Transcending the Illusion of Separateness: A Grounded Theory Study of Processes That Occur Between Client and Horse During Equine Facilitated Learning

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Abstract

Equine Facilitated Learning (EFL) has been reported as a promising growth and well-being practice, with the potential to benefit humans in a variety of ways. However, explanation of relevant theoretical foundations is currently lacking. Aiming to contribute to the theoretical base of this practice, this research employs grounded theory methods to explore processes that occur between client and horse during EFL. Client voices are centred via their role as participants of this study. Their perspectives form the dataset that highlights experiencing connection as the core category. The findings outline two processes: the relationship building process and the personalising process, which sit within the wider EFL context. Ultimately, the findings are abstracted to a tentative grounded theory that explains the processes occurring between client and horse as complex and dynamic systems of reciprocal influence. This is discussed in relation to current literature and practical implications, to highlight how this study extends available understandings of EFL. Limitations of the research are also noted, as well as future recommendations.

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Chapter One: Introduction

At a quiet farm in Aotearoa New Zealand, there is a team of beings offering learning experiences to a range of clients. A herd of horses make up most of the team, and clients attending the facility can participate in a practice called Equine Facilitated Learning (EFL). While volunteering at the farm, I had countless opportunities to witness clients having profound experiences. I was often struck by what appeared to be small moments, profoundly contributing to a client's whole experience. On one occasion I was working with a client and a horse, observing them as the client petted the horse. I was sitting on the ground about a meter from them, not wanting to interrupt their interaction. The horse, River, stood with his head hanging low, bottom lip relaxed, eyes and ears soft: he appeared to be enjoying the interaction. As I watched, the client began to breathe deeply and slowly. She mumbled "something's happening" and continued to pat River. She closed her eyes, her facial expression soft, and continued to breathe deeply. River's body language did not change much. A small flick of his ear in the direction of the client appeared to be the only indication that he was aware of her changing state. Slowly, the client began to cry and again noted "something's happening". Unsure if I should interrupt, I began to lift myself from the ground. River's head swayed slightly in my direction, seemingly blocking me from getting up. I stopped and asked the client if she was ok. She smiled and nodded, continuing to breathe deeply and pat River. The interaction continued for another minute or so before the client stepped back from River and looked around. "What just happened?" she asked. I was not sure, but I wanted to find out.

The above is just one example of many fascinating moments I have observed between EFL clients and EFL horses. Many of those moments appear profound, but not all as peaceful. Others have appeared less emotionally intense, but no less meaningful. My

anecdotal experiences have left me in no doubt that clients of EFL can experience great learning and growth through the moments they share with the horses. In discussing those moments, I am frequently met with clients who emphatically note how powerful their experiences have been. However, those assertions are often followed up by expressions of uncertainty as to what exactly occurred or how to explain it. Those moments, along with my own experiences with horses, drew me towards EFL as the focus of my doctoral research.

Equine Facilitated Learning

EFL is one of several terms that describes a practice in which human facilitators bring together horses and humans to provide a learning experience for the human (Latella & Abrams, 2015). EFL in particular, consists of varied processes in which often (but not always) unmounted activities are completed by the human individual, always in the presence of a horse, and sometimes in direct relation to a horse/s. Throughout these processes the human facilitator typically attempts to limit their own involvement in the activities, giving limited direction, but always debriefing with the client afterwards. Activities may include a client completing and building an obstacle course, before moving through with the horse, or the client doing the same activity in the presence of the horse but with no expectation of the horse moving with them. Depending on the EFL model being used (Latella & Abrams, 2015), human facilitators are typically equine experts, mental health professionals, or both (Burgon et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2016). Throughout EFL sessions, the purpose differs depending on each individual, demographic factors such as their age and current presenting problem or goals, and the approach employed by the human facilitators. However, broadly, EFL practices seek to provide individuals with learning or therapeutic experiences that positively impact their overall well-being and learning. It aims to increase personal growth in ways that will be benefit clients throughout their day-to-day life (Burgon et al., 2018).

Equine Assisted Counselling, Equine Assisted Learning, Equine Assisted

Psychotherapy, Equine Assisted Mental Health, Equine Assisted Services, Equine Facilitated Learning, and Equine Assisted/ Facilitated Therapy are all labels used in practice and in research to describe some form of the practices mentioned above (Burgon et al., 2018; Ferlazzo et al., 2023; Kemp et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2016). In some cases, the title used to describe a practice aligns with the specific model that is relevant to the human facilitator's training.

However, the titles used to describe a practice are not necessarily unique to one specific model of training or approach to practice (Burgon et al., 2018; Hallberg, 2018; Lietz & Napan, 2020; O'Hanlon, 2021). Even within different facilities practicing under the same umbrella term, such as Equine Assisted Psychotherapy, there is no guarantee that the services and processes will be the same (Hallberg, 2018). Additionally, despite variation regarding approaches and activities, the general goals of such practices are often similar across different titles. This provides a challenge for anyone wanting to conceptualise their own practice. For example, some practitioners consider their work a form of 'therapy'. Others prefer to classify their work as a learning and growth practice that is not necessarily a form of therapy (but may have a therapeutic effect). This variation in and among the plethora of titles also poses a challenge for anyone wanting to research practices such as EFL (Hallberg, 2018). Ferlazzo et al. (2023) noted a need for the streamlining and clear differentiation of language and practice types. Ongoing streamlining and determination of language and practice differences would likely aid comparison of research projects as well as assist in validating the utility of these practices (Ferlazzo et al., 2023; Fine & Andersen, 2021; López-Cepero, 2020).

For this project, the term Equine Facilitated Learning (EFL), has been chosen. EFL has been chosen as this project's preferred label as it avoids use of the term 'therapy', which may hold connotations of service users as being ill in some way. 'Therapy' may also invite pre-conceived ideas around what the practice would involve or look like. The practice studied

within this project does not need to be considered a form of therapy. A client will not necessarily engage in EFL hoping to 'fix something' or address mental distress. Rather, they may engage to grow their understanding of themselves, as well as their ways of being in relation to the rest of the world. 'Learning' was deemed to better describe possible functions of the practice and offer wider interpretations of what the practice may entail. Additionally, by choosing 'facilitated' over 'assisted', my aim is that this label provides a better explanation of the horses' role within this work. The horses are crucial components of this work. They actively facilitate the practice, as opposed to assisting the practice. Finally, the term 'client' is used throughout this thesis to acknowledge the current, practical reality of the EFL field, whereby the practice is most frequently offered as a service by sole-traders and businesses. Throughout the rest of this thesis, the term 'EFL' will be used as an umbrella term to encapsulate practices that bring together horses and humans to provide a learning experience for the humans, with a focus on psychosocial growth, wellbeing, learning and benefits (as opposed to, for example, physical health benefits). However, when discussing specific research projects, I will use the title offered by the original authors to avoid mis-representing their research or specifics of the equine practices that were studied. A summary of the approach and perspectives from the EFL facility connected to this study is included in Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods of this thesis.

EFL differs from traditional horse riding and physical-goal oriented, therapeutic riding in many ways. Hippotherapy is a strategy used by professionals such as occupational and physical therapists, in which horses are used as a treatment tool, with their movement and rhythm considered to benefit the physical development of the human rider (All et al., 1999; American Hippotherapy Association, 2022). Through intentional manipulation of horses' movements, hippotherapy can also encourage increased engagement other domains, such as an individual's neuromotor or cognitive systems, facilitating benefits in those areas

(American Hippotherapy Association, 2022). Human facilitator involvement is substantial during hippotherapy, with the human clinicians intentionally using hippotherapy as a tool within a wider service or process (American Hippotherapy Association, 2022). This contrasts with many EFL practices.

With a larger focus on un-mounted activities, EFL practices generally place minimal emphasis on how the physical mechanisms of the horse affect the physical development of the human. Rather, the physicality of the horse is beneficial in other ways, such as through the way the horse reacts to the clients' actions, helping to raise the client's self-awareness (Burgon, 2011). Keeping the client firmly on the ground may also act as an equaliser within the horse and human relationship and help the horse to maintain a 'professional authority'. By not mounting the horse, the likelihood of a situation where the client takes a position of control is reduced.

EFL horses are typically not formally 'trained' in certain behaviours the way a 'riding-horse' may be. Similarly, there is no consensus on a specific personality or temperament that is considered ideal for an EFL horse. Rather, like humans, horses are generally considered individual, and able to bring their own unique qualities to each interaction and relationship. As in any practitioner-client relationship, different horses may be drawn to different clients, and vice versa. Human facilitators tend to use varying methods when pairing clients and horses: some make decisions based on factors such as session goals, client personality and horse personality, while others encourage a process whereby the client and horse make the choices themselves (Hallberg, 2018). Throughout sessions human facilitators may choose to act as 'space-holders', providing the physical and metaphysical space, in which the horse can interact with the human client. By limiting the interference of the human facilitator, the horse can interact with the client with more autonomy than would be afforded with increased human input (Lietz & Napan, 2020).

Throughout the world various certifications are offered for individuals wanting to train in the practice of horses in connection with humans. The certification programmes vary in how they title and conceptualise their practices (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association n.d.-b; Gestalt Equine Institute Of The Rockies n.d.-b; The Equine Psychotherapy Institute n.d.). Organisations offering certification programmes include: Eponaquest Worldwide, The Gestalt Equine Institute of the Rockies, Natural Lifemanship, The O.K. Corral Series, and PATH International (Eponaquest Worldwide n.d.-a; Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association n.d.-b; Gestalt Equine Institute Of The Rockies n.d.-b; Natural Lifemanship n.d.-a; OK Corral Series n.d.-c; Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International n.d.; The Equine Psychotherapy Institute n.d.).

Eponaquest Worldwide is a multi-disciplinary organisation that offers an apprenticeship for individuals to become Eponaquest certified EFL instructors (Eponaquest Worldwide n.d.-b). The programme's founder is Linda Kohanov, who has developed EFL and therapeutic techniques for working with both individuals and groups across a variety of domains and for both professional and personal development. No formal clinical qualifications are required for entry into the programme; however, horse experience is necessary.

The Gestalt Equine Institute of the Rockies offers certification in Gestalt Equine Psychotherapy (GEP) and Gestalt Equine Studies (GES). GEP and GES are relationship focused and works to enhance clients' relationships with themselves, the environment, and others by incorporating horses into the therapeutic experience (Gestalt Equine Institute Of The Rockies n.d.-b). The programme requires applicants to be practicing mental health clinicians, graduate students or 'professional coaches', and have some experience in basic horsemanship. Only registered therapists can receive the certificate of GEP due to 'psychotherapy' being a protected title (Gestalt Equine Institute Of The Rockies n.d.-a). GEP

and GES differ from models such as the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA) model in that an equine specialist is not required in the clinical team (Acri et al., 2016).

Natural Lifemanship offers a range of certification programmes for practitioners, equine professionals, and those who are both practitioners and equine professionals (Natural Lifemanship n.d.-c). Individuals must first complete training in the 'Fundamentals of Natural Lifemanship' which states its objective is enhancing understandings in areas such as attachment theory and the neurobiology of trauma (Natural Lifemanship n.d.-b). Overall, a relationship and trauma focused approach to working with clients in the practice of equine assisted therapy/learning is emphasised.

The O.K. Corral Series offers certification in either equine assisted psychotherapy or equine assisted learning. The focus is on majority unmounted exercises, and places importance on 'natural' behaviours of horses and herds. Principles of equine assisted psychotherapy, such as increasing awareness of nonverbal communications and balancing being attentive and being 'at-ease', underpin the O.K. Corral Series (OK Corral Series n.d.-a). Neither prior horse experience, nor formal mental health or education qualifications are indicated as pre-requisites for attendance at these seminars (OK Corral Series n.d.-b).

PATH International offers a programme certifying individuals as Equine Specialists in their Mental Health and Learning Application Process (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International 2023). Certification focuses on horsemanship, understanding how to collaborate with mental health professionals and educators, and general mental health knowledge and education processes. Equine Specialists are certified to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the horses involved in equine assisted mental health/learning practices.

Another common and popular model that practitioners train under is the Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association's model, better known as the EAGALA model (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association n.d.-b; Notgrass & Pettinelli, 2015). The EAGALA model was established in 1999 and uses the term Equine Assisted Psychotherapy to title their practice (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association n.d.-b). Basic precepts from the model are derived from principles of the Association of Experiential Education (Association for Experiential Education n.d.), with the defining and separating component being the inclusion of horses in the practice (Notgrass & Pettinelli, 2015). Within this model, clients participate in carefully chosen non-ridden activities involving one or more horses who are described as being allowed to provide natural responses to situations.

Metaphor is a key component in this model, with the interactions between the horse and client claimed to generate metaphors that relate to other areas of the client's life. The human facilitators utilise these metaphors, and the overall experiential process, helping the client to debrief, reflect, and learn from the experience.

To work under the EAGALA model, practitioners must work in teams of two, with a registered mental health expert and an equine specialist in each team (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association n.d.-a). Under the EAGALA model, a mental health expert is considered anyone licensed to practice psychotherapy in the United States, however the EAGALA model has trained practitioners from all over the world, including several who practice in Aotearoa New Zealand (Aroha Equine and Wellness n.d.; Bay of Plenty Therapy Foundation n.d.; Changing Horses n.d.; Dune Lakes Lodge n.d.). The range of service titles used by EAGALA certified facilitators in Aotearoa New Zealand examples the plethora of terminology associated with these practices. For example, some of the relevant terminology includes: 'Equine Assisted Human Development', 'Equine Assisted Learning', 'Equine Assisted Therapy', and 'Horse Inspired Learning' (Aroha Equine and Wellness n.d.; Bay of

Plenty Therapy Foundation n.d.; Changing Horses n.d.; Dune Lakes Lodge n.d.).

At the time of writing this thesis, to the best of my knowledge, there are no official regulations regarding EFL practices in Aotearoa New Zealand. This means that any person can refer to themselves an EFL facilitator or practitioner and practice this work however they see fit. Without regulatory bodies there is no way to guarantee that standards of practice and welfare are the same across different EFL facilities. Practically, this makes it difficult for providers to validate their own services and offer certainty to individuals wanting to engage as clients. For researchers, this increases the difficulty of defining the studied practice and selecting appropriate facilities to engage. Previous literature has emphasised the difficulty of defining the scope of practice and acknowledged risks associated with a lack of regulatory bodies. Involvement of health practitioners registered in relevant disciplines such as psychology or social work, and the inclusion of basic relevant safety education in EFL programmes have been suggested as strategies to minimise potential risk issues (Hallberg, 2018).

Despite the difficulties outlined above, research has shown that EFL and associated practices can be beneficial to a wide range of populations, particularly in adolescent and adult age groups (Burgon, 2011; Burton et al., 2019; Coffin, 2019; Lee & Makela, 2015; Wilson et al., 2017). However, EFL has struggled to gain credibility as a legitimate growth and learning practice and is often posited as ‘other’ or ‘alternative’ to mainstream models of learning and therapy (López-Cepero, 2020; White-Lewis, 2020).

Along with difficulties in defining practice scopes and boundaries, another barrier to strengthening the validity of EFL practices is a current lack of theoretical foundations. Where theory has been the focus of research and literature, the majority of projects have either sought to identify beneficial components or have applied pre-existing theories to EFL. For

example, embodiment and the EFL environment have previously been identified as valued components of EFL (Lawson, 2016; Rance, 2016). The applied pre-existing theories have been borrowed from other domains, such as attachment theories from human psychology (Bachi, 2013; Vincent & Farkas, 2017). However, there are limitations of both atomistic approaches and application of pre-existing theory. Atomistic research has been noted as lacking holistic explanations (Hallberg, 2018), and paying more attention to characteristics of horses than to mechanisms of change (López-Cepero, 2020). Applied pre-existing theories, such as Biophilia theory, have been noted as providing only partial explanations (Fine, 2015), and are generally posited as requiring further exploration as to their relevance (Bachi, 2013). Ultimately, EFL researchers have continuously recommended that future studies seek to build theory within the EFL domain (Hallberg, 2018; Vincent & Farkas, 2017). However, such research has been minimal (O'Hanlon, 2021), with EFL's theoretical gap needing further investigation.

This Research Project

This study sought to make a novel contribution to EFL's theoretical foundations, and in doing so contribute towards filling the theoretical gap identified by previous researchers. Specifically, this Aotearoa New Zealand based study explored adult EFL clients' perspectives of the processes occurring between client and horse during EFL, that make the practice impactful and effective. A qualitative approach was chosen due to the current lack of holistic, procedural frameworks developed from within the practice. In addressing this gap, it is important to explore the possible processes occurring, from the perspectives of some of the individuals who they serve. An informed grounded theory approach was used as it lends itself well to exploration of process in areas with little prior theory (Flick, 2018). By using an informed grounded theory approach a key objective of this study was to complete a holistic exploration, and ultimately construct a tentative grounded theory. Holistic findings have the

potential to offer novel insight and extend current understandings around mechanisms of change within EFL. Therefore, they have the potential to offer another piece to EFL's theoretical puzzle.

Researcher Reflexivity

Throughout this project it was important that I engaged in honest and ongoing reflection. Doing so helped me recognise how my personal history, subjective positions, and developing perspectives were all impacting the research process. Overall, through the complex and dynamic interplay of every element of this project, a constant balancing of tensions was required.

When I began the project, I was a volunteer facilitator at the studied facility. Therefore, I approached the project with pre-existing knowledge about the practice and an appreciation for the experiences that can occur during EFL. As a student completing post-graduate study in a clinical psychology programme, I had an understanding of the potential risks that a poorly considered or formulated practice could have. I also held an acute awareness of the rigidly negative attitudes that some health care and education practitioners hold towards services perceived as 'outside of the mainstream'. This motivated me to design and complete an EFL focused project within the clinical psychology programme. It also informed the way I approached research design, engagement with participants, analysis, and presentation. To me, it was important that every step balanced the rigorous scientific approach with the dynamic nature of the practice.

From the beginning of the project, it was also important to me to acknowledge the influence that my experience of life as a cis-gendered, Pākehā female had on the project. I have grown up in mainstream Western education and health systems. My engagement in these societal structures have contributed to the specific knowledge I have been exposed to,

and the learning and health paradigms I have experienced. How I engaged with pre-existing literature, unpacked experiences with research participants, analysed and made sense of data, and presented this thesis is all influenced by, and limited to, my subjective experiences.

A key influential component of this project was my own affinity for non-human animals. Inextricably linked to that were my developing ideas around human and non-human animal interactions. A couple of years before beginning this project I stopped riding horses. It was not because I did not believe humans should ever ride horses. Rather, I had realised that I did not have the opportunity to develop a safe enough relationship with the horses I was around. Therefore, I did not think it was fair to expect them to let me ride them. My ongoing reflections informed the large amount of time spent considering the ethics of this project and of EFL practices. I hope that this is evident in the positioning of horses throughout this thesis. I also hope that the ideas shared encourage others to reflect on their relationships with all non-human animals.

Towards the latter end of this project, I stopped regularly volunteering as an EFL facilitator. Unfortunately, I could not balance that role with the requirements of the clinical psychology training programme. Increasing time spent working in the clinical psychology field, largely with a youth forensic population, influenced my appreciation of the complex and varied histories that EFL clients may have. For me, this increased the tension between the need for regulatory bodies in the EFL field and the belief that the value of these practices should not be dismissed just because those bodies do not yet exist. This tension impacted how I presented and contextualised this project. I hoped to offer appropriate respect and credit to the EFL practice, and all involved, while not ignoring potential risks or issues.

Both unfortunately and fortunately, most of this project took place during and post the global COVID-19 pandemic. The context of a global pandemic undoubtedly shaped the

research and my own contributions to it. Through my 'insider' position I got to see how the EFL industry in Aotearoa New Zealand was shaped by the pandemic. I was struck by how quickly and drastically EFL practices can change at the whim of human facilitators. Change and evolution of practice is to be expected (and hopefully promoted). However, I think that the widespread effects of COVID-19, across such a short period of time, put a magnifying glass over processes that can shape change. For me, watching this occur across various areas of EFL reinforced the potential risks for clients and horses, when there are no basic regulations and practice standards in place. Again, this increased tension within me as I pondered how to balance the benefits and risks of EFL practices.

Ultimately, completing this project and writing this thesis highlights the ontology of a complex system of reciprocal influence. In outlining the subjectivities above I hope that I have acknowledged myself as a dynamic part of the complex systems that exist within, and contribute to, this project and thesis. Hopefully I have indicated how one dynamic part of a complex system can shift and in turn influence all other parts of the system. In that way this section of my thesis serves two functions. First, it details some of my specific contributions and subjectivities. Second, this information will influence reader understanding going forward. As a result, the act of reading this thesis may also be considered a participation in the ontology of complex and dynamic systems of reciprocal influence. As my reported subjectivities influence reader understanding of the findings, a reader's own subjectivities will likely also influence their understandings. In turn, the specific understanding gleaned by a reader means that any ongoing discussion or use of the findings by them can be considered as their reciprocal influence on the findings. Information presented in Chapter four: Findings and Chapter five: Discussion of this thesis will provide further clarification of complex systems with reciprocal influence, and in turn influence the meaning made of this chapter.

Overview of Chapters

As above, the first chapter of this thesis introduced EFL practices and sought to provide the context and rationale for this project. Furthermore, it indicated the qualitative, grounded theory approach used to conduct the study and noted the objective of producing a tentative grounded theory to contribute to the current gaps in EFL's theoretical foundations. I ended the chapter by positioning myself as the researcher within this project and introducing the concept of complex systems with reciprocal influence.

Chapter two, the literature review, further contextualises the study, situating EFL under the umbrella of Animal Assisted Therapy and Interventions. A brief history emphasising non-human animals' roles in human healthcare is provided. Following that, a review of previous EFL literature is presented, outlining outcome-based research, theoretical literature, and previous EFL studies completed in Aotearoa New Zealand. The chapter ends by outlining and briefly discussing important ethical considerations of including horses as facilitators in EFL.

Chapter three, methodology and methods, details the methodology and methods used in this study. In doing so, this chapter offers clarity on the design and processes undertaken throughout the project. Grounded theory approaches to research, particularly informed and constructivist grounded theory, are outlined. Additionally, a summary of an interview between myself and the founder and director of the studied EFL facility will offer readers insight into the ethos of the facility. The research design is outlined, and the non-linear grounded theory methods of analysis used in this project are explained. Finally, a brief summary of ethical considerations is presented.

Chapter four, findings, focuses on findings and details the core categories constructed in the data analysis. The categories will be presented within contextual components, and two

processes: the relationship building process and the personalising process. The structure of this chapter seeks to highlight the early consideration of relationships between core categories, identification of the core category experiencing connection, and therefore the early conceptualisations of processes as grounded in the dataset.

Chapter five, discussion, begins by presenting the tentative grounded theory, positing EFL and the processes occurring between client and horse as complex systems of reciprocal influence. The study is situated within pre-existing literature and both theoretical and practical implications are suggested. Limitations of the study are addressed and several future recommendations for research and practice are made. Finally, the thesis concludes with a summary of key take-aways that aim to enhance reader understanding of this study and potential future directions for EFL. Overall, chapter five emphasises the original contribution that this project makes to the field of EFL.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review will provide a brief history of animal assisted therapy and interventions, before turning the focus to EFL. Relevant research from across the globe will be presented, considering the implementation of EFL within a variety of populations. Current theoretical underpinnings will be outlined, highlighting the need for further exploration into the theoretical basis for EFL. Subsequently, current research into EFL within Aotearoa New Zealand will be detailed, followed by a critical evaluation of ethical positions and considerations regarding the inclusion of horses within this practice.

Animal Assisted Therapy and Animal Assisted Interventions

Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) and Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) are umbrella terms for human-healthcare practices that involve many types of non-human animals. A much larger body of research exists surrounding AAT and AAI than specific EFL research (Anz & Chung, 2023; Fine, 2015; Serpell, 2010). Non-human animals' connections with humans is a topic that has been documented throughout time, and non-human animals' involvement in human-healthcare has been noted over several centuries (Anz & Chung, 2023; Friedmann et al., 1980; Serpell, 2010; Stutley, 2003). The constructions and beliefs regarding non-human animals' participation in human-healthcare have varied throughout history and across cultures. Early records link non-human animals to spiritual healing within hunter-gatherer societies (Serpell, 2010) as well as shamanic practices (Harvey & Wallis, 2016; Stutley, 2003). Within the Greek Pantheon, ideas about the healing properties of non-human animals were closely tied to the healing power of Gods (Serpell, 2010). More recently, Western sciences have incorporated non-human animals in into modern, medical models of Western science. This inclusion has offered evidence of their benefits to human health across several domains, including both physical and mental health (Allen et al., 2001; Friedmann et al., 1980; Maujean et al., 2015; Stefanini et al., 2015).

In early hunter-gatherer societies, animist belief systems conceptualised non-human animals as each holding a unique spirit that could act independently of the earthly body it inhabited, while the body was dreaming or unconscious (Hallowell, 1926; Serpell, 2010). Across many cultures the non-human animal spirits were believed to be both volatile and powerful, therefore gaining them a large amount of respect. The power and wisdom held by those spirits was sought after, and many methods were used for individuals to gain the guardianship of a spirit animal. Once an individual acquired the support of a spirit guide, it was believed that the guide would communicate and give advice to help the individual navigate through daily life (Serpell, 2010). It is perhaps early animist belief systems that positioned the healing power of non-human animals in the highest regard of any other belief systems which have followed.

Shamanic practices and belief systems have existed for millennia and are still practiced in varying ways throughout countries such as North and South America, various European countries, Korea, Central Asia, and Siberia (Kendall, 2021; Stutley, 2003). Shamanic belief systems afforded more power to certain humans than the early animist beliefs of hunter-gatherer societies (Serpell, 2010). Although beliefs evolved over time and differ across populations (Stutley, 2003), a commonly acknowledged belief throughout history was that certain humans, known as shamans, were able to connect deeply with spirit guardians that frequently took the form of non-human animals, and were considered to hold immense healing powers (Harvey & Wallis, 2016). As with the animist belief systems of early hunter- gatherer societies, the concept of non-human animals as spiritually powerful and beneficial to humans, remained. Put simply, shamans were considered able to forge such powerful connections with their animal spirit guides, that they could establish the power to control them (Serpell, 2010). Among other consequences of this ability, shamans were then believed to hold all knowledge of how to treat illness. This was due to the animist belief that

illness was brought on by the volatile spirits who had somehow been wronged by the humans they would curse (Harvey & Wallis, 2016; Serpell, 2010).

In the Greek Pantheon, animist beliefs were also evident. However, along with non-human animals, gods were also credited with ethereal, healing powers. This included a belief of some gods holding shamanic healing abilities and turning themselves into non-human animals, both to hide their identities and to cure illness (Serpell, 2010). For example, some stories posit that individuals would visit the shrine of Asclepius, god of medicine, to seek healing. After being put into a slumber the god would 'heal' the individuals, often by assuming the form of a snake or a dog and then licking the appropriate part of the human's anatomy (Serpell, 2010; Toynbee, 1973). In this case, the non-human animal's association with human-healing was closely linked to the god's capacity and choice to transform into a non-human animal, in order to heal a human. This appears to signal a variation in available beliefs, with such stories suggesting a more anthropomorphic conceptualisation of non-human animals.

Anthropocentric belief systems appeared to dominate western understandings of non-human animals during the Renaissance period (fourteenth to early seventeenth century), positing them as symbolic of human conditions, traits, or morals (Harrison, 1998; Muratori, 2019). Examples of such representations include pigs as symbolic of gluttony, wolves as symbolic of envy, and foxes as symbolic of slyness (Muratori, 2019; Spenser et al., 1613). These conceptualisations also appeared to reduce understandings of non-human animals as sentient or powerful. French philosopher Descartes suggested that non-human animals were machines that did not think and did not possess self-consciousness (Harrison, 1992). However, historical attitudes towards non-human animals appeared to shift again in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century with ideas of animals as social agents, and companions, capable of helping develop emotion and a sense of responsibility in humans.

The prevalence of these ideas appears to align with the migration of many Europeans from rural regions to more populated towns and cities (Serpell, 2010), shifting the role of some animals from farm animal to city companion. By the end of the seventeenth century prevalent views of non-human animals appeared more supportive, and attitudes of non-human animals as beings that needed to be cared for appeared to develop (Salisbury, 2022). Changes to the perceptions of, and attitudes towards, non-human animals across time appeared to lessen beliefs surrounding their healing 'powers', and in turn the roles of non-human animals in human-healthcare changed (Serpell, 2010).

Non-human animals were recorded in western mental health settings from the late eighteenth century. This continued to increase throughout the nineteenth century, with non-human animals recognised as 'pleasing' and able to 'awaken' emotions (Serpell, 2010). Small animals, such as dogs, cats, birds, and rabbits, were most commonly included. Alongside mental health benefits, non-human animals were also recognised as beneficial to those suffering physical injuries.

However, shifts in western scientific models of medicine during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the popularity of non-human animals as beneficial to mental and physical health take a downturn (Allderidge, 1991; Serpell, 2010). In the mental health realm, a change in perception of non-human animals' inclusion in mental health appeared to coincide with the rise in popularity of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. Previously, non-human animals were understood as spiritual creatures whose power far exceeded that of most humans. However, they were now being conceptualised as creatures limited to basic biological drives, such as self-preservation and sexual impulses (Montagu, 1956; Serpell, 2010). This idea was further perpetuated with Freud's interpretations of his client's dreams and free associations. Freud explained non-human animals in dreams as representing an individual's darkest, most undesirable ideas and sentiments (Quinodoz, 2005). The notion of

non-human animals as representations within dreams and thoughts is a nod to animist and shamanic beliefs. However, their presence was interpreted in a way that removed their power and positive association, replacing this with the simplistic and shameful association of man as beast (Serpell, 2010).

Boris Levinson helped to turn this association around during the mid – late 1900s, following his experiences of including his dog Jingles during psychotherapy sessions with children (Fine et al., 2019; Trivedi & Perl, 1995). During these occasions, he observed the positive impact that Jingles had on young clients, and the benefits of this impact on therapeutic relationships and process (Fine, 2017). Ultimately, Levinson argued that animals were essential to human evolution and that for humans to achieve emotional well-being they must engage in positive relationships with animals, who possess the ability to provide a healing connection between humans and nature (Serpell, 2010).

Non-human and Human Animal Connections in Aotearoa New Zealand

Born in Aotearoa New Zealand, I am Pākehā and my ancestry is European. The following paragraphs include references to Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) and Mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge). While reading them, it is important to acknowledge and consider that this section briefly offers some of my Pākehā understanding of my learnings about Te Ao Māori and Mātauranga Māori, presented briefly through the specific information that I have chosen to include in this thesis. To increase understanding and engage further with the information presented below, I encourage readers to seek out Māori literature (the meaning of 'literature' not limited to *written* materials). The works referenced within this thesis may be a good place to start. This sentiment applies to all references to Māori concepts, ideas, and research mentioned throughout this thesis. Additionally, I have included English translations of kupu Māori (Māori words) where relevant. However, often kupu can have many meanings. Furthermore, concepts are multi-layered, complex and nuanced, and English translations are

often inadequate. Again, further exploration and the seeking of Māori literature is encouraged.

