

Remedial or therapeutic Vaulting (as therapeutic or educative technique)

Introduction

Vaulting was born in ancient history, long before the Roman Empire, in the Middle and Far East. Mongolians, Afghans, Cossacks, Selchucks, Beriberis and other populations developed some popular acrobatic games and rituals riding on horses that still nowadays can be seen in some special celebrations. In the age of the great empires (Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Otman) vaulting was often included in the main celebrations at the side of riding skills demonstrations. Vaulting was used also as a part of the training for military riders. For this reason we can see today basically two types of vaulting: the Circus vaulting and the Sport vaulting. The Sport vaulting comes from the military tradition as well as all the modern Classical riding such as Dressage or Show Jumping. On the other side, Circus vaulting proceeds from the popular tradition. In military traditions the horse is considered as a tool to be controlled and thus submitted by force just like a soldier, in order to be reliable and effective. In the popular tradition is a partner to reach goals with through active communication.

The main difference nowadays is that in circus horses usually move free, they are not leaded by the lounge (long rope) while in sports vaulting it is obligatory to use the lounge and it is recommended that the horses are perfectly and completely submitted to the action of the leader who leads through the lounge and the long whip. For this reason – safety – and for the physical welfare of the horse, in sports vaulting also lateral fixed reins are used, to shape the horse into a reunion posture which is considered the best in order to develop a strong back musculature.

Another difference is that the vaulters can be riders or not. They can be connected with the horse or they can just perform exercises on the horse. Generally in circus they are riders, while in sport vaulting they are usually acrobats.

The vaulting that we consider to be truly Remedial or Therapeutic is the one in which there is a connection between the horse and the vaulters, because we believe that the emotional connection is the base for any learning.

Of course we can obtain mechanical benefits from mechanical exercises on a base in regular movement, but for those benefits it is enough a mechanical horse. To reduce the horse to a mechanical tool is in our opinion negative both for the horse and the vaulter/rider. The horse loses any chance to give her/his emotions to the patient, and is forced to move in a mechanical way. The patient is not allowed to develop a connection with the horse and thus can only exercise his mechanical abilities with a higher risk of injury with respect of doing the exercises on a mechanical horse in a gymnasium, due to the fact that the animal always is somewhat unpredictable, even when totally submitted and conditioned.

Picture/image to illustrate...



Photo: Nelson Vidoni with Anna Cavallaro, actual world champion of Sport Vaulting.



Photo: International Festival of Circus Golden Elephant (Elefant d'or)

Brief description of the kind of vaulting that we practice.

We integrate some vaulting exercises in our programmes of educative or therapeutic riding and grooming.

We train the horses in the round pen without lounge, in freedom, first without rider. Then, with the rider on, we first use the lounge (but not the long whip), or a leader with the short rope and eventually a side walker on the inner side.

Only in a second phase, with advanced riders, we take out the rope and work with the horse in freedom.

We work only at walk, due to the kind of horse that we use for therapy and vaulting: an Hispanic Breton who used to work in the forest pulling trunks. For this kind of horses is easy to bare the weight of more than one rider/vaulter. We move in line and not in circle, in the riding arena and not in the round pen, generally with groups of up to five children or three (light) adults.

When working in therapeutic riding, we practice also some vaulting exercises at trot and canter, using a handles belt and a pad instead of the saddle, in circle in the round pen, with or without lounge.

We always start our sessions with feeding and grooming the animals, then we

do a warm up for the riders/vaulters and for the horses, then comes the moment of riding with connection, seated on the pad, and then we can start the vaulting exercises. From seated to kneeling, and to standing up, with the horse on halt. From seated to kneeling and then the flag or superman position, at walk, and finally trying to stand up at walk.

When doing therapeutic riding, wishing to do some kneeling and standing up at canter, we always use the lounge and we work in an open field or an arena, since the round pen fence could be very dangerous. We know that some centres use circus round pens where they can work with the horses in freedom without running any risk.

6 exercises.

Exercise 1:

How to find balance in movement with the support of Feldenkreis-method:

Brief description:

FELDENKRAIS EXERCISES ON THE MOVING HORSE

Child is sitting on the horseback, the leader holds the leash and controls the speed of the horse, in case of a scaring or insecure situation, side-walker near the horse/ child

intention/ Goal:

safe, independent seat on horseback

Learning experience for the child :

body awareness, relaxed posture

method:

With the assistance of Feldenkreis Awareness exercises adapted to the mental and physical situation of the child.

task:

the child can perceive the horse via the seat with all senses, during moving around.

First step: "Allow yourself to be carried by the horse."

Next steps: "How large is the area with which your bottom touches the horse?"

"Which colour can you imagine, or: how deep is the imprint on the horseback?"

"How does your seat changes when the movement gets faster?"

"How does your seat changes when you let your arms hang loose and turn slowly to the right and to the left facing the back so that you can look over your shoulder?"

"Imagine the length of your legs, hanging on the left and the right side of the horseback. Do they feel equal?"

"Imagine balancing a glass of water in each hand, what effects does that have to your seat?"

"Imagine that an invisible helper supports your back with his hand and holds your head really gently so that you can relax your back." (It's also conceivable an actual helper can intervene as support)

The perception of the seat serves the child in that case as a reference point to detect changes in his balance.

