**PLANNING, IMPLEMENTING AND EVALUATING A SOCIAL AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS COURSE FOR RIDING INSTRUCTORS**

**Annika Seefeld**

'You and I are in a relationship which I value and want to keep. We are also two separate persons with our own individual values and needs.'

~ Dr. Thomas Gordon ~

(Gordon Training International, 1978)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To all participants for joining my research study.

To Taru Lintunen for a constant and effective supervision & support.

To my friends, colleagues and people I met on the way, while carrying out my Master's Thesis and for their in-put, food for thoughts and opinions.

To my parents for supporting me in every possible way.

ABSTRACT

Social and emotional skills are very important for effective coaching. As research in this field is still very limited, the purpose of this study was to plan, implement and evaluate a course teaching social and emotional skills to riding instructors. The objective of this research project was to analyse the usefulness and feasibility of a social and communication skills course for riding instructors. The present research study is an educational action research case study approach. The course was based on Thomas Gordon's Model of Human Relationships and included different skills such as I-Messages, Active Listening, Shifting Gears and Problem Solving Skills.

In total four participants took part in the course, varying in age, discipline and employment status. The course was carried out in eight 1 ½ hours sessions on two days in Bielefeld, Germany. The data collection methods were researcher's notes and researcher's log. The course was video recorded. For further data collection feedback forms and a knowledge test were filled in by the participants as well as verbal feedback was written down. In addition, all participants send three more feedback forms to the researcher, one after two weeks, another one after one month and the last one after three months.

An important finding from the researcher was that the course is applicable for everybody regardless of their previous knowledge or skills. Every participant is improving, learning and practicing in their own pace. Therefore, it is indispensable for the supervisor of a SEL intervention to be flexible in his or her support and way of teaching. However, a heterogeneous group of participants is an advantage for sharing different experience, support each other and look at problems from a different point of view. In addition it was shown that the progress of the course needs to be traced and changes need to be made according to new information gained through the analysis. All participants agreed that skills learned during the course are useful for their work and for effective communication. However, it was shown that all participants struggled to apply the skills during riding lessons and rather used them in conflict situations with different customers. It was examined that all participants increased their theoretical knowledge of social and communication skills. Furthermore, all participants agreed that the course raised awareness of the importance of effective communication.

For future research in this field it is recommended to support participants also at work to apply the newly learned skills. However, more research is needed to examine the long-term effect as well as applicableness.


KEY WORDS: Social- and communication skills, Riding instructors, Effective relationships, Coaching, Self-assertive

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPENDICES

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Communication is a hot topic in the equestrian sport world. However, discussion is mainly focused on the horse and rider, but this is not the only interaction between two individuals that takes place. A lot of research has been done recently about the communication between athlete and coach. Different findings prove that there is a huge need to focus and improve the communication skills of coaches (Lintunen & Gould, 2014). Due to this, coaches are able to communicate their instructions in a way that the athlete perceives the real and correct message send by the coach. This will lead to an improvement of the athlete's performance.

Being active in equitation myself since I was four years old and learning from different riding instructors, I can say that the style is mainly dictatorial. During the last twenty years I experienced both sides, being a riding student and instructor. Most riding instructors teach in the way they have learned and I noticed that this also applied to myself. However, this leads to a lot of misunderstandings, riding students quitting and a negative learning environment. Participating in our University's course about successful communication and social and emotional learning made me realize how important interpersonal communication is. Especially the support and chance to develop social and emotional skills through equestrian sport is forfeited. Lintunen and Gould (2014) described the importance of the five core competences of social and emotional learning according to CASEL (2015) as well as their importance for effective coaching

Our sport life influences our daily life and our development. Having a riding instructor, who tells you that you are not good enough, can have a negative effect on your social and emotional development. In addition, coaches are role models and should be aware that their behaviour has an influence on their young athletes. Looking at coaches and sport instructors it is essential that their behaviour is socially and emotionally competent to create a safe learning atmosphere for their students. This will create space for positive experiences for their students as well as bring enjoyment (Lintunen & Gould, 2014). Therefore, interventions carried out for coaches will have advantages for the coach and his or her improved skills will have a positive effect on his or her athletes (Lintunen & Gould, 2014). Currently, there are no existing courses focusing on communication skills specifically for riding instructors.

Therefore, the objective of this thesis was to plan, implement and evaluate a social and communication skills course for riding instructors. The aim of the course was to educate riding instructors about effective communication to strengthen their relationship with trainees and clients. The thought behind the course was also to create a discussion between

participants and provide a chance for exchange of experiences. For research purposes observations of the supervisor, who is as well the researcher, video recordings, a knowledge test and feedback from participants collected at different times were used. It is expected to improve theoretical knowledge of communication skills, which will be used to have a better interaction between coach and athlete.

2 SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

2.1 Definition of social and emotional learning

Social and emotional learning is defined as the process of children and adults to "acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (Elias & al. 1997; Weissberg et al. , 2015; CASEL, 2015). Elias and Weissberg stated that 'social and emotional learning is critical to success in school and the workplace, and to sustaining healthy relationships with family and friends (2000). It will lead to emotional health and living a life controlled by yourself (Elias & Weissberg, 2000). Carrying out SEL interventions has the advantage to 'increase student's self-confidence and self-esteem, improve their attitudes toward school and education, and increase their prosocial behaviours (e.g., cooperation and helpfulness with others), and their academic performance in terms of both grades and test scores' (Weissberg et al., 2015). Fruthermore, Durlak et al. (2011) and Sklad et al. (2012) argue that SEL interventions can decrease aggressive behaviour and emotional stressors.

Five core competences have emerged which are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making according to CASEL, the Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning. These five core competences can be described more in detail as follows referring to CASEL (2015):

1. Self-awareness is defined as being able to consciously recognize your own emotions and thoughts as well as being aware of how they influence your behaviour. To be able to be self-aware an individual must precisely know his or her strengths and weaknesses. In addition, 'a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism' is required.

2. Self-management is defined as the competence of an individual to control his or her emotions, thoughts and resulting behaviour according to a situation in an effective way. The individual is able to regulate stress, manage impulses, and increase motivation to achieve personal and professional goals regarding the individual's goals and future.

3. Social awareness is defined as a skill of an individual to be able to empathize with other individuals from different cultures, backgrounds as well understand social structures in family, education and community. The individual is able to recognize resources and support coming from these instances and knows about ethical codes for behaviour.

4. Relationship skills are defined as the competence of an individual to create and keep worthwhile relationships to other individuals and groups. Clear communication, active

listening, cooperation, resistance to incongruous social pressure, constructive negotiation in conflict situations as well as striving to support others are main characteristics of relationship skills.

5. <u>Responsible decision making</u> is defined as the competence to consider ethical norms, security issues, social standards, consequences of certain actions as well as welfare of others and the individual itself, while making a realistic and conscious decision regarding one self's behaviour or social interaction.

All five competences described above are results of so called social and emotional learning, which enables us to improve our performance, well-being as well as our interaction with other individuals and groups (Lintunen & Gould, 2014). We have to deal with our emotions and thoughts as well as our affected behaviour from these every day.

Sport is one area where emotions are present and often not enough attention is paid to their expression and management. An issue evokes as emotions, which are not managed correctly will stay in our mind and impede our performance in a team or as an individual athlete (Lintunen & Gould, 2014). Lintunen and Gould stated that 'a great deal of potential is lost in sport due to lack of social and emotional skills in athletes and coaches of all ability levels (2014). For a coach, athlete or human being to become a social and emotional competent individual, one has to learn how to manage diverse social and emotional skills.

Each ability stated by CASEL as the five core competences of social and emotional learning consist of different characteristics mentioned by Lintunen and Gould (2014) as displayed in Figure 1. For an individual to be self-aware he or she needs to be able to define values and recognize needs, desires, feelings, wishes as well as knows one self's strengths and weaknesses. To be seen as a person to hold the competence of self-management he or she needs to be able to express her feelings, beliefs as well as thoughts in a clear way. This person is expressing her- or himself with I-messages and avoids Roadblocks of Communication, which will be described later on. To avoid Roadblocks of Communication is also a skill necessary to be learned to form social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. An individual being socially aware active listening is another important characteristic to be learned. For an individual to hold relationship skills he or she needs to be able to use positive as well as confronting I-messages and possess group skills. Last but not least if an individual is holding the competence of responsible decision making he or she possess problem solving methods, takes over responsibility for one self's decisions and results as well as communicate these in a clear way.
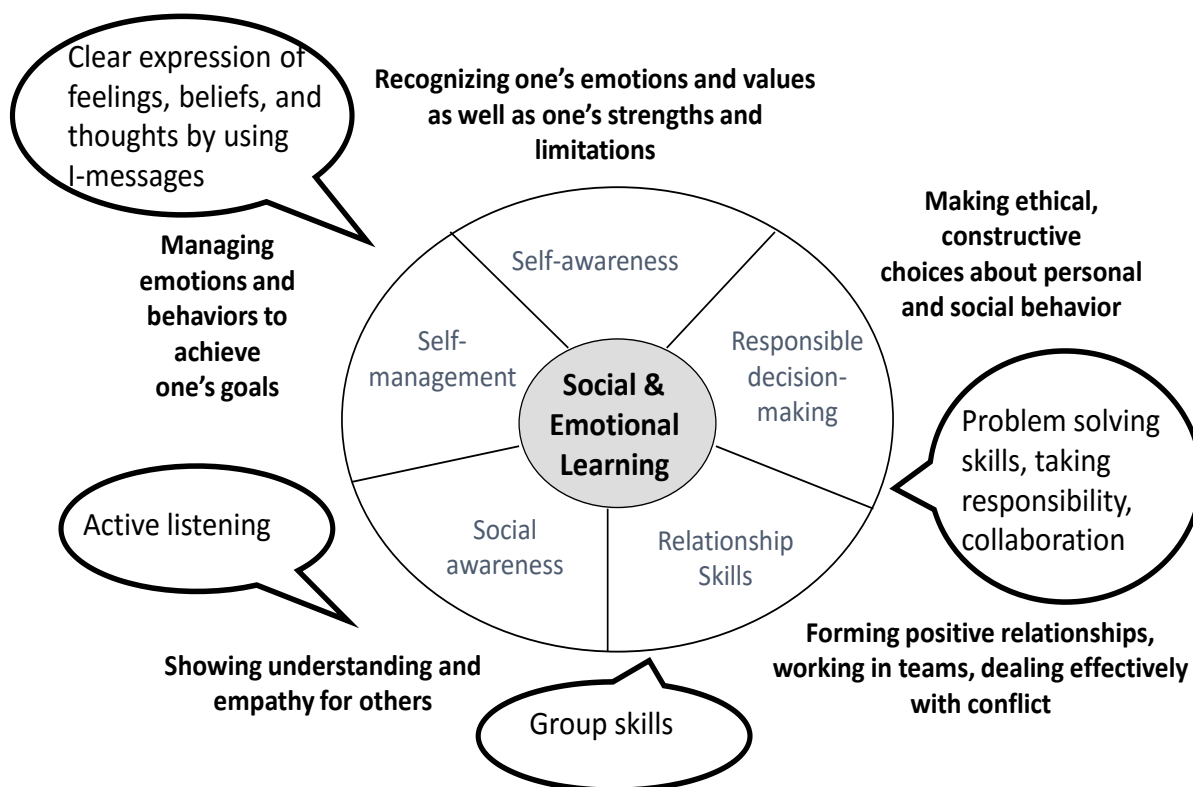
Figure 1: Social and emotional learning core competences (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2003; 2012) in the center and corresponding skills in the theory of Gordon (2003) in speech balloons. (Lintunen and Gould, 2014).

2.2 Self-awareness & self-management

Being self-aware means that a person can recognize his or her own emotions and feelings. Furthermore, he or she is able to describe these, express interests and needs as well as his or her strengths. Due to this, an individual would be able to handle stress in a better way and control impulsive reactions (Lintunen & Gould, 2014). Emotional intelligence is a key element of effective communication. Salovey and Mayer (1990) described emotional intelligence as 'the ability to monito one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions'. Regulating emotions is a key role for social interaction as individuals will be influenced in their behaviour by it. 'An inappropriate outburst of anger, for example, can destroy a coach-athlete relationship' (Lintunen & Gould, 2014). There are different ways to handle emotions by first thinking about the next action to take, use non-verbal or verbal expression to state emotions as well as develop strategies like physical activity to manage emotions. In addition, meditation, breathing exercises or similar can be done to handle emotions more effective (Lintunen & Gould).

3 INTERACTION BETWEEN ATHLETE AND COACH

Most sports, including equestrian sport, include leadership roles whether it be within coaching staff, athletes and captains, or managers of a club. Those in a leadership role have the potential to directly impact the performance and emotional reactions of the players based on the leader's behaviour (Jowett, 2007). Indeed, how a coach communicates with his or her players can have implications for the team's performance (Horn, 1985; Jowett, 2007).

The trainer plays an important role in the life of an athlete. His role is to support, teach and improve the athlete. However, this does not only focus on the sport career of an individual it also includes character building, social skills and competences. 'The coach's behaviours and attitude are a model that many of his players imitate not only in the sport but also in other aspects of their lives (Smoll & Smith, 2009; Mora et al., 2009)'. As sport settings are often related to being part in a team three different life skills were proven by Holt et al. (2012) that can be related to it. Athletes learn to take initiative, respect and leadership. Leadership happens to also transfer from sport settings to the daily life of athletes. Leadership was defined by Northouse in 2010 as a 'process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal' (Gould & Voelker, 2012). As Gould and Voelker (2012) proved with their research study is 'competitive sport one of the most underutilized venues to develop leadership skills'. However, the athletes have to be guided during this process and not left alone. Coaches have to teach to the athletes how to efficiently act in those leading roles by being role models.

Smoll et al. (1992) created a preseason workshop to train coaches and increase their supportiveness, which led to different positive outcomes. Coaches were giving quality instructions and especially children low in self-esteem benefit much more from supportive coaches. Self-esteem of those children increased and coaches were perceived more positive by the players. It also led to more fun for the athletes and no difference in win-loss record was found. 'Physical educators and youth sport coaches are in a position to advance students' social skills by structuring and implementing specifically developed programs' (Goudas & Magotsiou, 2009). Mora et al. (2009) proved through a project on positive communication style training for basketball coaches that such a training improved communicative behaviour as well as support of coaches (2009). 'Consequently, youth-sport participants might benefit from coaches who are trained to create a positive team environment.' (Newin et al., 2008) A positive team atmosphere also leads to more enjoyment which is directly linked to continue participating in sport (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986; Smith & Smoll, 1990; Newin et al., 2008).

Besides this it was proven that higher life satisfaction through sport is reached as well as less school-dropouts occur. Less school-dropouts lead to career achievement as adults which is reached by increased discipline and commitment (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Different research has indicated that life skills can be taught through sport if the right conditions are provided by coaches and parents (Falcão et al., 2012). As adult influence has a great impact on the child's development and if it proceeds positive or negative (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005).

## 4 EQUESTRIAN SPORT AND BENEFITS

In Germany, 8.74 million people are nowadays interested in equestrian sport, which is mainly carried out as a recreational or competitive sport (Ipsos Studie, Fédération Équestre Nationale (FN), 2001). The British Horse Society (BHS) published a research study in 2011about 'The health benefits of horse riding in the UK'. One important key finding was that 39% of participants in the study 'had taken no other form of physical activity in the last four weeks', which proves the importance of equestrian sport for these people, who might be sedentary otherwise (British Horse Society, 2011).

As a consequence of domestication, horses are dependent on humans and not wild and free as they were in the earlier stages. We as humans are now responsible for an appropriate life that comes as close to their origins as possible. Moreover, keeping horses involves supplying their basic needs such as providing them with feed and water, shelter, space for grazing and enough exercise. Consequently, the relationship to a horse can be perceived more as a symbiosis, which is defined as 'a close, prolonged association between two or more different organisms of different species that may, but does not necessarily, benefit each member' (Free Dictionary, 2013). The BHS (2011) found that riders 'are strongly motivated to take part in riding by the sense of well-being they gain from interaction with horses'.

First of all it is important to set up a definition for well-being. Well-being is defined as 'a good or satisfactory condition of existence' and 'a state characterised by health, happiness and prosperity' (Dictionary.com, 2013). In this context, the expression "happiness" has to be clarified. Normally two kind of answers are given if people are asked what they mean by 'happiness'. On the one hand, they describe it as being in a state of joy and on the other hand, as a state of satisfaction. But these two terms have to be considered separately. Joy needs to be understood as an emotion and satisfaction as the result of reflection. The person's happiness can be measured by enquiring people about their current feeling, their feeling for the entire day or over a longer period. Admittedly, it involves some kind of self-rating and a

subjective point of view (Strack, Argyle, Schwarz, 1991). From a psychological point of view, happiness is important for most aspects of social and private life (Argyle & Martin, 1991).

A German proverb states that greatest happiness on earth is on the back of a horse. It often combines social contact to other horse owners and contact to nature. All three facts, sport, social contact and nature are proven to have a positive effect on human's well-being and bring joy to our life (The British Horse Society, 2011). It was proven by the BHS (2011) that horse riding evokes and increases positive psychological feelings.

Joy can be caused by several aspects for example 'physical activity, exercise and sport', 'social contacts with friends' or 'nature, reading, music' (Argyle and Martin, 1991). Regular physical activity may have psychological benefits. Happiness is one of these benefits which is gained by men and women if they are participating in physical activity. Furthermore, people who are "living in a country with greater access to sports facilities" (Huang and Humphreys, 2012) show higher participation and also report higher life satisfaction.

