

CHILDREN (7-13 YEARS) AND EMPATHETIC EQUINE CONTACT AND HOW
THIS MAY FACILITATE SPIRITUAL AWARENESS OF GOD, OTHERS AND
THEMSELVES: A CONSTRUCTIVIST INTERPRETIVE
PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATORY STUDY

BY

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AS PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
PHD IN HOLISTIC CHILD DEVELOPMENT


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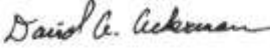

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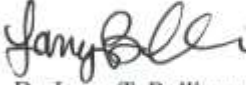
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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of equine contact on the development of spiritual awareness (relational consciousness) in children to see how wholeness of experience and connectedness might make a difference.

Using a multi-qualitative approach incorporating empathetic equine contact, questionnaires with encouragement to express creatively, together with focus group discussions and individual conversations and observation, the research examines children's lived experiences with horses to understand how such interactions may encourage spiritual awareness, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-reliance, and self-efficacy and resilience and transcendence of difficulties to be able to rise above, to use challenges positively for themselves and others. The theoretical framework of relational consciousness (Hay and Nye 2006, 109) guides the analysis, looking at how equine contact may foster children's spiritual awareness.

Key themes that emerged include: the actual and potential of overcoming fear, both natural and evolutionary fear and anxiety-based disorders, as a result of equine contact; the positive outcomes from being with horses, that is, learning how to communicate with a powerful and potentially dangerous animal using non-verbal methods; the closeness of relationships between human and horse and also the closeness of relationships between humans which emerge as a result of being together with horses; the comforting and sensitive nature of horses and their potential to build confidence; and a strong sense of spiritual connection with horses.

The findings suggest that equine contact could nurture children's spirituality and holistic development, though more research is needed to definitively establish causal links.

This study contributes to understanding how regular, guided interactions with horses may offer a pathway for fostering spiritual growth in young individuals and how other animal-assisted activities may support children's wellbeing and spiritual growth.

These findings have implications for child development programmes, spiritual education, and animal-assisted therapies.

CERTIFICATE OF PROOFREADING

I, Maryam Prano, certify that this dissertation has undergone proofreading and editing by Prof. Marie Osborne an authorized proofreader of the Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary.

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DECLARATION

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31ST July 2024

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY COMMITMENT

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to

My beloved husband Larry

My grandfather, Tom Livermore, who first taught me to love the natural world and who also showed me the wonders of looking up information in the index.

My father, Gerry Murphy, who always encouraged me.

Lastly and equally importantly, to my mother, Joy, who first introduced me and my sisters to horses. She knew deep down that we would almost certainly find solace in these creatures sent by God.

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Marigold exclaimed when she saw a picture of the white horses of Camargue, “They look like pearls!” This spontaneous comment is the inspiration for the subtitle of my dissertation because it describes how I feel about the responses to my inexperienced enquiries. The young people offered their pearls without guile or judgement. For this I thank them.

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ACRONYMS

AAI	Animal-Assisted Intervention
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder
APA	American Psychological Association
ARS	A_ Riding Stables (Pseudonym)
BHS	British Horse Society
DAP	Developmentally Appropriate Practice
EAAT	Equine-Assisted Activities Therapy
EAI	Equine-Assisted Intervention
EAL	Equine-Assisted Learning
EAP	Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy
EAQ	Equine-Assisted Qualifications
EAS	Equine-Assisted Services
EASE	Equine-Assisted Social Learning
EAT	Equine-Assisted Therapy
EFL	Equine-Facilitated Learning
HRT	Horse-Riding Therapy
NHS	National Health Service
NRS	N_ Riding School (Pseudonym)
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty towards Children
ONS	Office of National Statistics
PATH	Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship
RAD	Riding a Dream Academy
RDA	Riding for the Disabled
SEMH	Social Emotional Mental Health

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND ITS BACKGROUND

“Come unto Me”

(Matthew 11:28, KJV)

Introduction

The recent opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Paris featured a robotic horse galloping through the River Seine with a masked rider carrying the Olympic flag around her shoulders (France24 2024), representing the spirit of the River Seine, Sequana, the Gallo-Roman goddess for whom the river is named (Nicklin 2024). “Horses became part of Olympic competition when chariot racing was first included in 680 BC and then, as now, the animals were considered as much athletes as their riders” (Kyriacou 2021). The Olympic spirit is “Beyond Gold Medals”, with the five rings representing excellence, respect, friendship, unity, and legacy (Devdiscourse 2023). The Olympic motto, which was adopted in 1894, is “Citius, Altius, Fortius” (“faster, higher, stronger”). It was modified by the International Olympic Committee in 2021 with the addition of the word “Communiter”, signifying “together”, and is embodied in the horse, which can gallop up to 34kph during three-day-eventing, jump over obstacles 1.45-1.60 metres high at an average speed of 24kph in showjumping, and exhibit controlled strength in dressage (Hobbs and Clayton 2022).

That evening, as the representation of the goddess Sequana rode atop the River Seine towards the Eiffel Tower, she spread out a pair of dove’s wings. Olympic Games tradition dictates that doves are released (or more recently represented in other ways) to

remind us of the sowing of seeds of peace between the nations, which was the vision of Pierre de Coubertin in 1894 (Flickner 2021).

The horse exhibits speed, power, and strength, but at the same time, we can recognize its nobility as it seeks relationship and strives to live harmoniously within the herd (Roberts 1996, 88,97), whether with *Homo sapiens* or *Equus*. The horse inspires nobility and peace (Isenbart and Buhrer 1969, 10).

Hamblin and D’Agostino showed how to draw on the spirit of humility, nobility, and surrender in the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro as they gave up their ambitions for each other (Flickner 2021). The Olympic spirit is a surrender to know that we are not ultimately in control, and that there is ‘Someone’ who is outside our experience and who is greater than ourselves, and that that Spirit is approachable and *able*, as Abbey D’Agostino recognized (Flickner 2021).

The robotic horse at the Olympic Games could be likened to a cathedral or a temple. They are man-made structures which emulate the spiritual for which many of us yearn. They are controllable versions (however “flying” and surreal) of what we cannot grasp but can only long for and glimpse in passing, of glory which we seek and can only gain through surrender (Proverbs 3: 5-6). In the Gospels, Jesus invites us to come to Him and that He will give us rest (St Mathew 11:28). We can surrender to God and be rested. We can cease to strive on our own.

I had the opportunity to return to working with horses and I have built upon the years of raising children, teaching, and coming alongside young people who have needed an alternative to mainstream schooling. In 2018, I began to help out on a weekly basis with the horses and children at a local stables. In 2021 I started volunteering every week

with children and ponies at N_ Riding School, and there I have witnessed small miracles with horses, where they are nobly and quietly present for children—inviting a young person to draw near, to surrender personal need for the good of being together, and to encounter peace.

Deep conviction borne out of these experiences that human effort alone will only partly succeed in holistic mending of brokenness continues to lead me to find ways to facilitate children's engagement with the natural world, particularly horses, which could offer opportunities to meet God through these encounters and to gain the spiritual awareness that He can help.

The Wonder of Horses

Winston Churchill is reported to have said: “There is something special about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man” (Scharff 2016). Throughout history, horses have played a pivotal role in many aspects of human life—transport, haulage, warfare, meat, leather, sport, pleasure, and companionship.

Horses are wondrous to look at and to contemplate and to be with, and this fact is evident in how they have been depicted, from the first cave paintings (Casella 2019) and chalk carvings (Gardner 2024) to the iconographic fine art of the Mediaeval (Ropa 2018) and Renaissance periods (Crane n.d.), continuing to today, for example, in the imaginative work *Freedom* (Jones n.d.) and in the Scottish giant steel horse heads *The Kelpies* (Scott n.d.). Artists have always been inspired by horses because of their beauty, power, and tenderness, coupled with finely tuned senses (White-Lewis 2019; Roberts 1996, 118-120). Stories, poems, and songs tell of the relationship between humans and horses (Cervantes 1986; Daumas 1863; Lewis 1954; Morpugo 1982; Haigh 2017). In this

project, paintings, photographs, audio readings, video recordings, and poetry are among the instruments used to inspire and to elicit responses from selected children aged 7-13 years, and to try to find out how empathetic equine contact may affect the participants.

Background of the Problem

Child in the Middle

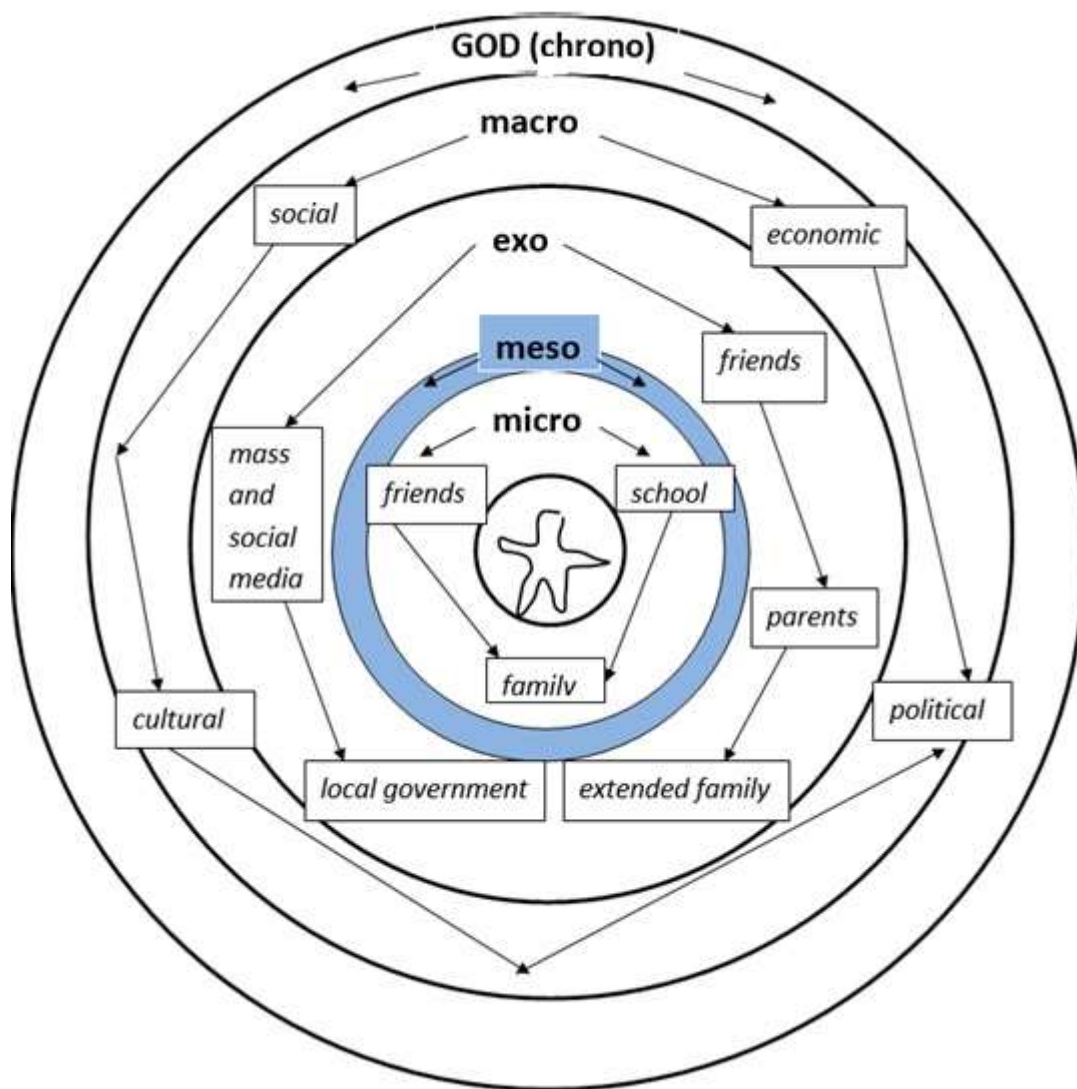


Figure 1. Connectedness (Based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model, 1979)

(Cherry 2023)

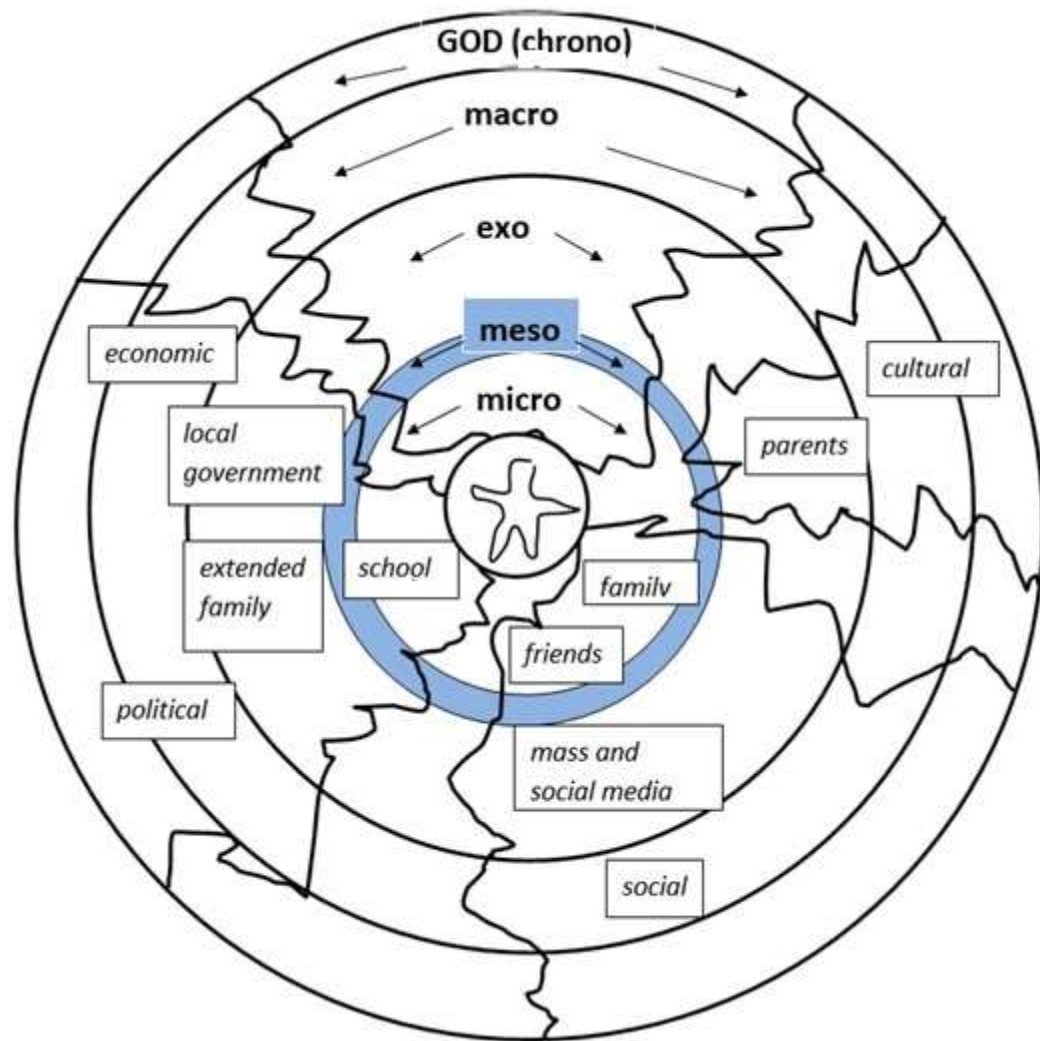


Figure 2. Disconnectedness

Figures 1 and 2 are based on the ecological model developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and are an illustration of how a child's life may become tarnished and scratched as they develop (Copsey 2005, 60-71) and as they are affected by the levels of interconnectedness between themselves and their surroundings. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model stresses the interdependency and interaction between people and their environments (Cherry 2023). Bronfenbrenner developed his theory to include the possibility that circumstances and experiences can have historic, present, and future

effects in a child's life as the 'nested' systems surrounding the child allow permeability (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Ettekal and Mahoney 2017, 2). Permeability allows brokenness to occur because of dysfunction and trauma throughout the systems, with any resulting disconnection bringing about spiritual delinquency (Figure 2). However, this same permeability can also facilitate God's blessing and healing, which is like a refreshing rain (Isaiah 44:3; Ezekiel 34:26). We are all surrounded by God and His love, hope, and grace (Romans 5:12-21).

Before birth, and within the microsystem illustrated above, the child absorbs the atmosphere (The University of Edinburgh 2020; Copsey 2005, 60) from outside the womb, and this continues to be the foremost influential system in place as the child goes to school and faces the world outside the home. The microsystem contains close family and friends, neighbours, and early schooling experience. Bronfenbrenner (Cherry 2023) indicates a mesosystem as a permeable layer between the immediate and the intermediate possibilities, as it allows a sliding backwards and forwards between the microsystem and the exosystem.

The exosystem is represented by extended family, social media, local government, and parents' friends and contacts. At this level, the child is confronted with ideas and situations which may be incompatible with what they have learned and accepted. Extended family and parents' friends may be a vehicle for challenging the parents' worldview. Mass media, social media, school friends, and other adults such as teachers, government contacts (e.g. social workers), or medical personnel will also speak into a child's life in ways which may undermine patterns of thought and expectations, leading to insecurity and discomfort with resulting disorienting dilemmas (Fleming 2018,

121-124). Mezirow's theory of transformative learning in adults stipulates that a disorienting dilemma can catalyse transformation in a person's life as they are challenged to make positive changes in their perspectives (Lohe 2017). The opposite could perhaps happen when a child is confronted by too much disorientation on too many levels to be able to rise above it. The macrosystem is the economic, social, cultural, and political framework in which a child grows. The chronosystem which is God in figures 1 and 2 permeates all the levels in a child's development and is the firmament which surrounds the whole of a child's existence from beginning to end.

Throughout the data-gathering, I found that participants responded readily to the term 'God', even though they might not have been positive all the time. God is a recognizable name. I have used mostly God or Creator God but on occasion, Transcendent Being. I believe that God is above and beyond all our attempts to categorize Him. I adhere to the biblical framework and my understanding of God is within the Judeo-Christian tradition. On thinking through God as construct and the God of the Bible, it is more helpful perhaps to think in terms of Creator God within a post-Christian and secular context as Creator God could be seen as an external system as well as a person. I have also used the term spiritual awareness which I define as awareness of Creator God: Someone bigger and larger and closer to me and you (than we can imagine) with "Everlasting Arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27). Here then is God as construct but also God as real and personal and maybe such views of God could be held together.

The child in the midst (Mark 9:36, 37; Brewster 2011, 121) is all of us. Jesus teaches his disciples that, to achieve true greatness, we must learn to be attentive to the smallest and the weakest around us—often the children (Stedman n.d; Matthew 19:14).

We can be in the midst with Jesus also as we become like children again—trusting and without guile. Figure 1 represents one picture of each of us and our children and how we can suffer brokenness and also can be healed.

The discussion centres around disconnectedness from which the child may suffer increasingly, and the resulting spiritual delinquency (Copsey 2005 60-71; Kessler 2000, 159-61). Children depend on adults around them to guide and instruct (Proverbs 22:6), and to help them in their early choices. If those in positions of care and leadership are not equipped for the role of guide and instructor, or if there is single parenting because of death, divorce, or absenteeism, it may make growing up more difficult.

Social Trends in the U.K.

Family Breakdown

The extent of family breakdown, separation, and divorce, the subsequent blending of families, and how this is affecting future generations in the U.K. are relevant as we think about trends and how they might affect our children nationally. Divorce rates in 2020 amongst opposite-sex couples in the U.K. are numbered at 103,592 (ONS 2021). It is hard to determine how many more families suffer from breakdown which does not end in divorce.

Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse

Among adults over the age of 16, 2.4 million experienced domestic abuse in 2023 (National Centre for Domestic Abuse n.d.). ONS records that in 2022 there were 1.5 million reported incidents in England and Wales, which is a 7.7% increase from the year before (National Centre for Domestic Abuse n.d.); the National Health Service reports

higher incidences of abuse, violence, and sexual offences throughout the last few years, particularly during and after the COVID lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 (NHS England 2022).

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

There is a continuing misuse of drugs and alcohol, with approximately 3.1 million people between the ages of 16-59 reporting using an illicit drug during the previous twelve months ending in March 2023 (ONS 2023). Of this group, 17.6% are between the ages of 16-24 years, which is approximately 1 million people (ONS 2023).

Mental Health in Children

The rise in mental health issues in children in school is of increasing public concern. A recent report states that there has been a 77 percent rise since 2017 in referrals, from 15,000 to 60,000 in 2021 for severe problems of self-harm, eating disorders, and suicidal thoughts (Jeffreys 2022, 1). One in every five children and youth had a probable mental disorder in 2023 (NHS England 2023). Self-harm, suicide ideation, and actual suicide are major public health concerns for youth and amongst children aged 6-12 also (Geoffroy et al. 2022; Townsend et al. 2024) More than a quarter of a million young people are still waiting for referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in the U.K (Children's Commissioner 2025).

Eating Disorders

There is evidence that nearly 10,000 children went for treatment in the months of April to December 2022, which is 25% more than the previous year (NHS England 2022)

and that more young people in the U.K. than ever before are receiving treatment for eating disorders (NHS England 2023).

Neurodiversity (Children on the Autistic Spectrum)

There is also a rise in children living with neurodiversity, currently estimated at one child in every hundred (BMA n.d.). Depending on diagnosis parameters in the U.K., one to twenty percent of children could currently be neurodivergent (Ginns 2024).

Online

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) publishes suggestions for how to stay emotionally healthy online. These include keeping the balance between online and other activities, being alert to content, and being aware of who you are talking to online (NSPCC Learning 2024). Although it is acknowledged that participating in social media online can be beneficial for keeping in touch with friends or learning about the world, very real problems can emerge through recruitment of vulnerable young people to be part of criminal gangs, through online grooming, or through cyberbullying, which is when a child is bullied by another person or a group over text (Papamichail and Sharma 2019, 3-5).

One in every six young people aged 5-16 in the U.K. report experiencing a mental health problem (NHS Digital (2020)). There is no conclusive evidence of a causal link that the online environment is adding to the mental and emotional difficulties for children (Papamichail and Sharma 2019, 1), but there is a concern that the most vulnerable children living in U.K. are not considered in research, nor is the suggested safety training for children always accessible to young people in care, for example, or who are otherwise vulnerable (Papamichail and Sharma 2019, 7, 8).

Use of Pornography

Pornography depicts unrealistic body image and performance that can impact children's self-esteem and confidence. A study in the U.K found that pornography and its related depictions have resulted in many children becoming sex offenders and that there is a direct correlation between viewing pornography and violent sexual acts child on child (Children's Commissioner 2023, page 1). Online child sexual abuse and use of AI-generated child pornography has increased exponentially (IWF n.d.) and that "AI-generated child sexual abuse imagery found online by the IWF has quadrupled in a year."

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking

Referrals for modern slavery and human trafficking in the U.K. are on the increase (NCA n.d.; United Nations n.d.). Many people, including children, have been found working in the cannabis farm industry, in agriculture, construction, car washes, the sex trade, and nail bars, among other jobs. Refugees and immigrants who are fleeing war and financial hardship find themselves trapped in dangerous circumstances. Other trafficking victims are U.K. natives who find themselves coping with unexpected setbacks (NCA n.d.).

Ethnic Minorities

In recent years because of war and economic hardship, people have migrated from Syria, the Horn of Africa, and other parts of the Middle East and North Africa, as well as from Eastern Europe and Ukraine. There is increasing population diversity in Britain (Lomax et al., 2019) and, according to Joe Mulhall of *Hope Not Hate*, the tensions which arise partly because of fear and misunderstanding were apparent in riots sparked by the

murder of three young girls in Southport and breaking out in various cities across the country during early August 2024 (BBC News 2024).

Aspects to the Background of the Problem

Various aspects of the background of the problem include loss of trust in relationships, hurt and pain because of broken relationships and abuse, emotional breakdown, fear, anger, bitterness, hopelessness, despair, hatred, disconnectedness, cynicism, and impairment of holistic wellbeing (Faust 2021, 1-26, 30-32, 71-118; White 2008, 28), all perhaps leading to a sense of unreliability, unpredictability, and even chaos (White 2008, 23). Other issues are spiritual disengagement (Tracy 2005, 117-21), shame (Tracy 2005, 81-83), lack of interest in service towards others (Kessler 2000, 69-72), learned helplessness (Seligman 1972, 407; Cherry 2023, 1), possible psychosis (Lim and Gleeson 2014, 5), and schizophrenia (Pettersson-Yeo et al. 2011). The following section discusses in more detail some of the aspects mentioned.

Relational Disconnectedness

The gap between the inside and the outside of a young person may be understood as a relational void with themselves and with others which is caused by delinquency in a child's life (Copsey 2005, 60-71). This can lead to cynicism, anger, bitterness, violence, and anarchy.

The latest report from the UK government outlines the results of spending large amounts of time on the phone, including a "blurred boundary between the lives children lead online and the 'real world' (Woodhouse and Lalic 2024). Adults and children can become addicted to the rush of dopamine which occurs through social media engagement, perhaps with the result that they lose connection with friends and family

(Huddleston 2016, 31, 35, 88). If children are encouraged to engage with parts of things, such as GIFs and videos on social media or simplified ‘readers’ rather than unabridged books, their view of the world may be arranged in fragments rather than a whole panorama (Mason 1989,183; Macaulay 1984, 29).

The Child is a Whole Person

Bishop Comenius (1592-1670) of Czechoslovakia and Charlotte Mason (1842-1923), who espoused the ideas of the Czech thinker, understood the wholeness of the child and how they are “persons” (Mason 1989, 13, 18, 29). Mason also understood the need for a child to have whole or living books, whole art, and whole music at their disposal to be able to take in the complete and unadulterated ideas presented and to be able to approach them without fear or hesitation (Mason 1989, 180-85, 213-18, 230-33; Macaulay 1984, 91-92). She also understood that the child’s mind is not a ‘sac’ [‘sack’—Ed.] or a vessel (Mason 1989) in which to place ideas and knowledge, a teaching method which a few decades later was described as a ‘banking system’ (Freire 1970, 72).

Maria Montessori re-introduced the importance of a child having access to a ‘vision of vastness’ (Montessori 1946) and in the same spirit of learning about ‘whole’ ideas, Dorothy L. Sayers spoke of the child being taught how to think through absorbing (poll parrot stage); arguing and questioning (pert stage); and analysing and synthesising (poetic stage) (Wilson 1991, 149, 154).

In the Celtic tradition, according to Maria Lief Crabtree, the idea that a child should be part of the bigger picture in the daily life of family and culture was welcomed (Catterton 2008, 78-79). Relatedly, books, especially books of folk tales and romance encourage children’s awareness of the transcendent, and they can nurture the imagination

(O'Brien 1994, 20), perhaps enabling children to rise above the limits of their senses and the fragmenting effect of isolated facts to comprehend “the Great” and “the Whole”.

Coleridge commented in a letter to his friend, Thomas Poole, “Those who have been led to the same truths step by step thro’ the constant testimony of their senses, seem to me to want a sense which I possess—they contemplate nothing but parts—and all parts are necessarily little—and the Universe to them is but a mass of little things” (Strhan, Parker, and Ridgely 2017, 269-70).

The Impairment of Holistic Wellbeing

A young person’s social, emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual welfare are part of the whole. If one area of the person is injured, the other parts may suffer. Recent findings by the NSPCC show that there has been an increase in police-recorded child abuse offences across the U.K. (Johnson 2019). There are those who are in care in the fostering system with its accompanying loss (NSPCC Learning 2022); there are those who are victims of bullying or cyberbullying (Peck 2023), and there are those whose families do not have enough money for breakfast or school lunches, which is most often an indicator of their socio-economic status (Sutherland and Vignoles 2017). There are those who are child carers of a parent or relative or other children in the home (Kavanaugh and Stamatopoulos 2021; The Children’s Society 2022); and there are those who are lacking physical or mental capability in some manner (Maciver et al. 2019; GOV.UK n.d.). In addition, Ennew reminds us that while some of these children will have access to spiritual nurture and care, many others will not (Crawford and Miles eds. 2017, 231).

Spiritual Disengagement

The Donut Man (Evans n.d.) explains that what is lacking in a person's life is that round hole in the middle of every human being which needs to be filled up with God. From a biblical perspective, the lack originates from when humankind was separated from God in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve decided to choose for themselves without including God (Genesis 3:8 (NIV)). Spiritual disengagement is what happens to us when we leave God out of the equation in any aspect of our lives. This could be because we have never been taught about God and the spiritual side of life (Crawford and Miles eds. 2017, 225-33), and it also could be because we are rebellious by nature and choose to do things independently, without God. The result of such disengagement can be that we lead lives which are increasingly shrivelled and closed up (Proverbs 17:22b). We can suffer from dissociation in our family and friend relationships or failure to progress in our schooling and work, and these could lead to general break-down and despair (Kessler 2000, 159-61; White 2008, 23, 29). The human condition contains conflicting needs of being an individual and of being part of a group. The iWorld (Kuehne 2009, 44-45) is the result of individualism and selfishness. These trends can obfuscate the problems of unresolved issues such as fear of the unknown, fear of death, fear of failure, greed, anger, and broken relationships.

The various aspects of the problem of delinquency in our spiritual lives may originate from ignorance, where the parents or those in authority withhold or misinterpret spiritual teaching and guidance from those in their care (Crawford and Miles eds. 2017, 225-33; Hay and Nye 2006, 133-34). It may also be the result of people who are directly responsible before God as individuals turning away and not paying attention to their

spiritual core, to their soul, leading to anger at God, rejection of God and a loss of faith (Proverbs 1:24-26). Or it may occur where individuals have been so damaged and hurt that they can only conclude that God does not care or that he is not there at all (Tracy 2005, 118).

The problem of spiritual disengagement can produce a lack of intellectual and creative flourishing, and this in turn can lead to a ‘closing of the mind’ (Hay and Nye 2006, 149-50). The increasing dependence on and misuse of the internet by young people (Papamichael and Sharma 2019, 5) can lead to this ‘closing down’, or what has been described as “digital dementia” (Delgado 2021; Manwell et al. 2022, 1). There may then be a failure to thrive and subsequently a failure to flourish, as being connected is necessary not only for information but also for enjoyment—and even survival—in a world which is increasingly digitally dependent. A second result is that young people may lose their ability to relate well to their actual surroundings, perhaps losing much of their empathetic ability along the way, an ability which is helpful in regaining hope and meaning (Kessler 2000, 71). Thirdly, there is a build-up of fear in their lives as they become more disassociated from families and friends (Kessler 2000, 159-61).

The data from recent results show that a third of English teenagers are failing literacy and numeracy, with a grade of 4 or below (Wood 2022, 1; Ofqual 2022). How can individual situations be turned around to allow a student who is failing to succeed in the non-negotiable areas of mathematics and English language to transcend practical and mental health issues, and to engage with hope in the pivotal secondary school years in the U.K.? How does the child who is struggling to find balance and meaning at home and at

school navigate the difficulties, and how can they overcome and transcend challenges?

How are aimlessness and hopelessness to be managed and resisted?

Healing of Disengagement

There are many ways to enable our children to connect with nature and this is shown to aid in holistic well-being (Louv 2010, 3, 35), which can lead to greater self-efficacy and the ability to transcend personal difficulty and to find some resolution (Tillmann et al. 2018).

Findings from recent studies suggest that child holistic well-being may be helped through contact with horses and ponies (Hauge et al. 2014; Adams et al. 2015; Frederick, Hatz, and Lanning 2015; Fleetwood 2016; New Fei et al. 2017; Clavell-Bate 2018; Eller 2019; Escobar 2019; Mickelsson 2019; Hemingway 2020; Haig and Skinner 2022). The mind and the body can be engaged by this contact, and the social and mental as well as physical parts of a person's being can be helped towards healing. Of course, empathetic equine contact cannot be the answer for every child's disconnectedness. A phobia of animals or allergy triggers may prevent children from having contact. Also, many children in the U.K. will never have contact with *Equus*. This is why organisations like the British Horse Society (BHS) and Riding a Dream Academy (RAD) are working towards widening their scope and enabling opportunities in the U.K. Equine contact is understood to be one way to facilitate holistic well-being. Organisations such as Changing Lives through Horses (CLtH) (The British Horse Society n.d.) and Equine Assisted Qualifications (EAQ n.d.) aim to offer a way for young people to engage with horses and at the same time to learn how to flourish in their learning environments and gain meaningful qualifications through alternate provision (Essex County Council n.d.).

Increasingly, it is acknowledged that holistic wellbeing—social, psychological, emotional, and physical—has a part to play in how children can function well in schools (Department for Education 2021).

The horse can offer an opportunity towards recovery for a variety of reasons. The horse is a prey or flight animal (Adams et al. 2015, 53; Hemingway 2020), and it is thus very sensitive to atmosphere. Such sensitivity can translate into a capacity of the horse to absorb and mirror emotion (White-Lewis 2019, 5.5;), which may be helpful for a child or young person who is struggling to find mental and spiritual equilibrium. Anecdotally, a young work rider known to me experiences relief from her anxious thoughts when she is in the company of a horse (Pablos Murphy, personal conversation, 2022), and a former student found out that an attitude of hopelessness leading to learned helplessness (Cherry n.d.) can be ameliorated by spending time with animals.

Close proximity to a horse, its physical warmth (an adult horse at rest is usually 99-101 degrees Fahrenheit (37.2–38.3 degrees Celsius), whereas the normal temperature for a healthy child is 97.52 Fahrenheit (36.4 degrees Celsius) (White-Lewis 2019, 5.4), and the powerful largeness and presence of the creature, together with the nonverbal connections (Hemingway 2020), can give a child the chance to relate to a ‘wide expanse’ of another living being.

A similar thing may happen with other animals, for example, a dog or cat (Hutton n.d.), and it can happen as well in a natural setting where a child is able to connect with things like trees and plants and a flowing river (Louv 2010, 3, 35). What would be very interesting is to look at how domestic animals in different parts of the world can enable children to relate to that which is ‘beyond them.’ David was a shepherd out in the

wilderness (I Samuel 16). He spent his boyhood tending his sheep and learning to recognize the animals that posed a danger to them and to himself—for example, the lion and the bear (I Samuel 17: 34-37). How did David discover the hugeness of life and its connections? He observed and experienced the natural world and the animals in it, and he related to them and to God (Psalm 19).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research project is to look at empathetic equine contact with a selected cohort of British children aged 7-13 years old, to see how their experiences facilitated relational consciousness, and to find out if they agreed that such contact encourages emotional and social resilience, spiritual health, and wellbeing.

Statement of the Problem

British children are becoming disconnected from themselves and from others and their spiritual awareness is damaged. In seeking to address this problem I ask: Is it possible that relationships with horses could help children holistically, positively and spiritually?

The research questions were:

1. Could social, mental, and emotional wellbeing result from empathetic contact with Equus and could this lead to greater resilience, confidence, and self-efficacy for a child?
2. In what ways did *space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy, and trust* (S.P.I.R.I.T.) (Nye 2009, 41-52) encourage relational consciousness, that is, awareness of oneself, others, and God through relationship?

3. Could a child be enabled through empathetic equine contact where the criteria of S.P.I.R.I.T. are implemented to achieve *some* transcendence of difficulty and some capacity to meet challenges positively?
4. What kinds of experiences with horses did children have which could help them spiritually?
5. What qualities of the horse did children experience which helped them to become more relationally conscious?
6. What qualities did children have which helped them become more relationally conscious through empathetic equine contact?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to find out how the experience of working with horses can make a difference holistically to children amongst the selected 7 to 13 year-olds, and to understand how empathetic equine contact could help them to become more relational and resilient, to develop self-efficacy (self-reliance and confidence), and to be able to move towards the ability to transcend difficulty in their lives—that is, not only to rise above, but also to use the challenge positively for themselves and others. A working definition of holistic wellbeing might be discovered by listening to what the children are saying about how they reacted, responded, and felt based on the interpretive phenomenological approach (Frechette et al. 2020). The participants aided the process of defining holistic wellbeing as they took part in the questionnaire and the focus group discussions. With the small sample available the objectives of the study were met; the summary of findings in Chapter V gives an outline of what happened.

Brief Description of the Research Design

The selection criteria for choosing children included, firstly, that a participant had some experience with horses and that this experience was ongoing, and secondly, that they were between 7 and 13 years old. Participants had opportunities to think about and understand the study through information flyers and two videos (Appendices A, F, G, H) which were available to them and their families. The selected participants had been involved with horses during the previous year. I had been working with or observing a few of the selected participants as they looked after horses and rode them. A questionnaire booklet was available in a shoebox for each participant. There were also craft materials provided for each child inside the box. A few participants did discuss their work with me, and the results of these conversations were incorporated with the data. The booklets were collected at the end of the session. After a break time, there was a focus group activity which involved semi-structured and open-ended questions to encourage discussion, and these group discussions were audio-recorded. All permissions were in place to record and to use the data.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of relational consciousness indicates the profound capacity that children have to relate to themselves, others, the world around them, and to God, and through this process, to be reflectively conscious of what is happening. Perhaps the consciousness of themselves as ‘subject’ in the process (Hay and Nye 2006, 109) enables the foundations of self-reflection and ‘orientation towards others’ to be established.

The theoretical framework for this study is Relational Consciousness. Rebecca Nye writes concerning the series of interviews which she conducted with primary school

children to find out what might constitute spirituality in the child. Relational consciousness is the term which Nye employs to explain the particular awareness, which is a thoughtful consciousness, a type of ‘meta-cognition’. Nye mentions that, in each case, she sees that the child refers to a relationship they have where there is a particular type of consciousness which adds value to the ‘ordinary or everyday perspective’ (Hay and Nye 2006, 109).

The acrostic S.P.I.R.I.T. is used (Nye 2009, 41) to describe relational consciousness and also to show practically how relational consciousness can be facilitated. These six criteria of *space*, *process*, *imagination*, *relationship*, *intimacy*, and *trust*, which form the basis for relational consciousness, were the guide for how the study was conducted.

Recently, I attended a Trauma-Informed Workshop at a Godly Play conference in Gloucester, U.K (Godly Play Foundation n.d.). I learned how S.P.I.R.I.T. can frame a session of Godly Play. For example, for S (Spirit perhaps interchangeable with Space): 1. “Mirroring” is the person together with others 2. “Acknowledgement,” as “I am here, and you are there - we are all here together” 3. “Empathy.” For I (Imagination): “Every moment and interaction is an intervention.” For T (Trust): “Relational trauma needs relational repair” (Godly Play Conference n.d.). It was interesting that the words mirroring, acknowledgment, and empathy particularly were mentioned, as they are central aspects of the horse in equine therapy (White-Lewis 2019, 5.5; Escobar 2019, 27; Banham 2024) because they mirror behavior (Mickelsson 2019, 3; Eller 2019, 29-30).

The criteria acted as a framework for the methodologies employed, as shown in the following table.

Table 1. S.P.I.R.I.T.

<i>S for space</i>	At the beginning we prayed for the time that the Holy Spirit would lead the day.
<i>P for process</i>	All the different types of activities made up the whole process.
<i>I for imagination</i>	The shoebox activities gave opportunity for imagination to roam and explore.
<i>R for relationship</i>	The focus group discussions were a chance for building on relationships and making new ones.
<i>I for intimacy</i>	The setting of a small group (with ponies in attendance too) enabled a freedom for discovery and intimacy. Conversations took place between individuals during the session which helped to encourage more opportunities for intimacy.
<i>T for trust</i>	Being with horses necessarily builds trust, as they can be the absorber of hard emotions and could provide a safe place as well as an attachment base (Bachi 2013; Adams et al. 2015, 62, 63; White-Lewis 2019, 5.5, 8), releasing the person to relax and express themselves more freely.

The theory of relational consciousness identifies how a person may discover the whole, and at the same time, may begin to register the smaller parts of the whole. To be able to encounter greatness (Montessori 1946, 182), it is helpful if a person can relate to that which is vast and big and needing full attention, putting the detail into a context to be explored and discovered, and, at the same time, can fully think about what is occurring.

Significance of the Study

In the background to the problem section, some of the extremes of scenarios in children's lives in the U.K. were discussed. The overarching question of this research project is whether children are spiritually sensitive and whether they can become spiritually aware through a conscious relationship with another sentient being—in this instance, *Equus*. If the spirituality of children is acknowledged as being a part of holistic wellbeing, there will be more emphasis placed on the importance of nurturing the spiritual core. From a Christian perspective, this would be a way to help towards a

relationship with God which can and does offer healing, health, and new beginnings (Isaiah 43:19).

Assumptions of the Study

The main assumption of this study is that the spiritual dimension in our lives and in our children's lives exists. Another assumption is that spiritual nurturing makes a difference for children in the home, in the community, and in school. It was assumed that listening to children's perspectives was more valuable than having an adult merely observe them and provide the researcher's interpretation. Also, it was assumed that the children would interact with the pictures and the videos, and furthermore, would be able to interact with their own ideas.

Definition of Equine Terms (and other animal terms)

Aid The natural riding aids are voice, legs, seat, and hands, and the artificial riding aids are the whip, spurs, and any other means which are contrived to guide and control the horse.

Bearing rein is a piece of the horse's bridle which is attached so as to constrain the horse's head and body movements, resulting in an unnatural and painful position.

Bucking is a free movement of the horse whereby it will lift its hind quarters and may kick out into the air.

Cantering is a three-beat gait as each leg is off the ground at regular intervals.

Equus is the name for the eight members of the equine or Equidae herbivore family (Akers 2019).

Farrier is a person who makes and fits shoes for horses.

Filly is a young female horse.

Heavy Horse The various breeds which were developed to manage farm work in pre-industrial Europe.

Pick out means to clean the underside of the horse's hoof with a hoof pick to make sure all debris is removed.

Rearing is a free movement of the horse whereby it will lift its two forelegs and stand on its hindquarters.

