted from a chart (Parelli & Parelli, 2011; Table 1) designed to map a horse's behavior in order to offer insights into the type of "horsenality" (rather than personality) the horse has. This is seen as an important tool; to help horse-human communication, the humans must adapt their strategy to fit the horses and the situations, learning to respond appropriately for that horse in the moment.

The adaptation of this observation chart was informed by research focused on human-horse communication guided by symbolic interactionism (Brandt, 2004; Irvine, 2004). These researchers argue that humans and nonhumans cocreate a language system by way of the body to facilitate the creation of shared meaning. This approach challenges the privileged status of verbal communication within symbolic interactionism and elsewhere, and claims that body language has its own unique complexities between beings, both human and nonhuman alike. The body is seen as a vehicle of expression and communication, and in this study, the observation included the body language of both horse and human. This body language between human and horse, and horse and human, is described on the chart in language attempting to describe how the humans appeared to the observer when they communicated with the horses. In describing this, the response of the horse was also captured, as the horse would only respond appropriately to the communication if it was delivered calmly, assertively, and correctly; therefore, the video images of both partners informed the observation data.

Studies to date in this area (Irvine, 2004; Flynn, 2000; Alger, & Alger, 1997) have focused on human interactions with predators such as dogs and cats, whereas horses are prey animals and, therefore, fundamentally different in the way they see the world and interact with each other and with humans (Brandt, 2004). Interactions between humans and horses involve some degree of risk due to the size and power of the horse, which made effective communication essential for safe interaction.

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TABLE 1 *Student observation sheet*

Smooth movements, loose muscles, forwards					Jerky movements, tight muscles, backwards	
Fast, calm aggression	Destructive, rough; won't stand still	Exuberant, fast, fun, play; loose muscles	HIGH ENERGY	Fast, efficient, athletic, vigilant	Can't keep still; frenetic, reactive	Fight/flight
Slow and deliberate aggression	Pushy, dominant	Experimental, brave, assertive		Responsive, perceptive, speedy curious	Hypervigilant; tense, jerky movements	Sweaty, panicky, running about
DOMINANCE	PLAY	CONFIDENCE/PLAY		CONFIDENCE/ CURIOSITY	FEAR	TERROR
Hostile, refusing, "try and make me"	Moves slowly, lazy, resistant, makes you work harder	Persistent, calm, focused, dependable		Bonding, Sensitive, gentle, connected	Weak, ineffective, tight body, retreating	Trembling
Calm, determined, immovable "you can't hurt me"	Won't move, unyielding	Patient, slow, at ease	ZERO ENERGY	Peaceful, connected, tranquil	Can't move, fixed	Frozen in fear
Soft muscles, calm stillness, easy posture					Tight muscles, awkward posture, almost invisible	

Note. Adapted from Parelli Natural Horsemanship Horsenality Tool, 2011. The chart maps four quadrants along two continuums that consist of high energy to low energy and dominance through confidence to fear.

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As this intervention focused primarily on developing students' behaviors through rehearsal, it seemed appropriate to observe and map behaviors in order to capture any potential changes.

See Tables 2 to 5 for a breakdown of each observation category.

TABLE 2 *Dominant/confident, high energy*

Fast, calm aggression	Destructive, rough, won't stand still	Exuberant, fast, fun, play, loose muscles	HIGH ENERGY
Slow and deliberate aggression	Pushy, dominant	Experimental, brave, assertive	
DOMINANCE	PLAY	CONFIDENCE/PLAY	

TABLE 3 *Dominant/confident, low energy*

DOMINANCE	PLAY	CONFIDENCE/PLAY	
Hostile, refusing, "try and make me"	Moves slowly, lazy, resistant, makes you work harder	Persistent, calm, focused, planning, dependable	
Calm, determined, immovable; "you can't hurt me"	Won't move, unyielding	Patient, slow, at ease	ZERO ENERGY