The positive effect of nature already was evidenced by different scientists. It has been proven that the contact with nature and especially green exercise has not only a positive short-term but also a long- term effect on health (Barton & Pretty, 2010). This study proved that self-esteem and mood improved due to every green environment. However, "daily environmental contact is becoming rarer" (Barton & Pretty, 2010). This development will have negative influences on peoples physical and psychological condition, because contact with forest environments provide multiple positive physiological and psychological effects on human health that included decreasing the blood pressure and heart rate and reducing anxiety and stress (W.S. Shin et al., 2010). Therefore, it is even more important to do green exercise. Evidence shows that physical inactivity leads to deaths, heart diseases, overweight, obesity and cancer (WHO, 2012). During 2-4 h post exercise acute changes in mood are still present, which have for example a positive influence on social interaction and an improved productivity. Sustained changes in mood are caused by being physical active and doing exercise regularly.

In addition, another study found out that green exercise, especially in connection with the colour green, has positive effects on physical and psychological well-being. The participants had to perform a cycling task while watching a video about real natural environment in 3 different colours (green, grey and red). The outcome was that during watching the green video the level of perceived exertion was lower than during the other two. After watching the red video higher feelings of anger could be noticed (Akers et al., 2012). In

this content it has to be mentioned that already just looking through a window had positive therapeutic effects on enhanced recovery from surgery (Ulrich, 1984). In addition, it also improved feelings of well-being and caused in a more positive mood (Akers et al., 2012).

Horse riding is often used as a form of therapy for physical or psychological handicapped humans. Hannah Burgon (2003) describes in 'case studies of adults receiving horse- riding therapy' the influence and the effect of riding therapy on women with mental health problems. The strongest elements of this study were confidence of the riders and the fact to motivate oneself. These two elements improved a lot during the six- month study. In a study from Bass et al. (2009) they found that autistic children, who took part in therapeutic riding sessions 'exhibited greater sensory seeking, sensory sensitivity, social motivation, and less inattention, distractibility, and sedentary behaviours'.

In Germany and Great Britain there are places like The Fortune Centre of Riding Therapy (FETH) (2016) or Sana Animal – Reittherapie (2016) offering programmes to improve social skills. 'The FETH Course uses the unique and relevant qualities of the horse, utilising the motivation and willingness to learn on the part of the individual, teaching transferable skills to provide comprehensive basic Further Education and Life and Social Skills development' (The Fortune Centre of Riding Therapy, 2016). If participants join the full-time residential course at the FETH (2016) they will stay in the programme for three years.

## 5 EFFECTIVE LEARNERS AND COMMUNICATORS

While we are growing up we develop our communication skills as well as our social and emotional learning develops. If we then decide to work on them and even change our skills and characteristics it will take a while. There is hardly any research on how long it will actually take as every human being is different and learns in a different pace. In 1970, the Conscious Competence Ladder was developed by Noel Bruch, while being an employee with Gordon Training International (Adams, 2011). His model describes the stages we go through as we learn. Bruch's model consists of four different stages, unconsciously unskilled, consciously unskilled, consciously skilled and unconsciously skilled (Adams, 2011). Starting at the first level of unconsciously unskilled, which is the condition humans are in before getting to know Active Listening, Roadblocks and You-Messages. After being informed about different ways of communicating, people know about these methods but are not able to use them properly. They reached the level of conscious incompetence, which is a difficult stage

(Adams, 2011). People know about e.g. I-Messages in theory but when using them they may mix them with You-Messages (Kober, 2013). This leads to difficulties trying to solve problems or approach people with I-Messages. Being in this stage and experiences negative outcome will lead to people quit and go back to their old habits. If people keep practicing their newly learned skills they will reach the level of conscious competence. This means they still need to pay attention to the correct use of I-Messages, Active-Listening and No-Lose-Method but they are able to use them properly. People may think it is still artificial and not natural to them using these skills. If those people are conscious about these facts and keep practicing and using I–Messages, Active-Listening or No-Lose-Method they will soon reach the level of unconscious competence (Kober, 2013). They were able to form new conditioned reactions to conflicts, expressing their internal state or helping other people to get to know their needs. These newly adapted reactions will come as natural as the old ones the person learned while growing up (Adams, 2011).

## 5.1 Learning process of the Effectiveness Training

Courses or interventions focusing on improving social and emotional skills of coaches or instructors are aiming for two outcomes. First the well-being of the coach will increase as he or she will learn and improve skills to become a socially and emotionally competent person, which is linked to emotional health (Elias & Weissberg, 2000; Lintunen & Gould, 2014). Secondly the coach's learned or improved competences will help to create a positive learning environment, where students feel safe and will increase their learning outcome (Lintune & Gould).

Effectiveness Trainings developed by Thomas Gordon focus on different target groups such as teachers, parents, leaders etc. In his last publication 'Be your Best' (Adams & Lenz, 1989), which is a revised version of the Effectiveness Trainig for Women (Adams & Lenz, 1979) Gordon is pointing out the universal usefulness of the interactive training for everybody who wants to have effective interpersonal relationships (Kober, 2013). It was mentioned by Gordon himself that all programs offered by Gordon Training International are effective no matter which culture, sex, age or profession participants belong to. Trainers all over the world have not changed the basic competences in Gordon's Effectiveness Training nor did they have to adapt or change the course structure severely (Kober, 2013).

Heaven et al. carried out a project with 61 clinical nurse specialists to study the transfer of communication skills learned in a workshop to their workplace (2006). All the skills, which were focused on during the training were improved. However, only the group

that received supervision afterwards at their workplace was able to use the learned skills in their working environment. Resulting from this outcome Heaven et al. (2006) are questioning the use of effectiveness trainings without supervision of participants while transferring skills to workplace.

Wilkinson et al. (1999) examined the long-term effect of a communication skills training for nurses and found that skills in which participants had significantly improved during the training were maintained. Their outcomes proved that 'over time the nurses became more confident in the emotional areas of care as a result of the training' (Wilkinson et al., 1999). Nurses, who participated in the course were able to actively use learned skills from the training at their workplace even after two and a half years (Wilkinson et al., 1999). However, Wilkinson et al. (1999) pointed out that communication skills courses lasting for a short amount of time such as three to five days are not as effective as courses stretched out over a longer period of time. Even though this may increase costs, it should be considered to reach a positive outcome.

5.2 I-messages

According to Gordon (2003) I-messages is equal with 'responsibility messages' because the person sending 'an I-message is taking responsibility for his own inner condition (listening to himself [herself] ) and assuming responsibility for being open enough to share this assessment of himself [herself]' (Gordon, 2003) with another person. Furthermore, through an I-message it is up to the other person how to react on the statement as there is no labelling coming from the sender of the I-message (Gordon, 2003).

I-messages are used to speak about yourself and expose your own feelings, emotions, experiences or needs to another person. As you are only talking about yourself they do not contain any labelling, judgement, evaluations or analysis of the other person. Due to this they are fully 'authentic, honest, and congruent' (Adams & Lenz, 1979). Adams and Lenz (1979) describe four different types of I-messages, each of them varying in their complexity and difficulty. Furthermore, three of them are in the 'no conflict area' (Breuer, 2012), which are declarative, responsive and preventive I-messages. Confrontive I-messages, which belong to the conflict area (Breuer, 2012).

I-Messages normally consist of three parts giving different information to the listener. One part describes behaviour of others or a condition. The second part describes emotions or feelings of the sender and the third part finally describes the effect or result for you. Depending on the I-Message you want to send the effect and emotions can be positive or

negative. Furthermore, some I-Messages are also complete if they only contain one or two parts, depending on the situation (Kober, 2013). As well as the order of an I-Message can vary depending on the situation and the type of I-Message. Following the four types of I-Messages are described based on Gordon's communication model:

1. <u>Declarative I-Messages</u>

   'Declarative I-Messages are you self-disclosure to others about your beliefs, ideas, likes, dislikes, feelings, reactions, interests, attitudes, and intentions' (Adams & Lenz, 1979, p.32). Most of the time this form of I-Message will cause the least resistance from the listener. However, every statement or expression can cause resistance and we need to be aware of that (Adams & Lenz, 1979, p. 33).

   Declarative I-Messages often contain only one or two parts stating a behaviour or condition as well as emotions or opinions of the sender. 'I feel a little sad right now, I enjoy playing tennis or I value time with my family' (Adams & Lenz, 1979, p. 32).

2. <u>Responsive I-Messages</u>

   Responsive I-Messages are used after a request was send to us by another person (Breuer, 2012). Our answer needs to be in line with our true emotions about the request. This can be very difficult, especially if we want to say "no" (Adams & Lenz, 1979). A correct Responsive I-Message should at least contain two parts stating our emotions and decision about the request as well as how the outcome of this will affect us (Adams & Lenz, 1979). Adams and Lenz (1979) presented examples of responsive I-Messages in their E.T.W. book, such as 'No, I don't want to go out to lunch today; I am trying to diet and I get too tempted when I'm in a restaurant'.

   It happens very often that people say 'yes' even though they want to say 'no' (Adams & Lenz, 1979). The reason for that is that we feel under pressure and maybe even confused by our own feelings and needs. We are scared to be punished if we say 'no' or lose the person. Sometimes we also hope that the person will pay us back the next time we ask for a favour. We identify ourselves with the problem of the person asking us for a favour or feel like it is our duty to do so (Breuer, 2012 and Adams & Lenz, 1979). The problem we create for ourselves if we say 'yes' instead of 'no' is that we feel bad. Not only is it affecting us, it is also affecting our relationship to the other person. We may get mad at the other person for requesting something from us, we do not want to do (Breuer, 2012).

Responsive I-Messages, even done correctly and as effective as possible will probably cause resistance and a negative reaction from the person asking for a favour. Especially, if people suddenly start to express their real opinion and feelings about a certain request and do not say 'yes' as they did before.

3. <u>Preventive I-Messages</u>

Preventive I-Messages are used to express your need of cooperation and support to another person by stating 'your full disclosure of that need' (Adams & Lenz, 1979). The advantage of Preventive I-Messages are that conflicts or confusion can be prevented by informing other people about our internal state and needs (Adams & Lenz, 1979). It also supports self-assertive behaviour as one characteristic of it is open and honest communication, which is done amongst others by Preventive I-Messages.

Most of the time Preventive I-Messages are formed with two parts expressing self-disclosure of the sender as well as reasons and effects of the request for the sender (Breuer, 2012). 'I would like to set up a timetable with you for the use of the soccer field; If I know times reserved for me I can plan my training sessions in a better way' is a Preventive I-Message, which could be send to another coach (Breuer, 2012).

Preventive I-Messages bear the risk to encounter the other person unprepared or come across a conflict, which needs to be solved then. Therefore, it is important to be prepared for resistance coming from the other person (Adams & Lenz, 1979).

4. <u>Confrontive I-Messages</u>

A confronting I-message has to meet three criteria according to Gordon (2003) '(1) they have a high probability of promoting willingness to change; (2) they contain a minimal negative evaluation of the student; and (3) they do not injure the relationship. If the behaviour of another person has or is influencing you and the satisfaction of your needs, a Confrontive I-Message needs to be send. Confrontive I-Messages are more powerful than the three types described before (Adams & Lenz, 1979).

An example given by Adams and Lenz (1979, p. 145) is 'When you don't do your homework [DESCRIPTION OF BEHAVIOUR], it takes more time and work for me to teach this lesson [TANGIBLE EFFECT] and I feel very frustrated]', which is an I-Message containing a negative effect for and emotion of the teacher.

The use of Confrontive I-Messages to influence another person's behaviour so we are not negatively influenced, will be successful if the other understands fully

that his or her behaviour is creating a real problem for us. Furthermore, the person is not interested in creating a problem for us. Our problem is solved as soon as our need is satisfied, regardless of the solution the other person finds to satisfy his or her behaviour and needs. (Breuer, 2012).

5.3 Resistance

Using I-Messages will help a person to be self-assertive and most of the time others will react on I-Messages with respect and the need to support. However, there will be situations where the other person reacts with resistance and defence (Breuer, 2012). This shows the discomfort of the other person to your I-Message. 'It is a natural, inevitable response when someone feels threatened' (Adams & Lenz, 1979).

Resistance can be shown indirect such as the person forgets agreements, acts lost and confused, makes fun about the I-Messages, lying, and excuses. On the other hand there is direct resistance such as anger, arguing, threaten, corrupt or punish (Breuer, 2012). Resistance is shown in a verbal way, but it can also be non-verbal, e.g. crying, rubescence, withdraw, make a fist, etc. (Breuer, 2012).

It is very important to pay attention to even little hints of resistance to know if our request or statement is creating a problem for the other person (Breuer, 2012). Furthermore, it is important to remember that often reactions we see are only a secondary emotion. For example if a man would react with yelling and being loud instead of crying if he is sad. In this case anger is a taught reaction to him as it is seen as unmanly to show 'weak' emotions such as crying (Breuer, 2012).

5.4 Active Listening

Active listening is an important skill, which needs to be learned, according to Lintunen and Gould (2014) to develop competence in self-awareness. Adams and Lenz describe the skill of active listening as part of the 'Effectiveness Training for women' (1979, p.36) as following: 'Active Listening is a special way of reflecting back what the other person has said, to let her or him know that you're listening, and to check you understanding of what she or he means.'

According to Adams and Lenz (1979, pp.36-37) there are four characteristics of Active Listening, which need to be internalised and can be learned for more effective communication. First the person listening receives a message, which is 'coded' in a verbal and non-verbal way. Secondly the listener needs to 'decode' the received message and

analyse what the other person is actually saying. Thirdly the listener sends a message back to the speaker presenting to him or her the listener's understanding of the speaker's emotional state or experience. Furthermore, the listener who send the feedback is asking if his or her understanding is correct. Fourthly the speaker has the chance to confirm or correct the feedback of the listener.

Kober (2013, p.71) describes the role and duties of an active listener, who should pay attention, avoid using communication blockers, refuse to take over the role of the saviour and give feedback about his or her understanding of the message the speaker send. In addition, the active listener will try his or her best to decode the speaker's message.

5.5 Roadblocks

Roadblocks are understood as communication barriers, which will hinder effective communication. Thomas Gordon classified 'The twelve roadblocks to communication' as unaccepted messages we send and will possibly stop any further communication (Gordon & Burch, 2003). If messages we send contain characteristics of ordering, warning, moralizing, advising, teaching, judging, stereotyping, interpreting, praising, reassuring, questioning, or being sarcastic our communication will be less effective (Gordon & Burch, 2003).

5.6 Shifting Gears

Shifting Gears needs to be done when the other person reacts with resistance to our I-Message. In this case we need to shift 'from self-disclosure to Active listening' (Adams & Lenz, 1979). It is one of the most important methods and skills learned in effectiveness training. As mentioned before, even sending an I-Message as clear, congruent and sensitive as possible, people will react with resistance as we surprise them with our statement or request. If we then continue sending another I-Message we will not be able to effectively communicate. What is important now is to switch to Active Listening and respond to the resistance of the other person. Due to this we can help the person to understand his or her defensive emotions about our statement and request. Furthermore, we are going to reach a better understanding of the other person and why he or she is not agreeing with us (Adams & Lenz, 1979).

Through Shifting Gears the first step is done to get into the No-Lose problem solving method, which will be explained later, if necessary. Most of the times shifting to Active Listening and respond to resistance of the other person is already enough to be able to go back

to self-disclosure. In this case, gears are shifted again and the sender of the first I-Message can again send an I-Message expressing his or her needs or emotions assertively (Breuer, 2012).

5.7 Owning the problem

In order to effectively communicate and make use of the skills described before, it is important to know 'Who is owning the problem?' (Breuer, 2012). One answer is the other one is having a problem or secondly I have a problem. As long as the behaviour of the other person is not interfering with my needs, the person's behaviour is no problem for me (Breuer, 2012). As an example used in Figure 1 the child is playing catch, which is no problem for parents. Even though the child gets hit in the face while playing (see Figure 1), parents still do not have a problem. As shown in Figure 1 both scenarios lie in the 'Area of Acceptance' (Gordon Training International, 2011). However, if the child throws the ball against the house parents to have a problem and the child's behaviour is in the 'Area of Unacceptance'. As well as if the child want to play and the parents are worried about their windows, the parents own the problem. In this case, the child owns the problem, too (Figure 2).
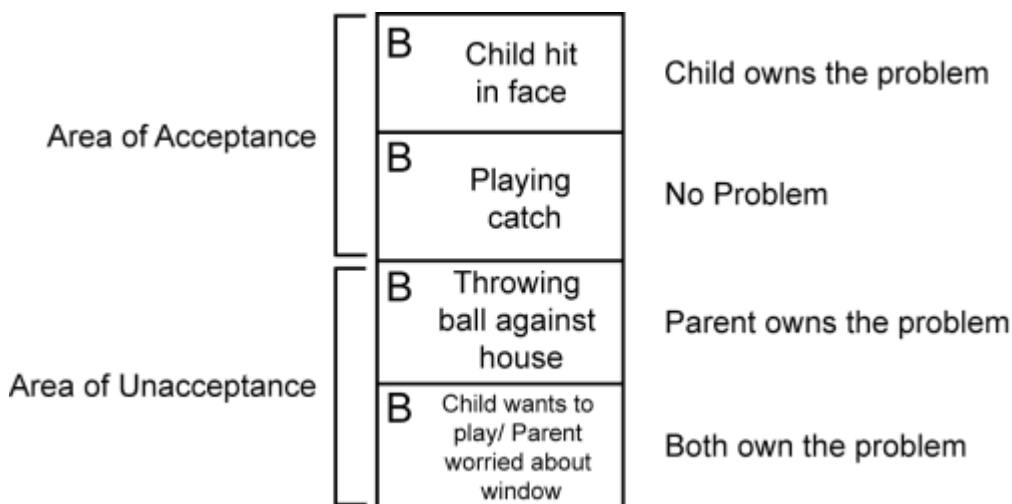


Figure 2: Origins of the Gordon Model – The Behaviour Window (Gordon Training International, 2011)

The Behaviour Window can be applied to figure out who is owning the problem. Therefore, it is very important to be aware about one's own needs and emotions. As soon as one's own needs are satisfied, this person does not have a problem anymore and it is not his or her

concern how the other person is satisfying his or her needs as long as the resulting behaviour is not interfering with the satisfaction of our own needs (Adams & Lenz, 1979).