Rugged up is when a horse has its blankets secured on its body.

Withers means the highest part of the horse's back above the shoulders at the base of the mane (*Cambridge Dictionary* n.d.).

Work rider is a person who exercises racehorses for a living.

Yearling means an animal in its second year of life, especially a horse or deer (Collins n.d.).

Definition of Child Wellbeing Terms

Children (7-13 years) Piaget's concrete operational stage of development (McLeod n.d) and Erickson's "industry versus inferiority" or competence stage of development (McLeod 2025) are from age 7- 11 years. This stage is one of logical thinking (Piaget) and of confidence growth according to competence levels and feelings of inferiority according to lack of competence (Erickson). The formal operational or adolescent years of scientific reasoning begin around 11 years of age (Piaget); this categorization mirrors the stage of "fidelity" where development of identity and roles occur beginning at age 12 years (Erickson).

Creator God refers to the God of the universe who is loving and who made everything

and who rules over all. The term God or Transcendent Being could also be used in the dissertation to refer to a construct of God, that is a first cause or a force for life.

Empathetic equine contact means contact with horses and ponies with understanding and connection.

Spirituality refers to the fact that above and beyond all as humans we are spiritual beings made by the Creator God.

Limitations of the Study

As there is little mention in recent studies reviewed in Chapter II of how equine contact can enable spiritual awareness of Creator God for children, being unable to build on previous research is a limitation of the study. Additionally, apart from the donkey of Balaam in the Bible, no *Equus* has talked, which means that we cannot discover the horses' perspectives on how they feel children respond to them.

Taboo

There appeared to be an implicit accord that talking about spiritual aspects of our lives was taboo in a postmodern U.K. context. There seemed to be an anxiety that spirituality might mean that I was “crossing the line”; researching the physical, emotional, and social was acceptable, but investigating the spiritual might be seen as strange. This made it challenging to communicate effectively with families and, consequently, with prospective participants.

Small Numbers

The scope of the study is limited by the comparatively small number of participants for the research project. There was difficulty gaining trust with gatekeepers

and primary carers. The way to manage this situation was to continue steadily to build relationships and to be consistent and to follow through on opportunities, however small. The study used purposive and snowball sampling to solicit participants and multiple qualitative methodologies to elicit data.

Communication

Although some small groups of participants knew each other within each workshop, the natural shyness of most made the initial connection more challenging. However, this was overcome in most cases because one of two of the participants in each group were naturally gregarious and facilitated conversation.

Shoebox Questionnaire

There were two points in the shoebox questionnaire where there were different approaches to the same question. In shoebox question 8, participants one to three in the first workshop in August were asked to say how they felt physically when they were with a horse. For participants four to twenty, they had the option of saying how they felt physically but also in their minds, in their hearts (emotionally), and in their souls. In shoebox 17, participants one to seven could respond to a question using their own words only, whereas for participants eight to twenty, there was an option of using a sticker system as well as responding using their own words.

Artwork

Although the I was not trained specifically in the analysis of artwork to extract meaning from data, it became apparent that it would be useful to record what the participants said about their work and to include this in the data for analysis instead.

Present

The control variable (Figure 3) in this study was whether a participant was actually present. There were two instances of participants not being present: Flor chose to leave the workshop after the shoebox questionnaire session and was not present for the focus group discussion; Topaz elected not to speak until we had finished the workshop, although she engaged in conversation during equine contact. These instances illustrate that the ethics of the project were adhered to, and no one was forced to do anything that they did not wish to do.

Flor chose not to continue after the shoebox questionnaire session. She rang her mother to ask her to come and pick her up and waited in the classroom as we continued with the focus-group discussion. When Flor's mum did come, it interrupted the discussion about using horses in work, play and war. This was a particularly significant point for the group and it was unfortunate that I found myself torn between listening to Flor's mum and being available to the small group. It was very helpful that one of the assistants stepped in to keep things flowing in the focus-group discussion. I would think again about how to handle such a situation in the future and would try to make sure that all parties were considered in such an event.

Topaz remained selectively mute throughout the shoebox questionnaire and focus-group discussions. This had the effect of compelling the other two participants to try and engage with her. They wanted her to speak. She was able to relax in the stables with the pony and the transformation in her was rewarding to all of us who were with her.

Equipment and Prompts

The projector equipment did not work satisfactorily in the first two workshops. It was evident that the analogue flip chart and the extra books with relevant photographs and pictures helped to elicit responses. On two occasions we ran out of time, which meant that not all the prompt material could be used, and not all the prompt questions were aired.

Sheila did not respond to the questions in [SBQ8]; I suspected this was because the construction paper pages were thick, and it could be that she simply turned one page too many.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

All the participants had ongoing equine contact, whether as riding or caring for the animal, or both. The participants came from rural and urban communities where there was wide diversity as the horse-racing industry in the N_ area attracts from many parts of the world, including Pakistan, India, and Brazil, together with most of the rest of Latin America.

There were two groups from N_ Riding School, drawn from a few school participants but also from the after-school programme participants. They were almost all local to N_ and the surrounding area. There was a sizeable number who were particularly vulnerable due to family, health, or mental health circumstances. Care was taken to inform parents and families and gatekeepers of the entirety of the project and to be as transparent as possible. Risk assessments (Appendix A), signed confidentiality forms (Appendix B), signed informed consent from the primary carers (Appendix C), and verbal assent forms from the participants (Appendix D) were sought at each stage. This

was in accordance with the health and safety guidelines for the British Horse Society (BHS n.d.) and the ethical guidelines laid out by the British Psychological Society (The British Psychological Society 2014). Another group was from A_ Riding Stables. They come from local school children and from American military families, but they know each other through the riding stables activities. For this project, it was important to welcome any participants who considered taking part, as it was hard to know who would be interested in joining.

The boundaries of the study were set by the concentration upon contact with *Equus* at very specific times during the week, and the research itself took place during a two-hour period with each group, which defined how much data could be gathered, and of what quality, in the short time allotted.

Further scope for such a project could entail looking into how participants viewed their relationships with horses. A number of articles explore the idea of a horse providing a safe place, a “holding place” and a sense of security and of love and discuss how equine assisted therapy can provide attachment opportunities for children. (White-Lewis 2019, 5.5, 8; Adams et al. 2015, 62, 63, 64, 67; Bachi et al. 2013)

Outline of the Dissertation

Research was carried out with participating children aged 7-13 years using qualitative multi-methodologies to find out if the selected children experienced relational consciousness (spiritual awareness of Creator God, others and themselves) through being with horses, and what forms any relational consciousness might take for them and, if they do experience relational consciousness, how it could help them in their daily lives.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

“Draw Near with Faith.”

Introduction

The horse is a large and potentially dangerous animal which commands respect (Adams et al. 2015, 58, 63; Hemingway 2020; Haig and Skinner 2022; Fleetwood 2016, 54). Children have to learn how to behave around horses and ponies and how to treat them well, and a horse cannot easily be ignored (Hemingway 2020). The horse is a flight or prey animal, which means that it is always on the alert for danger (Adams et al. 2015, 53; Hemingway 2020), and this has made it very sensitive to its surroundings (Burgon 2011, 167; Escobar 2019, 26; Tappe 2020, 25, 27; Fleetwood 2016, 54; Miller and Adair 2020, 8). This translates into sensitivity to emotion also, which makes the horse able to mirror a person’s emotions (White-Lewis 2019, 5.5; Smith et al. 2016; Burgon 2011, 167; PATH International n.d.; Escobar 2019, 36; Tappe 2020, 29). Recent studies have found higher levels of oxytocin in horses when relaxed with a human in a positive grooming situation or in a humane training environment, which suggests that horses can respond with enjoyment and emotion (Niittynen et al. 2022, 5).

History of Equine Assistance

Throughout history, the horse has been a partner to humanity, whether in work or war or pleasure or healing (White-Lewis 2019, 2). The Greeks exercised on horses to

help physical ailments (White-Lewis 2019, 2). Florence Nightingale wrote *Notes on Nursing* in 1898 and espoused the importance of contact with horses and other animals for patients surviving the Crimean War in the early 1800s (White-Lewis 2019, 2). Healing contact with horses and with wounded soldiers during WWI was utilised and found to be helpful (White-Lewis 2019, 2). The organisation Riding for the Disabled was established in 1969 following the success of Lis Hartel, the Danish dressage champion in 1943 and 1944, who gained an Olympic silver medal in 1952 (Helsinki) and in 1956 (Melbourne). In September 1944, Hartel contracted polio whilst pregnant, but, after determined rehabilitation, went on to ride and to again compete globally. Hartel's case increased medical interest in the physical benefits of riding horses for people with disabilities (Hedenborg 2016, 4). In the U.S.A., the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NARHA) was founded in 1969. In 2011, NARHA changed its name to The Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH) (Holistic Horse n.d.).

Equine Assistance and Concept Analysis

Twenty-six different ways of using horses therapeutically in medicine have been identified by White-Lewis (Haig and Skinner 2022), and, according to Wood et al., there are twelve distinct types of equine services (Haig and Skinner 2022). As the use of horses for physical therapy and psychotherapy has burgeoned, the language employed to differentiate and direct attention to the various disciplines within the equine-assisted industry has become increasingly convoluted and confusing. One problem which has been identified is that the terms 'equine-assisted learning' and 'equine-facilitated learning' are used interchangeably and can "include education directed at improving

communication skills, self-awareness, confidence building and self-control by interacting with a horse”, which, according to Burgon, Gammage, and Hebden (2018), can be accomplished by “grooming, riding and saddling along with non-verbal communication, play therapy and mindfulness practice” (Adam et al. 2015, 66; White-Lewis 2019, 2; Hemingway 2020). The use of EAI is defined using concept analysis to understand differences between recreational and therapeutic activities (White-Lewis 2019, 5.2). For the purposes of this literature review, the following taxonomy will be used: Animal-Assisted Intervention (AAI), Equine-Assisted Intervention (EAI), Equine-Assisted Therapy (EAT), Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP), Equine-Assisted Social Learning (EASE), Equine-Assisted Learning (EAL), Equine-Facilitated Learning (EFL), Horse-Riding Therapy (HRT), and Equine-Assisted Activities Therapy (EAAT). There is much research to be initiated still, and the field is under-documented, which may explain the lack of cohesion in the taxonomy. Equine-Assisted Services (EAS) is a helpful umbrella term to incorporate all the specific approaches (Haig and Skinner 2022).

Holistic Wellbeing through Empathetic Equine Contact

Sensitivity to emotion in a horse is helpful and comforting and reassuring for a child and, it has been suggested, can aid healing as the horse becomes a listener and an absorber of emotion, even supplementing bonds of attachment as in a mother and child relationship (White-Lewis 2019, 5.5). With this kind of emotional connection, coupled with a large and very warm body with which to engage, often a child’s confidence levels will rise (White-Lewis 2019, 5.4, 5.5). The size of the horse can make a difference for some young people who find it hard to concentrate and the largest horses are the ones which help to build confidence. Although this seems counter-intuitive, the largeness of

size does appear to make a difference, especially for those who are suffering from neurodivergent conditions and those who are not settling well in the horse environment (Evans n.d., 34-36). Whether a horse is small or large, happiness and acceptance, confidence and physical gain are recurring (White-Lewis 2019, 5.5, 8). Moreover, an improved quality of life is said to be experienced by the child in ways that might not have happened without the equine contact (Adams et al. 2015, 61,62).

Emotions of Horses

Scientists hesitate to state categorically that horses do feel the full range of emotions that humans would understand, and their preference is to focus on a reductionist line of inquiry to better understand perceived emotion (Henderson 2014). A recent study has explored the ability of horses to connect auditory and visual cues of carers and strangers using negative and positive stimuli. It is shown that horses with a long history as companion animals can distinguish between human facial expressions and tone of voice, and they will react negatively to a possible threat, showing their highly developed emotional intelligence (Nakamura, Takimoto-Inose, and Hasegawa 2018). Other commentaries have highlighted the synchronisation of herds of horses in the wild, which is a protective measure. It has been noted that horses will graze together, will sleep together, and will walk to find water together, as well as being alert to any danger in unison. In domestic situations, physical and emotional synchronisation is “embedded in the psychology of the horse ... that they will naturally wish to merge and flow with others, humans as well as horses” (Harvey and Rees n.d., 46-47). Relatedly, there is a

study on the coding of horse facial expressions which could help with animal welfare and veterinary practice (Wathan et al. 2015).

Equine Assistance and Intervention Strategies

In recent years, there has been a rise in research projects which aim to find out how equine-assisted intervention may be of wider use within the community. Social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) has become increasingly topical (Hemingway 2020). Much work is still qualitative, with only a small amount done quantitatively. Hemingway suggests that they would like to see more medically based quantitative studies which will add to the evidence.

Horses can be used to aid healing mentally, emotionally, and psychologically, and horses can be a vehicle for teaching and learning. There can be an overlap in the areas of therapy and of learning, as was shown in the research conducted for eleven weeks in a “randomised controlled trial” with 131 adolescents “to determine what effect equine-facilitated learning would have on participants’ cortisol levels” (Pendry, Smith, and Roeter 2014, 80). During the intervention, it became clear that the horse could facilitate teaching “safety, respect, trust, leadership, boundaries, confidence, and relaxation.” Furthermore, “There was a significant decrease in the levels of cortisol in the experimental group” (Pendry, Smith, and Roeter 2014, 89), and it was concluded that there may be evidence-based support for equine-facilitated learning and positive interactions with horses (Pendry Smith, and Roeter 2014, 91).

Further research is recommended into why EAP may have beneficial effects for the client (Fleetwood 2016, 54), research which would include the study of methodological considerations and sample sizes together with how to provide control

groups. Likewise, more healing intervention with horses should be conducted in order that we may understand further what can be achieved. EAI could provide such a holistic approach, to reach not only the physical but also the psychological, mental, and emotional: “This newly researched intervention has promise in assisting the nurse to provide physical and psychological positive outcomes” (White-Lewis 2019, 7, 8).

Equine-Assisted Therapy

Recent studies show that children with physical or mental disability can profit from Equine Therapy or Equine Psychotherapy (Frederick, Hatz, and Lanning 2015; Eller 2019, 26, 27; Miller and Adair 2020, 1-3; Hemingway 2020; Haig and Skinner 2022). The various types of Equine-Assisted Intervention have different emphases depending upon whether the intervention is addressing a physical, psychological, emotional, or social-behavioral issue. The term Equine-Assisted Therapy (EAT) covers physical and psychological work in the field but usually involves a horse, a client, and a therapist walking beside the horse and rider. Since the 1950s, it has addressed mostly physical issues but has slowly come to incorporate mental and emotional issues as well (Banham 2024, 2, 3).

Children who suffer from cerebral palsy can benefit from the practice of Hippotherapy (Gwangju Institute of Science and Technology 2021). Children living with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) were found to benefit not only physically but also emotionally and psychologically as relationships with horses, instructors, and other children developed, and where “normalcy” could be achieved through enjoyment and growth of self-confidence (Lemke et al. 2014). Studies concerning the physical healing of

a child who is interacting with horses also mention the improvements in the child's emotional, social, and psychological wellbeing (Hession et al. 2019; White-Lewis 2019, 5.4, 5.5., 5.9; Almasloukh 2022). It has been suggested that children suffering on the autistic spectrum and from ADHD are likely to benefit from EAI (Tan and Simmonds 2017, 760; Peters and Wood 2017, 3226, 3239-240; Fleetwood 2016, 12; Hemingway 2020). EAAT can improve adaptive behavior and motor function in autism spectrum disorder (Zoccante et al. 2021).

Building relationships with horses through anthropomorphism and projective behaviors (Fleetwood 2016, 26), mirroring emotions (Fleetwood 2016, 22), framing a metaphor (Fleetwood 2016, 23), the preverbal experience as well as that of healthy touch and being protected in what is described as Winnicott's "holding environment" (Fleetwood 2016, 25), with opportunities to be close to nature (Fleetwood 2016, 31), can produce immediate and helpful results.

Horses Impacting Trauma Healing

Studies on equine-assisted therapeutic work with trauma survivors determine that there are two broad categories at which to look: the nature of the equine-human bond and the therapeutic value of the equine-human bond. The nature of the bond is "intimacy, nurturing, partnership, identity, and utility". The value of the bond is in "healing and recovery, feelings, proximity and touch" (Yorke, Adams, and Coady 2008, 4, 8); mutual understanding and trust (Yorke, Adams, and Coady 2008, 9); transparency and safety; safe touch; and provision of unconditional responsiveness (Yorke, Adams, and Coady

2008, 10, 12). Furthermore, unlike many professional approaches to therapy, riding focuses on ability, not disability” (Yorke, Adams, and Coady 2008, 12).

Young people who suffer from trauma or social and emotional dysfunction, or who are engaged with substance abuse or struggling with self-harm or eating disorders, for example, can find a safe place when involved with Equine-Assisted Services (Haig and Skinner 2022). A study followed the progress of a group of First Nation youth in Canada and showed that “Human interactions with horses can be a distinct way for exploring social relationships and wellbeing”. It might be that the historical links with hunting and war and horses was profound for the young people and helped them to respond positively. It was noted that the horse is “highly instinctive as a flight animal and contributes to the programme as such” (Adams et al. 2015, 53). EAS, particularly EAL, has shown the potential to make a difference in working with indigenous youth and with children at risk more broadly (Haig and Skinner 2022).

Equine psychotherapy is rehabilitative in nature and shows promising results as an integrative and complementary therapy for the treatment of traumatic stress with youth (Eller 2019, 10). It can produce a reduction in anxiety (Frederick, Hatz, Lanning 2015). The horse can provide the ‘glue’ to the practice of the person coming back and learning more. Moreover, the personality of the horse and building a relationship (Burgon 2011, 172) are helpful, as a transfer of learned skills to the human world is often seen. Studies conducted with youth at risk of severe solvent abuse amongst the First Nations of Canada found that contact with horses on a weekly basis helped with connectedness, courage, wellbeing, self and social confidence, and self-esteem as well as mood and emotion awareness (Adams et al. 2015, 57, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65). In this same program, the young

women found they were able to understand the boundaries set by the horse and translate what they learned into a human-human context (Adams et al. 2015, 63, 64).

Reciprocity in Equine-Human Relationships

Reciprocity in equine-human relationships has been discussed already in the stories of holistic interventions. There is value in the reciprocal healing that horses can offer as living responsive beings with an awareness which gives honest non-verbal feedback (Mickelsson 2019, 3). The development of trust is necessary to work with a horse, and this involves the mind, body and spirit (Eller 2019, 29). For the child or adolescent who has experienced trauma, safety, belonging, and self-esteem can be found through interaction with the horse. Safety, belonging, and self-esteem are essential human needs (McLeod n.d.; Miller and Adair 2020, 2-3). The primary levels of attachment are those of ‘a secure base and a safe haven’ which can be provided through a ‘holding environment’ between horse and human, where the mental and emotional needs are addressed alongside the physical (Adams et al. 2015, 67). As the horse is a large and powerful animal, the client “on the ground” has a challenge to work with the horse and to lead it through ground exercises, thereby forming a relationship and realising their own feelings and concerns at the same time, learning to understand themselves more through the horse mirroring their emotions, almost as a “bio feedback loop” (Maker 2019). This means that the healing process can be a two-way event which involves proactive engagement, and a relationship can form.

Relational Consciousness through Space, Process, Imagination, Relationship, Intimacy, and Trust (S.P.I.R.I.T.)

What is relational consciousness? Relational consciousness is the “intentional and natural process of relating to the world, to all things animate and inanimate, to others, including a Divine other and the self” (Hay and Nye 2006, 119-24).

Research by Rebecca Nye (Hay and Nye 2006, 109, 110-13) shows that children will experience spiritual awareness through relationships. Nye’s work is influenced by the foundational research of Maria Montessori, who observed how a child would enter a phase of deep concentration relating to their subject, in which long periods of child-led learning could take place (Berryman 2013, 28-32). Berryman focuses his work on finding out why and how a child arrives at what he terms the “middle realm,” where a centre point is reached, where “flow” happens, and where maturing and learning can take place (Berryman 2013, 128). A theme which recurs in the work of Montessori and that of her successors Sophia Cavaletti (1917-2011), Gianna Gobbi (1919-2002), and Jerome Berryman (Berryman 2013, 67), is the need for interested but non-agenda adults standing by, observing, encouraging, and not demanding anything in return. When this type of relationship is available, there is relaxation and a confidence which enables the child to follow through, contributing to self-awareness, confidence, patience, and self-esteem (Escobar 2019, 26), which in turn enable children to capitalise on the opportunities (Adams et al. 2015, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65). According to Burgon (2014), the deep connection possible between horse and child allows for respect, compassion, and sensitivity (Escobar 2019, 26). This, then, can lead to an increased awareness of others and of God (Adams et al. 2015, 65). Such a relationship also enables the child to flourish creatively and

intellectually as a result of growing social ease, and an accumulation of confidence and trust (Oser 2014, 3-4; Yorke, Adams, and Coady 2008, 4; Adams et al. 2015, 63. 64).

Soul Friendship with Horses

Connection, inclusion, and stress reduction with an interested other person on hand to relate to and to enable feelings of safety, are important in helping one to look outside the self to build shared values as well as to relax and enjoy living and learning together (Oser 2014, 3-4, 8; Wang 2012, 7-8). The philosophy of soul friendship (Roberts 2012, 16) suggests companionship, community, interpersonal guidance, activity, and focus on others. “When two friends walk towards the same truth together, all society benefits” (Roberts 2012,17). The *anam cara* of ancient Celtic tradition is soul friendship (Roberts 2012, 1) which can be cultivated between child and horse, between child and child (or another person), and between child and God. Could such a high calling in friendship be applied to what happens in communities, clubs, and classrooms? What would be the result of research to show these levels of *philia* operating? An atmosphere of trust and mutual response could be a way for inspiration to flourish and for creative and intellectual engagement to occur (John 15:15). It could also mean that a child has the opportunity to look beyond themselves and experience God and His creation.

Studies indicate that the natural world is integral to how children learn and play and interact with each other, and how they perform in their studies in school. The “rich tapestry of loose parts” which is the natural world—“sticks, stones, and mud” are the basics for any creative, pretend, and exploratory play or problem-solving exercise (Kuo, Ming 2019). It is observed that “Children’s play becomes strikingly more creative,

physically active and social in the presence of loose parts” (Kuo, Barnes, and Jordan 2019).

Can equine contact enable relational consciousness in children? Equine contact represents the loose parts of the natural world very well. Time with a horse may be accentuated as the child can be in a natural environment and, at the same time, build a relationship with an equine friend. This could be a good thing, not only for those children who have disabilities or lack of opportunities (Hemingway 2020), but also for those who are considered mainstream and typical (Hauge et al. 2014).

A Child’s Spiritual Wellbeing encouraged towards Transcendence

Equine-Assisted or Facilitated Learning

The mind can thrive creatively and intellectually when presented with a variety of ideas and objects to dwell on and to manipulate. The natural world, as “a tapestry of loose parts”, encourages social, creative, and physically active play (Kuo 2019). Relatedly, in various contexts it is being recognized that creative and intellectual flourishing can happen when an individual is given the opportunity to relate to horses.

Can relational consciousness impacted by equine contact help a child flourish in mainstream school, and, if so, how? Within what Marcel calls a relational atmosphere of welcome, availability, non-judgement, and “creative fidelity” (Berryman 2013, 138-39) combined with opportunities for inspiration and ways to capitalise on the experiences, EAL can revolutionise a child’s learning (Adams et al. 2015, 62, 63; Haig and Skinner 2022; EAQ n.d.).

Equine-assisted learning is a new field of research. It springs out of the more traditional fields of EAT and EAP. A study looking at how indigenous youth from

Canada and the United States—and at-risk youth more broadly—would benefit from EAL, showed that participants enjoyed the experience, and that learning was facilitated (Haig and Skinner 2022). Likewise, in an African context, it was observed and understood from parents that children improved noticeably in their intellectual capacities, and there was a “recommendation to pursue more of this kind of therapy rather than simply the more formal classroom interventions” (Surujlal and Rufus 2011).

Research studies in England include work with primary school children in mainstream schools in the north of England. Equine-Facilitated Learning (EFL) is a way to help children engage with their school activities, developing the whole young person (Clavell-Bate 2018, 16, 26) . Participants and school workers noticed differences in the areas of “friendship, positive changes to behavior and attitude, self-worth and confidence” and remarked that “self-reflection and self-awareness and support from the teaching assistant was important and was judged to be integral to the EFL experiential learning process” (Clavell-Bate 2018,11).

Horses and Low-Income Families and Children in the U.K

The Horse Rangers Association, which began in 1954, offers opportunities for children unable to afford riding lessons and for children with disability to learn to look after horses and to ride them (HRA n.d.). Summerfield Riding Stables in Birmingham, U.K (Summerfield Stables n.d.) focuses on children who would not be able to ride or interact with a horse unless there were funding available. Riding a Dream Academy (The Riding a Dream Academy n.d.) is a nationally operated charity which raises money and supports young people living in urban settings who would like to pursue riding and

looking after horses. Alongside—and influenced by—Riding for the Disabled (RDA n.d.) is the N_ Riding School. It is sponsored by the British Racing School (The British Racing School n.d.) amongst other private donors and organisations, and it targets local schools, providing week-long immersion with ponies and horses to those children in school who are struggling with academic or behavioral issues. N_ Riding School also offers after-school sessions to children who are fostered, for example, or who live in challenging circumstances.

In the U.K., 11 percent of 16 to 24-year-olds are not in education, employment, or training and one in ten children have a probable diagnosable mental health disorder as do one in five young adults (NHS England 2023). The British Horse Society (BHS) has developed a program to harness the powerful impact of the horse, with the expectation that this will bring about a lasting change for some youth who are disengaged and without hope. Within the Changing Lives through Horses Program at the BHS, the aim is to develop six key life skills through equestrian activity: communication, confidence, relationships, teamwork, responsibility, and personal achievement (BHS n.d.).

Resilience and Transcendence through Equine contact

Does relational consciousness through equine contact enable resilience and transcendence? Can a relationship with an animal help a person to connect with the Eternal Thou? (The-Philosophy.com n.d.; Buber 2000, 115-120). “The eyes of an animal have the capacity of a great language.... This language is the stammering of nature under the initial grasp of spirit (Buber 1996, 144)” (Gross 2017). Furthermore, just as there is a “dimension of depth”, which Christian theologian Paul Tillich talks about, many scholars

of animals and religion today suggest that there is a “religious depth often present in our relationship with animals”, “created, as it were, to reveal the human being to man himself” (Gross 2017). First Nation Youth in a solvent abuse program in Canada identified the spiritual connection with the horse and reported that this could help not only with relating to the spiritual, but also with relating to fellow students and making social connections (Adams et al. 2015, 63, 64, 65). In agreement is the comparative religionist Kimberley Patton, who talks of “something charged, something holy” within an animal. Legend and myth in First Nation cultures illustrate this point as well (Wild and Free n.d.), illustrating that the horse has a “strong spiritual power” and is a “truth teller which can lead individuals in the right direction” (White-Lewis 2019, 5.3). The nonverbal hugeness of the horse means that we have to connect on a deeper level of understanding (Haig and Skinner 2022).

Learning coping skills with resulting resilience through equine contact is noted and discussed with reference to Indigenous youth (Haig and Skinner 2022; Adams et al. 2015, 62) and with at-risk Youth (Burgon 2011, 168-69).

Awareness of God or Ways of Knowing is considered in some recent studies with Indigenous Youth and The First Nations (Adams et al. 2015, 62, 65, 68; Haig and Skinner 2022 and with Yazidi youth (Eller 2019), and also with parents of children with disabilities in a Christian context in Texas (Escobar 2019). It would be helpful to consider ways that humans have related to the horse historically and what that might mean currently for children in the U.K. context and globally.

Theology of the Horse: Religion, Legend, and Myth

We can respond to the beauty of the horses in the cave paintings of Lascaux in France (Ministère de la Culture n.d.; Harris 2011; History Today n.d.). Could it be that the ancient artists were expressing something which they had observed, but also that which they felt inside themselves (Montessori 1946,184)? The fascination with Stonehenge (Pearson 2013) and, more pertinently, the centuries-old awe-inspiring huge white chalk carvings of horses on the low hills of the West Country and other parts of the U.K. (Lutyens 2021), are examples of the human search for beauty and meaning. Humans are concerned with beauty and mystery, that is, a sense of awesomeness (Zahind 2012, 33). An ancient example of the desire to express and record beauty and mystery is the massive bas reliefs of Angkor Wat in Cambodia, which contain engravings of horses, buffaloes and elephants (L’Huillier n.d.).

The practice of Holy Communion, shown to the disciples by Jesus at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:24-25; Mark 14: 18-21; Luke 22:21-23; Jn. 13: 21-30), concerns both Beauty and Mystery. Full of mystery, the young donkey colt, never having been sat upon by a human, was brought by the disciples for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem (Mark. 11: 1-6). McCormick and McCormick (2014) note that in a similar way, by reflecting God’s holiness and awe, *Equus* can invite closeness and confidence, and a wondering and imagination are thereby stirred (Escobar 2019, 26). This can be valuable for the child (O’Brien 1994, 16-20).

References to the horse in religion, legend, and myth can give us an idea of how the horse has had a deep impact on our lives. The people of the Camargue region of Southeast France say that the semi-feral white horses, which are indigenous to the marshy

areas beside the coast, were a gift from Poseidon, the god of the sea and horses. They tell the story that Poseidon gave the horses to herdsmen to help them and live with them, but not that they should be subjugated or mistreated. The herdsmen today still care for the horses with respect (Sumner 2020) and carry poles to herd with a three-pronged trident at the top (Magdalene Publishing n.d.).

Mongolians have a strong sense of spiritual connection with their horses. Today, they are used for farming, transport (World Mongol 2022), and increasingly, tourism (Nergui 2021). In the time of Genghis Khan, they were used in battle but were also constant companions and friends to the warriors, who would drink a beverage of fermented mare's milk and would even survive in extreme conditions by drinking their blood. The Mongols believe that each horse has a unique spirit and "that the horse is a gift from the gods and that its mane contains the horse's spirit and strength". Mongolians also use the horse's milk in purification ceremonies. Often warriors killed in battle were buried with their horses so they could "spend the afterlife together" (Henry n.d.).

In North America, connection to horses is part of the Indigenous Peoples' culture. [I asked about the appropriate ways to name the Indigenous Peoples of North America. It was found that most if not all Indigenous Peoples preferred the title but that other groups also could prefer the term, First Nations. Some peoples chose Native American as their preference (Charron 2019)]. The idea of the horse visiting as a spirit to foretell, to comfort, and to keep company is encountered, as is the lament for days lost and gone in the past when horses and men were free (Wild and Free n.d.). There is a Bedouin legend that Allah created the horse out of the south wind, "giving victory to its forelock and

binding treasure to its loins”, to be established as “one of the glories of the earth” and to have “flight without wings” (Daumas 1863).

In the Bible, *Equus* is depicted in varied ways: It is a sign and picture of war and armies (Joel 2:4; Revelation 19:14); it is shown to be a helper and a servant of humankind (James 3:3; Isa. 28:28); it is a symbol of wealth and power (Deuteronomy 17:16; Psa. 20:7) and justice and war (Revelation 19:11-16); it is described as swift and terrifying (Habakuk 1:8). In Numbers 22: 21-39, God gave Balaam’s donkey not only spiritual sight and sense to see the angel blocking the road, but also power of speech to communicate with its master.

The donkey is one of three animals to speak in the Bible: the serpent (Genesis 3:1), the donkey (Numbers 22: 28), and the eagle (Revelation 8:13) (Darcy 2022). Balaam’s donkey remonstrates with her master to say, “I have served you all these years and have never disobeyed, so why would I do so now?” The donkey’s fear of the angel displayed sensitivity to an atmosphere indicative of the prey animal together with spiritual intuition. God chooses a donkey, the humble beast of burden, to confront the sorcerer (seer or prophet) (Joshua 13:22) Balaam, who is riding off to place a curse on the Israelites despite God telling him not to (Balaam was tempted by the money offering from King Balak of the Moabites (Numbers 20:12-22) (Martin 2023). Is this a foreshadowing of God using a “descendant” of Balaam’s donkey to carry Jesus into Jerusalem to die so that the curse of sin will be lifted from his children? The cross which girds every donkey from mane to tail and over its withers, which some argue (Morris 2018) is a leftover from the evolutionary camouflaging of *Equus* but could also be a reminder to us of God’s ways (Szathmary 2022).

In the New Testament, we read of Jesus' birth in a stable (Luke 2:1-7). According to tradition, Mary and her unborn child had travelled on a donkey with Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The story of the good Samaritan and his donkey relates how they help the injured man to safety (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus chose to enter Jerusalem on a colt—a young donkey—rather than a white charger of war (Matthew 21:1-7; Luke 19:28-40).

These pictures and stories of horses and other equine animals in cultures from many parts of the world could be points of reference for children.

Relational Consciousness and Spirituality with Horses

The equine-human relationship helps us to see outside ourselves and to relate to another sentient being who feels and responds (Adams et al. 2015, 63, 64; White-Lewis 2019, 5.5, 5.9; Hemingway 2020; Haig and Skinner 2022; Escobar 2019, 26). This consciousness of another can facilitate existential questions about meaning and purpose which will help to increase spiritual awareness (pertaining to thoughtfulness, which is Heidegger's term) (McCormick and McCormick 1997, 191; McCormick and McCormick 2004, 14; Escobar 2019, 26, 29).

Contact and building relationships with horses and ponies can teach resilience and enable transcendence. The broken or flawed vessel is a picture of how humankind can be celebrated and used for good (Moore 2019). One teaching depicts the cracked vessel as able to allow the wine, the love of Jesus, to seep through to bless those around us (Vega 2008). It could be that the opportunity to experience safe touch in a non-judgemental and caring environment is one way for children to become resilient and to transcend their

negative experiences, building on the hurt and harm to make something beautiful and workable, and even to share them to bless others.

Experiences that Could Help Children Spiritually

Submission

Our relationship with other animals and the wider natural world and how it can be an encouragement to and a conduit for our spirituality is addressed by Aaron Gross's paper on animals and religion. Gross references not only the Abrahamic faiths but also other major and less well-known religions as he explores the idea that the animal, in its animality, is totally in submission to God, whereas humanity has the choice of whether to submit to God or not. This, it is suggested, would be the defining difference between humans and animals (Gross 2017, 1-23). Further, this animal submission to God, which is said to have resulted in the Prophet saying, "All animals are Muslim", is at the same time what we learn from animals and what we are attracted to in animals.

Connectedness

Recently, a family member explained to me that he had not grown up with animals, but on finding himself the owner and caretaker of two kittens, he was surprised to find how this experience was opening his eyes to the spiritual, and, although he had come from an atheist background, he was sure that there was something other than the physical which he saw in the small creatures as he interacted with them and they with him (Steve Edmunds, family conversation, July 30, 2022).

Puchalski and others highlight this idea as well: "Spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and

the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred” (Puchalski et al. 2014, 643; Hutton n.d.).

A search for identity, meaning, and purpose through connection with the natural world is highlighted by the German philosopher, psychoanalyst, and social psychologist Erich Fromm as he explains, “Although humans are a part of nature, we also transcend it because of our self-awareness and reasoning capabilities”. Fromm believed that the more people are separated from the natural world, the more intense is the need to find ways of escaping isolation and meaninglessness (Hutton n.d.).

This ‘existential dichotomy’ can lead us to seek a “conduit to the natural world, nonverbal connectedness to an innocent sentient being and animals as a joyful connection to the moment” (Hutton n.d.). A friend tells me that she finds contact with her dogs and with trees very uplifting and encouraging. She likes to remember how trees help each other by feeding and sheltering one another (Sheena Johns, October 1, 2022). This phenomenon has been discussed from a scientific point of view, giving additional understanding (Grant 2018).

Stories of Holistic Interventions with Horses

Monty Roberts, trainer and advocate for use of nonviolent methods, tells his own story of growing up with horses in an eloquent and moving style. He was brought up in fear of an aggressive and irrational parent, and Monty sought refuge in his horse as a very small youngster. He would even sleep in his horse’s stall when “times were bad in the house” (Roberts 2004, 12-13). Roberts describes situations throughout his life where he was able to recalibrate himself and his life through the reassuring contact with his horses (Roberts 1996). Relatedly, the imaginary tale told through the film *Lean on Pete* (Haigh

2017) shows how a friendship between a horse and young man enables healing in the face of abuse and tragedy.

In children's literature, the equine and human relationship is extensively explored. *Black Beauty* (Sewell 1877) is a story of how a horse survives cruelty from human masters but is sustained through the kindness and love of others. Sewell, suffering from ill health, would ride in a carriage rather than walk, and wrote the book in response to her observations of carriage horses being treated harshly. It is suggested that the popularity of the book—written from the point of view of the horse—helped to bring about a greater understanding and awareness of horses, and that its publication encouraged the work of animal welfare activists in Victorian Britain and in the United States (Norris 2012).

Amazing Grace (Apted 2006) is a film about William Wilberforce (1759-1833), who is known for his work to stop human slavery and trafficking (Sherwood 2022), and who also was an advocate for animals suffering because of human cruelty. He was one of the founders of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA).

The Horse and His Boy (Lewis 1954) is an imaginary tale of how a “talking” horse, *Bree*, teaches a young boy who has been lost and maltreated to ride. These lessons from the horse require the boy Shasta to listen, to obey, to trust, and to have courage, which is recognisable in the real world of working with horses and riding them. At the same time, the story relates how *Bree* must learn humility and trust. The use of the anthropomorphic serves to make the story immediate and compelling for the reader, and it is a useful measure for building empathy, and perhaps it heightens awareness of how reality could be perceived by a horse. Likewise, the series of thoughtful encounters which make up Mackesey's book *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox, and the Horse* (2019) can

resonate with us as we, children of any age, identify with the messages of kindness, acceptance, and courage. *My Friend Flicka* (O'Hara 1941) is a well-known and beloved book and television series (1955-1960) set in Wyoming, USA. The attraction of the story is in how the relationship between the boy protagonist and his filly is developed and how the boy grows and heals from past trauma as he becomes closely involved with the animal. The boy is transformed by the relationship, and it helps him in all his other relationships, particularly with his father.

At-Risk Children Relating to Horses

In 2013 and 2014, two sets of studies were done with two cohorts of at-risk adolescents from Singapore prevocational schools (New Fei et al. 2017, 3.2, 4). Participants were taken to a ranch-style setting outside the city where they learned how to look after a horse, relate to the animal, and how to ride. The groups were from mixed backgrounds, with about fifty-percent coming from lower-income and deprived settings. There were five habits of mind which were set as the goal and as the measurement of success of the program: persistence, thinking flexibly, taking responsible risks, managing impulsivity, and listening with understanding and empathy. According to the researchers, it was found that by using multi-level modelling, character skills were improved and that these improvements were correlated with academic performance.

Equine-assisted learning sessions can aid in “confidence building leading to an improvement in the areas of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and development of empathy through horses, leading to positive opportunities” (Burgon 2011, 177), together with the added bonus of improved social support (Hauge et al. 2014) supporting self-regulation,

independence and self-growth, “serving as a catalyst to build trust and pedagogical relationships” (Mickelsson 2019, 3, 5). Amongst many more benefits, these equine sessions were shown to help youth “increase in self-awareness of feelings and build trusting relationships whilst setting and respecting boundaries” (Haig and Skinner 2022).

Increased Self Confidence through Working with Horses

A group of Norwegian youth who were typical (Hauge et al. 2014) worked at a riding stable where they were learning equine-related skills. They were able to spend time with horses and get to know how to understand them. It was found that although the self-esteem and self-confidence levels remained fairly high and unchanged amongst these largely well-cared-for young people, the levels of social interrelating and trust building were comparatively high. This means that attachment to the instructor, to the horses and to the other participants was positively affected and that relationships flourished. It was concluded that, although self-efficacy and self-esteem were already well grounded in the students, the added underpinning of positive relationships was worthy of note as this was an essential need for wellbeing.

Even for a few weeks, equine-assisted learning can help to increase levels of hope and decrease depression in young people at risk (Frederick, Hatz, and Lanning 2015, 815). Essential life skills and trust, together with responsibility, can be gained through programs such as Equine-Assisted Social Learning (Mickelsson 2019, 5).

Contact with the Natural World for Children

Another way to encourage building and consolidation, facilitating resilience and transcendence, is to take care of the atmosphere where children gather and live and learn,

championing the need to experience and appreciate the natural environment and the living earth to best further the flourishing of a child's mind and heart and soul along with physical thriving (Mason 1989, 42-95). Contact with the natural world for children in school indicates that this can make a difference (Kuo, Barnes, and Jordan 2019; Louv 2010, 102-12). Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) training for preservice training encourages students to think creatively about how to engage their classes in alternative environments (Cunningham 2014, 61). An atmosphere of flourishing can be encouraged by providing opportunity for relationship, thereby enabling spirituality (inspiration) and creativity and viability (Mason 1989, 94-99; Berryman 2013, 181; Hay and Nye 2006, 109 -13). Contact with the natural world can be a vehicle for inspiration coupled with a liveliness of imagination (Mason 1989, 42-95; Louv 2010, 102-12; Kuo 2019). Children who need extra encouragement in their school situation could access that through Equine-Assisted or Facilitated Learning. The concept of nature deficit disorder (Louv 2010, 99-112, 225; Kuo 2019) indicates that a lack of time outdoors experiencing and engaging with nature leads to a cortisol imbalance. More time in nature, even a little bit, helps with concentration, and one day a week outdoors can improve the daily cortisol patterns. Outdoor play and learning aid physical fitness and this, together with cardiorespiratory fitness, helps academic achievement (Kuo 2019).

