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The affective pedagogies of horse-human interventions: a more-than-human perspective on equine assisted learning with marginalised young people

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a more-than-human perspective on an equine assisted learning programme undertaken by marginalised young people attending a flexi-school in Australia. In contrast with therapist led equine programmes, our research examined horse assisted activities as a site of embodied learning. Paying attention to the affective dimension of horse-human relationality we explored how student and teacher narratives articulated learning in terms of *affective pedagogies* (being moved to learn differently). We discuss the theory-method tensions that arose through our shift from a mixed methods humanist design to a more-than-human analysis. Questioning the limitations of traditional humanist theories of attachment and individualised agency, we trace the agentic capacities afforded by the horse-human learning assemblage involving horses, volunteer coaches, young people, teachers, yards, grooming tools, etc. Our article contributes to explorations of more-than-human learning at the intersection of embodied movement, therapeutic interventions and informal education.

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Introduction

More-than-human approaches to knowledge are challenging the anthropocentric focus on human meaning and agency in sport and education research (Taylor et al., 2019; Thorpe et al., 2021). At the heart of this scholarship is a critique of 'human exceptionalism' as it is steeped in a powerful binary logic that has valued culture over nature, self over world, reason over emotion, mind over body, human over animal, masculine over feminine, able over disabled, whiteness over Indigenous cosmologies and cultural difference (Birke, 2007; Braidotti, 2013; Haraway, 2016; Nxumalo, 2020; Rosiek et al., 2020). Everyday experiences of learning and moving are being explored through *entangled relations* with animals, nonhuman environments, objects, texts, art and digitality as complex assemblages (Gough, 2016; Merchant, 2019; Taylor et al., 2019). In particular, horse-human relations have

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emerged as a research focus for leisure and sport scholars (Dashper, 2016; Finkel & Danby, 2018). However, the emergence of horse-human relations has not yet resulted in a connection with the conventional therapeutic research on equine interventions of various kinds (Johnson & Bruneau, 2016; Kendall et al., 2015; Malcolm et al., 2017).

More-than-human thought has productive potential for sport and learning research in that it might increase our awareness of young people's, often unobserved, strong relations to the artefacts and spaces that surround them. To date, there has been little exploration of the equine-based learning of marginalised young people through more-than-human perspectives that retain a focus on social justice. Our article traverses these literatures with the aim of furthering understanding about the *affective pedagogies* of horse-human learning in an equine programme in Eastern Australia. We explore the affective experiences of young people as they *feel their way* through horse-human relations within the storied contexts of school and home, such relations shape possible subjectivities beyond 'troubled children' and 'poor learners' with 'insecure' attachment. We also outline the theory-method tensions – the affective disruptions – that arose as we shifted towards a more-than-human perspective that troubled the humanist assumptions underpinning the initial mixed-methods study funded by the Australian Research Council (Grant# LP150100320).

Thinking 'with' horse-human relations

Despite a long cultural history of entangled domesticated relationships, horses have been recognised for their intelligence and agentic capacities (kicking and biting refusals, as well as cooperation) in ways that refute any naturalised assumption about human mastery. Horse training approaches have also become more relational in ways that Smith (2011, p. 10) suggests, 'not only eschews forceful dominance and the subjection of the horse by restraint, pressure and coercion into fearful compliance, it also advocates an appreciation of the horse as a sentient being whose interests and inclinations need to be respected'. There is of course an ontological limit to what humans can claim to 'know' about what animals such as horses think and feel, as well as different cultural and Indigenous ways of knowing that are not informed by western binaries and hierarchies (John, 2019).