5.8 No-Lose Conflict Resolution

The No-Lose Conflict Resolution is described by Breuer (2012) as a conflict solving process where both individuals win and no one loses. For this method to be successful certain requirements need to be met such as needs of both individuals are seen as equally important. Secondly, the problem will be solved from the view of needs and not starting with solutions. Thirdly, no power is used by any of the individuals to get their will, as long as there is no emergency situation (Breuer, 2012; Adams & Lenz, 1979). The No-Lose Conflict Resolution, also called Method 3 is split up into six steps, described by Adams and Lenz (1979) as follows:

1. Needs have to be defined to see where the problem lies. It is most of the time difficult in the beginning to separate actual needs from solutions already made. For Method 3 to be successful and both individuals being satisfied, it is important to focus on the true needs. Therefore, both individuals need to honestly disclose their internal emotions and needs by using assertive skills such as I-Messages. To help each other being aware of one's own needs Active Listening is another essential skill in the No-Lose Conflict Resolution.

2. The second step of Method 3 is brainstorming about possible solutions. At this point all solutions are solely presented and in the best case written down. No judging or evaluating is done at this point. In this stage Active Listening is very important to make sure both individuals understand presented solutions completely.

3. At this step both individuals think about each presented solution and if it would be a satisfying condition for them. Solutions are analysed and evaluated, which leads very often to new and even better ideas. Evaluating solutions critically is very important, otherwise a poor choice will be made and the solution might not be realized to its full extend.

4. In the fourth step both individuals will decide on a common solution, which mainly evolved already from the steps before as the best solution. Most effective is if the solution is verbally expressed as well as written down, so no misunderstanding will arise later.

5. During step five the solution will be implemented and both individuals will act according to agreed facts. Breuer (2012) mentioned that it is important to start with a mind-set that the other person will behave according to the agreed solution. If this is not the case, I-Messages should be used to confront the person, who is not acting as agreed. Especially if people are not used to Method 3 it may need several reminders in form of a Confrontive I-Message to make sure the person understands that she or he needs to fulfil his part of the agreement (Breuer, 2012).

6. The sixth step is the evaluation of the agreed solution and its usefulness, visibility as well as weaknesses. During this step both individuals discuss if the agreed solution helps them to satisfy their needs. It is important to be open to change the agreed solution to terms agreeable for both individuals.

## 6 SOCIAL AWARENESS

Social awareness is an essential competence to effectively interact and communicate with others. Due to processing information gained from others through verbal and non-verbal expression of emotions, behaviour and needs interpersonal interaction is facilitated (Denham, 2015). One skill, which needs to be acquired to be effectively social aware is active listening. This will support for example the coach in different situations and can be used to achieve different objectives such as solving conflicts with parents, athletes or other coaches and get a better understanding of their needs (Lintunen & Gould, 2014). Furthermore, as explained by Lintunen and Gould (2014), it can be used to support the athlete to understand his or her own needs, wishes and emotions, which in return will help to set goals and create motivation. This shows that being social aware does not only have a positive effect on ourselves, such as educational success and more successful relationships (Denham, 2015), but also on others such as our students and athletes.

Based on the literature review importance is shown of teachers and coaches being well equipped in their social and emotional skills. However, only limited research is available on the effectiveness of teacher training on social and emotional learning, which is assumed to be due to lack of instruments to measure results (Lintunen, 2006). Furthermore, another limiting factor to prove the effectiveness of receiving training in social and emotional skills is the actual time it takes teachers and coaches to actually use their improved competences to create a better learning atmosphere for their students (Lintunen, 2009). Recent research study was done by Talvio (2014), who focused on changes in teacher's social and emotional learning

skills after participating in an Teacher Effectiveness Training (TET) based on Thomas Gordon's model of human relationships (Gordon & Burch, 2003). Talvio's research study showed that teachers became more competent in their social and emotional skills after receiving the TET (Gordon & Bruch, 2003). Teacher's newly learned competences were not limited to the classroom and could also be applied in different settings (Talvio, 2014).

## 7 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to plan, implement and evaluate a social and communication skills course for a group of riding instructors in Germany. The training course for riding instructors is based on Thomas Gordon's theory of social interaction and effectiveness training approach to increase and improve social skills and competences. The goal of the course was to increase participant's theoretical knowledge and to teach a more rewarding communication style. The purpose of this evaluation was to describe the process of implementation of the course.

8 METHODS

8.1 Researcher's background

In 1997, I joined a riding club and since then I have been addicted to the Equestrian Sport Sector. The riding stable was known for stabling their horses in most natural way as possible for example riding lessons were always given outside. In the beginning I took weekly riding lessons but it did not take long before I spend every weekend in the stables and helped older ones to give riding lessons. The riding club offered the possibility to compete at local riding competitions and take different riding tests where I participated gladly. Furthermore, trail riding, summer camps and sleeping in the stables were offered. In 2003, I started to give riding lessons myself in the weekend to younger kids. Those kids varied from five to ten years old and needed time to get used to horses, grooming them and do first exercises on the horse. During this time I met all kind of different children, some were very brave and needed to be stopped to not get hurt, others did not want to stay without their parents and were very shy. It took a lot of time and patience to get them used to the horses till they would actually ride with a smile on their face.

In 2007, I took my Trainer-Assistant test to be officially certified to assist with riding lessons. During the preparation course we had courses about how to coach and give riding lessons in an appropriate way, which also included giving feedback. It was a combination about showing the correct theoretical knowledge of riding skills, but also your practical skills of dealing with your riding student. How to motivate a person to take the next step, calm down at a competition or get back on the horse after falling off.

After finishing High school successfully I started the 'Equine Leisure and Sports' study in Wageningen, the Netherlands, at the Applied University of Van Hall – Larenstein. During my study it became clear that my main interest is in the training of riders and horses. I participated in courses such as Sport Psychology and Physiology. We learned to work out training schedules regarding the athletic improvement but also dealt with arousal and anxiety problems, low self-esteem and –confidence or how to improve motivation. This theoretical knowledge helped me a lot during different internships in Texas, German and Finland. I improved my practical skills in training, teaching and motivating people to be physical active.

The more experiences I got in working with riding students, keeping them motivated and support their learning most positively, I noticed it mainly all comes back to communication. Having experienced how it feels to teach in a different country, in a second language for me or even for me and the student strengthened this thought even more.

Next to this I think that joining a riding club can improve the development of social and life skills of children. However, it is very important that the supervisors are aware of their role and importance. If I take a look at so called "summer camps" offered for children, I have experienced that the supervisors are not always focused on the children. Besides this it is not easy to communicate with the children and at the same time communicating with the horse. Interventions to improve the communication of coaches and their youth athletes have shown that the children increased in self-esteem, team-building skills and especially continued with the sport (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005 & Falcão et al., 2012) . One problem is that children stop riding at the age of 12 because other things get more important, speaking from experiences being a riding instructor for that age group. However, that was the time when I learned and improved the most. I was old enough to take over more responsibility and face more difficult problems.

Taking part in a social and communication skills course at the University of Jyväskylä taught by Prof. T. Lintunen and Ms. H.-M. Toivonen as part of my master's degree in 2014 started to create the thought in my head to develop a social and communication skills course especially for riding instructors. To improve my knowledge and skills as an instructor I participated in a course to improve and strengthen your relationships through more effective communication of Gordon Training International (http://www.gordontraining.com/) with Dr. Karlpeter Breuer as the instructor. Under the supervision of T. Lintunen I designed my social and communication skills course for riding instructors in spring 2015 and carried it out by myself in summer 2015.

8.2 Research design

The current research is a mix of educational action research and a case study approach. This methodological use was chosen as action research can be used as a tool to analyse characteristics of a project as well as contribute to a current issue through its practical character. Kurt Lewin introduced the idea of action research to demonstrate a more democratic way how to improve professional practice. Noffke and Somekh are in line with Lewin's statement by mentioning the importance of educational action research to provoke a change in traditional and fixed environments such as schools (2009). Stringer stated that action research 'works from the assumption that all people affected by or having an effect on an issue should be involved in the processes of inquiry. In these circumstances the task of the

practitioner research is to provide leadership and direction to other participants or stakeholders in the research process' (2007).

In sport settings coaches and instructors are taking over the role of a teacher and role model (Smoll & Smith, 2009). Therefore, the course was developed for riding instructors to reach out to the athletes through their coaches, as coaches have a great influence on the development of their athletes, especially children (Falcão et al. 2012). The researcher took over the role as a supervisor of the 'social and communication skills course' to provide valid information to participants.

It is still a young research field with less than 80 years of history (Edwards & Willis, 2014, p.11 – 19). Edwards and Willis defined action research as 'a form of systematic investigation that typically involves attempts to solve practical problems in real world settings through the involvement of stakeholders who work or live in those settings' (2014). The aim of Action Research is to create social change, which means 'to increase the ability of the involved community or organization members to control their own destinies more effectively and to keep improving their capacity to do so within a more sustainable and just environment' (Greenwood & Levin, 2007).

As a theoretical background and framework of the 'social and communication skills course for riding instructors' Thomas Gordon's model was chosen as well as connected communication skills. Thomas Gordon's different trainings are all focused on improving communication skills and tools for more effective communication. As a follow up effect it will facilitate relationships as well as help the individual to be in line with one's own emotions and needs (Kober, 2014). The model of Thomas Gordon was chosen as it was in line with the research methods and aim of the study to combine theoretical research knowledge and practical use. Thomas Gordon had used his knowledge gained from research and work as a therapist to create a model, which can be taught to individuals for prevention purposes (Kober, 2014). Assumed by the researcher social structures and behaviour of individuals can only be changed when research findings are brought in an understandable way to professionals identified as key figures in those social structures.

It was chosen to only focus on riding instructors and create a communications skills course specifically for them. Due to this the present study is as well a case study focusing 'to explore the particularity, the uniqueness, of the single case' (Simons, 2009).

8.3 Procedure

After planning the training for the riding instructors the course was carried out in Germany. It was called 'Social and communication skills course for riding instructors' and was organised on a weekend in Bielefeld, Germany. The course lasted 16 hours in total and was split up into eight 1 ½ hours sessions. The first four sessions were carried out Saturday and the second four sessions on Sunday.

As communication skills are best learned by using them the course consisted of theoretical and practical phases. First participants learned the theory and afterwards practiced skills in different activities such as role-plays, group work and solving a problem. Every session was started with a so called icebreaker to get participants into a comfortable mood and create a relaxed learning atmosphere. Therefore, only low-risk icebreakers were used, where participants could decide how personal shared information are, as well as bearing a low-risk of causing dilemma situations. After each session a short debriefing and feedback round was done to round up the session and give participants the chance to state their opinion. Furthermore, it should give participants the chance to actively take part in the research and adapt the course to their needs. As it was about their learning and to gain new knowledge it is necessary to actively involve the participants (Simons, 2009). Due to this, each session was a unit in itself, but of course, each session was also linked to the previous and following one. The first session included a lot of organisational information as well as get-to know each other, setting up rules and trying to create a positive learning environment. The course consisted of a mix of theoretical and practical units, whereby it was paid attention to mix them so participants did not get bored, while only listening.

Directly following the course participants filled in a knowledge test as well as a feedback form. After two weeks participants did sent another feedback form evaluating the use of new learned skills during their work. Another feedback form was filled in after one month and a last one after three months. All participants were asked to send the feedback forms via e-mail to the researcher. The researcher sent out reminders a few days before the next feedback round was due. It was chosen to collect feedback over a period of three months to give participants time to use their new learned or trained skills in practice as well as reflected on their usefulness.

| Day | Session | Content | Time |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | 1 | Welcoming & Introduction | 15 – 20 min. |
| | | Structure & course contents | 5 min. |
| | | Learning log | 5min. |
| | | Rules | 10 min. |
| | | SEL & SEL-wheel | 15 min. |
| | | Emotional intelligence | 15 min. |
| | | Iceberg theory | 20 min. |
| | 2 | Values & Cloverleaf | 20 – 25 min. |
| | | Relationship – Credo | 5 min. |
| | | Relationship – Mind map | 10 min. |
| | | Self-assertion | 15 min. |
| | | I – messages | 10 min. |
| | | Stating I – message | 20 min. |
| | | Responding I – message | 20 min. |
| | 3 | Responding I – message | 10 min. |
| | | Preventive I – message | 25 min. |
| | | Confronting I – message | 40 min. |
| | | Advantages & Disadvantages of self-assertion | 20 min. |
| | 4 | Clear sending & receiving | 10 min. |
| | | Active listening | 10 min. |
| | | Passive listening | 10 min. |
| | | Communication blockers | 20 min. |
| | | Exercise: active & passive listening | 30 min. |
| | | Emotion - cards | 5-10 min. |
| **2** | 5 | Introduction (Questions & comments) | 5 min. |
| | | 5 positive things – exercise | 10 min. |
| | | Verbal resistance | 10 min. |
| | | Non-verbal resistance | 5 min. |
| | | Shifting gears | 15 min. |
| | | Active listening with resistance | 15 min. |
| | | Shifting gears & stating I – messages | 30 min. |
| | 6 | Shifting gears & responding I – messages | 30 min. |
| | | Shifting gears & preventive I – messages | 30 min. |
| | | Understanding for interpersonal relationships | 10 min. |
| | | Behaviour window | 20 min. |
| | | Gifting – exercise | 5 min. |
| | 7 | Who owns the problem? | 20 min. |
| | | Paper cup – exercise | 10 min. |
| | | Win – Win solution | 10 min. |
| | | Needs & solutions | 20 min. |
| | | Activity – Role plays | 30 min. |
| | 8 | Effective communication | 10 min. |
| | | Activity – Shifting gears with confronting I – message | 50 min. |
| | | Positive learning environment | 10 min. |
| | | Emotion – cards | 5 – 10 min. |
| | | Verbal feedback & debriefing | 5 – 10 min. |
| | | Knowledge test & feedback | |

Table 1: Content of the 'social and communication skills course for riding instructors 2015' carried out in Bielefeld, Germany.

8.4 Participants

The course was given to a group of four participants, who were all female riding instructors in Germany. Due to personal data confidentiality of the participants, they were named as participant A, B, C and D.

Two participants just started their work as self-employed trainers. One of them owns a stable and the other one is working as a mobile riding instructor. However, the participant working as a mobile trainer has her horses stabled at the stable the other participant is owning. Both of them are exclusively working with children. Another participant is employed at a riding school mainly for children, which is located in Southern Germany. However, she has been working with adults and has still a few adult riding students. The participants are at the age of 22, 25 and 26 years. The fourth participant is a riding instructor owning her own business in Western Germany and is competing in Western riding competitions. She is 43 years old and the only one, who is instructing competition riders. The other three participants do not compete themselves and focus on leisure riding lessons for children and young people. Regarding the discipline, two instructors are following the English riding style and two do Western riding.

Two participants are closer friends to me, the researcher, which means we do know each other for several years, are the same age and have been competing in the same team or went to school together. The other two participants I knew through friends and through riding lessons taken by one of the two. One participant already knew all of the other participants. One participant is her riding instructor, the same the researcher was taking riding lessons from. Another participant is boarding her horse at the stable of the participant who knew all the others. The last participant is known by this participant through the researcher and social events. The other participants did not know each other or had only met once without any deeper interaction.

8.5 Data collection

According to Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) Four-Level Training Evaluation Model, which can be used to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of training programs, reaction, learning, behaviour and results need to be measured. This data will give information necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of a training program. For each level of model a different instrument was used. Qualitative data was collected via the researcher's log,

observations made during the implemented course as well as from the knowledge test and feedback of participants.

The quantitative data was collected through a feedback questionnaire filled in by the participants (Appendix 2). It included open and closed questions where the participants had to rate their opinion about the course with a 5-Point-Scale (Fully agree, partly agree, neutral, partly disagree and fully disagree). It also included the satisfaction of the participants and the actual use of the training for them. The questionnaire was handed out to the participants after the last session on the second day of the course.

The researcher's log, observations and feedback questionnaire provided data to measure the reaction of the participants. Learning of participants was measured through the knowledge test and for the third level, feedback forms were returned after two weeks, one month and three months. Lastly results of the course were analysed through the written report.

Observation: I was present during the course as the teacher, which gave me a good insight into action, atmosphere, interactions and function of the group as well as of the whole course. During the course I took notes when participants were working and as well during the breaks. Each session was summarized in a researcher log including observations, evaluation, impressions as well as feelings. Furthermore, I interpreted situations, incidents and (inter-) actions of participants.