The moment of inspiration facilitated through atmosphere is noted in the studies undertaken with Norwegian adolescents (Hauge et al. 2014) who appreciated their surroundings in the countryside and enjoyed the green environment. Parents of children on the autistic spectrum (neurodiversity) commented on how it made a difference to be "out there" in the beauty of the valley with their children enjoying the riding and the

horses (Tan and Simmonds 2017, 764-65), and one of the perceived benefits of this was being able to relate to others more (Tan and Simmonds 2017, 766). The Yazidi too, who were a group of young refugee participants, were amazed to see the open and free landscape beyond the city limits as they drove to the stables. They remarked that it reminded them of home and that they did not know such areas existed near them in their new country (Eller 2019, 37). This type of revelation was very strong and had positive results for engagement, as the young women could enjoy the mutuality of their lived experience. The young Yazidi girls were not the only participants to marvel at how they could learn to understand the horse (Eller 2019, 38), but they were vocal and explanatory of their feelings about the process. The First Nation participants also responded strongly to the need to get to know the horse and were able to begin to relate the experience to knowing their own culture more deeply (Adams et al. 2015, 62).

Partnership with Horses

A horse can inspire a feeling of partnership when ‘doing it together.’ The young person with a disability will often feel that they have an opportunity to be in the process with their mount and to form a close relationship, capitalising on the opportunities for ‘safe touch’ in a secure environment (Haig and Skinner 2022). One young man announced that he was “*facing his fears and was learning how to ride.*” He found he was riding alone in the school with only himself and the horse. He was heard to say, “*Well, it is just the two of us now, we’ll have to work it out*” (Elisha, conversation at NRS, June 16, 2022). Similarly, military veterans suffering from PTSD reported intense bonding of an intimacy and nurturing kind during a study by Yorke, Adams and Cody (2008) (Tappe 2020, 31).

Equine-assisted qualifications (EAQ) offer the chance to gain nationally-recognized qualifications for both children and for teachers. The emphasis is on groundwork with the horses and time to do school learning on-site as well (Marshall and Hibberd n.d.). The equine-assisted Learning program at New Horizons aims to develop “self-awareness through the company of a horse which can assist the individual to work out what they would like to change and how to go about it by themselves without being told what to do” (New Horizons n.d.).

A recent study shows that “horse-powered reading”, in which the child is first introduced to the horse and its environment and is encouraged to learn in an interactive and meaningful way before even starting a reading program, could help (Pickel 2019). The child has an opportunity to create a metaphor for herself or himself (Miller and Adair 2020, 8), and within this horse-inspired metaphor, Maslow’s essential needs of safety, belonging, and self-esteem can be met. When the child is ready to pursue knowledge after the social and emotional needs are met with equine interaction, self-confidence can build, and reading-related skills may be pursued.

The head, heart, and hands approach, which allows teacher-student engagement in a normal situation and encourages community and relatedness, enables teacher-student conversation to be collaborative rather than directive (Mickelsson 2019, 5). In addition, the horse stables environment provides stimulus, exercise, fresh air, wellbeing, learning, and growth, allowing team spirit and inner strengths to flourish (Mickelsson 2019, 5).

Emotional Learning with Horses

More recently, studies in how emotions affect our learning have involved horses and ponies. Links between the methods of EAI and the results are yet to be established,

but some positive results have been found, e.g., “Resting state brain function can be affected positively through equine therapy interventions”, and “The effects of EAI on ADHD found activation of the brain region, which is related to behavioral inhibition, which is a problem for those with ADHD” (Hemingway 2020). Reports by Naber and others show reductions in cortisol (the hormone associated with stress) in participants’ post-intervention (Hemingway 2020). Hemingway concludes that this study found that learning occurs initially through our emotions and bodies rather than cognitively, and the cognitive recognition of changes may occur later.

However, as we have noted above in the story of Elisha and his horse, before relationship building or learning of any kind can take place, the child and the horse must learn to trust and not be afraid.

Qualities of the Horse which Could Encourage Relational Consciousness

It has been noted that horses are large, strongly emotional prey or ‘flight’ animals (Adams et al. 2015, 53; Burgon 2011,167; Fleetwood 2016, 7; Miller and Adair 2020, 3; Hemingway 2020, 12). They possess a herding instinct coupled with unique characteristics and vulnerability (Burgon 2011,167; Eller 2019, 37). Horses are highly sensitive to mood and atmosphere (Adams et al. 2015, 53, 55; Burgon 2011,167) and can respond emotionally (Adams et al. 2015, 55, 63, 64; Burgon 2011,167), providing opportunities for building metaphors (Fleetwood 2016, 23; Miller and Adair 2020 2-3; Haig and Skinner 2022) and creating strong possibilities for bonding and attachment (Adams et al. 2015, 64; White-Lewis, 2019, 5.5; Haig and Skinner 2022). The horse will mirror a person’s feelings (Fleetwood 2016, 22), and this can be helpful as a reassuring and healing event in reducing anxiety, PTSD, and depression symptomatology, for

example (Tappe 2020, 29; Maker 2019). An empathetic relationship with a horse may help a person to understand how to relate to others (Adam et al. 2015, 62, 63, 64, 65; Escobar 2019, 25; Haig and Skinner 2022; Mickelsson 2019, 3; Maker 2019), and perhaps, the Divine other also (Hay and Nye 2006, 119-24; Chi-Kin Lee 2022).

Safe Touch of Children with Horses

Working with a horse enables a child to experience ‘safe touch’ (Adams et al. 2015, 62); Yorke, Adams, and Coady 2015, 12; Fleetwood 2016, 25; Haig and Skinner 2022). This is especially important for children who receive little safe touch from carers and peers. *New Leaf Triangle* case study files report learners are able to build trusting relationships with peers and staff through, along with other nature-based activities such as working with wood, working in the forest, helping to care for animals and different arts and craft activities in an outdoor environment, establishing acceptance and understanding with a horse, a process which includes the development of a healthy touch relationship through grooming and general care of the horse (New Leaf Triangle n.d.). The studies mentioned suggest that the social and emotional bond which develops between a horse and a young person can provide an impetus to children to transfer their newly developed relationship skills into a human-to-human context.

Safe touch is made available through the huge and warm reassurance of the horse’s body (Adam et al. 2015, 62; White-Lewis 2019, 5.9). Together with this physicality is the non-judgemental availability and acceptance from the horse (Bizub, Joy and Davidson 2003, 381). This safe environment may help with uncovering of half or completely forgotten existentialia (Frechette et al. 2020) and could help with the process of facing fearful memories and unlearning them (National Scientific Council on the

Developing Child 2010, 4). For example, the cognitive-behavioral approach seeks to simulate a mild version of a situation in which the patient would be encouraged to engage with the stimulus (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2010, 4). It would be interesting to find out if the horse could be a helper in the area of inviting approachable touch which is non-threatening as a possible means of healing anxiety-based fear and PTSD resulting from violent and abusive touch.

High Touch

High touch is the real and safe touch of another sentient being rather than a negative or vicarious experience. High touch actual contact could be considered a real alternative to ‘high tech’ contact on social media, for example, which is often a vicarious experience and could be dangerous. “We die from lack of touch, not a lack of words” (Alford 2017). Buber was specifically concerned with touch as it was a means of experiencing the ‘betweenness’ which could aid understanding of the distance but also the closeness of I-Thou and I-It (Buber 2000, 24, 29, 39).

Parental Perspectives on Children’s Journey with Horses

The importance of therapeutic relationships and how horses can help is highlighted in a study in which the parents of intellectually-impaired children were interviewed, and their responses were analyzed to see how they responded to the changes which occurred in their children through the course of EAI. These parents commented that they saw themselves as part of the journey of change for their child and that they were personally involved and had agency in the process, together with the horse and their

child (Watson 2019, 2). The study concludes that it would be helpful to extend the research to look at how children themselves perceive the changes in themselves and others (Watson 2019, 2). The consciousness of relationships and how they are affecting us and others and how they are affecting what is outside our own understanding can be brought about through contact with the horse (Watson 2019, 2). McCormick and McCormick (2004) note that horses can teach us [in relationships] how to work with “pure intention and in the spirit of love, trust and confidence” (Escobar 2019, 26).

Learning to Face Fear with Horses

Many of us are afraid of initial contact with a horse because of its sheer size and power, and the possibility of injury uppermost in our minds (White-Lewis 2019, 2, 8; Hemingway 2020; Surujlal and Rufus 2011, 374). A mother commented that her son has learned to enjoy being in the natural world (including horses), which is something “bigger than himself” (Escobar 2019, 33).

Psychology of Fear

Fear in young children is often connected to fear of wild and dangerous animals (Maurer 1965; Vallance and Fernandez 2018, 7, 8), fear of monsters (Green 2023, 1; O’Brien 1994, 13-16; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2010, 6) and getting lost. Fear as an adaptive emotion (Beckers et al. 2023) can be seen as natural fear or evolutionary fear (survival fear); it includes fearful reactions to loud noises, cliff heights, leopard spots, mosaic patterns which could represent snakes and pointed objects (Subramaniam 2019), darkness (Children’s Hospital of Georgia 2020), and deep water (Wisner 2021). These fears could be classed as natural or evolutionary fears coming from a time when the human needed to be alert to survive (Vallance and Fernandez 2018, 4;

Guy-Evans 2023). If the young child does not grow out of these anxieties, it may be seen as a problem needing treatment (Vallance and Fernandez 2018, 1, 5, 6; Fritscher n.d.).

Suffering from an anxiety disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder can result from some trauma, either a single or serial event in a young person's experience (Fritscher n.d.; Guy-Evans 2023). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is often accompanied by other psychiatric disorders such as oppositional defiant disorder and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), substance abuse, and depression (Vallance and Fernandez 2018, 8). These problems are frequently found in autism spectrum disorders (Vallance and Fernandez 2018, 8) and will exhibit differently but may result in ongoing fearful reactions into adolescence and adulthood (Vallance and Fernandez 2018, 23; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2010, 1). Treatment can take the form of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) or pharmacological means (Vallance and Fernandez 2018, 1).

Extinction or Unlearning of Fear and Anxiety

Unlearning of fear and anxiety, which is also termed 'extinction' of fear and anxiety (Furini, Myskiw, and Izquierdo 2014), is a process. Horses present initially as something to be afraid of because they are not understood, or just because of their size and their potential to cause injury (White-Lewis 2019, 8). Overcoming this fear can lead to a meaningful experience and a longer term relationship which helps in addressing the deep fears and anxieties which a child suffers as a result of trauma (Eller 2019, 28). Likewise, it can help a child with neurodiversity who may, according to Gabriel et al., find calmness through contact with the horse (Peters and Wood 2017, 3238). Children

who suffer from PTSD or anxiety can learn to be at ease with a horse, thus paving the way for healing and resolution in their lives.

Children's Qualities which Could Help Them to Experience Relational Consciousness

Awareness-sensing, mystery-sensing and value-sensing (Hay and Nye 2006, 65-78) are qualities which could help children to experience relational consciousness. Children are most likely to be in the “here-and-now” or “point mode” (Donaldson) to be present in the moment. “Tuning” (Schutz) is going with the sensation or idea, as when we are deeply involved with listening to a piece of music; “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi) is the feeling which we get when we have had an absorbing conversation with someone or when we are reading a book which we cannot put down. “Focusing” or “felt-sense” (Gendlin) is our instinctual feeling for a situation which precedes any intellectualization (Hay and Nye 2006, 66-71). These “awareness-sensing” capabilities are the tools which children use to tune out what is unnecessary for the task at hand, to fully engage.

“Wonder and awe” are two sides of how we experience the mystery of the sacred: fascination or wonder and fear or awe. Imagination helps us to make sense of the awesome and the fascinating and we use it to try and understand. Hay and Nye use the example of James Watson’s “lively account of the human side of the process of discovering the structure of DNA” (Hay and Nye 2006, 73) to show how this has worked.

Value-sensing is a term coined by Margaret Donaldson. It indicates the importance of “feeling” and the underlying belief in “ultimate goodness” (Hay and Nye 2006, 74-77). “Intuitive knowing” is the felt-sense of ultimate goodness, it is the “ways of knowing” which we recognize as being intrinsic to our humanity. The Indigenous

Peoples of North America use this phrase to describe their relationship to the natural world and the spiritual world (Adams et al. 2015; Haig and Skinner 2022).

Our ability as children to be aware to the exclusion of all else around us, to experience wonder and awe and “trust in being” without cynicism, and to believe in ultimate goodness, that is pure delight with the absence being despair, and to use that as a ‘springboard’ to find meaning, is a way that we can experience relational consciousness.

The Gap in Studying Horses with Children

There is a discernible gap in studies looking at equine contact and children, namely that they do not include—and at worst, deliberately ignore—the spiritual.

Organisations such as PATH International and Riding for the Disabled, together with all of the enterprises reviewed above, are doing the therapy work but missing the spiritual aspect of a holistic approach.

In the First Nation context in Canada, spiritual wellbeing is on the same level as the other three sections of the quadrant of wellbeing: physical, mental, and social (Adams et al. 2015, 57, 58). In fact, the way of knowing arises from a different epistemological level, in that the person can know because the knowledge is already there, within them through traditional ways of knowing, that is, storytelling (Adams et al. 2015, 56). This is in contrast to the epistemological approach of installing knowledge in a person from without (Mason 1989, xxx; Freire 1970, 72). For the First Nation young people, the spiritual is already part of the whole and is acknowledged rather than received. One young participant remarked that because of the opportunity to work and learn with horses, she had begun “to reconnect” to her family and had begun “to pray and think about God”. Another articulated a rekindling of interest in their culture and a Creator

(Adams et al. 2015, 62, 65): “I didn’t really think lots about God at the time, but when I started going to the horse program, it got me thinking lots and now I just pray every night and, like, I just pray that everything goes alright with my family when they come here [for a visit at the Treatment Centre]” (Cohort 2, Youth 10). Another participant made the point, “Knowing that those horses are part of my culture made me realize that I can believe in a Creator” (Cohort 2, Youth 3).

The importance of the spiritual in the lives of Yazidi girls and their families is a cultural reality (Eller 2019, 76-80). EAS can be adapted and used to help indigenous youth in trauma-informed and spiritually-grounded ways (Haig and Skinner 2022). Overall positive feelings were reported among participants, including facilitating the exchange of spiritual knowledge (Haig and Skinner 2022). Emphasis was placed on the importance and value of traditional culture and teachings and the connections to such (Haig and Skinner 2022). In Native American cultures, the horse, according to Dell et al. (2008), is “specifically identified to have a strong spiritual power” and “the horse is a truth teller who can lead individuals in the right direction” (Adams et al. 2015, 68).

White-Lewis explains in detail the various EAI and how they can be utilised to help in physical, psychological, and social settings (White-Lewis 2019). There is acknowledgment of certain cultures entwining their spirituality with the horse (Adams et al. 2015, 68; Haig and Skinner 2022), and evidence-based data of the positive emotional effect of horses on young people (Hemingway 2020), but there is no meaningful mention of how equine contact could spiritually help and heal a child in the U.K.

In the quest for spiritual awareness faith is needed to help make the connections and to believe that God is with us (Romans 8:31). Healing of brokenness and

disconnection come as faith brings possibilities and hearts are open to the message of hope. Selected children offered glimpses of how they were being healed and reconnected spiritually, responding to the invitation to draw near with faith to that which they (and we) yet do not understand.

Relational Consciousness, Spiritual Awareness and the Search for Purpose and Meaning

“The bond is beyond words; there’s definitely a spiritual connection. You can share with a horse, and they listen to you. You can see their ears turn back, and they’re listening to every word.” With these words Escobar explains that the results show an increase in spiritual awareness through connection with horses. However, she reiterates, “The subject of spirituality has not yet been [thoroughly] explored in relation to EAT”, and as “equine sentience is an ongoing area of research (PATH International n.d.)”, more is to be discovered about horse-assisted therapy, “creating bridges between the mundane of earthly activity and the mystical as an avenue for spiritual development” (Escobar 2019, 26). Furthermore, McCormick and McCormick indicate, that there can be an “awakening process aided by the horse which brings connection to the Source of their being, which can bring them closer to their own spiritual identity” (Escobar 2019, 26).

Inspiring, nurturing and facilitating atmosphere in the home and in the classroom is important for a child to flourish (Mason 1989, 94-99). DAP advocates “time, and time to discover in alternate settings, offering opportunity and collaboration and connectedness which can provide constructivist ways of finding purpose and meaning” (Cunningham 2014, 61).

In the current study, actual hands-on equine contact, combined with the use of a focus group methodology (Adler, Salanterä and Zumstein-Shaha 2019), was a way to engage children in a non-threatening environment where they would be encouraged to express themselves in conversation and using art materials. A quantitative style questionnaire using Montessori-inspired fine quality tactile materials with which to engage creatively (Jones n.d.) was given definition by using a 'shoebox' to act as a control mechanism for the participant, enabling some closure and a sense of achievement. The idea of a 'secret box' has been used to offer ways for researcher and participant to interact and it can enable a "lessening of the unequal power relationship between adult researcher and young participant" (Punch 2006). If a participant chose to converse one-on-one with the researcher, there was an emphasis on reflexive procedures on the part of both the researcher and the participant (Kutrovatz 2017, 65). Observation was employed and served as an underpinning to data gathered using the other methods.

The biblical soundness of my study is in understanding that it is possible to come to The Lord Jesus for His help in many different ways – He draws us in to Himself through joy and tragedy alike -- and to be upheld by the Everlasting Arms (Deuteronomy 33:27) and to know that He is the "Alpha and Omega;" the "Beginning and the End" (Revelation 1:8; 21:6) and that there is rest from our burdens of disconnectedness in Him (St Matthew 11:28). To be reconnected to God is to rest from the struggle. He is close to us and at the same time He is Almighty. It is good to remember this as we draw near with faith, leaving behind our human made schemes for doing it ourselves, and as we acknowledge Him in the process of understanding the connections between that which we can see now and that which is still obscured to us (I Corinthians 13:12).

During the service of Holy Communion, we are invited to “draw near with faith” to receive the holy sacrament, the body and the blood of The Lord Jesus Christ (The Book of Common Prayer 1662). The data-gathering events were such an invitation issued by the participants to me and any others who were interested—an inquiry concerning a person’s soul steps onto holy ground.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

“Where no oxen are, the trough is clean; but increase comes by the strength of an ox” (Proverbs 14:4, NKJV).

Overview

The purpose of this research project was to look at children involved with empathetic equine contact to see how their experiences could encourage relational consciousness, and to find out if such contact could facilitate relationships with God, others, and themselves. The process was a messy one with much work which seemingly did not bear fruit. The lesson for me was to keep going and to keep praying. I was reminded many times of the verse in the Bible (above) where we read that when the stable is clean, it might be nice and tidy, but there is no busyness and no production. It was an appropriate verse for me to keep foremost in my thinking and it seemed to fit the horse-racing industry culture where I live.

Participants were from demographically mixed backgrounds. The two riding stables where data-gathering took place were different establishments. A_ Riding Stables is a privately run business where children came with their families to learn and to join in. There was availability for young people who were on government schemes also. The emphasis was on inclusion of all. It was a place of welcome and of opportunity for the local children and for the children and families of the United States Air Force, which has two bases nearby. There was cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity.

N_ Riding School is a charity which was set up four years ago to cater to the young people in the N_ area. Schools and families are welcome to enrol their children. Most of the children were struggling in school for a number of reasons. Children suffering from anxiety and depression, various physical disabilities with resulting challenging behavior, and poor academic results could come to visit the horses and have either a weeklong introduction or enrol as an afterschool student on a weekly basis. Age ranges were generally from eight or nine to fourteen. Many of the children who came were in foster care situations and had experienced trauma in their lives. There was a wide range of ability, ethnicity, and socio-economic background.

Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework for the project demonstrates the connections between the independent and dependent variables and how these variables are affected by moderating, mediating, and control variables (Swaen and George 2022). The conceptual framework (Figure 3) illustrates how the moderating variable—a participant's openness to the process—the mediating variables of contact opportunities, and the control variable of a participant's physical presence contributed to the analysis of responses.

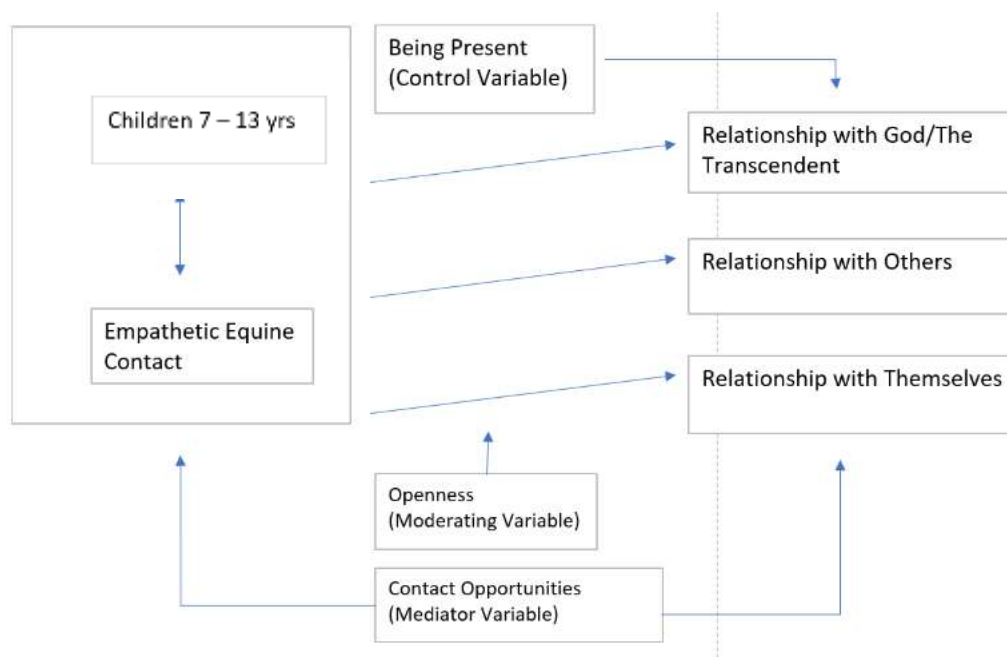


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework (Multivariate Regressive)

Philosophical Approach

A philosophical foundation for the group of methodologies employed was that of interpretive phenomenology and is explained by Frechette et al. 2020 in the section Philosophical Underpinnings. A constructivist paradigm for this study encouraged the participant and the researcher to build patterns of understanding while at the same time uncovering forgotten existentialia, which could happen as a result of being-in-the-world, or “our own humanity”, separated from Dasein or Being (Heidegger) (Frechette et al. 2020). The hermeneutic circle, which is described by Heidegger as the “moving back and forth from the part to the whole” (Frechette et al. 2020), is echoed by Buber as he discusses I-It and I-Thou respectively (Buber 2000, 20-21).

Buber’s childhood experience and friendship with his farm horse (Alford 2017) was instrumental in helping him develop his ideas of relating with subject (I-Thou) and how through thinking about the relating, Thou becomes an object (I-It). He viewed the

horse as an object until he had the experience and the realisation that his horse was the “Other.” Buber recounts how he could suddenly see the “far-awayness” as well as the closeness of the I-Thou relationship:

When I stroked the mighty mane, sometimes marvellously smooth-combed, at other times just as astonishingly wild, and felt the life beneath my hand, it was as though the element of vitality itself bordered on my skin, something that was not I, was certainly not akin to me, palpably the other, not just another, really the Other itself; and yet it let me approach, confided itself to me, placed itself elementally in the relation of Thou and Thou with me (Alford 2017).

The interpretive phenomenological approach indicates that Dasein presupposes a reality already apparent. Because of this, it is important that lived experience, existentialia, (that which is forgotten), and authenticity are considered (Frechette et al. 2020). I placed an emphasis on remaining alert, being self-aware, and being attuned in order to uncover any new understanding of this particular study, to “pull together ‘existentialia’ out of forgetfulness” (Frechette et al. 2020), and to shed light “over” (guarding) and “against” (leaning and supporting) (Buber 2000, 39, 41), the physical, psychological, social, and emotional, i.e., the parts of the I-It, which exclude the I-Thou (Buber 2000, 35). Lived experience can be understood through relating, remembering, and authenticating (Frechette et al. 2020), as well as through hermeneutics (Theology Matters 2018) or interpretation of the lived experience within a constructivist paradigm. The emphases in an interpretative phenomenological approach are that of “being, of knowing, of uncovering these factors through not only interviews but also through ‘authentic modes of data collection such as participant observation and art-based methods’” (Frechette et al. 2020).

What is interesting about this philosophical approach is that the interpretation of the lived experience is the actual experience itself, but it also becomes something that adds

value and importance to the experiencer. This echoes Nye's observation that a child's relationship with someone or something leading to spiritual awareness has lasting significance for their ordinary or everyday lives (Hay and Nye 2006, 109).

To allow participants to respond thoughtfully and reflectively, without hurry, was one of the objectives of this research, as this was a way to elicit authentic data which means something. I looked for responses from the children's own perspectives.

Looking at children's spirituality using a questionnaire is problematic, but it seems that any approach to finding out about this subject is difficult. The Feeling Good, Living Life methodology (Fisher 2004, 307) was developed in order to provide a simple streamlined and objective instrument for collecting data on spiritual wellbeing in children. Fisher recounts that it was not easy to find participants in schools, and it was through perseverance that access was made possible (Fisher 2004, 310).

The constructivist interpretive phenomenological approach, that is the hermeneutical 'backwards and forwards' which enables remembering of half-forgotten memories and the uncovering of self-hood, of authenticity, as the person reflects and understands and builds up a picture of their lived experience (Frechette et al. 2020), helped to lessen the tension for all participants, including gatekeepers and me, as it kept the focus on the child and the experience of the educational equine workshop (which is the data-gathering event) rather than concentrating on performance, and it encouraged listening to and hearing from the children and trying to see how the significance of horizons might meet at places. For example, it would have felt 'forced' to talk about God at points, and it required openness and flexibility on my part to be sensitive, and to be ready to wait, and for there to be silence also at points. This kind of atmosphere was

encouraged: where availability occurred, as expounded by Marcel (Malbois 2019, 3-9), hospitality evolved through the use of silence, as explained by Palmer, (Kessler 2000, 42), and by making room for the mundane and even the troublesome (Pohl 1999, 10).

Multiple Methodologies

It was interesting to see how the participants responded according to Piaget's constructivist paradigm (McLeod n.d.), in which the added advantage of the interpretive phenomenological use of data crystallization (Figure 4) facilitated the 'back and forth hermeneutic circle' (Frechette et al. 2020). One of the methodologies employed was the shoebox questionnaire (Table 3), which contained eighteen questions with multiple-choice style responses and further opportunity to respond independently. Participants could also use the art and craft materials supplied to respond. The focus group discussion used a series of prompts to encourage response (Table 4). Further opportunities for data crystallization came from equine contact, observation, and individual conversations (Figure 4).

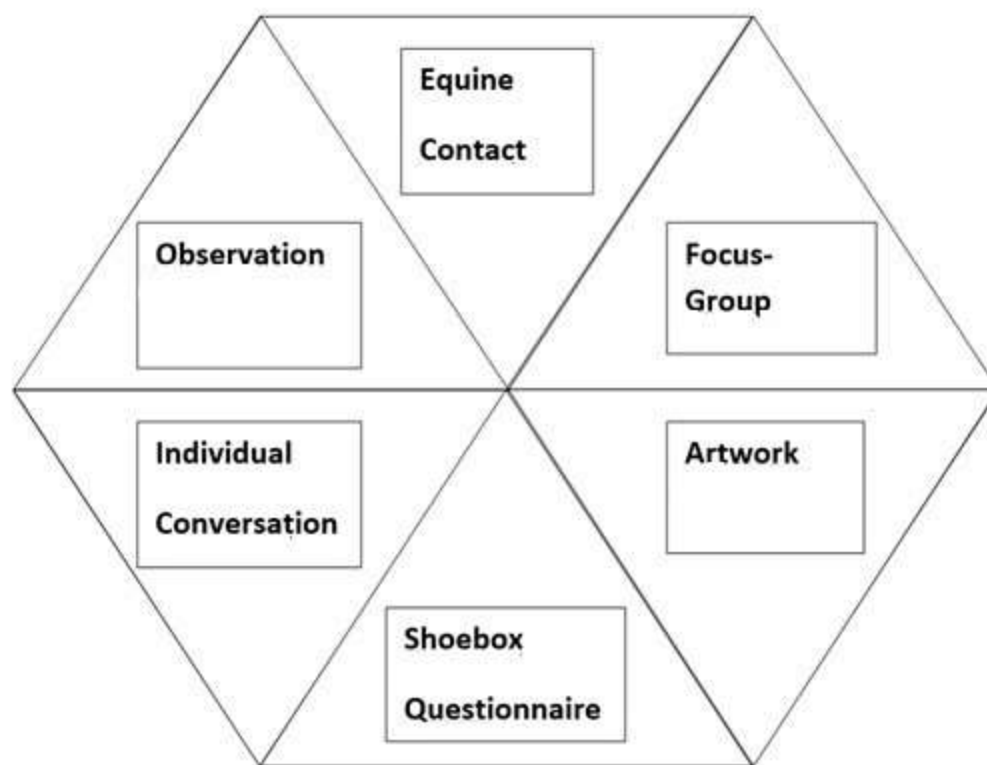


Figure 4. Data Crystallization

Description of Research Methodologies

The data-collection occurred as a result of using multi-qualitative methodologies which complemented each other. A brief description follows.

Equine Contact

Equine contact served to create a space for participants to get to know each other and to talk about their experiences with horses. It was an introduction and could also be a conclusion to the workshop. During the first two workshops equine contact was a concluding data-gathering event. It served to bring together selected children as they talked about the workshop and shared ideas and experiences. The remaining three workshops began with equine contact and this was helpful as selected children responded

enthusiastically. I had not expected equine contact to be so versatile in its application and it happened only because circumstances were organised in a certain way by the owner of A_Riding Stables and the manager of N_Riding School on the particular days.

Participants were encouraged to meet the horse(s) and to groom them. Each occasion was different and depended on what was available. For example, during one workshop we were able to go out to the stables and meet each of the horses there as the participants took time to introduce them and explain how they, the girls, knew them. On another occasion, we were able to concentrate on one horse and have an extended grooming session in the stable with all four participants joining in.

Shoebox Questionnaire Using Multiple-Choice Style and Semi-structured Questions Including Artwork Responses

The shoebox questionnaire was organised in a style reminiscent of the quantitative multiple-choice approach. However, the questions were semi-structured and open-ended, which invited a qualitative response. The use of shoeboxes in this investigation was to facilitate individual participation and to encourage engagement, action, and reflection. Apart from the attraction of a shoebox as a “useful pot to put things in” (Milne 1994, 79), there could also be the excitement connected to finding out what was inside, rather like opening a birthday gift. Each workshop began with a short presentation of the shoebox, and the participants were invited to choose a box and explore its contents.

The shoebox questionnaire was an invitation to participants to engage with the art materials and booklet provided in the box and to respond independently to the eighteen questions. The methods used were, in part, Montessori-inspired (Jones n.d.), in that they allowed time and space for reflection and for creativity in response. The questions were

mainly multiple-choice style with five or more possible responses, including space for individual thought. Amongst the materials were an A5 size booklet made from construction paper and card, modelling clay, coloring pencils, plain paper, glue, scissors, pipe cleaners, paints and brushes with a water cup.

Focus Group Using Semi-structured and Open-Ended Questions

Focus groups have traditionally been used to find out how adults with shared characteristics in an enclosed and controlled setting feel about a certain product or particular subject; their viewpoints are valuable when doing market research (Cornell 2022). The focus group approach has also been found to be effective with children (Adler, Salanterä and Zumstein-Shaha 2019; Morgan et al. 2002). Younger children do well in smaller groups of four to six participants, being able to concentrate for about forty-five minutes, whilst older children, aged eleven and upwards, can operate successfully with eight participants and maintain concentration for up to ninety minutes (Heary and Hennessy 2012, 3; Kelly 2013, 79).

Krueger and Casey (2009) comment that one of the strengths of a focus group situation is that ideas will be voiced and others in the group can respond in a “permissive and non-threatening environment” (Adler, Salanterä, and Zumstein-Shaha 2019).

A focus group method of data-gathering following on from the more structured method of a questionnaire was a natural outlet for participants to expand upon how they had decided to respond in the shoebox questionnaire booklet (Table 3). The focus group activity took place after a snack time and a stretch. To begin the focus group, there were a series of semi-structured and open-ended questions based upon and referring to the questions in the shoebox questionnaire (Table 4).

These prompts were in the form of an analogue flip chart which was constructed using photographs and paintings from a number of different sources. The pictures which proved to be successful at eliciting discussion and response are cited and referenced appropriately and are recorded in Table 4 and Figures 5, 6, and 7. Likewise, the PowerPoint which was used to augment the flip chart is found in Appendix E. Other paintings which were taken from books and not used in the flip chart but also elicited meaningful responses are cited and referenced. Many of the paintings and illustrations used in this document are in the public domain. All others which were used but are not in the public domain are only described, as it would otherwise be necessary to obtain copyright permissions from the various publishers (Morris 2020). I did get in touch with two publishing houses to ask permission, but this was not provided by the time the dissertation was submitted.

The focus group lasted thirty to forty-five minutes. It was audio recorded, with informed consents and verbal assents of the participants.

Individual Conversation

An opportunity to have a one-on-one conversation with the researcher to explain what they did with the shoebox questionnaire and how they felt about the focus group discussion was a way of triangulating (Bans-Akutey and Tiimub 2021) and perhaps confirming the experience for participants. No recording of the few individual conversations took place as there was not time or space to do this. Instead I wrote out as much of the conversation as I could remember. To further this triangulation, it became apparent that a crystallization of the multiple methodologies employed would be helpful (Ellingson 2009, 3-5).

Observation

Observation (Smit and Onwuegbuzie 2018) was used to note how participants related and responded to their equine companions, to each other, and to the wider world (Table 7). A set of criteria, I-Self, I-Others, I-World, and I-God (Hay and Nye 2006, 109) were used to construct the checklist. Any comments or experiences that transpired as a result of observations were factors in how the data were analyzed and interpreted.

As has been mentioned, relational consciousness is not simply having heightened awareness; it is being able to thoughtfully apply the understanding on a meta-cognitive level and to appreciate that the relationship has made a significant addition to the everyday (Hay and Nye 2006, 109). For example, Nye notes that the aspects of a relationship include I-Self, I-Others, I-World, and I-God; these aspects were the instruments used in the project to extract meaning from the observations and were used according to the learning theory developed by Jean Piaget (McLeod n.d.). The constructivist paradigm according to Piaget would see the interaction of the experiences of a child and their ideas being the framework for how they understand life and how they respond to it. It is important to see how the role of reflexivity, i.e., both authenticity and inauthenticity illustrated through the dual modes of “the self” and “self-hood”, plays in the process of understanding the everyday lives of people (Horrigan-Kelly, Millar, and Dowling 2016). The process of collecting the observation data using the aspects described above required knowing, reflexivity, and ways of authentication provided by synthesising the various methodologies (Figure 4).

The multi-qualitative methods employed complemented each other well, as there was a certain bounded activity and detail to be worked through in the shoebox

questionnaire, whereas the focus group meant a widening of possibilities, an invitation to express oneself more generally, and to engage with others in the process, perhaps helping to ensure that the research tools remained relevant (Shaw, Brady, and Davey 2011, 5). In this way, a safer peer group could be created, and power imbalances between adult researcher and child participants were reduced (Adler, Salanterä, and Zumstein-Shaha 2019).

Reflexivity

This practice was helpful as it ensured that I went ‘back and forth’ in the reviewing of conversations and events and kept an openness and transparency in the process of the data-gathering and subsequent analysis. Not only was it good to keep in mind the explanation of children’s spirituality as being ‘implicit associative’ (Hay and Nye 2006, 105), i.e., that “by which the general realm of children’s spirituality might be recognized in the philosophical, contemplative or emotional sensibilities”, but also it was essential that I be able to continually check with myself as to my own sensibilities and how I was remaining open to possibility or was maybe closed and ‘stuck’ within my preconceived set of ideas. Relatedly, I was encouraged by a young mother who helped me advertise the data-gathering workshops to also post a short profile of myself (Appendix F) so that families could read about me, my qualifications, and experience, so that they would be in a more informed position concerning what I was offering to the participants. This was not an easy thing to do, but it helped to heighten my sensitivity to what people consider important and how I could be aware of others’ needs rather than thinking only about what I needed.

I have changed most of the words ‘researcher’ to the first person. There are a few instances in the paper where researcher remains but this is because it fits best in the context.

Crystallization

A crystallization of the multiple methodologies employed allowed for each part of the data-collection process to come to bear equally on the findings. Proponents of the use of crystallization in qualitative research argue that this approach presupposes that there is no absolute truth and that researchers will be engaged in finding their own truths (Ellingson 2009, 10, 17, 29-30). Whilst it is appreciated that this is a useful way of thinking within a Marxist or feminist or other humanist framework, as it supposedly allows for more creativity and openness (Ellingson 2009, 3-4), it does not follow that those seeking eternal answers from the perspective of transcendent objective truth will necessarily find it difficult to utilise crystallization, which is a melding together of data in all its messiness (Ellingson 2009, 57-58), in order to discover some facets of possible objective truth, if they are able to hold together in either trusting hand, both the belief in objectivity and the understanding that the Bible offers scope for a myriad ways to interpret. Although there is no room for discussion here, it is interesting to think about how to bring together the two seemingly opposing positions of objective truth and subjective interpretation. The New Testament writers took their inspiration from the Old Testament using subjective interpretations (Walton 2002, 65). What is at stake for the traditional view is that the “myriad interpretative” approach might undermine the Bible as the Word of God. I adhere to the idea that there is room for another perspective, and although this can be challenging, it could better reflect the person of God.

It is important to remain open to hearing others from their different world-views' perspectives. Particularly, working with children from non-Christian cultures and belief systems, it is worth striving for what Ennew terms 'holistic spirituality' so that "children can have a framework for their own spirituality and be encouraged in their relationships between self and others, self, the created environment and (ultimately) self and God" (Crawford, Miles, Velazco 2017, 233).

I say this not to compromise what I believe, that is in the Trinitarian God of Love and Saving Grace, but rather to come alongside the other person who does not believe as I do but wants to engage and discuss and may need help. This cannot happen so easily unless there is humility and teachableness from each viewpoint and I see these qualities most clearly in the Person of The Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 2: 41-52; Luke 23: 26-43).

Coexistence of perceived opposites are our daily experience: "Now we see in a mirror, dimly [a "glass darkly" KJV], but then face to face. Now I know only in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known". (1 Cor.13:12, ESV). For followers of Christ, this is our understanding of what we have yet to comprehend. Moses wore a veil to protect the people from their fear of the dazzling of God's presence shining on his face (Exodus 34:29), indicating that our humanity can only suffer a portion of God's illumination at any one time. Interestingly, Ellingson quotes Emily Dickinson's poem, "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant," in which "The Truth must dazzle gradually" (Franklin 1998) and mentions how crystallization could be thought of as a facilitation of small "dazzles" happening in fragments, slowly and gradually (Ellingson 2009, 29-30). She explains this as something which happens necessarily as truth is uncovered with blurred edges (Ellingson 2009, 34), and that all truths are fluid and changing (Ellingson 2009, 32-

33). I would argue that objective truth is unchanging: “Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever” (Heb. 13:8), even though our cultural and religious understandings of small parts of that whole objectivity may be very different. The discussion concerning free will and determinism which is an outgrowth of this biblical claim is outside the compass of this dissertation, but the links can be noted. For example, Heraclitus uses the picture of the constantly changing river which keeps flowing (Kirk and Raven 1957, 196) and at the same time refers to the “unity of the river” which depends on the regularity and continuity of change (Kirk and Raven 1957, 196-99), thus keeping all things in balance. It could be said that The Lord Jesus Christ offers that unchanging unity which is continually balancing the changes which we experience.

Figure 4 shows a slice of a collection of six prisms. The assumption could be that the prisms will tessellate infinitely allowing for endless ways of reflection. These particular six methodologies employed are reflecting light to produce “tiny dazzles.” The light could be interpreted as objective truth. In this way, it is possible to see how crystallization is a way of showing not a new substance or truth, but a purification of the impure substance or dimly and darkly perceived truth which we encounter. This is reminiscent of the uncovering of forgotten existentialia (Frechette et al. 2020) and a reminder of how we so quickly reduce the I-Thou to I-It (Buber 2000, 19-24).

We look at the water changing, and we forget the river. However, relational consciousness is the framework, and rather than using the data to support the idea of there being relational consciousness, the framework is utilized to theorize the findings to understand them inductively, as in a grounded theory approach. In this way, the data can

come from the “in between” (Ellingson 2009, 56), which is how Buber talks about the process of relationship happening between the I-Thou and the I-It (Buber 2000, 26-27).

Research Design

Promotional Videos

Two videos were shared (Appendix G) which were used as a communication tool to tell gatekeepers about the data-gathering workshops and to inform families and recruit participants. Participants were either in touch with horses on a regular basis each week or had had recent opportunities to engage with horses as part of a school programme or an after-school club. The data-gathering was organised to take place on a Saturday morning and each session lasted two hours. The ages ranged from seven to thirteen years.

Ethics

At any time during the session, if a participant did not wish to continue or to engage further, they were able to indicate this without hindrance. If they chose, work already done would not be used in further analysis. They were free to withdraw, and it was clear that the withdrawal process was uncomplicated and without pressure in any way. Additionally, if a participant did not wish to have their work recorded, then this was respected.

A particularly clear list of what I needed to be aware of when making decisions concerning ethics is detailed in the section titled Ethics and Epistemology (Ellingson 2009, 40ff). One specific question resonated with me; it asked how I might feel if any of the participants or their families read what I had written (Ellingson 2009, 40-41). This helped me to make sure that I looked at what I was writing from the point of view of the participant and their family.

Equine Contact

The opportunity to be at close quarters with a horse and to groom it and communicate with it whilst also relating to fellow participants was designed to underpin the workshops as they occurred. Non-verbal cues from the horse can help the human participant to understand whether it is happy or not. A calm and docile acceptance of a child signifies contentment on the part of the horse, whereas fierce faces with ears turned back and teeth showing and turning away indicate displeasure and discomfort.