In contrast with research on equine therapy programmes (facilitated by therapists) (Burgon et al., 2018), our research examines horse 'assisted activities' (e.g. grooming the horse, picking up hooves, leading the horse) within an equestrian programme designed to engage young people with complex lives through informal learning outside a conventional school setting. As Berget and Braastad (2008, p. 323) suggest, 'Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA) is the term used for a less controlled service that may have a therapeutic effect, but which is not a true therapy in a strict sense'. Initially, our project like much of the literature had been framed through humanist theories that sought to explain the mechanisms of change and psychological outcomes from the equine assisted learning programme. Downes et al. (2016) usefully map out the major humanist theories that have shaped research into the benefits and therapeutic effects of animal assisted interventions (equine, care farming, etc.) on young people who have experienced various forms of adversity and marginalisation. We argue that most of these perspectives draw upon ontological assumptions about human subjectivity that privilege an individualised, agentic self that 'interacts' with a separate, non-human realm of nature. In this way, non-human nature (animals, gardens, etc.) is constituted as passive 'matter', lacking in agentic capacity and serving as a background to the unfolding drama of human-family life and individual resilience. Animals are, however, afforded some agency given their unique capacity to connect with people through *affective* relations (emotions, feeling, touch, objects of affection and identity formation – rider, pet owner etc.). While the role of affect is recognised it is largely conceptualised through attachment theory that emphases how horse-human bonds can forge different modes of 'secure' connection across species (Berget & Braastad, 2008; Downes et al., 2016). However, conventional attachment theory still rests upon humanist assumptions about how agency is exercised by humans through connecting with the horse as a substitute

'other' to restore disrupted human bonds and parental relationships (trauma from abuse and adversity that influences children's socialisation, learning and development).

Our previous publications had contributed to this literature by reporting on the overwhelmingly positive experiences and shifts in behaviour that were identified by young people and teachers in areas of social connectedness, self-confidence, behaviour and attention. (Norwood et al., 2019; Norwood et al., 2020; Norwood et al., 2021). Yet, we began to wrestle with the untold story about the more-than-human *affective processes of learning with horses* that had been obscured and yet were evident in our observations and the responses of students, parents and teacher. For example, young people experienced affective and emotional transitions throughout their engagement with the horses involving fear, awe, confidence and respect. This article thus grew from a different line of questioning about the powerful feelings and agentic capacities that horse-human interactions (that we will rethink as intra-actions) produce 'with' young people. We were also better able to acknowledge the complex affective relations shaping these young people's everyday lives, identities and 'behavioural/diagnostic' labelling (often bound up with the effects of power, such as shame, frustration, anger, fear). Our focus became less concerned with 'what' the programme outcomes were and more about 'how' the capacities of marginalised young people were opened up through the multiplicity of horse-human relations (trainers, objects, peers, different horses, equipment, outdoor spaces and other aspects of everyday life).

We drew upon the useful insights of more-than-human scholarship about affective relations and pedagogical processes to think more deeply about the uniqueness of equine encounters for marginalised young people (Taylor et al., 2019). From this perspective, affect is not conceptualised in terms of what individual emotions 'are' and instead is analysed in relation to what embodied feeling and sensation can 'do' (Ahmed, 2004, p. 4). Thinking beyond emotion as primarily 'subjective' feeling, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) theorise how affects are implicated in the movement of forces and desire as, 'an ability to affect and be affected. It is a pre-personal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. xvi). While affect exceeds containment in language, the distinction between affect and emotion is analytic given the way experience comes to be storied. Affect works as the movement, sensation and flow of power that connects materials, objects, human and nonhuman bodies through *assemblage*s, always exceeding containment within human intention and consciousness (Hickey-Moody, 2013).

A more-than-human perspective enables us to recognise the affordances that horse-human programmes offer young people who struggle with mainstream education in terms of the *affective pedagogies* that 'teach us by changing how we feel' (Hickey-Moody, 2013, p. 79). Sociomaterialist theories of affect and entanglement unsettle assumptions about a bounded, instrumental human body as the object and subject of conscious learning about, in or through movement (Garrett, 2022). Rather by paying attention to how embodied learning is constituted through relations of affect we understand the body in a generative sense as always becoming. Learning is produced through embodied relations of moving, feeling, sensing and responding to other bodies, memories, objects, place experiences etc. In this sense the affective forces of learning are not reducible to emotional states 'within' a body, rather they work as intensities or forces of dis/connection that are continuously enfolded into subjectivity in both conscious and unconscious ways. In the context of relating 'with' horses as large creatures, young people are engaged in learning through the affective intensities of particular embodied movements (towards, away, together, apart, different rhythms). Affective pedagogies work through those intensities of experience (joy, excitement, curiosity, also fear, frustration, sadness) where the horse-human relation produces felt capacities to do, move, know differently. The intensity of embodied learning occurs in the enfolded, entangled moments of horse-human becoming.