Horses did not exist in Aotearoa New Zealand before colonisation (Petrie, 2011). Kurī (dogs), kiore (rats) and tangata (humans) were the first mammals in Aotearoa New Zealand, arriving together, inextricably linked through their shared whakapapa (genealogy) (Dunn, 2021; Petrie, 2011; Stewart, 2023). Within Te Ao Māori, all that exists contains mauri (life force or essence) and all that exists are related by whakapapa, including land, bodies of water, and human and non-human animals (Dunn, 2021; Stewart, 2023; Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, 2007). The relationships between human and non-human animals are multi-layered and nuanced, diverging from western separations and binary conceptualisations, and emphasising interconnectedness. The nature of the connections and relations between human and non-human animals can be varied and intricate (Dunn, 2021). Human relationships with kurī are a good example of this. For example, narratives from pre-colonisation suggest that kurī were considered as ancestors, as well as a source of food (Stewart, 2023). Furthermore, whakatauki (proverbs) such as *he ihi kuri*, *he tangata haera* (like a dog follows his nose, man will find opportunity) (Woodward Education, 2024), used to refer to immoral actions, linking negative elements of humans with the behaviour of dogs (Stewart, 2023).

The early 1800s saw the arrival of horses to Aotearoa New Zealand, brought in by Pākehā settlers (Orbell, 1999). Stories of their arrival include reference to a ‘monster’ coming in from the sea (Pomare & Cowan, 1989), the creation of the kupu ‘hōiho’ (horse), and of the less common ‘kāmia’, also meaning ‘horse’ and reportedly developed by Māori after hearing Pākehā calling for their horses to “come here!” (Orbell, 1999). Horses were expensive and quickly became symbols of prestige and wealth, owned by both high-ranking Māori and Pākehā (Orbell, 1999; Petrie, 2011). Historical accounts evidence their conceptualisation within the interconnected and varied relations between Māori and non-human animals (Dunn,

2021; Orbell, 1999; Petrie, 2011). One notable relation between horses and humans in Aotearoa New Zealand's history was of their inclusion in the settling of crimes. Horses were offered as reparation in instances where acts of adultery had been committed. Adultery was considered as a serious crime and therefore the involvement of horses to achieve justice, highlights the value placed on them (Petrie, 2011). Along with their relationship to human crime, horses were involved in daily life, providing services such as transport for humans.

Missing from early historical accounts appears to be any involvement of horses in human healthcare. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the formal inclusion of any non-human animal in AAT or AAI appears to have only begun approximately five to six decades ago (Walker et al., 2015). The recent inclusion of non-human animals in human healthcare in Aotearoa New Zealand appears to align with the increasing availability of relevant western research over a similar timeframe (Allen et al., 2001; Batabura et al., 2022; Friedmann et al., 1980; Siegel, 1999; Stefanini et al., 2015; Trujillo et al., 2020; Wells., 2009).

A particularly ground-breaking study, completed by Friedmann et al., (1980) researched the survival rate of Coronary Care Unit patients one year following discharge. Results showed that patients with pets had a significantly higher survival rate than those without. Involving 96 participants and obtaining both psychological and physiological data, the presence of a pet was beneficial to individuals' wellbeing in both domains.

Since the above study (Friedmann et al., 1980), many others have supported the claim that animals and AATs/AAIs have a positive effect on individuals' psychological and physiological health, across a variety of populations (Batubara et al., 2022; Brodie & Biley, 1999; Jones et al., 2019; Maujean et al., 2015; Wells, 2009; Wohlfarth et al., 2013). For example, in the older adult population, pet ownership has been evidenced as a protective factor against stress, with dogs in particular providing the most companionship and

attachment (Siegel, 1990). Similarly, in a population of adults working high stress jobs and diagnosed with hypertension, the presence of a pet as a form of social support assisted in lowering blood pressure in response to mental stress, where Angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitor therapy did not (Allen et al., 2001). More recently, AAT inclusion in the therapeutic recovery of adolescents hospitalised with psychiatric disorders indicated significant positive impacts, particularly in the domains of global functioning and school attendance Stefanini et al., (2015). Additionally, Trujillo et al., (2020) evidenced AAT to have a positive impact on therapy attendance and the overall wellbeing of adolescents with psychiatric and substance used disorders, compared to a control group. Overall, as with other populations, the effectiveness of AAT/AAI with various factors related to adolescent populations has been evidenced and supported by many research projects (Burgon, 2011; Germain et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2019; Waite et al., 2018).

Although research has evidenced benefits of AAT and AAI on human health and wellbeing, a need for more research has been indicated (Fine et al., 2019; López-Cepero, 2020; Santaniello et al., 2020). Reviews of AAT/AAI research have noted a general need to increase internal validity in AAT/AAI research in ways such as clarifying the relationship between topics such as human and non-human animal interactions and AAT/AAI, and of the mechanisms informing empirical evidence. In turn, interventions can be adapted and researched further to improve their practical efficacy (López-Cepero, 2020). Furthermore, a need for ongoing development of consistent terminology and associated AAT/AAI intervention methods were emphasised in order to aid study of the field and the comparison of experiences (Santaniello et al., 2020). Avoiding positioning AAT/AAI as alternative modalities has been suggested (López-Cepero, 2020). Rather, positioning them as complimentary interventions has been recommended (Fine et al., 2019).

Initial research on AAT/AAI involved studies that mainly focused on dogs, cats, and

other small animals, however the past couple of decades has seen a large increase in the study of horses in therapeutic settings (Adams et al., 2015; Ferlazzo et al., 2023; López-Cepero, 2020). This turn towards horses in therapy settings brings about an interesting change in the essence of AAT/AAI research. Typically research around AAT and AAI has involved companion animals. The nature of an animal being a companion means that an individual or family has consented to the animal living in their home or property and being a major part of their everyday life. It is quite possible that a companion animal provides a different type of support and has potential to have very different effects on an individual, than an equine at an EFL facility (Siporin, 2012). Meeting an equine that is on its own turf, physically imposing, and that is, in a sense, in a position of authority and expertise in the present situation, could change the dynamics of interaction and change the quality of the relationship for its entire duration. Even the physical size of a horse is vastly different to common companion animals, such as a cat or dog. Characteristic differences likely factor into the nature of the relationship between non-human animals and humans (Menna et al., 2019).

Additionally, with the majority of AAT/AAI research being conducted on companion animals, it begs the question as to whether the benefits to humans would continue were the relationship between the animal and human to cease. While there is no doubt that companion therapy animals can have positive effects on individuals' physiological, psychological, and psychosocial well-being, it does not necessarily mean that the individuals have learnt specific lessons, strategies, or skills, that they can take with them as they engage with the rest of the world. EFL represents a break-away from the companion animal model and provides situations for humans and horses to come together as independent beings.

EFL Research to Date

Previous EFL studies have varied greatly in their designs, purposes and studied populations. EFL has been reported as positively impacting various populations including at-

risk children and youth (Burgon, 2011; O'Hanlon, 2021), adolescents experiencing mental distress such as depression or anxiety (Wilson et al., 2017), veterans (Palomar-Ciria & Bello, 2023; Romaniuk et al., 2018; Wharton et al., 2019), women who have experienced interpersonal violence (Schroeder & Stroud, 2015), and First Nations Youth (Snowshoe & Starblanket, 2016). Specific factors evidenced as impacted, improved, and enhanced by EFL include; self-efficacy, empathy, overall happiness, depression and anxiety levels, levels of physical pain, global functioning, and overall emotional health, and many more (Burgon, 2011; Duffy, 2018). Despite including a wide variety of populations, the age range of participants focused on in these studies are often children/ adolescents, with less research available on EFL programmes involving adults, older adults, and primary and pre-school age children (Lee et al., 2016). Additionally, the research has been outcome focused with less attention given to informing and developing theory (Ferlazzo et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2016; Lentini & Knox, 2015). Where theoretical exploration and application has occurred research often focuses on important components of EFL (Hallberg, 2018), or applying pre-existing theories and hypotheses (Vincent & Farkas, 2017), with minimal focus on theory building within the practice (O'Hanlon, 2021).

Outcome Research

Children and adolescents are popular subjects in the study of EFL (Burgon, 2011; Schultz et al., 2007; Trotter et al., 2008; Wilson et al., 2017). Outcomes reported by research into EFL with child/ adolescent populations include; increased global functioning (Schultz et al., 2007), decreases in aggression, reduced conduct problems, and reduced levels of depression and anxiety (Trotter et al., 2008), and reductions in trauma symptoms following sexual abuse (Kemp et al., 2014). Additionally, (Burgon, 2011) researched seven adolescents' experiences of a therapeutic horsemanship programme in the United Kingdom. The adolescents were considered to be 'at risk' by the researcher and their referring services. The

number and the length of the sessions, and the period over which the sessions occurred varied amongst participants. Following participation, interviews were analysed and considered alongside fieldnotes. Results indicated that from participants' perspectives, equine assisted learning/therapy had provided them with an increased sense of confidence, self- esteem, mastery, and self-efficacy, whilst furthering the development of their empathy, and creating an opening for positive opportunities.

Wilson et al. (2017) conducted an Australia based study of adolescents with diagnoses of anxiety and/or depression and used interviews to gain therapists' perspectives of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy for this population. Key findings included increased confidence and self-esteem, and increased ability to regulate emotions, echoing the work of Burgon (2011).

Perkins (2018) completed a study of six females in the United States foster care system who were living in group community homes. They participated in life-skill focused psychoeducational group sessions that incorporated equine assisted learning and occurred weekly for eight weeks. Observational evaluations completed by a mental health professional, equine therapy volunteer, and an EAGALA certified equine specialist indicated positive improvements in confidence levels, communication skills, and respect. As with Wilson et al's (2017) study, participants indicated that they perceived significant improvement in their ability to emotionally regulate.

Overall, research has shown EFL practices can be beneficial for adolescent populations, in a variety of ways. However, the evidence-base is still limited, and more research is required to strengthen it (Latella & Abrams, 2015; Lee et al., 2016; Stern & Chur-Hansen, 2019).

Romaniuk et al. (2018) studied the effects of equine assisted therapy on depression,

anxiety, stress, happiness, and quality of life in a population of Defence Force Veterans. Their study design was longitudinal, and included a programme for individuals, as well as one for veterans and their partners. Their results showed a statistically significant decrease in symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress following the intervention, along with an increase in happiness and quality of life. These results were consistent across both individual and couple groups, however the significant reduction in psychological symptoms at the three-month follow up remained only for the couples group. Romaniuk et al. (2018) suggested that this may highlight a need for partners to be included in equine therapy programmes for veteran populations.

Further to the above, veteran populations have been a common inclusion in research studying the efficacy of EFL for trauma-based disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Burton et al., 2019; Ferruolo, 2016; Palomar-Ciria & Bello, 2023). For example, Wharton et al. (2019) studied the effectiveness of Equine-Facilitated Cognitive Processing Therapy (EF-CPT) using a sample of 27 veterans previously diagnosed with PTSD. The manualised programme was delivered individually by a clinical psychologist, across 12 sessions. Results indicated that 84% of the sample no longer met criteria for a PTSD diagnosis at the end of the intervention and that trauma-related guilt was reduced for all participants. These results indicated EF-CPT to be a promising intervention amongst this population. However, the small sample size and lack of control group were limitations of the study.

In line with the study completed by Wharton et al., (2019), reviews of PTSD focused EFL research have indicated potential for such services to be a beneficial intervention (Palomar-Ciria & Bello, 2023). Additionally, it has been suggested that EFL may be particularly appealing for individuals hesitant to engage in a talking-based intervention (Ferruolo, 2016). However, research in this area is limited by factors such as sample size and

a lack of longitudinal results. Furthermore, a need for standardisation across practices has been emphasised (Palomar-Ciria & Bello, 2023).

Schroeder and Stroud (2015) investigated an equine facilitated therapy group programme, observing a group of four women who had histories of experiencing interpersonal violence. The group met once a week over a nine-week period and the sessions alternated between equine facilitated therapy one week, and group discussion the next. Women participating in this programme reported an increase in their general competency and capability due to having participated in the programme. They also noted feeling more mindful and self-aware. The researchers observed that, although not required or requested to, participant group members disclosed detailed experiences of past trauma as soon as in the first equine facilitated therapy session. They theorised that this may have been due to the uniqueness of the treatment, while participants noted feeling strong support from both equine and human facilitators, as well as from other participants.

A less researched population in the EFL field are indigenous populations, however, some studies do focus on or acknowledge indigenous participants (Dell et al., 2011; Kemp et al., 2014). Utilising an Aboriginal framework, and analysing interview data, Dell et al. (2011), researched the experiences of First Nations and Inuit youth who attended an in-patient equine assisted learning programme at the Nimkee NupiGawagan Healing Centre (NNHC). All the youth who participated in the study had problems with solvent abuse, with many also abusing alcohol and other drugs, and having historical experiences of physical and sexual abuse. Three key themes in the data were those of Spiritual Exchange, Complimentary Communication, and Authentic Occurrences. The researchers concluded that the equine assisted learning programme provided a space for the youth that was culturally relevant, allowing them to connect with their spirituality, engage in communication that strayed from spoken word, and participate in authentic experiences that were not filtered through a

Western ideological lens.

Research by Kemp et al. (2014) on equine facilitated therapy with youth who have experienced sexual abuse specifically considered results regarding indigenous participants. This study evidenced that following participation in equine facilitated therapy, the youth showed improvements in behaviour and symptoms of depression and trauma. For the indigenous participants (who identified as either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander), the results were the same as those of non-indigenous participants. These results provide support for the potential cross-cultural relevance of EFL, although more research is required.

Coffin (2019) explored equine assisted learning as an alternative therapeutic intervention for Aboriginal youth (aged 6 – 25 years) for trauma, grief, and loss. Participants completed a minimum of six weekly sessions either individually, in pairs or groups. Photos of sessions, and an adapted Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire were utilised for data collection. Self-reports indicated reductions in sleeplessness due to worry and experiences of anger. Additionally, observational data indicated increased confidence levels and ability to self-regulate.

EFL as a modality beneficial to indigenous populations is significant for Aotearoa New Zealand as research indicates that Māori experience disproportionately worse health outcomes than non-Māori across a variety of domains, including poorer life expectancy, mental health, and various aspects of physical health (Sullivan et al., 2023). Furthermore, Māori models of hauora (wellbeing), emphasise holistic and multi-dimensional frameworks, that consider hauora as wider than the individual (Teinakore, 2023). For example, Sir Mason Durie's Te Whare Tapa Wha model of health and wellbeing comprises four dimensions: taha tinana (physical wellbeing), taha hinengaro (mental/emotional wellbeing), taha wairua (spiritual wellbeing) and taha whānau (family wellbeing). The model is visually

conceptualised as a wharenui (meeting house), and wellbeing in one area is linked to all others. Change to wellbeing in any of the four domains will impact the overall wellbeing of the whole wharenui (Teinakore, 2023). To date, no EFL research has specifically focused on EFL practices and their relevance to, or existence within, Māori culture. However, the research regarding EFL and other indigenous populations indicates potential relevance. Outcomes such as experiences of spiritual exchange (Dell et al., 2011), improved sleep (Coffin, 2019), and reduction in symptoms of depression (Kemp et al., 2014), highlight potential for EFL to benefit hauora in a variety of areas (i.e., wairua, tinana, hinengaro). Such findings could be beneficial to improving Māori wellbeing through a modality better aligned with Māori beliefs, values, and practices, than current, mainstream western healthcare practices and services.

Influential Components and Factors of EFL

As mentioned above, less attention has been given to theory development in relation to EFL than to its benefits (Lee et al., 2016). However, in the last decade particularly, some researchers have considered the question ‘why horses?’ and explored what aspects of EFL practices are important and influential (Hallberg, 2018). Others have taken pre-existing theories and attempted to apply them to EFL as a way of explaining why and how EFL can be so beneficial to humans (Bachi, 2013; Burgon et al., 2018; Latella & Abrams, 2015; Lee & Makela, 2015; Lee et al., 2016; Vincent & Farkas, 2017). At the time of writing this thesis, there appeared to be only one prior study specifically focusing on theory building within EFL practices and using a grounded theory method (O'Hanlon, 2021).

Various characteristics of horses have been indicated as significant contributors to the appeal and efficacy of EFL and their suggested impacts vary between them (Hallberg, 2018). For example, non-verbal communications displayed by horses have been suggested as important contributors to the construction of a non-verbal focus during EFL, which in turn

may encourage increased embodiment by clients (Ford, 2013). Additionally, as indicated earlier, non-verbal communication has also been highlighted as an important contributor to increasing the appropriateness of EFL for indigenous populations (Dell et al., 2011). The size of horses has also been suggested as an important component of EFL (Hallberg, 2018; Lietz & Napan, 2020). One suggested benefit of horses' size, and associated power, is that it facilitates opportunity for clients to address fears and practice regulating their emotions (Lietz & Napan, 2020).

The horse species' position as prey within the animal kingdom has also been considered in explanations of how horses contribute to the effectiveness of the EFL practice (Burgon et al., 2018; Hallberg, 2018; Latella & Abrams, 2015; Lietz & Napan, 2020; Nieforth & Craig, 2021). Being prey animals has meant that for thousands of years the survival of the horse species has largely relied on those animals' abilities to tune into their environments, reading anyone coming into their space, and running when they sense danger (Burgon et al., 2018; Latella & Abrams, 2015). Being so connected to their environments, horses have highly developed abilities to read and interpret non-verbal signals from those around them, even if the communicators may not be aware of the signals they are sending (Despret, 2004). The case of the horse Clever Hans (Despret, 2004) is an example of this ability functioning between horse and human. Hans was first believed to have powers of telepathy after he was proven able to answer maths questions given to him by human questioners he had not previously met. Further investigation showed that Hans was tuning into micro-movements made by the humans, signalling to him when he had given the correct answer. The humans were not aware of their own movements, and hence Hans serves as an example of a horse being able to read signals that humans may not consciously display.

The purpose of this ability for horses living in the wild is so that they can recognise when a being is safe to be around and perhaps even have in their herd, or even when that

being may be a good leader for them to follow (Latella & Abrams, 2015; Nieforth & Craig, 2021). Human facilitators have theorised that horses' specialised 'prey animal abilities' are powerful within EFL because a horse can sense what someone is bringing with them to a session and when they are being authentic in their communications and therefore are safe to connect with. Horses will then be reflective in their communications, either creating a situation for a human to step back and see themselves clearly, or to connect in meaningful communication and relationship. Human facilitators of EFL have reported that the reflective communications offered by horses are powerful for human growth, learning, and healing (Lietz & Napan, 2020).

Horses as reflective during communication (Lietz & Napan, 2020), has been described elsewhere as horses 'mirroring' the behaviours and emotions of others (Bachi, 2013). However, this form of communication is not the only type suggested to have a role during EFL practices. Scopa et al. (2019) posited that horses have complex communication skills and outlined the 'emotional transfer hypothesis'. Their hypothesis suggests that during horse and human interactions a pairing process may occur whereby the emotional states of both individuals coordinate, influencing each other. Regarding what they termed equine assisted interventions, Scopa et al. (2019) hypothesised that emotional transfer could play a key role in relationship maintenance between horse and human, and in turn a key role in the success of interventions. Quantitative study into horse and human heart rate variability during interactions with each other, offer preliminary support for the occurrence of a coupling process (Guidi et al., 2016; Scopa et al., 2019). One finding indicated that variability between horse and human heartrates increased as proximity between horse and human increased. Scopa et al. (2019) suggested that this finding may signal a distancing between human and horse during stressful interactions, whereby their physiological reactions trend away from each other and towards that typical of their species. Currently there is not enough evidence to

suggest generalisability or provide a conclusive explanation. Scopa et al. (2019) advocated for a multidisciplinary approach to further exploration of the emotional transference hypothesis.

Impacts of the presence of a horse and the context in which EFL occurs have also been suggested as contributing to factors that improve the efficacy of EFL (Burgon, 2014; Burgon et al., 2018; Hallberg, 2018). For example, horses have been reported as mindful beings, and suggested as facilitating increased mindfulness in human clients (Burgon, 2014; Burgon et al., 2018). Additionally, the often-rural context of EFL practices have been posited to increase client and clinician relationships. For example, a clinician wearing casual clothing may increase the perceived authenticity of the clinician from the client's perspective (Hallberg, 2018).

Overall, various parts of EFL have been suggested to contribute to the effectiveness of this practice. However, a commonly noted limitation of this research is a lack of holistic explanations that consider the role of multiple components of EFL and provide a theoretical foundation for EFL practices (Hallberg, 2018; Vincent & Farkas, 2017). General AAT and AAI researchers have also reported a need for holistic explanations of AAIs. In particular, it has been suggested that human and animal relationships are considered as complex systems that are impacted by all living beings in the relationship, function in a circular fashion, and with components having reciprocal influence (Menna et al., 2019).

Theories Previously Explored and Applied to EFL

Researchers have explored and applied various theories to EFL practices, from varying scientific areas such as psychology (Bachi, 2013; Hallberg, 2018; Lentini & Knox, 2015; Vincent & Farkas, 2017) neuroscience and evolutionary biology (Hallberg, 2018). The following theoretical applications will be expanded on below: Rogerian and person-centred,

biophilia, polyvagal theory, and possibly the most applied, attachment theory.

In acknowledging a relationship between client and horse during EFL, previous researchers have referenced the work of Carl Rogers (Burgon et al., 2018; Chardonnens, 2009, Nieforth & Craig, 2021). Rogers suggested that for therapy to occur, six conditions must exist (Rogers, 1959 as cited in Tudor, 2011, p167). The six conditions were as follows:

1. Two persons are in contact
2. The first person (client) is in a state of incongruence (being anxious or vulnerable)
3. The second person (therapist) is congruent in the relationship
4. The therapist is experiencing unconditional positive regard toward the client
5. The therapist is experiencing an empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference.
6. The client perceives, at least to a minimal degree, conditions four and five.

A large body of literature appears to have developed from and beyond Rogers' six conditions of therapy, including what is commonly referred to as the "core conditions" (Tudor, 2011; Wyatt, 2001). The core conditions are often presented within the category of person-centred therapy and include therapists offering unconditional positive regard, congruence, and empathy to clients (Thorne, 2003; Tudor, 2011; Wyatt, 2001).

Both Rogers' six conditions of therapy, and the 'core conditions' described elsewhere in literature, have been discussed in relation to EFL (Burgon et al., 2018; Chardonnen, 2009; Nieforth & Craig, 2021). Naming the 'core conditions' (Tudor, 2011), Burgon et al. (2018) suggested that Rogerian conditions were highlighted in equine assisted therapy/learning. Specifically, clients acknowledged that horses were listened to and had autonomy within the

equine assisted therapy/learning context. In some instances, this increased client trust of human practitioners. Nieforth and Craig (2021) interviewed therapists and practitioners to explore equine communication in relation to patient-centred communication and therapy during equine assisted mental health services. Their findings indicated that horses exhibited congruence by displaying behaviours that signalled clients' internal dysregulation to the human professional. This occurred even when the clients' own external behaviours suggested that they felt calm. Additionally, they provided unconditional positive regard through proximity to the client and by allowing physical touch from the client. Finally, they also provided feedback that facilitated the human professional's understanding of clients and encouraged reflection from clients.

In considering EFL in relation to Rogerian theory or person-centred concepts, it is important to understand that the core conditions are not representative of Rogers' six conditions for therapy. Distinguishing which are being considered in relation to EFL is important to avoid ongoing misrepresentation or oversimplification of Rogers' six conditions for therapy (Tudor, 2011; Wyatt, 2001). Furthermore, Rogers (1959 as cited in Tudor, 2011, p172) emphasised that when the theory of conditions is applied outside of its original context (therapy between two people), its applicability may decrease. Therefore, careful consideration of its applicability and utility must be made.

Biophilia theory outlines that humans have a natural inclination to pay attention to and interact with non-human animals and nature (Beggs & Townsend, 2021; Wilson, 1984). In doing so, they can gain a better understanding of both others and themselves (Wilson, 1984). Lee and Makela (2015) explored how changes to equine assisted psychotherapy clients' mental health could be impacted by horses' behaviours and roles. Their research used the biophilia hypothesis as a guide and their findings suggested that certain characteristics of horses such as their size, their non-verbal communication styles, and their provision of

present moment feedback all contribute to a context in which clients can explore psychological processes (both within themselves and others). The study posited that in doing this clients' engagement with non-human animals facilitates development of their 'psychological mindedness' (Beitel et al., 2005). This in turn increases the value they place both in themselves and others and ultimately contributes to enhanced mental health (Lee & Makela, 2015). However, other EFL researchers have suggested that biophilia theory is not holistic enough and does not pay enough attention to the relationship between human and horse during EFL (Fine, 2015; Vincent & Farkas, 2017).

Polyvagal theory (PVT) is becoming increasingly popular within EFL literature, particularly as it may relate to EFL with clients who have experienced trauma (Castaneda, 2023; Esposito and Fournier, 2023; Kasper, 2021; Rotier and Dickinson, 2024; Schlote, 2017, 2019; Trotter and Baggerly, 2019). Developed by Steven Porges, PVT emphasises the role of the autonomic nervous system (ANS), particularly the vagus nerve (part of the parasympathetic nervous system), in regulating and influencing social mammals' senses of safety, threat, and social connection (Esposito & Fournier, 2023; Porges, 2022; Porges & Furman, 2011). PVT comprises three core tenets: a three-tiered hierarchy of the ANS, neuroception, and co-regulation.

The three-tiered hierarchy suggests that sub-systems of the ANS function hierarchically and include the dorsal vagal system, the sympathetic nervous system, and the ventral vagal system (Esposito & Fournier, 2023; Porges, 2022). The three systems work simultaneously and can impact each other. However, one system may be more activated than the others at any one time, in turn having the dominant influence over the individual's behaviours. The dorsal vagal system is considered the oldest system (Porges., 2022). In the absence of threat, this system facilitates regulation of the gut, assisting digestion, and growth. It can be considered the 'rest and digest' system. However, in the presence of threat, the

dorsal vagal system functions to ‘shut-down’ or immobilise an individual. Within the ‘fight, flight, freeze, or faint’ paradigm of threat responses, a dorsal vagal state influences a freeze or faint response (Esposito & Fournier, 2023). The sympathetic nervous system is in the middle of the three-tier hierarchy. It is considered to have evolved after the dorsal vagal system and functions to mobilise an individual. When activated in the presence of a perceived threat, the sympathetic nervous system facilitates an increase in heart rate, providing increased energy to allow an individual the options of fight or flight. The ventral vagal system sits at the top of the hierarchy, and facilitates social engagement. It is considered able to downregulate the sympathetic nervous system, allowing for socially engaging behaviour (Porges, 2022). This is considered to facilitate an individual’s safety, because social connection is essential for survival. In the presence of perceived, or actual, danger, the ventral vagal system may influence a ‘fawn’ response, by which an individual uses social strategies to reduce the threat and maintain peace within a relationship.

The activation of different components of an individual’s ANS is closely linked to the second tenet of PVT: neuroception (Esposito & Fournier, 2023; Porges, 2022; Porges & Furman, 2011). This term refers to neural processes that monitor the environment, other people, and an individual’s own body to check for cues of safety or threat/ danger. Neuroception can both influence, and be influenced by, an individual’s ANS state. For example, while the ventral vagal system is activated, cues of threat picked up during neuroception may be less likely to trigger defensive behaviours that may occur when the sympathetic nervous system is dominating the individual’s experience. However, during dominant activation of the sympathetic nervous system, neutral cues may be interpreted as threatening, as the sympathetic nervous system reduces an individual’s capacity to accurately interpret environmental cues (Esposito & Fournier, 2023; Porges, 2022).

Coregulation is the third core tenet of PVT (Esposito & Fournier, 2023). Coregulation

refers to the mutual regulation of physiological states between two individuals. It is a bidirectional process that connects individuals' nervous systems and allows each to regulate the other. Cues provided between two individuals, picked up and interpreted during neuroception, assist the occurrence of coregulation (Porges, 2022). For example, specific facial expressions and tones of voice used by a mother towards their baby can have the effect of regulating the baby's physiological state. As the baby's physiological state is regulated, it can assist in regulation of the mother's physiological state too.

Considerations of PVT as relevant to EFL are becoming increasingly popular (Castaneda, 2023; Esposito and Fournier, 2023; Kasper, 2021; Rotier and Dickinson, 2024; Schlote, 2017, 2019; Trotter and Baggerly, 2019). References to PVT are particularly common amongst those with a focus on EFL practices and trauma (Castaneda, 2023; Schlote, 2017, 2019); Trotter and Baggerly, 2019). Emphasis is placed on a mutual need for social connection and attachment, and shared stress-regulation mechanisms between horses and humans (Schlote, 2017). Horses are suggested to facilitate the development of safe and supportive environments, and offer humans the experience of safe relationships, whereby the horse is both attuned and responsive to the human (Schlote, 2019; Trotter and Baggerly, 2019). Developed by Sarah Schlote (2019), EQUUSOMA Horse-Human Trauma recovery includes both attachment theory and PVT in its integrated explanation of how equine-facilitated trauma therapy can assist humans. Schlote (2019) posits that a human must experience a safe relationship with a horse first, before exploration of new psychophysiological experiences can occur. Within this relationship, humans can have experiences that raise their awareness of different ANS states, and offer different outcomes as new insights, responses, and regulation skills are developed (Schlote, 2019; Trotter and Baggerly, 2019). For example, in the absence of threat, energy from the ANS when dominated by the sympathetic nervous system may be emotionally experienced as excitement

rather than fear. In the presence of threat, equine-facilitated trauma therapy may offer the opportunity for a human to practice distress tolerance and boundary setting, in turn facilitating development of new beliefs about one's own capacity for distress-tolerance, and skills in keeping oneself safe.

Espasito and Fournier (2023), also included PVT in their work regarding the general field of equine-assisted interventions. They developed a transdiagnostic intervention theory of how change happens in equine-assisted interventions. The theory is called Equine-Assisted Story Transformation (EAST), and PVT was used to explain the physiological domain of humans' experiences during equine-assisted interventions.

While PVT is a popular theory, increasingly so in EFL literature, it has also been subject to critique (Doody et al., 2023; Grossman, 2023). The core assumptions and claims made by PVT have been criticised for both lacking and not aligning with current scientific evidence. For example, an article by Doody et al., (2023) included the argument that PVT's explanation of the ANS of 'social' mammals as an evolution from 'asocial' reptiles is oversimplified and does not acknowledge that social behaviours also occur in reptiles. Furthermore, Grossman (2023) offered a critique of five foundational, physiological premises of PVT, citing current scientific evidence to challenge the accuracy of those premises. Grossman (2023) included the argument that there does not appear to be any scientific literature evidencing the mammalian vagus nerve as being repurposed, to aid socioemotional behaviours. Such critiques are important to consider when engaging with PVT, particularly in context of theories as they relate to EFL. Including popular, pre-existing theories may aid understanding of EFL practices by people both within and outside of the practice. However, integrated EFL theory-building from within the practice is novel. An overreliance on such theories, without consideration and acknowledgement of their limits, could lead to foundational problems in the theoretical basis of EFL practices going forward.