Multi-methodologies

The multi-methodologies of equine contact, shoebox questionnaire and artwork, focus-group discussion with individual conversation and observation were a way to ensure that each participant had a better chance of expressing themselves with authenticity (Frechette et al. 2020).

Selection of Subjects: Dealing with Sample and Population

Written permission was given to use the premises at A_ Riding Stables (Appendix H), and verbal permission (recorded) was given to use the premises at N_ Riding School (Appendix I). The sampling methods employed were first of all purposive, supplemented by the method of snowball sampling as relationships were formed between the researcher and the families of participants. They were aged between 7 and 13 years, and they had contact with horses on a regular weekly basis. There were no other prerequisites for selection.

Purposive Sampling and Snowball Sampling

Purposive sampling is choosing participants from a particular group with similar characteristics, with “a chance for better matching of the sample to the aims and objectives of the research” (Campbell et al. 2018). In this case, participants came from families where there was opportunity to ride each week and have contact with horses on a regular basis. As it was challenging to find participants, it was good to employ snowball sampling to supplement the purposive. Snowball sampling is a type of purposive sampling (Simkus n.d.). To use snowball sampling in this project required time to build relationships with the families of participants. If one or two families were found to be interested in allowing their children to participate, then it was possible to ask for introductions to other families with similar openness.

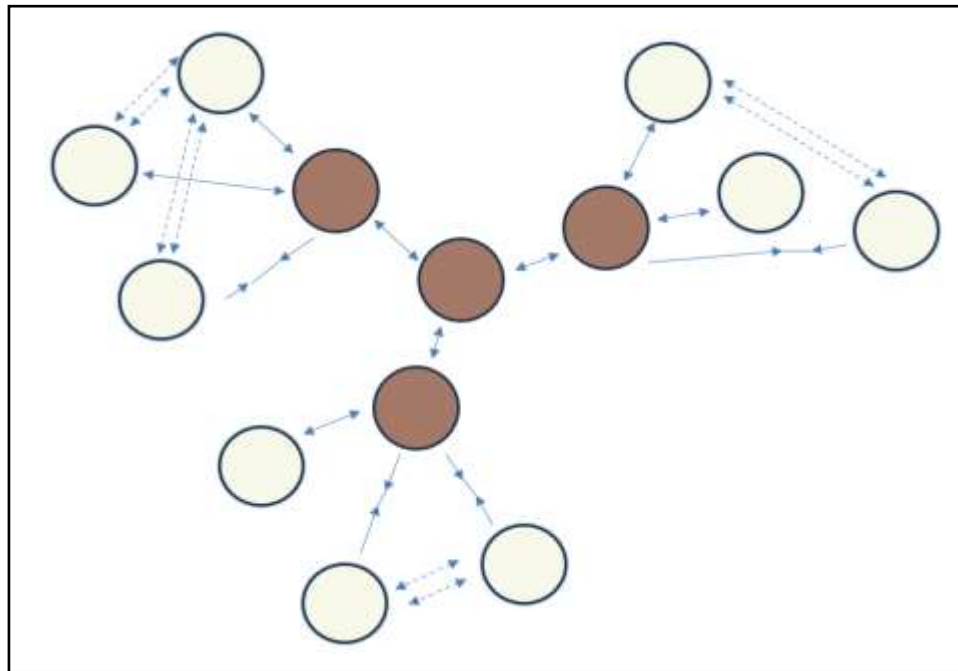


Figure 5. Multi-Level Relationships between Purposive and Snowball Sampling

The chocolate-colored purposives interrelated with others in a variety of directions, and made cream-colored “snowballs”, which in turn created and responded to dynamic dotted connections. The dotted connections were made between the purposely chosen participants and families and people that they knew.

A_ Riding Stables

The promotional videos (Appendix G) were sent to any interested parties via WhatsApp or email. In addition, an updated flyer (Appendix J, K, L), together with a copy of my profile (Appendix F), was sent out via email or made available in hard copy and was posted on the A_ Riding Stables Facebook page. All prospective families (children and parents), carers, schoolteachers, social workers, and riding establishment staff, together with any other gatekeepers, were able to receive the videos and flyers. My contact details were made available for anyone to get in touch to ask questions and to seek clarification of the process for their children.

The director of A_ Riding Stables promoted the data-gathering plans and informed her Facebook group of parents about the event. There was purposive sampling employed through contact with the owner of A_ Riding Stables, as she advocated for the me by direct contact with the families. She posted the link to the videos on Facebook. Snowball sampling was employed in this particular situation as the parents talked to each other and recommended the project.

N_ Riding School

N_ Riding School hosts various groups of primary and secondary school children who come for a week’s coaching and instruction as part of the wider school curriculum because they are having behavioral or academic challenges in their school settings. Some

of the children come from homes where their parents are employed in the horse racing industry but where they have not had the opportunity to be close to horses themselves. In addition, there are after-school classes available most weekdays, catering to children who are fostered or are having particular difficulties because of trauma (Anna Sylvester, conversation at The British Racing School, Snailwell, U.K., June 16, 2022). I have worked as a volunteer at N_ Riding School since its inception in June 2021. Within the groups that come to N_ Riding School, the needs are very diverse, and the work is multi-layered and demands sensitivity and wisdom on the part of staff and all assistants. There are students from different parts of the world, as many internationals live in and around N_ and work in the racing industry. Some students are suffering from mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, and some are on the autistic spectrum. There are those from disadvantaged backgrounds alongside more mainstream students.

Purposive sampling was employed through personal contact with parents and carers which was made possible through verbal assent from the N_ Riding School programme manager. A link to the videos (Appendix G) and the flyer (Appendix K), together with a copy of my profile (Appendix F), was sent out on WhatsApp or by email. There was a possibility of some snowball sampling taking place, but not as much happened as was anticipated.

Reflection on the Process of Finding Participants

I was open to families and groups of all faiths. While asking God to help me remain firm in my Christian faith, it seemed a sensible goal to encourage freedom of ideas and discussion, however difficult and impractical at times.

Perhaps, because of the subject matter of the project—“Children possibly experiencing spiritual awareness of God or Transcendent Being, and awareness of themselves and others, through empathetic equine contact”—there was some cautiousness. Gatekeepers who were trying to keep their children safe in schools seemed to be concerned at the thought of existential engagement which could lead to emotional and spiritual questioning and confusion, and it appeared that they would rather not facilitate such conversations. Individual parents and carers were cautious too. For these hard-to-reach groups of gatekeepers, transparency and trust-based relationships were very important. Snowball sampling depends upon one person or group recommending the researcher to another person or group, and this proved to be helpful when there was difficulty in establishing connections (Naderifar, Goli, and Ghaljael 2017).

Home Education Families

Contact with one home-schooling mother resulted in the workshops being advertised on a particular home education Facebook page, which meant that a number of home-schooling respondents came to take part in the workshops held at N_ Riding School. The home-schooling mother was instrumental in advising me to think about setting up equine educational workshops as an attractive idea to prospective families and participants (Monica Underwood, telephone conversations, 2023).

Development of Instruments

Equine Contact

Equine contact took place at the beginning or at the end of the workshops depending on availability. An atmosphere of inclusion and of openness to possibility was the main focus for the participants.

Table 2. Equine Contact

Description of Horse	Atmosphere	Equipment
Experienced riding school pony or horse which had understanding towards children and young people and was able to sense insecurity or anxiety on the part of the respondent.	Inclusive in the stable area with other horses around. An opportunity to be open to another language from another sentient being. The horse was big enough to be surrounded by four or six young people and it remained calm and responsive.	We used grooming kits made up of different types of brushes and combs as well as hoof picks which are used to clean out the underside of the horse's feet. We also used blankets and rugs during the autumn and winter workshops, as the horses need these to keep warm.

Shoebox Questionnaire

No exact equivalent to the shoebox questionnaire as an instrument of data-gathering has been found, although the 'secret box' used by Samantha Punch is similar in approach (Punch 2006). An interesting outcome from Punch's work is that the box enabled young people with various preferences to engage successfully but also allowed for a minimisation of the power dynamic between the adult researcher and child participant. This may have something to do with the fact that the participant can take ownership of the box.

Explanation of Shoebox Questions

The questionnaire was in the form of a shoebox which contained an activity book, paints, brushes, water cup, coloring crayons, sharpener, eraser, good quality paper, scissors, glue stick, and some modelling clay. The activity book was a scrapbook made of sugar paper (construction paper). On each page at the top was written a question, and the

possible responses were below. There was a space marked ‘other’ for all questions.

Questions 15, 16, and 18 were completely open-ended. All of the questions invited an art or craft response, but question 18 specifically requested the participant to draw or paint a picture to show their response.

Questions 3 and 5 of the shoebox questionnaires assumed some empathetic response towards the horse. The interpretive phenomenological approach to extracting meaning called for me to have an idea of the significance of my own horizons in the process and to seek to understand something of the significance of horizons for each participant. During this process, it was necessary that I remained reflexive in intention and open in attitude (Frechette et al. 2020). The “desire to unearth what a participant cares about and to listen for more than words—for underlying beliefs, assumptions and interpretations” was what encouraged me to remain authentic and transparent with myself and with the others. The shoebox was a questionnaire which elicited not only quantitative but also qualitative responses. The reason that I decided to use a shoebox as a methodological instrument is because it has proved to be a useful way to initiate interest and engagement. The booklet within the shoebox was a way to effectively collect data because it is containable and manageable.

Table 3. Shoebox Questionnaire

Question Number	Question Text	Response Choices
1.	How would you describe your experience, working with horses and ponies, at ----- (name of riding stables or another site).	alright – outstanding – very good – disappointing – enjoyable – other (please use another word if you prefer).
2.	When you look at a horse, how does this	awestruck – worried – happy –

	make you feel?	frightened – fascinated, other (please include any other feeling words which you prefer).
3.	Think about a particular horse or pony which you have got to know. How would you describe the character of this particular horse at your riding school?	knowledgeable – sensitive – difficult – unintelligent – calm other (please use any other words or phrases which you prefer)
4.	What are your strongest memories with your pony or horse?	humorous (funny) – fear – love – annoyance – friendship – other (please include any other words or phrases which you prefer)
5.	How do you listen to and talk (communicate) with your pony or horse?	laughingly – cautiously – commandingly – anxiously – as a friend - other (please use any other words or phrases which you prefer)
6.	Do you feel that you understand your pony or horse?	always – seldom – very well – sometimes – never
7.	What level of understanding do you feel that you have with your pony or horse?	high– low – fairly good – very low – very good
8.	<p>When you are with your pony or horse, how do you feel in your body (physically), in your mind (mentally), in your heart (emotionally), and in your soul (centre of your being).</p> <p>Participants 1-3 were given the opportunity to respond concerning the body only.</p>	Stronger – less healthy – weaker – healthier – no difference – other (please explain if you use another word) – these options were available for each category.
9.	What emotions or personality traits have you noticed that your pony or horse has experienced?	happiness, fear, contentment, joy, curiosity, friendliness, crossness, kindness, impatience, or any other feelings, (please use any other feeling words which you prefer)
10.	When you are with your pony or horse, how do you act towards others around you?	kindly – suspiciously – carefully – roughly – trustingly – other (please use any other words which you prefer)

11.	In the U.K., horses and ponies have traditionally helped humankind with farming, mining, transport, and war. What are some of the most important purposes that horses and ponies have today?	tourism – recreational – pomp and ceremony – agricultural work (herding and weight bearing) – law and order (police, fire, rescue) – competition (for example: racing, show jumping, and dressage)
12.	What do you think are the most likely environments that horses and ponies will experience in the future?	To be wild and free – to be working with and for humans – to be extinct – to be racing and competing in competitions – to be neglected.
13.	What do you feel when you are working with a horse or pony?	happiness, fear, contentment, joy, curiosity, friendliness, crossness, kindness, impatience, or any other feelings, (please use other feeling words which you prefer).
14.	How could a relationship with a horse or pony help a young person?	Through friendship – through love – through understanding – through mutual caring – through working together – other (indicate as many as you wish and explain if needed).
15.	Is it possible that horses and ponies have souls – that is, a part of them which is not physical?	
16.	When your pony finally gets to heaven, what will they say about their life on earth?	
17.	How could young people learn about themselves from horses and ponies?	Participants 1-7 had no suggestions for their responses. Participants 8-20 had three stickers to choose from and they could also respond freely without using the sticker choices. Stickers: by having courage; by listening to their pony; by thinking of their pony before themselves.
18.	Draw or paint (or both) a picture which shows how you feel about your personal experience with a horse or pony.	

Focus Group Discussion

The instrument used for the focus group discussion methodology was a list of semi-structured and open-ended questions. The semi-structured and open-ended questions were designed by me and were not tested by another, and they were not adapted from another source. The visual and audio prompts which were used to facilitate discussion around each prompt question consisted of a flip chart (Table 4) and a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix E) to complement the flip chart.

Alongside the flip chart, various books were also displayed to pique interest and elicit responses. *Goya* by Hagen and Hagen (2016) contained the painting entitled *The 2nd of May 1808* (Figure 6), which was shown to the participants.

Art Appreciation in Focus Group Discussion

Paintings, photographs, poems, other literature, and film were used in the focus group discussion to elicit responses from the participants. There were strong reactions to the classic paintings by Goya (1814) and by Lady Butler (1881) and to the black-and-white photography featured in the book *The Kingdom of the Horse* by Isenbart and Buhrer (1969). Not only were the subjects of the paintings and photographs moving in themselves, but the actual representations of them using balance, space, and symmetry seemed to add to the interest and response (Trehitt 2024).



Figure 6. The 2nd of May 1808 (The Fight Against the Mamelukes) 1814.

Table 4. Flip Chart Prompts

Sequence	Question	Explanation
1	What do you see?	The first chart was a collection of photographs and pictures which included a gaily outfitted Arab horse, a small herd of Przewalsky horses in a black and white photograph, different types of zebrass, asses from North Africa, donkeys, native British pony breeds including Shetlands, and Australian outback horses on a ranch.

2	Who are horses?	Bedouin Legend (Appendix E PPT 1) slide. Audio recorded poem read out aloud. The second chart showed black and white images of two horses greeting one another and “making faces” (Wathan et al. 2015; Morell 2016), and a series of questions were posed concerning horses and emotion to encourage discussion concerning whether and how horses feel physically, emotionally, and in their spirits: Do horses have souls, that is, a part of them which is not physical and makes up the centre of their being? The words “spirit”, “feeling”, “emotion”, and “imagination” were written on the chart.
3	Where do horses come from?	Cave painting examples on the third chart showed prehistoric horses and reindeer together with what look like bison from the Lascaux Caves in France (Ministère de la Culture 2024; Harris 2011; History Today n.d.) and Altamira near Santander, Spain (Britannica n.d.). A close-up view of one of the paintings at Lascaux was shown (Appendix E PPT 3).
4	How can horses be used as symbols?	The words “power”, “war”, “magic”, “holiness”, and “helping” were written on the fifth chart to give ideas about symbolism and horses. Images of Roman military on horseback in the form of marble reliefs from the pedestal of the ruined column of Antonius Pius (AD86) (Denton and Campbell 2012-2013) and the relief from the Temple of Athena in Ilium (ca.300 BC), together with the picture of a quadriga with the radiant Greek sun god Helios (Cambridge 2024) were shown. Biblical scenes from the Old Testament of horses and chariots in Egypt and that of the Syrian General Naaman in his chariot drawn by his warhorses coming to wash at the River Jordan, together with the New Testament account of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey were depicted on the fourth chart. Also shown were photographs of the white horse carving in chalk found in South West England (English Heritage n.d.).

5	Why did the peoples of North America become so close to horses?	The illustrations on chart five showed the paintings <i>The Captive Charger</i> (Artsy. n.d.) and <i>The Trail of Tears</i> (Justo. n.d.), concerning The Indian Removal Act of 1830. In this painting horses were depicted as being central to how people were able to move over long distances. Relatedly, another painting shown recalled the Pony Express used in the United States for communication purposes (National Park Service n.d.). The <i>Apsaroke Warrior Chief</i> by Peter Nowell was also shown (Appendix E PPT 3).
6	What can happen to horses in war time?	Flip chart 6 showed paintings of horses and people in war. The thirteenth-century relief at the temple of Abu-Simbel gave an idea of how horses and chariots were used by the Egyptians and Hittites in battle (Egypt Museum n.d.). The Norman conquest of England and Wales and Ireland began at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, and this event was documented in the <i>Bayeux Tapestry</i> (La Tapisserie de Bayeux 2024). A picture of the painting of the charge of the Royal Scots Greys at the Battle of Waterloo, <i>Scotland Forever!</i> by Lady Butler (1881) (Figure 7), was also shown, taken from the book by Isenbart and Buhrer (Isenbart and Buhrer 1969, 100-101). To complement these pictures, a video of Traditional Mongolian Cavalry was also used (Appendix E PPT 4).
7	Do horses enjoy games and play?	Images of Ethiopian players on horseback with spears and armoury were shown (Isenbart and Buher 1969, 246-247) and horses dressed up in feathers and bright trappings were depicted in fairs performing in a circus environment (Isenbart and Buher 1969, 282-283).

8	More games and play.	Black and white images of polo being played in India and Pakistan, along with courtship games in Mongolia and wagon racing in Canada were shown. In addition, the chart showed barrel racing in the United States and horse racing in Australia as well as Australian rodeo (Isenbart and Buhrer 1969, Equestrian Games)
9	Working relationships: Do horses enjoy their work?	The chart showed photographs of carthorses, ponies working in film, pit ponies in the U.K, police on horseback in Lesotho, and highland ponies being used to carry a full-grown stag carcass. Additionally, pictures were shown of horses being used in sheep roundups and horses being used to pull cartloads of hay. Also displayed were pictures of horses jumping and in dressage competitions.
10	Why was the story of <i>Black Beauty</i> so shocking to people when the book was first published in the early 1800s?	Following the theme of working relationships, chart ten highlighted the story of <i>Black Beauty</i> , which tells the story of how horses were treated cruelly in Victorian England. A clip from the film (Thompson, 1994) is found in PPT.5 (Appendix E). The prompt was to elicit not only discussion about how horses can be treated cruelly by humans but also wonder at the fact that horses can perhaps feel and think and have emotions. Sewell's personification of <i>Black Beauty</i> was instrumental in helping us see a situation from the horse's point of view.
11	More working relationships: Do horses enjoy their work more now than they did in the past?	Horses were shown in racing, in showjumping, and on parade. These illustrations indicated the variety of occupations for horses of all sizes and shapes.
12	Friendships.	Images of ponies and dogs and small children as well as a foal with its mother in a herd of semi-wild horses were shown. There was a picture of two horses giving each other a scratch "nose to tail" on the withers and there was a black and white image of two horses enjoying an evening drink pondside together. These pictures were shown to elicit conversation about how people and horses can relate and how horses relate to each other.

13	More on friendship: understanding between horses and humans. How can we learn about people and what they are like through horses?	A photograph of a racehorse and a young jockey rider was shown where the two were enjoying each other's company after a race. There was communion and relaxation in the picture. A video clip of <i>Mr. Ed The Talking Horse</i> was played to help illustrate in a light-hearted way other possible relationships between people and horses (Appendix E PPT 6).
14	Horses as helpers: How does <i>Bree</i> help the boy?	The groups were invited to listen to an audio recording of <i>The Horse and His Boy</i> (Lewis 1954, 21-22, 24-25).
15	How is the horse helping his companions?	The groups had the opportunity to watch a video (Appendix E PPT 8) from <i>The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse</i> (Mackesey 2019).
16	Does anyone have a story of how they have been helped by a horse or pony?	The invitation was given out to the groups to share their experiences and memories.
17	Two questions to think about: 1. Can we say that horses have souls? – that is, the centre of their being? 2. Do horses have emotions, and can we understand them?	On this chart there was a handsome photograph of a bright bay-colored horse.
18	Would anyone say how being with horses has affected their lives?	Various photographs of horses were shown, amongst which was a picture of the white horses of the Camargue region in France, taken by Sally Ann Thompson (Alcock 1973, 2, 3) (Figure 8).



Figure 7. *Scotland Forever!*

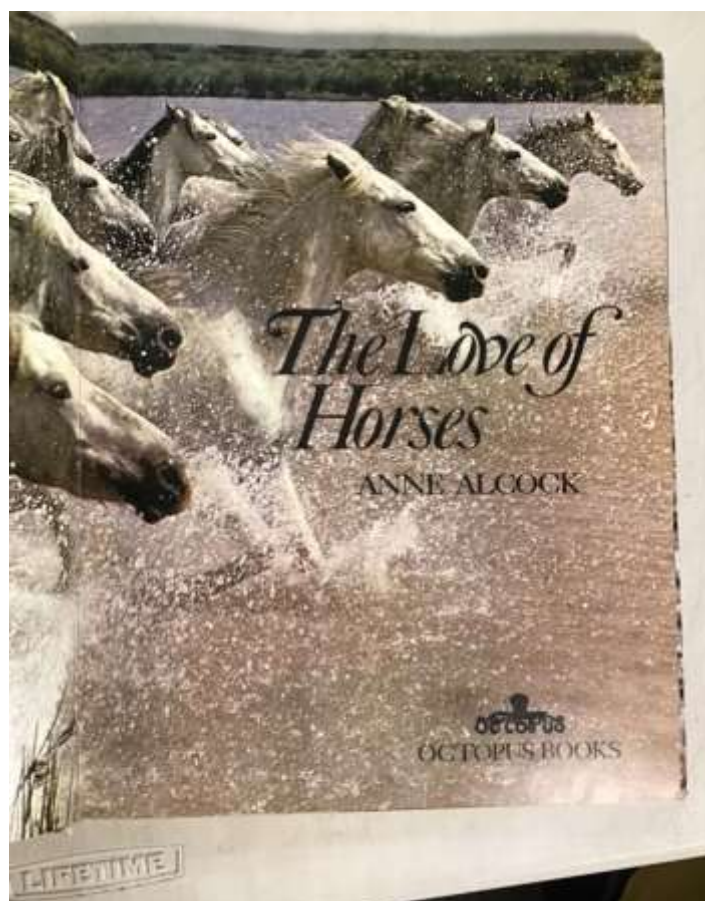


Figure 8. White Horses of the Camargue Region in France

Individual one-on-one conversations

The individual one-on-one conversation is a methodology which has been used specifically amongst children in the work of Rebecca Nye (Hay and Nye 2006, 81-108). For this project, the conversation and any explanation came at the instigation of the participant. When they expressed interest in conversation about their shoebox questionnaire or what was discussed in the focus group, I responded and encouraged by listening and asking questions if appropriate.

Observation

A checklist was used to observe the participants during the workshop (Table 7). A description of what was observed for each participant can be found in the presentation of data for each participant in Chapter IV. This checklist was devised from the categories which indicate “the four cardinal points on our relational compass” (Berryman 2013, 92; Hay and Nye 2006,109).

Pilot Study

A pilot study was organised, and the two participants, Michael (pseudonym) [M.10] and Jonah (pseudonym) [M.10], came from the local area. A young staff person called Philomena (pseudonym) [F19] was present. The Programme Manager at N_ Riding School gave verbal permission to use the site (Appendix I). Permissions were given by the parents and carers involved (Appendix C), and the participants gave verbal assent (Appendix D). Confidentiality forms were available for the assistants to sign and date.

It took about forty-five minutes to get through thirteen slides for the focus group discussion. We left out two of the slides to do with how horses can help humans, and we

had to let go of the last three slides. This was a shame, as those five slides were quite critical to the investigation on emotion and how horses and humans express themselves, and also how horses can point us towards thinking about a transcendent being or higher power—God. The assistant made a comment at the end that she was surprised that both boys concentrated on the material for a full hour. This outcome could demonstrate how important it is that the atmosphere is right (Mason 1989) so the participants can relax and enter the flow (Berryman 2013, 127-29).

After the pilot workshop had ended Philomena [F.19] talked about the morning and said that she considered the opportunity to relate to horses and other animals to be a really important part of life, and she said that it was worth reflecting on when considering relationships with others, too. She thought a reflective process such as this was important, and that it was something that they did not do at N_ Riding School. She especially liked the shoebox questionnaire. She mentioned that she thought it was good to talk about emotions, how the horse can help in dealing with them, and how this can help us in our relationships with others.

What Was Learned through the Pilot and What Changed for the Data-Gathering Workshops?

It would have been beneficial to have had the equine contact in the pilot, and this was something that I worked on intentionally for the actual data-gathering. During the shoebox questionnaire, Michael mentioned filters (Razuk et al. 2018), and using a yellow background, as he and Jonah had dyslexia. It was not possible to produce these types of booklets for everyone, but some were available at each workshop.

The pilot showed also that the booklets could be smaller, with only one question per page. There was doubling up in a few places due to lack of space, and this caused

confusion. It was clear that both participants were most comfortable using a pencil to indicate their responses. However, it was thought that others would be happier using more creative methods, and for this reason the different art and craft options remained.

I realized that a more holistic approach to question [SBQ8] could be implemented for the data-gathering, as there was scope to ask about not only the body but also the mind, the heart, and the soul. Additionally, questions [SBQ14], [SBQ17], and [SBQ18] could be phrased to encourage more than a simple 'yes' or 'no' response.

A role play using the story of Martin Buber (Alford 2017) and his boyhood experience with his farm horse was successful in the pilot, insofar as both boys, especially Michael, were happy to be involved and were enthusiastic. Our small group on the day had fun, but I doubted whether the role play section could be successfully replicated, and due to this reasoning and lack of time overall, I decided not to use it for the data-gathering.

It appeared best for there to be more three-dimensional analogue promptings available and some of the material was either too old-fashioned or not appropriate for certain audiences. The story of *Lean on Pete* (Haigh 2017) seemed too difficult to show as the trauma of the young man, experiencing domestic violence and loss, without a home, was a real-life experience for some of the participants.

As a result, I prepared a flip chart using cut-out magazine pictures and photographs from books to encourage responses during the data-gathering events, and the edited PowerPoint presentation of eight slides acted as a support for the analogue flip chart.

Field Procedures

There were two different sites to consider when thinking about field procedures. At A_ Riding Stables, the sessions took place on site. Written permission to use the site was given by the owner and director. There was a covered area which included a cabin and a large porch that was available for the data-gathering sessions to take place. It was fully fenced and safe for younger children. There was a toilet nearby and a cold water tap for washing of hands and for drinking. Within the designated area, there was plenty of room to move around, and there were picnic tables which served as work benches, eating, and drinking places. There was also wheelchair access, and although some of the terrain would have been challenging, this could have been overcome with assistance.

At N_ Riding School, there was an up-to-date education building on site. This facility consisted of a classroom with good space and light, tables and chairs, a comfortable sofa, and a ping pong table for relaxation moments. There was a small kitchen in an adjoining room with toilet facilities in a further section.

Data-Gathering

Before gathering the data, I secured the IRB Notification Approval and a permit to conduct research (Appendix M). The audio-recorder had responsibility for making sure that the equipment was working correctly. Recordings were made at the designated times and with permissions and verbal assent in place (Appendices M, N, O, P). At each site, there were safe spaces to stretch and to be at rest as well as to engage and to work both individually and as a group. The average size of the data-gathering groups was four participants. For each session, there were at least two adults: I and the technical and

general assistant. All assistants read and signed and adhered to a confidentiality agreement.

Table 5. Chronology of Events During a Data Collection Workshop

7 – 13 years of age	
10:00 -10:10	Welcome and introduction. A presentation of the questionnaire and a chance to ask any questions.
10:10 -10:40	Questionnaire–materials with which to respond to the questions.
10:40 -11:00	Break time.
11:00 – 11:15	A participant explained their questionnaire responses to the researcher if desired.
11:15 – 12:00	Focus Group session with semi-structured and open-ended questions for discussion.
12:00 – 12:15	End of session. Questions and individual conversations.

The American Psychological Association (APA) code of ethics details five principles for practitioners and researchers: beneficence and non-maleficence, fidelity and responsibility, integrity, justice, and respect for people’s rights and dignity. The ten standards which are the foundations of this code of ethics are: resolving ethical issues, competence, human relations, privacy and confidentiality, advertising and other public statements, record keeping and fees, education and training, research and publication, assessment, and therapy (Cherry 2023). With this code in mind, together with the standards which underpin it, participants in the data-gathering events detailed above were assured of a duty of care towards them and all people involved. Many if not all of the principles and standards discussed apply to children as well as adults (UK Research and Innovation n.d.). I considered carefully informed consent as opposed to verbal assent; a young person could have been quite able to give their own informed consent after talking through the parameters with a trusted adult.

Written permission to use the site was obtained from the owner and director of A_ Riding Stables. Written informed consent forms (Appendix N) and verbal assent scripts (Appendix O) to read and think about were available for all parents, carers, participants, and other gatekeepers involved at A_ Riding Stables either on Facebook or via email or WhatsApp. The paperwork took place on the day using hard copy.

Verbal permission (Appendix I) was given by the programme manager to use the site at N_Riding School. There was also verbal endorsement from the programme manager for the project. The programme manager did not wish to sign a permission form, as this could have become complicated with the various bodies which are involved in the organising and funding of the Riding School; she stated that it was best to keep an informality about the procedures. Although the verbal permission to use the site was confined to certain dates and times on the recording, there was flexibility on when and at what times we could use the site. Informed consent forms (Appendix P) and verbal assent scripts (Appendix O) were made available to the parents, carers, and participants, together with any gatekeepers at N_ Riding School. These were available either through email or WhatsApp. The paperwork took place on the day using hard copy.

Data Collection and Recording

The responses recorded in each shoebox booklet were collected. The data were identified with the first name of the participant and indicated age and gender. All names were deleted once the data was organised for analysis and pseudonyms were assigned. The data will be kept in files for reference and analysis for one year following submission of the dissertation and will be deleted as soon as possible afterwards, following publication of a peer review of the research. The recordings will be stored by the

researcher in separate audio files, dated and identified, and will be on a computer under a password known only to the recorder research assistant and the researcher. These audio recordings will be stored for about one year after the peer review has been published.

It was emphasised at all stages that the participant was not obliged to go through with any part of the data-gathering and that they could choose to decline to take part at any stage. Furthermore, in the event of a participant declining at any stage, all effort would be made to facilitate this withdrawal process to cause the least discomfort or concern. The emphasis should be upon the participant's wellbeing and thanks should be given for the attempt made. In this case, should the participant wish it, all data recorded would be deleted.

Data-Processing and Analysis

Patterns were highlighted in different colors in the collected data; a system of tagging was employed to categorise. Groups of themes emerged, and these became the guide within the framework of the research questions for looking at the data further.

As a result of the pilot, it was important to think about ways to facilitate the interpretative phenomenological approach (the disclosure or uncovering of forgotten existentialia) within the conceptual framework of moderating (openness), mediating (contact opportunities), and control (being present) variables, resulting in groups of themes. Moreover, it was helpful to also categorise the data gathered within these themes according to “awareness-sensing, mystery-sensing and value-sensing” (Hay and Nye 2006, 65-78), perhaps indicating relational consciousness occurring as the participant remembered their experiences with horses, encouraged by the atmosphere of availability,

hospitality and generosity (Pohl 1999, 61-62ff; Kessler 2000, 1-17; Palmer 1997, 80) in the equine educational workshop.

Summary

This chapter focused on the multiple qualitative research methodologies which were used and how they were employed. The discussion has included the way participants were selected, and it has also included the ethical considerations of all requests and selection of participants. Data collection and data analysis have been explored. Chapter IV constitutes a presentation, analysis, and interpretation of the results, and Chapter V gives a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Reflections on the Study

Finding Participants

Finding and recruiting participants for the data-gathering events proved to be challenging. Primary carers were cautious about giving consent for their children to take part in a process which might focus on the spiritual aspect of a child's life. A recent conversation with a young home-educating mother of four helped me to understand how to communicate more effectively with primary carers and their families. As a result, I concentrated on describing the data-gathering event and I was clear about my intentions. This was in line with biblical thinking (Matt. 19:14), and with Article 12 UNCRC which states that a child's views should be allowed free expression and should be given "due weight" (Marshall and Parvis 2004, 380). Crucially, I indicated what a participant might gain from the experience. Consequently, I devised flyers (Appendices F, G, H) for distribution to the various communities willing to consider participation. The flyer advertised the data-gathering events as equine educational workshops where participants

had the opportunity to engage actively and reflectively on their experiences during the event within the wider context of their ongoing regular contact with horses. I was clear that it was my intent that each participant come away from the event with a self-motivated fresh perspective and inspiration. The flyer stated that the events would be free of charge, as the researcher wanted to gather data for analysis to find out about children and empathetic equine contact, and that the researcher wanted to use any findings for her dissertation.

Additionally, it was suggested that I write and circulate a short profile of myself. Primary carers who looked at the project for their children would wish to assess the me. The profile contained details of my qualifications and career working with children and young people. It also gave details of the PhD in Holistic Child and Youth Development at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary (Appendix F). The thinking was that the I needed to be seen as someone who had breadth and depth and who could offer a valuable experience to families. This suggestion was a help to me, as I needed to reflect upon how I presented myself to prospective families and gate keepers.

In Old Testament times, a clean manger or trough with a permanently tidy stall would signify that there were no animals to use for ploughing and food production (Edgar 2018). Interestingly, Ellingson mentions the messiness of the research process which uses crystallization as an approach to analysis (Ellingson 2009, 42). The following record of the findings arising from the project shows that messy process.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

“They Are Pearls”

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”
(Galatians 5:22-23, NIV).

Introduction

This chapter presents the six research questions and the responses to those questions from selected children aged 7-13 years old. The original age bracket was 7-11 or 12 years in line with Piaget’s and Erickson’s child development theories (McLeod n.d; McLeod 2025). However, as participants were hard to find, I welcomed all those who showed interest. Working between stages of child development meant that the results could not be validated so easily. It became clear that I would have to take each participant individually to try and find some data that could be validated by looking at the specific age groups represented. I found that it was important to keep individual ages and genders in mind as I studied the data and thought about the selected children involved and the independent variables also. Validation of data was possible through treating individual participants with reference to their particular age group and gender. Other factors were relevant such as the independent variables of schooling type, family size and structure and birth order which added context.”

The research questions are as follows: Could social, mental, and emotional wellbeing result from empathetic contact with *Equus*, and could this lead to greater

resilience, confidence, and self-efficacy for a child; In what ways do *space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy, and trust (S.P.I.R.I.T.)* (Nye 2009, 41-52) encourage relational consciousness, that is, awareness of oneself, others, and God through relationship; Could a child be enabled through empathetic equine contact where the criteria of S.P.I.R.I.T. are implemented to achieve *some* transcendence of difficulty and *some* capacity to meet challenges positively; What kinds of experiences with horses do children have which could help them spiritually; What qualities of the horse do children experience which help them to become more relationally conscious; What qualities do children have which help them become more relationally conscious through empathetic equine contact? The results were gathered through the data-gathering workshops by using the six methodologies to elicit responses to the research questions. The analysis process entailed a synthesis of the responses to each research question. A hermeneutical approach, that is going backwards and forwards, remembering and disclosing in the process (Frechette et al. 2020), for the data-gathering methodologies was utilized as the participants were encouraged to remember and retell their experiences, thus once again living those experiences and through that process being able to think afresh and reevaluate what had happened. Emergent themes from the data-gathering reflected the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5: 22-23.

Results

The presentation of results is a collection of the responses to the research questions using the six methodologies and their instruments (Table 11), employed to gather data: equine contact; shoebox questionnaire and artwork; focus-group discussion

with individual conversation; and observation. Relational consciousness provided the theoretical framework within which to analyze and interpret the results.

Analysis

The process of analyzing the data entailed using color coding to indicate patterns. I categorized the data according to participant, particular focus-group, questions and prompts, number of like responses, and outliers. Relational consciousness was used as a framework to synthesize the results which culminated in certain emergent themes: Comfort, love, emotion, peace, soul and awareness.

Purpose, Significance and Data-gathering

The data-gathering indicated that selected children were affected by horses which was the overarching question in the research and that they did experience spiritual awareness, which signifies that children's spirituality is important to consider as part if not the foundation of children's holistic wellbeing.

In Chapter III, I discussed the purpose, the problem, and the objectives of the study. How the study was framed conceptually was also considered. The statement of purpose was to look at empathetic equine contact with a selected cohort of British children aged seven to thirteen years old, to see how their experiences facilitated relational consciousness (Hay and Nye 2006, 108-09), and to find out if participants thought that such contact could encourage resilience and spiritual health and holistic wellbeing.

The statement of the problem was encapsulated in the question, "Can empathetic equine contact help to facilitate a child's core spirituality or their 'signature' (Hay and

Nye 2006, 97, 107), thus encouraging awareness of themselves, others, and the Creator God (or Transcendent Being) to further establish relationships with each other and God?” Nye uses the term ‘signature’ to denote the key motivation in a participant which she observes, and which appears to be an indication of how a participant may be motivated to relate consciously (Hay and Nye 2006, 107-109).

The sub-objectives of the study and the related research questions were to find out how the experience of being and working with horses and ponies could make a holistic difference to children among the selected seven to thirteen-year-olds. Specifically, they are to understand how equine contact could help them to become more relational with others and themselves and with God, to become more resilient, to develop self-efficacy, and to be able to move towards transcendence of difficulty in their lives—that is, not only to rise above but also to be able to use the challenge positively. I looked for signs of awareness-sensing, mystery-sensing, and value-sensing (Hay and Nye 2006, 65-78) as indications of meta-cognition.

What happened was that participants’ experiences were almost all a recounting of “lived experience” which was of the “everyday” and could be easily overlooked (Frechette et al. 2020). The process of listening to what Heidegger refers to as the “everydayness” of the participants’ experiences and witnessing how they were able to uncover what Heidegger additionally refers to as “half-forgotten existentialia” through “being-with-others” brought an “authenticity” to their telling (Frechette et al. 2020) and became instrumental in demonstrating their individual spirituality or signature for the listener (Hay and Nye 2006, 107-09).

I sought to develop a working definition of holistic wellbeing. It appeared that the way to do this was to listen to what the children were saying about how they react, respond, and feel, based on the interpretive phenomenological approach (Frechette et al. 2020). Participants discussed their lived experiences with horses and uncovered forgotten or hidden memories of experiences (Frechette et al. 2020) as they participated in the shoebox questionnaire and the focus group discussions. Participants had the chance to ponder on the everyday happenings with horses which perhaps could allow understanding, as the experience of being with the horse could provide connection to the participant's "horizon of significance," thus "attributing meaning to a new situation." In turn, they could think about these experiences and how they might interpret them in the "back and forth" of Heidegger's hermeneutic approach (Frechette et al. 2020).

Data Collection

Table 6. The Age and Gender of Each Respondent Age

	Age 7	Age 8	Age 9	Age 10	Age 11	Age 12	Age 13	All
F	1	2	2	1	4	2	1	13
M	0	0	3	3	0	0	1	7
Total	1	2	5	4	4	2	2	20

The dependent variables were age and gender and equine contact on a regular basis. The independent variables were the participants' faith background or worldview framework, if known; whether they lived locally or further away from where the workshop which they attended took place and whether that factor made a difference;

whether they were in school or home-educated (home-schooled); and the level of experience and contact they had with horses. Other modifying variables for this study included whether a participant had, according to their adult carers and themselves, particular needs (mental, physical or emotional), and whether a participant was adopted or looked-after or from a single-parent home, for example.

Data Presentation

The data are presented according to the sub-objectives of the study found in Chapter I (Table 11). The resulting six research questions and the instruments used to elicit responses to the questions (Table 10) together with analysis and interpretation of these results can be found in Appendix Q.

Empathetic Equine Contact

At each of the data-gathering workshops there was an opportunity for empathetic contact, that is, where there was an atmosphere of openness and possibility with horses. The empathetic aspect of the contact is important to emphasize, as not all contact with horses is positive. In fact, there is often a negative story behind fear of horses for a person (Cleveland Clinic 2022). All were able to greet and pat a horse and spend time with it in the stable with the small groups. Most were able to groom a horse and talk with the animal in the stable.

Shoebox Questionnaire with Artwork

The gathering of data through the shoebox questionnaires with artwork served to prepare the group for the focus-group discussion. The shoebox questionnaire questions may be found in Table 3. Frequencies of responses to the multiple choice style shoebox

questions were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet to aid analysis (Appendix R). Any artwork is described alongside the shoebox questionnaire results, as this is when creative responses took place.

Artwork

Artwork allows the researcher (with the relevant training) to see into a participant's inner world. This may or may not be a representation of the external world; nevertheless, it can "capture feelings, representations, and perceptions," and they may be able to express what they see, feel, and think about their surrounding reality (Fabris et al. 2023). I used artwork in this project to enable participants to express themselves as freely as possible.

Focus Group Discussions and Individual Conversations

The gathering of data through the shoebox questionnaires and focus group discussions formed the basis of the workshop, with artwork and individual conversations supplementing the responses and participation. Focus group discussion prompts are to be found in Table 4 and Appendix E.

Observation

To analyze the observation results the categories *I-Self*, *I-Others*, *I-World*, and *I-God* were used (Hay and Nye 2006, 109) through which a child could experience relational consciousness. As I observed the participants responding to the workshop environment and interacting with others and with the materials and with the horses, I referred to the perhaps rather arbitrary "I" categories (Table 7), to help find patterns

indicating emergent themes which were contrasted to and complemented by themes resulting from the other methodological instruments used. (Petallar)

This form of awareness has been described by Nye as ‘metacognition,’ that is, being self-conscious in one’s awareness (Hay and Nye 2006, 109), “Crucially... a special sense that added value to their ordinary or everyday perspective... sometimes this was explicitly expressed as having a distinctive form of awareness. Metacognition may be categorised using the terms awareness sensing, mystery sensing, and value sensing (Hay and Nye 2006, 65-78).