This focus on how young people attune or 'learn to be affected' through multispecies relationships has been explored by education scholars, with respect to decentering the human and shifting how animals have been positioned as objects to learn 'about' (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016). By engaging 'with' the horse, young people learn by attuning to the visceral encounters, smells, touch and slow movements that constitute a dynamic interplay that is vastly different to

instructional or child centred pedagogies in physical education (see also, Malcolm et al. (2017, p. 2). The affective pedagogies of equine encounters produce particular interspecies contact zones or 'meeting points' (Birke, 2017) where bodies intermingle, touch and move in ways that exceed cognition, language and separate identities. As Birke (2017, p. 64) states such 'Meetings, whether in the stable, on the lead rope, or under saddle, involve learning to move together and in relation to one another, and form the basis of human-horse relatings'. It is the *affective and entangled relations* that we suggest have been overlooked in much of the literature on equine programmes where there are more than two actors in play. Karen Barad (2007, p. 19) reconceptualises interactions between entities to emphasise the dynamic relationality of 'intra-action' where, 'To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence'. Various elements and forces are brought into relation in equine programmes as *learning assemblages* involving specific horses, volunteer trainers, young people, teachers, yards, grooming tools, saddles, outdoor space, horses in popular culture, clothing, equestrian disciplines and knowledge practices, etc.

Embodied learning is shaped through the particular arrangements of assemblages – patterned ways of thinking, responding and organising horse-human relations. These horse-human relations assemblages also connect with or 'plug into' other assemblages that produce sites of learning through the entanglement of formal education, family life, sport, play, neighbourhood, etc. that are in turn implicated in policies, material contexts, histories and social inequities and opportunities (socioeconomic, gender, cultural, disability, sexuality, etc.) (Fox & Alldred, 2016). In this sense, *agency* is thought of in terms of relational capacities rather than as an individuated quality that resides only in the human (and in a limited capacity with the horse). It is these *agentic capacities* that this article is interested in tracing through the affective pedagogies of the equine programme to open up different ways of understanding the relationality of embodied learning with young people (Barad, 2007; Taylor & Bayley, 2019).

Equine assisted learning research project

The interviews conducted for the project were undertaken as part of an Australian Research Council funded project with students (13–17 years old) and their teachers in an outreach school in a semi-rural area of Eastern Australia with high social disadvantage. Students attended a flexible (flexi) school, run by a non-profit organisation, where the learning environment and activities changed daily. They attended the flexi-school due to difficulties within mainstream education that were related to a complex range of individual, family and social circumstances and inequities (such as learning difficulties, 'ADHD' diagnoses, childhood abuse, trauma, poverty, and family breakdown). Many young people were familiar with the affective relations of shame, loss, sadness, disconnection and anger that were also intensified by experiences of bullying (as victim or perpetrator), violence and stereotyping.

The school was approached to take part in the programme which was not a part of their standard structure. 38 students were approached and consented (own and parental) to take part between 1 and 6 weeks prior to the start of the programme. Drop-out prior to the programme was largely due to unexplained absence from school or absence due to known social issues. The programme lasted 7 weeks and a minimum of 5 weeks attendance was set for inclusion. Twenty-three students completed the programme and 20 (11 female, mean age of 13.8 at start of programme, range 13–17) were available for interview. Additionally, 3 teachers and 1 social worker participated in interviews. Ethics clearance was received from the first author's institutional Human Research Ethics Committee (GU Ref No: 2010/588). Students are referred to by an initial (e.g. 'D') to maintain anonymity. As many scholars have identified, ethical processes and issues are narrowly conceived within institutional contexts despite the methodological and epistemological implications for sport and educational research (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2012). Our turn towards affective pedagogies does highlight the ethical implications of pursuing knowledge 'about' young people (and their behaviours) that has

historically disregarded the complexity of their embodied experiences, more than human relations and effects of inequality.