Attachment theory describes the creation of bonds between individuals and considers how individuals make sense of and respond to interactions with others (Holmes, 2014; Mandelbaum, 2021; Vincent & Farkas, 2017). Early attachment theorists suggested that the infant and caregiver relationship is a crucial bond for the infant, rooted in the infant ensuring survival. Early experiences of the infant and caregiver attachment were suggested to impact the infant's interactions and relationships with others as they grow (Holmes, 2014; Mandelbaum, 2021). Attachment theory posits that an infant or child whose caregiver is sensitive to, and consistently meets, their needs is likely to develop a secure attachment style. Consequently, an infant or child whose parent is not sensitive towards their needs, and dismissive or inconsistent in their responses, increases the likelihood that the child will develop an insecure attachment style (Mandelbaum, 2021). Individuals are suggested to develop an internal relational model of themselves and others from which they engage in and make sense of interactions with others as they grow. However, attachment theory indicates that future relationships, including the client and therapist relationship, can provide experiences whereby an individual can develop a new more secure sense of self (Bachi, 2013; Mandelbaum, 2021).

Attachment theory is one of the theories most often considered in relation to EFL practices (Bachi, 2012, 2013; Burgon et al., 2018; Dell et al., 2011; Hallberg, 2018; Siporin, 2012; Vincent & Farkas, 2017). Bachi (2013), considered how core components of equine facilitated psychotherapy aligned with core concepts of attachment-based psychotherapy (ABP). Equine facilitated psychotherapy emphasises the importance of the client and horse relationship and credits horses as sentient facilitators who provide feedback that human facilitators can use to bring the unconscious to the fore, often through use of metaphor (Bachi, 2012, 2013; Brandt, 2013; Hallberg, 2018). Bachi (2013) suggested that in equine facilitated psychotherapy horses can enhance therapeutic processes through the multi-faceted

responses that they prompt in clients (i.e., emotions, cognitions, and behaviours). Those responses could then be used to facilitate therapeutic processes relevant to attachment theory.

Regarding specific concepts of ABP, Bachi (2013) indicated that equine facilitated psychotherapy can offer a 'secure base' and 'haven of safety'. For an individual to explore emotionally difficult relational experiences they require a secure base to start from (Holmes, 2014; Mandelbaum, 2021) which, during therapeutic interventions, can be offered through a 'holding environment' (Mandelbaum, 2021): a setting in which trust and safety exist. A horse's back (when mounted by the client), the physical stable and surroundings in which the practice takes place, and horses' general acceptance and lack of judgements were all noted to foster a holding environment from which the client could explore (Bachi, 2013). Additionally, a horse's tendency to mirror behaviours and emotions were noted as valuable to the ABP concept of affect mirroring: whereby a client's state is outwardly reflected by their therapist and which in turn allows opportunity for the client to be seen and see themselves, in turn securing the secure base. 'Mentalising and reflective functioning', which could be used in therapy to increase clients' awareness of and apt responses to others' signals and emotional requirements, was also considered. Opportunities for clients to care for horses through activities such as grooming were described as having capacity to foster clients' explorations of how 'others' feel. Finally, a focus on the body as crucial to the experiencing of emotions (including within attachment-related emotional experiences), was suggested as supported through the focus on non-verbal communication and experiences of the body in equine facilitated psychotherapy. Bachi (2013) concluded that core concepts of attachment theory aligned well with core features of EFP and encouraged further exploration into the application of attachment theory and EFP.

Vincent and Farkas (2017), responded to the call for further application of attachment theory to what they termed equine facilitated therapy. They suggested that attachment theory

could be applied to the bond between client and horse during equine facilitated therapy, and to their relationship as a therapeutic intervention. Through their non-judgemental natures and offerings of unconditional support, horses were described as exhibiting features aligned with those required to develop a secure attachment in infancy (Holmes, 2014; Mandelbaum, 2021; Vincent & Farkas, 2017). Furthermore, Vincent and Farkas (2017) put forth that components such as the safety afforded by the physical environment, shared experiences, and skill development opportunities all foster the development of resiliency, a key feature of attachment. Another component of attachment theory, transitional object theory, was described as applicable due to the client-horse relationship becoming representative of previous struggles the client has experienced. Through the safe and supportive environment fostered by the horse and human clinician, equine facilitated therapy was suggested as able to assist clients to overcome the effects of previous difficult experiences. Finally, referring to the 'holding theory' they reported that horses could function as a being for safe physical contact and that the difference in size between client and horse could mirror the size difference between infant and caregiver.

Törmälehto and Korkiamäki (2020) utilised attachment theory in their study exploring whether contact with horses could develop attachment bonds, and whether such bonds could influence the motivation of adolescents in professional care. Nine adolescents, aged 16 through 17 years, participated in a short intervention session based on the Equine Assisted Social Emotional Learning (EASEL) method (Louhi-Lehtiö, 2012). The EASEL method promotes interactions with horses at liberty (without tools such as lead ropes), with overall aims being to increase clients' social and emotional skills through increasing factors such as client self-awareness. In line with EASEL methods, the session consisted of participants observing two paddocks of horses for 10 minutes each, before being given the option to enter the paddocks one at a time and move closer to the horses. Most participants elected to enter

the paddocks, and the individual time spent by all participants totaled approximately 30 minutes. Discussions had during the observation period and post session were recorded, and data-driven coding and theory-driven thematisation were completed during the data analysis stage. Results indicated that even interactions of short duration between horses and adolescents may activate attachment bonds that include four features of an attachment relationship: safe haven, secure base, proximity maintenance, and separation distress. These results support a finding from an earlier study completed by Dunlop and Tsantefski (2018), which indicated that for children experiencing parental substance abuse, horses can resemble features of secure attachment figures.

Currently, no research appears to link Māori conceptualisations of attachment and EFL. Both Māori and Western theories of attachment promote safe and consistent care from adults towards children (Fleming, 2018). However, they also differ, with Māori cultural perspectives emphasising more holistic conceptualisations (Fleming, 2018; Mikahere-hall, 2020). These differences are important to consider as they may enhance understanding of attachment within EFL. Researchers have emphasised the importance of multi-caregiving within Māori culture. A child's attachment bonds, and important connections, extend wider than their immediate caregivers, to include members of their whānau (extended family), hapū (made up of multiple whānau) and iwi (made up of multiple hapū) (Fleming, 2018; Mikahere-Hall, 2020). Children are considered able to build secure bonds and connections equally amongst multiple whānau members, with the nature of each bond developed through their interpersonal interactions (Mikahere-Hall, 2020). This perspective negates the idea of an attachment hierarchy that places the parent and child bond at the top. Furthermore, emphasis is placed on extrapersonal connections, with wairua a nuanced and core concept that, put simply, speaks to a state of connection between Māori and all elements of existence (both physical and metaphysical) (Fleming, 2018; Valentine, 2016). Connection to Whenua (land)

and Māramatanga (understandings, insights) of Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) are included in this holistic understanding of attachment, with all influencing and impacting a person's sense of self and their wellbeing (Fleming, 2018). The above is a brief description of some of the important components of the holistic, multi-layered, and intricate understandings of attachment offered by Māori. To engage in the complexity and interconnectedness of these concepts at a deeper level, I would recommend reading the original works cited above as a start.

Despite relating a range of theories to EFL practices, a clear consensus of theoretical applications has not yet been reached in the literature. This is likely impacted by many factors, including the plethora of theories available and the wide variety in current EFL services. Researchers and academics consistently note the need for further focus on theory application and building within EFL practices (Hallberg, 2018; Vincent & Farkas, 2017).

Acknowledging the theoretical gap, O'Hanlon (2021) used a grounded theory approach to study the role of horse-human interactions within equine assisted therapy/learning. She focused on the practice as it serves disadvantaged young people and interviewed clients and staff to gain their insights. The second of her three-part doctoral thesis appears to be the first of its kind to use grounded theory with the aim of building theory regarding the role of horse and human interactions within this practice. Her results proposed a holistic framework and tentative theory in which learning processes occurred within a process of connecting. Horse and human interactions were theorised to create a space in which clients felt safe enough to 'try something different'. Themes such as being part of a social sanctuary, connecting with my body, connecting with horses, and connecting with other people assisted clients' experiences and development in many ways. These included increasing their feelings of safety, their willingness to try different ways of interacting, and their skill development in the areas of communicating and perspective-taking. Ultimately, horse and human interactions

during equine assisted therapy/learning increased the clients' autonomy and confidence, facilitating development of a 'valued identity' by 'telling a different story to that which the client entered the practice with'. O'Hanlon (2021) recommended that future researchers continue to focus on theory building and increasing the variety of populations studied. It was posited that this would aid meaningful comparisons across research projects and participant groups. Additionally, a need for both data relating to negative experiences of the practice and of the specific role of the horse within the practice was indicated.

EFL Research in Aotearoa New Zealand

Although mentioned as a therapeutic treatment modality in some research (Horn, 2021; Walker et al., 2015), studies specifically focusing on EFL within an Aotearoa New Zealand context are currently limited. However, a handful do exist and, as with international research, they vary in their focus, methods, and sample populations (Lawson, 2016; Lietz & Napan, 2020; Rance, 2016; Tipton, 2014). Both participant and human facilitators' perspectives have been studied, with the focus of research including perspectives of what makes EFL effective, the outcomes of EFL work, and how EFL can be beneficial for specific purposes in specific disciplines such as post traumatic growth and the social work discipline.

For her Master's thesis, Rance (2016) completed a project that focused on one case study exploring the perspective of the human facilitator, and three case studies exploring the perspectives of three women's experiences of equine facilitated psychotherapy. A photo-voice method of analysis was utilised, by which her participants were able to take photos, or have photos taken of them and important aspects of their experiences. Following this the participants selected their most important photos and discussed their choices in an interview. From these interviews, the most important participant-identified aspects of equine facilitated psychotherapy were constructed into themes. The themes included embodiment, relationships with horses, spirituality, metaphor, and safety. While this study was novel in its consideration

of participants' perspectives of crucial aspects of the practice, the participants were limited to females and did not include any participants who were indigenous to Aotearoa New Zealand. Additionally, although it did give participants a voice to contribute ideas around what makes the practice so effective, the chosen method of analysis did not specifically contribute towards the building of theory. By utilising a method and methodology that intentionally lends itself to theory building, the views of participants could move from ideas through to theoretical concepts.

Lawson (2016) also completed a Master's thesis, studying the practice of what she termed equine assisted psychotherapy. The study involved two participants and interviews were conducted following participation in a course of equine assisted psychotherapy. The interviews focused on how each participant was affected by their experience, and the study employed an interpretive phenomenological method of analysis. From this study, key outcomes included the participants experiencing a transformation into what they considered to be new versions of themselves. They considered themselves to have new ways of thinking and being within the world. Also, of note within this analysis was that the participants considered the experience occurring in natural settings (outdoors), and the spiritual connections that they felt with the horses, to be important aspects in making the therapy valuable. As with the research conducted by Rance (2016), Lawson's (2016) inclusion of participants' perspectives of the equine assisted psychotherapy practice that were most valuable therapeutically is a largely under-addressed component. However, once again, the participant pool was small, consisting of only two participants. While the role of qualitative research is not necessarily to produce generalisable findings, further studies with increased participant numbers may allow for comparison over time and context.

Both Tipton (2014) and Lietz and Napan (2020) focused on the perspectives of the human facilitators in their studies into practices of equine assisted therapy and equine assisted

interventions. Tipton (2014) interviewed four facilitators (two practicing under equine assisted psychotherapy, and two practicing under equine assisted counselling) on their perspectives around the benefits of, equine assisted therapy. The aim of this research was to gain a better understanding of why equine assisted therapy was not considered a viable mainstream therapeutic treatment option. Following the interviews, a thematic analysis was completed. The results highlighted that from these practitioners' perspectives, practitioner safety was the biggest barrier to having this treatment modality move into a mainstream therapeutic modality. Practitioners spoke about feeling alone in the work that they do and being under-supported in therapeutic and legal senses. They also spoke about a lack of practice regulations and ethical guidelines in Aotearoa New Zealand, that could protect them as practitioners.

Lietz and Napan (2020) also chose to focus on human facilitator perspectives, completing a thematic analysis of four semi-structured interviews with practitioners of equine assisted interventions. The aim of the study was to explore equine assisted interventions in relation to complex-trauma, and the perceived benefits that it could bring to clients who sit within a complex-trauma population. Furthermore, the study aimed to explore this topic's relevance to the field of social work. Following the thematic analysis, crucial components of equine assisted interventions, as perceived by these facilitators and which were relevant to social work included: client centred and strength-focused approaches, the viewing of client interactions through a 'post traumatic growth' lens, and fundamental principles of ethics such as integrity, autonomy, and respect. By completing research that relates equine assisted interventions to principles of social work, Lietz and Napan (2020) have helped increase evidence of equine assisted interventions as a viable modality within the specific discipline of social work. This research is therefore helpful in promoting EFL practices to a discipline that emphasises the importance of the mental health of clients.

As outlined above, despite being limited in numbers, EFL research within Aotearoa New Zealand has been completed in a variety of ways. From facilitators to participants, research has considered an array of perspectives, with different overall aims. However, currently the EFL research that has been completed in Aotearoa New Zealand consists of small sample sizes and lacks variety in participant populations. Future EFL research could include a wider variety of participants and methodologies. For example, projects could include clinical or indigenous populations and be completed within a kaupapa Māori framework (by, with, and for Māori) (Wilson et al., 2022). Additionally, while participant perspectives regarding how EFL is effective is less often considered internationally, no Aotearoa New Zealand study appears to have focused on methods that specifically build a foundation for theory development. In the future, additional methods of analysis, such as grounded theory, may be a useful inclusion.

Horses as Facilitators

Connection between horses and humans in any moment means that relational positions are automatically assumed. Factors such as the attitudes, beliefs, and actions of those participating contribute to the varying nature of each connection. In the practice of EFL, and other equine-related professions, different ontological positions are assumed by the humans, as they present different ways of being together. Similarly, researchers have assumed different ontological positions when studying these professions. Horses as beings in and of themselves, and as components of the profession, are conceptualised in different ways. Understanding these conceptualisations and developing an ethical position is crucial when engaging in EFL, or any situation involving connection between human and non-human beings. This is to help ensure healthy relationships are formed and to avoid the benefit of one, at the detriment of another (Fine & Andersen, 2021; Fine & Peralta, 2021). Below, various conceptualisations will be considered, along with previous research into the wellbeing of

non-human animals in human healthcare (Ferlazzo et al., 2023; Fine & Andersen, 2021; Maujean et al., 2015; Merkies et al., 2018; Veganfest, 2017; Wilson et al., 2017). It should be noted that this section does not attempt to provide objective conclusions as to how horses and humans should be in relation with one another. Nor does it attempt to provide objective conclusions to any ethical dilemmas that occur when two species engage in a working or other type of relationship. Rather this section seeks to critically ponder these concepts, acknowledging that only subjective positions, albeit with differing consequences for those involved, can ever be reached. Furthermore, animal welfare and ethics within an Aotearoa New Zealand context will be considered (SPCA New Zealand 2020; Walker & Tumilty, 2019).

A common conceptualisation in previous EFL research is the framing of the horses involved in EFL as ‘tools’ (Maujean et al., 2013; Schultz et al., 2007; Snowshoe & Starblanket, 2016; Wilson et al., 2017), that can be used to benefit the wellbeing of human clients when necessary (Chardonnens, 2009). The conceptualisation of a horse as a tool assumes an anthropocentric stance, disregarding the sentience of the horses and the active and crucial part that they play in EFL practices. Instead, the use of the word ‘tool’ frames the horse as an object. Whether intentionally or not, this wording may encourage readers to assume ethical positions that ignore important components of equine wellbeing that are related to their sentience (such as their capacity to feel stress and social isolation [Wiśniewska et al., 2022]).

Therapeutic riding is another example of a practice that brings horses and humans together, with aims of enhancing human wellbeing (McDuffee et al., 2022). The practice aims to provide benefits in a variety of domains, such as physical and psycho-social, through participation in horseback riding (McDuffee et al., 2022; Watson et al., 2020). Literature consistently describes how horses are 'used’ in therapeutic riding, to achieve benefits to their

human riders (DeBose, 2015; McDuffee et al., 2022; Shree and Nithya, 2023; Watson et al., 2020). Similar to the word ‘tool’, the idea of ‘using’ a horse may encourage the adoption of unhelpful and unethical attitudes towards horses in the future. It is also possible that the current conceptualisation of how horses can be ‘used’ for human benefit within therapeutic riding, may reflect the current experiential reality for horses included in the practice. For horses, the lived experience of being ‘tools’ that can be ‘used’ to benefit humans would likely reduce their autonomy and fail to acknowledge their sentience. Although basic needs such as housing, feeding, and healthcare would be essential to some degree, their lives may not be enriched far beyond that. This could mean that emotional needs are left untouched and that their neglect and/or abuse would serve as the cost for human needs and wants.

Another perspective regarding equine participation in this work is that the exploitation of horses occurs in any interaction where a domesticated horse functions to meet the emotional or therapeutic needs of humans (Veganfest, 2017; Zamir, 2006). Assuming this position, it is considered that through domestication a co-dependent relationship is formed in which an imbalance of power exists. Therefore, even if an individual is not riding a horse or engaging with them in traditional western ways, that horse cannot truly consent while in relationship with humans because they are dependent on them. To avoid ongoing exploitation, humans should remove any form of control (aside from provision of basic survival needs), including interaction that serves a predetermined agenda or emotional need of the humans (whether conscious or subconscious) (Hurst, 2015; Veganfest, 2017). At first glance, this perspective may appear at the opposite end of the ‘horses as tools’ viewpoint. However, it is possible that the two are not so far apart. Whether assuming that a horse is a ‘useful tool’ (Maujean et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2017), or believing that exploitation occurs in any horse and human interaction where a human hopes or expects a need to be met (Veganfest, 2017), a position is taken that neglects to acknowledge the sentience and

autonomy of the horse. In other words, conceptualising ‘horse-as-victim to human need’ assumes the same passive non-agentive position as ‘horse-as-tool for human desire’ does.

When thinking about non-human animal and human interactions, an important question is, what is in it for the non-human animal? What would motivate a non-human animal to engage in various daily interactions, and in the ways in which they do? Some answers to the question appear more obvious than others. Domestication has ensured that some non-human animals have become reliant on humans for their basic needs. By engaging in civil and obedient relationships with humans, non-human animals can help ensure that they remain fed and housed. Staying obedient and abiding by the rules set by their human also means that they are less likely to come under any harsh punishment that may be inflicted by a frustrated or angry human. Horses competed in traditional riding competitions such as eventing or rodeo, provide obvious examples of motivations that a non-human animal may have for choosing obedience. To illustrate, by moving forward after a slight squeeze from human calves, a horse can avoid the use of spurs or whips as the human endeavours to achieve their agenda. By keeping soft to the contact of a humans’ hands on the reigns, a horse can avoid harsh pulling of a bit inside their mouth, or the addition of more severe equipment, again used to have the horse meet the agenda of the human.

However, not all interactions between human and non-human animals seem so obvious in motivation. Hans the clever horse, provides an example of this (Despret, 2004). During the experiments in which Hans was tested and re-tested, by answering questions with different questioners, it was shown that Hans was not only able to read the minute behaviours of the questioners but was also able to influence their behaviours. Hans could train ‘bad questioners’ (ones he could not read), into ‘good questioners’ (ones who would now signal the answers to him, in the way in which he understood). This brings up not only the question of how, but why. Why did Hans take the time to influence these questioners to become better

at interacting with him? Hans had already proven his talents over and over and had been questioned by many. Were he not able to answer the questions asked of him, there was no apparent negative consequence. Hans did not rely on answering every question to have his basic needs met, nor was he in any obvious danger for not being able to read somebody. Rather, it was more likely that the 'bad questioner' would be swapped out for another. Seemingly, there were more complicated motivations for Hans around why he bothered to influence the behaviours of the questioners. Perhaps he was genuinely invested in the connections he was making with his questioners, and possibly enjoyed his role of teacher and communicator throughout those interactions. Hans (and elsewhere possibly other non-human animals) may have experienced nuanced positive effects of reciprocal engagement with humans.

Over the past decade, increased attention has been given to the impact of equine assisted services on the horses who are involved (Ferlazzo et al., 2023; Hallberg, 2018; Kelly et al., 2021; Merkies et al., 2018). The research adds to a larger body of literature on the welfare of non-human animals in human healthcare (Fine & Peralta, 2021) and is weighted more towards horses involved in therapeutic riding programmes. Behavioural, physiological, and biochemical markers are commonly measured to determine the stress levels of the horses (Ferlazzo et al., 2023).

Merkies et al. (2018) completed a study that used cortisol levels, heart-rate monitoring and behavioural markers to explore differences in horses' responses to individuals diagnosed with PTSD comparative to a control group. Their results indicated that differences in horses' responses related to the participants' overall experience levels with horses, and not to whether they had PTSD. For example, in both participant groups the horses' heart rates were significantly lower when in the presence of inexperienced participants. Mierkies et al., (2018) suggested that this may be due to mannerisms displayed by horse-experienced participants,

that increased horses' attention because of the meaning the horse made of the mannerism. For example, based on a horse's past experiences, certain behaviours displayed by a horse experienced individual may suggest to the horse that they are about to be ridden. Overall, findings from this study concluded that the horses seemed more responsive to physical cues from human participants, as opposed to participants' mental or emotional needs. These findings are significant to consider within EFL for multiple reasons. Firstly, they may influence the sense a human facilitator makes of a horse's behaviours during sessions. Secondly, they suggest that a horse's experience of a session may be influenced by the participants' prior experience levels. Knowing this, human facilitators may avoid placing unrealistic expectations on horses during sessions, such as regarding their role. Furthermore, they could intentionally adapt their sessions to minimise stress to the horses.

Currently in Aotearoa New Zealand there are no specific ethical codes regarding the inclusion of non-human animals involved in human healthcare. However, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) has developed a certification programme to identify farming and pet-care businesses whose welfare practices meet a certain standard (SPCA New Zealand 2020). The standards acknowledge the globally recognised five freedoms (David, 2016), but are encapsulated by five domains: nutrition, physical environment, health, behavioural interactions, and mental state. A key intent of the five domains model is to increase consideration of the animals' emotional needs. This focus aligns with the recognition of non-human animals as sentient within Aotearoa New Zealand's current Animal Welfare legislation (SPCA New Zealand 2020). Although the SPCA does not presently offer certification for businesses that involve non-human animals within human healthcare, their model may be useful in considering the welfare of those animals.

Walker and Tumilty (2019) interviewed social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand to discuss the ethical frameworks regarding non-human animals' involvement in animal-assisted

social services. They argued for the need to develop ethical codes as opposed to welfare codes, suggesting that welfare codes tend to require a bare-minimum whereas ethical codes tend to use values and principles as foundations for future actions. Additionally, they noted the need for any developed codes to consider the breadth of non-human animals involved in these practices, and the variety of environments in which they occur.

More recently, Woodhouse (2021) completed a study exploring the link between animal welfare and Māori values, considering how the findings could be incorporated into Aotearoa New Zealand animal welfare policies. Key components of welfare included: kaitiakitanga as a way of thinking and acting that values the importance of the natural environment, and spiritual connections to, and the mauri (vital energy) of, land and non-human animals. Interconnectedness and mutual influence appeared to be an important thread throughout the findings. For example, within kaitiakitanga was the idea of a mutually beneficial connection between humans, non-human animals, and land. Woodhouse (2021) posited that the findings spoke more to animal ethics than animal welfare, appearing to place less priority on what a 'good life' may look like, from a specific animal's perspective. The importance of the spiritual world and mauri was emphasised as lacking in western approaches. Therefore, revision of current ways of thinking about non-human animal welfare in Aotearoa New Zealand was suggested as important.

When thinking about horses who facilitate EFL practices, I think it is important to consistently be reflective in our approach and to ask ourselves questions that encourage us to consider the horses' roles in this work, how the work affects their lives, and whether they can ever really have autonomy to engage (or not) in this work. Research that asks the question 'what is in it for the horses?', considers the impacts of EFL on horses, and explores ethical frameworks, would all be useful in advancing this discussion. From a facilitatory perspective it also seems important that each horse is considered not only as a herd member but also as

individual, and therefore to have distinct needs from other members of the herd. Being reflective in practice will increase the opportunity to be aware of each horse's personality as well as potential changes each horse may go through at different times of their life. While having processes in place to allow a horse autonomy is ideal, ongoing reflection by facilitators can help increase the likelihood of recognising when a horse may not be fulfilled by the work they are doing, or simply may not want to do it at all.

Throughout the research process I endeavoured to be as reflexive and honest as possible while considering the horses' roles in their EFL work, and within the project. The facility that the project took place at has processes to promote choice for horses as to whether they participate in EFL. Having facilitated at the service I had an understanding of the care surrounding the horses involved in the project and the efforts put in to ensure their communications were heard and respected. I endeavoured to weave the ethos of the facility into the write-up of the project, aligning my real life understanding to the written conceptualisation. I aimed to avoid ever positioning the horses as tools, while also avoiding helicoptering over them and disregarding their sentience and ability to understand and choose this work. Through ongoing reflection, I aimed to acknowledge the dynamic ethical tensions related to this practice and respectfully attend to them as they shifted and played-out in real life.

Summary

As detailed in this chapter, non-human animals have been included in human healthcare practices in a variety of ways throughout history (Serpell, 2010). EFL practices represent a break-away from companion animal models of AAT and AAI, and have been evidenced as beneficial to the wellbeing of various populations, in various ways (Burton et al., 2019; Romaniuk et al., 2018; Schroeder & Stroud, 2015; Wharton et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2017). However, current literature lacks a strong theoretical foundation for EFL practices

(Hallberg, 2018; O'Hanlon, 2021). The current study aimed to contribute to the theoretical foundations of EFL through completion of a grounded theory study exploring the processes that occur between client and horse during EFL, that make the practice impactful and effective, from clients' perspectives.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

As evidenced in the literature above, there are a range of studies exploring the perspectives of various populations and the impacts of EFL on those populations (Burgon et al., 2018; Ferlazzo et al., 2023; Hallberg, 2018; Lietz, 2018; Romaniuk et al., 2018). There are also a range of theories and models that have been applied to EFL and the horse and human dyad involved in EFL work (Bachi, 2012, 2013; Lee et al., 2016; O'Hanlon, 2021; Vincent & Farkas, 2017). In seeking to understand the meaning clients make of their experiences and interactions with horses during EFL and, in turn, their perspectives of important occurrences during horse and human interactions, I used an informed grounded theory (GT) methodology. Informed GT is an addition to constructivist GT, rooted in social constructionism, relativist ontology and pragmatist epistemology. This chapter will outline GT methodology, focusing largely on informed and constructivist GT. Explanation will be provided as to how informed GT methodology guided my approach to the design and creation of this research. A conceptualisation of EFL from the perspective of the director of the EFL facility used in this study will then be summarised. The research design and the GT methods used throughout this project will also be outlined, followed by a summary of the ethical considerations regarding this project.

Grounded Theory Methodology

Grounded Theory is a qualitative research approach that seeks to study phenomena in an exploratory way, aiming to produce middle-range theory (theory that is produced using both empirical data and abstractive analysis, bound by context, and which can be used to explain concepts and their relationships with each other [Kaidesoja, 2019; Sohlberg, 2017]) or theoretical concepts that are grounded in the research data (Flick, 2018; Milliken, 2010). GT has been suggested as an appropriate approach for researchers aiming to explore social processes in areas where little prior theorising has occurred and who do not have rigid

expectations of following a fixed set of methodological rules (Flick, 2018; Morse, 2016). GT was deemed an appropriate approach to this project, which aimed to build theory in relation to the processes occurring between clients and horses during EFL by exploring the lesser studied perspectives of human clients. Additionally, at the time of conducting this research, it appeared to be only the second of its kind to explore this phenomenon with the aim of building theory. Moreover, it appeared to be the first of its kind to do this with a focus on adult EFL clients and within the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Novel data was bound to be constructed and a research approach without fixed methodological rules allowed for flexibility in my responses to, and use of, this data. GT approaches have developed and diversified as the methodology has become increasingly popular with researchers across various disciplines (Flick, 2018; Charmaz, 2015; Morse, 2016; Morse et al., 2021; Thelimus; 2022; Thornberg, 2012). Below, a brief summary of the development and foundations of GT is provided.

Classic Grounded Theory

Glaser and Strauss (1967) initially developed GT as a qualitative methodology that allowed theory to emerge from data, using an inductive method of analysis (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012; Themelis et al., 2022; Thornberg, 2012). Differing career paths led to Glaser and Strauss taking different positions on the development of the original GT. Original GT, and the developments later made by Glasser, are widely known as classic GT (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012; Charmaz, 2015; Thornberg, 2012). Classic GT advocates for the postponing of a literature review in the research area, so that the researcher can enter the data collection and analysis process without any predetermined hypotheses (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2015; Themelis et al., 2022). By avoiding any prior knowledge of the topic of inquiry, classic GT believes that the researcher is kept as open as possible to discovery and is able to avoid forcing data to fit within current theory. The classic GT position argues that by doing so, the

researcher will produce theory that is grounded in the real world, and the experiences of those living in it (Thornberg, 2012). However, more recent considerations of GT methodology have critiqued elements of the classic GT approach, including for example, that classic GT does not appropriately acknowledge the researcher's influence on the research process and findings. Critiques of classic GT, and proposed alternatives, has led to many variations of GT methodology, all of which share perspectives that include constant comparison of data and ongoing data collection and analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015; Bryant & Charmaz, 2012; Charmaz, 2015; Themelis et al., 2022; Thornberg, 2012). However, they differ in their approaches to literature reviews, epistemological and ontological stances, and perspectives of analytic methods (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2015; Morse et al., 2021; Themelis et al., 2022).

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Constructivist GT is a flexible and interactive approach to research that uses inductive and abductive strategies for conducting and constructing research (Charmaz, 2015). Often underpinned by relativist ontology and pragmatist epistemology, constructivist GT builds on social constructionism, acknowledging that theories are not discovered through the data, but rather constructed (Charmaz, 2015; Mills et al., 2006; Morse et al., 2021). This take on grounded theory acknowledges that the researcher brings with them their own personal subjectivities that relate to their own experiences of and within the world. These subjectivities then impact the way the researcher interacts with the research process, participants, and data. In turn the theories that represent an external reality, are constructed by the researcher, the participants, and the interactions between them (Charmaz, 2015; Gehtmane-Hofmane, 2019). This version of GT does not claim one inherent truth or reality, waiting to be discovered, but instead acknowledges the presence of multiple realities, and that there can be multiple perspectives of these realities (Morse et al., 2021). In regard to prior knowledge, and the

presence of a literature review, constructivist grounded theorists advocate for both . The notion of being able to avoid having preconceived hypotheses is rejected as impossible, due to the essence of being human and constantly experiencing the ever-evolving social world (Charmaz, 2015). Instead, reflexivity is encouraged. The researcher should work to be reflexive throughout the entire research process, acknowledging their subjectivities, theoretical preconceptions, and assumptions (Gehtmane-Hofmane, 2019). Furthermore, the researcher should carefully consider the impact of such factors on all components of the research process such as data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2015; Morse et al., 2021; Thornberg, 2012).