Table 7. Observation Checklist

Name	I-Self	I-Others	I-World	I-God
Topaz	Topaz was sensitive to her mum’s comments.	In EQ we heard from Topaz herself as opposed to through her mother.	Attuned to the horses.	Contact with horses, particularly <i>Cosmo</i> has helped her not to be so afraid.
Moses	Moses was shy but given encouragement, he engaged.	Self-awareness highly developed but also his other-awareness. Watchful and questioning.	His approach was one of dispassion and analysis.	He said that he accepted the traditional tenets of belief in God.
Rachel	Rachel was the first to engage with the material within the group. Lead the responses in the discussion as it unfolded.	She was expressive concerning her personal experiences and how she had been helped.	She has helped others, particularly horses with reference to her horse, <i>Jamie</i> .	Without fear.

Bella	Bella was quietly confident.	She said that horses are all very different, like people.	She had common sense, and she could see the need for courage and how others are helped as she has been helped.	Being brave and realistic but still reaching out.
Sheila	Sheila was self-aware and took notice of her surroundings and others.	She was self-contained, with her friends but also alone.	Sheila could not bear to think of or watch pain inflicted on horses. Too sad.	Being brave.
Sophia	Sophia grappled with conflicting ideas (about horses being strong...about whether to like people)	She would watch how people act around horses to understand them (people) and to see if they should be trusted or not.	She was vocal about injustice towards others and the world, especially horses.	Aware of holiness and objects which could signify that – such as Apollo in his chariot with horses.
Romana	Romana was conscious of her self-worth as a young horsewoman and a rider and was she eager to share her knowledge.	She would wait to see how others responded before saying or doing.	She was aware of injustice.	She knew that she needs help sometimes and she goes to the horses for comfort and help.
Jamal	Jamal had developed a sense of identity and assurance.	He had enjoyed horse contact over the months at N_ Riding School and liked riding.	He was interested in ideas and books and also drawing tanks. He wanted to learn more about horses.	He was excited and thrilled by the lion and the cat helping Shasta (Lewis 1954).

Maryam	Maryam was shy and reserved.	She was eager to please and watched others, especially her brother.	She used the word “cruel” to describe the treatment of <i>Black Beauty</i> .	She painted a picture as a celebration of beauty in nature.
Angel	Angel wanted to be with horses for his life.	He was proud of his father. He waited to give others a turn first with the horses.	He understood and he noted everything in detail.	There was an ‘otherworldliness’ in his approach. He was thankful for his life and for his time with horses, and he indicated the importance of trust in the horse and in himself
Stacey	Stacey had the ability to overcome and to meet the challenges she encountered.	She explained how to handle a horse which is misbehaving or not responding well by waiting and being patient—without need for shooting or punishing	She enjoyed the world of horses and how they could interact with humans.	She said that she was very lucky.
Gerry	Gerry reacted negatively to the pain and worry that he saw around him e.g. <i>Scotland Forever!</i> (Fig.7) . He was trying to process.	He reacted to the “bearing rein” scene in <i>Black Beauty</i> with something akin to horror.	His premise was the idea that horses may be re-released in protected circumstances into the wild – was aware of the need for care.	He punctuated our final group conversation with small excerpts and comments from the Mackesy book – completely entranced and absorbed.

Charles	Charles was interested in friendship with people and with horses.	He enjoyed the discussion with the group about how the foal became more cautious after being weaned and was not so ready to trust humans	He aware of how horses can help him and others through friendship.	He pondered and voiced his thoughts on how horses were created, and he said that horses make you feel better if you are lonely
Prince	Prince was aware of how much there is to know and to think about. Horses have taught him more and have helped him understand more	He was empathetic in response to the foals and how they might feel meeting humans for the first time	He reacted against the killing and carnage depicted in the painting <i>Scotland Forever!</i> (Figure 7) by saying it was not only “sad” but also “brave”	He felt very trusting and comfortable with horses. In the New Forest he was excited and moved by his experience and wondered why and thought about it still now.
Eloise	Eloise said that her horse had helped her not be so scared.	The instructor was so worried about the horse not being able to get up again – this deeply affected Eloise – the worry and the upset. She said that non-verbal communication was useful to help humans relate to horses but also to other humans.	She was aware of how people could be cruel towards horses and wondered about this.	She said that horses teach us how to communicate without saying anything and without using words.
Marigold	Marigold was candid about her fears and	She loves to be with her horse and to groom	She loved the white horses and said that	She said it helps her if she is sad, to go out

	how she was able to conquer them with the aid of the horse.	him – she said that horses can understand if we are nervous, and we can see if they are angry.	they were “like pearls, so shiny and silky”	riding, and to enjoy the forest and the beautiful view and she translated the horse’s words in Mackesy’s book to be speaking to us. She explained how horses could understand us and how we are feeling, and how helpful that was.
Apple	Apple was self-contained and understanding of herself.	She empathized with the horse in <i>Black Beauty</i> (Appendix E PPT 5).	She agreed that horses have emotions.	She understood trusting and being without fear to be a good thing. Apple said that she is able to think about everything when she is riding
Jeremy	Jeremy recognized how he had been helped by horses.	He said that the horse could sense when someone is sick or sad.	He was aware of how he had been helped by horses.	He said that horses are “in themselves” and that they have feelings
Flor	Flor was shy and reserved.	Her attachment to her mother was strong.	She did not wish her artwork to be shared.	She had the courage to ask to go home early.
Grace	Grace was quietly confident and self-contained,	She said she loves horses “Cos they are friendly. Their	She thought ancient chalk carvings could have been for	She was certain of how much horses knew and how much

	cheerful, and thankful.	noses are comforting and soft.”	communication purposes.	they felt.
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Horse or Pony?

In this study, the term ‘horse’ was usually used to refer to the equine species. The pony is a specific type of *Equus caballus* which is smaller, more intelligent generally, and perhaps more adaptable to its surroundings (Robinson n.d.).

Research Question 1

Could social, mental, and emotional wellbeing result from empathetic contact with *Equus* and could this lead to greater resilience, confidence, and self-efficacy for selected children?

“Just seeing horses on a bad day makes me feel better.” (FGD 5: Table 4, Flip Chart 18) Grace

“Everything”, when asked what she thought about whilst riding her pony in the forest. (FGD 4: Flip Chart Prompt 18) Apple

Topaz

Feelings of anxiety and fear prevented Topaz (a pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the participant) [12F] from joining in for most of the morning. She remained selectively mute, hunched over with her hair covering her face and eyes and only whispering to her adoptive mother who stayed for the session. The two participants with her tried to include Topaz as the morning developed but it was really only when we went into the horse stables environment to visit one of the ponies there that she opened up

to talk about her experiences with her own horse *Cosmo*. Topaz had not wanted to talk to me or any of the other adults present, but this changed when we were with the pony (Observation Checklist (OC)I-World). Topaz made eye contact and found her voice of enthusiasm, expressing her love for horses.

Moses and Rachel

Moses (a pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the participant) [10M], and Rachel (a pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the participant) [11F], operating from a core spirituality of empathy using a signature of kindness (Figure 10) (Hay and Nye 2006, 97-99) listened and asked questions and enjoyed the freedom from fear (Figure 9) which Topaz was experiencing. The results from the equine contact were an increase in confidence for Topaz, Moses and Rachel.

Rachel

Rachel mentions that she and her horse do not always agree (“see eye-to-eye”), but that they manage to work it out. This indicates that Rachel is learning how to be self-reliant in her dealings with the horse, becoming more confident, and building up her resilience in potentially challenging situations (OC I-Others; I-World; I-God Table 7).

Sheila, Bella and Romana

Sheila (a pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the participant) [10F], Bella (a pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the participant) [10F], and Romana (a pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the participant) [9F], talked about their experiences falling off their ponies while out riding and having to be

courageous and get back on again even though they were afraid. Each participant discussed how their pony had waited for them and helped them in the crisis “*as a friend*” (FGD2 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 16; Appendix E PPT8). The events resulted in the girls feeling more confident and having an understanding that they could do more than they previously thought (self-efficacy) and that they felt stronger (resilience).

Stacey

Stacey (a pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the participant) [F7], remembered how she was afraid in a chair lift where the bar had fallen off and how she was able to be brave in the situation (OC I-Self; I-God Table 7). She said that her life with her pony *Milkie* and riding and learning how to be strong (self-efficacy) had helped her in that crisis (resilience). Stacey was confident and adventurous, and reacted very positively to the film of the Mongolian archers at Naama Academy (FGD3 Table 4, Flip Chart 7; Appendix E PPT4), believing that she could ride that way too – that is without using the reins and going very fast (OC I-Others; I-World; I-God Table 7).

Eloise

Eloise (a pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the participant) [13F], explained that she had experienced comfort and assurance from being with her horse and that she thought her horse understood her and this helped her to be happier. She talked about how it was frightening sometimes and recounted how her brother and his horse had slipped and had fallen (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 10; Appendix E PPT5). Despite her fear, the results from these experiences in her life with horses were confidence and resilience and learning more self-reliance as well as working with others (OC I-Self

Table 7) (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Charts Prompts 16, 17). Eloise talks about really needing her horse to understand her and to be there as a comfort for her. As she takes a positive and hopeful point of view, the indications are that she will gain in confidence and will learn more about how to operate in more complex situations and to be resilient (OC I- Others; I-World Table 7).

Apple

Apple (a pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the participant) [8F] shared how she loved to go riding in the forest to enjoy the scenery and the peace but also to think (OC I-God Table 7). When asked what she thought about, she replied “*Everything*”. Apple exhibited a core spirituality of peace and the language which she used to express herself was of thoughtfulness and calmness. Apple used the word “calm” twice in the shoe box questionnaire responses to remember her strongest memories with her pony [SBQ4 MCQ] but also to describe the nature of her pony [SBQ3 MCQ].

Flor

Anxiety and fear were evident as Flor (a pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the participant) [11F] tried to respond positively at first, hanging back in the equine contact session (OC I-Self Table 7), even though Jeremy (a pseudonym was used to protect the identity of the participant) [13M] invited her to join in, not speaking at all in the shoebox questionnaire session but responding to the written questions using art materials. Finally, Flor asked to go home which she did before the focus-group discussion began. Social, mental and emotional well-being appeared largely lacking but

the confidence and self-reliance to use her voice to request that she go home and leave the workshop was an indication that she could stand up for herself in the process (OC I-God Table 7).

It was also encouraging to me that Flor felt comfortable enough to speak and to voice her needs as it suggested that an atmosphere of hospitality (Mason 1989; Palmer 1997; Pohl 1999; Kessler 2000) and Marcel's "disponibilité" or "availability" (Malbois 2019) was achieved for the participants.

Jeremy

Jeremy was interested and expressed "fascination" (SBQ2 MCQ) in being with the pony and wanted Flor to join in too, inviting her to take his place with the pony. He later explained how fearful he had been of horses and how his meeting with *Geranium* and learning how to look after her and to ride her had helped him to not be so afraid and to also learn how to conquer his fear in other situations (OC I-Self Table 7; SBQ4 MCQ; FGD5 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 18). The results from equine contact showed how a core spirituality which was freedom from fear (figure 11), perhaps through love (1 John 4:18) which Jeremy expressed as his feeling for the horse (Jeremy and *Geranium*: A Reflection), and confidence in being with the horse had helped him become more self-reliant and resilient. Jeremy reached out to Flor using the language of kindness (OC I-World Table 7).

Marigold

Marigold expressed her appreciation of the horse in a number of ways. She said, *“Horses help save people. They save people. It’s still today. They do, like, in London. They have, um, mounted horses.”* She thought that horses were good at controlling crowds *“because they have different types of brains. It’s, um, exciting to see them in London, and it’s also very nice to see them right there instead of cars. So, they, it’s, like, nice to see horses. Like in a busy place. Helping.”* There is the sense in Marigold’s description that horses in this context provided social, mental, and emotional wellbeing for her. She sounded stronger and more confident as she reflected on how horses can help in a city like London and how they can protect people [FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompts 9, 11]. Marigold also reflected on how beautiful the horses of the Camargue region in France appeared: *“like pearls, so shiny and silky”* (OC I-World Table 7).

Highly Valued

The data indicate that the participants felt close to their horses “as friends” [SBQ5 MCQ] and that this was very important to them. Fifteen participants express their “happiness” when looking at horses [SBQ2 MCQ]. The participants’ strongest memories of being with a horse were friendship (17) and love (8) [SBQ4 MCQ]. It is interesting that the character quality of “calmness” in their horse is appreciated by ten participants with “kindness” and “sensitivity” also being valued highly.

Value-sensing is when worth is assigned (Hay and Nye 2006, 74-77). The horses were seen as worthy companions and as living beings with individual characters and differences.

These results show that the selected participants experienced social, mental and emotional well-being with horses and that the relationships with horse helped them in confidence, self-efficacy, and resilience.

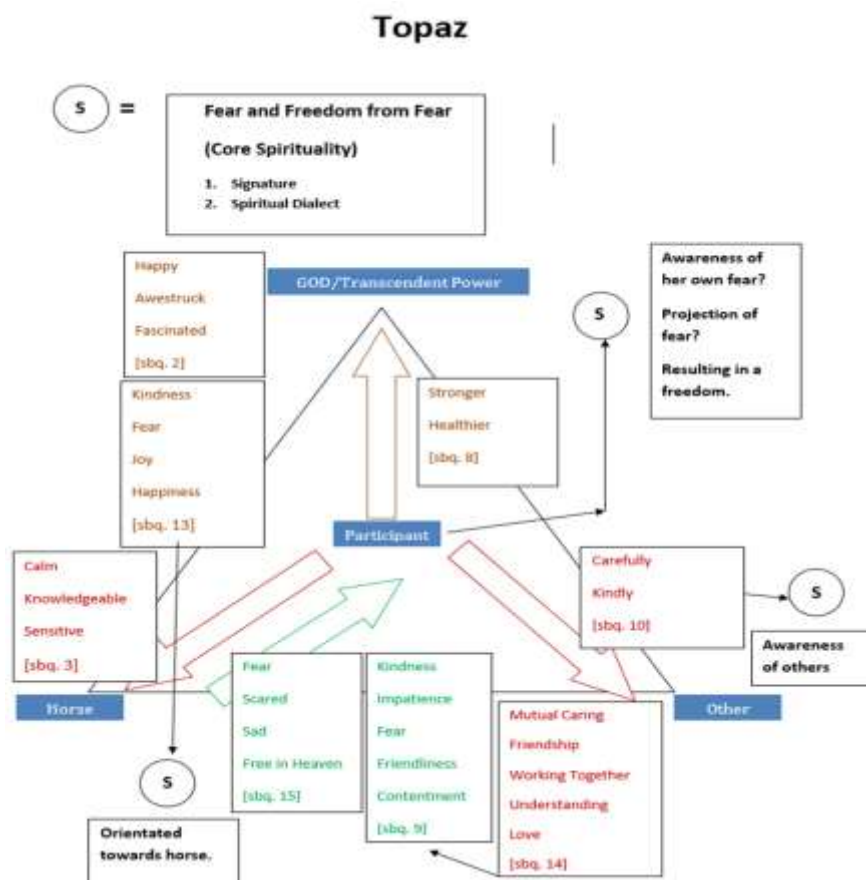


Figure 9. Topaz: Helping Connections

The participant's core spirituality (or signature) was presented as "fear". The helping connections and the spiritual dialects (or languages) of awareness of others and herself and her orientation towards her horse which were used to express the core spirituality show the links to how there was a resulting "freedom from fear." Figures 9, 10 and 11 were created using Microsoft Word (Piano 2025)

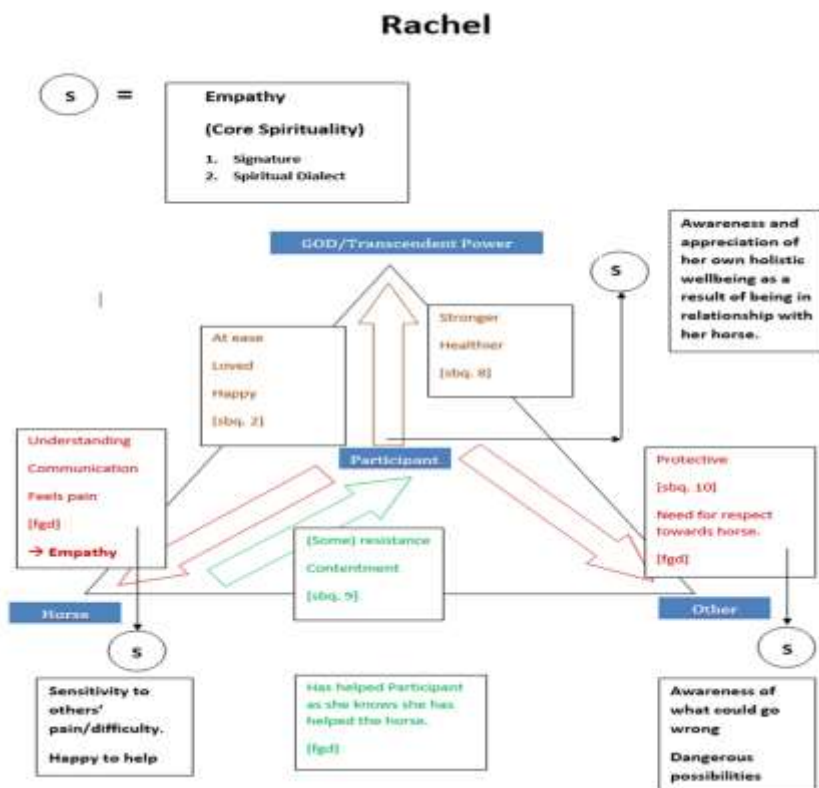


Figure 10. Rachel: Helping Connections

The participant's core spirituality (or signature) was presented as "empathy." The helping connections and the spiritual dialects (or languages) of sensitivity to another's pain, awareness of what could go wrong, and awareness of her own wellbeing as a result of life with her horse were used to explain the links as to how she, the participant, was able to understand and help another person.

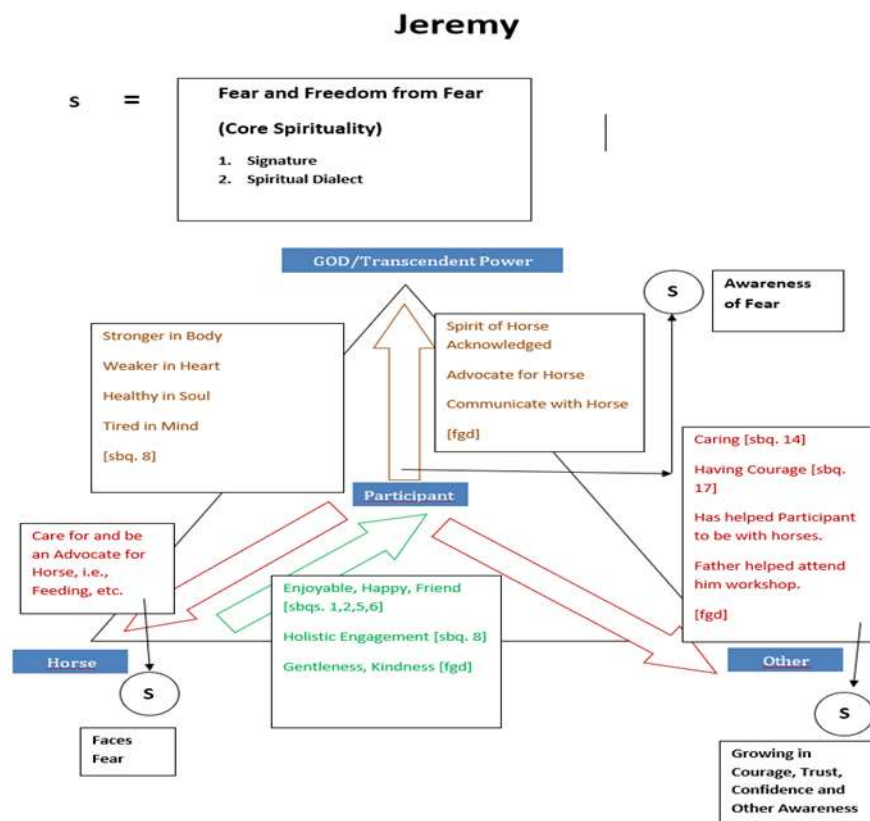


Figure 11. Jeremy: Helping Connections

The participant's core spirituality (or signature) was presented as "fear." The helping connections and the spiritual dialects (or languages) of awareness of his own fear, facing the fear and gaining courage, trust and confidence and other-awareness show the links as to how he had found "freedom from fear."

The remaining seventeen participants demonstrated core spiritualities of their own using individual languages to indicate spiritual signatures. For example, discussion concerning the core spiritualities of Bella, Sophia and Romana can be found below in the section which demonstrates the artwork. It would be unrealistic to work on the assumption that each child had one spiritual dialect and presented one spiritual core through that language (Hay and Nye 2006).

A short overview provides some insight: Prince's signature appeared to be of wonder and he used a language of analysis to try to understand; Apple's signature was one of peace; Marigold of wonder and awe; Charles and Gerry both demonstrated spiritual signatures of mystery, Charles philosophizing to understand whereas Gerry just took delight in the book he found which he loved; Stacey had a signature of thankfulness; for Maryam a love of beauty seemed to be her signature. Grace also liked to use a language of philosophizing to explain her spiritual signature of comfort and security which she voiced and was trying to understand.

Summary of Integrated Responses to Research Question

The participants' responses to the shoebox questionnaire [MCQ1-14] were recorded using an Excel spreadsheet (Appendix R). The responses to shoebox questionnaire [OEQ15-18] and the responses to the focus-group discussions and individual conversations were analyzed for patterns using color coding and were compared and contrasted to the SBQ responses. Additionally, the results from the Observation checklist complemented the responses from the other methodologies.

The themes which emerged resulted in indications of feelings of happiness, joy, love, friendship, peace, comfort, and trust and attributes of goodness, kindness, patience, faithfulness, gentleness, understanding, and self-control which show that equine contact promoted holistic wellbeing and led to gaining confidence, self-efficacy, and resilience for selected children. The themes emerging were measured by frequencies of responses in the [SBQ MCQ1-14] which are displayed in the Excel spreadsheet in Appendix R and the groups of same or similar responses from participants to [SBQ OEQ15-18] and the focus-group discussions. The related literature reviewed in chapter II discusses the extent to

which equine contact is shown to promote holistic wellbeing in children living in multi-various contexts. Children at risk in places as disparate as Singapore, Canada, and the U.K, as well as typical children in Norway are reported to experience happiness and joy and all of the feelings mentioned above together with gaining attributes such as patience, understanding and self-control, resulting in confidence, more self-reliance and even rising above difficulties to see beyond their immediate lives (Adams et al. 2015; New Fei et al. 2017; Fleetwood 2016; Clavell-Bate 2018; White-Lewis 2019; Hauge et al. 2014.)

Research Question 1

In what ways did space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy, and trust (*S.P.I.R.I.T.*) (Nye 2009, 41-52) encourage relational consciousness, that is, awareness of oneself, others, and God through relationship for selected children?

“I feel loved and at ease” [SBQ2 MCQ] Rachel

“Able to be myself in my anxious thoughts with my horse” [SBQ5 MCQ] Topaz

Space

The physical space of the stables environment with the horses made an immediate impact on the cohesiveness of the first workshop participants. Throughout the morning Topaz, Rachel, and Moses had operated independently from one another. Once in the outdoor space with a pony to focus on, they related to the pony and talked about their own ponies that they knew (OC I-Others; I-World Table 7). They related to one another and to me and to the other adults helping (Equine Contact (EQ)1).

Bella, Sheila, Sophia, and Romana met me in an equine context where they were comfortable. They knew all the ponies. We were outside much of the time with the

ponies in adjoining fields, so it was easy for the participants to take a minute to go and greet a pony and then come back to the workshop session. The outdoor space gave freedom to move around and be relaxed and the four girls could build on their already established relationships to remember their past experiences with their ponies and with each other, finding new memories and incorporating them into their new lived experiences (Frechette et al. 2020). The stories of their ponies' behavior and their mutual remembrances of occasions riding together and facing challenges together (SBQ18 OEQ) resulted in renewed connection with each other during the focus-group discussion.

The girls remembered the times when they had to be brave and keep going as they faced challenges of falling off and being afraid which (OC I-God Table 7).

Stacey and Angel met Jamal and Maryam for the first time in the space of the horse stable environment. The tasks during the equine contact session were to remove the pony's rugs and to brush it and to put the rugs back on again, whilst talking about the pony, its needs, and how to look after it properly. Stacey and Angel were sensitive and understood that Jamal and Maryam did not have their experience, and they waited for their fellow participants to spend time with the pony first but remained willing to help and offer advice (OC I-Others Table 7). There was a freedom to be relaxed in the outdoor physical space and there was corresponding mental and emotional space in the process. Angel showed a core spirituality of sensitivity in the situation, and he spoke with confidence and maturity, using a language of consideration (EQ3).

Eloise and Jeremy showed in their respective equine contact session how they could rise to the occasion to be the older helpers in the physical space. Both demonstrated concern for the others and tried to engage their group. Eloise showed her workshop group

what she knew about taking care of a horse and she encouraged her fellow participants. Jeremy, even after being rebuffed by Flor, teamed up with Grace to work together, though they did not know each other before that morning. The results of equine contact were that the space gave the participants a chance to expand out from their own frames of reference to see from the perspective of another, whether it was horse or person, and to speak and act with languages of kindness and of inclusiveness (EQ5). The thirteen-year-old participants showed their consideration of others and of the world around them as they were careful to include and help their younger companions not forgetting that they needed to be mindful horses too (OC I-Others; I-World Table 7).

There was physical, emotional, and auditory space available in the equine contact context where the horses offered an atmosphere of possibility and opportunity and most importantly safety. The results from this were that the participants moved carefully and spoke quietly and respectfully with the horse and with each other (EQ). The physicality of the horse's body compels attention and requires a careful and intentional approach (Adam et al. 2015, 62; White-Lewis 2019, 5.9)

Process

Moses came to the first workshop with some trepidation as he is unsure in new situations. Since the workshop, we have had the opportunity to discuss his ongoing life with ponies. On the day Moses said about his experience with horses and his thoughts about how horses can help other children that: *"They help you a lot"*. [SBQ17 MCQ]. During our subsequent conversations, Moses has expressed his enjoyment and his satisfaction with how he can look after his Shetland pony. As Moses grows up he learns about life in a fostering family, trying to make sense of his environment and his

experiences. He is “happy” [SBQ2 MCQ] in the process of being with his pony every day. Equine contact every day for Moses and his pony are relaxation over time which comes from familiarity, increased knowledge and understanding, lessening of fear, social ease (Mickelsson 2019; Oser 2014, 3-4; Yorke, Adams, and Coady 2008, 4; Adams et al. 2015, 63. 64) resulting in confidence gaining and increased ability to see from another’s point of view (OC I-Self; I-Others; I-World Table 7).

Bella, Sophia, Sheila, and Romana had the benefit of knowing each other in a familiar environment over a long period of time. The results from the data-gathering tell of a process of growing up together, increasing in knowledge and understanding (for Sheila, (OC I-Self Table 7), sharing the joy of horses together, learning how to be less afraid and more courageous (for Bella and Sheila, OC I-God Table 7), how to take responsibility in a crisis with their pony, gaining confidence (for Bella, OC I-Self Table 7) and becoming more aware of how this is happening (for Bella, Sheila, Sophia and Romana, OC I-Others; I-World Table 7).

Sophia reflected on how she would treat others when they were with her and her pony and thought that she would wait to see how the person behaved towards her horse before deciding about whether they could be friends [SBQ10 MCQ]: *“By seeing how they act differently when they’re with the horse,” and she said that she watches and waits. “Well, if they are nice. Well, horses are really amazing. If [people – Ed.] are acting really mean around, then I’m like, well, scratch you off of my friend list. But then, if they are acting nice, I’m like . . . maybe become friends?”* (OC I-Self; I-Others; I-World Table 7) She continues: *“But that all happens in my mind, like.”* She reiterated,

“You may be trusted, you may not; we shall see.” (FGD2 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 11).

Romana also reflected upon what she was learning by living with her horse and being with her friends. In agreement with Sophia about one of the horses illustrated being in pain she said: *“If I saw a horse in pain, I would be a bit scared to do anything”*. (FGD2 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompts 1 and 2). Romana demonstrates a maturity and realistic self-understanding in her response as she thinks about cruelty towards horses (OC I-World Table 7).

Jamal is a reader, and he relates to the world, others, and himself through his experiences of reading. When we met, Jamal took time to tell me about the different books about horses which he had read: *Black Beauty* (Sewell 1877), *The Horse and His Boy* (Lewis 1954) and *War Horse* (Morpugo 1982) were among his favorites. Jamal was in process of gathering information to help him understand horses and the wider world and he explained to me how this was showing him connections in different ways (OC I-Self Table 7). Jamal was particularly pleased to talk about *The Horse and His Boy* as he wanted to explain how he had understood that *“the cat and the lion were the same person and that they were good, not wanting to harm”* (FGD3 Individual Conversation; OC I-Others; I-World; I-God Table 7). A core spirituality of imagination was evident, and Jamal used language of analysis to communicate his understanding. What was particularly interesting about his perception and excitement was that Jamal comes from a Muslim context. Some might cite Lewis’ work as being within the Western and Christian canon but here was an example of how relational consciousness (the spiritual awareness of oneself, others, the world, and God) can transcend the boundaries which are set by

humans. Relational consciousness supersedes human religiosity and reflects a pan-human experience, (Crawford, Miles, and Velazco 2017, 229-32).

Angel and Stacey had their growing up memories with horses and could draw on this long-term process to remember the “everydayness” of their lived experiences (Hay and Nye 2006, 109; Frechette et al. 2020) and some experiences which were out-of-the-ordinary also and to reflect upon how they were still learning not only about horses but themselves, others around them, and the world. In talking about how they have managed to face difficulties, Angel described how he had been helped by his horse *Brian* as he was afraid, but he learned to trust the horse (FGD3 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 16) (OC I-Self; I-Others; I-World Table 7), and Stacey talked about how she was able to remain calm and strong in the chairlift crisis because she had been riding all her life and implied that that had been her training to deal with difficulty (FGD3 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 16; (OC I-Self Table 7).

Gerry and Charles were in the process of growing up with their family foal and watching how the baby horse was with its mother, how the weaning process was taking time and had its difficulties, and how the character of their foal was developing (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompts 12, 13). The twins described what they saw happening and their thoughts about the character development. They were interested in how the foal’s character affected them and their relationship with it (OC I-God Table 7). The results of their observations were that the foal was more cautious of them and more suspicious of them during the weaning process and they wondered about why this was. The boys’ reflections were indicative of an expanding viewpoint towards others (the foal) (OC I-Others; I-World Table 7) and themselves (their reactions) (OC I-Self Table 7).

Eloise and her two friends Marigold and Apple were living their lives together with their horses. They related their lived experiences with horses as ‘everydayness’ (Frechette et al. 2020) but they used the remembering of half-forgotten memories to talk about the important people in their lives. Marigold and Apple’s grandmother who is a horsewoman has fostered the love of horses with her granddaughters as they mentioned her as a strong influence; Eloise’s brother was a fellow rider with the three girls, and they had had some dramatic experiences together such as falling off and the horse slipping and falling too (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 10; Appendix E PPT5). The results of these lived experiences and the retelling of them showed perception of not only themselves but others also and the wider world too: the girls had discovered a young, neglected horse in a field soon after the accident and they had reported it. The horse was rescued as a result which was satisfying to them (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 10) (OC I-World Table 7).

As the three participants recounted their experiences they exhibited increased knowledge and understanding, familiarity, confidence, lessening of fear, relaxation over time, and social ease.

Jeremy spoke about his year with horses. He said how he had been very afraid, but he had had the opportunity to get to know *Geranium* and that she had helped him overcome his fear. He could look back and talk about the time that he was bitten by a racoon, for example, and he could relate the fear he felt during that episode to the fear that he first felt with horses, and he reflected upon how he had been helped in the process of being with *Geranium* to be more relaxed and more confident (OC I-Self; I-World Table 7). The results from the data-gathering show that the process helped Jeremy so that

he was able to relate to Flor and Grace to seek their companionship in the equine contact context and could choose not to retreat into his own world of anxious thoughts (OC I- Others Table 7).

Imagination

Results of the data-gathering from [SBQs 3, 5, 6,7, 9, 14 MCQ], which invited an anthropomorphic response, showed how the participants enjoyed their relationships with horses using their imaginations as a guide (OC I-Self; I-God Table 7).

Responses included the use of words, “calm” (10), “kind” (6), and “sensitive” (5) to describe the horses’ characters. “Silly” (1) and “difficult” (1) were extra words used that were not suggested in [SBQ3 MCQ]. “As a friend” is used seventeen times in response to [SBQ5 MCQ] to say how they listened and talked with their horse. Rachel says that: she and her horse *“do not always see ‘eye-to-eye’ but we love each other so we manage”* [SBQ6 MCQ]. Eloise says that: *“I feel like when I’m upset being with my horse makes me feel happy and like the horse really knows how I feel.”* [SBQ7 MCQ]. “Joy” (10), “kindness”, “friendliness” (9), “happiness” (8) as well as “impatience” (5) and “curiosity” (4) were chosen to describe emotions and personality traits in their horses. “Fear” (2), “crossness” (1) and “resistance” (1) were also noted [SBQ9 MCQ].

Sophia mentioned that she would wait to see how a new person behaved around her horse before she thought about offering friendship (FGD2 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompts 12,13). The non-verbal quality of the horse (Mickelsson 2019, 3; Adam et al. 2015, 66; White-Lewis 2019, 2; Hemingway 2020), meant that Sophia had to think about how the horse was responding and why. She was using the responses of her horse which

she judged in an anthropomorphic way to help her decide how she would react to a possible new friend.

Results from relating in an imaginative and anthropomorphic way produced expressions of love, friendliness, kindness, comfort, happiness, relaxation, joy, and confidence building, and through these experiences and the remembrances of them, a relational consciousness or meta-cognitive reflective approach towards awareness of self, others, and the world.

Often, anthropomorphism is used to humanize the human-horse relationship (Kirrilly 2019). There is an argument for this activity as it can serve to aid healing a person's hurt as part of a wider plan involving mirroring emotions, framing a metaphor, the preverbal experience, and healthy touch in what is called "Winnicott's holding environment" (Fleetwood 2016, 23-26). Participants responded to say that they observe emotions and personality traits in their horses [SBQs 3-7, 9 MCQ]. Certain participants expressed how they were sure that their horse knew how they were feeling and that they were helped by this. Others talked about their ponies as people. Use of the imagination to build relationship could serve to translate from human-horse interactions to human-human interactions and perhaps human connections to the Divine (Hay and Nye 2006, 119-24; Chi-Kin Lee 2022).

A sense of mystery was apparent amongst the participants when they are with a horse. The words "awestruck" (4) and "fascinated" (7) "curious" (1) [SBQ2 MCQ] were chosen to say how the participants felt when they looked at a horse and "curiosity" (4) [SBQ13 MCQ] was used to describe how the participants felt when they were with their horse. Mystery-sensing (Hay and Nye 2006, 71-74) is when we experience awe and

wonder. Questioning and being curious is part of wanting to find out and imagination can be part of that process.

Jamal was thrilled to gain insight into the world of horses through his reading. He had thought about the story of *Black Beauty* and understood how the writer had written from the point of view of the horse (use of the anthropomorphic), and he thought that this was “good” because it helped us understand that horses feel pain (FGD4 Flip Chart Prompt 10).

Prince also understood that the story of *Black Beauty* was written from the point of view of the horse and when Marigold mentioned the horses being “trapped” in a carriage harness, Prince said, “*I do not like being trapped myself.*” His imaginative response was similar to Gerry’s imagining of his horse saying when he got to heaven that “*he did not understand why he was kept in a house.*” [SBQ15 OEQ]. Prince watched the “bearing rein” scene of the *Black Beauty* video (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 10; Appendix E PPT5) and Gerry remarked, “*I don’t get why he was getting madder and madder and madder. I didn’t get why they . . . Why was the woman making them go tighter and tighter?*” Charles joined in, equally concerned: “*Well, because they put it tighter and tighter, but then they wanted to try and loosen it. And that’s why they, that’s when they were at their maddest, and it stops you kind of breathing.*” He agreed with his brother and friend, “*Sad. It was cruel. Being on the ground. And then it just calmed down and listened.*”

When I explained that it was a fashionable way of showing off horses in the early Victorian times and that the action brings up the head and tightens the back, Gerry remarked that it was “sad” and “cruel”, imagining how he would react in the

circumstances, had he been there. The whole group responded with dismay and concern at the thought of a “bearing rein” being used (OC I-Others; I-World Table 7).

Charles was interested in how the first horse had been created or evolved (FGD4: Table 4, Flip Chart Prompts 1, 2). He expressed the process using his imagination to explain to the group how it had “*all started a long time ago.*” As we moved on to other prompt questions, Charles stayed with his own thinking and even though some of his fellow participants did not agree with him and chose to argue the evolutionary route, he proceeded with a monologue of the “*first horse*”, going backwards to explain where his foal had come from and where the foal’s mother had come from. He vocalized his imaginative and wondering quest for an answer for as long as anyone would listen. It seemed to be his way of expressing his dawning realization of the possibility of infinity.

Prince responded to the final prompt in the focus-group discussion which asked whether anyone could talk about how they had personally been affected by horses by telling of his experience in the New Forest where he witnessed a herd of wild ponies running.

Grace’s imaginative response as to how and why we can be close to horses and have mutual understanding occurred where she explained how she thought it happened: “*almost as if a horse swallowed a human*” (FGD5 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 17; OC I-God Table 7).

Relationships

Sophia explained how she would wait to see how a stranger would treat her horse before she would think about them as a friend, indicating that she took her horse's viewpoint seriously (FCD2 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompts 12, 13).

Rachel said that she felt protective towards others when with her horse [SBQ10 MCQ]. Other responses to this question included “kindly” (13), “carefully” (9), “trustingly”, “calmly”, and “suspiciously” (2). These results show that participants were aware of others and themselves and the wider world when in an equine contact situation and that they understood the need for care and thoughtfulness towards others (OC I-Self; I-Others; I-World Table 7).

After watching the Mongolian Archery riders (Appendix E PPP4) together, Jamal mentioned that he had done archery once himself and that his father was going to do some more with him. Angel joined in to say that his father did archery with him regularly and he expressed admiration for the way that the Mongolian archery riders were riding and practising their art at the same time, *“turning round trying to shoot another. It is hard enough to try to shoot my dad's hunter bow!”* There was a moment of tension as Jamal listened. Whilst looking at different types of work which horses did (FGD3 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompts 9,11), Jamal pointed out the armed policeman on horseback in Lesotho, Southern Africa. He noted that he had carved out a tank on the bar of soap (Appendix S Figure 17) which was included in the shoebox craft materials, and we talked about how the tank can be the modern substitute for the horse in warfare today. Jamal and Angel came from different cultural backgrounds and yet they had met each other at the workshop because of a shared interest in horses. Whereas Jamal was bookish, (for

example, he remarked that “*it is Black Beauty the horse who is speaking in the film, that is, the story is told from the horse’s point of view*”), was interested in the history and mechanics of warfare, Angel was more focused on horses and people and demonstrated a sensitivity to atmosphere. In discussing how horses get along with each other, Angel said that it was “*pretty much like humans in how they get along.*” (FGD3 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 1) Angel carved a sun with beams of light shooting out from it on his bar of soap to express how he feels about his life with horses [SBQ18 OEQ]. It would have been very interesting to see a relationship developing over time between the boys but that was not possible.

Jeremy benefited from his relationship with *Geranium* and learned how to see beyond himself, to become aware not only of his own fear and anxiety, but also that he need not be that way, and how he can use his self-awareness to understand how another might be feeling. He related as a friend to both Flor and to Grace in the equine contact session and offered to work together with the pony (OC I-Self; I-Others Table 7).

Gerry and Charles talked about their foal and how they had been watching her grow up. Gerry explained how friendly his foal *Whiskey* is and how she lets them give her hugs. “*She actually lets us give her a hug for a minute. Oh, yeah. Yeah.*”

Bella, Sheila, Sophia, and Romana expressed their pleasure and joy in relating to their horses and each other and their families in the equine environment on a weekly if not almost daily basis.

Importance of Friendship

Friendship is important to the selected children as they express how it plays a part in the relationships with horses and with others around them. “Friendship” is used thirteen times in response to [SBQ4 MCQ] to describe the participants’ strongest memories with their horse. “As a friend” is used seventeen times in response to [SBQ5 MCQ] to say how they listened and talked with their horse. In response to [SBQ14 MCQ], the word “friendship” is chosen fourteen times to describe how a relationship with a horse could help a young person. Charles said, *“If you’re lonely, they might make you feel better”* (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 18; OC I-God Table 7).

Intimacy

Eloise, Marigold, and Apple shared not only a home-schooling culture of intimacy and experience, but they also enjoyed their horses together. Marigold and Apple both said how much they loved riding their horses in the forest, and they said that this was peaceful and calm (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 18), and they spoke of their horses with warmth and thankfulness [SBQs 4, 5, 13 MCQ] Results from the data-gathering showed how spending time together with a purpose and tackling challenges together could facilitate an intimacy in their friendships with each other, the horses, and with other people around them, including their families.

Results from the shoebox questionnaire and the focus-group discussion showed how Bella, Sheila, Sophia, and Romana shared their love of horses and how their friendships had grown. During the morning session, Sophia was eager to complete the workshop tasks so that she could go and be with the pony in the next door field and just

be with him. All of the participants were most interested in being with the ponies and talking about them and discussing their characters. The participants went as soon as they could to be near the horses, give them a hug and brush their manes. The physical touch was natural and joyful.

Gerry and Charles were intimately involved with how their foal was growing up with its mother. They talked intensely about the weaning process which they were witnessing. The boys had lost their own mother not long before and there was a poignancy in their observations with the foal and its mother (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompts 12, 13).