The students travelled by bus to the equine centre and on their arrival started the equine programme that offered informal learning opportunities. Students spent time getting to know and interacting with a horse on the ground (picking up hooves, leading the horse) with a view to riding a horse towards the end of the period (not all students elected to ride), whilst also engaged in horse related tasks around the barn (cleaning stables, feeding, grooming, etc.). In week 1 they, with help from a volunteer coach, went to collect the horse they would work with from a nearby field and bring to the open stable. In subsequent weeks most students would request the same horse and volunteer, but sometimes they worked with different ones as necessary.

Volunteers were all trained staff with up to level 1 Riding for the Disabled Association of Australia National Coaching Accreditation Scheme qualifications (Levels range from 0–2 and level 1 coaches fully approved to run sessions). Volunteers regularly worked for the equine centre with young people with physical disabilities but had only worked with this population once previously. The horses were more passive or active at different times during the process depending upon the activity. For example, they may have exercised greater capacity in freer and more mobile activities (e.g. cooperation, stubbornness, other desires) and acted more passively whilst stationary or being groomed. Horses demonstrated different moods, characters and engagement with students during the programme. At the end of the weekly session students talked for 10 minutes with the volunteers about the day, including about incidents and accomplishments. Following the final session, a certificate for completion of the programme was given to each student.

Producing data

The data 'collection' procedure has been outlined in previous publications (Norwood et al., 2020; Norwood et al., 2021) and we acknowledge how collection is implicated in the broader production of data (stories and measured responses). A researcher (second author), the teachers and the social worker observed and took field notes about the behaviour and interactions of the students whilst at the equine centre. Teachers and the social worker were also asked to observe behaviour outside of the programme. Several members of the research team also observed the programme and contributed their affective reflections on notable 'meeting points'.

After the programme completion the second author interviewed the teachers and students. Semi-structured interviews lasting 30–60 minutes with the teachers pursued questions relating to any changes for the students over the course of the programme, how changes occurred within or outside the programme, (e.g. differences in behaviour whilst at the equine centre compared to the rest of week) and improvements to the programme. The students were asked what they thought of the programme, any personal benefits, whether they thought the programme changed them as a person (e.g. character, attitudes or views on anything), dislikes or anything they would change?

The limitation of the interview method for understanding young peoples' experience of learning with horses was one of the challenges that emerged in the research. The affective experience was hard to put into words and questions often followed adult lines of thought (about change over time, likes and dislikes). Renold and Ivinson (2014, p. 371) also identified this issue with teenage girls' experiences of riding horses, 'Identifying these partial articulations goes some way towards recovering affects that are often excluded in the analysis of interview talk'. Acknowledging this limitation, what stood out were the clear articulations of affective moments of learning which were also evident in both the researcher observations of the horses and the teachers/social worker responses about young people and horses. The exploration of affective pedagogies that has informed the analysis in this article arose out of interdisciplinary conversations instigated by the first author within the research team about how these encounters felt (rather than what was seen as behaviours) in both observations and in reading the transcripts of experiences. Each researcher involved in data

collection was invited to write through these affective moments as a method of surfacing (Blackman, 2021) what was previously unnoticed and this informed the following analysis of the affective relations.

To explore embodied affect as *relational*, as opposed to individuated notions of emotion, our approach required a different line of questioning to consider *what* the affective pedagogies of horse-human learning enabled these bodies to 'do' and *how* changes were produced through entangled agential capacities. Hence, our analysis followed the *movement of affect* across the narrated experiences of and about young people as we identified the 'hot spots' or moments that 'glowed' with a certain intensity for them, for their carers and teachers, and us as researchers (MacLure, 2013, p. 662). The teacher's stories that arose in the interview process importantly incorporated the broader contexts that were entangled with students' lives. To follow Renold and Ivinson's (2014, p. 365) work with teenage girls and horses, this approach 'allows us to map the affective "ontological intensities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) of those often imperceptible micro-moments of teen girls' becomings'.