Informed Grounded Theory

Informed GT sits within the constructivist GT spectrum, contributing to literature review approaches and including deduction within the analytic rationale (Themelis et al., 2022; Thornberg, 2012). Informed GT rejects some realist notions of classic GT. Of particular note is the informed GT view that prior knowledge of literature and theories relating to the studied topic can be helpful rather than a hinderance. Informed GT points out six potential problems and impracticalities (Thornberg, 2012). Firstly, avoiding prior knowledge would mean that researchers could not complete research within their area of expertise, as it would be impossible for them to unacquire knowledge. Secondly, this argument could be used as a justification for ignoring current literature, which may in turn cause problems in the form of ‘atheoretical’ allegations (Morse, 1994). Thirdly, researchers are not likely to stop reading literature all together. This then means that they would be likely to read research that differs from their area of enquiry. This may cause problems following analysis, as the researcher may become limited in potential future research fields due to their new knowledge. Fourth, researchers often have to provide research proposals in advance of funding or ethics reviews, and therefore must begin reading literature before data collection and analysis can occur

(Dunne, 2011; Hallberg, 2010). Fifth, if researchers are uninformed on reputable theories, then what may appear as an entirely new theory could in fact signal their own unfamiliarity with current literature (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012). Sixth, lack of reading in order to avoid researcher contamination is too extreme a position and underestimates the abilities of researchers to understand and appreciate theories without allowing them to overtake the data (Thornberg, 2012). Recognising these six problems, informed GT instead advocates for a researcher's prior knowledge, and aligns itself more closely to constructivist GT approaches (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012; Charmaz, 2015; Themelis et al., 2022). In order to strategically use prior knowledge and a written literature review, informed GT calls on influences from the domains of qualitative research and the philosophy of science (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012; Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003), as well as arguments from Robert Thornberg (Thornberg, 2012), who coined the term informed GT. The resulting arguments suggest strategies for data-sensitising that avoid the researcher becoming too fixated on current theory, but also from disregarding current theory in pursuit of theoretical breakthrough. Data-sensitising strategies will be outlined later in this section but first an informed GT rationale for theory building approaches and achieving analytical power will be summarised.

As noted above, informed GT advocates for prior knowledge and early writing of a literature review (Themelis et al., 2022; Thornberg, 2012). It argues for a continual interplay between data and literature. Each can inform the other, and as research progresses, analysis can be supported by already established theories. Similarly, the content and shape of a literature review can be informed by analysis reported in the data. A researcher may choose to build on a certain literature point, and add pre-existing perspectives into their literature review, should the data speak to it. As long as the researcher does not get fixated on pre-existing theories, and enter a process of forcing data, prior knowledge and a pre-written literature review are considered useful tools in aiding analysis and theory building (Themelis

et al., 2022; Thornberg, 2012). Rather than believing in and attempting to engage in a pure inductive process, the researcher is encouraged to recognise the constant interaction of deduction, induction (in which they will never be completely naïve) and abduction (Themelis et al., 2022; Thornberg, 2012). In regard to research, the terms ‘deduction’, ‘induction’, and ‘abduction’ are often split between quantitative and qualitative research, with quantitative research being deemed ‘deductive’ and qualitative ‘inductive/abductive’. However, differing understandings of and approaches to these terms have developed within scientific research (Hammersley, 2023). Ultimately, each term stems from the Latin word ‘ducere’ which means ‘to lead’ and in general they can signal how a researcher may engage with data and research processes, developing certain conclusions or explanations through their approach (Agterberg, 2020; Hammersley, 2023).

With a prefix of ‘de’ meaning ‘from’, deduction can indicate conclusions derived from consideration of facts or commonly accepted arguments (Agterberg, 2020; Hammersley, 2023). Within informed GT, deduction can be used in consideration of pre-existing literature, including to assist with formation of a research question (Themelis et al., 2022). For example, within this project deduction was used to identify the theoretical gaps in EFL literature and emphasise the value of horses from EFL clients’ perspectives. Hence, it informed development of a research question seeking EFL clients’ perspectives on processes occurring between human and horse during EFL.

With a prefix of ‘in’ meaning ‘toward’, induction can indicate reaching generalised conclusions that are inferred from specific occurrences (Agterberg, 2020; Hammersley, 2023). Within informed GT induction can occur through the researcher’s continuous interpretation of constructed data, such as interview transcripts, and the ongoing researcher interactions with and analysis of the data. Indeed, this was true for the current study and the specific analytic tools used are outlined in the method section of this chapter.

With a prefix of ‘ab’ meaning ‘away’, abduction can refer to a researcher’s process of considering various hypotheses to select the best possible explanation of data (Agterberg, 2020; Hammersley, 2023; Themelis et al., 2022). Within informed GT analytical power is considered in combining open-mindedness to discovery and the ability to draw abductive interpretations (based on the researcher having enough prior knowledge), while also disregarding inflexible, rigid beliefs. Abductive thinking and analysis were aided within this research through strategies such as memo writing, theoretical coding, and diagramming. These analytic tools are outlined in the method section of this chapter.

Thornberg (2012) suggests seven strategies from qualitative and philosophical science fields, in order for a researcher to sensitise themselves to data, in turn ensuring their data holds information power: Theoretical agnosticism (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003), theoretical pluralism (Kelle, 2007; Thornberg, 2012), theoretical sampling of literature (Thornberg, 2012), staying grounded (Hallberg, 2010; Thornberg, 2012), theoretical playfulness (Charmaz, 2014), memoing extant knowledge associations (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012), and constant reflexivity (Birks & Mills, 2015; Thornberg, 2012). Theoretical agnosticism encourages the researcher to remain critical while engaging in literature reviewing, not tying themselves to any particular theoretical stance. By remaining critical of prior research, the researcher can determine which elements of prior theories are important and useful, as well as which should be discarded. This in turn means that prior research may be helpful in guiding the researcher towards important components of their data, while also keeping them free enough to explore new avenues (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003; Thornburn, 2012).

Theoretical pluralism was suggested by Kelle (2007) as a way of avoiding the forcing of data into certain prior theories or concepts, while ignoring others that may better align with the data collected. Thornberg (2012) suggests using theoretical pluralism as a way of understanding the limitations of prior theories, and for correcting and building upon their

lines of reasoning. From this view, opposing perspectives are recognised as necessary for enhancing understanding. All information is viewed with the recognition that knowledge is socially and contextually bound, and therefore needs to be revised and re-constructed on a continual basis.

Theoretical sampling of literature suggests that the researcher uses prior knowledge and theory to build their own theoretical sensitivity and the ability of the current study to connect with and add to prior knowledge. The researcher is encouraged to theoretically sample literature as they would data. This means that as the researcher builds their analysis the data speaks back to the literature review through the researcher seeking and including relevant pre-existing literature (Thornberg, 2012).

Staying grounded refers to the researcher's acknowledgement and understanding that their focus should always be on current data. Every theoretical concept constructed should always be based in the current study's data, and no data should be forced to fit into pre-existing concepts (Hallberg, 2010; Thornberg, 2012).

Theoretical playfulness refers to the creative component of qualitative research (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher must be imaginative and free-thinking, remaining open to unexpected information and ideas. When theoretical playfulness is combined with other strategies such as theoretical agnosticism and staying grounded, new meaning and connection making can occur (Patton, 2015).

Memoing extant knowledge associations refers to memo writing completed by the researcher that aligns with more classic GT recommendations of having complete freedom during the development of ideas and theoretical concepts, by utilising prior knowledge in a flexible, imaginative, and adaptable way (Birks & Mills, 2015; Thornberg, 2012).

Constant reflexivity is the final of the seven strategies drawn upon by Thornberg

(2012) and refers to the engagement of the researcher in reflexive processes throughout the study. The researcher is required to acknowledge the subjectivities that they bring with them to the research process, in turn gaining enhanced understanding of the lenses through which the data has been analysed (Birks & Mills, 2015). Using memoing in a reflexive way will also help the researcher to uphold other data sensitising strategies, such as theoretical agnosticism (Thornberg, 2012).

In designing and conducting this research project I employed an informed GT methodology, considering it as part of the constructivist GT family, not a separate reconsideration of GT. The philosophical roots of informed GT, that echo constructivist GT's social constructionist paradigm, relativist ontology and pragmatist epistemology (Charmaz, 2015; Morse et al., 2021; Themelis et al., 2022), served as the foundation of my approach to the entire research process. These foundations encouraged me to acknowledge the possibility of multiple truths and realities that are fluid and co-constructed through interactions between myself and my participants. They were considered as situated within time and context, and tied up in history, culture, and individual experiences. Additionally, while the analysis is grounded in co-constructed data, it was also informed by my interactions with pre-existing literature and written through subjectivities that I as a researcher brought to the process.

Practically, tenets of informed GT methodology influenced my approach in many ways. The encouragement of early researcher engagement with pre-existing literature and an explorative stance towards knowledge (Charmaz, 2015; Morse et al., 2021; Themelis et al., 2022; Thornberg, 2012) was suitable for myself as a researcher who was studying clinical psychology and had prior experience in the EFL realm. A research proposal prior to data collection was required by the doctoral programme that this study took place within. Therefore, interaction with literature needed to occur early in the research process. With these foundations and practical requirements, it would have been impossible to complete this

project from a classic GT methodology (Birks & Mills, 2015). As offered by informed GT, I viewed my prior engagement with literature and EFL services as helpful tools in the development of my project and in connecting with my participants (Thornberg, 2012).

Moreover, the flexible approach advocated for in constructivist GT, offered methodological guidelines but not specific rules of when, what, and how a researcher should complete their GT project (Gehtmane-Hofmane, 2019). Employing this approach enabled me to design and conduct a project that used a GT method while researching within limitations of scope and duration imposed by a professional doctorate. GT is not recommended for projects aiming to quickly and superficially study phenomena (Flick, 2018). The professional doctorate scope allowed for thorough analysis, while informed GT methodology guided flexibility in theory building where a classic GT approach was not possible (Birks & Mills, 2015).

Furthermore, the exploration of multiple possibilities regarding a topic or question, encouraged by this methodology (Morse et al., 2012; Themelis et al., 2022; Thornberg, 2012) suited my project and informed my approach to including participant voices in a novel way in EFL research. During analysis I sought to include deduction, induction, and abduction through an interactive and interpretive approach (Charmaz; 2015; Morse et al., 2021; Themelis et al., 2022). Finally, I aimed for ongoing reflexivity in my approach to all aspects of this project, acknowledging my own history, experiences, worldview, biases, pre-conceptions and how they may be impacting the data.

The Practice of EFL Within This Project

Acknowledging the informed GT stance of prior knowledge as helpful within research, I conducted an interview with the founder and director of the EFL facility where this research was conducted. This interview summary is presented to acknowledge the

specific ethos of the facility and situate the research within the EFL context experienced by my research participants. The current facility was developed after its founder decided to leave behind traditional equestrian practices to develop a facility that offered horses a “better deal”. The facility aims to allow horses to live as naturally as possible for domesticated non-human animals. Simultaneously, it also aims to offer human clients the opportunity to experience being with horses in ways that differ from traditional Western equestrian practices. For example, horse riding is not taught, and horses are rarely mounted on land. On some occasions, horses are mounted at the lakes that surround the property, for the purpose of human and horse swimming together. This facility’s founder is trained in the EAGALA model of equine assisted learning which, among other areas of training such as natural horsemanship and non- violent communication, informs EFL as it is carried out at this facility.

Efforts are made to provide the horses with autonomy over when and how they work. Paddock gates on the property are kept open so that the horses can move freely through most of the property. The land available to them includes a mix of rural paddocks and Aotearoa New Zealand bush that runs up a steep hill. Horses are not kept in stables at this facility. However, there are stables on the property and humans who stay overnight are offered the experience of sleeping in them. Doors, lighting, and beds have been added for human comfort.

Horses who complete EFL work on any given day are invited into the paddocks and arenas surrounding the main homestead by facilitators, or clients with the support of facilitators. Attention is paid to horses who show interest in entering the areas where EFL is completed, as well as horses who show particular interest in a specific client. Similarly, attention is paid to horses who show little interest or appear actively avoidant of entering those spaces. Oftentimes multiple trips in one day are made to the gates that connect the

‘work’ areas from the ‘living’ areas as different horses wait patiently (and at times impatiently) to join in. Sometimes halters and lead ropes are used to guide horses, with an emphasis on ‘leading from the side or behind’ to avoid pulling on the horses. Other times horses and humans move between the spaces with no physical instruments connecting them. The overall intent is that horses are engaged with in ways that minimise risk of forcing them to participate in activities, while increasing their autonomy to choose to participate.

The role of human facilitators is posited as ‘holding space’ and effort is made to stay out of the way enough to allow horses and human clients to have an experience together. Through the human facilitator staying out of the way it is suggested that they can avoid putting their own personal biases and ideas onto human clients during their experience.

How the experiences then occur between client and horse depend on the activities chosen and the participants involved. Some activities are completed during individual client EFL sessions and others are completed within groups. ‘Holding sacred space’ is an example of an activity that can be completed individually or in a group: human clients are invited to sit or stand in a shared space with a horse without holding any specific agenda for what will occur. Other activities include abstract goals set by facilitators, with minimal further input from them. For example, in an activity called ‘all the horses and all the people’ a simple instruction is provided such as “the goal is to have all the horses and all the people moving in the same direction, at the same time, and physically connected”. No further guidance occurs. For some activities increased instruction and guidance is given such as in the ‘path of your life’ exercise where clients are instructed to build an obstacle course that represents their life’s path, before moving through it while accompanied by a horse (and sometimes another human) and taking note of what they experience as they move through different areas. Sometimes a human facilitator provides input throughout an activity but attempts to do so minimally. An example of this type of activity involves a human client getting a horse to

"catch" or "follow" them. A human facilitator uses their understanding of horse behaviour and the current specific horse to aid the client in getting the horse's attention and enriching their experience (such as by changing pace or attempting to run with a horse over a small obstacle). At all times human facilitators are expected to provide oversight on the physical and emotional safety of clients and horses by observing their interactions and behaviours and stepping in if they believe it to be necessary. Following all activities human facilitators are also responsible for debriefing with human clients and discussing any part of their experience that they choose to speak to.

The horses who complete EFL work at this facility are not considered 'trained' for this work although all are domesticated. They are believed to have an inherent understanding of how best to engage with clients. The work is not considered therapy, but horses are generally considered to have a therapeutic effect on humans. Some of the horses have been bred at the property, while others have arrived through alternative routes and in varied conditions of physical and emotional health. For the most part they run as one herd and differ in ages, with the herd previously including foals, senior horses over 30 years old, and many ages in between.

The physical environment is also believed to provide crucial input to clients' experiences, through the rural outdoor spaces that it offers. Additionally, the director of the facility believes that the physical space can take on energy of all experiences that occur at the facility, which she believes can be felt by clients who spend time there.

The experiences provided at this facility are offered to humans of all ages and backgrounds. Through EFL at this facility it is suggested that clients can achieve personal growth and learn life skills, such as confidence and assertive communication, which are transferrable to their daily lives. Additionally, clients or groups who come to the facility with

specific purposes in mind can focus their learning in specific directions and activities can be selected or designed in relation to their goals. It is important to note that EFL is not considered to be contained within formal sessions and activities. The facility's director places strong emphasis on "organic experiences" which can occur at any time during a client's visit to the property. In the same vein, client and facilitator discussions that occur at lunch, or any other informal component of the day, are considered a form of debrief that may support learning. Insights may develop after sessions or between sessions when clients ponder what happened and how it relates to their life.

The above perspectives discussed between myself and the founder and director of the EFL facility, along with my own understandings as a previous facilitator of EFL at this facility influenced the project's design, data collection, and analysis. Due to the focus on non-ridden experiences at this facility, experiences shared were not analysed if the client mounted the horse. Below is an outline of this project's research design and the GT methods used throughout.

Research Design and Methods

Participants

Participant inclusion criteria consisted of adults (18 or over) who had previous experience with, or were currently engaged in, EFL sessions as clients at the studied facility. Participants were recruited using the facility's client email database. An e-poster (Appendix A) was sent to participants by a facility administrator, inviting them to express interest in participating in the research. Additionally, some participants approached me for participation, following word of mouth through their engagement at the facility. Through the recruitment process, the aim was to engage a mix of adult participants with differing levels of experience in EFL. No specific criteria were included in regard to the participants' reasoning for engaging in EFL. Again, this was to engage a participant sample that represented the mix of

clients that attend the facility.

A total of eight participants took part in the interview process, with four completing two interviews several months apart, in line with the GT methods used in this study (explained below) (Thornberg, 2012). Reasons for engagement in EFL varied, with motivations including prior mental health struggles, personal growth, familial growth, and enhancing leadership within a corporate setting. Participants varied in their levels of experience with EFL, ranging from having completed one session at the time of first interview, to having regularly attended the facility for over five years. Table 1 provides brief demographic details of each participant.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Age bracket	Gender	Ethnicity	Brief summary of experience with horses outside of EFL	EFL participation at time of interview/s	Number of interviews participated in
Abby	35 – 40	Female	Pākehā	Had horses as pets for riding during childhood. A previous experience of 'equine therapy' at another facility prior to attending the studied facility.	Attendance as a client on three separate occasions	2
Bailey	18 – 25	Female	German	Grew up with horses as a significant part of everyday life. Previously participated in both traditional and non-traditional equestrian practices.	Lived at the studied facility for five weeks, participating in EFL as a client and assisting as a farm-hand.	2

Bradley	30 – 35	Male	British	Spent 12 years living on a farm during childhood. Did not have horses but was surrounded by other farm animals such as cows.	One day of EFL	2
Raven	35 – 40	Female	Sri Lankan New Zealander	Experienced traditional horse-riding during childhood. Volunteered at a therapeutic riding programme for several years during adulthood.	Regular attendance as a client for over three years. Also a regular facilitator of EFL.	1
TK	45 – 50	Male	New Zealand/ European	Grew up around horses. Parents kept them as pets.	Sporadic attendance as a client of EFL for over five years	1
Violet	60 – 65	Female	New Zealand/ European	Works in the EFL field and regularly facilitates youth camps in which horses are a central component	Attended a three day stay at the studied facility as an EFL client	1

Zara	45 – 50	Female	New Zealand Pā kehā	Minimal prior experience with horses and noted some ‘fear’ of them.	Sporadic attendance as an EFL client for over five years	2
Zoe	18 – 25	Female	Mā ori/ European	Had horses as pets and frequently participated in traditional western horse-riding practices.	Regular attendance as an EFL client for over five years	1

Data Collection

As summarised above, prior to beginning data collection with the research participants, an interview with the founder and director of the facility was completed. Due to the considerable difference in the ways in which EFL practices are defined across research projects (Lee et al., 2016), a rich understanding of this facility's framework helped me to weave it through the write-up of this project. The interview also provided an overview of the variety of EFL experiences participants of this project may have had.

Video recorded, semi-structured interviews were conducted, to gather data on the participants' perspectives of their experiences with EFL. Focus was given to impactful interactions that occurred between human and horse. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow interviews to have purpose and a sense of direction, while also being flexible enough to explore various topics as the participant brings them up, and which may not have been anticipated during interview question planning (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Flexibility for exploration was important for this project, due to the limited pre-existing literature on this topic and in-line with the GT methodology. Using semi-structured interviews allowed me to provide some framing for the interview, while also following the participants' leads on the key components of their own experiences. Recording the interviews gave opportunity for richer analysis, as not only the participant's speech content could be considered during analysis, but also their body language, and visible affect. The interview guide for the initial interviews can be found in Appendix B of this thesis.

Initially, I intended to complete multiple interviews with clients new to and currently engaging in EFL. The aim was that the data collected would allow for analysis of changes that may have occurred in clients' perspectives as they gained more experience with EFL and had more time to reflect on the process. I had also planned to collect observational data by observing participants during EFL experiences. The aim for this was to compare and integrate

the observational data to interview data. In turn this could have deepened analysis and informed potential differences in what clients expressed as impactful, and what interactions/ actions/ moments appeared important from an external viewpoint. However, data collection for this project occurred largely during 2020, at the same time as the COVID-19 global pandemic. Country-wide restrictions meant that the facility was unable to have clients attend EFL sessions for several months. Therefore, following new clients and observing their sessions was not feasible. I considered completing a cross-sectional analysis of data from participants with varying EFL experience levels as an alternative to my initial plans. However, due to the depth of the data collected I chose to forgo this analysis in favour of doing justice to the overall analysis of processes occurring between client and horse.

Sample Size

In determining sample size for a grounded theory project, the concept of 'saturation' is typically used (Malterud et al., 2016). Theoretical saturation is considered the signal that a researcher does not need to collect further data. It is generally considered to have been reached when a round of data collection does not produce any codes that differ to those found in earlier data (Birks & Mills, 2015). However, despite the use of saturation originally being tied to grounded theory, the term has been used widely across qualitative projects, often inconsistently and to various degrees of quality (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Morse et al., 2014). Instead of saturation, this research sought to gain *information power* through the data collected (Malterud et al., 2016). Information power describes a conceptual model for determining the sample size of a research project through consideration of several domains: the aim of the study, sample specificity, the use of established theory, the quality of dialogue, and the strategy of analysis. The overall premise is that the more information power a sample has, the smaller that sample size can be. In contrast, a sample with low information power would require a greater sample size. The domains are considered related and influential to

each other, and researchers are recommended to consider the information power of their data throughout the project. The notion of information power was selected over saturation for this project due to its conceptual guidelines for determining sample size (Malterud et al., 2016). However, GT methods recommended for achieving saturation, such as constant comparison during data analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015), were applied as part of the analysis strategy of this project. Below, the information power domains as they relate to this project are described.

Study Aims. This study aimed to gain participant perspectives of the important processes that occur during EFL sessions, with a view that final analysis could contribute to theory building in the field of EFL. This study's aim involved relatively broad phenomena. Information power guidelines considered this factor as contributing to a need for a larger sample size than studies exploring narrower or more specific phenomena (Malterud et al., 2016).

Sample Specificity. Aside from obtaining adult participants who have or are currently engaging or beginning to engage in EFL sessions as clients, the sample population desired was broad. Again, information power guidelines suggested that when planning a project, a researcher considers a broad sample specificity as a need for a larger amount of participants than required for a narrow sample specificity (Malterud et al., 2016).

Established Theory. Current theories and concepts applied to EFL practices such as theory regarding horses as prey animals, Rogerian theory, biophilia theory and attachment theory, are taken from a range of scientific fields (Bachi, 2013; Burgon, 2014; Burgon et al., 2018; Hallberg, 2018; Lee & Makela, 2015; Nieforth & Craig, 2021). Gaining participant perspectives with a view towards theory building, was a novel way to contribute to the current body of theoretical perspectives. Exploring a phenomenon that already has some

theory applied and considered in relation to it, contributed to the potential for increased information power with fewer participants (Malterud et al., 2016).

Quality of Dialogue. Being in my final years of clinical psychology training and having previously facilitated and participated in EFL, I already had knowledge and experience of both EFL and interview processes. Those factors, coupled with the choice of semi-structured interviews, were likely to increase the quality of dialogue and therefore the construction of rich interview data. This in turn increased the likelihood of achieving greater information power with fewer interviews than would be necessary for someone with less background knowledge and less structured interviews (Malterud et al., 2016). The challenge in this scenario was to be sensitive to my own assumptions and understandings, requiring reflexivity and frequently checking my understandings with participants throughout the interviews. Ongoing reflexivity and taking a collaborative approach to participant interviews aligned with the informed GT methodology selected for this project (Themelis et al., 2022; Thornberg, 2012).

Quality of dialogue was a dimension considered throughout data collection and analysis. Overall, participants were quick to share detailed accounts of their experiences and discuss a range of topics and ideas that they perceived relevant. Furthermore, reviewing interview transcripts throughout the data collection and analysis process confirmed that I frequently checked my understanding of participants' perspectives. Co-construction of data was evident through the conversational flow of the interviews as well as through instances of offering terms and phrases to each other if one party appeared to be struggling to articulate themselves. Instances of participants disagreeing with or rejecting components of ideas I shared and noting if I had misunderstood them, appeared to signal their comfort in expressing themselves within the interviews. All of these factors appeared to contribute to high quality dialogue in the current data sample.

Analysis Strategy. This research project used a grounded theory cross-case method of analysis. As opposed to a case study analysis, a cross-case analysis meant the inclusion of multiple participants and comparison of data across cases. As part of the grounded theory method of analysis some participants were invited to participate in a second interview (a process called theoretical sampling). This was in order to build on the development of theoretical memos from earlier data.

When deciding on the initial sample size, the above factors were considered in relation to their combined impact on a sample's potential for information power. Also considered was what would be a realistic scope and size for a project completed within a professional doctorate programme. In this professional doctorate programme half of the degree is earned through clinical training. In turn the student must split their efforts between academic research and the clinical requirements. Following early considerations, the project aimed to have five initial participants, with multiple interviews completed as part of a theoretical sampling processes. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions on data collection methods (i.e., observation of participant sessions was not possible), this number was increased to seven during the project. In considering the 'quality of dialogue' domain during early data collection I decided to add an eighth initial participant. This was due to conversations with some participants veering into experiences outside of those at the current facility, therefore constructing data that could not be included in the analysis. Additionally, early analysis of one transcript highlighted a tendency for that participant to link their perspectives back to traditional riding or mounted experiences and therefore they were not included in the ongoing analytic process. Through theoretical sampling, four participants were invited to participate in a second interview. Rationale for re-interviewing participants instead of the more traditional recruiting of new participants is explained below in the analysis section of this chapter (Birks & Mills, 2015). Including second interviews, a total of

12 interviews comprised this dataset.

Analysis

GT methods of analysis were employed for this project (Birks & Mills, 2015). In general, GT methods suggest a simultaneous process of data collection and analysis, multiple rounds of data coding, use of memos, and constant comparison between data, codes, and memos. How a researcher defines and uses methods of analysis within their analytic process is typically guided by their chosen GT methodology. For this project constructivist and informed GT methods were applied and employed flexibly to best suit the data and the evolving research process (Birks & Mills, 2015; Braun & Clarke, 2013; Charmaz, 2015; Thornberg, 2012).

In keeping with the two key rules that govern GT analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015), I endeavoured to treat 'all as data' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), analysing not just the participants' words but also any notable body language and affect picked up on the filmed interviews. Additionally, analysis occurred always with the research purpose and question in mind, to avoid losing focus or becoming overwhelmed by the data (Birks & Mills, 2015). The overall process was shaped by a concurrent procedure of data collection and analysis through coding and memo writing, with theoretical sampling providing opportunity to stay engaged with participants and continually include their voices within the forming theoretical concepts (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012). Initial, focused, and theoretical coding were used in this analysis and are presented below. What follows is an explanation of how I made use of memos and storylines as additional analytical tools in this study. The components are separated to aid understanding of their individual properties and analytic value. However, it is important to note that GT analysis is recursive, components of analysis overlapped and were employed at multiple stages throughout the analysis and development of the resulting tentative grounded theory.

Initial Coding

Initial coding is a coding process that often involves analysis of transcripts or raw data such as field notes (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2015). For this project each participant interview was initially coded line-by-line. Both gerund and in-vivo codes were used to begin breaking down the experiences with a focus on apparent happenings and description and terminology used by participants. For example, some initial codes were developed to indicate actions occurring across many transcripts, such as the codes 'communicating physically' and 'relating authentically'. Other codes developed were more specific to terminology used by a certain participant when describing their experiences or perspectives, such as the codes 'the story I'm telling myself…', and 'brain rewiring'. This process aimed to open the analysis up to the range of possible concepts constructed in the interviews and the processes occurring between the participants and horses during EFL. I also aimed to keep myself as a researcher aware of the nuances within the data through this process (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2015). Initial codes were frequently compared with each other, to consider codes that held the same or similar meanings, as well as codes that seemed to speak to similar concepts, or elements of participants' experiences. Through the continuous comparison of initial codes and the identification of basic action areas, I began moving towards the grouping of codes and the second coding process: focused coding.

Focused Coding

Focused coding is a more directive form of coding whereby data is re-coded using significant codes developed during the initial coding process. Prominent codes are selected by choosing those which are most frequent during initial coding, and those that best encapsulate the possible analytic areas apparent during initial coding (Charmaz, 2014).

During early analysis, initial codes were grouped based on their similarities and relevance to each other. Additionally, some codes were collapsed into others during this

process. For example, during early grouping of initial coding the codes ‘communicating physically’, ‘communicating non-verbally’, ‘communicating energetically’ and ‘taking away human language, allowing different ways of relating’ were grouped into a category named ‘communicating’. ‘communicating emotionally’ and ‘feeling/sensing communications’, were collapsed into ‘feeling/sensing communications’ due to similarities in the actions captured within the codes. Subsequently, ‘feeling/sensing communications’ was also grouped into the ‘communicating’ category. Other codes, such as ‘communicating without gear’ and ‘communicating clear intent’ were discarded completely due to infrequent use during initial coding and not capturing differing action from other codes. The ongoing comparison of initial codes and the associated data aided the grouping of codes to construct multiple categories of codes that served as the initial group of focused codes for this dataset. Examples of initial groups of focused codes include: ‘communicating’, ‘connecting’, ‘experiencing’, ‘grounded experiences’, ‘transcending’ and ‘the self’. As the below paragraph will highlight, the initial groups of focused codes were developed, adapted, and re-defined throughout the continuous data collection and analysis process.

During focused coding, the transcripts were re-coded, this time incident by incident. Examples of initial and focused coding within this data set are shown in Table 2. Through the focused coding I aimed to confirm and determine the relevance of the selected codes. Coding incident by incident encouraged ongoing consideration of the relationship between the focused codes/categories. This aided my conceptual development of processes occurring between the participants and horses during EFL. Although the identification of a core category is not considered essential within my chosen GT methodology (Birks & Mills, 2015), through the process of focused coding I identified experiencing connection as the core category within this data set. Experiencing connection captured the processes apparent during analysis. Ongoing focused coding and comparison allowed for identification of categories

and sub-categories that defined the properties of the processes and factors surrounding and influencing them. Comparing incidents, codes and categories highlighted similarities and differences between and among all categories, signalling not only areas of relation but also gaps in the analytic ideas (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014). These gaps indicated the needs and directions for theoretical sampling. As previously mentioned, the coding process was not linear. Transcripts from interviews that were part of the theoretical sampling process were also coded with both initial and focused coding processes. Categories, their defining properties, and the relationships between them were continually revised and adapted in-line with the available data. The final categories and subcategories developed through the initial and focused coding processes are outlined in the findings chapter of this thesis.

Table 2

Transcript Extracts Exemplifying Initial and Focused Coding

Interview extract	Initial coding	Focused coding
but then I was in there pretty quickly and the horse started responding, faced me on and started walking towards me	Connecting and communicating with the horse	Communicating physically
or I stopped and the horse came up to me	Communicating physically	
and I don't know it was just like this empowerment or something came up. It was, it just felt magical.	Experiencing powerful positive emotions	Experiencing the 'horse-high'
So I ended up kind of in an almost giggling state, I felt like I was in a trance almost.	Experiencing an altered state	

Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling was used following focused coding of the initial interviews and memo-writing processes, as a way of progressing the conceptual analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015). Typically, theoretical sampling involves the recruitment of new participants, purposefully recruited to answer specific questions and address gaps identified through early coding and memo writing processes. However, *who* is recruited and *why* is to be determined by the needs arising from the early data analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2015; Morse et al., 2021). For this project I decided that instead of sampling new participants to

answer questions, past participants would be invited back to answer questions relevant to experiences they had previously discussed. Four participants were invited to participate in second interviews. When selecting which participants to invite I considered several factors such as: their EFL experience levels, how their early interviews had informed current categories and conceptualisations, which participants had shared experiences that signalled variation in process, and whether any initial interviews contained data signalling gaps that required further exploration. The rationale for re-interviewing was that these participants were the experts on their own experiences and, therefore, they were best placed to speak further on specific points with the help of questions constructed during memo writing. Following initial interviews, many participants reported that the interview had provided space for them to reflect on and deepen their understanding of their EFL experiences. Extended time since the initial interview meant that it was possible that the participants had reflected even more on their experiences. Those reflections in combination with new research questions allowed the participants to share additional insights and explore with myself the limits and boundaries of certain experiences in relation to certain theoretical ideas. Additionally, having already interviewed these participants I had built rapport and trust with them. This would likely improve the quality of dialogue within the interviews and increase information power (Malterud et al., 2016). Re-interviewing helped to further the overall analysis during the theoretical sampling phase and deepen the developing conceptual analysis.