In social and action research observation has been an important tool to describe a specific group as well as interpret results (Simons, 2009). By collecting data through observation 'rich description and a basis for further analysis and interpretation' (Simons, 2009) was provided. Simons also mentioned that 'through observing you can discover the norms and values which are part of an institution's or programme's culture or subculture. These can often be detected through the rules of the organisation, the artefacts displayed, interactions between people and communications with the external world' (2009). In this study interaction of participants all working as riding instructors were observed as well as their learning development and adaption of new learned skills.

Video recording: The whole course was video recorded to ensure as much data will be taken into account as possible and enable me, the researcher, to go back and check situations during the course. It was done by a camera integrated in a laptop and was recorded from one fixed angle. Before the course started all participants were informed about being video recorded and gave their explicit consent. None of the participants seemed to be bothered by the camera or

acted differently. As it was a fixed camera it almost seemed nobody noticed that the course was recorded. No video was transcribed as it was solely for validation reasons and for me to double-check situations and happenings if needed.

Evaluation of the course: At the end of the course all participants were asked to fill in an evaluation form (Appendix 2), answering questions by rating their agreement of different statements from one to five. One being strong disagreement and five strong agreement. All statements were related to the course regarding study pace, course material, supervision and overall grade. Each participant filled in the evaluation form by herself and got as much time as needed.

Feedback: All participants were asked to evaluate their use of effective communication skills, which they had learned during the course (Appendix 3). First evaluation was done two weeks after the course was given, the second one was collected one month after the course was implemented and the last round of feedback and evaluation was done three months after the course weekend.

Each of the participants send the feedback to me, the researcher by e-mail. I took care of reminding all participants in time to send the feedback, so data could be collected equally. All participants responded for all three times.

Knowledge test: After completing the course, participants were asked to answer several questions to test their knowledge and understanding of course contents (Appendix 1). The test is not done to give grades or points to the participants. It is used as a tool for the researcher to evaluate the learning process of the participants. Noticing during the course, which parts are difficult for which participant, the test should show if participants could improve their knowledge and skills of effective communication.

8.6 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was done in a narrative way. All results were reported in form of a story about the course. By using Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's (2006) Four-Level Training Evaluation Model it was focused on the reaction, learning and behaviour of the participants as well as the results of the course. Each session was evaluated by the researcher in form of a researcher log, which includes personal judgement of situations by me, the researcher. 'For many authors in the social sciences interpretation is the key process for making sense of what

has been learned' (Simons, 2009). Due to deciding which situations to describe more closely, which questions to ask and which tools to use (Simons, 2009) analysis of this research study is focusing on evaluating and analysing the meaning of social and communication skills courses for riding instructors. Results give evidence about usefulness and necessity of such courses as well as possibility and realization of them. Knowledge test and feedback were analysed descriptively.

To be aware 'that we do not fall into the trap of simply confirming what we know already' (Simons, 2009) all findings were discussed with my supervisor T. Lintunen. In addition, observing with a video had been used 'to provide an objective record' (Simons, 2009).

8.7 Ethical questions

All four participants of the study joined by free choice and out of their own interest in taking part in the 'social and communication skills course for riding instructors'. By participating in the course they approved to be part of the study as well as all gave their consent. To ensure anonymity was kept at the best possible no names were mentioned and it was referred to participant A, B, C and D while the researcher kept descriptions of participants as well as examples as minimal as possible. Furthermore, the whole story was written in a way that makes it difficult to recognize individual participants. While analysing feedback, knowledge test or reflections sent in later no identification of participants was used. As well as the description of participants in the methodology sections was done without referring to A, B, C or D.

Before the course, all participants were informed about the structure and process of the study. It was mentioned that all participants can terminate their participation at any time of the course. As well as it is their free choice to participate in activities, exercises or discussions. In addition all participants were informed about and agreed to be video recorded while participating in the course. All recordings would solely been used for research purposes and will be only viewed by the researcher to double check observations.

As part of the course rules were set up in the beginning of the course. Each participant could mention aspects and facts, which are important to them to create a safe environment. In addition, times for breaks were discussed and drinks as well as snacks were provided to ensure physical well-being of participants. During the course participants were asked to make suggestions concerning the amount of exercises and the way these were carried out. This was

done to adapt the course in the best way possible to the participants and to meet their expectations. Furthermore, I agreed with all participants to keep everything said and done in the course between us. Especially as very personal and private experiences and memories were shared.

8.8 Trustworthiness

During the last years educational action research became a prominent methodological tool for research especially in schools, universities and communities. Noffke & Somekh (2009) are stating that educational action research 'is widely accepted as a means of supporting school based professional development, for example in teachers' unions' efforts to provide continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers, in the efforts of agencies to improve schools, communities, and as a part of certification schemes in many countries'. Simons explains in her book 'Case Study Research in Practice' (2009) that case study research evolved as a valid research approach to provide information about teaching programmes for decision making bodies. Focusing on one case and studying its uniqueness and particularity in a complex environment will provide knowledge, which can be also generated to similar cases, situations or programmes (Simons, 2009). Case study research being a subjectivist approach requires different criteria for its validity and trustworthiness (House, 1980). According to house a subjectivist approach is validated through its 'accuracy in reflecting the situation, relevance, timeliness and meaningful to participants and audiences'. Guba and Lincoln (1989) introduced new criteria to evaluate authenticity of a study, which are fairness, respecting participants' perspectives and empowering them to act, which this research project followed. Guba and Lincoln (1989) are supporting the criteria House (1980) pointed out as the essential criteria 'establishing the validity of the case', which are fairness, justice and a democratic process.

During the whole research process these criteria were kept in mind by the researcher and applied. Setting up rules, informing participants about research process and applying their feedback as well as ask their opinion how to carry out activities. In addition, the overall aim of case study research to be educative (Simons, 2009) were followed by implementing the course as well as give background information and theoretical knowledge to the riding instructors. Furthermore, Simons' (2009) guideline to constantly evaluate the process and make changes based on newly gained knowledge, but never lose the overall objective of the thesis, was followed by the researcher.

By participating in the course 'Training zur Beziehungskonferenz' of Gordon Training International and several university courses covering the topic of effective communication I gained a sufficient understanding of teaching a course as well as understanding different processes occurring. In addition, all sessions were video recorded as well as notes were taken to ensure all incidents, which occurred were documented.

Due to this, I as a researcher ensured according to Stringer (2007) veracity, truthfulness and validity of presented information and results found from the present research study. Furthermore, all findings were discussed with my supervisor T. Lintunen to ensure that results do not solely display my opinions, perspectives and views. In the end the research report was sent to participants for member checking to read and check to ensure authenticity and truthfulness.

9 RESULTS

9.1 Implementation of the course

The course 'Social and communication skills course for riding instructors' was carried out in Bielefeld, Germany on the weekend 18th and 19th July 2015. Each day had the same structure of four 1 ½ hours sessions, 15 minutes break in between the first and second as well as third and fourth session. Between the second and third session there was a one hour lunch break. The four participants were a heterogeneous group when it comes to age, riding discipline and employment status. The location of the course was at the stable of one of the participants in a club room, with the possibility to go outside to have separate rooms for group work. I had organized a projector, two laptops, flipcharts, pens as well as other necessary material for the activities.

9.1.1 Day 1

1st session

The course started at 9 o'clock on Saturday morning 18th July 2015 and all participants were in time. Before the course started the group had coffee together and were chatting, so the atmosphere was relaxed and calm. I knew all of the participants, whereby two of them are closer friends and the other two are people I met through riding lessons and the stable. All participants were taking part in the conversation and introducing themselves already. It was my intention to create a relaxed and open atmosphere as I do believe it is easier to learn when you are feeling comfortable in the place where you are.

I started the course on time with an introduction and welcoming all to the course. After I introduced myself, even though all of them know me I wanted to explain them more about me and my studies. Next I used an icebreaker and get-to-know-each-other exercise to keep the talkative atmosphere. Each participant had to choose an item, introduce herself by telling her name, equestrian background and the meaning or relation to the picked item. Participants talked easily about their jobs and equestrian background but they seemed to struggle with picking an item, which related to them. Being used to such icebreakers and activities I did not think it would be difficult, but maybe as it was the first course for all participants in this field it took them a little while to find an item and make up a story. It was noticeable that the oldest participant, who is taking part in different courses all the time had the least trouble with the item picking and storytelling.

Afterwards organisational information was given to the participants and I mentioned helpfulness of a learning log. As all participants were voluntarily taking part of the class I also decided to make the learning log voluntary. I did not mention the knowledge test in the end, as I did not want to tense the atmosphere as the test was just for research purpose to judge how much they learned and remembered.

We continued with setting up rules for the time of the course to ensure a good atmosphere and everybody knows what is required from her. It was difficult to get participants to name rules they want to be written down. One participant also ask why we do have to set up rules, as we are all adults and know how to behave. I explained, that it is important so everybody knows what is expected from her. It will also give us a basis for discussion if someone is not satisfied with someone else's behaviour. In addition, rules will help us create a relaxed and safe environment for a good learning atmosphere. My explanation seemed to make the participant think and agree, as right after she said she wants that we let each other talk and do not interrupt each other. Now that the first move was made, other participants followed. Our rules ended up to be:

- ➢ Do not interrupt a person talking
- ➢ Listening
- ➢ Everything said in the group stays within the group
- ➢ Sticking to the break times
- ➢ Changing partners

It was my suggestion to make the rule to keep everything, which has been said inside the group. The reason for my suggestion was, that I knew some of the participants interact in the same environment. As mentioned earlier one participant is boarding her horses at the stable of another participant, as well as this participant is taking riding lessons at the stable of a third participant. Furthermore there are many common circles of acquaintance of participants. Before the course participant A had mentioned to me, that she sees this as a possible problem which could arise. Having participated myself in courses, which require a trustful atmosphere and sharing of personal experiences, hearing this rule being spoken out loud made me feel safer. So I was hoping to support a safe learning environment by bringing up this rule. It was noticeable, that B, who named most of the rules, was creating those from previous experiences. Every time she suggested a rule, she gave an example from a previous workshop or course she joined, where this had worked well or not. A and C were rather quiet and not bringing up any rules. It could be as I named already the rule, which was important to A, as

when I mentioned the rule she was strongly agreeing by nodding. Just as the get to know each other activity, I think that participants have to get used to activities like this even though they are tools to create a better atmosphere. Comparing myself with the first time I participated in a workshop which was about learning tools for better interactions with other people and now, it got a lot easier to state rules, which are important to me, state my emotions or give other information about myself.

To start getting into the topic I chose to shortly talk about social and emotional learning and the influence of coaches or teachers on that. I wanted to give my participants the right mind set and make them understand the importance of having a good relationship with their students, which also includes an effective communication. After explaining the theory we did a partner activity, whereby each partner picked six emotional cards I provided. Each participant had the task to explain when she had felt like that and which emotions were it that she felt. A and D went outside to do the exercises and B and C stayed inside. First I was taking notes before I went to listen to both pairs. All participants were talking about past experiences and it was noticeable that they really tried to express their emotions they had at that specific moment. C was describing a situation where she achieved an action she was hoping for it to happened already a long time. When she got to the point telling that she managed to do that instead of saying 'I was so happy', 'I felt so relieved' or 'I was so excited', she said 'I think that was when I had this feeling'. B then asked 'It was an I-managed it feeling for you or?' and C strongly agreed 'yeah, yeah'. It seemed like she was very relieved, that B understood her. However, from my point of view it was very difficult for C to say the words 'I was really happy about it!' She said while B was talking, quietly 'I think that was when I was happy'. Also in the following description of the cards, C is not naming any emotions, but using the cards and description of the picture as a metaphor to describe the feelings. For example instead of saying 'I feel lost, confused and like I am still trying to figure out what I want to do' she ends her description with 'yeah so just like the child on the playground', which was shown on the card she picked. If she would mention an emotion, she did it in a very insecure way and always using words like 'maybe, could be, I guess, it should be'.

It seemed like B had an easier time expressing her emotions, when she feels happy and also describes the situation very detailed, how it has to be so she feels happy. One fact noticeable was, that she compared herself to others and was saying 'when others are saying doing this is a burden, I don't understand that as I really like doing it'. Instead of describing what she likes she is saying how she is not. In addition it was noticeable that B was asking

questions to C to understand the story. However, C was not asking any questions to B or giving any comments. She was quietly listening. However, when they were done with all six cards B and C were talking about their latest life changes in educational matters as well as place to live etc. Both were very actively talking, both were asking questions for a better understanding and exchanging private information.

A and D seemed to have a quite easy time expressing feelings and tell about situations when they were in this emotional state. They were also done in half the time, but did not rush and also did all six emotional cards.

Afterwards we did an evaluation round and I asked all the group if they found it difficult and what kind of examples they used. B started and mentioned they rather used their own experiences and were talking about private. Then C was raising her voice and supporting B in her statement. C said 'yes we were using private examples … of course not diving totally deep in your emotional world but yes private stories....' All participants agreed that it was a good way to get to know each other better as well as get background information, why and how certain things happened.

It was greatly noticeable that all participants were more talkative after this activity and engaged in the course. It seemed like it was already easier to reflect on their actions when I asked them e.g. how they chose the cards.

We continued with a discussion about which rights do I have regarding the expression of my own opinion and my emotions. It was very interesting to hear different opinions, but mainly all participants agreed on the same rights. D was using a recently happened situation to support her statement about her rights to affect others with the expression of your own opinion.

As a starting point to get into the iceberg theory we made a discussion round where every participant stated how they are spending their time as well as if they are satisfied with this time scheduling. Each participant had certain activities they were satisfied with the time they spend on, would like to spend more or less on it. For this activity it seemed like all participants found it quite easy to state those information. However, even though nobody seemed to be bothered to share those information, I used my own experience to explain the iceberg theory. I ended the first session with this as I felt like it was time to give everybody a break, after giving a lot of information. As well as give my participants time to think about my example and link it to the importance of expressing your own emotions. During the break I noticed participants sharing similar stories and linking my example to their own life.

<u>2<sup>nd</sup> session</u>

The second session started with an explanation of the next activity. We were doing a value-cloverleaf in pairs. Partners should write common values with similar intensity in the middle of the cloverleaf. Then they would go ahead and write each of them in one leaf three values highly important to them that are different from the partner. In the last two leaves each of them would put in values, that are important to her but not to the partner. Explaining this activity I did not want to lead participants to much, so I did not give any examples. However, the task did not seem clear to the participants so I explained it with real life examples. It took a little while until all participants understood how to do it.

In the end, when we discussed, there were differences between the two pairs, how they carried out the task. Maybe more explanation would have been needed. Both pairs agreed that it was easier to find similar values and talk about their individual significance attributed to a particular value. Most difficult was to find different values. C and D worked together and only found materialistic values, which differed from each other. Pair A and B made out different values between them, however they did not have a problem with the value of the other person. From this exercise an active conversation and discussion started, when those different values could bring us in a conflict. As well as how far we could influence another person of adapting to our values. This was especially interesting as participants of different disciplines were discussing as well as there were leisure and competition riders. Having different opinions and values spoken out loud in a safe environment gave us a good discussion basis. Creating an atmosphere, where all participants feel good about sharing private experiences, opinions and values, was one of the most important factors for the success of this course. All participants seemed to be open minded, listening to other participants and discussing.

Coming from this discussion I presented the relationship-credo 'A credo for my relationships with others' of Thomas Gordon (Kober, 2014) to remind my participants why effective communication is important. I think it describes very well how human beings wish their relationships would be. However, it is not always easy to live up to those guidelines. Be honest, open and express my own needs.

I went through the credo, stopping after each part and related it to real life situations and my own experiences. All participants listened and I could see on their reactions that they were thinking about their own experiences and relationships. Right after I finished, I asked them to draw a mind-map including all people they do have a relationship with being a riding instructor. I left it up to them, where they draw the mind-map and if they do it together or alone. B suggested to draw it in their booklet, they got from me in the beginning to use as a

learning log. Afterwards we could compare them and look at differences. None of the other participants disagreed, so they started to write their relationship mind-map in their booklets. It was a moment, where one participant decided for the whole group, but as no one seemed to be bothered by this suggestions I let them go ahead.

I asked A to start and she seemed to be alright with being picked as the first one. Before she started I asked to judge how difficult those relationships are. If they appear as a problem at the moment or if they are rather neutral. Close relatives and friends were mentioned by her as being the most difficult ones as meeting their expectations puts pressure on her. D in contrast stated relationships with visitors and unknown people as more stressing and exhausting. B stated relationships to people she is dependent on as most annoying and difficult. Especially if she is the person in the middle managing a relation with both and her business is dependent on it. While presenting her relationships, B tend to speak out her opinion and how she thinks she should interact with other rider for example. If it would be her duty to correct mistakes from other riders at the riding area when she sees them but they are not her students. Stating this, she also mentioned that this is a long discussion and that there are different opinions about it. In the beginning of her talking all participants seemed to listen very well, as she got more into the topic and clearly stated her opinion, it was noticeable that the other participants did not agree fully with her. At some point, while she went on with her explanation, the others seemed to lose interest in listening. As I did not want to get too deep into a debate on principles I did not motivate anyone to comment on this and I did not either even though my opinion on this topics differed from hers.