TABLE 4 *Confident/unconfident, high energy*

HIGH ENERGY	Fast efficient, athletic, vigilant	Can't keep still frenetic, reactive	Fight/flight
	Responsive, perceptive, speedy, curious	Hypervigilant; tense, jerky movements	Sweaty, panicky, running about
	CONFIDENCE/ CURIOSITY	FEAR	TERROR

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TABLE 5 *Confident/unconfident, low energy*

CONFIDENCE/CURIOSITY	FEAR	TERROR
Bonding,	Weak, ineffective, tight	Trembling
Sensitive, gentle, connected	body, retreating	
Peaceful, connected, tranquil	Can't move, fixed	Frozen in fear

Interviews

On the final day of each course, semi-structured reflective interviews (Liamputtong, & Ezzy, 2005) were undertaken by the course facilitator with each student (n = 20). These interviews focused on the learning of the students and enabled them to reflect on their experiences and knowledge. These interviews were audiotaped with their consent in order to enable an independent researcher to analyze the interview data. Further interviews were also undertaken with participants (n = 4 of the same students) by a researcher and audiotaped in order to further explore and validate the findings. Interviews were undertaken in a sheltered spot on the sports field and lasted for 15 to 20 min with the course facilitator and up to 45 min with the researcher. Prompts were used during the interviews that focused on encouraging the students to consider the nature of the course, what they had learned, and their reflections on any impacts this might have had on them during the course and outside the course during the rest of their time in prison.

The 20 facilitator interviews were part of the course itself, which is why they needed to be carried out by the facilitator. It needs to be noted that the data were influenced by the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, and it could be the case that students were giving "socially acceptable" answers (Radley & Billig, 1996). However, the responses of the students are still valuable at this exploratory stage of evaluation for this intervention and are supplemented and verified by the researcher interviews.

Analysis

The audiotapes were transcribed including both interviewer/interviewee contributions and non-verbal utterances such as "uhm," "ahh," and silences. The transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with a focus on gaining an understanding of the participants' perceptions of the impact of the course. Each transcript was read and re-read in depth. First-level thematic analysis was undertaken using pattern recognition that generated emerging themes using the words of the interviewees and second-level analy-

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sis that was being undertaken to integrate themes and further elucidate the recurring meanings from the interviewee transcript data (Boyatzis, 1998; Quinn-Patton, 2002). Each transcript was compared and contrasted with later transcripts to identify themes that were discussed by the research team and integrated and revised in the light of issues identified in subsequent transcripts.

Ethical Issues

Access to the setting and participants was negotiated by the researchers and the course facilitator, and it was informed by the research proposal and ethics process required by the prison service that was successfully gained prior to commencing the study. Consent was received from the participants by the course facilitator and the researchers using a consent form and information sheet. The participants were free to withdraw from the research process at any time without having to withdraw from the intervention unless they so desired. Great care was taken not to pressurise the participants. The researchers were aware of the potential for the participants' reading and writing skills to be limited and offered support in a sensitive manner where it was needed. Safety and confidence were the priorities at all times. At no time were students observed displaying distress. All the information collected and the identities of the participants were confidential. Each participant was given a code number that was used to identify the data collected.

The behavioral stress responses of the horses were observed using an approach based on research undertaken to develop a behaviorally based observation schedule to assess stress and distress in horses (Young, Creighton, Smith, & Hosie, 2012). At no time were participants left unsupervised with the horses. No participants had a known history of nonhuman animal abuse.

Results

Observations

At the start of their course, the students observed in this study were all recorded in the orange areas on the right of the chart, as they exhibited instinctual behaviors that could be described as tense or weak and ineffective. By the end of the course, all the participants observed had moved their observed body language into the green quadrants and could be described as becoming calmly assertive, confident, focused, and gentle. See Table 6 for observations.