Exercise 2:
how you can feel connected to the horse through the common movement

Brief description:

VISUALIZATION AND SENSORY PERCEPTION EXERCISE

Child is sitting on the horseback, the leader holds the leash and controls the speed of the horse, in case of a scaring or insecure situation, side-walker near the horse/ child

intention/ Goal:

Learning to perceive the movement of the horse

Learning experience for the child :
trust and connection

method:

With the help of visualization and sensory perception exercises the child is encouraged to concentrate on his body and it's movement. He/ she can establish contact with the horse through physical impulse or through activating inner images.

task:

The child is encouraged to observe, which parts of his own body, or the horse's body, move, when the horse is walking. He can place his own hand on these parts of the body and thus create a changing connection between the movement of the horse and his own movement. It also can be done at different speeds. Other possibility: the side-walker touches different parts of child or horse body during the movement, in the next step the child can touch the corresponding parts of his/her own body or of the horse body, which supports the child's perception of himself as well as his connection to the horse. For these exercises it is necessary to be sure of what kind of instruction is the best for each child, if verbal, visual or kinaesthetic. For the next step the child can playfully deal with the different postures on the horse to find out the effect on himself or on the horse. For example: What kind of posture do you choose when you are tired, or when you are proud, or famous, or scared, and how does this affect to your horse and the way the horse move?

This exercise helps the child to understand the interaction in a better way.

Exercise 3:
isolated movements on the walking horse

Brief description:

BODY CONTROL WITH THE HELP OF RHYTHMIC MOVEMENT

1 or 2 Children are sitting on the horseback, the leader holds the leash and controls the speed of the horse, side-walker near the horse/ child

intention/ Goal:

Learn to move different body parts independently, can be used as a preparation for next learning steps, like: ride trot, canter, or develop vaulting as a competitive sport

Learning experience for the child:
motor skills, Body control, skill

method:

rhythmic movement, music, rhythm, gestures as an expression of inner feelings.
The rhythm of the walking horse can help to find rhythm in the own body
Can be combined with all kind of musical accompaniment.

Task::

First step: the child can find out the rhythm of the horse walking, and speak, sing or clap the rhythm with hands. Another child can beat the rhythm along with it.
Next: - count the steps of the horse at different speeds. Changes of rhythm and speed with the help of visualization.
Changes between stop and go with the help of visualization. With hands on the croup, feel the rhythm or count the steps
Next: - "take a lot of space with your arm, left side/right side" ... and similar.

Very good for movement oriented people.

**Exercise 4:
learn to ride at trot or canter**

Brief description:

LEARN TO CHANGE THE SPEED AND THE RHYTHM OF HORSE WALKING

Child is sitting on the horseback, the leader holds the leash.
Together with the Leader and the therapist the child learns to control the speed of the horse step by step.

Or: the child is holding the leash and learns step by step from the ground, to control the speed of the horse without anybody sitting on the horse.

intention/ Goal:
speed control and secure fit on horseback in fast gaits

Learning experience for the child :
courage, self-confidence

method:
Feldenkreis – exercises,

Task:
to learn how the pelvis moves at walk and at faster gaits.
Consciousness about the right and left side of the body developed through perceptual exercises, verbal, visual, or through body contact.
To make the horse go faster from the ground, feel the difference.

**Exercise 5:
learning together with others in a group**

Brief description:

CIRCUS LESSONS IN A GROUP WITH CHILDREN

Child is sitting on the horseback, the leader holds the leash.

intention/ Goal:
Cooperation, Inclusion, promote potential

Learning experience for the child :
The children can recognize and contribute their own skills and make the experience, to accept challenges,

method:
Role-play, Imagination

Task:
Together with all the children of the group, every child chooses his role in which he wants to ride.
Step: Riding in the magic circle :
In the beginning of the lesson, the horse is decorated as a "magic horse" (with ribbons or something similar)
Every child may ride a certain number of laps, and wish for what he wants to transform / be transformed in.
Children are helping each other to get on horseback.
Step: in the group every child can find a fantasy name, like "riding fortune" or "brave rider" or "the king of the horses" ..
The group works together on how each child can contribute and present themselves
If possible: at the end a joint performance

**Exercise 6:
jumping up/jumping down**

Brief description:
JUMPING UP/JUMPING DOWN

Child and trainer stand at the side of the horse. The trainer helps the rider to jump on. Then the rider will have to jump down. It can be done first with the horse standing quiet on halt, then at walk, at trot, and finally at canter.

intention/goal:
overcome the fear to fall down.

Learning experience for the child:
learns to concentrate and act in a rush, jumping. Learning to land smoothly both on the horse back (jumping up) and on the ground (jumping down)

method:
circus techniques

Methodical and didactic considerations...

What is the exercise for? What can the client learn? What kind of experience can he/she have with the exercise ?

And how can we adapt the exercise for different people?

Advantages/disadvantages...

We think there is NO GENERAL advantage or disadvantage. It really depends on the whole situation!! Especially: which topic does the child have?

We believe that it would be better to approach the question of how to adapt the learning situation to different children/persons with different abilities and conditions, for inclusive situation...

Here it can be mentioned if something is not helpful or presents some risks or contraindications...

- The most positive aspect for a therapeutic riding we see in Vaulting is, the reduction on the movement process for the child. Without being responsible for the speed and direction control, the child can focus on his own body in movement, the horse movement, and he can expand his range of movement.

- The most problematic aspect we see is the functionalization of the horse on the aspect of movement.

We would like to emphasize, that vaulting can be used for some very special, helpful experiences and exercises, but we think we should provide for the consciousness: we act with a really reduced part of the horse personality.

- And generally, whenever we work with the lounge leash we should take care, to have also some free encounter between child and horse before, in combination, during or after the lesson, to experience the respect for each other and the elementary free personality of child and horse .

- In my point of view it is important to consider with which intention we use vaulting. What part of development should it serve and how?

- horse welfare: physical and psychological compensation for the horse following the unilateral effort

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