Theoretical Coding

Theoretical coding represents the most conceptual and abductive form of coding within GT. Although it has been suggested that GT studies can be completed to a satisfactory level without theoretical coding, it is also widely accepted that theoretical coding moves analysis towards theoretical integration and the construction of a grounded theory (Birks &

Mills, 2015; Morse et al., 2021). This can be both explicit and implicit during analysis processes, with reliance on theoretical codes suggested to increase if a researcher delays identifying relationships between concepts until late in their study. Theoretical codes can be from within or outside of the researcher's discipline, and it is posited that when GT methods are used appropriately the data will signal the appropriate theoretical coding format (Birks & Mills, 2015). I began considering relationships between codes, categories and concepts early in my analysis which emphasised the overlapping nature between focused and theoretical coding. Subsequently, my need for theoretical codes from pre-existing frameworks was less than if I had delayed exploration of relationships in the data. This early work is emphasised in the structure of my findings chapter, where the categories are presented within processes and identified relationships between categories are acknowledged throughout the write-up. Theoretical coding helped to move the conceptual categories and processes into a tentative grounded theory. Simultaneously, it also clarified and increased the theory's relevance to pre-existing knowledge and theory within related domains such as mental health, psychology, AAI and EFL (Birks & Mills, 2015; Morse et al., 2021). More specifically, through consideration of pre-existing ideas and terminology I was able to transform early relationships between categories, and in turn the conceptual processes from the core category of experiencing connection into the tentative grounded theory: the inextricable nature of client-horse processes during EFL.

Memo Writing

Throughout the entire analysis process memo writing was used in several different ways. Some memos were used to tease apart the codes, concepts, and categories. During this process I was able to study them, engaging in a process of constant comparison. In doing so, questions around the different analytic ideas became apparent, providing a basis for the further interviewing that took place during the theoretical sampling process. To help keep

myself sensitive to emergent concepts and theories during the research process, memo writing also took place with Thornberg's (2012) strategies in mind. Some memos were written with complete freedom to explore emerging ideas and any possible links to them. Others were written linking one idea to one theory, while another memo would link the same idea to a different theory. This was done in the hopes of remaining theoretically playful (Charmaz, 2014), as well as theoretically agnostic (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003). Focus was also put on staying grounded within the data, using what was evidenced in the data as the starting point to any possible link with current literature. Often memos employed several of Thornberg's (2012) strategies. Extracts of memos written throughout the project can be found in Appendix C of this thesis. They are included to highlight the evolving analysis and conceptualisation of data and movement towards identifying the core category of experiencing connection. In addition to the uses above, memo writing also functioned as a place in which I could be reflexive about my own subjectivities and their impacts on the data (Morse, 2016; Thornberg, 2012). Overall, memo writing served as a step that moved the analysis from a place of coding towards preparing theoretical analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2015).

Storyline

Storyline is another grounded theory technique that I used during this project. Storyline involves the development of a 'story' of the phenomena being studied (Birks & Mills, 2015). Throughout this project I continually asked myself what story were participants telling through data. I wrote these ideas into storylines within memos, which aided explanation of the relationship between codes and categories. Doing so allowed me to increase abstraction of my data and increase the theoretical nature of my findings, without over reliance on pre-existing theory or frameworks. This helped to ensure that findings and theoretical explanations were primarily grounded in the data and not a result of forcing pre-existing frameworks onto the data.

Mapping/ Diagramming

An additional component of the analysis processes in this project was the use of mapping and diagrams. Throughout the project I used both hand and computer drawn maps and diagrams to help me visualise potential relationships between codes, categories and ideas, and to enhance the overall clarity of the processes and ideas developing.

Ethics

This project was reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application NOR 19/66. Participants, horses and human facilitators have all been given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity and the integrity of EFL experiences for future clients who attend the facility. Participant autonomy was attended to throughout the project in ways such as complete choice in answering questions, opportunity to review interview transcripts, and the opportunity to withdraw from the study up to one month post initial interview. An EFL facilitator was available to support participants following interviews and additional contacts for support were provided to all participants (Appendix D).

Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter outlines findings from the data analysis. Presented are the core categories developed through the initial and focused coding stages of analysis. They are presented within three sections (the EFL context and two processes) to emphasise the early analysis, consideration and conceptualisation of relationships between categories (outlined in chapter three of this thesis). The findings presented below contribute to making the practice impactful and effective, from participants' perspectives.

The sections of data in this chapter are ordered with two primary aims:

1. To guide the reader through the overall analysis, facilitating understanding of the processes, and their components, indicated within the interview data.
2. To enhance understanding of the interplay between the different components and processes, as indicated through analysis of the interview data constructed between myself and my participants.

Participant quotes have been used throughout this chapter to highlight the grounding of the presented analysis within the experiences and perspectives shared by participants. Where a participant has repeated the same word twice during a statement, in an inconsequential means (i.e., "yeah, yeah"), the second repetition has been deleted to facilitate ease of reading. Additionally, where removal would not impact reader understanding of a quote, words used to facilitate thought during conversation such as "um" have also been deleted. In some of the presented quotes a word or words have been inserted into the quote. This was done to enhance the reader's understanding of the context or topic being discussed. Square brackets have been utilised to signal the inserted word or words. For example; "[we were communicating] but not in a forced way or a very deliberate way." (Zara)

Throughout this chapter the words 'human', 'client' and 'participant' are used

interchangeably to refer to the participants of this study, who spoke to their experiences as clients of EFL. The word 'horse' has been used to refer to horses who take on a facilitatory role during the clients' EFL experiences. Where a human facilitator has been referenced in this analysis, they have been acknowledged as such.

The analysis presented in this chapter, grounded in the experiences shared by research participants, provides the evidence-based foundation of the tentative grounded theory outlined in the discussion of this thesis.

Context

'Context' within this project is defined as *"the interrelated conditions in which something occurs"* (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Although this study focused on processes occurring between client and horse during EFL, some contextual elements were noted as significant. Participants frequently highlighted three contextual factors as influential to their experiences. Therefore, due to their influence on experience, and in turn process, those contextual components have been included in this analysis. Within this project, the basic premise of EFL occurring between beings from two different species, the personality of client and horse, and the dynamic concept of space were highlighted as significant contributors to context.

Beings From two Different Species

Of particular importance, from participants' perspectives, was that EFL occurred between beings from two different species. In other words, an important contextual factor was that EFL occurred between a humans and horses, rather than two or more humans. Differences in perspectives, values, and meaning making between humans and horses, as well as shared similarities, all contributed to the contextual component of beings from two different species.

When discussing how EFL differs from practices that only involve humans, Zara shared that “It's different because the horse isn't coming at you from the human perspective.” Her insight signals the commonly held participant belief that there is an inherent difference in perspectives between the human species and the equine species. When exploring whether the same experiences had with a horse could occur with another being, Zara noted:

> *A very little baby. Maybe because in a veeeerrry little baby. There's not the 'I' yet. The very little baby is still really tightly bound with mum in a, at least a two person...there's no ego yet. So, you know again I'm talking in those moments with standing with Queen (horse) or when Austin (horse) comes, there's a dissolution of 'I', of the ego. A very little baby doesn't have that, that strong 'I', like a toddler you know? That's not going to happen with a toddler*

and

> *There's not so much 'I', and you can, you can drift into it, so maybe the horse doesn't... But having said that, you know, I'm always surprised by these horses because once we're finished in the arena, they go back to being horses and they've got plenty of horse 'I'. So it's not that there's, like I think about River (horse). He's such a great therapy horse and then he goes up there and kicks ass. It's like 'actually I want to be the boss here.' He's got loads of horse ego!*

Zara’s suggestion that her experiences may have been possible with a “very little baby”, due to a baby’s lack of “I” or “ego” emphasises the importance of EFL occurring with a horse (as opposed, for example, with an adult human). She appears to suggest that a difference in “ego” supports the experiences to occur as they do. Furthermore, she suggested that horses’ egos become relevant when they interact with other horses. This idea indicated that certain elements of being horse or human were relevant or meaningful in the context of

interaction between two beings of the same species. The relevance and meaning appears to exist due to the commonalities between the beings from the same species. Therefore, when engaging in EFL, differences between the human and horse species may render certain elements of oneself irrelevant within the interactions occurring. As those elements lose relevance, the differences between the two beings may then contribute to the construction of a different context than could be experienced by two beings from the same species. Describing a moment during one of his EFL experiences, Bradley also discussed the difference between perspectives of horse and human that were commonly noted by participants in this project:

> *one of the women turned up in a really beautiful old Mercedes Benz. I'm a sucker for cars. And I was like, I love the car. And it distracted me… The horse didn't even bat an eyelid. It doesn't care whether you turned up in the flashiest car or the worst car. You just had to be with it. And that's what it cared about.*

Additionally, Bradley's sentiments acknowledged a difference in value systems in that moment: his horse placed higher value on being with someone than the type of car a person drove. The difference in perspectives and value systems between horse and human, was prominent throughout participant interviews. These differences may also suggest a difference in meaning making and, in turn, a lack of shared social understanding. Clients engaging in EFL may bring their humanness with them, while horses may bring their 'horse-ness' with them. As outlined by Zara earlier through the example of "ego", certain concepts may be experienced as relevant and present during interactions with others who share an understanding of what defines that concept. The meeting of two beings who make meaning and understand their worlds differently may then create a novel context in which potential for new meaning-making and understanding can exist. Through their use of comparisons between interactions with other humans, participants outlined the idea that if the human client was to engage in relation with another human, similarities in their shared social

understandings and meaning making would contribute to a different context. In turn this would change the quality of the experience. For example, following from Bradley's experience of being distracted by a car: two humans may deduce similar understandings of what owning an old Mercedes Benz suggests about the owner's socioeconomic status, potentially impacting the ways in which the two interact moving forward.

Through the meeting of horse and human, and due to the different perspectives, value systems and social understandings depicted above, participants acknowledged a novel potential and freedom within the EFL context. For example:

> *I feel like it's also a distance between us because we're not the same species where I can do things in their presence without that they immediately have to react on it. Or, for example, I can, I could be next to a horse and just start singing without that I fear that they think something about me. (Bailey)*

and

> *The horse isn't putting anything on you, the horse doesn't have any expectations from you. I think maybe that's something appealing to people because they know that the horse isn't going to expect me to do this or that or say this or that. It's not judging me or anything. (TK)*

In the above examples, Bailey and TK reflected on important elements of interacting with horses that contributed to the effectiveness and appeal of EFL. Bailey explicitly noted the value of horses being a different species to humans while acknowledging that this provided the liberty to act without fear. Her use of the example of singing in front of a horse again signals to the idea that horses have differences in their meaning making and social understandings. TK's sentiments also acknowledged the freedom present in the context of interaction between horses and humans due to a lack of judgement or expectation. Overall,

these examples represent the narrative described by participants that the distance or differences between horse and human contributed to an environment within which the EFL client could act without fear of judgement, or pressure of social expectation. These examples contrasted with examples of interacting with another human, positing the EFL context as novel.

Furthermore, participants shared the perspective that as humans and horses did not understand nor exist within shared social constructions, they did not share the same social constraints. This factor contributed to the novel potential of the EFL context, in which limits surrounding human to human interactions were not relevant. For example:

> *A horse can facilitate someone to be mentally resilient, without stopping them from coming to harm. A psychiatrist cannot let them come to harm… If you've got someone that is having therapy with a horse, (and) that is self-harming… apologies its slightly graphic, if they are, say for instance, cutting themselves, a horse can't stop them from doing that. Right, but it also can't judge them or can't beg them or suggest that they don't, which is non-judgmental. A psychiatrist's duty of care, and as a caring human will ask them not to do it. (Bradley)*

Above, Bradley used the example of ethical obligations pertaining to mental health professionals (psychiatrist) along with the human understanding of risk relating to self-harm behaviours. Through this example, he emphasised the limitations and differences of interactions that occur within a human and human context, compared to a human and horse context. Due to differences between horses and humans, participants pointed out that experiences and processes that occur in EFL were different than those which occur between two or more humans.

However, it was not only differences between human and horse that were noted as

important. As exemplified by Bailey, participants also noted similarities between the two species:

> *I think it's, it's kind of that we're closer together. But in other areas, there's this separation between us that allows me to feel more free. So it's, it's a bit both together. closer together and further way… Maybe it's, maybe it's that because of this distance, the things that are similar, those are the things that are more important, that are deeper, that are more authentic.*

Discussing which components of the meeting of horse and human were important in facilitating EFL processes, Bailey noted that a combination of both shared similarities and differences was important. Bailey also suggested that the similarities between the two species may be more important and "deeper" than the differences. This narrative may signal shared values between humans and horses that are meaningful in a cross-species context and in turn influence the processes that occur. These shared values may represent the most essential components of being, which are able to come to the forefront during EFL due to the distance created by the (possibly less essential) differences.

In summary, participants in this study described the meeting of beings from two different species (humans and horses) as a significant component of the EFL context. Differences in perspectives, values, and meaning making between humans and horses, but also some shared similarities, were identified as important elements of this contextual component. Participants considered this component to contribute to the creation of a novel context, that differed from contexts created when two beings of the same species meet. They utilised examples such as differences in understandings of human self-harm behaviours, to highlight the ways in which the potential for experience is shaped through EFL occurring between a human and horse.

Personality of Client and Horse

Participants also described individual characteristics of themselves and the horses as significant. Defined as “the various aspects of a person’s character that combine to make them different from other people” (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries n.d-a), the word ‘personality’ has been chosen to describe aspects of participants and horses that influenced the nature of the processes occurring during EFL, from participants’ perspectives. Personality, elements of it, and historical experiences that contribute to its development are all included within the context section of this analysis as they are considered to shape the experience a client has. However, specific components of personality are not always present in processes that occur due to their variation between individuals. Hence personality provides a setting for and is influential to processes, but not a core component of them.

Throughout interviews participants frequently spoke of the characteristics of the horses, as they perceived them, and noted how those characteristics affected their experiences.

> *Honey's very representative of a lot of mommy issues. I guess, but like, I don't know. I guess she represents to me a very pure and very beautiful maternal energy. So, when I say mommy issues, that's a disrespectful way of describing what I mean. But, I guess working with her has helped me to kind of, address, process some of that stuff because she is, she is that stuff that I felt like I was missing, or lacking ... she's love, you know? (Raven)*

The above insight was shared while discussing Raven’s learnings after participating in EFL with Honey. Raven noted perceiving Honey to hold a maternal quality and described processing difficulties that related to her relationship with her own mother while working with Honey. This is an example of participants noting how particular qualities of their horses shaped their experiences. Or, in other words, that the personality of the horse contributed to

the context in which the experiences then occurred. In this case Raven credited a perceived part of Honey's personality ("pure" and "beautiful maternal energy") with impacting her EFL experiences and learnings regarding her relationship to her own mother.

> *The young ones always want to do something. Like Topaz for example. Like I can, you know, like, I really feel like he, and I can just hang out and just be with each other and it's really nice. It feels really lovely. And then equally I feel like he's very similar to Andy in that he has this like really fun, kind of like, this mischievous playful kind of side that is really cool to get swept up in as well. Yeah, and allows like, just really fun interactions and yeah, and again, that kind of ability to really practice those ways of being in relationship with somebody else in a really fun way*

The above, also shared by Raven, further highlights how participants noted the personalities of the horses as significantly contributing to their experience. Raven utilised words such as "pure", "maternal", and "love" to describe her perceptions of Honey. She also noted that these qualities contributed to the experiences in which she processed parts of her maternal relationship. Speaking about horse Topaz, she described him as "fun", "mischievous", and "playful". In her experience these qualities of Topaz allowed for practice of being in relationship with another in "a really fun way". Raven's examples demonstrate participant perceptions that different horses can impact their experiences varyingly.

In addition to discussion of horses' personalities as influencing EFL experiences, Bradley suggested that personality could be utilised to influence the strength of learning experiences:

> *River might just like, get grumpy with you and a person feels like I did I was like, 'Ah, I'm not very good at this' right, that in itself is a micro harm which then is a growth. We then get on to Regalo and she may, she bites or kicks right, then that's the next step*

up. But again, if you've, you know, loosely speaking, you look at any athlete for instance, they build their muscles by tearing, micro tearing their muscles and each time their muscles get stronger and stronger. If we use the same concept of mental healing with horses, you start with the easiest one, you don't, you don't send someone to run a marathon, right, on day one. Send them to run 100 meters or 50 meters and build them up. This would be your 50 meter introduction whereas Regalo might be your half marathon. Right?

Speaking about his own EFL experiences, Bradley noted a difference in the temperaments of the horses he encountered. In his example an "easier" horse could provide an introduction to learning through EFL that could later be progressed by a horse with a more difficult temperament. In practice a human facilitator would likely observe and endeavour to interrupt a session if they believed a client may be at risk of physical harm (i.e., through biting or kicking) from a horse. However, Bradley's example again emphasised participants' experiences of variation in the horses' personalities. This example also suggests that human facilitators could intentionally manipulate the EFL context, with the specific purpose of increasing the intensity of a client's learning experience. Bradley's narrative represents an anomaly in the data as he suggested differences between horses could be utilised for the same purpose across EFL clients. Other participants tended to echo Raven's narrative, whereby horses' personalities were only discussed in relation to that client's experience.

As well as describing the personalities of the horses, participants also noted their own personality as an important contextual component which in turn influenced the processes occurring during EFL. Individual traits, historical experiences, and personal beliefs were all considered influential by participants.

Reflecting on her contributions to an EFL experience with horse River, Abby spoke of

specific personal qualities: “My innocence. My softness, my spaciousness, yeah, these are the essences I guess I've sort of been discovering of who I am.” She went on to note that those qualities shaped the EFL experience as they “enhanced them within me and the connection”

Abby noted experiencing her “innocence”, “softness”, and “spaciousness” to both be enhanced through EFL processes, but also to facilitate building the connection between herself and the horse. Other participants also spoke about how components of their personality impacted EFL processes:

> *I think I had quite clear ideas of what I wanted. And I'm a person who does very quickly, like I start doing and when I want something, then I just do it. And then it was like this during this life path, because I was like, Okay, I want to go now, and I initiated things. And yeah, I'd say I was quite quick and doing things and not watching the others around me very much, but rather focusing on what I wanted, focusing on my goal. And then when there was when there were problems, I think I was focusing on still on ‘okay, how can I get forward now and not on how can I solve this problem now?’*

Discussing completion of an EFL exercise, Bailey indicated her own proclivity to act quickly and with a strong focus on personal goals. She explained how her future oriented focus continued to influence her experience when problems arose in the present. Comparing Abby and Bailey’s examples highlights how individual clients’ personalities have the potential to impact EFL experiences in different ways. Abby’s qualities were seen as enhancing connection during her experience. In contrast, Bailey’s qualities appeared to influence quick action while ignoring other people and horses.

Historical experiences (and sometimes a lack of such experiences) were also shown to contribute to context and in turn impact the EFL experience:

> *I think I brought a confidence I didn't know I had to it. Because I've always said I'm not confident but I think there was something about I don't know if it's because I've been around horses before or because of the space of River and whatnot.*

Speaking about an experience with horse River, Abby noted bringing a level of confidence to her interactions. Although not definitive in her belief as to where the confidence stemmed from, she acknowledged one possibility was her personal history with horses. The possibility of a relevant personal history increasing confidence while engaging in EFL was contrasted with other participants' experiences:

> *Just my awkwardness around trying to connect with the horses. And then I probably what I did was probably bring some of that same energy and awkwardness to when I was talking about it. And he might have picked up on that and responded to that.*

Reflecting on her contributions while interacting with horse Austin, Zara noted an "awkwardness" around trying to connect with horses. Of the participants in this study, prior to engaging in EFL Zara was one of the least 'horse-experienced' participants. Comparing Abby and Zara's history of prior horse experience emphasises participants' perspective that their individual personal history could contribute to the EFL context through relevant attributes that they brought to the experiences.

Bradley also highlighted the importance of personal historical experiences as contributors to context:

> *I suppose my upbringing is no animal was vicious unless attacked, which is entirely understandable. And because this horse may have characteristics that are less friendly, shall we say? Or less sedate? I still felt relatively comfortable. But I was just mindful and cautious.*

This example also indicates a third contributing component of personality: personal

beliefs. Bradley's history involved growing up in a rural area and extensive experience with non-human animals. As noted above, he indicated that through his upbringing he developed the belief that "no animal was vicious unless attacked". Bradley understood this belief to influence his sense of comfort and impact his approach ("mindful" and "cautious") while engaging with a horse that he perceived as less friendly than others.

To conclude, participants described the personalities of both clients and horses as important components of the EFL context. 'Personality' within this analysis included: perceived individual characteristics of horses, individual characteristics of clients, the historical experiences of clients, and the personal beliefs held by clients. Personality is considered a component of context due to the capacity for it to provide a framework and in turn influence the qualities of EFL processes that occur. Additionally, as elements relevant to individuals are not consistently present across experiences of processes, they are not considered core components of the processes themselves.

Space

Participants utilised the concept of "space" (Abby, Raven, TK, Zara) often throughout interviews. Formally defined as "the dimensions of height, depth, and width within which all things exist and move" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries n.d-b), the term space was utilised to explain literal and intangible qualities of the context in which processes occurred. Through describing elements of space during interviews, participants also signalled to the capacity for space to both influence, and be influenced by, the beings involved in the EFL practice.

Discussing the effect that EFL has had on her, Raven reported that "simply existing in the same space as a horse, is, for me, personally, is therapeutic." Along with the therapeutic importance of sharing physical space with a horse, she also indicated that the horse gave the space a healing potential. Her example suggests that through the horse influencing the space, the space then influences her.

Other elements or experiences of space shared by participants included space as a verb. For example, Raven described some EFL experiences as occurring “in that doing kind of space”. Contrastingly Zara provided the following example: “She was already doing her dozy, sleepy, meditative chilling out thing and I went to just to give her a scratch. But suddenly, I was in that space as well.” In these examples both participants were describing interacting with horses. While doing so they utilised the concept of space, attaching an active quality to it. Raven’s quote in contrast with her preceding quote highlights an intangible difference in the qualities of space, as experienced by participants during EFL. Where Raven described “simply existing” in a physical space in relation to one experience, she described the space as a “doing” space in relation to another experience. The difference in the descriptions shows the dynamic nature of space that participants noted experiencing. Zara’s quote also characterises the space as having an active quality. Her example goes further to describe the active quality as having a relaxed essence, which influenced her state of being. Zara did not elaborate on whether she thought that her horse’s actions influenced the space, or the other way around. However, she did note experiencing the same internal state as her horse, while sharing the same physical space.

A third utilisation of the concept of space, described by participants in this project, was the notion of space as an intangible entity that could be “held” (Raven, Abby) by participants of the EFL practice. For example, Raven shared “they're (human facilitators) there to just hold space for you”, and Abby offered:

> *maybe it's because of the intent of the space that's held. Like, if it had been in a therapy session as opposed to the horses being out in the paddock, maybe a different dynamic is going on in this, in this arena or this space*

Raven’s quote higher above provides another example of the variation in the

experiencing and conceptualising of space that was described by participants. She discussed part of a human facilitator's role being to "hold space" for the client. Abby's quote related to discussion of factors that may influence horse behaviours across EFL experiences. Again, Abby's quote suggests the idea of space being 'held' within the practice of EFL. This example also goes further to describe the space as having intentionality. The sentiment of holding space describes the space as something that can be supported or maintained by individuals, typically human facilitators, involved in EFL. In describing human facilitators as holding space, participants indicated that holding space was not about holding the state or controlling the client's experience. Rather, it was about allowing for processes to occur between client and horse. The states and experiences of client and horse could change while the space was held and maintained. These comments by the participants indicate that the living beings participating in EFL are not the sole influences on the space. Therefore, it could reasonably be assumed that participants' varying conceptualisations of 'space' were not simply a way to describe their own internal state. Rather, space was considered a dynamic component of context that, from participants' perspectives, influenced EFL experiences and was also influenced by those involved in the EFL practice.

Considering the dynamic characterisation of space by participants, space could be likened to 'atmosphere'. However, the indication of space as also including physical expanses suggests that participants' experiences of 'space' move beyond the tone of the context. Additionally, suggestions of space as having "intent" (Abby) or requiring action (i.e., a "doing" space [Raven]) also hint at space as including more than could be captured through a word such as atmosphere. Overall, 'space' as conceptualised by participants within this study appears to be a nuanced and complex concept. Participants indicated that space is an important component of the EFL context and can contribute to context in different ways. Through contributing to context, space could then influence EFL processes and experiences

in multiple ways.

To summarise, participants in this study reported contextual components as factors that framed and contributed to the processes occurring between client and horse during EFL. This project did not focus on the EFL context, meaning that components of context discussed in this analysis are likely not exhaustive. However, the frequency of participant reference to certain contextual components, and their stated influence on the EFL processes, emphasised the necessity to present them in these results. The three significant components of context were: beings from two different species, the personality of client and horse, and space. These components have several functions such as influencing the creation of a novel context within EFL that differs to contexts that only involve humans. Additionally, contextual components can shape the ways that clients experience EFL. Just as contextual components were described as influential over client and horse, client and horse were also considered influential contributors to context. Human facilitators were not frequently spoken of during participant interviews: however, this may be due, at least in part, to this projects' focus on the processes occurring between client and horse. When acknowledgment occurred participants often spoke of human facilitators supporting context by holding space while EFL occurred. The results of the analysis of important processes that occur between client and horse during EFL are presented below.

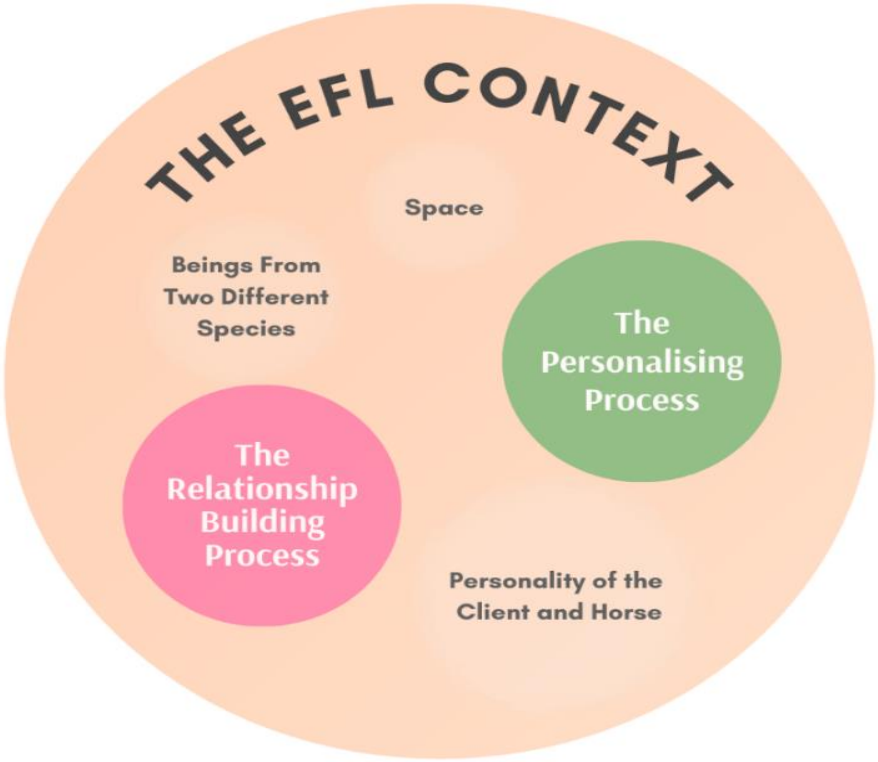
Participant Identified Processes Occurring Between Client and Horse During EFL

During data collection participants were encouraged to share EFL experiences that they found notable or impactful. Their narratives appeared to detail extremes of connection between themselves and the horses and analysis emphasised 'experiencing connection' as the core category of this dataset. Additionally, analysis of participant accounts and the relationships between core categories highlighted the occurrence of two processes. Each process was indicated to contain different core components and interact differently with the

contextual components presented above. Furthermore, the processes appeared to have differing influence and impacts on participants' experiences of the connection between themselves and the horses. The processes have been named the relationship building process and the personalising process and are presented below.

Figure 1

Processes and Contextual Components of EFL



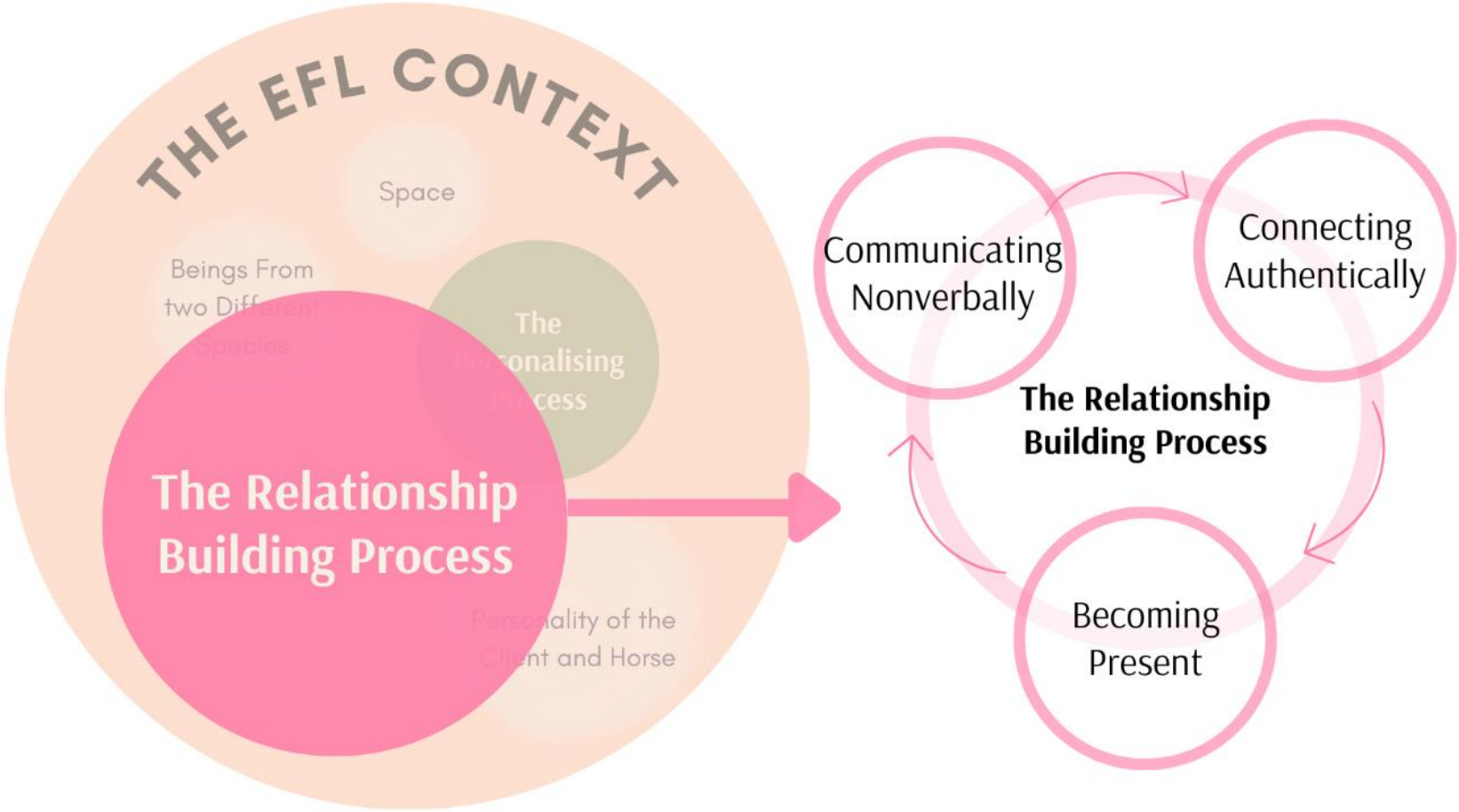
Note. Figure 1 shows the important processes identified as occurring during EFL. Surrounding the processes are significant components of the EFL context

The Relationship Building Process

The relationship building process (Figure 2.) was highlighted as occurring between client and horse during EFL, making the practice impactful and effective from participants' perspectives. Participants acknowledged that connecting and being in relationship with the horses during EFL was important in facilitating their own learning and transformative experiences. Analysis of the experiences shared indicated three core components of the relationship building process: communicating non-verbally, connecting authentically, and becoming present (Figure 3.). The core components were also indicated as processes within their own right. Below, the relationship building process is detailed through presentation of its three core components.