Another participant stated relationships to other trainers working with conflictive methods or training styles clashing with hers, as most difficult. So far she has solved those problems by stating clearly she does not change her methods and expects the other one to accept this as well as she accept the other trainer's style. More difficult for her are situations where she is dependent on people's decisions, which she does not agree with, especially if she has to explain herself to a third party like her riding students or their parents. In those cases she mainly eludes herself from the discussion and sends those people of to talk with the person who made the decision.

Listening to different stories she sounded very strict in her decisions as if her riding students or parents do not agree with decisions made regarding the lesson, they have the option to accept this or change the teacher. In addition, it was stated very clearly that she does not change her decisions, because students were allowed to do something at another stable or

under the supervision of another trainer. I got the impression, that this participant followed the rule I do not influence you and you do not influence me, we just co-exist next to each other.

Following I gave descriptions of different situations to my participants and asked them to judge how they assert themselves in those situations. Beforehand I explained differences between self-assertive, non-self-assertive and aggressive behaviour, so they could allot descriptions of situations to named behaviours. I explained to them the relation between our behaviour and influence of others on it. As we often do things, because we think others expect us to do so and we end up being unhappy about how we spend our time. This exercise was used for participants to get a better understanding of their actions. As well as to point out if their actions are in balance with their emotions and needs. Explaining this I used a lot of examples of my own behaviour, my weaknesses and where I still need to work on being self-assertive. B mentioned doubts about choices we do have to do certain things or not when orders are coming from out boss or supervisor. I explained to her that being self-assertive does not mean you can do whatever you want, but you do have the right to explain why you think something should be done different. It was very helpful of B to ask this question as it gave me the chance to give more explanations. Especially as it was noticeable, B's statement came from previous experiences while working in different stables. The statement described very clearly the opinion of many people in the equestrian world, who I worked for, who expect their students or workers to do exactly what they say without questioning it if they get an order. Due to lively discussions and exchange, I could not finish contents planned for the second session, as we agreed to stick to the break times.

3rd session

After the break, when participants started to sort the cards, B asked several questions and it seemed to be difficult for her to link a situation to a certain behaviour. As the situations were described in a general way, no specific people were named, who participants were dealing with. This made it for B quite difficult and she needed some extra time as she also stated she cannot think if there are given explanations. Also A had some questions to clarify some situations and how she should judge her behaviour. She was the only one stating that most of the time she is not self-assertive during those situations, whereby D rated that she mainly shows self-assertive behaviour. B, as mentioned before is not sure about her ratings as situations are not black and white as she said. Some of the situations she would have linked to self-assertive behaviour, but was not sure if it is or rather aggressive. C did not state how she divided situations, but agreed with B that it was difficult to allot a general situation to a

certain behaviour. I did not ask her how she split up situations to a certain behaviour, as I did not want to pressure her to give information she does not want to give. As well as those cards were meant to be for themselves to see how their behaviour is and to raise awareness.

This was the moment to introduce I-messages to the participants, as they had already asked how to be self-assertive. First we talked about stating I-messages and I used as well my personal experiences to explain differences between You- and I-messages. I also pointed out that also positive You-messages can lead to resistance from the other person. Therefore, I prepared different example sentences, which I read out to participants. B had some difficulties to agree on the quality of some sentences. We were discussing about it, as she does not think telling someone 'I am very happy you were very concentrated during the lesson and transferred all my advices immediately so it was easy for me to teach the new exercise to you'. She doubted that 'concentration' is a characteristic and would rather see it as a judgement. D supported my choice of sentence and tried to give an explanation why it is correct to use. I agreed with D, but also with B and said that it is really tricky to give a compliment without judging the other person at all. However, if I state that I have this impression and give clear characteristics it falls under I-messages. It seemed that B was satisfied with D's and my explanations.

While I was explaining the structure of stating I-messages all participants seemed to be carefully listening. Following I asked them to write down five stating I-messages, they would or could use in their job as a riding instructor. B and C started to write down sentences immediately, whereby A and D seemed like they had to think about stating I-messages a little longer. After all participants finished to write their I-messages down I asked them to get together in a pair to read out the five I-messages to each other and check if they are correct according to the characteristics I showed them. A and C worked together inside, whereas B and D went outside. After this activity all participants had worked together and everybody stuck to the rule of working together with different partners. A and C discussed all I-messages in depth and were not finished when B and D came back inside. I had been with the pair inside as they had several clarification questions. In the end both, A and C seemed to get a good and correct understanding of stating I-messages and made changes to their five sentences. In the whole group we discussed sentences, which had been changed and I made the participants explain why they had to be changed to the other participants. All participants seemed to fully understand why certain words need to be changed and even self-corrected parts while reading it. D read out a sentence, they had already changed but still were not fully changed to an I-message. As well C read out her sentence and before anybody could say

something, she noticed what needed to be changed in addition. In total it seemed everybody had a good and clear understanding of a correct I-message in theory. When I asked if it was difficult to form stating I-messages, A mentioned that she always needed a second thought about it. Quite easily she would use a You-message, especially when it is about positive statements like a compliment. Even though she knows theoretically how to build an I-message, theory and praxis are quite different. B agreed with her, stating that it is easy to understand structure and use of I-messages, as well as forming easy ones regarding neutral things like the weather. However, it becomes more difficult during a conversation to remember and notice if you are using I- or You-messages.

We continued with answering I-messages and I first explained why and how to use them to my participants. I focused especially on reminding my participants that they have the right to say no, ask for time to think about, change their answer and do not have to give reasons for their decision. Subsequently to this I asked them to write down three answering I-messages. They should choose from previous situations they remember, where they did not answered a question as they would have liked to related to their profession as a riding instructor.

This time we discussed their results immediately in the big group and I asked participants to describe briefly the situation and then say their answering I-message. D started and gave an example which had happened at her stable. It was very interesting to hear that D had answered the question with an I-message almost exactly as she had written down. She explained that after denying the request of her clients she managed to get to a common understanding why she is not doing so. D then stated, that her clients now changed their opinion about their request after several debates and exchanges of principles. The request was about using a very debateable training method. Even though D's example already happened some time ago it she stated that she can almost remember every single word she said, as she was thinking a lot about it. If she was allowed to influence her clients opinion and even changing it by pointing out the negative sides of this training method. From previous experiences I have seen several rider-trainer-relationships break up because of disagreements on training methods. In my eyes, the use of an I-message and the function of D to dispute with her clients the training method led to a change in the client's opinion. It was a great example to show the role and influence of a riding instructor. As well as it is worth of discussing different opinions instead of dropping someone if we do not like what they are doing without trying to communicate about it. As if we do debate we and also the other may learn something and may change their opinion and values.

B showed in two examples that she got a very clear understanding of answering I-messages. She explained, why she also gives reasons when she says yes. So that the person who is asking a favour knows exactly why she can do it, so there are no misunderstandings when she denies the request the next time.

C's example made clear that she knows how to use answering I-messages and has no problem to tell other people no. However, if this leads to a dispute she will withdraw herself from it and not go on with explanations. Stating her example of a positive answer to a request seemed like the person asking her to do a favour was almost afraid to ask, but she was very secure answering yes she can do it and stated reasons why she is doing it.

A gave an example where she would have liked to answer no, but instead gave a lot of explanations and hoped for the person to understand that she does not want to do it. D mentioned that this rather sounded like excuses instead of self-assertive behaviour, which was correct. It was a great example to point out what happens if we are not self-assertive and tie ourselves up in a chain of explanations, which gives more possibilities to the questioner to attack us. The risk that we then do something we do not want to do becomes greater. It was good to see a discussion arising from that and D sharing examples when this has happened to her as well and now she learned how to express her answer clearly.
When I started the debriefing of this exercise C stated that it was easier for her than stating I-messages.

We continued with preventing I-messages and I started again with theory, covering when and how to use preventing I-messages. As well as how they help us making our life easier. Every time I was explaining theory it seemed like all participants were listening very careful. This was also noticeable in the questions they asked and comments participants made. I ended the third session with having my participants writing down three preventing I-messages related to their working life as a riding instructor.

The atmosphere was very relaxed and all participants were chatting with each other. It was to some extend course related or related to their work and experience as riding instructors. It was very interesting to hear how my participants played different scenarios through while they were trying to figure out their preventing I-messages. Both participants owning a stable were exchanging experiences about facts that should be included in a contract. There was also a lot of exchange between the stable owner and the one participant boarding her horse there. All participants shared previous examples differing from situations when they were already able to use I-messages. The discussion got to a point where all participants started to discuss language. How things are said in different parts of Germany or

other German speaking countries. C shared experiences how her language adapted to different areas she has been and all participants agreed and mentioned similar experiences. It was interesting to see participant B mentioning how she changed her language by giving an example and D saying she would have not understood if B was saying yes or no.

4<sup>th</sup> session

Starting with the fourth session the atmosphere was very relaxed, participants were talking, laughing and in a positive mood. D started with sharing her preventive I-messages and all participants were able to build correct preventive I-messages. It was noticeable that all participants started to only use personal experiences and created preventive I-messages, which they could use in their professional life as a riding instructor. I had the feeling that all participants felt safe and we managed to create a supportive learning environment.

When we started to go deeper in different examples and situations it was clear that all participants were very keen on creating correct I-messages. As well all were asking questions when there were things unclear. It was a good feeling when all participants were taking part in the discussion and see how they exchanged information. Especially D was trying to help and solve a problematic situation of B by sharing her experiences in such a situation.

We moved on from preventive I-messages to confronting I-messages. Again I explained first about the theoretical background and gave examples how to create a confronting I-message. All participants were asked to write down three confronting I-messages related to their work as a riding instructor. This seemed to be more challenging than creating preventive I-messages. Especially A seemed to struggle a lot with building a confronting I-message, so I offered to help her. To not disturb the other participants, we left the room and it seemed that A felt more comfortable outside. She already had an idea how to create the I-message. As it was about an up-to-date problem, she did not feel comfortable to share it in the group to get help creating a correct I-message. Outside she explained me the situation and created the I-message almost by herself with little hints from me. The three other participants worked on their I-messages silently and alone. None of them seemed to have big problems and as it was already the last session for the day, it seemed everybody was getting tired. After almost finishing their sentences, B and C were discussing already about their examples. They mentioned that it is easier to form a confronting I-message when there is an actual disadvantage for them like more work. In their opinion it sounded like it was not enough of a reason if the behaviour of another person is solely making them sad, worried or angry.

Coming back to the group B still needed some time to finish her sentence. While she finished her sentences the other three participants and I talked about riding students of D. She also started, when everybody finished their sentences and read out a correct confronting I-messages as well as all other participants.

B shared a second confronting I-message she wants to use when confronting someone, whose behaviour had upset her. As mentioned earlier, she felt like being upset about a statement of another person is not enough to confront this person. While getting deeper in this scenario, D also helped to explain and supported B to figure out why this behaviour is upsetting her. The consequence for B would be to quit the contact with this person, which she does not want. However, the things said to her by this person are attacking her profession as a rider as well as her skills as a riding instructor. She feels like those statements are not true and this person is saying those things without thinking about them. As B wants to keep the relationship to this person, she is going to try to confront her with the I-message she wrote down.

I continued with pointing out advantages of self-assertive behaviour as well as challenges coming with it. Moving on from that to clear sending and receiving of messages, active and passive listening as well as road blockers. Everything was explained with personal experiences I shared with my participants. All participants were quietly listening and it was noticeable that it has been a long day already.

Still questions were asked, especially from B to presented examples and situations. It seemed like she wanted to have a guideline how to behave in every situation. However, I tried to explain to her that no situation is like another and that everything I present are guidelines to help us communicate more effectively but not a one hundred percent guarantee to solve every situation as we wish. She reminded me a lot of myself taking part in my first workshop about effective communication.

Following to the theory we did another activity in pairs whereby one participant tells about a personal problem and the other one is active listening. After finishing their story the listening participant got feedback from the talking participant and then they changed roles. I pointed out that it was up to them how personal the problem was that they were going to talk about. In addition, I presented how to give feedback and which aspects should be taken into account. After actively listening the second round was done by one participant sharing another problem and the second participant being a passive listener.

Participant A and D worked together and went outside to do the activity, whereby participant B and C stayed in the room. Both had a difficult time deciding which problem they

wanted to share. After we had discussed about different situations how we listen to our friends and that we quite often to judge what they say, B started to share a problem. It was very difficult for C to summarize in her own words what B said. When B pointed that out, C justified that she already had trouble doing that during her studies, where active listening was part of a compulsory course. Even though I was observing the pair at that moment I was not able to help C as I was watching their body language. C was sitting with her feet against the table and tilted on her chair. She did not nod or use any other way of communication to show her interest. When she started to summarize, she started laughing and explained that she just cannot do it. That she already 'screwed up' in her exam about active listening and that it is just not her. At that moment A and D came back inside and we started debriefing about the activity.

A and D were very satisfied with their performance and noticed a clear difference between active and passive listening.

B and C stated that it was very difficult and felt not natural to them. I shared my own experiences and that it takes some time to get used to it. First you start realizing and being aware of your own communication and actions, which is a starting point. When we are aware of our actual communication and reflect on it, we are also able to change it and understand the reaction of the other person better.

We ended the day with emotional cards and all participants needed some time to find correct cards. This time the task was to reflect back on the day's sessions and explain how they felt. Comparing this to myself as well as my fellow students in similar courses it seemed more difficult for my participants. I already got used to quickly reflect on my own opinion and feelings as well as sharing those.

C started and stated that she feels satisfied. There was nothing totally new in the course that she has not heard about and she believes that every communication course has a similar basic. However, she stated that she felt more comfortable during this course as she had felt in similar courses before. Furthermore she liked Gordon's model as it is not influencing and manipulating as she thought communication guidelines would be comparing to previous courses. A mentioned that it was very good to deepen her knowledge about I-messages and effective communication. Now she just feels relieved after a long day and cannot wait to get to her horse to go for a ride. I also took part in the closing round and told my participants that I felt very happy and relieved as everything worked out just as planned. Furthermore, mentioned also how grateful I am that all of them participate in discussions and share valuable information with each other. D supported A's statement and found it very interesting to

deepen her knowledge in the field of effective communication. As well as A she is now happy to go home and relax. B mentioned that she does not like to be asked how she feels about something when she answers a question. In previous courses she was forced to state every time how she feels about an action. During the present course she stated she did not feel the pressure even though we were sharing emotions and opinions, but it was up to her how openly she was sharing her emotions.

It was noticeable that all participant were fortunate to finish for the day, which is understandable after eight hours of seminar. Especially as only one of them is still a student and used to sitting in class for a longer period of time. All other participants are used to work most of the time a day outside and to physically active work.

## 9.1.2 Day 2

### 5th session

All participants were early and we started the day off with coffee, talking and laughing. The atmosphere was very relaxed and even though it was early on a Sunday morning all participants seemed very active.

I started by asking if participants had any questions or comments about the day before. Nobody had any questions so far and I just started with a warming up exercise. Therefore each participant should name five positive things, which happened to her yesterday or during the morning before the course started and made her happy. B asked if it had to be course related or could just be anything. I told them that it is completely up to themselves what they were going to name.

First one started with naming five positive things and it seemed easy for her. Only one time she gave an explanation of why it was a positive fact to her. The next person seemed to have little difficulties naming five positive happenings. However, it did not seem to be difficult for her to share those and she did not justify why they made her happy. The third participant seemed to easily find five positive things, which occurred and as well as the previous one did not give any explanations. The last participant in contrast to the others had more difficulties to find five positive factors about her previous day. Others tried to help, when she could not remember how many facts she already named. The last fact mentioned by her was that she was happy to not have to deal with problems other people do have to deal with. The reaction of the other participants were unbelievable laughing and one participant

asked confused '…and this made you happy?' The answer was just 'yes it does'. As well as the day before I joined the round and shared five positive things of my previous day. Continuing with theory about verbal and non-verbal resistance I tried to point out clearly that even by using I-messages it happens that I encounter resistance. While explaining theory I used examples from the previous day to make it more understandable and have the personal relation of my participants to the course. As well as creating a safe learning environment for my participants and continue in a relaxed atmosphere. I used verbal and non-verbal resistance to lead my participants to the content of shifting-gears.

Everybody was listening carefully, looking at me and the presentation. However, no questions were asked so far and everybody was very quiet. As the first session was covering a lot of theory participants seemed to lose their concentration as they started to look out of the window or staring somewhere else. It seemed like their concentration was coming and going in cycles as they would ask comprehension questions every now and then.

After finishing with the theory I asked the group if they want to practice stating I-messages and shifting gears in pairs or in the whole group. B mentioned that it would be good to do it in the whole group and have two observers. Everybody agreed with this suggestion and B stated an I-message of hers from the previous day. A was disagreeing with her and it was participants B task to shift-gears and listen actively. B seemed to be very confident and had no problems to do a role play, whereby A asked several times if she was doing it correct. Both participants reach the point of mutual understanding. However, as soon as A gave up her resistance and said she can understand B's opinion, B ensured A that she can also understand her opinion. It was interesting to see that C mentioned she would not have felt understood by B rather attacked through the last statement. This sowed clearly that one statement can be received totally different by two different people, which C pointed out clearly. D agreed that the discussion could have been totally different depending on the two people discussing. I reminded all participants after that first example to not give too many arguments against the stated I-message to make it easier to practice their active listening skills.