The researchers observed and recorded that the students appeared to have grown in confidence, learned to control their body language, and learned to communicate effectively with the horses. Between the start of the course and

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TABLE 6 *Student behavior observation sheet*

Smooth movements, loose muscles, forwards				Jerky movements, tight muscles, backwards	
Fast, calm aggression	Destructive, rough, won't stand still	Exuberant, fast, fun, play, loose muscles	HIGH ENERGY	Fast, athletic, vigilant	Can't keep still, frenetic, reactive	Fight/flight
Slow and deliberate aggression	Pushy, dominant	Experimental, brave, assertive		Responsive, perceptive	**START OF THE COURSE** Hypervigilant; tense, jerky movements	Sweaty, panicky, running about
DOMINANCE	PLAY	CONFIDENCE/PLAY		CONFIDENCE/ CURIOSITY	FEAR	TERROR
Refusing, "try and make me"	Moves slowly, lazy, resistant, makes you work harder	**END OF THE COURSE** Persistent, calm, focused, dependable		Sensitive, gentle, connected	Weak, ineffective, tight body, retreating	Trembling, awkward
Calm, determined, immovable "you can't hurt me"	Won't move, unyielding	Patient, slow, at ease	ZERO ENERGY	Peaceful, connected, tranquil	Can't move, fixed	Frozen in fear
Soft muscles, calm stillness, easy posture				Tight muscles, awkward posture, almost invisible	

Note. Adapted from Parelli Natural Horsemanship Horsenality Tool, 2011.

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the end, all the students showed observable improvements in their ability to control their body language, and to be assertive rather than aggressive or ineffective or anxious. This was charted through the observers placing the majority of their observations in the right-hand side, orange quadrants in the first session. See the marked dimensions on Table 7.

In comparison, the majority of their observations at the end of the course were in the marked dimensions in the green zone. See the marked dimension on Table 8.

The researcher who was present and observed the whole 2.5-hr session at the beginning and at the end of the course recorded observations for the whole period. However, the researcher also recorded observations for the 30-min period of the video-recording, starting and stopping their observations with the recording to ensure direct comparisons could be made by another researcher observing the videos only.

Interviews

The following findings emerged from analysis of the interview audio data. All the observed participants were also included in those who undertook a final interview (n = 20) including the two students observed who had previously completed their course. The participants are identified here through letters of the alphabet to show the range of responses from different participants. The following were identified as important areas of learning from the participants' accounts: (1) Qualities students felt that they had developed, (2) Qualities of the course that they identified as helping them; (3) The ripple effect of being more relaxed on the wing, and (4) increased confidence to learn.

Qualities Developed

Calm assertiveness. All but one of the students described how they had become calmer and more assertive. They described how the course helped them to rehearse these skills and how rehearsing them with the horses helped them to want to engage with the course.

> To keep calm, I am not usually calm never calm on the outside. I have practiced keeping calm you have got to let the horse feel safe. . . .you need to bring it [your energy] down to get things done. Calmer with people, patience, I would get angry. Normally I would get angry. I control myself now I can do it rather than fight . . . never thought about it on anger management thing or life skills. . . .just ignored it . . . it feels good with the horses when they respond; you want to try. (A)

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TABLE 7 *Participants in first session*

START OF THE COURSE
Hypervigilant, tense, jerky movements FEAR Weak, ineffective, tight body, retreating

TABLE 8 *Participants in last session*

END OF THE COURSE
Persistent, calm, focused, dependable Patient, slow, at ease

> Once I had felt it [harmony with the horse], it feels lovely, I wanted to put the effort in . . . get the result . . . know I can do it. (H)

Confidence. Most of the students talked about how unconfident they normally were and how they found their confidence grew through undertaking the course. Interestingly, the students' responses reflected that they equated angry behavior with lack of confidence rather than aggression; through their reflections on the course they were able to articulate this.

> It's always the bad temper . . . I have no confidence. . . .I hate that feeling when nothing works. Now I know I can do stuff. I am going to study more. . . . I am more confident. I feel happier in myself, more confident on the wing, my mates have noticed. I would say [people should do the course] people with the same problems as me people who are angry. . . .with no confidence, really it gives you more confidence, you know, by having a go. (C)

Two former students who had completed the course returned to help future students. They reflected on what this opportunity meant to them, and once again reflected on the influence of the course on their ability to engage with learning and development.