We explore those micro moments and affective intensities through three analytic configurations that evoke embodied learning as movements of becoming; (i) fear-desire-confidence-capacity, (ii) anger-calmness-being with (iii) love-friendship-becoming connected. We also considered how affective pedagogies travel between students, teachers, families, schools and beyond to open up different stories about young people's capacities beyond the dominance of deficit discourses in their lives.

Affective pedagogies: embodying relational horse-human capacities

(i) Fear-desire-confidence-capacityAt one session, I remember a very nervous young man who would not go near the horse to begin with. The horse took very small steps towards him instead of waiting for him to come. The horse stretched out its neck and put its head low to the ground, gently reaching closer and closer to the young man. The horse first sniffed the young man's feet and then worked up his legs until the young man could simply reach out his fingers to stroke the horse's head. The young man instantly calmed down. (Researcher observation).

This observation highlights how horses were not simply passive recipients of human attention, rather they actively engaged young people in ways that generated a range of affects. Young people commented on their initial fear of working with the horses and developing greater confidence with their more-than-human relationships over time. For example, 'I feel like I am not as scared of horses anymore'; 'I am kind of more comfortable around horses now, because I was scared at the start ha ha'; 'I … liked the fact that they (volunteer coaches) were taking their time and they were really … helpful as I was really scared of being bitten and kicked at first and they were just really, really helpful'.

Young people successfully navigated embodied feelings of stress and uncertainty to overcome their fears about horses and doing something new. Overcoming initial fears of the horse may have contributed to an increase in confidence and a decrease in general nervousness. The role that volunteer coaches played in developing horse-human relationships appears to be entangled with trust as students learnt that strangers were able to support them. The teachers/social worker commented on how they noticed students embodied greater confidence through the programme as they navigated risk-taking. This experience was very different to being positioned as children 'at risk' with various deficits (poor grades, troubled home life, crime, bullying, etc.). For example,

> They had complete freedom to work with an animal that could have potentially killed them, I think that is a big part of it, if they had done something stupid or wrong they could have been trampled or like not walk ever again and I just think I think that was a really big part of this 'you can do this and we are actually trusting you to do this' and they had to work out how they were going to relate with the horse because of that freedom so I think that was a really big part of it.

> I think for those that have a bit of anxiety … [the programme] helped with their … confidence, overcoming some fear about trying new things.

> N was soooo much more confident, she refused to work with them the first two weeks, and then started doing a little bit, a little bit … and … she was in the stable with her without a trainer at one stage and I was like WOW.

> … and I also think erm I don't know do horse have some sort of magical 6th sense? Are you going to look into that in your research? Because yeah, I do think there was just something about the horses you know a kind of … majesty … some kind of power that they had over the young people I do believe that.

This noticeable shift in thinking-feeling-doing raised questions for us about the embodied learning relation that students enacted *with* the horses as large, risky and responsive animals (the 'love' of working with horses). Horses have highly developed senses and ways of knowing that are attuned to body movements, environmental cues and herd behaviour. For many young people, horses also powerfully enact 'nonhuman charisma' (Lorimer, 2007) – they are large, awe inspiring, strong creatures that are not easily 'tamed' despite domestication in western culture. Learning through the senses – touch, movement, feel, sight, smell, taste and hearing – required a responsiveness where students 'attuned' to the horse as pedagogue. With a focus on embodied learning that attunes to horses (listening, touching, responding to the other), equine programmes significantly differ from conventional educational contexts that privilege stillness, cognitive activity and self-discipline within human intra-actions. A comment by the teachers evokes this different mode of learning that the charismatic horse enables,

> she is completely engaged and didn't require any attention on me … C requires a lot of attention.

