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### PEDAGOGICAL ASPECTS OF HORSE RIDING

*The horse riding as every kind of recreational sport have extensively positive impact on our health and well-being. The methods of therapy with a horse are useful in medicine as the supportive forms of standard physiotherapeutic methods. However, in Poland there is not many studies on the wide pedagogical aspect of the horse – man relation. Meantime, according to ex. American research, this specific interaction between species can be useful in supporting the therapy methods in such fields, as: special education, emotional and behavioral disorders, development disabilities, remedial education or resocialization.*

**Key words:** horse riding, recreational sport, therapy methods, special education, resocialization.

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### ПЕДАГОГІЧНІ АСПЕКТИ ВЕРХОВОЇ ЇЗДИ

*Верхова їзда, як і кожний вид рекреаційного спорту, справляє винятково позитивний вплив на здоров'я людини та її самопочуття. Терапія з конем використовується також у медицині, коли мова йде про класичну іпотерапію, тобто про підтримку стандартних методів фізіотерапії на рівні гімнастичних вправ на коні. Однак, педагогічний аспект стосовно взаємовідносин «людина – кінь» досі недостатньо висвітлений у науці. Між тим, цей вид взаємодії може служити з метою підтримки методів ортопедагогіки, спеціальної освіти, психолого-педагогічної терапії або реабілітації.*

**Ключові слова:** верхова їзда, рекреаційний спорт, методи терапії, спеціальна освіта, реабілітація.

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### ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ ВЕРХОВОЙ ЕЗДЫ

*Верховая езда, как и каждый вид рекреационного спорта, оказывает исключительно положительное влияние на здоровье человека и его самочувствие. Терапия с лошадью используется также в медицине, когда речь идет о классической ипотерапии, то есть о поддержке стандартных методов физиотерапии на уровне гимнастических упражнений на лошади. Однако, педагогический аспект относительно взаимоотношений «человек – лошадь» до сих пор недостаточно освещен в науке. Между тем, этот вид взаимодействия может служить в целях поддержания методов ортопедагогической, специального образования, психолого-педагогической терапии или реабилитации.*

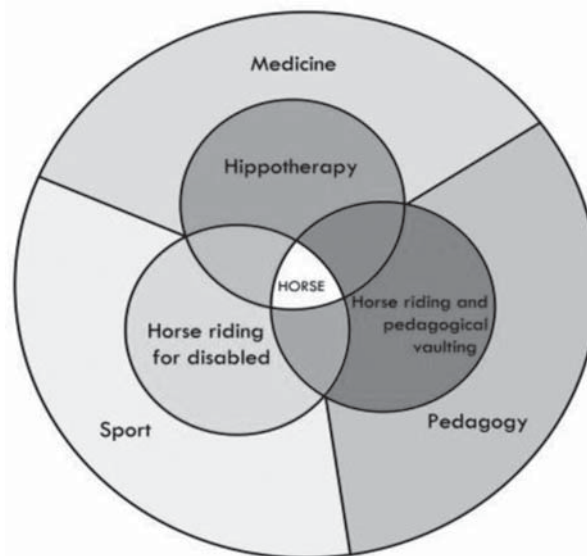
**Ключевые слова:** верховая езда, рекреационный спорт, методы терапии, специальное образование, реабилитация.

**Лит.** 18.

**Statement of the problem.** In the recent decades in Poland increased attention in the field of physiotherapy supportive methods such, as hippotherapy. Also equestrian activities and sports develop intensively relatively to the times of communistic system in Poland. Horse riding became the sport for everyone and we can easily note increasing attention on equestrian activities for disabled. However, as observed, pedagogical aspect of animal therapy with a horse seems to be neglected. This kind of impression can be caused by overwhelming pedagogical dimension of the animal therapy, recreation and sport, which anyway «invades» horse activities. In USA researchers note positive effect of a horse therapy on inmates and difficult youth [13]. No study in this subject in Poland has been found. Nevertheless, encouraging children and youth to associate with animals can at least result in supporting their development, and as the American study showed, it can help both youth with and without disorders. Purpose of this paper is to show methods of the horse therapy and its results with the special view on the pedagogical aspect.

