

**Study of a Riding Schools Equine
Retraining Programme based on Evidence Based Equitation Science Principles and
Training Methods**

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Introduction

Bringing horses from a natural to an unnatural environment is cited as causing many physical and psychological problems (Furieux et al., 2014; Visser et al., 2008; Harewood & McGowan, 2005). Failure to understand how horses learn is further cited as being a significant factor in the reason for problem behaviours (McGreevy & McLean, 2005; McLean & McGreevy, 2004). This study presents a programme aimed at retraining 34 equines using equitation science principles. Specifically, this study presents the results of a retraining programme involving 6 equines with problem behaviours related to pulling, barging, not standing at posts and mounting blocks, loading and clipping difficulties.

Method

This study was based on ground activities (unmounted) informed by the 8 training principles set out by the International Society for Equitation Science (ISES) i.e., immediate release of pressure following the correct response, using signals that the horse can differentiate, training and initiating one response at a time, training habitual responses using consistency and repetition, training only one response per signal, eliminating fear during training, training persistence of responses and finally, checking for relaxation throughout training. Individual equine training sessions were videoed, documented and reviewed at bi-monthly staff meetings. Training period took place over a 12 month time-frame working with different equines at different times.

Results

Findings of the study showed that when ISES training principles were applied, all problem behaviours were eliminated in an average time of 4 weeks (10 minutes twice daily). In addition, behavioural changes were also observed as being deeply embedded and, with a variable training schedule, were maintained over time.

Conclusion

Equines housed in Riding Schools are cited as being at risk of developing stereotypies due to a wide range of factors. Failure to understand how horses learn can exacerbate this and has been shown to contribute significantly to behavioural and welfare difficulties. This study shows that when equitation science training methods were applied in a strategic, universal and resourced manner, behaviour problems were eliminated, leading to enhanced horse welfare and safer, more positive human- equine interactions.