Students spoke of their increased confidence in terms of how they had learnt to attune to horses, that is they began to embody and enact 'horse sense' in various ways. Responses to the question about what they enjoyed included, 'Walking with the horse, telling it what to do when to stop and that'; 'Seeing what it takes to like be with a horse and like the jobs I have to do for it' and 'Learning how animals feel. If you touch the middle of the hoof it'll hurt them'. The programme engaged students to feel and think relationally with some recognition of the horse's perspective. The students and teachers pointed to particular affective intensities in horse-human learning that transformed the agentic capacities of the young person to respond in new ways. As Malcolm et al. (2017, p. 9) noted in their study of how a horse therapy programme worked with children with autism, the 'embodied interaction had educational effects beyond learning to ride'.

(ii) Anger-calmness-being with

Young people (particularly boys) commented on how working with horses help to shift their experience of and response to their feelings of anger. For example, 'Yeah, it changed me a lot, before I used to be angry all the time, and then, but now I don't know, I'm not that angry anymore'; 'I think it just made me a lot calmer in stressful situations because there was a few times where we would like trip over or something and you had to be calm or else they'll take off so it just made me calmer'; 'I just I learnt how to work with people more and that I can control my temper'; and 'I'm really calm when I am around the horses. Like, I love being around the horses'**.**

This significant shift in several student's experience of anger points to how the embodied and affective learning relations with horses, peers and coaches can open up different modes of thinking-feeling-being with. As Staunæs and Raffnsøe (2018, p. 11) have noted, ' … the successful use of horses demands a "response-able" human student, a student who allows herself to be affected and not simply react'. What is important to note about this transformative movement is how alternative ways of feeling and acting without anger dominating, move students away from fixed identities associated with 'anger management and behavioural issues' that they have acquired through educational discourse.

Importantly changes in how students expressed and managed their anger beyond the programme was noted by teachers/social worker in their observations of different learning contexts. For example,

> 100% you notice a change in every one of them … definitely L, so the really hard-core ones … since the program has been going and we've been working on the Monday with the horses and [following] that on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday he will 'time himself out' and remove himself from an angry situation and take time out and count it backwards and then he will come back and he'll go again if he needs to … how can you time yourself out, how much control has he learnt since doing that program? So that's the most *amazing* thing for L because he has no control and he just can't let it go and he hasn't been able to let it go and now he is letting it go walks away and gives himself time out. It's *amazing* (laughter).

> So at that time [6 weeks prior to week 1 of program] I can still remember … there had been some improvements to her not flying off the handle [but] she would still do that and so she doesn't do that at all really [now], I'd go as far as to say she just doesn't this at all anymore which is so wild, cuz I guess, I could *never* envisage that or envisage what that would look like when I first met her you know.

These experiences of learning new affective modes of relating with others (such as becoming calm when angry) involve a dynamic process of *un*learning that works through embodied habits and practices. The programme produced a different affective infrastructure for the enactment of horse-human learning, as Staunæs and Raffnsøe (2018, p. 9) suggest,

> Encountering a horse pen as a pedagogical setting is to enter a space with other rules, other habits and other repertoires of how to relate to other living creatures than those one normally meets at the office or institution, where the daily work activities takes place.

One of the researcher's observations identified this affective process of unlearning fear and embodying calmness that arose through being with horses in their environment,

> the boy started off scared and hesitant while the horse appeared confident and relaxed. By the time they reached the stable from the field the boy had matched the horse's level of comfort and had immediately connected to it. I also remember the boy saying exactly this. But the feeling of connection and comfort wasn't led by the boy, it was led by the horse and facilitated by the volunteer.

(iii) Love-friendship-becoming connected

Young people commented on how their embodied sense of connection with horses and people shifted through the programme. They responded to questions about what they enjoyed most or learnt with comments about making friends, 'I made a friend. (who?) Tia [a horse]'; 'I feel more comfortable around horses now. It made me talk to the other kids more as well and so like that was good too'; 'My sister … made a connection with the horse, and I thought she couldn't connect with anything'.