A stated the next I-message and it was C's turn to disagree, which seemed to be easy for her. After A summarized what C said, who agreed with the summary, it was noticeable that C wanted to end the discussion. She stated her opinion again and after finishing she said 'mh, yeah it is just like it is'. Her whole body language seemed distant as she was trying to block the conversation as well as tried to make A's opinion seem ridiculous by using depreciative expressions. It seemed like the role play was very difficult for C. She shared with us how she handled this situation earlier without any communication. It seems like discussing

and sharing her opinion is very complicated for her and she rather tries to avoid it. Now she was forced to discuss even though it was an artificial situation and a role play. However, she was trying to use the skills she already learned and also tried to express her opinion. A had a difficult time to actively listen to C, but she did very well and transferred my advices immediately. She also ask a lot of comprehension questions and seemed very interested in improving her communication skills. The next pair to discuss was C and D, whereby C stated her opinion and it was her turn to actively listen. It seemed already easier for her and this time she managed to summarize in a serious way what D said. However, she had chosen an example, which was not her opinion and it was noticeable that it made it difficult for her to find arguments to support her statement. Afterward I asked her if she really agrees with the statement she just gave and her answer was 'no'. D offered to do the role play again and C should state her own opinion. It was much easier this time for C to give argument, which supported her opinion as well as actively listen to D. However, D stated afterward that she did not have the feeling that C fully understood her even though she was summarizing the words D had said. I used the moment to discuss with my participants the importance of words matching my actions and feelings. I think it was very important to clearly point out that all the skills presented and practiced in this course need to be applied and embraced by them. Of course it would take some time until it felt totally natural, but if I did not fully agree with a certain skill it will never have the wished outcome. Transferring those skills to our life means to work on ourselves and we may have to change our actions and behaviour. This can only be done if I really want to change and fully understand how a skill works. All participants agreed with it and it seemed that it made them thoughtful.

It was very positive to see how active all participants were in discussing and sharing their observations. Lively discussions were going on and every participant seemed to be comfortable in sharing her thoughts and opinions. We continued until all participants had taken over each role at least once. Last role plays were done by using examples from the cloverleaf they made the day before.

It differed a lot how complicated it was for my participants to get into roleplays but the longer we did it, the easier it seemed. In addition, participants, who had an easier time to actively listen supported the ones, who had more difficulties. As well as all participants reacted very positive to feedback given from either other participants or me. It was immediately transferred in role plays. After a role play of A and B I took over the role as the discussion partner to show how to deal with more resistance. During their role play they tried to be very kind with each other and did not give a lot of resistance. All participants liked it a

lot to get an example and have a discussion base by comparing both role plays. It led us to a very active discussion and brought us closer to real life situations, which was mentioned by C.

6<sup>th</sup> session

It was noticeable that after each break the atmosphere was very relaxed and talkative. All participants were chatting with each other mainly about equestrian related topics.

We continued with stating I-messages and C should name a statement to discuss with A. However, it seemed very difficult for A to take over the role as a discussion partner this time. B and D tried to help A and gave her arguments against C's opinion. It seemed that A felt pressured by them instead of supported and said that they can do the role play. I decided that I will do the role play with C and A seemed relieved and said she is going to observe. When B said that A should do it and practice, A's answer was that she does not have to do anything and that observing is enough for her at the moment. I engaged in the verbal exchange and reminded them that nobody has to do anything they do not want to do, which solved the discussion. After we ended the role play I quietly asked A if she wants to try another role play and she denied, which I accepted and moved on.

We continued with answering I-messages and I asked my participants to say very clearly no. I decided that I am going to play the role plays with my participants. So three participants were observing and one was acting with me. I chose to do so as the discussions got more fluent and closer to real life situations. It felt that I acting with them made it easier to act more natural. As well as answering I-messages seemed again easier for all participant.

All participants gave me a situation they had been in and I formulated a request to them they had to deny. A agreed to do a role play with me and it seemed she had no problem acting with me. When I gave feedback to her she also had no problem with acting the same situation again and transferring my advices. It was very interesting when she shared her feelings about denying my request and it was very positive that we discussed about it. It seemed very helpful for A to highlight her rights and needs in this situation. In then end she seemed convinced that she has the right to say no in this situation and also got arguments why.

B mentioned that it still was quite difficult to stick to your own opinion and not give in if you deny a favour. She said it was very good that we talked about our rights the day before and wrote down answering I-messages. Now answering to a person who put in a claim was already more complicated even though it was a role play.

C and D seemed to have no problems to say no when I put in a claim. Some small advices were given by me and other participants. Especially not giving to many reasons and an excusing explanation seemed to be difficult for all participants. It was noticeable that one participant was very active in giving feedback to other participants. She gave correct feedback and did it in a very direct way. Even though she did not say anything wrong or was making fun of someone, I should have paid more attention that she is not intimidating other participants. It seemed that especially another participant was quieter and less active than before.

After we finished the first round I wanted my participants to shift gears in the next round. First they deny my claim and then shift gears to help me understand why they say no. This exercise was very good as it was noticeable that all participants had to deal with and figure out their needs. All participants used personal experiences, which made all discussions livelier and everybody seemed to be deeply engaged. For me it was good to see A asking a lot of questions and stating her opinion after she had been quieter before. I think it was a good decision to take over the role of the discussion partner as it seemed everybody felt more secure. Especially A and C seemed to have an easier time doing role plays when I was the discussion partner.

After finishing this round we got into a discussion when it is easy to say no and when it is more difficult. C stated that it is easier to say no if the other person does not have any power over you or you are not dependent on the relationship. It is good to see that all participants start to analyse their relationships and differences between them. This showed that all participants started to get deeper into the topic of effective communication.
We moved on to preventing I-messages and I asked my participants to use one of their preventing I-messages they wrote down the previous day. I would be the partner reacting to their preventing I-messages.

Before we started, I wanted to hear from my participants if they do understand why shifting gears is so important. D could explain very well why it is so important to shift gears and other participants agreed with her. In my opinion it was good to ask them as for effective communication it is important that I do understand why I do certain things. I think I should have done it more often, to ask my participants to explain me facts I presented to them.

I shortly reminded my participants why we use preventing I-messages and what the main characteristics are. B started and stated afterwards that it is difficult to stick with expressing your own needs and not apologizing for it. A added on that it is as well difficult to not feel bad about expressing your own needs.

During this exercise it became clear that most participants still have troubles to be self-assertive instead of being aggressive or non-self-assertive. A tend to be non-self-assertive whereby B and C mainly started off in an aggressive way and then, after receiving resistance from me became non-self-assertive or more aggressive. D seemed to have the least problems and managed to express her needs as well as help me to understand her reasons being her role play partner.

It was positive to see how all participants got a better feeling of shifting gears and using I-messages as well as active listening. When I was the role play partner I would not stop the discussion if they made a mistake considering Gordon's theory, but I would point it out with my reaction. This seemed to be very effective as all of them noticed it immediately why I could attack them or give more resistance.

I moved on to talk about understanding for interpersonal relationships, which was very good at that point. All participants still seem to have trouble to express their needs and feel like it is alright to do so. We discussed about acceptable, unacceptable behaviour and the fact that it is not possible to be consistent all the time. All participants seemed very interested in this topic and to transfer this knowledge to their own experiences. I did not tell them anything very new but all participants listened to me very carefully. It almost seemed like they have never heard before about these facts.

This was the start of talking about Gordon's behaviour window and who is owning the problem. Therefore I gave examples of different situations to my participants and asked them to stated, who owns the problem. All participants had an easy time to assign who has the problem in different situations. It was a good exercise to have my participants discuss without me interacting a lot. In addition, it helped my participants to become more critical towards their own problems and others.

A discussion arose from that when something becomes my own problem. It seemed to be a little bit more difficult to understand for B when something becomes my problem, even though it is the problem of another person. It was noticeable that all participants, especially B, C and D were very keen on discussing different scenarios. A would mainly listen quietly and it seemed she was analysing everything. At some point she would state her thoughts, which showed me that she was processing information in her own way.

After a while we could solve it and all together come to a common understanding. It was positive to discuss different scenarios as it became clearer for everybody. In addition, all scenarios were very personal examples, which made it more interesting for all participants to

discuss and solve a scenario. This was noticeable by very active participation from all of them.

7<sup>th</sup> session

Following to the discussion and break we did an exercise, where the whole group had to solve a problem together. It was good to observe the group from a distance as in the beginning it seemed like they want to have my acknowledgment for a possible solution. Being very passive and just observing the group started to brainstorm more freely and came up with a lot of ideas. The more ideas they had the easier it seemed for them to come up with more. It was very positive to see that everybody was participating in brainstorming and discussing. After the group were done collecting ideas I asked them to mark each idea, which is realistic. The exercise was used to show my participants that there are always more than one solution to a problem. Even though some may seem unrealistic, they may help us to come up with a solution. It was a good way to start into the topic of win-win solutions and get my participants into a creative mind-set. I used the exercise to explain theory of win-win solution process and how it is done. It seemed like a good idea as all participants understood in the first attempt how solving a problem with a win-win solution is done. To get more practical experiences I handed out papers with different sentences, describing different problem situations. My participants were asked to underline in each sentence the need of the example person and the solution of the problem in different colours. All participants had an easy time underlining the correct part and they also stated that it was easy for them.

I continued to explain more in depth why it is important to find win-win solutions and how it is done. Therefore I used situations my participants had explained the previous day when stating their confronting I-messages. While I played through a scenario with A everybody was carefully listening and watching. It was positive to see for me that A had no problem acting the scenario with me. In addition A seemed very interested in this topic and asked several questions to get a better understanding of a win-win solution process. B and D gave examples of their own experiences in conflict situations, which were solved in a positive way as well as negative experiences. It was noticeable that we were able to create a safe environment, where it is possible for everybody to share personal experiences. Furthermore, it was noticeable that especially A still had difficulties to be self-assertive while interacting with another person. She had a hard time understanding that it is alright to ask another person for help as well as saying she cannot do a certain task. After discussing different examples and me reminding her of her rights it seemed like it became clearer for her.

We moved on to discuss about different conflict situations I handed out to my participants. First I wanted them to act out all situations in pairs but I decided to do it in the whole group after asking my participants if they agree with it. All participants liked the idea to act them out in the whole group and have two observers.

C started in the role of the confronting person and chose an example, which had already happened to her. B took over the role of the person being confronted. It seemed difficult for C to formulate a confronting I-message. Previously she had solved the situation in an aggressive way and send the confronted person away. After she stated the confronting I-message it seemed to get easier for her to act out the situation. Compared to role plays before it seemed to be a lot easier for C to actively listen and summarize what B was saying. I did not interrupt the play even though C attacked B with a You-message. It was a good decision as C noticed her mistake and reacted. Very positive was when she stuck to I-messages and B reacted with less resistance. This was a good experience for C to point out the difference in using You- or I-messages. C did a good job following the process to find a win-win solution. She stated afterwards that it was a positive experience having the feeling of the other person reacting with less resistance. As well as solving a situation, which happened to her in a different way even though it is in a role play.

In addition, it seemed very helpful for all participant to debrief and evaluate the situation afterwards instead of me interfering immediately in the role play. Especially B and D were very keen on explaining and giving feedback on what happened in role plays. Very interesting was B's statement that acting out the confronted person, who did not have to actively listen made her follow C's statements less. For me it was a sign that B engaged herself into the topic of effective communication and transferred already learned facts to new situations. As well as it showed me she understood the importance of active listening. Furthermore, B gave feedback to C of not giving too many information in a statement as this will lead the other person to stop listening to her. Judging C's verbal and non-verbal reaction to that it were valuable information for her. For me it was positive to see participants giving feedback to each other and the other one accepted it, which shows that at least B and C felt safe in that moment.

D and A acted out the next scenario, D being the confronting person and A being the confronted person. It was noticeable that A had difficulties to act out a person being confronted. D formulated a confronting I-message and responded very well to the resistance of A. It was good to see how this helped A reacting on D's statements. A stated afterwards that she had a difficult time to act out the role play as she could not put herself in the role of

the confronted person as she would never do something like that. Even though it seemed very difficult for her to act she was very active in discussing the role play and debrief the situation.

B mentioned that most of the times, when having a conflict we do not spend much time evaluating and analysing the whole situation. As well as she might have reacted totally different in a real situation. It was a good statement to lead us in a discussion about usefulness and application of learned skills in the course. In my eyes that was very good as all of my participants noticed that it was very difficult to use their newly learned skills. Furthermore, it seemed to calm down my participants when I shared my experiences of how I started to apply these skills. That it will take time to use them automatically and natural, which can only be achieved by practicing. Furthermore, it was interesting to discuss about it being difficult and hard to express our needs but still we have the right to do so. In addition, it was pointed out by A that we do not only have the right, we also should try it so we are more in line with ourselves and become self-assertive. This coming from A was interesting to hear as she had difficulties to express her needs and speak out her opinion.

8<sup>th</sup> session

After the break we continued with role plays and acting out different conflict situations so my participants could practice their skills in shifting gears as well as active listening and sending I-messages. A and C acted out the next role play with A being the confronting person and C being confronted. Stating a confronting I-message seemed to be fairly easy for A and C seemed to have no problem to disagree. However, summarizing and responding to C's resistance seemed to be very difficult. A was asking me for help and I was giving her an example how to answer. It seemed to be the right thing to do as she continued with the role play and was able to follow the steps of finding a win-win solution. Still it was noticeable that A had a difficult time to not give in to the first solution C gave to her. A stated that she was so focused on forming correct I-messages and following the process correctly. This threw her off in acting the role play out more naturally.

After debriefing and evaluating the role play more in depth, B and D acted out the last role play. This time D being the confronted person and B being the one confronting. Both seemed to be quite confident in acting out the situation and could follow the process to reach a win-win solution. As they seemed very confident I did stop the play on spots where B forgot to re-phrase D's sentence or send a You - instead of I-message.

I continued to talk about effective communication and roles we take over while communicating. I used a picture of a man holding an arrow in a bow pointed a woman who is

holding the bow. The woman and man have a discussion about taking down the arrow, whereby the man feels attacked by the woman even though he has the power. While discussing the man turned himself in the victim position and made the woman feel bad about asking this favour. It is very provocative as everybody agreed with the woman. I wanted to show my participants that just because someone if making me feel bad about my request, opinion or expression of emotions does not mean this person is right and I am wrong. What the woman in the picture did not do was responding to the resistance of the man after asking him to take down the arrow. I used the picture to discuss with my participants that using the skills we learned in this course can help them to handle communication better. Trying to shift gears and use I-messages, even though I will face resistance will help me to become more self-assertive. I let them discuss about the picture and it was positive to see that they pointed out things which the woman in the picture did wrong to communicate effectively. This showed me that all participants had learned and understood at least in theory information I gave to them during the course.

Even though it was the last session all participants seemed to be very attentive and listened carefully to me. We discussed about creating a good learning environment for our riding students and how learned skills during the course can help us do so. In my eyes those discussions during the course, did not matter if they were planned or not were always a good chance for me to see if my participants understood what I presented to them. As well as a good chance to learn from each other's experiences or give each other feedback.

I ended the course with another round of emotional cards and asked every participant to take two cards. While picking the cards participants were chatting with each other and exchanging about what they are going to do in the afternoon. The atmosphere was very relaxed and informal. A started voluntarily and I saw it as a good sign as she was normally rather reserved in the beginning of the course. Other participants followed and it seemed it was already a lot easier for all participants to share their emotional state.

I ended the course by informing my participants again of how I will process the data, collect more feedback from them and about the knowledge test. After thanking my participants for being part of the course and their active participation I handed out the feedback forms as well as the knowledge test.

9.2 Knowledge test

The knowledge test showed differences in the answers for all participants. Most of the answers were correct especially regarding topics discussed very deeply as well as during the

second day. It was shown that there were differences between the participants in which questions were answered correctly and which were not fully correct. In addition, it cannot be said that answers were incorrect as all given answers were correct to some extent. Differences shown between participants were already shown in the course. Answers, which seemed most difficult for a participant were related to a skill participants were struggling with during the course already. Consequently, the results of the knowledge test support the observations made during the course.

However, all participants answered the question regarding differences between assertive, non-assertive and aggressive behaviour correctly. Each participant was able to clarify very clearly what is the difference as well as describe main characteristics of the behaviour. Furthermore, each participant could explain and give an example of a stating I-message. One participant was struggling with replying I-message. Her example was "Yes, I can turn the horses out, I am anyhow still at the stables." During the course we talked about using "I will" instead of "I can" to not give any room for assumptions to the questioner, as you can always debate about what you can do and what not. Furthermore, the little word "anyhow" could lead to the assumption that she can always do it if she is at the stables.

Writing confronting I-messages the same participant described her feelings as 'being annoyed' by the other person's behaviour. She had been using annoyed instead of disturbed which, considering the German language would have been more precise in this situation. 'Annoyed' would be seen as a more attacking word in German than disturbed. She also used annoyed most of the time in her examples during the course and it seemed like it is more natural to her.

Another participant wrote a confronting I-message instead of a preventing one. During the course it was noticeable that she had advanced her view more aggressively instead of self-assertive.

The other two participants were able to answer all questions in their own words and correctly. It was interesting to see that those two compared to the other two participants used their own words to describe the skills. As well as the sentences they gave as an example were new ones made up by them. The other two participants had used mainly descriptions I used during the course as well as examples.

Three participants had no problem at all to describe active listening and shifting gears. The one participant, struggling to describe these two skills have had problems during the course as well with both skills. However, her answer was not incorrect she solely missed some characteristics.