**Research analysis.** In the horse therapy field, it can be note complementarity of the scientific disciplines. Equestrian activities, when observed, give an impression of overwhelming positive effect on the human individual. Supporting the medical treatment in the case of the horse therapy goes usual together with the pedagogical therapy and sometimes even with the sport therapy (paraolimpics). In the below picture the complementarity of the horse riding impacts can be notice.

*Pic. 1. Complementarity of the scientific fields in the equestrian activities [11, 24].*



Determination of the boundaries between disciplines involved in the horse therapy brings some difficulties but it is necessary. There is a need to decide which form of the therapy must have the largest impact on the patient and what financial source will be involved. In Poland, ex. hippotherapy has been recognized as one of the supportive therapies for disabled and can be refund by the National Health Fund. **Biomedical aspects of horseriding.** The largest

impact on our health has our lifestyle. According to the former Canadian Minister of Health Marc Lalonde the concept of the «health fields» considers a composition of four independent fields determine an influence on individual's health. These include: biology – 16%, environment – 21%, **lifestyle – 53%** and medical care organizations – only 10 % [15]. Thus, it appears obvious that encouraging children and youth to any form of recreation or sport activities and teach them proper health lifestyle habits can have a great influence on the prevention of very serious diseases. Recently lack of sport activity cause overweight and obesity, which bring long list of the comorbidities, also psychosocial ones, such as: low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, social isolation and worse school performance [4, 12].

The horse in the medical therapy is used in the addition rehabilitation treatment. Hippotherapy method is a neurophysiological treatment indicated for patients with the neurological movement disorders [11, 25]. In other words, hippotherapy in the classical and common terms is understood as therapeutic exercises of neurological system by use of the horse. The therapy can be only use with the presence of the qualified professional in the field of the physiotherapy and on the specially selected, prepared and trained for this purpose horse. In this respect, the horse will serve as a special agent in the treatment, transferring a motion on the patient and moving the slowest of its pace – walk.

The physical and psychological development of the disabled children is often disturbed and in this case the medical aspect of the horse riding takes deep pedagogical dimension in the attempts of the mental improvement. The pedagogical aspect shows up also when the disrupted motoric development has negative impact on the processes of the child adaptation to live in a society, in which the important role is played by the ability to establish contacts and relations in the peer group [12, 145].

**Pedagogical aspects of horse riding.** The «medical field» in the picture 1 of this paper shows the common area for horse riding and therapeutic-pedagogic vaulting. According to the Strauss [11], this area is understood as an early childhood therapy, which the goal is to achieve the motor improvement and may refer to children with the deficits in the psychomotor area and children with psychosomatic diseases. Changes in the behavior influenced by the contact with a horse are individualistic, psychological, psychotherapeutic, physiotherapeutic and social. «By combining elements of sport with the fact of personal contact with the agent – horse it is engaged whole human being in corporal, spiritual, mental and social dimension» [11, 25]. Integration with the environment, as well as teaching empathy are the crucial elements of support the child development. By the attempts of understanding living creature and reaction to its variable conditions man creates the bonds between the external world based on acceptance, respect and tolerance. Response on other living creature condition reinforces also a desire to build patient own integrity. Those goals are possible to achieve in the process of upbringing and education in the harmony with nature [3, 21–22; 7, 9–12]. In addition, an animal teaches a man closeness, which helps to establish contacts with other people with similar interests and hobbies. Moreover, it helps to endure loneliness, various pathological conditions, convalescence or any form of isolation [3, 21]. The therapy with the use of animals is alternative and nonconventional form of supporting classic therapeutic methods [6, 9]. The most often met forms of animal therapy are: hippotherapy, dog therapy, cat therapy and pet therapy as a combination of few various species of animals used in the therapy [3, 22]. Activities involving animals have its specific therapeutic targets. In terms of psychomotor functions: development of cognitive functions, development of vocabulary, expansion of short- and long-term memory, development of motor skills, development of eye-hand coordination, development of ability to concentrate attention, development of directional and spatial orientation; devel-