The teachers/social worker emphasised the intense moments of connection (love, friendship, belonging) through pedagogic encounters with horses, volunteer coaches and students themselves. Learning was mobilising through love and a desire to connect in ways that involved developing new capacities, skills and ways of knowing self and others. Students extended their developing 'horse sense' to human animals in particular ways.

> I definitely think that was a huge difference and a positive difference … working with Cinnamon and the horses as a whole and the trainers, has affected her for the better … she doesn't connect with people that easily actually, and she doesn't allow herself to be soft very much … she was so engaged, she made a connection with the horse so easily, she really loved her horse and it was ok to love something it was ok, to like, it was even ok to give up other things and let people know that you really love this, and that, that I have never seen with her before … I have never seen her let down her guard enough to be able to say "no I love working with the horses and that is what I am going to do", so I am missing out on this other thing (sailing).

> … they really wanted to be friends with those horses and I saw it in both A and C, it was like boom, no one can stand between you and Barnaby no one can stand between you and Cinnamon it was like best friends for life so yeah. I think a bit to do with responsibility they had personally, the size of the horse yeah.

> L. has a lot of issues around anxiety, depression and controlling everything and everybody and when she gets there [riding school], she's just another person she just changes into this beautiful 13 year old who's only worried about doing what she needs to do and wanting to do everything, but without controlling … put her with other students and she'll work with them like that 'it's your turn it's my turn'.

> A.'s biggest thing in life is making friends, he has really struggled to make friends his whole life and so he really gets upset about why he hasn't got a best friend, he gets upset about who he is and often he'll come to me and say "I think I just want to be a different guy" … he was our main person who got bullied in the group … but now he has got friends and what that means is he'll do whatever he can to be cool. But what I found interesting is that the two hours in that week [with the horses], he didn't, because he realised he really liked working with Barnaby he made a connection with Barnaby, 100% … he learned to ignore all the distractions … .he had this affinity with Barnaby (who) was really fast, and I think he admired that strength in Barnaby.

The teachers noticed how student's relationships with horses and coaches also influenced their peers in this collective learning context. We can see in the accounts below how affective pedagogies are thoroughly entangled with horse-human relations in ways that move students to engage in collaborative ways with others beyond the programme.

> I think it's changed relationships amongst the young people … I think it has impacted our group, I think it's brought our group closer it was nice to kind of mix up … it has, you know, strengthened relationships outside of just the horse programme.

> she didn't want to ride the horses though and I think this is a self-conscious issue … but then she really liked leading them … and she loves to take on the leadership role and so she still wanted to work with the horses but she felt she deserved a different role I think than anybody else [having some prior experience] … I think she was really under the spell because she just loved them, she loves horses and she would talk about it a lot, and I said yeah she enjoyed leading other students.

Teachers narrating the agentic capacities of horse-human relations

The specific stories produced by teachers about the changes observed in young people and the shifting complexities of their everyday lives brings into view the broader assemblage of forces that shape learning (family, care, school, identity, support, poverty, bullying, etc.). We theorise these stories as *enactments* of meaning about change and identities, not simply as representations of observed 'truth' (Rosiek & Snyder, 2018). Teachers recognised the power of the horses as nonhuman pedagogues along with the volunteer trainers, they were surprised at the 'amazing' changes in students and found it difficult to explain these powerful affects. Malcolm et al. (2017, p. 8) identified a similar response with children who have autism where 'staff and parents often described "breakthrough moments", significant improvements in social functioning of riders as a result of weekly sessions at the Centre'. Teachers produced mini biographies of each student about how they acted, felt and related to others in different contexts. Their stories did not simply detail individual change but rather mapped out how agentic capacities involved the entanglement of affective horse-human relationships with other learning and life contexts. We heard these entanglements and micro transformations in the teacher's stories about their conversations with parents that narrated how young people experienced the programme within the flexi-school context.