9.3 Feedback after the course

Directly after the course I handed out a feedback form to the participants to be filled in while their memory is still fresh. The first part was to rate contents, material and implementation of the course. First participants had to rate if their expectations they had towards the course were met and three mostly agreed. One participant was in the middle, which means her expectations were not fully met, but also not negatively surprised. I perceived that their needs were met. The second questions was about the usefulness of the learned skills for their work as riding instructors. Two participants agreed mostly that these skills are useful while instructing or dealing with clients. It was interesting to see that one participant mainly disagreed to this statement. The third statement was asking about the usefulness of the skills learned outside their working place. Again, two participants stated that they agree mostly, but this time one participant completely agreed. The fourth statement was about the structure of the course being coherent and clear and all participants agreed to that. Three agreed completely and one mostly. The rating for the fifth's statement regarding the learning pace of the course was equally distributed, two participants being neutral and two mostly agreed. Regarding the appearance of the supervisor being professional opinions varied a lot. Two participants mostly agreed to the supervision was professional, one is being neutral and one participant mainly disagreed. However, all participants graded the course overall with a four, which stands for very good. As well as all participants mostly agreed that the material used during the course supported their learning process and they acknowledged that different material was used during the course. It was positive to see that all participants stated their input and energy level during the course as medium to high, whereby three participants rated it high and only one as medium.

Next participants answered four open questions. First they were asked about their main goal of participation in the course. One participant answered she was looking for new food for thoughts to improve her communication especially with her customers. Two participants stated that they wanted to deepen their knowledge in communication skills. The fourth participant joined the course to be able to solve conflict situations more effective. Next participants were asked to name exceptionally good facts about the course. All participants agreed that the atmosphere was very good, comfortable and safe. Furthermore, two participants stated to this question that activities and exercises were very positive as well as enough time to ask questions and practice new skills. One participant stated that it was very positive for her that I participated in the activities and role plays. Additionally she mentioned

the variety of examples and real life scenarios as excellent. Another participant liked a lot that everybody worked with everybody together in different exercises.

Regarding the third question how the course could be improved, opinions of participants varied a lot. It was suggested to have two different courses, a first one about theory and a second one about practicing the skills. According to the participant it would be easier to do role plays when you already know the theory. She stated that if there would be a course only filled with theory about effective communication, every participant would have a common basis when doing the practice course.

Another participant stated that there were too many role plays and she would have liked a closer link to their practical work. Maybe combine the course with actual instructing of a riding student or at least observation of a riding lesson. A third participant suggested less explaining and more practicing as she learns best by doing something. The fourth participant proposed I should have given more time for feedback after group work as well as printed all slides of the power point presentation for participants to make it easier to read.

The last question was to give participants the chance to give additional feedback, which was not given through any of the answers before. One participant stated that she liked the mix of theory and practice, but it led to a lot of input, which had to be processed quickly to carry out activities. None of the other participants had anything additional to add. The reason for this could be that it were two long days with, as mentioned from the participant before, a lot of input.

9.4 Two weeks later feedback

All participants received feedback forms with three sections to fill in two weeks after the course was carried out. Under the first section participants stated if they were able to use skills learned or improved in the course during their work as a riding instructor. Second participants were asked to name difficulties or problems which occurred while using learned communication skills. Thirdly participants could mention facts that could not be answered before and they wished to say. The first participant stated that she was able to use I-messages as well as active listening especially when she had to talk to clients. Sometimes she needed to remind herself to use these skills, but in general she did. However, it was still difficult for her to express and stick to her opinion or needs. Instead she would give more and more reasons and tried to justify her statements. Furthermore, she mentioned that she could only use active listening at some points during her riding lessons and none of the other skills. Still she is practicing and trying to use I-messages. For her it was interesting while reflecting back on

certain situations that she noticed she is already using more communication skills than she thought she did. Two of the other participants stated the same. The course had raised their awareness to reflect on their communication. Especially in difficult situations. Two participants stated that it is very difficult to use learned skills while instructing as they main give orders to their students. One of those participants mentioned that especially with children she did not use any of the learned skills as they just follow her commands like 'circle your arms' etc. The other participant agreed on that saying that there was no situation when she could have used skills she learned during the course. However, she does think about facts learned during the course and feels more confident in difficult communication situations outside her riding lessons. Another participant mentioned that it is very difficult to focus on her own communication and correcting herself while she is teaching a riding student. Working on herself at the same time she is instructing makes her lose the thread. She proposed that she would need someone standing next to her and pointing out her communication mistakes while instructing. Just as I did it during the course and the role plays. She stated that it is a long process to change your communication and suggested to include instructing a riding student in the practical part of the course.

The fourth participant stated that she started again to reflect more on her communication and especially when a conversation seemed to be stuck she remembered skills learned during the course. As long as there is no conflict she is not paying a lot of attention to her communication style.


## 9.5 One month later feedback

After one month all participants sent another feedback form answering the same questions as after two weeks. One participant stated that she could use some of the learned skills such as active listening and I-messages especially with adults and advanced riders to clarify disagreements. However, it was still difficult for her to consciously use the learned skills while instructing children. Most of the time they just follow what she says and do not disagree. Another participant agreed on that and stated that she in addition would not start discussing about her training methods with children. In her opinion the learned skills are mainly useful in a coequal relationship and not in a hierarchic relationship, as she is above her young riding students. From her point of view the only skill learned she could use was the win-win solution. As there have not been any conflict yet she could not try her skill.

The third participant stated that the skills especially confronting and preventing I-messages as well as active listening helped her a lot recently. She had to talk about changes in

her contract with her clients and felt more secure as she had discussed these situations in the course and with me, the researcher. She knew that she has the right to express her needs and emotions as well as confronting her clients with changes. There were still moments, especially during conversations where she went back to her old communication methods but afterwards she would realize it and reflect on it. Due to this she could handle the next situation already better and was positively surprised how 'easy' it was to talk with all clients about the changes.

The fourth participant mentioned that especially after now being reminded of sending feedback again and due to this thought about the course again it reminded her of being more conscious again about her communication. She had the feeling her communication skills are already good as she has a good relationship to most of her customers. However, in situations where she said something she did mean to say like 'yes' instead of 'no' she remembered her rights. Regardless of that she still is facing some situations where it is difficult for her to express her opinion or needs. Especially if she fears that the person may get back at her, resign or has any other power. Most of the time these people are not easy to communicate with and she tried to use her active listening skills. Sometimes it worked and in other situations it did not. In her opinion she already came a long way improving her communication skills, but it is a lifelong learning process.

9.6 Three month later feedback

After three months I had contacted all participants again to send me their feedback, which all of them did. In my opinion it was positive to reach out individually to each participant and reminded her of sending me the feedback. Two participants had to be reminded twice by me, but in the end I got all feedback.

It had not changed a lot from the feedback before, but all participants stated that they reflected less and less on their daily communication. Newly reminded by me through the feedback form they did reflect on some situations and could notice slight changes in some relationships. Especially an improvement in relationships stated as more difficult before. Trying to speak out their opinion and not be scared of approaching more difficult topics with these people made them feel more satisfied. Three participants mentioned situations when important issues needed to be discussed or approached and they thought about what they had learned in the course. Even though they were aware of the skills it was still difficult to use them instead of going back to their normal communication style. Two participants stated, that it would be good to get more training especially practical support while instructing. One

participant stated that if she had now riding students who always have an excuse why they cannot do something, she was tired to dispute with them about it.

All participants could see some improvements, but stated that more training, practice and support would be needed to make their communication more effective.

10 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to plan, implement and evaluate a social and communication skills course for riding instructors in Germany. From the beginning on me, the researcher, observed every incident during the planning phase and made notes. I continued writing a researcher log during the course, noting all important observations to support my evaluation. In addition, participants were asked to fill in a knowledge test and a feedback form right after the last session. As well as three more feedback forms were later on send to me, stating usefulness and applicableness of the skills learned during the course for each participant individually. The whole time the project process was observed and evaluated by the researcher as well as adapted as new knowledge or insight was gained. It being a case study research, this is one of the most important steps according to Simons (2009).

The course was created based on skills important to improve the five core competences of SEL, which are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making (CASEL, 2015). Each participant started at a different level, as some had participated in courses approaching similar skills. According to the knowledge test after the course all participants were able to explain the theory of self-assertive behaviour, Active Listening, Shifting Gears, as well as form simple I-Messages. This is one of the main findings of the course, which proved that theoretical knowledge could be increased among all participants.

For me as a researcher I noticed right in the beginning that this group differed a lot from the people I took similar effectiveness trainings with. It was noticeable when I started with icebreakers, even though they were low-risk activities, which allowed the participants to decide how personal answers they wanted to give, it seemed very difficult for the four women to participate. Comparing this to my fellow students I think we got used to icebreakers and get-to-know-each-other games. As the course went on it was noticeable it became easier for most participants to participate in these icebreaker activities. Icebreaker activities for example asked to express one's wishes, feelings or values. Comparing participants to myself I think I learned through participating in different courses how to quickly reflect on my internal state as well as express a statement about myself. Even though these icebreakers do not force participants to be very personal it might be difficult enough to share anything about oneself if the person is not used to it. However, I still think that it was a good decision to use these icebreakers as all participants seemed to find it easier the more often they participated in one. These activities that should help to create a positive learning environment could in addition

also help participants to practice sharing their internal state in a safe environment and through this have positive experiences. Having these positive experiences might facilitate the adaptation to newly learned behaviour and skills.

Setting up rules for the course and how to behave surprised all participants and it seemed really difficult for them to express rules they would like to have to feel safe. Reactions like: 'We are adults we know how to behave', seem to be quite common, discussing this with my supervisor, Taru Lintunen. There is still limited research in this field of how to set up a safe environment and guarantee psychological safety which is important to be able to learn and memorize knowledge (Lintunen et al., 2005). However, comparing this to the incident when I reminded all participants of their rights and their surprised reactions it could be argued that it sometimes is important to be reminded of most basic things as we tend to forget about them. People get stuck in their way of being or thinking as it is most comfortable to just be like that without the effort to change. However, this change in my eyes is often much needed to improve our well-being and interaction with others, which will in return also lead to our improved welfare. Once we got used to do certain things in a certain way this process will start automatically when triggers occur that make us react in a defined way. As mentioned by Gordon (2003), Adams and Lenz (1978) as well as Kober (2014) relationships need work to be effective as well as our competences. Taking the easy way out and stop trying and improving will not bring us further and we are stuck in our behaviour, which may be a disadvantage for effective communication.

During the course one participant shared an experience, where she had to argue with a riding student about using a certain training method or not. She as an instructor thought that the method is not appropriate and even harming for the horse. Due to communication and explanation why she does not want to use this method or even want the method to be used at her stable, while wearing clothes with her brand etc. they came to a conclusion to use a different method. The riding student now understands why the method would not have been a good choice and is training the horse differently together with the participant as an instructor. Taking care of a horse requires a lot of responsibility and young riders have to learn how to do this correctly. In this case, the instructor was a good role model and did not just deny the request of using the method. She took the time to explain and give other options so the young rider could learn and develop. This is in line with Lintunen and Gould (2014) stating that coaches can be role models. Especially when competent in the five core competences where effective communication is one key element of. In my opinion it was very positive to see the exchange of experiences, positive or negative, and how other participants reacted on it.

Having such a positive example of effective communication may motivate the other participants to work on their communication skills. It showed them another way of how to deal with requests of their riding students if though they deny the request. While participants discussed different experiences it was noticeable that it helped them to get support from each other, as they all have to deal with similar issues, to some extent. However, due to different experiences, age, working environment and discipline they came up with solutions the participant sharing an example had not thought about.

It was also interesting to see how all participants had their individual difficulties with certain topics. What seemed easy for one participant was very difficult for another. In these situations it was great to see how they helped and supported each other. Having a mixed group in age, discipline and working environment led to the fact that they could complement each other very well. The fact that they are all "sitting in the same boat" and have to deal with riding students, parents, clients, suppliers, bosses etc. created already a positive and supportive atmosphere. In the beginning of the course I tried to focus on creating a safe and positive learning environment, as in my eyes it is very important to feel safe when sharing experiences. I used, as mentioned before, low-risk icebreakers, set up rules and informed all participants about confidentiality of the course. However, there is still little research on the topic of how to create a safe learning environment and psychological safety (Lintunen et al., 2005). Casel (2001) describe psychological safety in educational setting 'as the ability to be able to direct one's attention and focus, to know oneself, to feel effective in the world, to be able to exercise self-control and self-discipline, to have a sense of internal authority that is fair and non-abusive, and to be able to express one's sense of humour and creativity'. This safety is important for human beings to learn and improve (Lintunen et al., 2005). It was noticeable during the course that all participants, even though they seemed to be independent, strong woman, were struggling to express their emotional needs and insist that their well-being is not disturbed by others. As described in the results participants stated that it is easier to send preventive I-Messages instead of Confronting I-Messages. Furthermore, two participants were discussing that it is easier to deny a request or send a confronting I-Message, when the result is a measurable and visual disadvantage for them such as more work, expenditure of money or time consuming. According to Kober (2014) and Gordon's theory everybody has the right to be satisfied, happy and express if one's well-being is influenced negatively. Combined with the five core competences of SEL (Casel, 2015) a person should be able to express their needs, emotions and wishes. Why it was very difficult for my participants to do so could have different reasons. One would be, they were not aware of their own emotions and needs, which

leads to the fact that they could not express these. Second reason could be that they were not aware of having the right to have these emotions and express if their well-being is negatively influenced. Kober (2014) is describing that especially women tend to feel ashamed of their emotions and that it is not enough to request something because it would make them emotionally feel better. Still in our society they way men and women are raised and educated vary, which could be a reason why all four female participants had difficulties insisting to express and satisfy their needs. As stated earlier in the results as an observation made by me the researcher, it seemed very important to remind participants about their rights. Not that they seemed new to them but it almost seemed they had forgotten that they have these rights.

While noticing during the course where weaknesses and strengths of my participants are, it was very important to focus on what needs to be explained more in-depth to meet the participant's needs. Sometimes it was very difficult to find the right balance between being specific enough giving guidelines but also leaving it a little open to challenge my participants and their creativity. I think that it is important to explain theory to participants but in the case of effective communication including I-messages, shifting gears and active listening it needs to be combined. As I myself learn best by doing, I noticed that I sometimes needed to give more support to some participants. It seemed that some of the participants needed exact guidelines how to carry out an activity to feel safe. Sometimes it felt like participants were scared of making mistakes and before saying something wrong they rather asked for support. In my eyes it is positive that participants were asking for support, but negative that they did not feel safe enough to just try themselves out. This could be related to them being used to a very authoritarian way of teaching from the Equestrian background or even school. One important observation was that one participant sometimes tried to take over the lead by stating very strong opinions and also pushing other participants to carry out a task. Combining this with the feedback that one participant stated that she did not see me, the supervisor as professional could be the reason for it. During the whole course my teaching style was democratic and not authoritarian, as this was in line with what I was teaching and my belief of how someone should instructing. In addition, I think a democratic teaching style also supports a safe and positive learning environment, which is in line with Simons (2009) and Lintunen and Gould (2014). Not being used to a democratic teaching style could be the reason why the participant received my role less professional and felt like she needed to take over the lead. However, I intervened in these situations as I could tell that other participants felt uncomfortable by her pushing them to do a certain exercise, but they did not feel prepared enough to carry it out. I felt the need of using the power I had as a leader of the course as the

participants, who first seemed to be keen on practicing and improving their skills, then felt intimidated and became quieter. This is in line with Gordon and Burch (2003) stating that there are situations where teachers have to decide to use their power if they can justify it.

Summarizing all findings of the feedback form participants filled in directly after the course it is shown that the overall feedback was very positive. The fact that one participant stated that the skills learned during the course are not useful for her work as a riding instructor were also displayed in the long-term feedback that the learned skills could not be applied during the riding lessons. However, I do not think that the learned skills are not useful during their work the result of participants not using their newly learned skills was one of Heaven et al. (2006) concern. They were questioning how useful effectiveness training are without the supervision of participants at their workplaces to transfer these skills. Participants of the present research study had mentioned in their feedback that it would be necessary and helpful to have supervised sessions while they are instructing as it is very difficult to carry out their work and correct themselves. This statement is in line with Kober (2014) describing different development levels of people starting to improve their communication style. As Kober (2014) explained it is important to continue practicing, but many people drop out at that stage, because using the newly learned skills feels artificial and it may not be always successful. According to the feedback it seemed that after the course most participants were stuck in the level of having theoretical knowledge but cannot use it naturally in real life situations.

One suggestion of a participant was to separate the course in two different courses, first the theoretical one and then, after participating in this one a practical one. In my opinion, this would make sense to some extent. I think using a similar course as the one I used for this research study as the theoretical course and then add practical supervised session individually to all participants. This would mean a lot of time effort and costs for the supervisor and it needs to be tested if people are willing to pay for such a supervision. It could be also done as a second course, having participants instructing, while others observe. During the present course it was very positive to see the support of the riding instructors to each other. Due to the fact that they are all working in the same field, it seemed that they felt related to each other and would listen to experiences shared and feedback given.

10.1 Limitations of the study

Limitations of the study were very clearly the short period of the course, which was only one weekend and a total of 16 hours. Even though it seemed to be enough time to provide participants with a sufficient understanding of the theoretical knowledge of the field, practical

practicing time was missing. As well as supervised instructing to help participants transferring their new knowledge and skills to their profession as riding instructors. The problem was that during the summer, when the course was implemented the competition season had started and there was not a lot of options when to carry out the course or increase the duration of the course.