oping a sense of balance, developing ability of movement. In terms of emotional and social sphere: developing the skills of a teamwork, developing the skills of verbalization patient's needs and feelings, developing the skills of relaxation, increasing self-confidence, eliminating fears [3, 22]. The other benefits of the human contact with the animal may be: development of empathy, bringing joy and smile, motivating social development, learning of self-acceptance, improving communication skills, stimulation of motor functions, encouraging to be active and independent, learning of responsibility and trust, providing entertainment, supporting passing through the traumatic situations (illness, loneliness) [3, 23–24]. Using hippotherapy or animal-pedagogical therapy at all, it is hard to find individuals with contraindications. These methods are addressed to both health children and those with developmental deficits in the mental or emotional sphere [3, 22]. Naturally, animal therapy can also be used by a person with a combination of various deficiencies, including physical ones. Amongst the main targets of the pedagogical hippotherapy as a one of the animal therapy method a few should be indicated. Firstly, learning the principles of handling the horse safely, including: proceeding at play and exercising; proceeding with strange and acquaintance animals; proceeding in the emergency situations. Secondly, developing proper attitude toward animals and improving knowledge about needs and abilities of the horse. On the third place learning about animals rights and respecting them, and acquisition of the basic skills of taking care, training and communication with a horse. Additional targets would focus on: developing sensibility and empathy, learning acceptance and tolerance, and building self-esteem, self-confidence, assertiveness, a sense of security [3, 30], responsibility and teamwork spirit [A. G.].

As well as in the case of the medical hippotherapy it is worth to mention instructor's competences in various forms of pedagogical therapy with a horse. Proper person should be not only well pedagogically qualified and experienced with the specific age group of patients but also need to be familiar with equestrian knowledge as a whole, including: stable management, horse's behavior and training methods or procedures in the case of emergency towards animal and the pupil. Obviously the instructor should also acquire all features of a good teacher such, as: persistence, willingness to overcome any difficulties and gaining new experience, good communication skills, flair for the transfer of knowledge. It should also apply to the rules of procedures with pupils requiring special pedagogical approaches. Both, well-prepared educator and the pupil should obey these rules. Lipkowski distinguished six universal rules in special education: rule of the benevolent help, rule of the formation of good work atmosphere, rule of the active learning, rule of the bringing up domination, rule of individualization and rule of educational contents [8, 46]. Above purposes and principles of the special education and animal therapy show, that properly conducted therapy with the animals can be useful in supporting the development and bringing up process of the child with the special educational needs, his socialization, and preventing negative behaviors and even social pathologies. In the case of the persons with the special educational needs, many psychological problems such as: anxiety, lower self-esteem or feeling of rejection are explained by the emotional coldness or lack of sensitivity in the early childhood period. Therefore, some psychologist use techniques known as regressive, which allow the patient «relive» some critical stages of early childhood and experienced, in a way, lack of necessary elements of those stages (warm feelings, a sense of security) [12, 145]. Substitute for those elements and regressive experience, in this case is a horse. It is believed, that characteristic feelings and experiences giving to a patient by a horse – warmth, softness, rocking can be a substitute of feeling safe and cared. In the relation child – horse, the patient is confident of total and unconditional acceptance, lack of rejection and evaluation, what can have a wide therapeutic impact [12, 146].

The therapy of intellectually disabled persons with a use of a horse has purposes: reinforcing the feeling of control by: possibility of taking decisions, sense of agency; reducing anxiety: connected with new situations; connected with separation; arising from helplessness; realization of ideas of patient's own possibilities; development of social competences by: supporting the development of decentration; supporting the control of expressing feelings and reducing tensions; experiencing responsibility and taking the role of animal's care; respecting rules and norms [12, 146–154].

**Equestrian in the service of resocialization.** In the end of the XX century start to bring the methods and forms of animal therapy in the rehabilitation and penitentiary practice. The methods provided with a use of a horse started in the United States in 1988 in one of the farms in Wyoming [16]. The privilege of associating with horses was proposed to the inmates in exchange for a good behavior. In the resort a special program was developed and it was based on evaluating an interaction worked out by the inmates and the wild horses – both requiring socialization. The system specifically determines the conditions for the project's management, including matching a person and an animal in the individual personality traits [16].