Grace drew a girl with very long arms stretching out around her horse's neck. The horse was leaning into the girl with its head against the girl, who looked like Grace. Grace said that this was her with her horse. Lots of blue marker pen hearts bubbled up from where the girl's head and the horse's head were touching [SBQ17 OEQ]. It is a scene of intimacy and trust.



ILL1 [02-12-23 Grace's Response \[SBQ 17\]](#)

Humans need physical touch (Alford 2017). Buber writes about his own childhood experiences of touch with his grandfather's farm horse and how he was enthralled by the vitality of the horse's mane (Buber 2000). Horses can provide a warm

and large physical presence which is not threatening, and which invites intimacy (White-Lewis 2019; Hemingway 2020). The physical experience with horses could lead to further mental and emotional intimacy, perhaps bringing healing.

I met Jeremy a few weeks later at the stables. He was having his weekly riding and ‘care of the horses’ lesson. It was my job to lead his horse *Geranium* around the ring and to help him if he needed it. Here follows a reflection on what happened that morning and how the horse’s warmth and large presence (she was a big horse!), coupled with her gentleness, helped Jeremy.

Jeremy and *Geranium*: A Reflection

The following is an account of an apparent emerging trust and respect between Jeremy and the horse without spoken human language being the main focus of communication.

He walked *Geranium* out to the arena, appearing hyperactive and lacking in concentration. He was eager to learn, but his rushing about in all directions did not help him to focus and to absorb the coaching. *Geranium* was responding negatively to Jeremy because he was keeping a tight hold on her reins, which was making her jumpy and headstrong. Susan, the coach, quietly gave instructions. The ride got more challenging as Jeremy continued to push and pull. It was evident that this was because of his nervousness and lack of understanding—both of which could be addressed in time. Jeremy asked repeatedly if he could ride by himself at a trot, but Susan was reluctant. Jeremy also requested to do ‘round the world’ (an exercise in the saddle where the person moves their body 360° using their legs and arms), but Susan said it would be best to wait for another time. Finally, Jeremy dismounted by flinging himself off and away from the

horse. Susan directed him back to *Geranium* and instructed him to keep hold of the reins and to pay attention to his mount. This time Jeremy was responsive to these instructions. He stood in front of *Geranium* and gave her a big hug around her neck for a few minutes, all the while murmuring into her neck what a lovely girl she was and how warm she was. He asked to take *Geranium* into the stables, where he became absorbed in untacking *Geranium* and looking after her. I heard him talking to Kitty, who was helping him, asking politely, “*Please hold this for me for a minute.*” It seemed that Jeremy had calmed down and was concentrating, and he had found a way to be on the same wavelength with the horse and with others around him too (OC I-Self; I-Others; I-World; I-God Table 7).

Trust

The data-gathering results showed that some participants, when with a horse, viewed others around them trustingly [SBQ10 MCQ].

Topaz began the morning in a subdued and nervous manner but by the end of the session had decided to trust those around her and with the help of her fellow participants and *Cherub* in the equine contact session, she did listen and speak and engage.

A group of six participants got to know each other and helped each other with the equine contact session at the very beginning. Trust developed and this meant that there was a good discussion in the focus-group discussion with everyone engaging on some level and talking about their responses and ideas. The equine contact had opened a way for this to be possible.

Marigold pondered on the story of *The Horse and His Boy* (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 14; Appendix E PPT7). As the conversation centred on why *Bree* did not

wish Shasta to use the reins, she thought, *“Because the horse doesn’t want him to touch him, the horse. The horse wanted the person to trust him without. Without holding him. It’s like he has to trust the horse not to . . .”*. She said that throughout the story, *Bree* helps the boy to trust people. In this instance, imagination helped the reader to think about trust in the wider context; the implicit understanding was that trust was a good thing. Marigold also accepted that horses could help in this way. Apple agreed saying, *“I used to be scared, but now I trust them.”* Marigold continued by telling of the time that she had first ridden *Edwina* who is her grandmother’s horse. She was scared but that feeling soon disappeared as she learned how to trust.

Two more participants recounted stories of how they had experienced this happening.

Prince had a similar experience first riding a horse and expressed his wonder at the process, *“Sort of . . . not physically. So, the first time I ever rode a horse, I just felt a lot more comfortable than I used to be. I just trusted in the horse, and it just did. Everything. Even the slightest little tug. It just obeyed me. So yeah, I just... yeah, it’s hard to explain”* (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 16).

Angel talked about riding his horse *Brian* and how he felt immediately that he could trust the horse *“You could say, um . . . the first time I got on Brian, he was not messing about and not putting his head around, and he walked round the ring and did as he was told.”* He says that this helped him know that *“I could trust a horse.”* (FGD3 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 15)

Sophia was adamant that she would not trust a new person until she had seen how they would treat her horse and then she would decide (FGD2 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 16).

I met Jamal and Maryam at N_Riding School a few weeks later with their mother and siblings as they had come for a riding lesson. Both Jamal and Maryam lingered and spent time with me to discuss further the books which they had been enjoying. The surprising thing to me was how open the brother and sister were as opposed to when they had been at the workshop where there was a reticence and a seeming lack of trust. In the chance meeting together at the stables the awkwardness was not present. Looking back, perhaps it was the link with the horses and the experience which we had had together talking about them and working with them in the equine contact session that had paved the way for further more lively conversation about their experiences with horses (OC I- Others; I-World Table 7).

Grace joined in with the equine contact session enthusiastically and without hesitation, finding herself in a strange environment made more comfortable with equine contact she was able to relax and to trust.

However, Grace's workshop companion Flor was not able to bridge that gap to trust with those she did not know. Even though others welcomed her in, she decided to leave the workshop early. Flor felt able to voice her discomfort and to ask to leave the workshop.

Intimacy and Trust

Topaz describes herself as being "*able to be herself in her anxious thoughts with her horse*" [SBQ5 MCQ]. Here, the participant can be herself with no pretence. There is

a degree of intimacy in the relationship which makes this possible and trust can be built on this basis. Moses describes how he knows that horses “*help you a lot*” [SBQ17 OEQ]; this denotes a recognition of need and a trust. Grace reports that she feels “*loved and at ease*” [SBQ2 MCQ]; Rachel comments that, “*We don’t always see eye to eye, but we love each other, so we manage*” [SBQs 6 MCQ, 17 OEQ]. Rachel made a pink clay horse’s head in response “to show how she saw horses working today.” [SBQ11 OEQ].



ILL2 [19-08-23 Rachel's Response \[SBQ 11\]](#)

Angel made a carving, which he explained was of “a sun”, in the soap bar which was among the craft materials in the shoebox to “show how he felt about his life with horses” [SBQ18].



ILL3 [28-10-23 Angel's Response \[SBQ 18\]](#)

Prince drew a pencil scene of hills and trees to “show how he felt about his life with horses” [SBQ18].



ILL4 [04-11-23 Prince's Response \[SBQ 18\]](#)

Jeremy completed his art responses by crafting a horse's head in clay to "show how he felt about his life with horses." [SBQ18] He made a horse's head in black clay, and he spent time and care making the yellow mane out of pipe cleaner fluff which he cut off the pipe cleaners found in his shoebox.



ILL5 [02-12-23 Jeremy's Response Horsehead \[SBQ 18\]](#)

The expressive paintings and sketches and sculptures speak out as they depict space for joy and delight and relationship with imagination, intimacy, and trust as the participants find their way along the process, relating to Creator God, to others, and to themselves.

Summary of Integrated Responses to Research Question 2

Space (and time) in the equine environment helped the participants to experience the on-going process of building relationships with their horses and with others. Their remembering and retelling of half-forgotten existentialia through the back and forth and their self-reflection of this process resulted in lived experiences of comfort, helping another, joining in, being courageous and having fun, wonder, personal effort, sadness, reflecting on life and death, fearful events and being anxious which became part of the process of getting to know another (either person or horse in this case) more intimately and learning how to trust themselves and others, becoming more aware of themselves, others, and the spiritual also.

Research Question 3

Could selected children be enabled through equine contact where the criteria of S.P.I.R.I.T. are implemented to achieve *some* transcendence of difficulty and *some* capacity to meet challenges positively?

“Working with a horse is a good thing to do as a young person, as you have to learn to communicate with someone who can’t speak your language or can’t speak at all” [SBQ14 MCQ] Eloise

“They help you a lot” (FGD1 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 18) Moses

“Young people can learn through being with a horse by “doing a lot of things if they try” [SBQ17 OEQ] Bella

“I knew I could trust the horse” (FGD3 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 18) Angel

As I looked through the data again to see if there were any stories of transcendence difficulties and meeting challenges positively which I had missed, I began

to revisit the now familiar situations which the selected children had shared. I cataloged the names and what they had said, and I applied a theme to each happening. I began to write the name, the event, and the themes side by side: Each time I thought as I wrote, the word “fear” came to mind. Applied to each participant, fear was a major factor in their responses and “freedom from that fear” or at least *some* release was evident as they explained to the group what had happened to them.

Jeremy

Jeremy had been afraid of horses but when he got to know *Geranium*, he realized how gentle and comforting she was, and he felt that he was friends with her. He came each week into the “holding environment” (Fleetwood 2016, 23-26) with the horses at the riding school and he enjoyed the mental and physical space, the process of each week, the use of his imagination in his friendship with his horse, the relationship with *Geranium*, a chance for a certain intimacy without fear, a safe touch, and trust developing. Jeremy went on to not only meet this challenge of his fear, but he also used the experience to help him transcend his difficulty and to turn his new understanding into something positive for others around him. He reached out to ask his fellow workshop participants if they would like to join him and he was comfortable just being himself and sharing what he knew about horses. It was apparent that Jeremy still struggled with anxiety on other levels but this event in his life was something that he was pleased about and happy to have the memory to draw upon, should he need it, of *some* transcendence of difficulty and *some* capacity to meet challenges.

Eloise

Eloise described how scared she was the first time she got up on a horse, especially as it seemed to be a much bigger horse than those ridden by her companions. Nevertheless she relaxed and found that she was able to keep going and ride. She mentioned feelings of anxiety and that she could gain confidence from her horse and feel that was able to not be so afraid. She said that she thinks that the horse can understand her and that makes her happy. She recognizes that she is not alone in her own difficulties and that others around her have challenges also. Again, the space, the process, the imaginative use of anthropomorphism in the relationship leading to intimacy and acceptance and understanding of herself and a degree of trust in herself which she displayed as she talked about the adventures with horses which she and her friends and her brother had together were part of how she was flourishing. She concludes that being with a horse and having to learn how to get along without spoken communication is a good thing for young people to do as it brings trust, joy, curiosity, understanding, working together, friendship, care, and kindness [SBQs 10, 13,14 MCQ].

Prince

Prince hesitates before responding to the question as to whether anyone has been helped by a horse (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart 18). He begins quietly but gathers momentum to tell his story of how afraid he was to get up on a horse. He explains that almost immediately he could relax and be at home in the saddle and that this experience was a wonderful thing and that he still could not really understand it. Since that time Prince has planned to own a Suffolk Punch heavy breed of horse and thinks that this will be a great opportunity, should he manage it when he is older. Through that experience of

overcoming his fear Prince has developed in confidence and is looking forward to the next challenge. He has been open and without fear in his sharing to people around him, most of whom he just met on the day of the workshop. The equine contact session (space) was a good way for him and the group to get to know each other a little (and relate) with each other and with the ponies.

Angel

Flip Chart Prompt 18 asked whether and how anyone had been affected by horses in their lives. Angel responded to say that he had been afraid to get up on his horse *Brian* at first but after he gathered courage to do so, he was surprised at how comfortable he felt, and he was glad that *Brian* listened to him as Angel asked him to turn or slow down for example. Angel had had space and time in the process to get to know his horse and the result was that he had learned how to trust his horse and himself.

Bella

Bella suffered from dyslexia and found it hard to read and write. One of the first things that I heard about Bella was that she had recently published a children's book about a ladybird. Bella was very pleased with this achievement and talked about her dyslexia and how she was glad to have finished the book despite the difficulties. With support from her parents and her school and, with her horse helping her to learn also, she trusted herself. With the space and time available, the chance to imagine and to gain intimacy helped her in the writing process. She had journeyed from a being a young student with little confidence academically to being a published author. She had left behind the fear of failure and had been able to transcend her physical difficulty and to

gain *some* capacity to meet her challenges. Bella was enthusiastic about her life with horses and implied that she drew strength and comfort from her horse.

Moses

Moses spends most days with his pony now. At the workshop Moses responded to (Flip Chart Prompt 18) by saying that “*They help you a lot,*” meaning the horses. He did not say much in the group but listened and had some questions. He joined in and tried to answer the questionnaire himself. In the focus-group discussion we were all talking about how horses have helped us. There were two mothers present also, and they asked if they could join in. It was a largish group and when I turned to Moses to ask him if he would like to add his story, he declined. I could see that he was uncomfortable and quite shy. There was an awkward pause and then one of the mothers very gently asked Moses if he would mind if the researcher told a bit of his story herself. Moses and I have known each other for quite a while, but I was unsure of how he would react to this request, and I waited. After a moment, Moses said that that would be fine. He was brave in the face of real discomfort and insecurity, and he was able to overcome his anxiety-based fear of being noticed. The space and time and the opportunity to go through two years of riding and pony care with the chance to imagine, relate to a pony, be involved and feel part of the regular weekly group there at the riding school, with lessons in trust each time, had made the difference for him that day. Moses drew and painted a picture of his horse to “show how he felt about his life with horses.”



ILL6 [19-08-23 Moses's Response \[SBO 18\]](#)

Summary of Integrated Responses to Research Question 3

The criteria of S.P.I.R.I.T. were evident in the participants' responses concerning their lives with horses, their memories of being with their horse, the use of the anthropomorphic to imagine their relationship with their horse and for that process to realise their emotions and feelings (Hemingway 2020; White-Lewis 2019; Fleetwood 2016), particularly concerning being afraid and overcoming that fear, leading to intimacy and trust with their horse and with others (Burgon 2011; Adams et al. 2015; Escobar 2019; Eller 2019; White-Lewis 2019) leading to confidence levels rising, courage in difficult situations, empathetic responses, a self-reflective approach to problems (Haig and Skinner 2022; Mickelsson 2019; Pendry et al. 2014; Burgon 2011) and this showed that *some* transcendence of difficulty and *some* capacity to meet challenges positively occurred for selected children.

Research Question 4

What kinds of experiences with horses did selected children have which could help them spiritually?

"Yes, ", he responded, pencilling hearts like bubbles which come out of text messages on the smartphone which he said showed horses having souls. [SBQ16 OEQ] Gerry.



ILL7 04-11-23 Gerry's Response [SBQ 16]

“You know that they are in themselves and have feelings.” (FGD5 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 17) Jeremy.

“I just like horses. ‘Cos they’re friendly. Nice. Yeah. And then their noses are comforting and soft.” (FGD5 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 18) Grace

Listening to and Helping Others

Rachel and her mother had taken a trip across the United States recently and they had met a “*real-life cowboy*” on their journey. Rachel told the group how she listened to the man’s tales of the rodeo and how he had been injured so many times. Rachel was intrigued by his stories and wondered about how it would be to live like that. She loved hearing about the horses that he rode and all his adventures. It was a spark to her imagination (FGD1), and the experience encouraged her to think beyond her own frame of reference to consider another person and their life (OC I-God Table 7).

The empathy that Rachel exhibited towards the cowboy who was suffering from his injuries showed in other ways: She was empathetic towards Topaz and her selectively mute stance and worked to help the situation; she also shared about her horse who had been mistreated and was unhappy and she talked about how she had been able to help him by spending time with him and looking after him. It gave Rachel satisfaction to know that she was able to make a difference for her horse (OC I-God Table 7) .

Falling Off and Getting Back On

Sheila illustrated her “falling off” experience in response to [SBQ18 OEQ] and she explained in detail how her pony had waited and encouraged her and helped her to get up and get on his back again:



ILL8 [26-08-23 Sheila's Response \[SBQ 18\]](#)

“The first time I was helped by a horse, I was with Little John. I fell off, he came over to me and tried picking me up. I said, “Little John, you can’t pick me up,” but he sort of helped me get up and kind of gave me a hug . . . so sweet. Then we became friends. Then he, Little John, was kind of saying, “You alright, you okay?” Kind of like a parent, “You alright, you okay?” (FGD2 Table 4, Flip Chart 14; OC I-God Table 7).

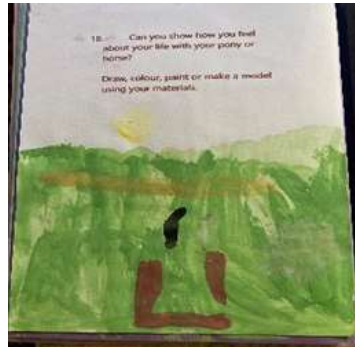
Bella also recounted how she fell off for the first time and how her pony waited for her.



ILL9 [26-08-23 Bella's Response \[SBQ 18\]](#)

She expressed happiness at this memory and exhibited perhaps a spiritual signature or core spirituality of a sense of adventure and courage (Hay and Nye 2006, 97-99; OC I-God Table 7).

Romana painted a picture and explained that it was of herself having fallen off her pony and her pony waiting for her. She recounted how she cried, but her pony helped her.



ILL10 [26-08-23 Romana's Response \[SBQ 18\]](#)

Her spiritual signature could be one of practicality with an accompanying language of resourcefulness, indicating the fruits of the Spirit of patience, faithfulness, and self-control (OC I-God Table 7).

Just Riding

Using a dark red burgundy felt tip pen to show herself galloping on her horse, Sophia exhibited a core spirituality of a sense of adventure and communicated using language of enthusiasm which suggest the fruits of the Spirit of love and joy (OC I-God Table 7).



ILL11 [26-08-23 Sophia's Response \[SBQ 18\]](#)

Angel's first ride on his horse was instructive for him as he did not know if he could trust *Brian* to listen to him. Angel described in detail how he was surprised to find out that his horse did listen and that they could have good communication (FGD3 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 16) and Prince also described how he had been nervous riding for the first time and how it had been a such a surprise to feel so comfortable and being able to trust on the horse (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 16; OC I-God Table 7).

Both Marigold and Apple expressed joy and happiness at being able to ride on their ponies through the forest. They commented on the peacefulness of the natural environment and their appreciation of actually being able to do such a thing. Apple said that she was able to think and when asked what she thought about, she answered: "*Everything.*" (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 16) (OC I-God Table 7).

Reading

Jamal enjoyed talking about the books which he had read about horses. Specifically, he gave a synopsis of *The Horse and His Boy*, and he talked about his reactions to the story of *Black Beauty*. He liked the fact that *Bree* and *Shasta* could talk together, and he loved their adventures. He was fascinated by the cat and how it was also the lion and after the focus-group discussion he was happy to tell me his thoughts (Individual Conversation; OC I-God Table 7).

Beauty

Love of beauty was a core spirituality for Maryam as she contemplated the wonder of the horse and how it looked. She reacted with concern and dislike to the scenes depicted in the film of *Black Beauty* where *Ginger* was being mistreated (FGD3 Table 4,

Flip Chart Prompt 10) and Maryam painted a beautiful pastoral scene to respond to [SBQ18 OEQ] which invited artwork to explain how the participants felt about their life with horses.

Pastoral scenes of safety, peace, and abundance showed how the participants value these types of experiences and indicated that they are able to access such kinds of experiences with horses. Jamal described his picture as giving hay to the horses in their field. Maryam said that her picture showed beauty (OC I-God Table 7)



ILL12 [28-10-23_Jamal's_Response_\[SBQ_18\]](#)



ILL13 [28-10-23_Maryam's_Response_\[SBQ_18\]](#)

Wonder

Prince described an experience which he had recently where he was in the New Forest, in Southern England, climbing trees by himself. He had climbed quite high and suddenly he heard a huge noise of rumbling and looked down in time to see a herd of wild ponies running beneath the tree which started to shake. Prince said that he was full of wonder at this event and had thought about it. He talked about the experience as something to treasure in his memory and he shared it with generosity of spirit. Even as he was retelling the story, his friend Gerry was interrupting him to disagree with him about the ponies being wild. Gerry's contention was that they are semi-wild and looked after by a warden. Prince mildly rejoined by saying, "*that may be but the ponies appeared very wild to me.*" Prince was not offended by his friend but was so caught up in this memory

of his own lived experience that he could transcend the challenge and be assured of his story. Here the sense of wonder and awe was palpable. Prince described his own ongoing questioning with thoughtfulness, showing that he had not dismissed the experience but had incorporated it into his “everyday” (Frechette et al. 2020) to be remembered and to be considered afresh at times (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 18; OC I-God Table 7).

The excitement and satisfaction of watching and being with their foal was foremost in Gerry’s and Charles’ minds as they discussed the lives of the mother and baby together and how they, the twins, enjoyed helping and handling the foal and its mother. They loved the life which they saw—they did not say this out loud, but it was evident in how they talked about how the foal would keep close to its mother and how the weaning process was difficult and how they observed the character of the foal developing. They detected a new cautiousness in the foal as it was going through the weaning process (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 17; OC I-God Table 7).

Prince shared how he had learned more about human and horse emotions through relating to his friends’ foal. He agreed with everyone in the group about understanding. *“We can understand horses and their emotions, and they do understand us”* (FGD4 Table 4; Flip Chart Prompt 17). Furthermore, in conversation concerning the foal which Prince had contact with, he thought, *“They’re not used to seeing humans when they’re first born. Yeah, I would be quite frightened if I were a foal born two minutes ago. I’d be quite scared if I was surrounded by humans.”* Prince concluded, *“They have taught me way more about understanding.”* (OC I-Self; I-Others Table 7).

Relationships

Eloise was passionately involved in the relationships with her horse and other horses that she came into contact with at her riding stables. She talked about not only the horses but the important people in her life: her aunt, her brother, her friends' grandmother, her riding instructors, and the people she met at the riding stables (FGD4; OC I-God Table 7).

Jeremy told of his freedom from the fear that he first experienced; he did not say it, but it was implicit that this had made him aware of others and their fears as he sought to communicate with his fellow participants (EQ5).

Jeremy responded to the question as to whether horses have souls, *"You know that they are in themselves and have feelings."*



ILL14 [02-12-23_Jeremy's_Response_\[SBQ_16\]](#)

He explained that he watched to see how the horses became impatient and angry because they wanted their hay and how they calmed down when they got it: *"Because I sometimes see when the horses get angry. Like, when Eden's angry, she kicks at the gate. So, when I was filling up the hay bags a few weeks ago, she kept kicking at the door until she got some hay."* He said that this showed him that *"there is a person in there."*

Jeremy related that he *"used to be scared of horses,"* but now *"not so much."* He continued, *"It's been helpful, and all the horses have helped me, like, think better and not*

really be scared of animals that much because they're so gentle and kind and they won't, like, bite my hand off like racoons." He explained how he had a frightening experience being bitten by a raccoon. *"I was chased by a raccoon. Quite scary!"* (FGD5 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 18; OC I-Self; I-God Table 7).

Grace agreed with Jeremy that there was a *"person there."* *"Yeah. It's almost like they've swallowed a human. And then the human is kind of turned into the horse, I suppose. 'Cos we know what we feel. And then the horse swallowed us and then we put our feeling into the horse. And then the horse kind of gets the feeling that the human would have. If that's how it goes, if the horse does have feeling."*

Charles drew a picture of a racing horse and jockey to "express his ideas about horses having souls."



ILL15 [04-11-23 Charles's Response \[SBQ 16\]](#)

Likewise Bella's drawing below shows her thoughts on horses and souls.



ILL16 [26-08-23 Bella's Response \[SBQ 16\]](#)

And Eloise's drawing of her horse shows her view of horses and souls too.



ILL17 [04-11-23_Eloise's_Response \[SBQ 16\]](#)

Grace summed it up, *"I just like horses. 'Cos they're friendly. Nice. Yeah. And then their noses are comforting and soft."* (FGD5 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 18; OC I-God Table 7).

Imaginative Thinking and Anthropomorphic Response

The kinds of experiences which could help selected children spiritually are reflected in the imagined responses using the anthropomorphic to *"what they thought their horses would say about life on earth once they finally got to heaven"* [SBQ15 OEQ].

The results show that most of the participants believed that their horses were content and well-cared for in this life and that this thought was encouraging to them. Marigold thought that when her horse finally gets to heaven, he would say, *"It has been a happy one in the field eating the grass, being ridden in the forest, and having a nice place to live"*.

The kinds of ideas imaginatively but also pragmatically expressed in response to [SBQ16 OEQ] that helped selected children spiritually included the chance to simply think about the question and possible responses to it. Most of the participants thought that the horse does have a soul, the implication being that they believed in an afterlife as Bella

and Sheila explained that they believed in reincarnation (FGD2 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 17). Bella said that “*the horse’s soul is the “part of their body that has their ‘nality,’”* [personality—Ed.]

Gerry responded to the question about horses having souls [SBQ16 OEQ] by answering “*Yes*”, and by pencilling hearts like bubbles which come out of text messages on the smartphone as we can see above.

And similarly, Jeremy responded, “*Of course they do. They’re living beings.*” (FGD5 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 2).

Marigold answered by saying, “*Edwina has a kind soul for children and is very gentle.*” She drew a picture of *Edwina*’s head and face as well as *Edwina* in her stable with a hay net.



ILL18 [04-11-23_Marigold's_Response_\[SBQ_16\]](#)

In this way, Marigold thought practically how her grandmother’s horse presented and used the word ‘soul’ to describe the horse’s personality. As another example of how the participants used artwork to express their ideas, Apple responded to the question concerning horses and ponies having souls by painting a pink heart picture and another

smaller heart with what looks like “beams” of small “flames” surrounding it, with the word “love” inscribed.



ILL19 04-11-23 Apple's Response [SBQ 16]

Flor made a model of a red clay heart using red pipe cleaners. Flor did not wish her artwork to be shown but she was happy for me to mention it in the context of representing how she thought about her life with horses.

If we agree that a good way to think about spirituality is “trusting in being” (Hay and Nye 2006, 76), we can go further to say that it is the opposite to cynicism – “holistic spirituality.” The situations and comments discussed in this section concerned with what kinds of experiences can help a selected child spiritually can sit comfortably with one another as they highlight various ways of “trust in being” and of “reaching out towards that mystery which lies outside our control” (Hay and Nye 2006, 78).

The kinds of experiences that the selected children mentioned were holistic in nature. It was not directly voiced that someone could be helped spiritually. However, many of the words chosen and used independently were spiritual (love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness, and patience for example), and echoed the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5: 22-23.

Summary of Integrated Responses to Research Question 4

Everyday contact, taking care of the horse, or relating to other people in the equine environment, listening to and helping and sharing the life together, being out riding in the forest and enjoying the natural world, being confronted with danger out riding and processing what happened and learning from it, enjoying books about horses, wondering and being awed by proximity to horses and appreciating their beauty, having to be courageous and getting back on after falling off, and using the imagination to anthropomorphise and relate further to a horse were among the kinds of experiences which selected children had which helped them spiritually.

Research Question 5

What qualities of the horse did children experience which helped them to become more relationally conscious?

“Whenever I am sad—just whenever—yeah, I can go to the ponies, so I do.”
(FGD1 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 18) Bella

“I feel like I often have a good understanding with my horse, but I don’t always understand everything” [SBQ7 MCQ] Eloise said that she felt “really happy” with her horse. “I feel like, when I’m upset, being with my horse makes me feel happy, and like the horse really knows how I feel.”

Horses are flight or fight animals, i.e. prey animals, which means that they have great sensitivity to atmosphere. A horse will sense not only physical surroundings accurately but also the mood and substance of the surroundings (White-Lewis 2019; Haig and Skinner 2022; Hemingway 2020).

Horses have a very strong herding instinct which means that the horse will seek out relationships within the herd and will want to be with the group (Burgon 2011,167;

Eller 2019, 37), and that in domestic situations, the horse will seek out relationships with humans as a good substitute for their own kind.

Flight or Fight Instinct

As horses are prey animals they have a great sensitivity to atmosphere which means that they can ‘take flight’ when they are frightened or disturbed. The sensitivity is how the selected children experienced this quality of their horses.

Thinking about how horses could help us learn about people and ourselves, Angel said that horses help us to trust ourselves. He responded to the excerpts from *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* (Appendix E PPT8) by pointing out that the horse exhorts the others to “*not give up,*” and adding, “*Asking for help isn’t giving up; it is refusing to give up.*”

Gerry and Charles talked about observing their foal and how sensitive it was to changes in the situation to do with feeding or because of their presence. They noted that the weaning process had resulted in the foal becoming more sensitive and even wary of the surroundings. (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompts 12, 13). The boys learned to look up and out beyond themselves to be aware of the foal and its needs at such a sensitive time. They related consciously and thought about the process they were witnessing, and it led them to ask questions about what it meant and why.

Eloise and her two friends, Marigold and Apple, recounted a story of being out on a ride with her brother and an instructor where her brother’s horse slipped and fell. The instructor became concerned, they explained, as sometimes it was difficult for the horse to be able to get up again (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 10). This occasion had left a strong impression on the girls, and they talked about the need for care and attention but

also for looking after each other and the horses while riding and taking care of the horses in the stable too. They realized that it was important to be alert and to think about others in the group. The girls were more conscious of how one event could affect another in this dramatic situation. They looked around and asked themselves what else could be happening. As a result of their new awareness, they found a young horse which was neglected in a field near their riding stables, and they went to tell a trusted adult who then arranged to have the young horse properly taken care of. They were realizing that there were other lives apart from their own.

Mirroring Emotion

Rachel said that she had got to know her horse very well and that he was better because she had spent time with him, helping him. She did not say but she implied that this experience had helped her also. The horse's sensitivity means that it can feel atmosphere intently and because of this, it can absorb a human's emotion and mirror those feelings back to the person (Fleetwood 2016, 23-26; White-Lewis 2019; Haig and Skinner 2022; Adams et al. 2015). It may be that Rachel's own, perhaps difficult, emotions were mirrored back to her by her horse, and this helped her to think about things and come away feeling happier and helped. She did not say any of this, but my assumption is that this is what happened, and that Rachel explained it in terms of the horse feeling better. It could be argued that Rachel was already naturally empathetic and kind to others. Rachel showed her kindness and concern for the injured cowboy on her train journey, and she also tried to help Topaz to overcome her not wanting to join in. Rachel showed her relational consciousness of the situation in the data-gathering

workshop, and she sought to address it. It is hard to say whether time with her horse had helped her become this way or whether she was naturally disposed.

Bella, Sheila, Sophia, and Romana recounted stories of being comforted and helped by their horses. Romana lived next door to her family's riding stables business. Romana said that "*You live there, and the horse is right there.*" (FGD2 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 15).

Likewise, Sophia acknowledged that she would trust her horse's reactions to someone new to see whether they, the human, could be trusted. Sophia knew about her horse's capacity to sense atmosphere and emotions.

Bella demonstrated a straightforward and sensible approach and whilst she could also speak in a romanticized way about her pony, she was more comfortable being practical and forward-thinking about horses. Her parents were both jockeys and her mother had injured herself badly in a fall so she no longer rode. (Bella chose to describe her horse's character as 'silly', which reflects how people who work with horses tend to view them as rather uncomplicated creatures.) Bella agreed that her horse could be comforting and helpful if she were upset but her expectations were more realistic. She responded positively to the video of *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* (Appendix E PPT8) and reflected on the issue of how her pony helped her by saying, "*whenever I am sad—just whenever—yeah, I can go to the ponies, so I do.*" She also described how her own pony has helped her learn.

Jeremy responded to a discussion about horses being used in hospitals to help by visiting the sick. He suggested that they were used this way, saying, "*Yeah, because it can sense that you're sick or that you're sad.*" (FGD5 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 16)

Jeremy benefited from his understanding of how *Geranium* could help him as he spent more time with the horse, and this is documented in “Jeremy and *Geranium*: A Reflection”. As a result, he was able to exercise some self-control and be aware of his horse and also those working around him with the horse.

Herd Instinct

Angel noted a picture of some wild horses (FGD3 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 12) and how the little ones were in the middle of the herd. He said that he had seen that before and it was the older mares protecting the babies. Angel had a gentleness about him with horses and with those around him. I observed this and wondered if it was a result of Angel growing up with horses or whether he was naturally slow to push himself forward and waited for others. It was an unusual trait for a ten-year-old boy, and it made me think that it could be a result of his family life with horses. A similar quality of stillness was observed in Bella also which may indicate that here horses might be the common factor.

Sheila on her pony *Little John* was behind the rest of the ride – her friends and their ponies. Sheila had got left behind and her pony was not happy. He wanted to be with his friends and so without warning, he began to go at a much faster pace and Sheila fell off. But this was a surprise for Little John, and he waited to see what his mistress would do. Then he walked over to her and nudged her and asked her to get up. No longer frightened but still sore and bruised, Sheila got up and got back on her pony to join the others. The story has been referred to a few times in this paper as it clearly shows courage and determination on the part of the participant, but the story is also a good example of a pony’s herd instinct and what can happen. Sheila mentioned that horses were herd animals, and this was why they would have charged together as depicted in the painting

Scotland Forever! (Figure 7) (FCD2 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 6). Angel (FGD3) and Charles (FGD4) both mentioned the herding instinct which this particular painting strongly shows.

Sophia talked about her pony *Ernest*, and how he had introduced himself over the hedge one day and how Sophia had known that he and she would be friends. Horses are not only relational towards their own kind, but they enjoy human company also. They can gravitate towards humans, wanting to be friends (Adams et al. 2015, 64; White-Lewis, 2019, 5.5; Haig and Skinner 2022). This quality encourages reciprocity and mutual relationships and offers an opportunity to think about these experiences and wonder about them – to develop one’s relational consciousness.

Relative Size and Physicality of the Horse

At first Jeremy was afraid of *Geranium* as she was very big. However, he soon realized that she had a gentle disposition and that she invited friendship. He became more relaxed and grew to love her. Jeremy realized that he could be relaxed unafraid with his horse, and this helped him to become less anxious altogether. He was aware of his ability to think of others and to be mindful of them rather than thinking about himself and he acted upon that in his workshop environment on the day (OC I-Others; I-World; I-God Table 7).

It was apparent to me that certain situations did continue to make Jeremy anxious which were not horse-related. During the final half-hour of the workshop, Jeremy worried about the time and when his father would come to collect him in the car. He kept checking his phone and the relative calmness and consciousness of others disappeared quite quickly as he realized that he must prepare for the next part of the day. Observing

this helped me to understand why his time with *Geranium* had been so beneficial to him as he had found he could relax and think of others rather than worrying.

Warmth

In the encounter with Jeremy and *Geranium* a few weeks after the workshop, he stood in front of *Geranium* in the arena and put his arms around her neck and murmured to her “*how warm she was and what a lovely girl she was.*” The horse’s temperature is a couple of degrees higher than that of a human (99-101 degrees Fahrenheit; 37.2-38.3 degrees Celsius). The body of a horse is large and enveloping and warm and safe, and this is important for children (Adams et al. 2015, 67; Yorke, Adams, and Coady 2015, 12; Fleetwood 2016, 25; Haig and Skinner 2022). The security that comes from being safely able to relate to a calm and large horse which is warm and generous can be freeing. This was apparent for each of the participants with the exception of Flor who could not relax that day. The equine contact sessions were very important to establish this atmosphere of security and hospitality.

Nonverbal

Eloise stated in the [SBQ14 MCQ] that as horses do not have our language we have to learn how to communicate with them differently. The need for communication is what drives the relationship between human and horse. It is possible to understand the horse through certain detailed behaviors—however, the overriding issue is one of relating and being conscious of that relating to ask why and what does it mean to relate to a horse. This can translate into how we think about relating to our fellow human beings.

Topaz told us about her horse who was maltreated and had a very difficult young life. We did not hear from Topaz herself, but her adoptive mother did say how Topaz had had a difficult childhood. For Topaz, being able to relate to a horse which had also been unhappy was helpful to her and she found comfort in the mutual friendship.

I observed that those participants who had not had so much experience were careful in the first instance and moved slowly and respectfully around the animals. The results of the equine contact and the qualities of sensitivity to atmosphere (which could lead to a hasty kick or other anti-social behavior) and nonverbal communicative patterns were that the participants became aware of their limitations with finding ways to ask the horse to do what was needed. They had to find a way to get the horse to move over in the stable, for example, but could not do that roughly using their own strength but had to find a way to work within the limitations of the relationship.

Summary of the Integrated Responses to Research Question 5

The qualities of the horse which selected children experienced and which helped them become more relationally conscious included the fight or flight instinct of which a particularly relevant aspect is that of the mirroring of emotion, the herd instinct of the horse of which a particularly relevant aspect is the natural interest in relating to a human, the relative size and physicality of the horse where the largeness and strength require respectful attention and the greater degree of warmth in the body of a horse adds to the comfort and enjoyment of physical touch, and the nonverbal which necessitates creative and careful communication.

Research Question 6

Which qualities did selected children have which helped them become more relationally conscious through empathetic equine contact?

“Yeah. It’s almost like they’ve swallowed a human. And then the human is kind of turned into the horse, I suppose. ‘Cos we know what we feel. And then the horse swallowed us and then we put our feeling into the horse. And then the horse kind of gets the feeling that the human would have. If that’s how it goes, if the horse does have feeling.” Grace.

(FGD5 Table 4; Flip Chart 17).

Topaz communicated her love and appreciation of her life with horses which alternated between “delight and despair” (Hay and Nye 2006, 74). Her personal quality of a sense of value was in her despairing drawings of her pony’s life on earth [SBQ15 OEQ] (ILLUSTRATION-NO) and also in her joyful countenance during the equine contact session. She used the words “happiness” and “calm” to evaluate her feelings towards her horse [SBQ2 MCQ] and how she viewed her pony’s character [SBQ3 MCQ] and she communicated with her pony both in “friendship” and “anxiously” [SBQ5 MCQ]. There is depth of feeling and emotion in her responses – high and low. There was hope of ultimate goodness (Hay and Nye 2006, 75) which came through Topaz’ contact with horses and her drive to communicate how she was feeling and not be so afraid indicated a yearning for spiritual connection (OC I-God Table 7).

Awareness-sensings are used to categorize the participants’ perceived qualities and show how these helped towards relational consciousness in answer to Research Question 6. Awareness-sensing is subdivided into “here and now”, “tuning”, “flow”, and “focusing”; mystery-sensing is subdivided into “wonder and awe”, and “imagination”;

value-sensing is subdivided into “delight and despair”, “ultimate goodness”, and “meaning” (Hay and Nye 2006, 65-78).

The “sensings” which Hay and Nye use to explain the way they are looking at children’s spirituality which is “trust in being” (76) a holistic spirituality and the opposite of cynicism as a “reaching out towards that mystery which lies outside our control” (78), is helpful. Rather than try to invent something different, I have used their categories and explanations. There is some permeation between the sensings.

Awareness-sensing

Rachel’s sense of awareness enabled her to focus with a “felt-sense” (that is, responding to the earthiness of life with horses as opposed to intellectualising it). She projected her feelings onto her horse and concentrated on its welfare (OC I-World Table 7). She said that she sensed pain and hurt in the horse, and she was happy that she had been able to help him feel better and that he had changed. (FGD1 Table 4, Flip Chart 17). Although this result indicates that Rachel was not yet able to be in touch with her own feelings, the translation into empathy towards others and being concerned for those around her was evident.

Bella’s awareness of the “here and now,” being in the moment, and the practicalities of being with horses showed wisdom and maturity and being able to relate consciously to those around her, to be aware of the importance of that (OC I-Others; I-World Table 7). She said that being around horses and watching how others treat them helped her to understand people more. Her mother had had a fall riding and broken her back and was not able to ride again competitively. This leant a realism to how Bella

talked about horses (OC I-World Table 7). Recently, she had published a children's book about a ladybird, and this was a proud achievement for her as she struggles with dyslexia.

Angel's long-term goal was to become a farrier and to work with horses (OC I-Self Table 7). He had a sense of time and his place in it and did not take his life for granted. He mentioned his father a few times and how he would go and do archery with him. This was a source of pride to Angel. He had a "felt-sense" of awareness which was foundational in how he related to others in that when he understood a situation, he responded thoughtfully (OC I-World Table 7). Angel sensed that his fellow participants did not have experience with horses which he had been "lucky" to have grown up with (OC I-God Table 7), and he waited for them to have first contact but stayed to help if he were needed. After listening to the Bedouin poem (Appendix E PPT1), Angel remarked that the soul of the horse according to the poem is when "*the horses . . . um . . . when they breathe over them.*" (FGD3 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 2) but when I asked him to explain further, he preferred not to.

Like her brother, Stacey had long-term goals. She wanted to be a jockey and ride fast. She did not take her life for granted and was conscious that she had benefited from close proximity to horses all her young life and she expressed thankfulness – she said that she was lucky (FGD3 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 18; OC I-God Table 7). Her "felt-sense" of life was the way that she related to others rather than overly thinking about it, but it was through that assimilation of feeling that Stacey was aware of others and her relationships with them.

Jeremy's awareness of himself and how he had been able to overcome his fear of horses translated into awareness of others and what struggles they might be going

through. Even though he still was coping with anxiety, as was evidenced by his fixation on the time, Jeremy was able to look outside himself and see how he could try to help. During the shoebox questionnaire, he spent a long time fashioning an ornate horse's head using multi-media from the art and craft materials [SBQ18 OEQ]. This showed that he was able "to be in the flow" and settle to concentrate.

Other groups of participants commented on particular Flip Chart Prompts which denoted an awareness-sensing in a shared way: The painting *Scotland Forever!* (Figure 7) generated discussion between Gerry, Charles, Prince, and Marigold. Their shared "felt-sense" of the story was that it was a very sad thing to happen, and they had many questions about why the horses would all run together and why the men could be so brave. Not only was there a "felt-sense" but also there was a value-sensing in that they all agreed it was not a good thing to have happened. There was also mystery-sensing as the participants tried to understand the parameters. Gerry, in his own way was trying to make sense of the carnage that the painting anticipates and was making a joke of it all but found that his companions did not respond to this (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 6) (OC I-World Table 7).