> I made a note about B, his parent actually phoned me "this is brilliant, this horse program, he has been coming home and talking about it every single day". I have written [about B's comment on his horse] Sunny, "yeah because Sunny and I have got the same colour skin" he just loved Sunny so much he talked about Sunny a lot, so I was shocked about that because he had only been here 3 times I think.

> Monday[s] in flexi world are the toughest and it is because … [students] have the longest time at home from Friday, and sometimes around violence, substance abuse, bad diet, they lose out on sleep and then they come to school. So it is usually your craziest day in terms of like fights or just for young people coming to school and being asleep. So I actually thought it was really interesting that the horse program was on a Monday.

> there has been a whole lot of changes with a lot of the students. Because of that upheaval [having two social workers attached to the class leave in a short space of term], every student has had the impact of it, but when

> they get to those horses they are back to that really beautiful base again within themselves and then they come out and we come in here on the Tuesday and there has been focus in their learning, not for all of them, like L is really struggling today but that's also because he knows that yesterday was the last equine day.

The teacher's stories about young people (and the retelling of parental stories) worked to circulate narratives that countered 'deficit' models of learning, disability, personality or family life that often saturated the educational space of schooling in this marginalised area. The teachers were also moved through surprising moments of affective pedagogy as they attuned to different ways of understanding and connecting with young people's embodied learning. Significantly the volunteer trainers figured in these stories as adults [all were women] who were not parents or teachers in the usual sense, hence they facilitated the learning capacities of young people through horse connections (as role models, showing skills and how to relate, be calm, take risks, express appreciation). Teachers commented on this relation,

> All those ladies [volunteer coaches] are really great … Our students don't ever thank anybody for anything, they just think they are entitled to it. Yesterday our group stood up and made a speech and covered points from what they got from the programme and how much they were attached to the ladies and how grateful they were … so they really, really appreciated that programme.

The teacher's observations point to how 'more-than-human spaces and entities are agentic in creating and eliciting emotions' (Taylor et al., 2019). Exposure to equine programmes might provide teachers with experiences that demonstrate the relationships that shape emotional wellbeing beyond individualised contexts, moral judgement and blame. This more-than-human approach could inform different ways of supporting students to learn embodied movement beyond the instructional pedagogy of Physical Education, to connect with the world where 'green shoots' can be nurtured (Gard, 2021).

Concluding remarks

In this article we have explored how approaching equine programmes from a more-than-human perspective can provide insights into the learning processes and outcomes of equine assisted activity programmes. Returning to our original data set we pursued different questions to trace the *affective pedagogies* shaping horse-human learning (Hickey-Moody, 2013). In contrast to a humanist perspective on individual change, we theorised the learning assemblage that was produced through the dynamic entanglement of students, horses, teachers, parents and volunteers. Students often experienced fear when initially engaging with the horses, however, they also learned to connect and express love, manage anger differently, act on their desire to learn and become confident in new situations. A more-than-human approach offers a way to think beyond binary constructions of emotion as purely an individualised state, and explore what emotions *do* and not just what they *are*. The horse-human intra-actions enabled students to realise their agential capacities to relate differently to other people such as teachers, friends and family. As Barad (2007, p. 23) suggests agentic capacities and intentionality are better 'understood as attributable to a complex network of human and nonhuman agents, including historically specific sets of material conditions that exceed the traditional notion of the individuals'.

Students also learned calmness being *with* horses and doing things with volunteers, which was often a marked contrast with chaotic environments at home and difficulties with school. Equine activities offer alternatives to physical education and to traditional forms of therapy in educational settings with students who have diverse needs and disability (Allen et al., 2022). Importantly, the programme also changed narratives of and for these young people in ways that challenged individualised deficit models (behavioural problems, stigma), and recognised the importance of the affective relations with objects, environments, animals, teachers, friends and peers. We agree with the productive potential of more-than-human thought for future sport and learning research as Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010, p. 540) state that 'it might, for example, increase our attentiveness to children's strong relations to the things, artefacts and spaces … that are often overlooked in favour of the social or interpersonal relations'.

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