The small number of participants can be seen as a limitation of the study. However, to be able to support each participant individually it is necessary to keep the number of course participants small. Due to this, it was possible to listen to personal experiences and give each person enough time to explain their opinion, values and experiences.

10.2 Future recommendations

One future recommendation is to include practical units after the theoretical course. This could be individual supervised instructing sessions to support participants to transfer their skills to their profession. Or a practical course could be offered as part two and taking part in the theoretical course would be compulsory to join the practical course.

Furthermore, it was noticeable that the supervisor has to keep in mind previous knowledge of participants as well as their level of communication. Even though it could be seen that all participants increased especially their theoretical knowledge, individual support is needed. It is also important to leave it to participants how personal their experiences are that they share as this is very closely linked to the learning environment. As mentioned earlier, icebreaker should help to 'break the ice' and make participants feel more safe and comfortable. However, it could be seen in this study that all participants had some trouble to participate in these activities. Therefore, it is important to use low-risk and very easy icebreaker. I would even recommend to use icebreakers where participants do not have to act independently or intrinsically motivated in the beginning. Having a group of people, who are not used to doing such activities may need more support and time. Even though it was mentioned earlier that participants reacted a little reserved when I suggested to set up rules, I think it is a very important step to do. There were no discussions about anything clarified by the rules and it seemed that especially rules such as we listen to each other, we do keep everything said inside the group or we are on time help to create a safe environment. On this subject more research is still needed as it seems to vary a lot on participants when a safe environment is reached and how.

10.3 Conclusion

One conclusion, which can be drawn from planning, implementing and evaluating a communications skills course for riding instructors, was that such a course is helpful and useful for everybody. Regardless of previous knowledge, age, riding discipline or learning pace. All participants learned and increased their knowledge individually. As mentioned before, all participants reached the level of theoretical understanding. Agreeing with previous literature it would be necessary to combine and supervise participants at their workplace. Due to this they would be able to use their newly learned or improved skills and could benefit from it even more.

Even though the course can be beneficial for everybody, it was shown that participants need different support. Some participants need more guidelines, examples and strict explanations. As a supervisor I need to be aware and adapt to the specific requirements of each participant and individually support them. Therefore, it was good to only work with four participants, as I had the chance to respond to need of support of each participant.

11 REFERENCES

Adams, L. (2011) Learning a New Skill is Easier Said Than Done. Retrieved from: http://www.gordontraining.com/free-workplace-articles/learning-a-new-skill-is-easier-said-than-done/

Adams, L. and Lenz, E. (1979) *Effectiveness Training for Women – E.T.W.* New York, NY: The Putnam Publishing Group.

Akers, A., Barton, J., Cossey, R., Gainsford, P. Griffin, M. and Micklewright, D. (2012) *Visual Color Perception in Green Exercise: Positive Effects on Mood.* Environ. Sci. Technol., 46, pp. 8662-8666.

Argyle, M. and Martin, M., (1987) *The psychological causes of happiness*, London: Methuen.

Barton, J. and Pretty, J. (2010) *What is the best dose of Nature and Green Exercise for Improving Mental Health? A multi-study analysis.* Environ. Sci. Technol., 44, pp. 3947- 3955.

Bass, M., M., Duchowny, C., A. and Lllabre, M., M. (2009) *The Effect of Therapeutic Horseback Riding on Social Functioning in Children with Autism.* J. Autism Dev. Disord. 39, pp. 1261-1267.

Breuer, K. (2012) *Das Gordon-Modell für persönliche Qualität und Effektivität in zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen.* Gordon Training International Inc.

Burgon, H. (2003) Case studies of adults receiving horse- riding therapy. *Anthrozoös: A Multidisciplinary Journal of The Interactions of People and Animals*, Volume 16, pp. 263-276.

Cambridge Dictionaries Online (07th March 2016) Definition of horse riding. Retrieved from http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/horse-riding

Casel (2001). Every Child Learning: safe and Supportive Schools. Learningfirst. http://www.casel.org/

CASEL (15th May 2015) What is Social and Emotional Learning? Retrieved from http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/

Denham, S. A. (2015) Assessment of SEL in Educational contexts. . *Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning – Research and Practice*, 285 - 300.

Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D. and Schellinger, K. B. (2011) The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school based universal interventions. *Child development*, 82, 405 – 432.

Edwards, C. and Willis, J. W. (2014) *Action Research – Models, Methods and Examples.* Applied Research in Eductaion and the Social Sciences, p. 11.

Elias, M. J., Zins, J.E., Weissberg, T.P., Frey, K. S., Greenberg, M.T., Haynes, N. M., Kessler, R., Schwab-Stone, M. E., & Shriver, T. P. (1997) *Promoting social and emotional learning: Guidelines for educators.* Alexandria, VA: Associationfor Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Elias, M., J. and Weissberg, R., P. (2000) Primary Prevention: Educational Approaches to Enhance Social and Emotional Learning. *Journal of School Health*, 70 (5), pp. 186-190.

Falcão, W. R., Bloom, G. A., Gilbert, W. D. (2012) *Coaches'perceptions of a coach training program designed to promote youth developmental outcomes.* Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 24 (4), 429-444

Fraser-Thomas, J. L., Côté, J., Deakin, J. (2005) *Youth sport programs: an avenue to foster positive youth development.* Physical Education and Sport Psychology, Vol. 10 (1), pp. 19-40.

Gordon, T. and Burch, N. (2003) *Teacher Effectiveness Training – T.E.T.* New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.

Gordon Training International (2011) *Origins of the Gordon Model – The Behaviour Window.* Retrieved from http://www.gordontraining.com/thomas-gordon/origins-of-the-gordon-model/

Goudas, M. and Magotsiou, E. (2009) *The effects of a cooperative physical education program on students' social skills.* Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 21, 356-364.

Gould, D. and Voelker, D. K. (2012) *Enhancing youth leadership through sport and physical education.* Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 83 (8), 38-41.

Greenwood, D. J. and Morten, L. (2007) *Introduction to Action Research – Social Research for Social Change* (2nd ed.). California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1989) *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Heaven, C., Clegg, J. and Maguire, P. (2006) Transfer of communication skills training from workshop to workplace: The impact of clinical supervision. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 60, 313-325.

Hills, P. and Argyle. M., *The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire: a compact scale for the measurement of psychological well-being.* Personality and Individual Differences, 33 (2002), pp. 1073-1082.

Holt, N. L., Sehn, Z. S., Spence, J.C., Newton, A. S., Ball, G. D. C. (2012) *Physical education and sport programs at an inner city school: exploring possibilities for positive youth development.* Physical Education and Sport Psychology, Vol. 17 (1), pp. 97-113.

Horn, T. S. (1985). Coaches' feedback and changes in children's perceptions of their physical competence. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 77(2), 174.

House, E.R. (1980) *Evaluating with Validity*. London: Sage.

Huang H. and Humphreys, B. R. (2012) *Sports participation and happiness: Evidence from US microdata.* Journal of Economic Psychology, 33, pp. 776-793.

IPSOS (2001) Marktanalyse Pferdesportler in Deutschland [Online] Available from: http://www.wpsv.de/ipsos.htm [Accessed11th November 2013]

Jowett, S., (2007) *Group dynamics advances in sport and exercise. In Group Dynamics in Exercise and Sport Psychology:* Contemporary Themes, by Mark R. Beauchamp (Editor), 2008.

Kirkpatrick, D. L., & Kirkpatrick, J. D. (2006). *Evaluating training programs: The four levels* (Third ed.). San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Kober, H. (2014) *Gute Beziehungen. Wie sie entstehen und stärker werden* (3er ed.). Regensburg: J.G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger GmbH.

Lintunen, T. (2006). Social and emotional learning in the school physical education context. In F. Boen, B. De Cuyper & J. Opdenacker (Eds.), *Current research topics in exercise and sport psychology in Europe* (1.th ed., pp. 25–33). Leuven: Lannoo Campus.

Lintunen, T. (2009). Social and emotional learning in sport. Paper presented at the *12th ISSP World Congress of Sport Psychology*, Marrakesh, Marocco.

Lintunen, T. and Gould, D. (2014). Developing social and emotional skills. In A. G. Papaioannou and D. Hackfort (Eds.), *Companion to Sport and Exercise Psychology: Global perspective and fundamental concepts* (pp. 621-635). New York, NY : Routledge.

Lintunen, T., Rovio, E., Salmi, O., & Gould, D. (2005). Increasing Psychological Safety in a Group. In: Proceedings of the ISSP 11th World Congress of Sport psychology, 15-19, August, 2005, Sydney, Australia.

Mora, À., Cruz, J., Torregrosa, M. (2009) *Effects of a training program in communication styles of basketball coaches.* Revista de Psychología del Deporte, Vol. 18, pp. 299-302

Newin, J., Bloom, G. A., Loughead, T. M. (2008) *Youth ice hockey coaches' perception of a team-building intervention program.* Human Kinetics Publications, University of Windsor.

Noffke, S. E. and Somekh, B. (2009) *The SAGE Handbook of Educational Action Research.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Random House Dictionary, Random House, Inc., *Well- being* [Online] Available from: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/well-being [Accessed on 20/02/13]

Salovey, P. and Mayer, J.D. (1990) Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality,* 9, 185-211.

Sana Animal – Reittherapie (2016) *Reittherapie.* Retrieved from: www.sanaanimal.de/reittherapie/index.html

Shin, W.S. et al. (2010) *Forest experience and psychological health benefits: the state of the art and future prospect in Korea.* Environment, Health, Preventive Medicine, 15(1): 38-47.

Simons, H. (2009) *Case Study Research in Practice.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Sklad, M., Diekstra, R., De Ritter, M., Ben, J., and Gravesteijn, C. (2012). Effectiveness of school-based universal social, emotional, and behavioural programs: Do they enhance students' development in the area of skill, behaviour, and adjustment? *Psychology in the Schools*, 49 (9), 892 – 909.

Smoll, F. L., Smith, R. E., Barnett, N. *P.* and Everett, J. J. (1992) *Enhancement of children's self-esteem through social support training for youth sport coaches.* Journal of Applied Psychology, Vol. 78, No. 4, 602-610.

Talvio, M. (2014) *How do teachers benefit from training on social interaction skills? Developing and utilising an instrument for the evaluation of teachers' social and emotional learning.* Faculty of Behavioural Sciences Department of Teacher Education, University of Helsinki, Research Report 36.

The British Horse Society (BHS) (2011) *The health benefits of horse riding in the UK.* United Kingdom: University of Brighton and Plumpton College.

The Fortune Centre of Riding Therapy – FCRT (2016) *Referral Orgs*. Retrieved from: www.fortunecentre.org/home/

The Free Dictionary by Farlex *Definition: Symbiosis* [Online] Available from: http://www.thefreedictionary.com/symbiosis [Accessed 11th November 2015]

Ulrich, R. S., *View through a window may influence recovery from surgery*. Science 1984, 224, pp. 420-421.

Weissberg, R., P., Durlak, J., A., Domitrovich, C., E. and Gullotta, T. P. (2015) Social and Emotional Learning – Past, Present, and Future. *Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning – Research and Practice*, 3 -19.

Wilkinson, S., Bailey, K., Aldridge, J. and Roberts, A. (1999) A longitudinal evaluation of a communication skills programme. *Palliative Medicine*, 13, 341-348.

World Health Organization, 2012. Revised who discussion paper (Version dated 25th July 2012) [WWW] Available from: http://www.who.int/nmh/events/2012/discussion_paper3.pdf [Accessed on 20/02/13]

APPENDICES


APPENDIX 1 - Wissenstest *(Knowledge test)*


Was haben Sie in diesem Kurs über Kommunikationsfähigkeiten gelernt?
*(What did you learn about communication skills in this course?)*

Name:
*(Name)*

Datum:
*(Date)*


Was unterscheidet assertives Verhalten von nicht-assertiven bzw. aggressiven Verhalten?
*(What are differences between assertive, non-assertive and aggressive behaviour?)*


Was ist eine aussagende Ich-Botschaft? Geben Sie ein Beispiel.
*(What is a declarative I-Message? Please give an example.)*


Was ist eine antwortende Ich-Botschaft? Geben Sie ein Beispiel.
*(What is a responsive I-Message? Please give an example.)*

Was ist eine vorbeugende Ich-Botschaft? Geben Sie ein Beispiel.
*(What is a preventive I-Message? Please give an example.)*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Was ist eine konfrontierende Ich-Botschaft? Geben Sie ein Beispiel.
*(What is a confrontive I-Message? Please give an example.)*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Definieren Sie aktives Zuhören.
*(Define Active Listening.)*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Was ist beim Umschalten zwischen Ich-Botschaften und aktivem Zuhören zu beachten?
*(What is important to keep in mind when shifting from I-Messages to Active Listening?)*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Welche Schritte gibt es bei der Win-Win Methode?

*(Which steps need tob e taken fort the No-Lose Method?)*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____


APPENDIX 2 – Feedbackbogen - Kursende *(Feedback form – End of course)*

Name
*(Name)*: _____

Datum
*(Date)*: _____

Wähle die Zahl, die deine Meinung am besten beschreibt. *(Select the number, which describes your opinion best.)*

Der Kommunikations-Kurs hat meine Erwartungen erfüllt.
*(The social and communication skills course met my expectations)*
Stimme überhaupt nicht zu    1  2  3  4  5    Stimmer vollkommen zu
*(Totally disagree)*                            *(Totally agree)*

Die im Kurs erworbenen Fähigkeiten können bei der Arbeit angewendet werden.
*(Skills learned during the course can be applied in work related settings.)*
Stimme überhaupt nicht zu    1  2  3  4  5    Stimmer vollkommen zu
*(Totally disagree)*                            *(Totally agree)*

Die im Kurs erworbenen Fähigkeiten können außerhalb der Arbeit angewendet werden.
*(Skills learned during the course can be applied outside work.)*
Stimme überhaupt nicht zu    1  2  3  4  5    Stimmer vollkommen zu
*(Totally disagree)*                            *(Totally agree)*

Der Verlauf des Kurses war verständlich.
*(The structure of the course was clear and understandable.)*
Stimme überhaupt nicht zu    1  2  3  4  5    Stimmer vollkommen zu
*(Totally disagree)*                            *(Totally agree)*

Die Lern-Geschwindigkeit des Kurses war gut (nicht zu langsam, nicht zu schnell)
*(Learning pace of the course was sufficient, not too fast or too slow.)*

Stimme überhaupt nicht zu     1  2  3  4  5     Stimmer vollkommen zu
*(Totally disagree)*                              *(Totally agree)*

Die Leiterin war professionell.
*(Supervisor of the course was professional.)*
Stimme überhaupt nicht zu     1  2  3  4  5     Stimmer vollkommen zu
*(Totally disagree)*                              *(Totally agree)*

Verschiedene Methoden und Hilfsmittel wurden während des Kurses benutzt.
*(Different methods and resources were used during the course.)*
Stimme überhaupt nicht zu     1  2  3  4  5     Stimmer vollkommen zu
*(Totally disagree)*                              *(Totally agree)*

Das Kursmaterial hat meinen Lernprozess positiv unterstützt.
*(Material used in the course supported my process of learning positively.)*
Stimme überhaupt nicht zu     1  2  3  4  5     Stimmer vollkommen zu
*(Totally disagree)*                              *(Totally agree)*

Gesamtnote:
*(Overall grade)*
Schlecht    1  2  3  4  5    Ausgezeichnet
*(Bad)*                        *(Excellent)*

Mein Arbeitsaufwand und Energielevel während des Kurses.
*(My amount of effort and energy during the course was ... )*
Schwach    1  2  3  4  5    Ausgezeichnet
*(Weak)*                        *(Excellent)*

Was war Ihr Hauptziel während des Kommunikations-Kurs?
*(What was your main goal during the social and communication skills course?)*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Was war besonders gut an dem Kommunikations-Kurs?
*(What was extraordinary good about the social and communication skills course?)*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Wie könnte der Kommunikations-Kurs verbessert werde?
*(How could the social and communication skills course be improved?)*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Zum Schluss würde ich gerne noch folgendes sagen, …
*(Additionally I would like to mention following ...)*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX 3 - Feedback Bogen - Später *(Feedback Form - Later)*

Name
*(Name)*: _____

Zeitraum
*(Time
period)*: _____

Konnte ich das Gelernte während meiner Tätigkeit als Reitlehrer / Reitlehrerin anwenden:
*(Could I apply improved or newly learned skills during my work as a riding instructor?)*:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Welche Schwierigkeiten / Probleme hatte ich bei der Anwendung der gelernten Fähigkeiten:
*(Which difficulties arose while applying learned skills?)*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Zum Schluss würde ich gerne noch folgendes sagen, …
*(Additionallly I would like to mention following, ... )*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX 4 - Results of feedback form after the course

| Questions | Totally disagree | | | | Totally agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The social and communication skills course met my expectations. | | | 1 | 3 | |
| Skills learned during the course can be applied in work related settings. | | 1 | 1 | 2 | |
| Skills learned during the course can be applied outside work. | | | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| The structure of the course was clear and understandable. | | | | 1 | 3 |
| Learning pace of the course was sufficient, not too fast or too slow. | | | 2 | 2 | |
| Supervisor of the course was professional. | | 1 | 1 | 2 | |
| Different methods and resources were used during the course. | | | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Material used in the course supported my process of learning positively. | | | | 4 | |
| Overall grade | | | | 4 | |
| My amount of effort and energy during the course was … | | | 1 | 3 | |

Table 2: Data of the answers from the feedback form filled in by participants after the course.