



Lessons Learned from Horses for School Practice

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Photo: Milla Turunen

I have noticed how powerful “tools” horses can be for igniting students’ personal growth.

Horses are temperamentally well-balanced animals, but their imposing size, tremendous strength, and keen intuition mean you need to approach them with respect, vigilance, and extreme sensitivity.

I am interested in the role of horses in the learning process, whether they improve well-being or the pedagogical relationship between adults and students?



Equine Assisted Social Education (EASE) as an intervention method



a combination of a social pedagogical framework and equine activities



the activities

emphasized body language

involved similar goals as those emphasized in the national curricula: interaction, curiosity, problem solving and teamwork



8 weeks

90 minutes sessions once a week



Other two interventions and control

Aggression Replacement Training (ART®)

- a psychoeducational method for helping individuals with a deficit in pro-social behavior.
- provided appropriate training via three elements: skill streaming, anger control, and moral reasoning (Calame, Parker, Amendola, & Oliver, 2011)

Co-operational mathematics (MATH)

- students practiced basic mathematical skills and problem-solving in pairs or groups
- instead having math books students had additional material

Control, treatment as usual (TAU)



Research questions

1

Does the well-being of students with special needs benefit from a short-term intervention?

2

Were the intervention outcomes related to the intervention program?

3

Were the intervention outcomes related to the students' (with special needs) gender?



Instruments

Achenbach System
of Empirically Based
Assessment
(Achenbach, 1991)

The Aggression
Questionnaire (Buss
& Perry, 1992)

The Empathy
Questionnaire
(Davis, 1980)

The Locus of
Control Scale for
children (Nowicki
and Strickland,
1971).

Childrens'
Loneliness
Questionnaire
(Asher, Hymel, &
Renshaw, 1984)



Results (ASEBA)

	EASE					ART*			MATH*			TAU				
	All	male	female	3rd	7th	male	female	7th	male	female	7th	All	male	female	3rd	7th
withdrawn-depressed		+														
somatic complain		+														
anxious-depressed																
thought problems								+				+				
social problems		+														
attention problems	+	+			+											
aggressive behavior		+														
rule-breaking behavior						+										



Results (parallel instruments)

	EASE					ART					MATH				TAU				
	All	male	female	3rd	7th	All	male	female	3rd	7th	All	male	female	7th	All	male	female	3rd	7th
Aggression																			
anger																			
hostility																			
physical aggression																			
verbal aggression																		+	
Empathy																			
empathic concern															+			+	
fantasy																			
perspective-taking																			
Locus of control																			
external																			
internal		-										-							
Loneliness																			



What teachers do matters (Hattie, 2008)

*As effective educators build
inclusive learning environments
and bonds with students,
incorporating informal learning practices
that differ from formal teaching
and learning
would help teachers build
these social contacts
in the classroom
(Mickelsson, 2023).*



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Lessons Learned from Horses: Three Pedagogical Interventions Promoting Well-being of Students with Special Educational Needs