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> Giving me responsibility, I enjoy it . . . it feels proper good when someone else gets it. I feel self-belief, I can teach people I want to do level 2 [horsemanship]. I want to come back and help. I am doing the City & Guilds. The more I learn, the more I can teach. I give up a bit too easy in life . . . I could have achieved a lot of things. I am going to do my CV and get out there. Remember your comfort zone [for learning], push forward, not too much, but move forward. (Q)

Focus—not giving up. Fifteen of the students reflected on how they had developed greater focus and effort; they felt that the nature of the course helped them not to give up, to engage and keep going.

> I need to work harder to get things done. . . .I give up too easy. . . .never give myself a chance. If things don't go to plan, I would normally give up. . . .need to keep going, the horses show you. You would not give up so I went along with it. . . .the horses are interesting; it feels good when they do things for you. . . .you want to try. I was never fussed to do stuff. . . .getting to know the horses feels different. At first I was not focused in order to get better, you have to do it [focus] and try harder. (E)

Qualities of Course that Helped

Practicality. The positive qualities of the course that all the students reflected on referred specifically to the practical nature of the course and being able to try things out.

> Doing it for real. . . .stop thinking about it . . . do it! . . .It's more practical [the course], you can see the results . . . other courses they are just telling you. Being given a chance to have a go. . . .I never give myself a chance. (I)

Facilitation. All but one of the students reflected on the style of facilitation and the feedback from the horses and the facilitator. The feedback from the horses seemed to really resonate for the participants' it was clear and immediate, and they seemed able to accept it for what it was in the moment.

> You don't nag just tell me and let me try. . . .you believed that I could do it. I have wasted my life away . . . horses can sense if you're angry or stroppy, you have to be clear-minded, otherwise they won't do it. . . .they tell you straight away. . . .this week I have had more good feedback than in the rest of my life. (A)

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Ripple Effect: Calmer on the Wing

Most students reflected on the impact of the course on their behavior in prison, specifically on the wing with other prisoners and officers.

> On the wing people have said I am calmer . . . I was always angry . . . mealtimes on the wing, don't go in all guns blazing, be calm, it's easier. . . .give people a chance. (N)

Being given the opportunity to rehearse being calm and reducing energy levels in order to communicate with the horses seemed to have substantially impacted the participants' behaviors elsewhere. They reflected on how they had learned to relax and to consider others and whether they can communicate effectively. For example:

> I have not been getting aggressive on the wing. I do in life get p****d off with people. I have learnt to relax on this course, learnt to forget about it. The main reason the horse won't do it is it's a misunderstanding for everyone . . . I am more understanding; often [with people] you're not understanding each other. I have practiced keeping calm . . . horses, read body language . . . makes you realise that when you think you're not letting of a lot of energy, you actually are . . . bring energy down . . . less confrontation. (S)

Indeed the reflections extended to the impact of the course on their other persistent problems.

> More relaxed in the past two weeks than the last year. My sleeping has improved, more calmer . . . no stress in the evening. . . .that habit of stilling everything down . . . helped me with relaxing around people . . . not normally relaxed. . . .when you're wound up, take a breather, let it go. I thought I was relaxed. I did not even realise myself. . . .the horses they tell you . . . people look at you differently, not be intimidated anymore . . . more respect. (R)

Learning to Learn

The students also reflected on learning to learn and experiment with learning, their own and that of others.

> I always say I can't do things, but I can. . . .more courage to do things . . . I am more focused on learning . . . just realised I can enjoy it. . . .learning is

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> a luxury, not everyone has the chance to learn new things. Learn to let everyone do things in their own time . . . everyone is different. (P)

Reflections of the Prison Staff

The reflections of two Offender Supervisors have been considered here. Between them, they referred seven of the participants to the course.