After about 90 days of training and socialization the horses are being adopted or sold, because the whole conception is based on the work with the wild horses. The program showed a high efficiency, because the wild horse undergone socialization and obedience training and individuals subjected to penitentiary interactions demonstrate many similarities. When the wild 500-600 kilograms animal is being caught, kept in custody without unlimited space of its natural environment, it will not tolerate aggression, will not bear any kinds of cheating, will expect honesty. Both the horse and the inmate all of the sudden found themselves in the total new environment and conditions of the laws, rules and limitations to which they must adapt. Thanks to the program the prisoners learn that only through the honesty, respect, trust, patience and teamwork even such an animal like a wild horse responds positively [16]. The authors of the program report, that the high percentage of their former inmates are successfully functioning in the society after serving their sentence. This penitentiary system also conducts programs for war veterans, pensioners, chronically ill persons and juvenile hall's inmates. There is also cooperation with the penitentiary centers for women and difficult youth [14].

**The role of the equestrian activities in the elimination of the negative behavior in children and youth.**

*Equestrian is beautiful sport and can be seen as an art  
on the highest level everyone would like to climb.  
Nevertheless, it can be done only by those,  
who infiltrate horses psychic and not with force  
but feelings achieve an understanding [10, 3].*

In those words of the great German rider Wilhelm Müseler we can note the deep pedagogical dimension of the horse riding. Sport can include also therapy, disabled activities, rehabilitation and pedagogy. It happens, because sport thought as a physical culture include: professional sport, physical education, tourism, hygiene, methodology, didactics of maintaining a natural relationship with the environment, and also a physical rehabilitation [9, 31]. According to Demel and Skład, sport means the activity being taken regularly, obedient to certain rules, with the strong competition factor, and tendency to achieving better and better results, what is manifested in the physical fitness. The sport and the physical culture have an ambiguous meaning. The most important features of the sport are: independence of the direct motives of the basic necessities of life; it is associated with the positive emotions; a motor na-

ture of the activities connected with their specialization; regularity in an effort to achieve the maximum results; competition form of improvement; strict adherence to the rules [2, 16–17].

From the sociological point of view, the physical culture is the system of values, activities and its effects in the field of body activity of the person in the specific external conditions, and stimulated with the social needs, and the forms and contents of those activities will depend on the type of the society, the degree of its development and its system of meanings and symbols [6, 39]. An extremely important role of the physical culture was shown in the historical fact of organization sport meetings by the prisoners of concentration camps during the Second World War [9, 17–18], ex. Boxing games and football matches on the roll-call square in Gross-Rosen force labor camp [A. G.].

According to Krawczyk, physical culture focuses on the human as a bio-psycho-social being, and its functions are designed to meet the needs of three kinds:

1. Biological needs – necessary condition for the proper functioning and psychomotor development of the human, to preserve its energy homeostasis, eliminate the consequences of a long-term exploitation, adjustment of daily and seasonal cycle, increasing the adaptability to change environmental conditions.

2. Psychological needs – aimed as an expression of personality, enriching the sphere of inner emotions and experiences, relieving stress and tension, thus helping to achieve a state of the psychological comfort.

3. Social needs – as a channel of socialization an enculturation, group integration factor, prevents deviations, disorganization and destabilization [6, 59].

Therefore, to the third category it can be applied the needs to prevent all kinds of disorders and it can be concluded, that physical education should become a regular part of the rehabilitation both in children and adults with social dysfunctions or at risk of social maladjustment [1, 34]. Equestrian is an exceptional sport, in which always the pair is taken into account. Children and youth riding horses take part in many additional preparation of the horse, such as: brushing, bathing, saddling, barn/ stable duties and other. The large spectrum of heterogeneous exercises and activities related to the horse riding also draws an attention [18, 20].

Apart from the pupil, the person of sport educator deserves a special view. A horse riding instructor as a teacher of physical education or a sport coach should be characterized by:

1. Effectiveness factor – partner attitude, the ability to lead a team, the ability to be noticed in the group.

2. Model of personality – a passion for work, creativeness and wide range of hobbies, leadership skills, sense of responsibility, extensive knowledge, to be well mannered, a high level of morality;

3. Universal characteristics – communication skills, emotional balance, kindness, sense of humor and good health [1, 33-34].