Mystery-sensing

Marigold and her sister Apple both expressed wonder and awe, a mystery-sensing, in the forest riding their ponies and they did not take for granted this experience. Marigold commented on how the natural world around her added to the sense of peace (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 18) and Apple said how she could think about "everything" while out there riding (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 18; OC: I-God Table 7).

A number of the selected children had a sense of mystery. Prince expressed wonder and awe [SBQ2 MCQ] when he looked at a horse. He told of his experience climbing a tree in the forest and how he witnessed the herd of wild ponies beneath him, and he wondered still about that happening and how it could be and how he could have seen it as he did. Prince also talked about the first time he rode and how all his fear went and he “just felt so comfortable and trusting” and he was full of wonder at that memory. Prince was so sure of the profound meaningfulness (sense of value) of his experience that even as Gerry challenged him vigorously and wanted to know where Prince had had experience with the wild horses, he (Prince) was undisturbed. Gerry disputed that the horses which Prince had encountered were really wild, arguing that there were no truly wild horses in England anymore. He asked me to go back to the third page of the flip chart to look again at the Przewalski horses, and he commented that they were truly wild, whereas other more modern breeds had been brought up in captivity and re-released. (The Przewalski has been bred in captivity and re-released also, but we did not have time to go further with the discussion. Prince’s father was present at the workshop, and as a biologist, he was able to give us some more information at the end of the session.) Prince continued on with a mild manner, changing the subject and talking about his desire to own a Suffolk Punch, which is a breed of heavy horse used in England traditionally for farming. He had studied the breed and was very interested in the idea. He was inspired by the beauty of the Suffolk Punch. Prince was questioning and was aware that he did not understand and that there was much to know about (OC I-God Table 7).

Charles wondered at his foal and how it related to its mother and him. He questioned new beginnings and was intrigued by the idea of where the first horse came

from. He expressed this awe and mystery through creating a monologue about the beginnings of the horse, and Charles began to describe how one horse came from another horse, and he continued for several minutes as his brother was speaking: “*Horses come from another horse. Horses come from another horse. And another and another and another, another and another.*” He went on for a long time in the background. “*coming from a horse, which came from another one, which came from another one.*” He spent a few minutes explaining his ideas in this way to himself and to anyone who would listen (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompts 1, 2; Appendix E PPT2; OC I-God Table 7).

Gerry had a sense of mystery also. He talked about his foal and how he was fascinated by the weaning process with the mother and baby. He saw the book *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* (Mackesey 2019) and wanted to communicate his wonder and delight of it to everyone in the room, he found his favorite passages and read it out, not stopping, for everyone to hear (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 15; Appendix E PPT8). And he said, “*Oh, I love this book. I love this book.*” Meanwhile, I introduced the audio of an excerpt from *The Horse and His Boy* (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 14; Appendix E PPT7). After the three-minute listening, Gerry had not seemed to be tuned in at all to *The Horse and His Boy*, and without pausing for breath, said, “*Yes. The mole likes cake.*” He had become completely absorbed and had skipped ahead to the next prompt! Gerry’s enthusiasm was infectious, and Prince began to explain how he had been helped by a horse as the discussion turned to how the horse was helping his companions (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 15).

Gerry thought that they were encouraged to ask for help and Marigold agreed with this: “*That’s like, if you need, you can ask that.*” Gerry continued, “*And at the end,*

'The End' is crossed out. It says, 'Look how far we've come.'” Here the participants used their imaginative capabilities to engage with the question of how a horse could help them and how being helped could encourage them to respond and help others. (OC I-God Table 7).

During the same workshop Eloise and Marigold discussed the Mongolian courtship rituals pictured and wondered what it was all about. Marigold was not even sure whether the woman was sad or happy at the situation (FGD4 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 8). This sense of not knowing but wanting to find meaning is the urge we feel to make sense, to reach out for the unknowable, to try and make it clearer even in our perplexity.

Jamal's mystery-sensing showed in his delight in the unknown but possibly knowable. He was excited about the books he had read and what he had already learned. His imagination helped him to make the leaps of understanding, for example, he had grasped that the cat and the lion in *The Horse and His Boy* (Lewis 1954) were the same (OC I-God Table 7).

Grace had a sense of mystery which was illustrated through her use of imagination. During the final part of the focus group discussion, the group talked about a horse's spirit and whether they have a soul or not (FGD5 Table 4; Flip Chart 17). Grace agreed with Jeremy that there was a “person there.” *“Yeah. It's almost like they've swallowed a human. And then the human is kind of turned into the horse, I suppose. 'Cos we know what we feel. And then the horse swallowed us and then we put our feeling into the horse. And then the horse kind of gets the feeling that the human would have. If that's how it goes, if the horse does have feeling.”* A strategy of ‘philosophizing’ (Hay and Nye

2006,114) helped Grace to think about what the mystery-sensing might mean (OC I-God Table 7).

Grace and Jeremy had a sense of mystery as they shared their thoughts on where the ancient chalk drawings on the English hillsides had originated from. They agreed it might have been some sort of communication ritual (FGD5 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 4).

Value-sensing

Maryam's sense of value as she thought about horses and how they are treated and how *Black Beauty* portrayed cruelty to horses showed a sense of "ultimate goodness" and she communicated this sense through painting and drawing the beauty in the natural world [SBQ18 OEQ].

An example of value-sensing was in the discussion which Jamal and Angel had about the Highland pony carrying a stag on its back to be brought back home for sport and for food (venison). Both boys remarked that the pony was very strong and that this was a useful job to do (FGD3 Table 7, Flip Chart Prompt 9). Jamal and Angel had a point of meeting here as they mused on the topic. Angel mentioned how machines are used to do the work that was done by horses traditionally. Even though they were from very different perspectives, they had found a topic of mutual interest.

Bella, Sheila, Sophia, and Romana expressed high indignation at the cruelty shown to Ginger, a horse in the film of *Black Beauty* (Thompson 1992). Their collective sense of value expressed by a recognition of "ultimate goodness" was unanimous. They related to each other in this retelling and remembering of their individual experiences of

the story of *Black Beauty* and also of the fresh experience at the workshop (FGD2 Table 4, Flip Chart Prompt 10).

Eloise had a strong sense of value about her life with horses and was aware of the possibilities for good and for bad. She mentioned using horses for equine therapy (*“I know that some horse are used for therapy which I think is important”* [SBQ11 MCQ]), showing her awareness of the good possibilities for humans with horses.

Summary of Analysis and Interpretation of the Results

The sub-objectives of this study were to determine whether empathetic equine contact (EEC) could facilitate holistic wellbeing; know how S. P. I. R. I. T (Nye 2009, 41-56) could be a way to experience relational consciousness; explore whether EEC could offer a way through relational consciousness for transcendence; identify what kinds of experiences could help spiritually; determine which qualities of the horse could encourage relational consciousness; and understand which qualities could make it more likely that relational consciousness was experienced as a result of EEC for selected children aged 7-13 years. Analysis and subsequent interpretation of the results was facilitated by the use of looking at children’s Core Spirituality and the ways that could be expressed through language (Hay and Nye 2006, 97-99). The awareness-sensing, mystery-sensing and value-sensing ways of looking at how the selected children responded to the instruments used to elicit data often served to confirm what was somewhat arbitrarily decided upon by me concerning a core spirituality (that is a fundamental spiritual momentum) of the selected child and a spiritual language definition to express the core spirituality or *signature*.

Emergent Themes

During the initial color coding of patterns in the data, themes from the findings emerged into some overlapping but definite categories: Comfort – horses as sensors and healers, being affected and helped by a horse; Love – giving and receiving, fear, freedom from fear, trust, confidence, resilience and transcendence; Emotion – learning and self-learning, humility, vulnerability, and feeling; Peace – seeking peace, being able to think, wonder and awe; Soul – spirituality in the forms of spirit, holiness, soul, shadow and imagination, that is, what we may sense outside of ourselves; and Awareness: self-awareness, other-awareness, empathy, love, communication, relating, friendship and respect. These themes reflected the fruits of the Spirit listed in St Paul’s letter to the Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Summary of Integrated Responses to Research Question 6

The qualities of awareness-sensing: Of being in the “here-and-now,” of tuning into the moment, of flowing with the moment, and of having a “felt-sense” with the horses and with their fellow participants; of mystery-sensing: Of wondering and being in awe, imagining, questioning, being curious and fascinated as they remembered and retold their experiences of mystery and questions with horses; and value-sensing: Of assigning worth, that is either ‘delight’ or ‘despair,’ of knowing “ultimate goodness,” and of seeking meaning (as they responded to the ideas and questions prompted by the shoebox questionnaire and by the focus-group discussion), are qualities of the selected children

which helped them become more relationally conscious through empathetic equine contact.

A summary of the findings is found in Table 8.

Table 8. Research Questions Responses and Summary of Findings

RQ	Responses
1. Could social, mental, and emotional wellbeing result from empathetic contact with Equus and could this lead to greater resilience, confidence, and self-efficacy for a child?	<p>EQ: Confidence levels rose and communication with others around increased.</p> <p>SBQ: Responses showed that the relationships formed with horses were characterised by understanding, kindness, friendship, and teamwork, providing a source of joy, happiness, and personal growth.</p> <p>A: Showed close relationships with horses and indicated how the horse was a place of safety and strength for the participants.</p> <p>FGD: Prompts used were to elicit empathetic responses to horses in various situations. As participants considered their reactions to the prompts, resilience, confidence, and self-efficacy were acknowledged. Most responded to say how they had been helped emotionally, socially, and mentally by a horse.</p> <p>OC: Results under I-Self indicated thankfulness and awareness of how a person fitted into the grander scheme. There was little I-centric thinking.</p>
2. In what ways do space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy, and trust (S.P.I.R.I.T) (Nye 2009, 41-52) encourage relational consciousness, that is awareness of oneself,	<p>EQ: offered a way to be in the moment. This space results in freedom to share and talk and enjoy. This process encouraged imaginative response through use of anthropomorphism and through relating of stories. Relationships, intimacy and trust were able to grow.</p> <p>SBQ: The children's responses showed how being with horses encouraged relational consciousness. They discussed life and horses as being "enjoyable" and "kind" and communicating "as a friend." There was nearly always understanding of horses expressed. There were reports of stronger and happier feelings in body, mind and heart. Emotions in the horse such as "joy" and "kindness" were highlighted. Relationships could be helped</p>

<p>others, and God through relationship?</p>	<p>through “caring.” There were mixed results in discussing horses in heaven and having souls.</p> <p>A: Artwork in response to SBQ16 depicted how the horse might have a soul and what that would mean and artwork in response to SBQ18 recorded some times of crisis with falling off, some times of harmony with paintings of hearts and also sculpture used to show this.</p> <p>FGD: Prompts introduced the horse in real and imaginary situations - war, working, friendships, helping. S.P.I.R.I.T enabled opportunity to confront the topics and to share thoughts and ideas. Awareness, mystery and value sensing were apparent (Hay and Nye 2006, 65-78).</p> <p>IC: Jamal sought time to talk about all the books which he had read where horses were prominent. He exhibited satisfaction and thrill concerning the stories and showed appreciation of his imaginative powers about that which he did not understand.</p> <p>OC: Rachel was vocal about how she has been helped by her horse but also how she now can help others. Bella, Sophia, Romana, and Sheila were concerned about ill treatment of horses and as they acknowledged being helped by their horses, they wished to be able to help in return. Angel and Stacey were aware of their personal opportunities to make a difference. Jamal was also aware of his capabilities as he grew, and he saw his time with horses as facilitating that growth. Prince, Charles, Gerry, Eloise, Marigold, Apple, Jeremy, and Grace likewise looked forward, acknowledging their own transcendence of particular difficulties, and were ready to meet challenges as a result of being with horses. (I-Others; I-World).</p>
<p>3. Could a child be enabled through empathetic equine contact where the criteria of S.P.I.R.I.T are implemented to achieve some transcendence of difficulty</p>	<p>EQ: The children’s responses showed how empathetic equine contact could help transcend difficulties. Jamal relaxed and became talkative which helped him to communicate and feel accepted. Of particular note was the overcoming of fear in nearly all participants in various circumstances.</p> <p>SBQ: Through imagination, intimacy, trust and relationships with horses in shared space and process, the children seemed able to achieve some transcendence of difficulty and positively meet challenges.</p>

<p>and some capacity to meet challenges positively?</p>	<p>A: Sculptures and paintings were created to show how their horses made the participants feel happy. Artwork in response to SBQ18 showed riding, falling off and getting on again, being comforted by their horse, love hearts, pastoral scenes of peace.</p> <p>FGD: Prompts initiated discussion about how horses can suffer and what that may mean for humans. Following on there were responses to how horses help humans. Pain and suffering is relatable, and the participants exhibited empathy, and through this were conscious of their own troubles and how their horse has helped them overcome in some ways and be more able to face difficulty.</p> <p>OC: S.P.I.R.I.T helped Jeremy understand his fear and how being with <i>Geranium</i> had helped him. As a result, he was able to reach out on the day to his companions Flor and Grace (I-Self, I-Others, I-World, I-God). Likewise, Eloise learned not to be afraid, using her imagination (anthropomorphising); she saw that others were having challenges and wanted to help (I-Self, I-Others, I-World, I-God). Prince and Angel explained how they had overcome their fear and with courage had been able to relax with their horses (space, process and trust) and had enjoyed the riding. Prince admitted that he still did not understand how it had happened and was still thinking about it all (I-God). Angel was more pragmatic but still noted that it had happened despite his doubts (I-God). Bella and Moses were afraid of failing – Bella as she struggled to overcome dyslexia and wrote a book, saying how her horse had helped her (relationship, intimacy and trust)(I-Self, I-Others, I-World, I-God) – Moses as he overcame his shyness to allow his experiences to be shared with the group (space, process, relationship and trust ; OC I-Self, I-Others).</p>
<p>4. What kinds of experiences with horses do children have which could help them spiritually?</p>	<p>EQ: Facing fear and overcoming it translated into awareness of others and thankfulness. For Angel and Stacey, their greater experience with horses showed, as they were content to hold back in the group and wait their turn, respecting their colleagues as well as the horses. Rachel related how her confidence had grown. She exhibited self-awareness and empathy towards Topaz as Topaz was explaining how she had been helped by her horse <i>Cosmo</i>.</p> <p>SBQ: “Caring,” “love,” and “understanding” were understood to be helping in relationships. Through developing imagination, intimacy, trust, and relationships with horses in shared space and process, the children seemed able to gain experiences that could</p>

	<p>help them spiritually, such as contemplating the soul nature of horses and expressing care through art.</p> <p>A: Artwork created during the workshops showed times of being comforted with their horses, times of crisis with falling off and getting back on, times of contemplation and wonder, and times of enjoyment and laughter.</p> <p>FGD: The following experiences were related by participants and appeared to lend themselves to spiritual sensing in awareness, mystery, and value (Hay and Nye 2006, 65-78): helping a horse to heal from its abusive past; being able to find a safe place with her horse; being comforted by her horse; being thankful for her life with horses; thrilled at the world of imagination with horses through book and film; gaining courage on a dangerous chairlift; appreciation of beauty in pictures and in reality; being conscious of understanding with horses; communicating in non-verbal ways; being able to think in a forest on horseback; to think better as a result of being with his horse; just to be with the horses.</p> <p>OC: To be more other-centred; to enjoy reaching out to others; to sense mystery; to be resilient after falling off; to understand the need for courage and how horses can help; to face circumstances which require empathy and understanding of justice such as cruelty to toward horses; to know that life with horses brings thankfulness; to be challenged to find ways to communicate non-verbally; to trust and to ask for help; to admit loneliness and know that horses can help; to wonder at horses; to face fears and to gain freedom from fear. (I-God).</p>
5. What qualities of the horse do children experience which help them to become more relationally conscious?	<p>EQ: Being “in the moment,” mirroring emotion, acknowledgment of the person and an empathetic response (Hay and Nye 2006, 65-78; Hauge et al. 2014) are qualities of the horse which invited children to become more relationally conscious.</p> <p>SBQ: “Listening” to the horse was implicit. The children seemed to gain awareness of self and others through experiencing horses’ qualities of kindness, enjoyment, understanding, friendship, and roles in work. Quotes like horses being “calm” and having “joy” help develop relational consciousness.</p> <p>A: Artwork created in the shoebox questionnaire denoted characteristics of nobility, empathy, wonder, beauty, excitement,</p>

	<p>familiarity, love, companionship, and friendship in the participants' horses and the environments represented.</p> <p>FGD: Soul, shadow, and spirit as well as acknowledgement of the afterlife were mentioned in discussion. Beauty of the horse but also the land and nature of which the horse is a part was important to the group. Their comforting abilities, their helping, gentleness, and kindness inspired courage, empathy, and wonder, and precipitated thinking about the closeness of the supernatural and how that can be explored through thinking about how a horse and a person can commune (Holy Communion) and how imagination can be stimulated through, for example, equine contact and through literature. [Overall, the sense of other-worldliness and mystery seemed apparent as a result of engaging with the qualities described above].</p> <p>OC: The following qualities of the horse were perceived by participants, and it could be that these qualities allowed the participants to respond in a relationally conscious way: Horses are prey animals, herd animals, comforters, understanding, all very different (like people), patient, like humans, they get on in varying degrees, simple (not complicated), and we don't have to put our feelings and emotions onto the horse, sensitivity (like the foal being weaned), beings that feel, heightened sensing of the horse, that is, knowing when we are sick or sad.</p>
6. What qualities do children have which help them become more relationally conscious through empathetic equine contact?	<p>EQ: Children are "in the moment," (Hay and Nye 2006, 65-78). Their abilities of awareness sensing (Rachel's response to Topaz, Eloise, Marigold and Apple with the three boys, Prince, Charles and Gerry), mystery sensing (questioning and engagement with children they did not know) from Prince, Gerry, and Charles), and value sensing (readiness to give opinion and know what is good (Hay and Nye 2006, 65-78), were affirmed and encouraged through equine contact.</p> <p>SBQ: The children's responses showed how certain of their own qualities helped develop relational consciousness through horse contact. They seemed to gain awareness of self and others by developing qualities like empathy, friendship, understanding, and care through equine relationships.</p> <p>A: Artwork created during the shoebox questionnaire depicted overflowing love and generosity and desire to commune with</p>

	<p>horses in conjunction with excitement of speed and beauty interspersed with humour and joy, not forgetting the thrill of challenge and acceptance of limitations. These qualities are important for an openness to possibility to grow.</p> <p>FGD: Children are often “in the moment” (Hay and Nye 2006, 66). The participants were honest and transparent during the workshops. Although Topaz, Moses, Maryam, and Flor did not engage in the discussions for different reasons, the remaining participants were eager to join in. The empathy which they displayed at various times usually translated into empathetic responses towards others. Imagination played a part in enabling the flow of discussion. A readiness to trust was mentioned to be a result of time spent with horses for most of the participants, namely, Angel, Rachel, Eloise, Marigold, Apple, and Jeremy. Courage was apparent in some of the responses, and Stacey’s story of the chairlift was an interesting outlier. The participants could synthesise, and this helped to make links between wonder, mystery and reality, be that of a foal or a herd of wild horses as lived experiences, even half-forgotten but uncovered through this exercise. As has been mentioned elsewhere, the participants’ references to their fear, love, trust, and freedom from fear were present, as was that quality of a sense of justice which was highlighted in the discussions surrounding cruelty towards horses. All of these qualities could become part of the process of relational consciousness or spiritual awareness for the participants.</p> <p>OC: The following words and phrases were taken from the observation chart to show the qualities of the participants, either observed only or admitted and observed also. These qualities showed relational consciousness as others were taken into consideration when the participants responded. They can be categorised using the sensing of awareness, mystery and of value (Hay and Nye 2006, 65-78): Sensitivity, generosity, watchfulness, carefulness, confidence, passionate opinion, facing conflicting ideas, awareness of limitations, being reserved but thoughtful, appreciative, thankful, awareness of ability, admittance of fear, gladness to overcome fear, questioning, analysing, self-containment, understanding of need and how that has been filled by horses.</p>
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Summary

I was pleasantly surprised at how the research questions not only fit together as I had designed them but they also lent themselves to being answered consistently and with coherence. Looking for flourishing in confidence, resilience and self-efficacy amongst the selected children, there were connections with the ideals laid out through the implementation of S.P.I.R.I.T and following on from this foundation were glimpses of transcendence and being able to meet challenges.

Probably the hardest research question to find answers to was RQ4, as to which kinds of experiences selected children had with horses which might affect and help them spiritually. It was necessary to be strict in keeping within the framework of relational consciousness as a way to measure with consistency. Responses of awareness, mystery and value sensings demonstrating personal spiritual signatures and the languages which were used to indicate such core spiritualities and the reflective process of participants concerning these experiences showed not only which kinds of experiences helped selected children spiritually but also how this was occurring through remembering and retelling. Responses to research questions 5 and 6 served to confirm how selected children were helped spiritually as some qualities of both child and horse were discussed.

Relationships with horses allowed for understanding and friendship providing a source of joy and happiness enabling personal growth and providing a place of safety and strength; there was evidence of contact with horses affecting selected children holistically, leading to greater resilience, confidence and self-efficacy. The use of anthropomorphism with horses helped selected children to relax and to communicate with their peers and other adults more easily. They were able to transcend difficulties also

as they gained confidence through learning to care for their horses. The criteria of S.P.I.R.I.T applied to the workshop data-gathering events helped many of the selected children to overcome their fears and anxieties as they reached out to their companions with the security of a large and comforting horse between them. Art and craft work was made by most of the participants to express how they felt about their lives with horses: scenes of high emotion, calamity and challenge whilst riding, as well as peaceful depictions of being friends together with a horse showed how the selected children responded very intensely. The kinds of experiences which selected children implicitly indicated as being instrumental in helping them spiritually were making friends with a horse, learning to trust a horse, appreciating the beauty and wonder of horses, reading imaginary books about horses, observing horses together and their behavior, being together with friends and horses, and just riding horses. Qualities of the horse which helped the selected children were those of sensitivity to atmosphere, resulting in emotion being mirrored by the horse, the herd instinct which makes a horse very open to forming relationships with humans as well as with other horses, and nonverbal communication which meant that the selected children had to find other ways of understanding with their horse. Selected children showed their abilities to be in the “flow” to have a “felt-sense” as well as a “wondering and awe” coupled with a sense of worth and ultimate goodness (Hay and Nye 2006, 65) which helped them to engage with horses and to learn from the experience.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“Glimmerings and Tiny Dazzles”

“For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (I Corinthians 13:12, KJV).

Summary of Findings

Through the process of crystallization of responses to the multi-methodologies, glimmerings and tiny dazzles of insight were apparent. A memory or thought was mentioned several times perhaps and expressed in different ways in the artwork responses and in the focus-group discussion responses, for example. The responses were obfuscated by half-forgotten memories which were not always explained or disclosed and the resulting backwards and forwards to find the self-hood (authenticity) of the participant was not clear (Frechette et al. 2020). The summary of findings is necessarily an approximation of what could be known.

Responses to research question 1 show that social, mental and emotional needs were being met for the selected children through spending time with horses. It is worth noting that Flor stayed only for the shoebox questionnaire part of the workshop, but her responses were positive. Confidence levels did rise with equine contact especially and there was an atmosphere of calm and happy busyness in each workshop. Stories of growing more confident, becoming more resilient and gaining self-efficacy were reported by the participants.

The criteria of S.P.I.R.I.T were implemented in the workshops. Responses to research question 2 show that space (and time) allowed the participants to engage with the process at their own pace, using their imagination, relating to each other and to the

horses, providing an opportunity for intimacy and for trust to grow. The participants noted that they had been able to not only grow as they related to others and horses, but they had been able to get over their fear and anxieties to face particular personal challenges. I observed that the selected children were able to reach out to others also and that this happening, several participants explained, was a result of not being so afraid. It is not clear whether all selected children thought this though. The participants showed that they were able to be aware of themselves as they reflected on their experiences and to be aware of others also as they wanted to relate and to be involved. Relational consciousness or spiritual awareness was evident.

Responses to research question 3 show that the selected children were able to relax in the space provided through equine contact (except for Flor), and through imagination (prompted by focus-group prompts particularly), and intimacy and trust in relationships with horses and other people; most talked of how horses had helped them to overcome some difficulties, specifically fear-related, and positively meet challenges.

Responses to research question 4 indicate that for selected children being with a horse, looking after it and riding it as well as learning about horses resulted in spiritual awareness of themselves and others. Facing fear and overcoming it translated into awareness of others and thankfulness. The reports were of positive spiritual experiences of joy, thankfulness, trust, kindness, understanding, healing of both horse and person, overcoming of fear and different challenges, feelings of safety, creativity and resilience.

Research question 5 asks what qualities of the horse do children experience which help them to become more relationally conscious. The sensitivity to atmosphere and the subsequent mirroring of emotion can help children to understand themselves more easily.

All selected children knew that their horse would make them feel better but not all understood why. There was unanimous agreement that horses wanted relationships with humans and the selected participants each had their own stories to tell of their experiences and how they had been helped. The nonverbal communication was talked about by the participants; the consensus was that it was important to understand how to communicate with a horse without speaking, that there was another way of doing things which required patience, creativity, and sensitivity. These kind of results indicated that selected children were operating on a spiritual level, not only physical, but it was not every participant who showed that they understood that or said that they had been able to think it through.

Responses to research question 6 show that selected children were able to exercise their personal qualities of awareness-sensing (of being in the here-and-now, of tuning, of being in the flow, of being focused in felt-sense) of mystery-sensing (of imagination, wondering, questioning and curious), and of value-sensing (of delight and despair, of purpose and meaning, and ultimate goodness) to become more relationally conscious (Hay and Nye 2006, 65). Participants understood that horses help them to feel better and to be better. Spiritual awareness is apparent in selected children in the way that they talk about their lives with horses: the understanding of how horses can help in areas of facing fear, of being kind, of reaching out and helping others, of having confidence, of thinking about things, of being thankful and appreciative, of awareness of both ability and limitations, of questioning and wondering and of being self-controlled and careful.

Perfect Love Casts Out Fear

The objectives of the study outlined in chapter I were to find out how the experience of working with horses could make a difference holistically to selected children, looking at their becoming more relational and more resilient with a view to being able to transcend difficulties and to use their experiences to help others. Tables 9 and 10 which show sub-objectives, research questions, references and the relevant research instruments are found in Appendix S.

I observed relational flourishing in each workshop scenario which was particularly interesting as relating was evident between participants who had not known each other prior to the morning of the data-gathering. The Observation checklist entries for Rachel, Bella, Angel, Stacey, Charles, Marigold, Eloise and Jeremy illustrate this happening (Table 7).

Most of the selected children had their own stories of how they had met fear and how they were able to overcome it or were in the process of overcoming it. Many of the selected children said or implied that they could meet and even transcend their challenges and difficulties because of the strength of love which they had experienced with their horses. Perfect love casteth out fear (1John 4:18 KJV).

God and Creator God and Transcendent Being

By giving opportunity for a child to experience the range of emotions and attributes described in this paper in relationship with another sentient being such as horse, elephant or carabao, where there is no judgement, only acceptance and enjoyment, God will reveal Himself. God left the Construct behind to come to earth and be born a human

so that we could begin to understand a little of who He is and how much He loves us (John 3:16). All around us are His emissaries, the world of nature, the animals, which shout out the Glory of God (Psalm 8).

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to look at empathetic equine contact with a selected cohort of British children aged 7-13 years old, to see how their experiences might facilitate relational consciousness, and to find out if the selected children believed that such contact could encourage resilience and spiritual health and holistic wellbeing.

Critique of Relational Consciousness

Relational Consciousness (Hay and Nye 2006, 109) was used as a framework for the research. The combination of ways in which children's spirituality could be understood became clearer using the sensing categories (Hay and Nye 2006, 65-78), captured through the particular lens of a child's individual signature (Hay and Nye 2006, 93-94, 107) and how that is expressed through their own spiritual language or "dialect" (Hay and Nye 2006, 118-22). This could be facilitated through the Space, Process, Imagination, Relationship, Intimacy and Trust (S. P. I. R. I. T) (Nye 2009, 41) framework, to further understand how spiritual awareness in a child might be categorised under the headings of I-Self, I-Others, I-World, and I-God (Hay and Nye 2006, 109). This framework I found useful, as it helped me to keep referring to what I was looking for: how were the children relating, and was there a consciousness in that relating?

It is evident that applying different approaches such as the sensing modes, the individual signature of a child, the use of a particular spiritual language, and (S. P. I. R. I.

T) could indicate a child's spiritual awareness or relational consciousness using the I- categories.

However, the added dimension of the natural world of the horse permeating the data-gathering workshops gave the process of finding out about children's holistic wellbeing the added possibility of exploring children's spirituality alongside large, powerful, and beautiful creatures which communicate and empathise in non-verbal ways and require a personal, courageous, and human response. The horses not only provided life at the workshops, but they made it possible for some of the children to connect and respond to that life.

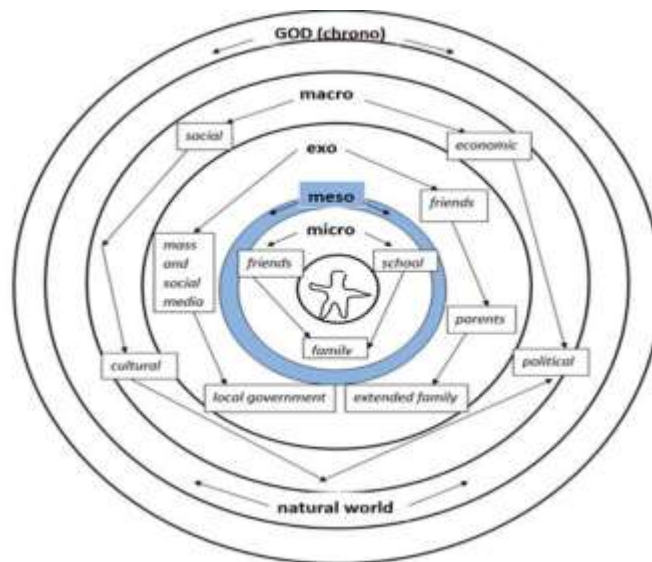


Figure 12. The Natural World (adapted from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model 1979)

Affected Positively and Holistically

Results show that selected children thought that equine contact affected them (and others) positively physically, emotionally, psychologically (mentally), socially, and spiritually, and that they understood how this could help their resilience and holistic wellbeing. From the small sample of participants it appears that empathetic equine contact can facilitate holistic wellbeing.

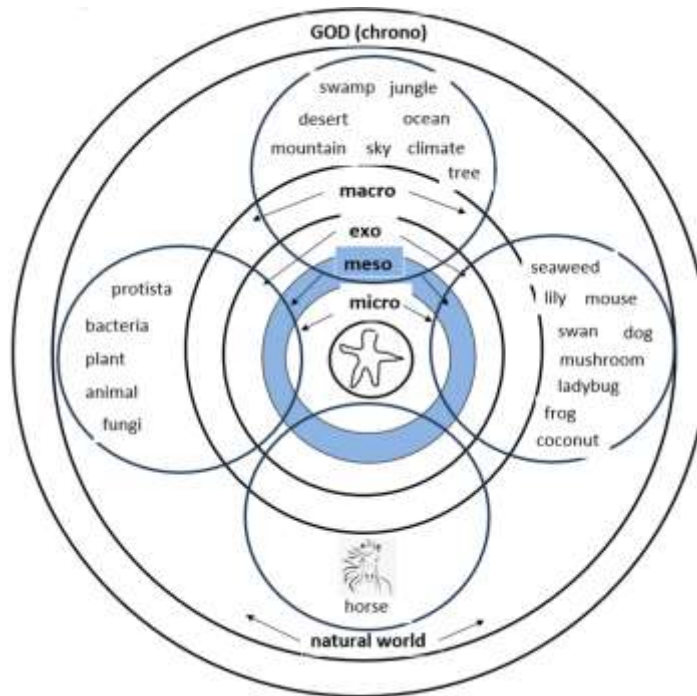


Figure 13. Permeable Connections

The natural world is one place of communing with ‘that which is beyond’ (Psalm 23:1-4; Psalm 12:1-8; Matthew 6: 26-27 and 28-33), and Buber provides an example in the account of his revelatory childhood experience with his horse (Alford 2017). The selected children talked about gaining comfort and friendship from their horses, and some children were sure that horses have a spiritual dimension to their existence which helped them when they needed love and assurance.

Spiritual Expression

A definition of spiritual health could be an awareness not only of oneself and others but also of God or The Transcendent Power leading to the incorporation of life-giving attributes. A definition of holistic wellbeing could be ‘working towards flourishing’ in body, mind, heart, and soul. It was interesting to see how each participant spiritually expressed themselves and how these expressions varied.

Remembering

It is important to hold the results and the themes emerging as a group, coexisting and in comparison, and contrast (Hay and Nye 2006, 114) to illustrate how relational consciousness could be recognized (Hay and Nye 2006, 114; Figure 7). The responses and the individual signatures which became evident were part of the uncovering of forgotten existentialia (Frechette et al. 2020). Relatedly, we are reminded not to forget that we have forgotten (Ellingson 2009, 40), and to be ready to bring that forgetting to the surface once again (Frechette et al. 2020, 3).

Relationship with God

Buber’s work, which stipulates the importance of a spiritual life built on relationship and connection (Buber 2000, 115), is a reminder of how the ‘back and forth’ (Frechette et al. 2020) of interpretative phenomenological research can bring about permeability (Buber 2000, 49) and, with that, approachability. The emergent themes included fear and freedom from fear, love, trust, courage, emotions and feelings, friendship, kindness, awe, and thankfulness, together with questioning and analysis. These responses form a basis of understanding for how individuals can interact with their

experiences of God, other people, the natural world, and themselves. In turn, this helps us to understand how to best provide for our children in their individual and corporate journeys of faith and growth.

Seeking the Ineffable

The human desire is to capture what is ephemeral and to try and express it (Busby 2004, 63). Indeed, it can be said that there is at least a part of our existence which is only relatable in the spiritual realm: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). As parents and carers, we can be conscious of the need to “help our children seek the ineffable” without prescribing. Chesto’s anecdotal account about her two-year-old daughter celebrating communion indicates how easy it is for adults to forget that children “begin life with a sense of the inexpressible mystery” (Catterton 2008, 18-19).

Galatians 5:22-23 says that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. In conclusion, it could be claimed that the above attributes or fruits in Galatians are recorded as being evident for each of the twenty selected participants in greater and lesser quantities. There were glimmerings and tiny dazzles (Ellingson 2009, 29-30; Berryman 2013, 139) of these attributes throughout the sessions which were acknowledged directly or indirectly by the participants. This could be seen as moving towards resilience and holistic wellbeing with the possibility of transcendence.

The topic of spiritual life was almost moot, as there was a shared belief that “Yes, there is that which we cannot see or explain, but we accept it, and we are happy to go

on.” It felt as if the children wondered why I was asking such a thing as whether a horse had a soul, for example. “Of course, didn’t you know?” seemed to be the response on the participants’ faces.

Curiosity

We can learn from this research in three particular ways. Firstly, the selected children who took part in the project exhibited almost a universal desire to know more about being with horses, and they wanted to show what they had understood. They had a curiosity which drew them in to engage.

Agency

Secondly, all the children who participated demonstrated a desire to be trusted and to be able to take responsibility for their choices in how they responded during the equine contact and the workshops. The freedom to decide to engage with a horse positively could build confidence and self-esteem which leads to resilience in relationships (Adams et al. 2015, 62; Burgon 2011, 171; Mickelsson 2019, 2-3; Escobar 2019, 25).

Building Bridges

Thirdly, the joy and love which spilled out from the selected participants towards horses and consequently, others around them, was infectious, and an ease of being together developed for all of us during the workshops. Shared positive experiences help build bridges, enabling not only resilience but also transcendence as it becomes possible to use those built bridges towards dependable and life-giving relationships which encourage and facilitate overcoming.

Recommendations

Discussion of Terms

Equine therapy centers provide therapy within an equine environment on different levels. Sometimes there is an emphasis on helping with social or emotional difficulties or perhaps helping with academic support. A riding stable is usually privately owned and provides opportunities for riding and caring for horses. A riding school can be government or privately owned and is a place of instruction that may provide opportunities for gaining qualifications. In the U.K., these types of provision are sometimes offered in the same establishment. ‘Stable yard’ and ‘riding establishment’ are generic terms. I use the phrase ‘equine therapy center’ as I believe that all communities for riding and horse care have the potential to offer therapeutic experiences to many of us and our children.

Children Who Are Anticipating Working with Horses and Those Already Working with Horses

Building up a core group of relationships with others in the same situation is helpful, as we need to have social and emotional support. Family and friend support is important and can make the difference for a child learning in a riding stable environment. Making good contacts with people who can help and advise is worth taking seriously.

Children and young people who are anticipating working with horses or who are already working with horses should register with the British Horse Society (BHS) in order to access information and have insurance coverage. At the time of this writing, the cost is £5.58 per month. Parents with limited means should ask about grants from the BHS. There are other national equestrian organisations which children can be a part of

such as The Horse Rangers Association (HRA n.d.); The Pony Club (Pony Club n.d.) and the Riding a Dream Academy (The Riding a Dream Academy n.d.).

It is important to have access to the correct personal protective equipment and to wear these whilst riding or working on the ground with horses. The equipment includes a hard hat, proper riding boots with a heel and a protective toe, and a pair of riding gloves. Back protectors are also good to use whilst riding. These are not inexpensive, and it is a good idea to find a riding stable where you can share some of the equipment, at least initially.

To continue on the path of working with horses, a young person can access grant money through the BHS for educational purposes. Various pathways are available to consider, and it is worth being in touch with institutions such as the British Racing School in Newmarket, Suffolk, UK to find out about options in the racing industry. Willingness to work hard and to listen and to put into practice what has been learnt is always advantageous.

Un-Hindering Children's Spirituality

We should be careful not to hinder our children's spiritual growth. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 14 (Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion) addresses the acknowledged tension between allowing the child to choose and giving the parent authority to guide (Marshall and Parvis 2004, 380-81). The Kingdom of Heaven is like a precious pearl (Matthew 13:45), the light of which we should not hide (Matthew 5:15). To ignore the luster of the gospel and its precious 'beyond price' message for our children is to fail them. We should be God's messengers of hope to the next generation. Ennew exhorts us to be vigilant in not neglecting our

children's spirituality in whatever way that might be manifested (Crawford, Miles, and Velazco 2017, 229-32).

Soul Care

Jesus invites us to come to Him: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28, KJV). In Chapter I, the problem of disconnectedness in young people was outlined. We cannot separate our own adult dysfunction and delinquency from that of our children. We can all come to Him for rest and for healing. The role of the church in the care of families is essential. The message of "the child in the midst," which is the biblical teaching that in order to gain the Kingdom of God, we should become like little children, admitting our need and seeking refuge, (Matthew 19:14; Brewster 2011, 17, 30) is for every Christian, and the care of families within the church community and beyond should be uppermost in our minds as we try to live out our witness for The Lord Jesus Christ.

Freedom from Fear

Children who are having difficulty facing natural and survival-based fears can be encouraged and helped through equine therapy to overcome these problems. Likewise, for children who have anxiety disorders and need help coping and overcoming them, the horse can provide a safe place, one where a child can learn to face fear and gain courage. The care of young people suffering in these ways is rewarding for all and should be taken seriously.

Soul Care in Equine Therapy Centers

Intentional care of staff to encourage holistic wellbeing is important for an equine therapy organization, as the work with young people with high needs can be challenging. It would be helpful to arrange weekly individual manager-and-staff and peer-to-peer check-ins to ensure transparency and help foster a culture of mutual support and appreciation. An atmosphere of availability would be a way to build confidence for individuals and for the staff. Work with children and horses requires endurance and patience as well as quick thinking and alertness to any danger or difficulty. As well as the children, staff themselves should feel able to ask for help, and they should be taken seriously in their requests. Equine therapy centers could be under the spiritual care or chaplaincy of a local church, if desired, to give added support. In a secular culture such as the UK, it is not always seen as positive to have church involvement, but if the school or center has spiritual affiliation, such connections would be a possibility, if adult consent and child assent are given.

Chaplains and Ministers Who Are Affiliated to the Equestrian Industries

With these thoughts in mind, chaplains who are affiliated with the equestrian industries should be mindful of how important it is to address the spiritual needs of those working with horses and the needs of the children in their care.

Financial support of equine therapy centers with charity status is an important ministry opportunity. It may be that a faith minister could come alongside a donor and encourage the importance of including spirituality and faith as part of holistic care. People who exercise the gift of giving need spiritual support also.

Sunday School Teachers and Adults Involved in Taking the Bible into Schools

Volunteers who take the Bible stories into local schools (Bible Society n.d.) or organize Godly Play chapters (Godly Play n.d.) or Catechesis of the Good Shepherd atria (Catechesis of The Good Shepherd UK n.d.) should be especially aware of the needs facing children living geographically within the equestrian world. Sunday school teachers should be alert for the needs of children whose parents and primary care workers are working in the equestrian industry, for example the racing world. Many times, families move for work, which adds to their emotional and social challenges.

Directors and Coaches Together with All Staff Working at Riding Establishments

Likewise, those who oversee and coach at pony academies and riding schools could hear children and respond. A balance should be found between availability and affording space to a child. It is important that these people in senior positions don't lose their contact with the "coal face," or in this case, the stable floor!