> All the participants I referred have not completed mainstream programmes (in the prison) for a variety of reasons ranging from lacking confidence to attend, not meeting specified criteria, and not wanting to engage. I have noticed that those I referred, post-course, have been more confident and assertive and better able to express their feelings, manage their emotions and have a greater ability to see the perspective of others, including their victims.
>
> Usually when I interview prisoners after a course, it's like getting blood out of a stone. . . .these young men clearly got a lot of insights from this course . . . all my lads have been very positive. . . .one told me it was the best thing he had ever done—monumental for him, it opened his eyes to who he can be.

The findings from this study will now be considered in relation to the literature and their overall relevance for the group under study.

Discussion

The findings from this initial study are important for different disciplines both relating to young offenders and EFL interventions. This study offers a step forward, as little has been published to date specifically for this group. The ability of horses to help humans positively develop their behavior, relationships with others, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-mastery has been alluded to previously within the few studies published on this area with young people (Trotter, et al., 2008; Burgon, 2011; Dell, 2011). This study adds to these findings by suggesting that horses can also help with developing interpersonal skills, temper control, and an understanding others, which would concur with the findings from Pendry and Roeter (2013), whose randomized, controlled trial showed improvements in young people's social competence following an EFL intervention using natural horsemanship techniques.

The study would also suggest that EFL can provide the small successes that may lead participants to learn to learn confidently and with pride as reflected

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on by the participants in their interviews and as found previously in Dell's (2012) study with young people. Indeed the three key themes that emerged from the interview data and were also observed and recorded by the researchers were the development of calm assertiveness, confidence, and focus. This study would suggest that the development of these transferable skills in the perceptions of the participants then in turn positively impacted their behaviors in prison.

The longer-term benefits of this program have now been examined more closely in a review published by The Horse Course, New Philanthropy Capital and CLINKS, both offering evaluation expertise to the third sector (2015). The 12-month reoffending rates were found to have been reduced by 27% compared with the Offender Group Reconviction Scale prediction for the study group ($n = 25$). This is a small group, but the results were statistically significant (The Horse Course Evidence Review, 2015).

It is also crucially important when exploring an intervention to consider the qualities of the intervention that render it effective. When writing specifically about what works to engage young offenders, Prior and Mason (2010) highlighted the necessity within research in this area to explore how program implementers can successfully engage young people and the techniques and resources they need to do so. This preliminary evaluation allowed the participants and the researchers to reflect on this issue. The participants reported that being able to do something practical and getting immediate feedback from the horses and the facilitator were essential qualities of the intervention rather than, "just talking about it."

In addition, the researchers observed the participants learning to learn confidently and learning to empathize. They had to try to understand the points of view of the horses in order to be effective when communicating with them. These are the very qualities that Prior and Mason (2010) highlighted when considering the evidence so far on what works to engage young offenders. It would appear that as a result of this course, participants learned to listen to another being through rehearsal and then reflected on the positive impact that had made on their relationships with other prisoners on the wing, which they said positively impacted their overall behavior in prison.

The numbers of participants included in this study limits the rigor of the data, and use of data gathered as part of the course needs to be taken into account; however, the observations and responses give insights into the effects of the course on these students and some indications of the processes that may be involved. The observation schedule used has been piloted in this study only, so it is not validated to be used with other groups at this time.

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Conclusion

Through working in a way with the facilitator and the horse that was action-based, experiential, and facilitated a non-judgemental approach, the young offenders who usually find it difficult to engage were observed to move from appearing anxious, tense, and ineffective to being calm, assertive, and confident when working with the horses. They reported feeling more confident and more in control of situations away from the horses. This short intervention appeared to have a deep effect on them.

Natural horsemanship has a comparatively small but growing following across the world. Since the version used here has a system and clear games to learn and play, it lends itself to evaluative research, as the observer can map and analyze the interaction between horse and human. Indeed this communication system allows for detailed observation of the horse and human interaction in a way that has not arguably been possible before and has great potential to further our understanding of this unique inter-species relationship between prey animal and predator.

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