Figure 2

The Relationship Building Process



Speaking about important factors of their EFL experiences, all participants acknowledged their connection or relationship to the horses as significant. Connection between client and horse was demonstrated to be built through active participation from both beings:

> *It's a co-creation, as far as I'm concerned. And it's like you're kind of creating a new space or a new type of energy in the world and a new type of connection. And it's almost like, I think that feeling that that mystical, otherworldly feeling is probably what they refer to as a miracle. You know, you're changing a way of being, its kind of in the, in the miracle of opening up a new connection. (Abby)*

Additionally, they described both the connection and the way of creating it as novel. Similar to the novel context and possibilities created by bringing together human and horse, during engagement in EFL novel connections were also built.

Some participants, such as Zara, expressed an important occurrence between human and horse during EFL simply as "it's relationship." Other participants detailed the qualities of their connections and relationships, and the effects that it had on them. For example:

> *One thing that I hadn't really understood before until I came here was the sort of magnetic connection that you can create. It's kind of like, locking on, like, you're sort of establishing a relationship with the horse and it's like locking onto them with a tractor beam or they're locking onto you. So you, you kind of like, go through this process and there, I guess, I think there are exercises that you can do where you can, where the horse will sort of lock onto you and sort of form this invisible bond with it, which means that once that's there, you can then turn away and walk away and then the horse will follow like it's on an invisible lead. It's quite amazing. And then you can turn around and stop and it'll stop when you stop. So you kind of feel like you're in*

sync with it. And that was pretty amazing.

and:

It's incredible. It's kind of like the movie Avatar. Remember that movie? Where they like jump on those flying creatures, and they like plugin, like they kind of connect with each other. Like there's some kind of, I can't remember what it was, there's something on the creature that you kind of plug into whatever. But yeah, you feel like you're kind of, you're at one with the horse I suppose. It's quite amazing. (TK)

TK's sentiments exemplify the participant narrative that experiences of powerful connection between client and horse included feelings of oneness and being in sync with another being in ways that participants had not previously experienced.

Participants also explained the effects that their connection to the horse had on them, emphasising the positive affective experiences that occurred:

I think the connection that you're encountering with a horse. I feel like, I don't know if it's the whole body or whatnot, but just, it's, it's like, the happy chemicals like…oxytocin. There's the one I was trying to think of. Yeah. oxytocin, it's like, yeah, anything to do with that kind of connection? And then or, you know, and serotonin, and all those things just feel like they get boosted. (Abby)

By naming the chemical oxytocin, evidenced as playing an important role in both romantic relationships and mother-baby attachment (Corina et al., 2019; Kohlhoff et al., 2022), Abby signalled the strength of the bond she felt with the horse. Furthermore, she described a perspective that chemicals such as serotonin, commonly known for contributing to positive mood (Michely et al., 2020), are enhanced when in connection and relationship with a horse. This suggests that connection and relationship with the horses can impact EFL clients by enhancing experiences of significant positive affect. It may also indicate that

experiences of connection can impact clients at a biochemical level.

The positive affective experience had by participants during connection and relationship with the horse was further noted as an important element of EFL that facilitated growth and learning:

> *That is what, what makes horses so incredible for me. And I think that is also part of why I think they are such great teachers…because this connection we have brings a feeling to me that I don't know. I thought about maybe it is creating, like a ground from which I can... where I feel good enough so that I can learn good, or I can handle things good, because I am feeling so good in their presence…And, yeah, they are sometimes not teaching us lessons, but they are helping us to be in the right mood to be open to learn those lessons. (Bailey)*

Participants noted that their openness to learning or receiving lessons increased while experiencing positive affect brought about through connection with the horses.

> *when I'm in connection with a horse, I'm more connected to myself. And then I can access those truths that are within me a lot better, or I can receive information a lot better when I'm more connected with myself. And that happens when connection with the horse is there.*

and

> *I also feel like I'm not learning the most things from exercises, I do with them, but from being with them, and from the moments in those exercises, like from experiencing to walk next to the horse or something or stand next to the horse. (Bailey)*

As Bailey explained, participants did not perceive it necessary for lessons to be taught by the human or horses during EFL. They suggested it was possible that the EFL client holds

the lessons within themselves before engaging in EFL. What was of note was that participants experienced the connection/relationship between client and horse as influential and important in lessons being learnt. As highlighted in Bailey's example above, participants associated increased connection to the horses with increased connection to self, which in turn facilitated her learning.

To summarise, throughout their interviews participants in this study continually reported the connection and relationship between themselves and the horses as a crucial component of EFL. Connection and relationship were indicated to contribute to positive affect and transformative learning. However, a strong connection and relationship with a horse was not something that participants described as instantaneous during EFL. Instead, participant discourse signalled to a process of connecting and relationship building that occurred and was characterised by several core components. These are presented below.

Communicating Nonverbally

Participants perceived communicating nonverbally as an important process that occurred between client and horse during EFL. Before engaging in nonverbal communication clients recognised a lack of common verbal language. Participants reported that this necessitated a discarding of familiar and dominant ways of communicating in favour of alternatives. Their accounts indicated physical and energetic communication as crucial in the process of engaging in nonverbal communication. Through engaging in non-verbal communication participants increased the quality of their interactions with the horses. In turn, this strengthened participants' connections to, and relationship with, their EFL horses. Hence, the process of communicating nonverbally can be considered a component of the connecting and relationship building process.

Participants drew on comparisons of interaction between two humans when describing their experiences of communicating during EFL without a shared verbal language.

For example, Bradley noted “its almost like putting people that can't speak the same language at all in the same arena and getting them to work together.” Additionally, Abby shared that “unlike another human, where you've got this language in common, you don't have that with a horse.” As they exemplified, participants varied in the degree to which they experienced the lack of shared verbal language as similar or different to engaging with a human. Where Bradley noted the experience to be “almost like” a possible human to human experience, Abby used the word “unlike”, suggesting a different degree of familiarity in her experiences. However, regardless of variations, a common experience stated by participants was a lack of shared language. In turn this lack of shared language appeared to contribute to experiences of engagement that differed from human to human interactions.

Communicating Physically. Participant accounts of relevant experiences suggested that a crucial form of nonverbal communication in EFL is communicating physically. Without a shared verbal language in common, participants acknowledged that engagement with the horse required alternative forms of communication. Participants indicated that horses used physical communication to acknowledge clients and components of the clients’ experiences. Additionally, participants indicated that they too could use physical communication to engage with the horse and, ultimately, impact the experiences going forward. Human facilitators were exemplified to impact the process of communicating physically by subtly guiding the clients’ engagements.

Discussing how the horses communicated during EFL, participants noted that the physical communication they observed were clear and direct:

> *They'll physically show you what they are, what's going on. So like, you can sort of tell if a horse is impatient. Like stomping its foot or, you know, whatever, you can kind of tell. Or if you're getting too close, you know, they'll let you know. It's pretty*

direct.(Bradley)

As outlined by Bradley, participants experienced horses as using physical communication to express their own state ("you can sort of tell if a horse is impatient"), and desires ("If you're getting too close, you know, they'll let you know"). In addition, participants also expressed narratives of horses using physical communication to respond to clients' states and experiences:

> *And he just walked through the circle. And he walked straight up to me as I was still speaking. So I'm looking at Cara (human facilitator) and I'm speaking and he's (horse) moving towards me. And I don't, I don't really notice that because I'm not focused on him. I'm focused on Cara and saying, "Well, I don't think they're that interested, you know these horses!" And he just walked straight up to me and he kind of stopped in front of me and dropped his head kind of right in my heart. (Zara)*

Above, Zara described an experience of Austin physically responding to her during a group debrief. During her interview for this project, she expressed that she had felt upset at her perceived lack of interest from the horses. Zara's account appears to suggest that Austin's actions were an example of physical communication being used to respond to an emotional state and belief held by a client. Zara's sentiments regarding horses responding to clients' experiences were echoed by other participants, such as Raven:

> *And then, at that exact moment, as I thought that thought, I felt this nose just in my back and it just went 'doomph!' like this in my back. And I just got the biggest fright and I was like, "ugh, what the?!", and I turned around and Janeiro (horse) was right behind me. And he had just like, knocked me basically off the mounting block. And I was like, where did you come from? And also, that was a little bit harsh. And it was just like the biggest, like he was, it was obviously like the second that I thought that*

thought in my head. He was like, yeah, that's the thing that you need to sort out.

Raven's example relates to her experience of an EFL in which she observed the horses and her present moment experience. During the experience Raven began to think about a situation in her life outside of EFL. The particular situation was causing her distress at the time. In her comments above, Raven outlines the moment in which she thought of an action she could take to move her distressing situation forward. Her experience in the moment with her horse (Janeiro) was that upon thinking of that solution, he physically communicated with her in response to that thought. This example signals to participants' perspectives that the horses communicated physically not only in response to verbal expressions, but also to less externalised elements of themselves such as a thought. In Zara's scenario she verbally expressed an upsetting belief around her experiences. As she did this, she likely also physically signalled her current emotional state, such as through her facial expressions or body language. During Raven's experience she was sitting down and facing away from the horse. However, it is still possible that physical signals of her internal experience were visible to Janeiro. In both Zara and Raven's experiences the horses may have been responding to a combination of stimuli, rather than solely verbal or internal thought processes.

As well as horses utilising physical communication, participants indicated that as clients they also used physical communication to engage horses.

I was in there pretty quickly and the horse started responding, faced me on and started walking towards me or I stopped and the horse came up to me and I started moving around the way Cara said... and I don't know it was just like this empowerment or something came up. It was, it just felt magical really moving around and having this horse sort of on my shoulder moving around everywhere I went, and then Cara said to me "move, move quicker" like dart over there and dart over there

> *and so I started doing it…I was just dodging from one like, like running to that corner, spinning around running somewhere else. And then meanwhile, having this horse, which is not small…kind of right on my shoulder just running, just moving its hooves around wherever I went… (Abby)*

Above Abby describes an activity in which she engaged with the horse by using intentional physical communication. The effect of this was that the horse responded in kind, mirroring Abby's movements. Her example also highlights another important component of physical communication that participants reported during their interviews: the role of the human facilitator. Participants noted that the human facilitator assisted engagement in physical communications by subtly guiding clients in their early stages of communicating nonverbally. As illustrated by Abby's example, her human facilitator initially instructed how she should move, but later provided minimal input through statements such as "move, move quicker".

Minimal and subtle input from human facilitators while building physical communication was prominent across participant interviews.

> *I think I had some encouragement from Cara or some tips or some little bit of yeah direction from Cara to, like to stay interesting. Like so to change direction so once you get her attention then you can move left and right and yeah, and then eventually, you know, she's responding and following you. (TK)*

Through his use of phrases such as "some tips" and "some little bit of yeah direction from Cara", TK indicated that his facilitator's input did not lay out a blueprint or step by step instructions for engagement during his experience. The narrative of a present but not overly involved human facilitator aligned with the model of EFL described by the founder and director of the facility who provided EFL sessions to the participants in this study. She

outlined the human facilitator's role to involve staying out of the way as much as possible but provide input and assistance when deemed necessary.

Physical communication was used by participants to initiate and progress communications with the horses. Participant accounts suggested that their awareness of different ways of building connection and relationship were enhanced as they consciously used physical communication to communicate with the horses. Additionally, participants acknowledged a greater awareness of self through the understanding that they were capable of communicating physically: "it's recognising a different way you can relate to, yeah, other beings or nature in general and other people… It just opened me up to that, and also realising that I can communicate in that way." As Abby noted, while engaging physically she also experienced increased awareness of communication strategies available to her. Abby credited the experiential process with enhancing her self-awareness regarding her own capacity to communicate physically. Moreover, she noted this learning to be applicable beyond the EFL context and beyond animal species.

Overall, communicating physically was described by participants in this study as an important component to the process of communicating nonverbally. Participant narratives indicated that both clients and horses use physical communication to interact with each other. Participants noted subtle guidance from human facilitators as aiding initial engagement in physical communication. Through engaging in a process of communicating physically participants also evidenced increased self-awareness, specifically in regard to the capacity to connect by using physical communication. While physical communication was an explicit component of communicating nonverbally, participants also signalled to a less demonstrable component which is outlined below.

Communicating Energetically. Alongside physical communication, participants also

acknowledged an intangible element of communication that was ‘sensed’ or ‘felt’ during EFL experiences. The intangible and experiential nature of this component makes it difficult to describe or define. Words such as “vibe” (TK) or “energy” (Abby) were used by participants as they endeavoured to explain their experience. For the purpose of consistency going forward, this analysis will refer to this element of communication as energy, energetic communication, or communicating energetically. Participants noted a process of becoming aware of the energetic component of their interactions with the horses as they settled into communicating physically. Additionally, energetic communications were experienced as more subtle communications and perceived to be deeper or less surface level than physical communications. During the process of communicating energetically, participants stated experiencing a synchronisation between themselves and the horses. Furthermore, participants indicated that as they engaged in energetic communication, they were less aware of their cognitive experience and increasingly aware of their physical experience.

During interviews Raven shared how she experienced communication from Janeiro (horse) during an EFL activity: “I felt it. I felt it in his body language and his behaviour and his energy”. Raven’s acknowledgement of feeling the communication, and feeling it through multiple avenues (body language, behaviour, and energy) emphasises a narrative shared by other participants: communication between client and horse during EFL involved both observable qualities and intangible qualities that were felt rather than seen. Additionally, her sentiments acknowledge the co-occurrence of physical and energetic communications.

Abby also acknowledged the subtle nature of energetic communications that occur between client and horse during EFL when she said “I guess, you know, there’s the body language but it feels like it goes even deeper than that. I feel like… there’s a more subtle energetic communication going on”. In addition, her sentiments also highlight that participants experienced energy as a deeper layer of communication than the more overt and

visible physical components.

The excerpts below, during which TK spoke about completing an obstacle course with a horse, demonstrates another narrative about energetic communication which was prominent throughout participant interviews:

> *I just decided, I'm just gonna start running… I'm just gonna put my energy out there. I'm just gonna start running and see what happens. And, and it just worked…I felt great. Like as soon as I started running… it was great. It was really enjoyable. To be able to look back over your shoulder and there's a horse right behind you. And you're jumping over a jump. And, it's jumping over the jump with you, you know? And then followed by another and another and another and you're weaving through tires and all kinds of stuff. And they're all doing it. It's pretty, it was pretty awesome because, and you kind of got the feeling that they might have been enjoying it like I don't know how you quantify it or whatever, but you kind of felt like it was playtime. Everyone was just having fun…*

and

> *I think again, it's this feedback loop where if you're feeling playful, and you're jumping around, and then they are, and you're running and then they respond, and then they start getting really playful, then it feeds back into you and you want to continue that energy, and the energy just keeps going.*

Participants commonly described experiencing a synchronising or sharing of energy between themselves and the horses. As noted above, synchronising of energy was described as a process in which energy moves between and through client and horse in a reciprocal fashion. TK's use of the phrase "the energy" when discussing the "feedback loop" he experienced is notably different from the beginning of this excerpt where he used the phrase

"my energy". TK indicated how he engaged in the interaction with the horse by consciously using his own energy. However, as he notes experiencing synchronisation of energy, he uses the phrase "the energy". This difference suggests a possible shift in TK's experiential understanding of the ownership of energy involved in the communication. This shift in experience may indicate that during the process energy becomes a shared component of communication, rather than belonging to either participant. The lessening of a sense of ownership of an element of communication and instead an increase in a shared component may signal a strengthened bond or connection between the participants (client and horse). As with the earlier examples shared in this section, TK's sentiments emphasise the intertwined nature of physical and energetic communication. Additionally, the above also highlights how participants experienced being affectively in tune with the horses, whereby the emotional qualities of the moments were also shared.

Connected to accounts of shared affective experiences during synchronisation of energy appeared to be increased awareness of sensation from the shoulders down.

> *I just felt like, it felt like there was an expansive feeling around my heart area, like, I guess. It's almost like, yeah, I don't know. Like, that was sort of leading it, or something. Like it wasn't in my head. It was from my body, you know? From the heart. (Abby)*

The above was shared by Abby as she reflected on the role of her body while interacting with a horse. Abby's discourse above states simply the narrative described by participants of experiences being more heavily influenced by parts of their bodies or beings unrelated to the conscious components of their brains. Abby's sentiment that her "heart" was "leading" her during the interaction appears to suggest a more emotional than intellectual process. This is further emphasised through her direct statement "it wasn't in my head". TK

also emphasised feeling over thinking while discussing his experiences and again connected this to his heart:

> *I think it's you feel more in your, in your, in your heart and sort of your heart and soul and body than in your mind. And you know, it's not really a thinking thing. It's almost something you feel in your body. So as a like, I guess if you think about where do you feel joy, you know, you probably feel joy in your heart.*

Differing from other participants, TK also used the concept of his "soul" to describe where he experienced synchronising of energy with the horse. He may have used the word "soul" to emphasise the depth of his affective experience, or his terminology may be indicative of a spiritual component of his EFL experience. Other participants also spoke of parts of the body outside of their brains and hearts as most influential while describing experiences of energy synchronisation:

> *well, it rises up. So it comes from low and goes higher. It does, It comes from, I can't think of feeling it in my legs, like not that low, but I imagine it definitely kind of from the bottom of your kind of torso, stomach, you know, even lower or I don't know. But it comes at least from a stomach. At least. But probably lower and it rises up. It comes right up and there you go…*

and

> *So it's not, it's not head consciousness. It's not even heart consciousness, its gut. And then you're taken over by the time it gets up to here (points to head), you're gone. I guess then that's the time when you can actually, when it gets to here (points to head), that's the time you can actually make your legs and arms move. (Zara)*

The above excerpt is taken from a part of Zara's interview during which she explained an interaction with Queen (horse) during an EFL workshop. Zara described that she and

Queen shared a playful affective experience and ran around an arena together. Prior to the above she spoke about herself and Queen becoming "joined" in a connection that had not been built through physical communication but through "a different way". This intangible way of connecting echoed the energetic communications described by other participants. In this quote she highlights the parts of her that she believed herself to be experiencing and participating in the event from. Similar to Abby and TK, Zara noted a lack of "head consciousness". However, she associated the experience with "gut [consciousness]" rather than "heart consciousness". Zara's quote also outlines another component of this process described by participants. This was the acknowledgement that the brain still plays a part in interactions, however it is not the driving force. Participants did not dismiss their brains completely. Rather they acknowledged other parts of themselves and their beings as more influential or dominant during their interactions with the horses. Their brains were credited with completing more mechanical components of interactions such as signalling the physical movement of the body.

Participants also noted that as they engaged in the process of building connection with the horse through physical and energetic communication, they experienced communicating as an effortless practice:

> *[we were communicating] but not in a forced way or a very deliberate way. I'm just, I'm going this way, and she's going too. Just a natural way. You know, I wasn't thinking oh what am I going to ask her to do? Am I gonna do that? I was just, I was just doing it. We were like fish in a school. Just joined. So yes, we were communicating, but it didn't take any effort. So it wasn't, It didn't need to be said. It just was happening. (Zara)*

Above Zara is speaking about the same experience with Queen outlined earlier.

Having been asked in her interview if the two of them were communicating as they ran around the arena, Zara's above statement demonstrates the effortless, flow-like form of communication described by participants when strong connection with a horse was achieved during EFL.

In summary, participants in this project described communicating energetically as a significant component of communicating nonverbally during EFL. Energetic communication was posited as an intangible element of communication, often experienced as occurring at a deeper level than physical communication. Through communicating energetically participants noted experiencing synchronisation of energy, and increased influence from areas other than their brains. Participants also indicated that communication was experienced as effortless while communicating energetically.

Effects of Engaging in Nonverbal Communication. Through communicating and relationship building with the horses using physical and energetic communication, two impactful flow-on effects appeared to occur. These were; dropping habitual ways of interacting and meaning making and evening out the power balance between human and horse. Participant narratives suggest that the effects could be both components of the wider communication processes, and processes within themselves.

Participants described one effect of lacking a shared verbal language, and therefore engaging in alternative communication styles, as a need to discard habitual ways of communicating:

> *rather than putting people with people… we know the pleasantries to say when I call, make a phone call 'Hi, how are you? How's your day been? How are you coping with COVID?' We are rehearsed, we are automated … With a horse you can't talk to a horse in that automatic habitual motion…it takes people out of their normal zone…So*

that you don't use any of your normal day to day habits or constructs that get you through life. (Bradley)

As Bradley stated above, during EFL clients are not able to use habitual ways of interacting that are available to humans who share a verbal language. Bradley's use of the phrase "we know the pleasantries to say" also signals to shared meaning making that can occur between humans during mutually understood social processes. Bradley used the example of starting an interaction by asking an individual how they are to highlight a conversational norm commonly understood between humans in Aotearoa New Zealand. As Bradley also noted certain social processes or scripts for engagement with another human could be entered into in a rehearsed and automated way, due to the habit of performing them day to day. Participant accounts emphasised that dropping habitual ways of interacting and meaning making was necessary due to a lack shared verbal language and social processes.

Furthermore, through relationship building with the horses during EFL, participants also highlighted a change in understanding of their relationship with those horses and to horses in general. In the following interview excerpt of conversation between Abby and myself, Abby was discussing the difference in her relationship to EFL horse River, compared to other horses:

Abby: *I think I think in the past, I've thought of horses in a different way and... quite quickly being around River, I was opened up to a different way of communicating or a different way of relating.*

Sophie: *Yeah, so that's what I've been wondering about while you were talking because you mentioned that you were communicating without a lead rope, without gear.*

Abby: *I felt like I needed to use force in the past*

Sophie: *Right, so it's a different relationship then or?*

Abby: *Yeah, because it just felt so free and fluid.*

[Break in conversation as Abby and I continue to discuss communication methods before circling back to the relationship]

Sophie: *So I guess then, is it, I'm trying to think, in that communication and the way he kind of, he's feeding back to you or he's communicating with you as well, is that how that kind of different quality of relationship forms there? Is that once you're communicating on the energetic level that's what allows you to have that different relationship?*

Abby: *Yes. Yeah, I think so.*

In the conversation between Abby and myself, we unpacked Abby's observation that prior to engaging in EFL she had thought of horses differently. As Abby stated, she experienced her relationship with River to be more "free" and "fluid" which changed the quality of it. Abby also credited the different ways of communicating, specifically energetically, as facilitating the relationship difference. Later in the same interview, Abby continued speaking about her relationship with River:

definitely it doesn't feel like a like a therapist or teacher or anything like that. It feels like, I use that word soft again, it just feels really harmonious and genuine and on an, on the some level actually to me

The notion of the horse and human relationship within EFL as a relationship with relative equality between the participants was also signalled by other participants during their interviews:

in a parent mode where you're telling, you know I'd be tell[ing] the horse to do this, a

> *child where I'd be like 'no, I'm not doing it' and stroppy and 'well you do what I want to do', or the adult one where we have a [face-to-face] conversation at an equal level of 'I would like you to do this. I'd feel uncomfortable if you didn't' and vice versa. And I feel again, it brings you into should we say that balance where the horse is expecting you to act, if we use that model, of the adult [to-adult] relationship. 'I wish you to go in this direction', I'm going to be very clear, but I wish you'd go in that direction. As an adult, I'm going to respect if you choose not to, right? So rather than being this, 'you will do what I tell you,'... as Cara alluded to, whipping a horse, you can't whip a horse to do what you want it to do. That's a parent-child relationship. If you do it the other way where I went in, and this is why Cara gets us to draw attention to ourselves. If you go in as a child, meek, quiet. Lacking the authority as an equal, the horse is going to pay no attention to you. If you go into adult, you get that right response. (Bradley)*

Using the example of an adult - child relationship compared to an adult - adult relationship, Bradley signalled to the balance of power that participants described experiencing relationship with the EFL horses. Additionally, by using the example of whipping a horse as being an adult - child type interaction, Bradley suggested a difference in human - horse relationships during EFL and other human – horse relationships. By drawing this comparison, he also alluded to the lack of traditional communication methods (and therefore the presence of novel communication styles) as facilitating the equality and power balance within the relationship. This was similar to Abby's comments, in which she noted thinking of horses differently in the past and feeling as though she needed to use force. Participants' narratives regarding equality and balanced power dynamics, along with their comparison of human – horse relationships in EFL and other human – horse relationships, may signal to an unsettling of the power dynamics that often exist between humans and

horses outside of EFL. Moreover, indication that the alternative communication styles used during EFL facilitate novel relationship also suggests that the processes of communication outlined in this analysis may facilitate the unsettling of relational power dynamics between humans and horses.

Connecting Authentically

Connecting authentically was signalled by participants in this study as an important component of the connecting and relationship building that occurred between clients and horses during EFL. Participants described experiences of strong and genuine connection to the horses. They also noted the perception that the horses required authenticity from them during interactions. Additionally, participants suggested that horses have a high ability to detect inauthenticity, which reduces the need and potential utility of impression management. During the process of connecting authentically, participants noted an increase in connection to self, and the experience of truly being seen by another being.

Speaking about an impactful experience with horse Austin, Zara noted “It's not like I've met some essential horse self. It just was true. Maybe that's the word I'd use, it was it was something that was true…Just maybe a moment of truth or trueness…”. Prior to that statement Zara noted experiencing such strong connection with Austin that she lost a sense of them as individual beings. Zara’s use of the words “true”, “truth” and “trueness” in relation to this experience with Austin highlights a sentiment commonly shared by participants: experiencing a fundamental reality occurred both in moments during EFL and in the connection between client and horse. Describing different EFL experiences, with a range of horses, other participants echoed Zara’s thoughts. For example, Abby shared “It really felt really pure” and Bailey expressed “this kind of more authentic connection and more true and real connection”. Abby’s use of the word “pure” is similar to Zara’s use of the word “true” and emphasises the participant narrative that their connections and experiences with the

horses occurred without being adulterated by anything. Likewise, Bailey's sentiment, while also using the word "true", utilises "authentic" and "real" to describe the connection. Again, this indicates the genuine quality experienced by participants. Bailey's statement also occurred in the context of comparing the relationship and connection experienced with the horses, to those commonly shared with other humans. Comparing genuineness of connection between clients and horses with human-to-human connections was a common comparison drawn by participants in this study. Participants credited client and horse connections with higher levels of authenticity in every comparison.

Participants also opined that contributing to the authenticity of connection in these relationships, was that it was required in order to achieve engagement with the horses. Discussing the need to communicate energetically in order to effectively connect with a horse, Abby reported "I couldn't fake it, either. Like, you know, it's ... it was genuine like if I wasn't doing it, he wasn't responding." Abby utilised the word "genuine" to emphasise the authenticity that she had to bring to communicating and connecting during EFL. When describing the genuineness needed in clients' behaviours and communications with horses during EFL, as Abby does above - participants commonly indicated that without them being authentic, the horse would not engage.

Lack of engagement from horses was not limited to lack of genuineness in behaviours and communications from the client. Participants also described the need to be authentic with their own emotions and expressions of self:

> *the harder I tried the less the horse wanted to do it. The more relaxed I went, and went, 'oh sad it's not working' , actually, the horse became more respondent… I did feel like perhaps, and there's two ways you could look at this, perhaps the horse was like well, if you come in with that attitude then no, or perhaps actually it was that my*

blockers of 'I've got to do this right', was actually the blocker that was preventing me from communicating correctly. (Bradley)

Above Bradley described an experience of attempting to engage with a horse while internally focused on achieving a particular outcome. Bradley indicated that in order to gain a response from the horse he had to acknowledge his sadness that his reality was not matching his desires. Bradley posed two possibilities for why this level of authenticity was required, the first being that the horse may have refused engagement based on his approach. The second possibility posed by Bradley was that his own ability to engage authentically may have been blocked by his focus on engaging in a certain way. Bradley's suggestion of a part of himself blocking engagement, with authentic acknowledgement of his state in the present moment as the requirement, was not something commonly acknowledged by other participants. However, his suggestion that the requirement of authenticity stemmed from the horse was also described by other participants.

Horses requiring authenticity was not the only idea suggested as to why connection and relationships between clients and horses in EFL had such high levels of authenticity. Another suggestion was the belief in clients that horses had an enhanced ability to detect authenticity:

I feel like you can't, you cannot pretend something in front of a horse. You can in front of people, maybe some people will see your true self nevertheless. But with horses, every horse will know when you pretend you're not nervous. They'll feel it. So there's no use in pretending something. (Bailey)

Bailey offered the above as an explanation of why she feels more able to be herself while in relationship with horses and why she experiences those relationships as more "real". Bailey's quote highlights the participant narrative that horses are always able to see an

individual's "true self" and that therefore pretending to be anything other than that is futile. This idea suggested that impression management was a pointless act in EFL, which in turn encourages clients to engage in a process of connecting authentically.

Contrasting interacting with horses to interacting with other humans, Bailey again noted the urge to mask or falsify certain aspects of oneself when engaging with other humans:

> *I can be more who I am, so that I can connect better with myself. Whereas most people, it's just in general, it's more that I feel like I have to play a role or pretend to be someone, pretend to do things or yeah. It's not always said I pretend to be someone, but maybe in most interactions with people, there's this trying to keep up a certain picture or trying to make them think I am this or that or yeah.*

In Bailey's example, the urge to do so was driven by a motivation to manage the impression obtained by the other party. Additionally, Bailey's quote also highlights an important effect of connecting authentically that was significant in participant interviews: an increased connection to self, experienced by participants as they engaged in authentic connection with the horses.