In the case of teaching dysfunctional persons to the above list of special qualifications, features and characteristics of an educator would be much longer. Speaking about a proper trainer (in the case of paraolimpics) or/ and a therapist (complementary disciplines of equestrian sport: medical therapy, pedagogy, sport), can be mention features, such as: empathy; awareness of own difficulties and limitations; awareness of own strengths in contact with disabled patient; flexibility and tolerance in situations where the previous plan needs to be canceled, what may prevent a sense of failure by both the mentee and the trainer/ therapist; ability to admit own professional difficulties within the therapeutic team, what gives an opportunity of consultation [12, 158]. Nevertheless, to this long list of wide range of competences and qualifications we would like to add those connected with highly technical sport as

the horse riding is, and the knowledge of biology, husbandry and animal sciences, it would be a material for completely separate paper.

**Purpose of research.** The purpose of this research is to show in the empirical study possibilities of influences and effects of horse riding and equestrian sport on children and youth with the special view on the pedagogical aspects. From the theory it can be assumed, that all above various and multilateral forms of interactions: horse – instructor – pupil provide an immensity of positive influences. Additionally, traditional and historical role of a horse, the animal serving human race since the dawn of man, make the above issues significant and rich in possibilities of providing general knowledge, broaden horizons, and build an ethical individual personality of the pupil or mentee.

**The main section of the research.** Aside from the above literature analysis, the empirical research was designed and conducted in accordance to the methodology of grounded theory, by which the social reality is best understood by the actors involved in it, in the case of research – researchers [5, 131–160]. In this study researcher and author of this paper is horse riding instructor involved in the equestrian environment since 20 years. Taking into consideration the specificity of the pedagogical study, in particular due to the specific nature of the horse riding environment, using the grounded theory methodology is justified. Therefore, the methodology through its flexibility makes possible to maintain during the research of the so-called ‘serendipity’, i.e. through these procedures the researcher have the ability to search and explore phenomena, which were not searched at the baseline of the research. The research material was collected through direct interviews with the parents of the children riding horses regularly, riding facilities owners and other members of the equestrian community. To supplement the empirical material and to understand the broader social and situational context the participant observation had been used. Interviews and observations were made in the Poland from May 2014 to December 2014. The study material collected will be below partially presented in the form of case study.

**Parent 1.** 44 years old mother of 14 years old boy, a librarian. Her history begin in the early childhood, when, as she said: always dreamt to ride horses. «My family lived in the PGR (Państwowe Gospodarstwo Rolne – A State Agricultural Farm was a form of collective farming in the People’s Republic of Poland, existing in the times of the communism in Poland) facilities, next to the stables. All of my spare time I spent watching horses running at the fields, but at that times it was impossible even to approach to the stables or horses for people from outside the stable crew. So I kept on dreaming... But the times changed, communism has fallen and PGR together with it and, maybe not for me, but for my son those dreams could come true». For the storyteller the crucial moment was meeting the new horse riding instructor: «To our village and stable came a girl, just graduated university and horse riding instructor courses, she had a head full of brave ideas». An idea of the new teacher was to activate the children of post-PGR parents and motivate them to take care and ride horses. The parent notice the great role of the educator: «Her employer was not happy with those ideas, the facility should be profitable, customers should be businessmen, rich people, but instructor was determined and change the life of few children». Amongst the influences of the horse riding on her son, the parent indicates: «My son help in stable in exchange for riding lessons, that was whole idea, and it was a therapy for him. His hyperactivity was controlled and he became more responsible, before he was so troubled, now I know he was just being bored with PGR environment stagnation». Finally, the story teller made her dreams came true and today she ride horses together with her son.