Farm Schools, City Schools, and Green Spaces

It is a challenge to be aware of the importance of access to the natural world for mainstream children in schools (Louv 2010, 1-14; Kuo et al. 2019). Free and uninterrupted time (but not necessarily unmonitored) to access a wood or other green space should be available daily for all schoolchildren. A farm school could provide such an opportunity. Government involvement could include research and funding to support these ventures. Parent and family cooperatives are a good way to involve people at a grassroots level to raise funds, organize work parties, and lobby at local and national

political levels to inform and connect policy makers. A small riding stable with Equine Assisted Qualifications (EAQ) available could be a part of a farm school where horse powered reading (Pickel 2019, 1, 2) takes place. This is an alternate provision of pedagogical practice which can help children learn how to read. Additionally, state schools can be invited to visit small farms and city farms on school visits. Scholarships could be made available for children from deprived areas to attend summer equine camps and get out of the city.

Rethinking the British National Curriculum

Opportunities to take the classroom outside are being carved out of the school day again as educators see the importance of children relating what they are learning to real life situations (Nuzzlets n.d.).

A four-day week in school with one day outside for everyone (Barker 2024) whilst still enabling the reaching of objectives would be one way to offer an alternative to teachers and students. This fifth day could come with a mandatory requirement to intentionally engage with the natural world, and there could be an option for equine studies in that program. This is an ambitious suggestion and implementing it nationwide would require vision, extensive consultation and trials in different school areas to gauge viability.

Could equine contact enable connectedness to help teachers and students to not only achieve but also enjoy? In this study, we have read the stories of a few students who have found this to be true. For children at risk with disabilities (Equestrian Therapy n.d.; Escobar 2019, 23-25); for children who feel bullied and excluded for different reasons and who have experienced violence; for children who harm others and for young

offenders; and for non-school attenders, the horse may well provide a safe and secure place to work out issues and learn more about how to become resilient and even to transcend difficulties (Miller and Adair 2020, 8; Naste et al. 2018).

Training and Education and Support

Alongside these hopes of resilience and transcendence comes the need for training and support, not only within the school systems but also within the equine therapy centers and even within the regular riding school environment. Opportunities for staff and volunteers to gain experience and qualifications to equip them for further responsibilities and tasks and to give a sense of satisfaction and worth would be important for workers and for the children who come to the Equine therapy center or riding establishment. It would be helpful for staff to have grounding in the various psychological, physical, social and spiritual needs of a child which they are caring for. The combination of understanding the theory and being able to apply it practically on the job would be beneficial.

Art and History Equus Exhibition

This research used art to elicit emotional connection with *Equus*. It would be an interesting project to ask an art gallery or museum to curate an exhibition of horses to show how they have been inspirational throughout human history with an emphasis on how they can help children and adults emotionally, socially and spiritually. This could be a travelling exhibition and could include local borrowed horses and donkeys.

Funding

Not all stable yards are well funded. The care of the horses is paramount, as they depend on humans for everything that they need in the domesticated environment. A community of willing parents and friends helps to ensure the smooth running of a yard and can ease the financial costs of running a private establishment. Charity status is vital for a riding school because of the prohibitive costs. Funding can be accessed from the government for a riding school to take part in ‘Changing Lives through Horses’ (CLtH, BHS), for example. and even to transcend difficulties (Miller and Adair 2020, 8; Naste et al. 2018).

Recommendations for Research

Evidence Based

Evidence-based research to find out if equine contact positively affects children with anxiety disorders would need ways to measure levels of anxiety over time. This could be done by child psychologists through collection and analysis of physiological data combined with individual interviews of participants both before and after the intervention.

Longitudinal

Longitudinal research of children working with horses from child to adulthood to learn about their holistic emotional, social, and spiritual growth would contribute to greater understanding of the connections possible between horse and human.

Roma, Gypsy, and Traveler Children and Horses

The Roma, Gypsy, and Traveler peoples live in many parts of the U.K. and Ireland. They travel to various locations throughout the year for work on the land or other occupations. Horses have played a large part in the cultures of these peoples. Today in the UK, Gypsy and Traveler populations still live as they have for centuries (ONS 2022). Their attractive white and brown or black or “colored” horses are sturdily built and are employed to pull carriages and work carts, and the children still play an active role in the economy of the family and take care of the horses (Kaur-Nagpal 2011). Research is needed around children and their roles within the family and how they interact with their horses to find out if they relate in a spiritual way to their charges and what that might mean in the Roma, Gypsy and Traveler community setting.

Children and Smaller Animals

As well as research with various large, domesticated animals, research is recommended involving the many smaller animals too, to see how the bonds develop between a child and their charge(s). Often it is children who look after animals, although there are more inferred references to children taking care of animals today: sheep and cattle (Meat and Livestock Australia n.d., 1) and goats (Mataveia, Visser, and Siteo 2021, 6). David’s story is a historical example of how the youngest child would take care of the family’s sheep (1 Samuel 16:11). Domesticated dogs and cats (Scoresby et al. 2021) are part of our lives and afford great friendship and comfort for all ages, in addition to their roles in protection and pest control. Dogs are used by the police (Van Bergen 2022), in the military (Army n.d.), for the blind (Guide Dogs n.d.), to herd sheep (The Working

Sheepdog Website) and for those with disability (Assistance Dogs UK n.d.). Husky dogs in the polar regions are part of the culture and work (Handwerk 2020).

Large Domesticated Animals

Indian elephants are employed in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and in Laos, where there remain eight hundred elephants in the wild (International Elephant Project n.d.), and there are sad tales of abusive conditions or loss of habitat (King 2019). In India, there are people working to bring India's wildlife, including elephants, to the children afresh through a program called Wild Shaale or Wild School (Zhu 2023). Although there is a dark recent history associated with young boys trafficked as camel racing jockeys (Sarkar 2014, 102), in Dubai we read of a German rider who has opened a camel riding school particularly for women (it is not known if children take part) (Chilton 2022). The domestic water buffalo is still a major source of power and food supply for countries in Southeast Asia (Zhang, Colli, and Barker 2020), and because of its docile nature, unlike its wild counterpart, it is used by families to rice farm (Buckley 2020). Water buffalos are traditionally part of the rural household, where they are also used for races and competitive fights (Bosman 2021). Donkeys are used as pack animals in southern Europe, North Africa, and Asia. Llamas are used as pack animals in Latin America and increasingly are farmed for their wool and used as therapy animals in the New World (Windschnurer et al. 2020; National Geographic n.d.). There is a long tradition of farming potbellied pigs (NAPPA n.d.) in Southeast Asia. Birds of prey are still used on the Eurasian Steppe and Arabia for hunting (Gersmann and Grimm 2018). All these connections between people and animals could benefit from research to determine how spirituality is part of the relationship.

What Is Replicable, What Can Be Transferred, and What Needs Modification in This Particular Research Process?

Research with children and horses and other animals is an area which requires more attention using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The shoebox instrument could be used in situations not only with children but also with adults and adolescents. Art appreciation and artistic expression are sometimes helpful in qualitative research projects, and crystallization of the various qualitative methodologies can serve to give a more in-depth view of the participant's responses.

For future projects with children and horses using mixed qualitative and quantitative methodologies, it would be helpful to have more time to get to know the participants. It would be interesting to adapt the Feeling Good, Living Life quantitative instrument (Fisher 2004) to use in conjunction with a shoebox and booklet together with the various qualitative methods of equine contact, art expression, focus group discussion, individual conversation, and observation. The Feeling Good Living Life survey is a quantitative spiritual health measure (Fisher 2004, 308), with the added advantage of having been tested, used, and reported on. Perhaps parents, carers, and gatekeepers would have a more concrete way to approach such a survey used in conjunction with the qualitative methods described and would be more open to their children taking part over a longer organized period.

Towards Holistic Wellbeing Including the Spiritual

Children's Access to Horses in the UK

In the UK, children could be inspired by horses in different situations. They encounter horses in a public procession such as the recent ceremonial coronation of King

Charles III (Scourfield 2023), in riding establishments, at agricultural and horse fairs (Appleby Horse Fair n.d.), with mounted police, with owners on the road (ONS 2023.), and in rural areas such as the Shetland Islands and the Gower Peninsula in South Wales (Alamy 2021). Horses are in feature films (Haigh 2017), literary works (Sewell 1877), popular children's books (Lewis 1954; Mackesy 2019), paintings ancient and modern (Figure 7; Jones n.d.), chalk hill carvings in Southwestern England, photographs (Thompson 1973), sculptures (National Trust for Scotland n.d.; Photograph 1) and puppetry (National Theatre n.d.). YouTube and other social media show horses in any number of situations around the world including Mongolian archery riders and horses (Appendix E PPT 4), the white horses of the Camargue (Wolman 2023), advertising videos, (Lloyds Bank 2022), and Monty Roberts teaching online (Monty Roberts n.d.). Children in the UK can access the ways and nature of a horse through various means. The aesthetic enjoyment of art and appreciation of the beauty of the horse (White-Lewis 2019) are important ways for children to be inspired and to be able to “draw near to the numinous through contemplation of the small parts” (Kuo et al. 2019; Louv 2010, 8), gaining an “understanding of how the pieces join together to create vastness.” Mason wrote that this could happen through the availability of “whole” literature rather than “snippets” (Macaulay 1984, 29).

Vision of Vastness

How can children catch the vision of vastness (Montessori 1946, 184) through their experiences with horses and with the natural world? We have seen how children use their sensing capabilities (Copsey 2005, 36; Hay and Nye 2006, 65-78) to build awareness, that is, to be in the “here and now,” to be tuning into a different language, to

be flowing in the moment, and to be able to focus using a felt sense as opposed to speech (Hay and Nye 2006, 65-71). They also use sensing to encounter mystery, that is, imagining with horses, setting aside the immediate and material, to be curious (Hay and Nye 2006, 71-74) and to rise above restrictions and be able to conjecture (Popper 1963, 137-38). Children use sensing too to apply value, that is, to look for ultimate goodness and to distinguish between delight and despair (Hay and Nye 2006, 74-78) as they interact with horses. This potentially sacred process takes time. Children need time and space to breathe and to wonder and to flourish.

Flourishing

There are many languages available for children to learn which are not human. The language of the horse is one and the languages of the camel, elephant, llama, and dog are others. Learning another language helps us understand that not all words are exactly translatable because there is not the actual word available as cultural nuances may suggest other meanings (Christianity Today 2023). This process could expand sensitivity towards another person or language group and enable less I-centered and more other-centered (Hay and Nye 2006, 109) comprehensions. Likewise, in learning Equus, the language of the horse, a curtain is lifted, and children can glimpse the small dazzles of awareness, mystery, and value which help them to better understand the whole and the small parts (Kuo et al. 2019; Louv 2010, 8) of which it is made, and to acknowledge God in it all.

APPENDIX A

RISK ASSESSMENT FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUINE WORKSHOP

at N_ Riding School (NRS) which includes home educating families

NAME:

DATE:

The classroom, kitchen and bathroom will be available for the workshop. There is very little risk to participants, families, or assistants on the day.

A perceived risk in the kitchen would be the hot water kettle if it were to be used by a child. We will make sure that the kettle is stable and not accessible.

If the group has the chance to observe and interact in a relaxed way with one or two of the ponies, then it would be required for all participants and assistants to wear the correct personal protective equipment (PPE), that is, hat and boots as a minimum. If an assistant does not wish to wear PPE, it will be best to sign a waiver form.

The technician on the day does hold a disclosure and barring service certification (DBS) but it is not from NRS. The technician will be with either the organiser or with the assistant with the participants for the morning.

The audio-recording will take place using my personal phone. There will only be audio-recording.

Each participant should be insured to participate. Those children registered with NRS as members are covered. If a member of NRS staff is present on the day, then insurance coverage will extend to those participants not usually included within NRS insurance policy.

APPENDIX B**CONFIDENTIALITY COMMITMENT FORM**

For All Research Assistants

Date:

Boundaries for Research Assistant:

The research assistant should be prepared to work respectfully with the participants and with their carers and families. You are expected to maintain confidentiality, i.e., not revealing the names and identity of participants, place, or contact information. You should not disclose the stories and discussions of the project to others. You are expected to maintain integrity and honesty in dealing with the research documents, and records, keeping them in a secure place.

Please know we have to treat each other with love by ensuring confidentiality and privacy. If you agree with the above statements, please sign, and date this form and return it to the researcher – Maryan Piano.

You may keep a copy of the form for yourself.

Research Assistant (Name)

Signature

Date

Research

Signature of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FROM PRIMARY CARERS FOR THEIR CHILDREN

to participate in the pilot equine educational workshop
data gathering project of Maryan Piano.

Name:

Date:

I understand the description of the doctoral dissertation research project of Maryan Piano and have had the opportunity to ask and receive answers to any questions regarding the research process. I understand that the equine educational workshop data-gathering event will be of a two-hour duration.

I have been informed that the group discussions and the one-on-one interviews will be audio-recorded for data analysis. I give consent for my child to be a participant in the survey, the focus group discussion, and any one-on-one interviews which the participant might instigate. I am aware that first names will be used during the pilot data-gathering project, but that after the data is gathered, collated, and analyzed, these first names will be destroyed, and that age and gender will be the only actual pieces of information used by the researcher, and that there will be full confidentiality of identity and any data. I agree that my child will be asked to give verbal assent as a prerequisite to any pilot data-gathering procedures. I also understand that my child may decide at any point in the pilot project to withdraw and that, should the participant wish it, any data gathered concerning my child's responses will be deleted.

I agree that the information gathered may be used in the doctoral dissertation.

Signature:

Participants are politely requested according to the safeguarding standards and procedures of The British Horse Society.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at maryanjoyrose@gmail.com or +44 (0)7568541602 with any questions or concerns.

APPENDIX D

VERBAL ASSENT FORM FROM PARTICIPANTS IN THE PILOT PROJECT

I am happy to take part in the two-hour equine educational workshop data-gathering pilot project organised in July 2023. I understand that I will be answering questions in a survey and that I will also be in a small group situation where we will be in discussions together. In addition, I am aware that I will be able to talk one-on-one with Maryan about my answers and my ideas, should I wish. I understand that I may decide not to join in before, during, or after the project and that, if I choose, my contribution will be deleted.

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION POWERPOINT PROMPTS

Slide 1:

Who Are Horses?

Bedouin *Legend*

*"And Allah took a handful of southerly wind,
blew His breath over it and created the horse.
He said to the magnificent creature,
"I have made thee as no other.
All the treasures of the earth lie between thy eyes.
Thou shalt carry my friends upon thy back.
Thy saddle shall be the seat of prayers to me.
Thou shalt fly without wings,
and conquer without any sword. Oh, horse."*

(StepBystep n.d.; Spicer 2013).

Slide 2: (History Today n.d.)

Where Do Horses Come From? Prehistoric

Pyrenees cave
Paintings in
Lascaux, France.



Slide 3:



The Apsaroke Warrior Chief

Slide 4:

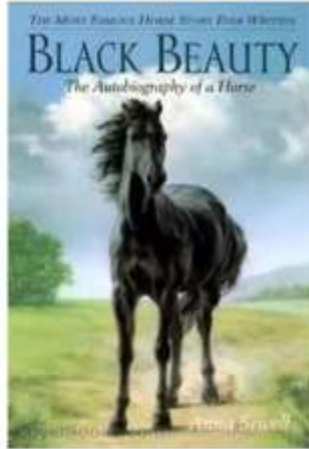
War and Peace (Games)

Traditional Mongolian Cavalry

Slide 5:

Working Relationships Between Horses and Humans

[Bing Videos](#)



Slide 6:

Understanding Between Horses and Humans Mr Ed. The Talking Horse

[Mr Ed The Talking Horse](#)

Slide 7:

Horses As Helpers The Horse and His Boy (by C.S. Lewis 1954)



- Shasta has just overheard his fisherman father agreeing to sell him to a cruel cavalry officer. He finds Bree, the officer's war horse grazing in the moonlight. Shasta learns quickly that Bree is a talking horse and together they plan their escape. Bree must teach Shasta how to ride.

Slide 8: (Apple TV 2022)

Horses As Friends The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse by Charlie Mackesy

[The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse](#)

APPENDIX F

PROFILE OF RESEARCHER

To Inform Parents and Primary Carers from A_ Riding Stables, N_ Riding School
and Home Educating Families.

Maryan's Profile

Maryan Piano is studying for a PhD in Holistic Child and Youth Development at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological College in Manila, Philippines.

She has forty years teaching and learning experience in a number of different countries (Egypt, U.S.A., U.K., and Spain) with children and young people of various needs and abilities from primary to university level. Maryan and Larry home educated for twenty years and ran a small school for the wider community during that time.

Maryan has a bachelor's degree in philosophy from the University of Warwick, U.K., and a master's degree in English literature from Westchester University in Pennsylvania, U.S.A.

Returning to working with horses after years raising her family, Maryan is working towards completion of the British Horse Society Stage 2 Assessment and hopes to go on to achieve a coaching qualification.

Maryan is wife to Larry, mother of five wonderful grown children, and now a grandmother. She volunteers at N_ Riding School on a weekly basis and is also a regular helper at an atrium for Catechesis of the Good Shepherd in Cambridge. Additionally, Maryan volunteers with Open the Book in local primary schools, and more recently she has undergone training in Godly Play with a view to starting up a chapter in her home village.

APPENDIX G

SCRIPTS OF VIDEOS

The videos functioned to raise awareness, introduce, inform, and ultimately, to invite participants. The scripts are fairly matched with the video, although there are a few minor differences.

Video (first section) to introduce and to raise awareness.

Have you ever wondered about all the ways that horses help children? Physically, socially, emotionally, and mentally and spiritually? This spring and summer, I will be gathering thoughts, ideas and responses from young people aged 8-17 years old about how horses affect them. All permissions, informed consents, and verbal assents will be in place for any data-gathering to begin. A participant may withdraw at any time before, during, or after the project.

Why do I want to gather data about how horses and ponies can affect children holistically? We know how the body can be positively helped through equine contact ([Physical therapy treatments incorporating equine movement: a pilot study exploring interactions between children with cerebral palsy and the horse - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)). There is evidence to support the idea that horses can help children psychologically, socially, and emotionally ([Equine Therapy for Mental Health: Benefits and Things to Consider \(verywellmind.com\)](#)), but there is little investigation into how the spiritual side of a child's life may be encouraged through equine contact. Because I believe that equine contact can affect children in a truly holistic way, I think that there is room for spiritual assessment, too.

All world religions and faiths have belief in God or in a higher power. For example, the First Nations of North America believe in the need for balance between the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual ([First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness \(fnha.ca\)](#)). In Islam, all is one with God; in Allah, the One God. (<https://islamcompass.com/spirituality-in-islam>). The Christian faith is founded on the three-way relationship between Father God, Son Jesus, and Holy Ghost (John 14).

With this in mind, let's look at whether and how horses and ponies can help children in spiritual ways.

Video (second section) more information; safeguarding; request for participants

How will I be gathering data?

Through a "shoebox" survey. There will be a chance for each participant to work on their own with good quality materials in response to some questions about their experiences with horses and ponies and what they think about how horses can affect their lives. This activity should last about half an hour to forty-five minutes. The participants will be asked to talk about their work and this one-on-one interview will be audio-

recorded, subject to consent and verbal assent. This could be five to fifteen minutes in length.

Through a focus group discussion involving up to eight participants, film clips, and pictures, as well as role play and listening activities. These will be used to prompt ideas and conversation within the group. This session will last about half an hour for younger groups and forty-five minutes for older groups. These discussions will be audio-recorded, all subject to consent with verbal assent.

The data-gathering session will be two hours in length. At any time, a participant may choose not to continue with the shoebox survey, focus group discussion, or individual conversation and, if they wish, their data will be disregarded.

Safeguarding

When children work with horses and go riding, they wear personal protective equipment (PPE). Their involvement with horses is a voluntary activity. Likewise, when children take part in a data-gathering event, they do so voluntarily, and they have protections in place to make sure that they are kept safe. Informed consent from the primary carer alongside verbal assent from the participant is a prerequisite to taking part in this project. A participant may withdraw at any time before, during, or after the project and, in that instance, if desired, all relevant data will be deleted.

Request for participants

Now that you have heard about the details of my hopes for data gathering, please consider giving consent for your child to participate in the project. You may get in touch with me via WhatsApp or by telephone or email, or indeed, come and speak to me. I would be very glad to meet you and answer any further questions or just have a chat. I will be very happy to send you the relevant consent form and the verbal assent script form, and I can do this online or as a hard copy. I really look forward to meeting up and working with you and your children. Thank you so much for taking the time to think about this project.

Maryan Piano, PhD Candidate, Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Manila, Philippines.

+44 (0)7568541602

Email: maryanjoyrose@gmail.co

APPENDIX H**SIGNED PERMISSION TO USE THE SITE**

from the owner and manager at A_ Riding Stables to conduct a data-gathering project.

NAME EMMA SPENCER
DATE 28/04/23
CENTRE APOLLO STABLES

I EMMA SPENCER owner and director at Apollo Riding Stables, give my permission to Maryan Piano to conduct data-gathering on the premises. Maryan may use the school room and bathroom facilities for participants, families, and assistants. I agree that any data gathering event will be of approximately two hours in length.

APPENDIX I

SCRIPT OF VERBAL PERMISSION

to use the site to conduct an equine educational workshop data-gathering project from the programme manager at N_ Riding School.

NAME

DATE

CENTRE

I,, programme manager at N_ Riding School, give my verbal assent to Maryan Piano to conduct data-gathering on the premises. Maryan may use the school room, kitchen and bathroom facilities for participants, families, and assistants.

I understand that there will be two consecutive Saturdays in June for the data-gathering events which will take place for two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon, and that there will be up to four groups of participants, one group for each of the four sessions.

Verbal Consent Audio File from Anna Sylvester:

https://1drv.ms/v/s!AjnV4A4DQzKlviG2XN1TiMHs_4uO?e=Vw0gh3

APPENDIX J

EQUINE EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOP

Flyer to A_ Riding Stables Families



A_ Riding Stables

Polite request for participants in a research project to find out how contact with horses and ponies can affect children positively - not only physically but also emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually - heart, mind, and soul well-being!

The activity will be on a small focus group basis.

All permissions, parental consents, and participant assents will be sought and signed off beforehand. Please feel free to check with A_ Riding Stables and/or with me if you have any questions.



Contact:

Maryan Piano, PhD candidate, (APNTS)

2, New River Green, Exning, Newmarket, CB8 7HS

#07568541602

maryanjoyrose@gmail.com.

APPENDIX K

EQUINE EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOP

Flyer to families involved in afterschool classes at N_ Riding School.

Activities for young people aged 7-13 years during a two-hour session to inspire reflection and engagement.

Methods based on the work of Dr Maria Montessori will be used to encourage interaction and confidence. This will include time and space for independent thinking and wondering.

The sessions are free to all young people between the ages specified and who have regular contact with horses and ponies. The focus will be on participation in Maryan's data-gathering project, which is looking at children and empathetic equine contact and how this may help holistic wellbeing.

APPENDIX L

EQUINE EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOP

Flyer to Home Educating Families
whose children are riding and working with ponies in the Ely area, Cambridgeshire



Home Educating Riding Families in Ely Area

Polite request for participants in a data gathering project to find out how contact with horses and ponies can affect children positively - not only physically but also emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually - heart, mind, and soul well-being!

The activity will be on a small focus-group basis.

**All parental consents, and participant assents will be sought and signed beforehand.
Please feel free to check with me if you have any questions.**



Contact:

Maryan Piano, PhD candidate, (APNTS)

2, New River Green, Exning, Newmarket, CB8 7HS

+44 (0)7568541602 maryanjoyrose@gmail.com.

Participants are politely requested according to safeguarding standards and procedures of

The British Horse Society.

APPENDIX NEW_M

IRB NOTIFICATION APPROVAL AND PERMIT



Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological
Seminary
Ortigas Avenue Extension, Kaytikling
Taytay 1920, Rizal, Philippines

NOTIFICATION OF REVIEW APPROVAL

April 29, 2023
Piano, Maryan
maryanjoyrose@gmail.com

Protocol Title: “CHILDREN (7-13 YEARS) AND EMPATHETIC EQUINE CONTACT AND HOW THIS MIGHT FACILITATE RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOD, OTHERS, AND THEMSELVES: A MIXED METHOD STUDY.”

Protocol#: AR-023
IRB Review Date: October 5, 2022
Effective Date: April 29, 2023
Expiration Date: April 29, 2024
Review Type: Expedited Review
Review Action: Approved

The IRB made the following determinations:

- Waivers: Waiver of informed consent documentation
- Other Documentations: All necessary attachments submitted
- Risk Determination: No greater than minimal risk

Please contact me at cingsian.thawn@apnts.edu.ph if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Miss Cing Sian Thawn
Director of Research
Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary

APPENDIX N

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PRIMARY CARERS OF CHILD PARTICIPANTS FROM A_ RIDING STABLES

in the equine educational workshop data-gathering project of Maryan Piano.

Name:

Date:

I understand the description of the doctoral dissertation research project of Maryan Piano and have had the opportunity to ask and receive answers to any questions regarding the data-gathering process. I understand that the equine educational workshop data-gathering event will be of two hours in length.

I have been informed that the group discussions and the one-on-one interviews will be audio-recorded for data analysis. I give consent for my child to be a participant in the survey, the focus group discussion, and any one-on-one interviews which the participant might instigate. I am aware that first names will be used during the data-gathering, but that after the data is gathered, collated, and analyzed, these first names will be destroyed, that age and gender will be the only actual pieces of information used by the researcher, and that there will be full confidentiality of identity and any data gathered. I agree that my child be asked to give verbal assent as a prerequisite to any data-gathering procedures. I also understand that my child may decide at any point in the project to withdraw and that, should the participant wish it, any data gathered concerning my child's responses will be deleted.

I agree that the information gathered will be used in the doctoral dissertation.

Signature:

Participants are politely requested according to safeguarding standards and procedures of A_ Riding Stables, Suffolk, and the British Horse Society.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at maryanjoyrose@gmail.com or +44 (0)7568541602 with any questions or concerns.

APPENDIX O**VERBAL ASSENT SCRIPT**

to be used to ask participants to give their assent to being part of an equine educational workshop data-gathering project conducted by Maryan Piano

NAME:

AGE:

CENTRE:

DATE:

I agree to be part of the shoebox data-gathering project, and I am ready to work with the shoebox activities and afterwards to take part in a small group discussion, which I realize will last about two hours on a day yet to be organised. I understand about the optional one-to-one conversation as a follow up to my work with the shoebox activities and with the group discussion, and I am fine with taking part. I agree to be audio-recorded as part of the one-to-one conversation with Maryan.

I understand that I may withdraw from the project at any time and that, should I wish it, all of my data which may have been gathered will be deleted.

APPENDIX P

INFORMED CONSENT FORM TO BE USED FOR PRIMARY CARERS

For Their Children At N_Riding School and for Home Educating Families
to participate in the free Equine Educational Workshop
of Maryan Piano.

Name:

Date:

I understand the description of the doctoral dissertation research project of Maryan Piano and have had the opportunity to ask and receive answers to any questions regarding the data-gathering process. I understand that the Equine Educational Workshop event will be of a two and a half-hours duration.

I give consent for my child to be a participant in the survey, the focus group discussion, and any one-on-one interviews which the participant might instigate and agree that my child will be audio-recorded. I am aware that first names will be used during the workshop but that there will be full confidentiality of identity. I agree that my child will be asked to give verbal assent as a prerequisite to joining in. I also understand that my child may decide at any point to withdraw from the workshop.

Signature:

Participants are politely requested according to the safeguarding standards and procedures of The N_Riding School (NRS) and The British Horse Society. The individual safe-guarding procedures of the participants' schools are mentioned as an added surety. Although the workshops are not commissioned by NRS, consent is given to conduct the workshops on the premises. The workshops are entirely optional. All the staff at NRS are DBS checked. Maryan is DBS checked through NRS. The technician, Larry Piano, is DBS checked but not with NRS. I will mention this in the risk assessment on the day.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at maryanjoyrose@gmail.com or +44 (0)7568541602 with any questions or concerns.

APPENDIX Q

SUB-OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Table 9. Research Questions and References with Research Instruments

Research Questions	References	Research instrument used to answer the RQ
1. Could social, mental, and emotional wellbeing result from empathetic contact with <i>Equus</i> , and could this lead to greater resilience, confidence, and self-efficacy for a child?	Hemingway 2020; White-Lewis, 2019, 58-67; Mickelsson 2019, 1, 3; Eller 2019, 10-12, 87; Adams et al. 2015, 3; Hauge et al. 2014.	Equine contact (EQ) Shoebox questionnaire (SBQ): 2-7, 10, 13-15. Artwork (A) Focus Group discussion (FGD): 5-11, 15, 16. Observation checklist (OC)
2. In what ways do <i>space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy, and trust (S.P.I.R.I.T.)</i> (Nye 2009, 41-52) encourage relational consciousness, that is, awareness of oneself, others, and God through relationship?	Nye 2009, 41-56. Eller 2019, 28.	EQ SBQ: 1-3, 5-10, 13 -19. FGD: 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16.
3. Could a child be enabled through empathetic equine contact where the criteria of S.P.I.R.I.T. are implemented to achieve <i>some</i> transcendence of difficulty and <i>some</i> capacity to meet challenges positively?	Haig and Skinner 2022, 9-11; Escobar 2019, 37; Mickelsson 2019, 3, 6; Eller 2019, 78; Adams et al. 2015, 55; Frederick, Hatz, and Lanning 2015.	SBQ: 4, 8, 10, 13, 14, 15, 18. FGD: 10, 11, 15, 16. OC
4. What kinds of experiences with horses do children have which could help them spiritually?	Mickelsson 2019, 5; Escobar 2019, 26, 27, 33, 36, 40; Adams et al.2015, 61-65.	SBQ: 14-16, 18, 19. FGD: 1,2,3,4, 5, 8, 10, 13, 14, 16.

5. What qualities of the horse do children experience which help them to become more relationally conscious?	Hemingway 2020; Escobar 2019, 26, 27; Adams et al. 2015,1,2; Hauge et al. 2014.	SBQ: 1,2,3,4,6,7,9,11,12,17. FGD: 1-5, 7,9,10,14, 16. OC
6. What qualities do children have which help them become more relationally conscious through empathetic equine contact?	Mickelsson 2019, 4-6. Escobar 2019, 36, 40.	SBQ: 1-10, 13, 15, 18. FGD: 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 16. OC

Table 10. Sub-objectives, Research Questions and Instruments Used

Sub-objectives	Research questions	Research instrument used
1. To determine whether empathetic equine contact could facilitate social, mental, and emotional wellbeing, leading to resilience, confidence, and self-efficacy for selected children.	1. Could social, mental, and emotional wellbeing result from empathetic contact with Equus and could this lead to greater resilience, confidence, and self-efficacy for a child?	EQ SBQ: 2-7, 10, 13-15. A FGD: 5-11, 15, 16. OC
2. To know how <i>space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy, and trust (S.P.I.R.I.T.)</i> (Nye 2009, 41-52) can be a way to experience relational consciousness, that is, to become aware of oneself, others, and God through relationship, for selected children.	2. In what ways did <i>space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy, and trust (S.P.I.R.I.T.)</i> (Nye 2009, 41-52) encourage relational consciousness, that is, awareness of oneself, others, and God through relationship?	EQ SBQ: 1-3, 5-10, 13 -19. FGD: 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16.
3. To explore whether empathetic equine contact can offer a chance for spiritual wellbeing through relational consciousness, encouraging both transcendence of difficulty and capacity to meet challenges positively for selected children.	3. Could a child be enabled through empathetic equine contact where the criteria of S.P.I.R.I.T. are implemented to achieve <i>some</i> transcendence of difficulty and some capacity to meet challenges positively?	SBQ: 4, 8, 10, 13, 14, 15, 18. FGD: 10, 11, 15, 16. OC
4. To identify what kinds of experiences selected children may have whilst	4. What kinds of experiences with horses did children have which	SBQ:14-16, 18, 19.

being with horses that could help them spiritually.	could help them spiritually?	FGD: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, 14, 16. OC
5. To determine which qualities of the horse can encourage relational consciousness that selected children experience.	5. What qualities of the horse did children experience which helped them to become more relationally conscious?	SBQ: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 17. FGD: 1-5, 7, 9, 10, 14, 16. OC
6. To understand which qualities selected children possess which make it more likely that they will experience relational consciousness through empathetic equine contact.	6. What qualities did children have which helped them become more relationally conscious through empathetic equine contact?	SBQ: 1-10, 13, 15, 18. FGD: 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 16. OC

APPENDIX R

FREQUENCIES OF RESPONSES

SBQ	Frequency			
[sbq1 MCQ] - How would you describe your experience, working with horses and ponies, at ----- (name of riding stables or another site).				
Enjoyable	11			
Outstanding	6			
very good	6			
Alright	2			
Adventurous	1			
Amazing	1			
so fun	1			
[sbq2 MCQ] - When you look at a horse, how does this make you feel?				
Happy	15			
Fascinated	7			
Awestruck	4			
Curious	1			
fun	1			
loved and at ease	1			
[sbq3 MCQ] - Think about a particular horse or pony which you have got to know. How would you describe the character of this particular horse at your riding school?				
calm	10			
kind	6			
sensitive	5			
fast	2			
gentle	2			
amazing	1			
difficult	1			
fun	1			
knowledgeable	1			
silly	1			
understanding	1			

[sbq4 MCQ] - What are your strongest memories with your pony or horse?				
friendship	12			
love	8			
funny	2			
bond	1			
calm	1			
fear	1			
humorous	1			
sometimes annoyance	1			
[sbq5 MCQ] - How do you listen to and talk (communicate) with your pony or horse?				
as a friend	17			
with command	2			
laughingly	2			
lovingly	1			
cautiously	1			
[sbq6 MCQ] - Do you feel that you understand your pony or horse?				
sometimes	8			
very well	8			
always	5			
we don't always see eye to eye but we love each other so we manage	1			
joy	1			
[sbq7 MCQ] - What level of understanding do you feel that you have with your pony or horse?				
fairly good	10			
excellent	5			
high	3			
very good	2			
i feel like when I'm upset being with my horse makes me feel happy and like the horse really knows how I feel) "fairly good, reiterating I have a good understanding of horses"	1			

fairly good. I feel like I often have a good understanding with my horse but I don't always understand everything	1			
happy	1			
lucky	1			
really happy	1			
Responses to [sbq8] - When you are with your pony or horse, how do you feel in your body (physically), in your mind (mentally), in your heart (emotionally), and in your soul (centre of your being).				
	Body	Heart	Soul	Mind
Weaker	1	1	0	0
Stronger	9	10	7	8
Healthy	5	3	2	5
Tired	0	0	0	1
Lively	5	3	8	4
No Difference	0	2	0	0
Outlier	2	0	0	4
[sbq9 MCQ] - What emotions or personality traits have you noticed that your pony or horse has experienced?				
joy	10			
kindness	10			
friendliness	9			
happiness	8			
impatience	5			
curiosity	4			
contentment	2			
fear	2			
crossness	1			
sometimes a bit of resistance	1			
[sbq10 MCQ] - When you are with your pony or horse, how do you act towards others around you?				
kindly	13			
carefully	9			
trustingly	6			
calmly	2			

suspiciously	2			
protectively	1			
[sbq11 MCQ] - In the U.K., horses and ponies have traditionally helped humankind with farming, mining, transport, and war. What are some of the most important purposes that horses and ponies have today?				
sport and games	12			
law and order (police fire and rescue)	6			
competition (racing and dressage)	4			
pony club	3			
tourism	2			
agriculture	1			
helping with mental health	1			
pets	1			
pomp and ceremony	1			
some horses help with therapy	1			
tourism (maybe)	1			
[sbq12 MCQ] - What do you think are the most likely environments that horses and ponies will experience in the future?				
racing and competition	8			
wild and free	7			
working with and for humans	7			
extinction	2			
for horses to be free	1			
neglect	1			
[sbq13 MCQ] - What do you feel when you are working with a horse or pony?				
happiness	15			
joy	9			
kindness	8			
friendliness	4			
curiosity	4			
fear	2			
[sbq14 MCQ] - How could a relationship with a horse or pony help a young person?				

friendship	14			
working together	12			
love	11			
understanding	11			
caring	9			
mutual caring	1			
yes, it can help	1			
working with a horse is a good thing to do as a young person, as you have to learn to communicate with someone who can't speak your language or can't speak at all	1			
[sbq15 MCQ] - Is it possible that horses and ponies have souls – that is, a part of them which is not physical?				
happy	2			
fear	1			
free in heaven	1			
had a good time but has to say goodbye	1			
i had a good one	1			
it has been a happy one in the field eating the grass, being ridden in the forest, and having a nice place to live	1			
it was great with my owner, I love her	1			
no idea	1			
sad	1			
scared	1			
that he enjoyed his life on earth had many memorable moments	1			
that his life on earth was very enjoyable fun	1			
that my owner was kind, caring, loving, curious, we always worked together - but i don't know why he or she shut me in a house	1			
that they had a good life, they were happy	1			
that they liked it	1			
that they loved their owners a lot	1			
that they loved, enjoyed it	1			
that they were the best pony ever, the best pony I could have asked for	1			
friendliness and happiness	1			
i had a good life running freely with my friends	1			

[sbq16 MCQ] - When your pony finally gets to heaven, what will they say about their life on earth?				
[sbq17 OEQ] - How could young people learn about themselves from horses and ponies?				
by thinking of their pony before themselves	12			
by having courage	8			
by listening to their pony	8			
by having courage - she added I like my pony to be with	1			
by learning to have responsibilities	1			
can learn about their own personalities with horses and ponies	1			
friendship and fun	1			
having fun with horses and by caring for them	1			
memories with a horse or pony	1			
that they love horses	1			
they help you a lot	1			
yes	1			
young people could learn about themselves through being with horses Bella said that young people can learn through being with a horse by doing a lot of things if they try	1			
GRACE: and she also spelt out the word "love" with a blue heart alongside. Grace drew a girl with very long arms stretching out around her horse's neck. The horse was leaning into the girl with its head against the girl who looked like Grace. Lots of blue marker pen hearts bubbled up from where the girl's head and the horse's head were touching (Appendix P Figure 24)				
[sbq18 MCQ] - Draw or paint (or both) a picture which shows how you feel about your personal experience with a horse or pony.				

APPENDIX S

COSTS OF THE PROJECT

The costs of conducting the data-gathering included paying for recording equipment, paper for permissions, and consent forms, fuel for getting to the various sites, and materials for the shoeboxes.

Table 11. Proposed Budget for Research Project

Particulars	Amount
Paper and printing	£100
Video for PPT and audio equipment	£100
Fuel	£150
Refreshments	£50
Shoebox materials	£50
Total Costs	£550

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Educational Attainment:

PhD in Holistic Child and Youth Development
Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary (May 2025)

Dissertation Title:
“Children (7-13 Years) And Empathetic Equine Contact And How This May
Facilitate Spiritual Awareness Of God, Others And Themselves: A Constructivist
Interpretive Phenomenological Exploratory Study”

MA in English Literature, West Chester University, Pennsylvania, USA. 1989.
Thesis Title: “The god of John Milton in *Paradise Lost* is not God”

Post graduate Personal Assistant Course involving secretarial training and courses in Law
and in Economics. 1984-1985.

BA in Philosophy, University of Warwick, U.K. 1981.

Language Proficiency:

English and Spanish

Work Experience:

August 2024 to present:	Equine Educational Workshop Development
August 2024 to present:	Set up Godly Play Chapter in home village
Spring 2024 to present:	Open the Book voluntary work in local primary school
2021 to present:	Newmarket Pony Academy volunteer with children and ponies
2021- 2024:	Catechesis of the Good Shepherd volunteer with children
Winter 2020:	Work with three foster children and a pony for six weeks
2018 - 2020:	Weekly Nature Study with a student on the autistic Spectrum (Virtual School, Norfolk, U.K.)
2017 – 2019:	Tutoring a gifted young student in all standard subjects

2017 – 2021:	Weekly Nature Study classes with home schooled children aged 3-17 Development of the one-year Open-Air Nature Studies Curriculum
2016:	Three months volunteer work at a Montessori alternative education school
2016 – 2017:	Fostering of two teenage boys to train in life skills and to tutor towards gaining IGCSE examinations in English, Spanish, Mathematics, and Sciences
2012 – 2015:	Home educating youngest child to IGCSE level Tutoring English, Spanish and Latin to students on a weekly basis Hosting and teaching English to groups of young people from abroad Encouraging a young man on the autistic spectrum during his first year of Philosophy at university: spending time, cooking, discussing, and listening
2009 – 2012:	Director and Head Teacher of Little Mountain School in Madrid, Spain
1989 – 2015:	Home Educating Mother Development of multi-level curriculum for alternate educational provision
1988 – 1989:	Research assistant. English Department at West Chester University
1987 - 1988:	Remedial English teaching for first year students Library Assistant
1987 - 1988:	First year English teaching at West Chester University
1985 – 1986:	Medical Secretary in London, U.K.
1983 – 1984:	Ministry work with Fellowship Foundation in Washington D.C.
1981 – 1982:	Primary School Teacher. October Language School, Mohandessin, Cairo, Egypt

Conferences and Workshops:

June 2025:	BHS Stage 2 Care and Teach assessments
April 2025:	Godly Play three day training course
November 2024:	BHS Stage 2 Ride and Lunge completion
April 2024 to present:	BHS Stage 2 Ride, Lunge and Care and Teach in training
June 19, 2024:	Godly Play Conference, St Mary De Crypt, Gloucester, U.K.
April 2024:	Online four sessions Godly Play Training
April 20, 2023:	Taster Day for Godly Play Training, St Edmundsbury Cathedral, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, U.K.
Summer 2023:	BHS Stage 1 Ride Safe assessment and completion of Stage 1.

- February 2019: Workshop on Children and Language Acquisition. Marungko Workshop. Kidpreneur introduction. MMP. Asia Graduate School of Theology. Manila
- 2012-2013: Dyslexia and Dyspraxia workshops at Hills Road College in Cambridge
- 2012-2013: Autistic Spectrum workshop at Hills Road College in Cambridge
- 2012-2013: Self Harm Workshop at St Mary's Church in Ely, Cambridgeshire