Abby also described engaging in impression management with other humans, while contrasting that to the more authentic experience of engaging with a horse:

> *So it's hard to describe in the moment, but I definitely feel like I get a sense of his essence more…And that's sort of reflected, you know… he's seeing mine and I'm seeing his…And there's no faking or anything needed. You know, it's just, it's really soft…I've spent most of my life pretending…Yeah, trying to do what I think society wants and be someone else and, um pretending to be normal. Whatever normal is!…But in quite a strong way, hugely to my detriment and it's just, it's been quite freeing being able to have this kind of interaction where.. yeah, you're enough as you*

are.

Additionally, she described the experience of being seen for who she truly is, while also seeing another being for who they truly are. As Abby noted above, she experienced a sense of her authentic self as "enough", which in turn provided a sense of freedom. Experiencing increased connection to self, and being seen and seeing, were two effects of engaging in a process of authentic connection during EFL that were emphasised as significant by participants.

To summarise, connecting authentically is a component of the relationship building process that participants reported as significant. Participants provided varying explanations of what contributed to the occurrence of a process of connecting authentically. Authenticity from the client as an expectation from the horse, and horses having increased capacity to detect inauthenticity were two explanations commonly provided. Through the process of connecting and relationship building with horses, participants noted that clients experience being in a relationship where impression management is not required nor useful. In turn this appears to allow clients the experience of a freedom from a version of themselves socially constructed to benefit them when in relation with other humans. As a result of this freedom, participants indicated that clients could experience being seen and accepted as they are, as well as experiencing a stronger connection to themselves.

Becoming Present

Another process occurring during EFL, indicated by participants in this study, was the process of becoming present. This was indicated through descriptions of changes in their awareness during the process of becoming present. Becoming present was a process that occurred within clients as opposed to between client and horse, however, participants noted interacting with horses aided the process to occur. Additionally, participants noted how components of EFL, such as non-verbal communication, also facilitated becoming present.

Becoming present was then also shown to contribute to enhancing those same components of EFL. Therefore, while becoming present was a process that was facilitated by other processes, it was also signalled to support those processes to continue.

To a certain extent, participants stated a movement of their focus as they experienced becoming present:

> *I didn't notice the time I was in the arena with River. Couldn't tell you how long I was there. All I know is I wanted it to be longer. Right? But I didn't leave and went 'oh that was just an hour' or 'that was just five minutes.' I came away and went I just wish it could be longer. (Bradley)*

Above, Bradley spoke about an EFL experience with horse River. Reflecting on his experiences, Bradley shared a narrative commonly expressed within this study: the loss of conscious awareness of time. Participants appeared to indicate that as they engaged with the horses, their focus moved towards the details of interactions that were occurring moment to moment. As a result, concepts such as time (which are bound by ideas of the past and the future) began to dissolve from clients' awareness, allowing them to experience the present moment.

However, intangible, conceptual components of experience were not the only factors shown to fall from conscious awareness during the process of becoming present. Participants also described less awareness of the physical components of their surroundings not significant to the interactions with the horses:

> *when I went in, I was hesitant because you know, all these people were watching, and I had that, normal human thing of 'oh my gosh, what if the horse just totally ignores me' or whatever. But there was a certain part of being in there where it was like everything else just disappeared. And it was just, in that rare, it was really, it was a*

> *very being in the present. That's what it was, it was really being in the moment with the horse and all those sorts of thoughts just disappear, and you're just fully engaged. (Abby)*

Also speaking about an experience with River, Abby's sentiments reflect another narrative commonly offered by participants: the loss of conscious awareness of human observers. Again, through movement of their focus to their interactions with the horses and therefore becoming present to their current experience, participants experienced losing conscious awareness of any individuals who were observing them. As the above also highlights losing awareness of observers coincided with a loss of negative cognitions. In Abby's experience negative cognitions related to the potential of rejection from the horse. Bradley also expressed experiencing negative cognitions at the beginning of his experience. However, in his experience his cognitions surrounded the potential of judgement from observers or 'failure' in the EFL exercise:

> *hard to admit, I was very much aware of feeling judged by everyone else, you know, I thought, 'oh, what if I don't do a very good job? What if everyone laughs at me? What if I can't do it?' Frontal cortex firing on all cylinders! When I started relaxing into it, I became more grounded. Became more present.*

As both above examples accentuate, once engaged in the practice of EFL with the horses, negative cognitions appeared to quieten.

Changes in awareness appeared to indicate less focus on components of experience not directly associated with present moment interactions. Additionally, participants suggested an expansion of awareness associated with other elements of their experience:

> *I wouldn't say I felt in my body per se, but I felt it in my, shall we call it, consciousness of being aware in the moment, right? Whereas a lot of the time you're*

> *kind of rush, rush, rush, rush, rush,... communications with humans, we kind of go with verbal communication first, because that's what we know and we rush into it. And I think you're not thinking about what's your posture, where you're stood in the room or the ... you know, in this case, in the field or the ring. Whereas you become much more conscious and much, much more grounded. Thinking about your nonverbal communication…*

and

> *I think it was cognitively physical. And that sounds an odd way to describe it. But my brain was engaged. So, I was becoming more cognisant of my physical positioning and position as a whole. And I was much more conscious of that. Rather than right now, I'm not thinking about my surroundings, I'm thinking about my words that I'm saying to you, as an example. Whereas with the training, I was thinking about, there was nothing about the brain. So if you think of your speech processing, there was nothing in that part of the brain triggering, it was all about all the other aspects of processing. (Bradley)*

Drawing comparison between his experience of participating in the research interview, Bradley noted a shift in his consciousness while being present with the horses. Bradley observed his awareness to shift from verbal components of his experience to increased awareness of physical components, such as physical posture. Increases in awareness of one's physical experience was a common theme described by participants as they engaged in nonverbal communication and experienced becoming present. In Bradley's experience his brain and cognitions were significant in the component of expanded awareness while becoming present.

Other participants associated becoming present with experiences of expanded

awareness that took their focus away from their minds. For example, Abby described her experience of becoming present as: “It's kind of like you go into this timeless space in the present moment. Which we don't get an opportunity to access very much when we're operating from our minds.” Additionally, she associated increased awareness with engaging in EFL from certain parts of her body:

> *it's almost like the rest of the world drops away. But it's like the whole world is in that moment. You know, it's like, yeah, you can just really be with your senses in your body. And it feels like this, this essence, energy is alive.*

Abby’s use of the phrase “it’s almost like the rest of the world drops away” in direct conjunction with “but it’s like the whole world is in that moment” summarises the common participant experience of shifts in awareness while becoming present. Additionally, Abby signalled to the experience of increased awareness of the senses in one’s body. Her quote also highlights that intangible elements of the experience such as the “essence” and “energy” are keenly felt through her use of the term “alive”.

In explaining the experience of becoming present, participants also described components of interacting with the horses that assisted the process. One component of the process noted by participants was the sheer nature of interacting with a horse:

> *you have to be very present with the horses, because you have to focus on like, when you're leading, you have to focus on "okay, are there any dangers or difficulties or...?" you have to be present in the moment, and when we have to be present, we cannot think very much. So there's a more clear space in the head. (Bailey)*

During Bailey’s first interview for this project, she reflected on the specifics of EFL and horses that facilitate experiences of significant personal growth. Bailey’s sentiments here demonstrate the narrative described by participants that awareness of potential risk while

interacting with horses requires individuals to be present. In this way, the basic premise of EFL, bringing horses and humans together, provides a context that supports an individual to be present. Similar to ideas shared by Abby and Bradley (which noted a lessening of negative cognitions while becoming present), Bailey noted the diminishing of cognitions in general as an important part of the experience of being present.

Although not always explicitly stated, participant discourse signalled to another component of EFL that encouraged presence in clients: the idea that horses in general are more present than humans. TK's sentiments are an example of how participants compared the ability to be present between humans and horses:

> *you know a lot of people they worry about the future, or they have things that happen to them in the past they carry around… but when you're with the horse, maybe they can forget about the past and stop worrying about the future and they're just there in the moment. And with the horse… the horse probably isn't too concerned with what happened last week or isn't too concerned with what's going to happen next week. Probably just happy to be where they are.*

Noting that "a lot" of people spend time consumed with the past and the future, TK suggested that horses were "probably" less concerned with those concepts. His phrasing suggests a difference in the presence of each species, crediting horses with increased presence. Also exemplified is the tentative way participants generalised horses, avoiding talking in absolutes when not speaking about their direct experience. The belief that horses are generally more present than humans may indicate that sharing space with horses provided participants with an example of presence. This in turn may have played a part in increased presence in the participants themselves.

Participants also exemplified the process of engaging in non-verbal communication

and connecting and relationship building with the horse as influencing the process of becoming present:

> *the horse is 100% present or not present with you so to speak. I know there's a varying degree, but a horse can't be like, oh, I'll get back to you on Facebook. Or let me just get you on TikTok. You know, it's, you're there with it, or you're not. And I think certainly, I'd say there's a lot of value in that. Because adding that nonverbal communication really builds into that as well, I think. You can tell so quickly, if it's listening, humans are very good, especially parents with children or vice versa going 'Mm hmm. Yes, of course, whatever you want'. They may be present but they're not present... (Bradley)*

Bradley's quote not only supports the idea that the basic premise of EFL (bringing horses and humans coming together) encourages presence. It also suggests the importance of non-verbal communication and connection/relationship building. Using popular social media platforms to emphasise the point, Bradley highlights the real-time and fixed opportunity to engage with horses during EFL. The inability to connect on social media platforms stresses that the opportunity cannot be delayed or resumed outside of the EFL environment. Additionally, the process of engaging in non-verbal communication previously outlined in this analysis aids in the process of clients becoming present. Participants reported that focusing on non-verbal communication improved their focus on themselves, as well as on the horses. Additionally, they suggested it was a clear signal to the presence of the horse during interactions. Using the example of comparison between the way a human may be able to feign presence through verbal communication with another human, Bradley implied that non-verbal communication does not allow the same to occur.

Connection and relationship building was also noted by participants in this study as

important in both aiding and maintaining clients' engagement in the process of becoming present. Emphasising the importance of being focused while interacting with horses Bradley noted that "you have to be 100% focused. Because otherwise the horse goes, you're not participating. So therefore, I'm not participating". As mentioned earlier in this analysis, participants described non-verbal communication as an important process that also impacts the process of connection and relationship building during EFL. Regarding its impact on the process of becoming present, participants suggested that engaging in non-verbal communication facilitates EFL clients in becoming present. As the quote above highlights, participants also noted that to hold the connection between client and horse, the client must continue to engage in the present moment. In this way processes of connection and relationship building, such as the process of engaging in non-verbal communication, facilitates the process of becoming present. In turn, experiencing the present moment then continues to influence and strengthen the process of connection/relationship building.

Overall, becoming present was described as occurring within the individual client. In this study, the participants indicated movement in their awareness as their focus shifted to the present moment. Reported to decrease during the process of becoming present was conscious awareness of concepts such as time, elements of the physical surroundings, and negative cognitions. In contrast, awareness of one's physical body was noted to increase while becoming present. Although the process of becoming present occurred within individual clients, participants also signalled engagement with the horse as aiding the process. The contextual component of bringing horses and humans together, and the perceived ability of horses to be in the present moment were both highlighted as influential. Furthermore, connecting and relationship building between client and horse, and engaging in non-verbal communication, were also noted to aid the process of becoming present. Becoming present was also indicated to influence these processes in turn. Participants suggested that becoming

present and experiencing the present moment, while a process in itself, is impacted by, and a component of, other processes.

Summary of the Relationship Building Process

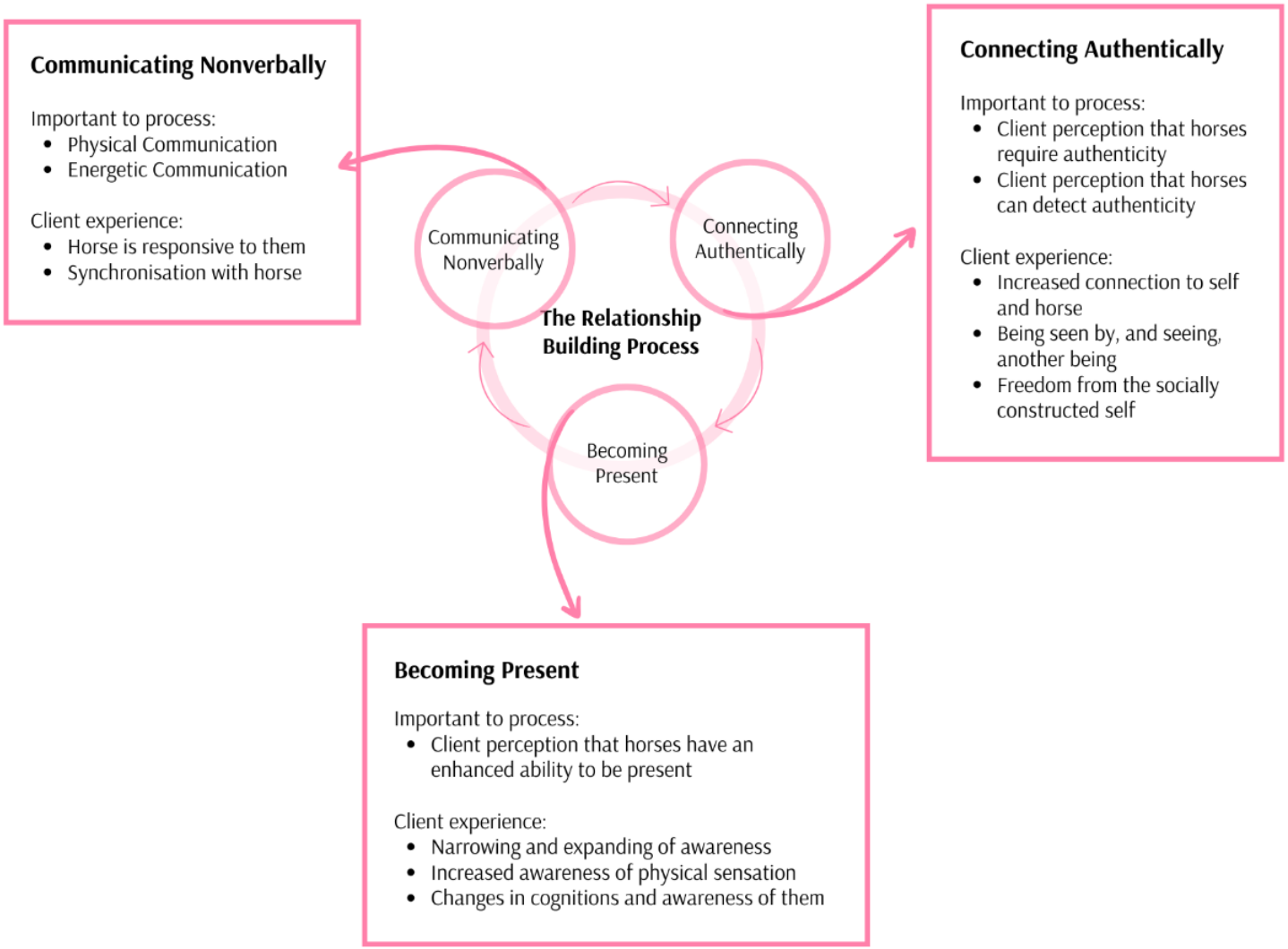
To summarise, through exploration of impactful and effective processes that occur between client and horse during EFL, participants described connecting and in turn relationship building between client and horse as one significant process. Within that process, participant accounts signalled three important core components. These were: communicating nonverbally, connecting authentically, and becoming present. Communicating nonverbally involved sub-components of communicating physically and communicating energetically. Through analysing participant experiences and discourse relating to the core components, those components were emphasised as processes within their own right. When considered together, the processes of communicating nonverbally, connecting authentically, and becoming present contributed to an overarching process of relationship building between client and facilitator. Additionally, communicating physically and communicating energetically were indicated as both smaller processes, and components of the process of communicating nonverbally.

Participant discourse highlighted that processes had the capacity to influence and impact each other during the practice of EFL. For example, participant accounts suggested that the process of becoming present was often influenced by increased awareness of one's own physical body. Participants endorsed that contributing to this increased awareness was the process of communicating nonverbally. In turn, participants also highlighted that in becoming present their ability to engage in nonverbal communication was further enhanced. The capacity for mutual influence between processes indicated an interactive relationship between them. These processes were shown to occur through the interaction of client and horse during EFL, shaping each other and in turn contributing to the connection and

relationship between client and horse. Hence, these processes can be considered components of a wider process; connecting and relationship building between client and horse. However, connecting and relationship building was not the only significant process highlighted by participants during this project. Participants also indicated a process that occurred during EFL, but which was experienced as significantly different to the process of connecting and relationship building with the horse. This process is outlined below.

Figure 3

The Relationship Building Process – Core Components Unpacked



The Personalising Process

Three participants in this study shared experiences that varied from those relating to the relationship building process. The experiences were highly personal in nature however, analysis of participants' accounts demonstrated similarities between them. Included in their similarities was a perceived lack of connection between participant and horse. Three core components of the process were identified: shaping (by the human facilitator), splitting awareness, and meaning making. Those core components encouraged participants to contribute elements of their personal histories to their experiences. In turn this further influenced the core components, and the personally relevant way that participants experienced the process. Additionally, the previously outlined contextual components of EFL were also shown to interact with the core components of the personalising process. Furthermore, participant narratives suggested that, despite the personal nature of experiences, the personalising process does occur between client and horses. The personalising process was deemed important to include for two primary reasons:

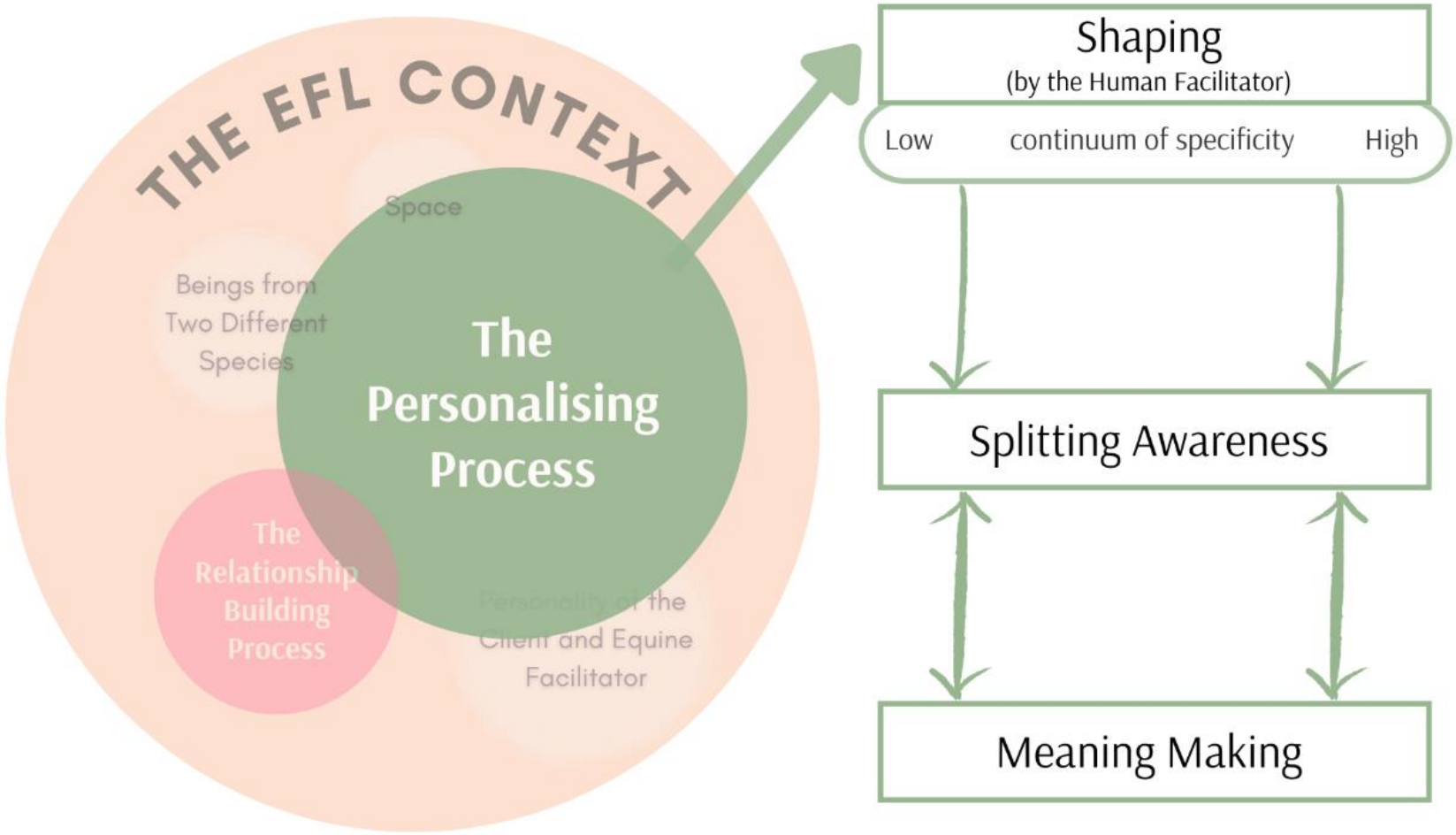
1. Consistency and depth of the described procedural components across the three participants.

2. Contrast between this process and the relationship building process, therefore highlighting the capacity for clients to experience different processes while participating in EFL.

Below, the core components of the personalising process are presented. Throughout, comparisons are drawn between each core component and core components of the relationship building process. Finally, consideration is given to why the personalising process can be understood as occurring between client and horse.

Figure 4

The Personalising Process



Participant accounts indicated the personalising process as a second process that occurred between themselves and the horses during EFL, and which made the practice impactful and effective. While sharing experiences emphasising the personalising process, participants noted experiencing a lack of connection between themselves and the horses. Specifically, this was expressed through descriptions of a lack of relationship between client and horse. Zara noted "I wasn't relational. I wasn't relational with Andy. Because I was preoccupied with my trauma. And with those other ones I was relational." Similarly, Bailey expressed:

> *it was really just we were doing something together. But it was not that she was... There was no relationship between the two of us...other than... there was no relationship between the two of us, other than we have to do this together now. You know, its nothing heart to heart or something. I didn't see her as a person. I just saw her as someone...*

Both participants stated experiencing a lack of relationship with some horses. Zara also contrasted the lack of relationship/connection she felt to her experiences that indicated the relationship building process. Bailey's comment that there was nothing "heart to heart" occurring during her experience also appears to function as a way of separating this experience from others. Her comment appears related to components of the relationship building process that participants indicated enhanced connection and relationship building. Examples of such components in the relationship building process include: experiencing synchronisation during energetic communication and experiencing being seen by, and seeing, another being. In this case she appears to highlight a lack of those qualities in her current experience, therefore emphasising the lack of connection and relationship experienced. Stressing the lack of connection in these experiences signalled to an overarching difference in the nature of these EFL experiences. Analysing the experiences further, it appeared that the

core components of the experiences differed from those signalling the relationship building process. Ultimately, the different core components of these experiences and the perceived lack of connection between client and horse indicated the presence of a second process occurring. As will be explained further throughout this section, this process (the personalising process) was characterised by experiences lacking in connection between client and horse, which appeared influenced by clients' increased connection to their personal histories.

The third participant who shared an experience signalling the personalising process did not comment on connection at all. Raven's experience occurred primarily with horse Honey. While describing the experience Raven did not explicitly state that she and Honey lacked connection during the experience, nor did she comment on the presence or quality of a connection. However, when discussing her EFL experiences in general she signalled to a pre-existing relationship between herself and Honey: "I found myself around Honey a lot". Raven's lack of discussion regarding the quality or presence of a connection contrasts to the certainty with which Bailey and Zara discussed the lack of connection/relationship that they experienced. This may suggest a difference in the nature of the personalising process as it occurred between these participants. Although it is possible that Raven also noted a lack of connection with Honey during her experience, her choice not to share that may indicate that it was not an important feature for her. If a lack of connection was present in Raven's experience, then her pre-existing relationship with Honey may have contributed to a sense that this was not a key feature of the experience. Alternatively, her pre-existing relationship with Honey may have influenced an underlying sense of connection between them that remained during the personalising process. Either way, Raven's experience appears to point to a variation regarding how the personalising process was experienced in regard to connection.

To summarise, a feature of the experiences outlining the personalising process was a

lack of connection between participants and the horses. Participants both implied and explicitly stated that the lack of connection was different to experiences that indicated the relationship building process. One participant did not comment on the client – horse connection as it occurred during her experience. However, she did acknowledge a pre-existing relationship with the horse which may have impacted the nature of her experience while the personalising process occurred. Specifically: it may have supported a sense that the current moment lack of connection was not important. Or it may have contributed to an overarching sense of connection to the horse that remained during the experience. The lack of connection noted by participants was experienced despite suggestion that the process still occurred between client and horse. Participant examples of this will be presented and discussed towards the end of this analysis. Additionally, an understanding of the process' core components will facilitate understanding of this process as occurring between client and horse. The first of three core components, shaping, is outlined below.

Shaping (by the Human Facilitator)

Participants described shaping by the human facilitator as a core component of the personalising process. Shaping in the context of this process refers to: the act of initial input by a human facilitator, in the context of an EFL activity, which influenced participants' experiences going forward. This definition was constructed due to its fit with participant accounts of their experiences (other EFL participants, such as human facilitators, may define shaping and its function differently due to their different role in EFL). Shaping was shown to vary in nature through less and more specific forms of shaping. Participant experiences suggested that variations in the act of shaping structured EFL activities along a continuum of specificity. Gaps in specificity appeared to leave participants to utilise their own personal histories to fill in details regarding their experience's purpose, meaning, and available learnings. Despite variations in the nature of shaping, it was deemed a core procedural

component rather than a component of context. This is because the behaviour of a human facilitator providing input (shaping) was consistent across the relevant participant experiences. However, shaping was shown to interact with important contextual components of EFL. This interaction appeared to influence the highly personal nature of participant's experiences during the personalising process. Finally, comparing shaping with components of the relationship building process highlighted its relevance to specific experiences and emphasised it as a core component of the personalising process.

One type of shaping exemplified by participants in this study was subtle and lacked specificity. This was provided by the human facilitator as direction for, and a function of, an EFL activity:

> *the purpose of the activity, it was basically just to go out into the paddock and like just feel ... like... be open and listen to what the horses are communicating to you and I sort of ended up with Honey. And I was patting her, and I think I was getting quite emotional because I was like, feeling a lot of Mum's stuff. And it was probably around the time where I was really having to define some very clear boundaries around that. To let go of a lot of stuff, I think to do with my relationship with my mother. (Raven)*

Raven shared this example while describing an experience with horse Honey. She did not explicitly acknowledge shaping by her human facilitator. However, through emphasising the purpose of the activity she signalled the influence that the input had on the rest of her experience. The instruction in this example highlights the gaps in the structure of an EFL activity that lower specificity shaping provides. Raven may not have directly quoted her human facilitator, however, her chosen language suggests a certain definitiveness in her understanding of the instructions. The human facilitator appears to have indicated that the horse would have something to communicate. Yet the lack of detail suggests that the subject

of that communication was not stated. Raven's focus while interacting with Honey then centred on her relationship with her own mother. Additionally, she acknowledged that the experience occurred during a time in her life where the nature of her relationship with her mother was in flux. Framing an activity with a specific function (i.e., the horse communicating something to client), while also being non-specific about the focus, appears to encourage clients to make sense of their experience in a way personally important to them. Subtle shaping, that is low in specificity, appears to suggest potential for a human facilitator to shape a client's experience to a certain degree. Concurrently it also grants autonomy to the client as they are left to select any element of their personal history with which to fill in details.

A second form of shaping described by participants was more directive and specific. Before detailing her own experience, Bailey also stated the specific purpose of the EFL activity. In doing so she acknowledged it as significant to what followed: "we had to build a course that showed our life path and then we went through with a horse and an expert companion." Bailey's example highlights direct instruction and focus for the activity giving us an example how shaping may look. She did not explicitly state being aware of the influence of shaping on the rest of her experience. However, explicit understanding and acknowledgement of shaping was demonstrated by Zara:

> *because of the way it's all set up, it's like family and the path of your life and you're leading, you know… it's in the context of the pathway. And it's in the context of difficulties you've faced in your life. It's totally in the context of this…*
>
> *I was preoccupied with the story of my life, because that's what I'd been asked to do…what I brought was a preoccupation with my family story. So, I'm going to put anything that happens through that lens, because that's what I'm preoccupied with.*

Speaking about her own experience of the same activity, Zara stated a link between her contributions and the pre-defined purpose of the activity. Her assertion indicates a clear belief that the initial shaping influenced her engagement with, and meaning making of, anything that subsequently occurred. The shaping in Bailey and Zara's examples provides a contrast to the less specific shaping experienced by Raven. Zara's insights into how shaping impacted her suggest that with a more directive approach a human facilitator has potential to move a client's focus in a specific direction. By providing higher specificity shaping, the human facilitators in Bailey and Zara's examples appeared to reduce Bailey and Zara's autonomy to choose what of their personal history they brought into the experience. Overall, shaping by the human facilitator appears to function as offering structure to EFL activities along a continuum of specificity. The gaps in specificity appear to leave clients filling in the details from their lives outside of the experience. Participant indications of a continuum of specificity marks an interesting difference from the perspective shared by the founder and director of the facility that provided EFL to these participants. She suggested that facilitators provide minimal directions during EFL activities so that clients will make meaning of their experiences based on whatever is important to them at that time. However, participants in this study appeared to suggest that human facilitators can have more influence over the focus of clients' experiences than they may be aware of.

Interaction Between Shaping and Contextual Components of EFL. Shaping appeared to influence the personalised way that participants experienced EFL when the personalising process occurred. Due to variations in the nature of shaping, and the experiences that followed, this analysis considered whether the act of shaping may be better understood as a contextual component. Components such as personality of the client and horse were deemed contextual due to their variability across experiences and participants. However, shaping by the human facilitator was a consistently occurring incident across

experiences outlining the personalising process. For example, the instructions and explanations provided by human facilitators were consistently acknowledged at the beginning of the experiences. Human facilitators were shown to actively initiate the process through input that shaped participant engagement going forward. Therefore, due to consistency in the occurrence of the act of shaping, it is best understood as a core component of the personalising process.

Participant examples emphasised important interactions that occurred between shaping and contextual components of EFL. One contextual component shown to be influenced through shaping was space. For example, in both Bailey and Zara's experiences shaping by their human facilitators influenced change to the physical space surrounding them (through building an obstacle course). How the space was utilised was also influenced by the human facilitator's instructions (e.g., to engage in the activity while thinking about one's life).

In addition to space, the contextual component of personality also appeared to be impacted by shaping. This is illustrated in Raven's example, as the low specificity shaping provided high autonomy for her to select what elements of her personal history were relevant to bring to the experience. Hence, the act of shaping by the human facilitator interacted with the contextual component of personality to inform participant engagement, and the meaning made of experiences going forward. Additionally, the personalities of horses may also interact with shaping during the personalising process. As was outlined earlier in this analysis, Raven perceived Honey as having a maternal energy and reported processing aspects of her maternal relationship with Honey. It is possible that the combination of the low specificity act of shaping, Raven's personality, and Honey's personality all influenced the maternal focus going forward.

Outlining the interaction between core and contextual components throughout this process is important because of the interwoven way they presented in participants' experiences. While core components were consistent across participant examples, the varied ways that participants experienced them appeared impacted by the influence of contextual components.