**Parent 2.** 40 years old mother of 7 years old daughter, a manager. According to her, every age is good for child to start riding horses, but the right animal, matched to the child is impor-

tant: «I was trying to ride horses myself in the nearest equestrian facility, but only big horses were there, no ponies. One day came a lovely little Shetland pony and this is how it started for my daughter». Shetland ponies are not suitable for riding but – if they are well-tempered can be a great start for the youngest children learning to associate with animals. «I remember well the first spring day we sought him! My daughter was squeaking and jumping from happiness. From this day on, we were in the stable almost every day». The parent adds: «And so my daughter changed... became so responsible, motivated and brave, she does not cry from no reason, what was often before». The end of the story, as the previous one is very optimistic: «We often ride together, and my daughter dream about her first horse show with the pony, drawing its pictures and start to read horse magazines and books».

**Parent 3.** 38 mother of 9 years old son, a school teacher. From the parent's perspective: «The most important is the instructor, his/her approach to the children, time to talk with parents, to stay open-minded, communicative». She starts to bring her son to the equestrian facility once a week, but thought he will resigned after a while. It did not happen. «He wants to ride more and more, now, just after a few months we need to be here at least twice a week. When I say we go to the stable he is ready and packed in a minute!». The parent emphasizes a great role of the physical exercises and the motivation to learning. «He knows, that we will not go to the horses if the homework is not done, so he never puts off since he started to ride». The parent admits, that her son is very interested about all things connected with horses, reads about them, draws them and contact with friend of the same hobbies.

**Case study results.** The interviews with three parents of riding children were conducted. As the most important influences of the three horse riding aspects showed in the paper, parents indicated as below.

**Table 1.**

*Influence of the three aspects of horse riding according to the parents (source: the author's own study).*

	Medical	Pedagogical	Sport
Parent 1	Reducing hyperactivity. Reducing fear.	Positive influence of instructor's authority. Teaching responsibility. Higher grades at school.	Reducing hyperactivity. Positive health effects.
Parent 2	Reducing fear. Strengthen muscles.	Self-confidence, Independency, Riding parent-child relation (competition). Shaping character. Motivation in competitions	Reducing overweight. Physical activity lacked at school.
Parent 3	Muscle relaxation, Higher flexibility of dysfunctional joint.	Positive influence of instructor's authority. Teaching respect, sensibility and discipline.	Large dose of physical exercises.

**Conclusion.** Hippotherapy, in the classical viewpoint is the supportive method of the medical rehabilitation. It is method well-known and appreciated in the medical and physicians environment. When it comes to the medical indications for hippotherapy, it should be decided by the doctor and rehabilitant or physiotherapist and always be carried out under supervision of highly qualified professionals. However, the pedagogical dimension of the horse-riding reflected in horse-instructor-pupil relations requires a deep analysis. Functioning in these in-



teractions contains the features of animal therapy and various disciplines of pedagogy. The participation of the horse in the therapy with the help of the animal-patient relation gives the expression of unconditional acceptance. The horse does not show impatience, reluctance, does not express any negative comments, which may result in the strengthening conviction of deserving a wider social acceptance and increase self-esteem. Supporting of those psychic states can occur a crucial determinant in returning to health in diseases or mental homeostasis after traumatic experiences. At the end, horse riding can have a very positive and comprehensive psycho-educational dimension by broaden horizons, interests, hobbies of children and adults, thus prevention of exposure to threats of the modern world. However, it should be noted significant role of the educators, coaches, instructors or therapists, who take part in close connected and complicated relations. The person of the instructor/ coach/ educator/ therapist stands inside these relations and being involved in it. Therefore, this kind of teacher is a specific link of communication between two species, enters the roles of intermediary and negotiator and in the final result can improve patient's psychomotor functions, return to the society the person excluded or even help to climb to the highest of equestrian art. In all those cases, the teacher can greatly determine lives of the pupils.

The largest limitation of the presented research is obviously to small number of the cases analyzed. On the other hand, however, it would be impossible to present in details more of the histories in one paper. The study on the pedagogical aspect of the horse riding should be still continued until so-called theoretical saturation, which in according to the methodology of grounded theory is the point to stop in the theoretical process of collection the groups of comparison. Saturation means, that there is no further data and the domain cannot be further elaborated, because there are still similar examples showing up [5, 131–160]. A continuation of the research should be conducted not only in Poland but worldwide, in order to draw more general conclusions, which could help to create valuable recommendations for parents of children with any kinds of physical and psychic disorders and fully exploit the horse riding therapy potential.

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