Contrasting Shaping with the Relationship Building Process. When describing experiences relevant to the personalising process, participants consistently acknowledged the occurrence of the act of shaping. This contrasted with participant experiences that described the relationship building process. In part this appeared due to the context in which the relationship building process occurred. For example, for some participants the relationship building process occurred during completion of an EFL activity. However, for others it occurred at random points during their overall experience, and without the presence of a human facilitator. This variation suggested a potential lack of importance regarding human facilitator input during experiences of the relationship building process. Comparatively, experiences outlining the personalising process consistently highlighted it as occurring during EFL activities. These activities will have been preceded by some form of human facilitator input. This difference provides further indication of shaping by the human facilitator as core to the overall occurrence of the personalising process.

Where examples of the relationship building process did take place during an EFL activity, participants referred to the activity. However, their explanations focused on the core components of the relationship building process presented earlier. The lack of participant focus on the purpose of the activities may suggest that even if shaping happened, participants did not perceive it as core to their experience. Again, this contrast signals the differing core components within each process. It also suggests that participation in an EFL activity, and occurrence of shaping, does not guarantee occurrence of the personalising process. No clear

indication of why the personalising process does not always occur during completion of EFL activities was apparent in the data. However, the contrasting core components between each process suggests that it is unlikely both processes occur at the same time. The contrast also suggests it is unlikely that participants favoured components of one process and therefore omitted details that would have indicated both processes occurring at the same time. The presence of two different processes occurring during EFL activities, at different times, may indicate nuanced differences in human facilitator input that, in turn, influence EFL experiences in a particular direction. Examples of low specificity shaping highlighted that shaping could be both subtle and influential. Understanding why some human facilitator input does not influence the occurrence of the personalising process may signal to ways that a human facilitator can aid an experience without shaping its direction or nature.

Conclusion. Overall, shaping by the human facilitator was noted as a core component of the personalising process. Participants described variation in the nature and specificity of shaping, leaving clients to fill in details using their personal histories. This appeared to contribute to participants experiencing and understanding the EFL activities in highly personalised ways. Although variable in nature, the consistent presence of shaping makes it best understood as a core component of this process. The interaction between shaping and clients' personal histories is one example of how the core components of the personalising process interact with contextual components of EFL. Additionally, by comparing the act of shaping with the relationship building process, differences between the processes are highlighted. This emphasised the key role that participants experienced shaping to play within the personalising process. While sharing their experiences, participants continued to highlight potential impacts of shaping. In doing so they signalled to the second core component of the personalising process; splitting awareness.

Splitting Awareness

Participants indicated that a second core component of this process was a splitting of their awareness while engaging in the EFL activity. Descriptions of historically focused thinking and feeling indicated participants' awareness to be split between their pasts and their present. Their historically focused thinking and feeling varied in nature. Participants provided examples of both historically related yet novel thinking and feeling, and thinking and feeling that was reflective of previously experienced cognition and affect. The variations appeared to signal differences in the ratio of the split of a participant's awareness between past and present. They also appeared related to differences in the previously outlined acts of shaping. Lower specificity shaping appeared to influence experiences of historically related, yet novel cognition and affect. In contrast, higher specificity shaping appeared to influence experiences of historically reflective cognition and affect. Additionally, a splitting of awareness also appeared to be reflected in participants' embodied experiences. This was indicated through descriptions of physical sensation. Furthermore, comparing this core component to components of the relationship building process emphasised how awareness and embodiment were experienced differently within each process. In turn this emphasised the influence that splitting awareness had over participant experiences, therefore further reinforcing it as a core component of the personalising process.

Raven acknowledged a splitting of awareness during an EFL experience by describing historically related cognition and affect: "my thought process during that interaction with her was that I was really proud of myself because maybe I hadn't got what I needed from my own mother. But I have found other ways of getting that maternal interaction." Raven acknowledged an affective state (pride) that she was experiencing during her interaction with Honey. She also described experiencing an insight that she had found ways to attain what she lacked in her biological maternal relationship. Her indication of awareness that she had met

those needs in multiple “ways” suggests that she was referring to more than the currently occurring interaction. Acknowledgement of events outside of the present moment highlights some of her awareness to be on her past. Acknowledgement of novel affect (pride), and developing insight, signalled to some of her awareness being on the present moment. Considered as a whole, her example emphasises the split in her awareness that was occurring as she engaged in the activity. It points to an interconnectedness between past and present that appears possible for a client when the personalising process is in action. Additionally, her experience suggests a capacity to cognitively process and possibly experience new personal insights when the personalising process occurs.

In comparison to Raven, the cognition and affect experienced by Bailey appeared to vary. In turn this appeared to signal a difference in the way her awareness was split between the past and the present.

> *the part that was in the arena, or there was a part, I don't know if you have an idea how it looks, but there was a part in the arena. And for me, that was like, school, and yeah, mostly school. Until school graduation. And I was pretty aware of that this represents that. And after that, I felt kind of thrown out into the world, which was pretty similar to how I felt after school. (Bailey)*

Bailey described this understanding as present during her experience, as opposed to developed upon reflection. Her experience of participating in the present moment while being aware of its symbolism to her life’s history indicated a historical focus in her awareness. Additionally, it appears to highlight a flow of the past into the present as opposed to an interconnectedness between them as was shown in Raven’s example. Her recognition that her affective experience was reminiscent of emotions she had previously experienced also suggests that a large part of her awareness was on her past. Differing from Raven, Bailey did

not describe novel affect or the development of insights while sharing this experience. This may indicate that less of her awareness was on the present moment. With her focus largely drawn towards her past, Bailey appears to have become preoccupied with significant historical incidents as they were experienced when they first occurred.

Participant experiences suggested that variations in shaping were related to differences in the split of their awareness, and their associated cognitions and affect. In particular: specificity in shaping appeared to impact the amount of autonomy a participant had in choosing the elements of their personal history that were used in the experience. This in turn appeared to impact the strength with which a participants' awareness was drawn towards their past, therefore influencing the nature of their historically focused or relevant thinking and feeling. For example, as previously noted, the act of shaping experienced by Raven appeared lower in specificity than that which Bailey experienced. In Raven's experience she appeared to have more autonomy to choose what from her past to focus on. The autonomy afforded by the lower specificity shaping may have encouraged increased consideration of present moment stimulus when selecting details of the past (such as her horse, or the wider physical environment). In turn this may have encouraged a more even split of awareness between past and present. Therefore, leaving room for a more flexible cognitive process and the experiencing of new emotions. In contrast to Raven, the shaping in Bailey's experience appears relatively high in specificity. This appeared to afford Bailey less autonomy, and her awareness was directed towards her life's path. The direction of awareness towards specific components of personal history may have discouraged consideration of present moment stimulus when selecting personal details to bring to the experience. In turn this may have encouraged Bailey's split of awareness to be weighted towards her past, promoting the past to influence thinking and feeling that was reflective of her historical experiences. The differences between the examples emphasises the potential significance a

human facilitator may hold. Through shaping, human facilitators may have capacity to intentionally initiate a process, influencing the nature of the client's experience going forward. Also contributing to the nature of a client's experience will be their unique histories. This emphasises the continued interaction between core components of this process and core components of the EFL context. Two clients who experience the same shaping would still likely have differing experiences, due to the contextual component of personality.

Contrasting Splitting Awareness with the Relationship Building Process.

Describing becoming present during the relationship building process participants noted experiencing a shifting in participants' awareness. Ultimately, they signalled that this moved their focus into the present moment. They explained a lack of concern with their pasts or futures as a feature of this. Being present appears to sit in opposition with the experiences of splitting awareness between the past and the present, as described in the personalising process.

Additionally, the significance of splitting awareness in the personalising process was not only indicated through descriptions of historically associated thinking and feeling. It was also highlighted through participants' accounts of embodiment, which were different than those described in the relationship building process. In describing the relationship building process, participants noted increased awareness of the influence of areas outside of their brains throughout their experiences. Notable (but not completely absent) in their descriptions was a lack of focus on cognition. In comparison, participants placed strong emphasis on cognitions while describing experiences in which the personalising process occurred. Their physical sensations also appeared to relate to awareness of cognitions. For example, Zara explicitly stated how she experienced physical sensation in an experience in which the personalising process occurred:

it's very head. Head and neck, and kind of throat orientated. It is quite shut down. It's like suddenly I like I can't really remember this, but it's like everything kind of constricted, it's like… things shut down.. but not [in] an expansive way, in a constricting way. So, my ability to see the surroundings or hear the surroundings…it swoops out. You also get, you also have no kind of understanding of the environment. So, no understanding of the environment, but in a constricting way.

Zara's explanation of her experience at this point signals a lack of awareness of the present while also appearing to indicate sensations of being restrained by the experience. Her description of this physical experience as largely felt from the throat upwards is markedly different from a previous experience that she outlined. Her previous experience detailed components of the relationship building process. During this she described physical sensations from her torso down and the idea of 'gut consciousness'. This contrast is significant because it appears to further separate experiences of the relationship building process from the personalising process. It also emphasises the differential nature of the core components of each process. Furthermore, it facilitates understanding of the experiences that may be had by an EFL client when the personalising process occurs. During experiences in which the personalising process occurs, clients may experience a sense of being 'stuck', with awareness directed towards their pasts and any associated cognitive processes. Zara also indicated lacking the ability to experience and understand the environment around her in those moments. Further in her discussion of this experience she referred to being "shut in". This explanation from Zara indicates that focusing awareness on historical details may influence present moment embodiment to be dominated by sensations from the shoulders up. Of note is that the shaping experienced by Zara was similar to that experienced by Bailey, that is, directive and relatively high in specificity. Zara's experience of restriction and being 'shut-in' may further emphasise the potential for higher specificity shaping to encourage an

historical focus. Moving awareness away from the present moment may then result in the client experiencing sensations of restriction or being “shut in” as they experience historically dominated thinking and feeling.

To summarise, participants described splitting awareness as a core component of the personalising process. This was indicated through descriptions of historically associated thinking and feeling, which varied in nature between participants. Variations showed capacity for thinking and feeling to be both reflective of past experiences, and novel yet related to the past. Interconnectedness between past and present was indicated as significant in experiences during which the personalising process is active. Particularly, increased awareness of past and present appeared to facilitate new insight and experience in the present moment. Splitting of awareness appeared related to shaping, with higher specificity appearing to encourage participants’ awareness to be weighted towards the past. Contrastingly, shaping that was lower in specificity appeared to leave participants with greater autonomy to select their historical focus, and in turn hold a more even split of awareness between past and present. This apparent connection between acts of shaping and splitting awareness highlighted the potential influence of the human facilitator in not only initiating the process to start, but also influencing the way it is further experienced. Comparison between experiences of physical sensations in the personalising process and the relationship building process indicated that splitting awareness also impacted participants’ experiences of embodiment when the personalising process occurred. Overall, analysis of relevant participant experiences indicated that splitting awareness was a core component of the personalising process. Further analysis of participants’ experiences demonstrated that splitting awareness was closely linked to the third and final core component of this process. This core component, meaning making, is detailed below.

Meaning Making

The third core component of the personalising process centres on the interpretations and meanings that participants made of their experiences. Overall, participants demonstrated historically relevant meaning making by making sense of their experiences in relation to their personal histories. Specificity of their previously explained acts of shaping, and the subsequent splitting of their awareness, appeared to influence the strength with which their histories influenced present moment meaning making. Lower specificity shaping, and more evenly split awareness, appeared connected to historically related meaning making that also considered present moment incidents as they occurred. In contrast, higher specificity acts of shaping, and awareness weighted towards the past, appeared connected to historically dominated meaning making. Participants signalled this by describing a reflective awareness that their initial interpretations may not have aligned with events as they occurred in the present moment. They also exemplified splitting awareness and meaning making to work together as they engaged in the relevant EFL activities. Ultimately participants externalised their historical focus and meaning making through their engagement in the present moment. A capacity for horses to become representative of components of participants' histories was also indicated. Finally, comparison between the personalising process and the relationship building process further emphasised the relevance of participants' histories that is experienced while the personalising process is active.

Further detailing her experience with Honey, Raven noted that horse Andy had also participated. Andy approached Honey and Raven, before chasing Honey out of the physical space directly surrounding Raven. Raven provided the following interpretation of this experience:

> *...him coming along and kind of chasing Honey out of the way. For me, that just felt like, it's time to let that stuff go. Like it's time to um yeah... It's not as important as you*

think. Like it's great and it will always be there because Honey didn't leave. She was still around. Like that's what it felt like. It was just like it will always, like you'll be able to find that when you need it. But you don't…it doesn't have to be…It doesn't have to be a big deal anymore. And that was, that's what that interaction, that experience kind of meant for me.

The "stuff" that Raven is referring to relates to her past experiences with her own mother, and difficulties surrounding that relationship. Raven interpreted the horses' behaviours as being purposeful in conveying a message regarding her maternal relationships. Raven appears to have made meaning of the experience that is specific and again connected to her maternal relationships. The nature of her interpretations and associated meaning making signal to the connection, and potential influence, of the core components of shaping and splitting awareness. Some of her awareness being on her past appears to have influenced her understanding of the events taking place within the practice. Raven's example was not clear as to whether her interpretations and meaning making were occurring in real-time during that experience or upon reflection of it. However, her example of novel insight development, outlined earlier, was signalled to occur in real-time. Therefore, it is likely that her interpretations above also occurred during the EFL activity. Raven did not spontaneously offer an alternative motivation for the horses' behaviours. However, when asked about horse insights Raven proposed the following:

Raven: *I mean, literally, the interaction between Andy and Honey could have been completely. I mean, you know, my brain tells me, that it has nothing to do with me that it's just Andy was probably like, "hey, she's getting scratches. I want some scratches" like "get out of my way Honey. Now scratch my butt" kind of, you know...*

Sophie*: so kind of, the horsiness of being a horse?*

Raven: *Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's like you know, my brain is like, of course, they're just horses being horses. But then something else happens. And it means something else to me. And like it feels like something else.*

While acknowledging this alternative explanation Raven also noted a tension with the validity of it. Raven endorsed a potential alternative explanation the least of the relevant participants and only when asked if it was possible. She also indicated that "something else happens." This may signal to an unexplored component of this process. Alternatively, it may be an indication of something occurring during reflection that, for her, negates the validity or significance of her alternative explanation. However, Raven did clearly signal consideration of present moment stimuli (the behaviours of the horses) while making meaning related to her past. It is possible that her capacity to attend to present moment stimuli contributed to the development of an understanding of her experience that remains valid both in the present moment and upon reflection. The strength of her capacity to attend to present moment stimuli was likely aided by the relatively even split in her awareness (influenced by the low specificity act of shaping that she initially experienced).

In contrast to Raven, the sense Bailey made of her experience highlighted a lack of consideration of present moment stimuli:

And it's interesting when I think of this, it [horse Regalo] feels so steady and calm next to me, but when I remember right, she was quite nervous. And that was part of why the other person on the other side didn't feel quite comfortable because she was like how do you say that? She was nervous and yeah, we call it dancing around…but when I'm around horses, it's like, I know horses, so it's all good.

By acknowledging incongruence between Regalo's behaviours during the activity and her real time experience of Regalo, Bailey indicated meaning making that lacked

consideration of present moment occurrences. Her spontaneous provision of an alternative understanding emphasises the strength of her historically dominated meaning making, particularly when considered with her personal history. Of all participants in this study Bailey had the most prior experience with horses. Her history involved horses as a consistent part of her everyday life. Therefore, her experience of Regalo as "steady" and "calm", despite incongruent behaviour, was likely influenced by her previous experiences with horses in her life. As she stated, Bailey "know[s] horses, so it's all good". Instead of considering the present moment stimuli available (a nervous horse that was "dancing around") Bailey may have made sense of Regalo through her historical experiences of horses. Bailey's lack of inclusion of present moment stimuli in her real time meaning making may have been influenced by a historically weighted split of awareness. As discussed earlier in this analysis, a historically weighted split of awareness appeared influenced by high specificity acts of shaping. Therefore, it is possible that during the personalising process high specificity acts of shaping influence a splitting of awareness that is weighted towards the past, in turn inhibiting consideration of present moment stimuli and ultimately leading to historically dominated meaning making.

Zara's experience appears to support an association between higher specificity acts of shaping, awareness weighted towards the past, and historically dominated meaning making. As with Bailey, Zara's initial act of shaping was relatively high in specificity and appeared to encourage a historical focus on one's life path. While describing her experience she offered the following:

> *So I'm walking this walk with Andy and we come around a little house and Andy gets a little bit spooked…He kind of nips me on the arm, which of course is the thing I'm the most terrified of…So in that moment, I'm kind of triggered back into being a child and I guess Andy is like suddenly my mother attacking me… part of what I work on, is*

> *the propensity to, well persecutory anxieties essentially, to be, you know, somebody's going to attack you, or you will attack. And here I am being attacked. Not that the horse was doing that at all, but that was my interpretation at the time…*

Zara's focus on her familial history appears to have influenced her interpretations of Andy's behaviour. Similarly, to Bailey, Zara spontaneously provided an alternative interpretation of the experience, and explicit acknowledgement that her initial understanding was incorrect. How Zara's account differed from Bailey's, but aligned with Raven's, was that her initial interpretation of the event included behaviours exhibited by the horse. This difference is important as it emphasises that even with her awareness weighted towards the past, Zara was able to attend to present moment stimuli. However, ultimately the meaning she made of the stimuli was dominated by her historical experiences. Therefore, Zara's account emphasises the potential strength of an individual's history in impacting the meaning made of their present moment experience when the personalising process is active.

Continuing to discuss this experience, Zara indicated the way in which her interpretation of Andy's behaviour impacted the experience as it continued. This demonstrated the intertwined nature of splitting awareness and meaning making:

> *it's not a moment where it's all love and collapse and unity and rainbows, it's a collapse into relational traumatic past where, yea, I'm not really sure how it happened but yeah, so this little nip on the arm and you know basically all these feelings, I want nothing to do with Andy. Andy can fuck off for all I care, like I don't want to finish this pathway.*

Zara's awareness being weighted towards the past appeared to influence the meaning she made of Andy's behaviour during the experience. Following her interpretation of present moment stimuli, she experienced historically reflective affect. This in turn impacted Zara's

relationship to the present moment, and specifically to Andy. As outlined above, Zara wanted "nothing to do with Andy" and did not want to finish the exercise. The historically dominated meaning she had made became externalised in her present moment. Recognising this is important as it highlights how the core components of this process, constructed in this study through participants' perspectives, play out in real time between client and horse. Recognition of each party's behaviours and input highlight the process as occurring between them rather than occurring solely within the client.

Meaning making described by participants in this study also highlighted the potential for a horse to become representative of a client's past when the personalising process was active. This in turn appeared to shift participants' perceptions of the role of the horses. For example, Zara likened Andy to her own mother. She made sense of his physical behaviour towards her through her understanding of her mother. In Bailey's experience, Regalo appeared representative of the constant and reliable role horses had played in her life's history. This occurred despite her reflective indication that Regalo was nervous and behaving in a distracted manner ("dancing around") during the activity. These examples indicate potential for variation in the ways a horse may become representative of a client's history when the personalising process occurs. They also suggest propensity for qualities that typically identify horses as horses, or an individual horse as themselves, to go unnoticed by the client. This may emphasise the strength of historically dominated meaning making through provision of a real-life stimulus that the client cannot separate from historical experience. Also of note, is that Raven did not report experiencing Honey or Andy as representative of individuals or elements of her history. However, in her interview with me she had described Honey as having a maternal quality to her. She also described Andy and Honeys' behaviours as purposeful to convey to her a historically related message. This difference again indicates connection between shaping, splitting awareness, and meaning

making. Higher specificity shaping, splitting of awareness that is weighted towards the past, and historically dominated meaning making appear to impact the potential for horses to become representative of an individual's history. On the other hand: lower specificity shaping, splitting awareness that is more evenly balanced between past and present, and historically relevant but not dominated meaning making appear to allow clients to engage with the horses while experiencing them as relevant to, but not directly representative of, their pasts.

Contrasting Meaning Making with the Relationship Building Process. Emphasis placed on historically relevant meaning making further indicated contrasts between this process and the relationship building process. The core components of the relationship building process facilitated connecting and relationship building between client and horse. While describing the core component of 'being seen and seeing', participants noted experiencing a sense of 'truly' being seen by the horses. They also described experiences of 'truly' seeing the horses. In contrast, during experiences of the personalising process participants described a capacity for the horses to become representative of their personal histories. Experiencing a horse as something other than who they are appears to sit in opposition to experiences of 'truly seeing' them. It is possible that a participant's historical focus inhibited acknowledgement of interactions that did not align with their internal and historical perspectives. For example, with Bailey's awareness split between her past and present, her extensive history with horses appeared to dominate her experience of Regalo as calm and steady. Her general idea of horses, built upon her historical experiences, may have inhibited her ability to acknowledge signals of what she later recognised: that Regalo was more likely nervous during the experience. Furthermore, it is possible that participants' engagement, dominated by their historical meaning making, impacted and influenced the horses' experiences. In turn this may also have impacted the client and horse relationship.

This appears particularly likely when considering the participant narrative that horses required authenticity to engage during the relationship building process. Therefore, an effect of the personalising process may be a less authentically connected relationship between client and horse. Particularly if client histories inhibit genuine consideration of horses in the present moment. This key experiential difference is a significant indicator of the potential for different processes to occur during EFL. Additionally, the stark contrast further emphasises the likelihood of these processes occurring at different times, as opposed to simultaneously.

Conclusion. Participants described meaning making as the third core component of the personalising process. Meaning making during the relevant experiences was associated with the personal history of each participant and varied between participants. The first two core components of this process, shaping and splitting awareness, appeared to inform the strength and nature of participants' meaning making. Lower specificity shaping and the subsequent split of awareness between past and present appeared to encourage meaning making that considered present moment stimuli as novel. Through the meaning making process, present moment stimuli (e.g., the behaviour of the horse) appeared to aid participants in understanding their experiences in ways related to their personal histories. In contrast, higher specificity shaping, and the subsequent split of awareness (weighted towards the past) appeared to influence meaning making that was reflective of historical experiences. In this case the relevant participant examples indicated present moment stimuli to be either: largely ignored by the participant or to be heavily woven into the participants' historical focus and therefore understood in the context of participants' historically based narratives. This was especially evident in participant descriptions of horses as representative of components of their histories. In considering the relationship building process, participants' emphasis on 'truly' seeing the horses differed strongly from participant examples of horses as representative of their personal histories. The contrast appeared to add weight to the lack of

connection described by participants during experiences in which the personalising process occurred. Such a crucial contrast between the processes served to further separate the two and lessen the likelihood that they occur at the same time. During analysis, the highly personal experiences described by participants signalled a crucial question: Can the personalising process, outlined through participant examples that lacked connection, be considered a process that is happening *between* client and horse during EFL?

Does This Process Occur Between Human and Horse?

Core components of the personalising process were shown through participant accounts of highly personalised experiences. Participants also described a lack of connection between themselves and the horses during these experiences. Therefore, it was important to contemplate whether this process could be understood as occurring between client and horse. Ultimately, participant narratives indicated present moment interaction between themselves and the horses. These interactions were influential to, and influenced by, the core components of the personalising process and therefore indicated that the personalising process occurred between both participant and horse. It also suggested that connection occurred even if participants did not perceive it. However, participant narratives also indicated that human facilitators made crucial contributions to the process, specifically through shaping. One participant also indicated active participation from, and interaction with, the human facilitator throughout the experience. This suggested that for that participant the personalising process occurred between client, horse and human facilitator.

Interactions Influencing the Process and the Present. As was outlined previously, participant experiences were subjective and related to their personal histories. Simultaneously participant examples also indicated present moment interaction between participants and horses. For example, Raven demonstrated that Honey and Andy were active in her experience: physically interacting with the environment, each other and herself. These

interactions appeared to aid continuation of both her experience and, in turn, the process. Raven also continued to input into the process and responded physically to the horses' behaviours. Similarly, Andy appeared central to Zara's experience and his act of nipping her "triggered" specific elements of her personal history. Zara also identified reacting to Andy through an understanding of him that was fuelled by historically dominated meaning making. These examples of present moment interactions influencing and being influenced by the process highlight how the process can be understood as happening between the client and horse.

Connection is Present but not Necessarily Recognised. In contrast to the relationship building process, participants' accounts provided limited insight into the possible experience of the horse during the personalising process. Throughout the relationship building process, participants described experiencing co-creation, synchronisation, and ultimately strong connection with the horses. Present moment awareness, and descriptions of moments of 'truth' provided an understanding that participants believed they were experiencing an untainted reality, shared by the horses. The focus on their pasts as core to the personalising process appears to have inhibited participants in having insight into the horses' experiences during the EFL activities. It is possible that, despite examples indicating that the process occurs between them, the horses experience the process in an entirely different way to the clients. It did not appear that there was no relationship indicated between client and horse during this process. Rather, experiences of connection and relationship between client and horse were not core to the process, from the participants' perspectives.

Bailey's experience lacked the clear description of interaction between client and horse that was described by Raven and Zara. Bailey did not indicate responding to or interpreting behaviours or actions from horse Regalo, at any point. This was emphasised through Bailey's reflection that Regalo's behaviour was incongruent to how she experienced

her involvement at the time. However, Bailey did acknowledge awareness of the presence of Regalo in general. She expressed an affective experience relating to the consistent and comfortable role that horses had played in her life's history. During her first interview for this project, Bailey had noted uncertainty about whether Regalo was a necessary component of that experience. However, during her second interview Bailey offered another reflection;

> *I liked that there was the horse with me in this exercise. But I didn't quite understand why it was there... I'm not sure how I said it exactly. But I had to think about this because, at first, it made me think, 'Oh, should I have not said that?' And then I thought, 'Well, no, because this is about the truth? ...Let's call it the truth and not about like, what I want it to look like', and yeah, and it has brought me to this...thought that…I know that it is helpful to have them, but I don't know why. And I think that's why I said like, I don't know why the horses are there, or why I need them or something like that. But I kind of, I really, truly believe in that it is helpful. And I feel that it is helpful. But I just don't know why.*

Although not sure why, Bailey had an underlying certainty that horses are a helpful component during experiences in which the personalising process occurs. Even though clear interactions did not occur between them, Bailey was aware of Regalo's presence during the experience. As suggested previously, it is possible that Bailey connected Regalo's presence to her personal history. Therefore, simply by being there Regalo may have contributed to the process and facilitated its continuation. Bailey's history of experience with horses may also have meant that she was unbothered by the behaviours Regalo showed during the activity. This influence from her personal history may then have impacted how she continued in the present moment. So, although Bailey did not recognise any connection between herself and Regalo during the experience, a connection may still have occurred.

Human Facilitator Contributions. Participant experiences relating to the personalising process indicated clear involvement from human facilitators. Shaping by human facilitators was shown to both initiate the personalising process and influence participants' experiences going forward. In this way human facilitators can be considered as contributing to and influencing the personalising process. However, Zara indicated human facilitator involvement later in her experience too:

> *Sam (human facilitator) recognised that it had gone outside of my window of tolerance and that it wasn't helpful anymore. Not for me, or for Andy. You know, um, because what Sam said to me was, you know, "look at Andy, he's looking at you really kindly" You know, so Sam is actually a bit like a couple's counsellor in that moment. He is tending to us both because something has gone wrong.*

As Zara shared, human facilitator Sam decided to actively participate in her experience with Andy. Her example highlights how Sam contributed to the moment by encouraging her to consider Andy through a different lens. In addition to Sam's contribution to the moment and process, Zara also highlighted how this input aided the creation of a novel yet historically related moment:

> *I guess maybe Sam took on the role of a father that could actually step in and help, and in that case, actually now, to put it that way. In that case, it's reparative. Because Sam could take on that role and in a way that my father didn't, then I could have a different outcome…*

and:

> *If Sam hadn't been there, I would never have gone near Andy again. If Sam, okay, so seriously, if Sam hadn't been there, then the traumatic story would just have played out, I would have done my projective identification, Andy would have bit me. I would*

have gone into blame and anger, which I started to do, and Sam could manage and mediate…

It is not clear whether Zara's understanding of Sam being representative of her father occurred at the time of the experience or solely upon reflection. However, her acknowledgement of him managing and mediating further solidifies his active role in the process. It also suggests that Zara, and possibly Andy, were responding to Sam's actions in the moment. In this experience it appears that the personalising process occurred between participant/client, horse, and human facilitator.

In Zara's experience all three beings actively participated in the experience, facilitating continuation of both the experience and process through their interactions. However, in Bailey and Raven's experiences human facilitator involvement was only reported to occur at the beginning. Shaping highlighted contribution to the process from the human facilitator. However, there is no clear indication that they were an active part of the process going forward. Nor is there a clear indication that Bailey, Raven or the horses engaged in a way that further included their human facilitators in the experience. Therefore, while participants in this study indicated clear contribution from human facilitators, only one participant's experience suggested that the personalising process occurred between client, horse and human facilitator. It is likely that all participants took part in a process of reflection, guided by their human facilitator, after their experiences. Furthermore, ongoing reflections outside of the EFL session likely occurred as they are encouraged by facilitators at the facility. These reflections likely aided participants' processing and meaning making of their experiences, possibly facilitating ongoing personal growth. However, further study would be required to determine whether participants perceive any post-activity reflection processes as a core part of the personalising process, or as separate processes that contribute to the overall process of EFL. No participants chose to speak to this process when sharing the relevant

experiences. However, interviews focused on their experiences with horses which may have influenced their lack of acknowledgement of post activity debriefs and reflections.

To summarise, accounts from participants indicated very personalised experiences of the core components of this process. However, they also showed that present moment interaction and recognition between client and horse both influenced and were influenced by the personalising process. Therefore, they also indicated the process to occur between client and horse. Additionally, their accounts suggested that connection between client and horse occurred, even if clients did not perceive or acknowledge it. While all participant examples highlighted human facilitators to contribute to the process through shaping, only Zara provided a clear example that the process occurred between herself, the horse and the human facilitator. Further inquiry would be necessary to determine whether, from participants' perspectives, this process commonly occurs between client, horse and human facilitator.

Summary of the Personalising Process

Participants in this study described a second important process that occurs between client and horse during EFL to be the personalising process. They highlighted three core components to characterise the overall process. These were: shaping (by the human facilitator), splitting awareness, and meaning making.

All experiences that demonstrated the personalising process took place during completion of an EFL activity. Furthermore, in all participant accounts shaping was indicated as the first step of the process. Variation in the nature of shaping appeared to create a continuum of specificity following which all participants utilised details of their personal history to engage with the rest of the experience. Less specific acts of shaping appeared to offer greater autonomy to participants regarding what of their history they utilised going forward. On the other hand, higher specificity shaping appeared to lower client autonomy by directing them to certain elements of their personal history.

The second core component identified through participant narratives was splitting awareness whereby participants engaged in their EFL experiences with their awareness split between the past and the present. With their awareness split between past and present, participants described experiencing cognition and affect that was relevant to their personal history. A participant who experienced lower specificity shaping appeared to have a more even balance of awareness in the past and present, experiencing historically related cognition and affect and developing novel insight during their experience. In contrast, a different participant experienced higher specificity shaping and appeared to have their awareness more greatly weighted in the past. Cognition and affect that they described experiencing appeared reflective of cognition and affect that they had previously experienced. Therefore, initial shaping appeared to influence the ratio and rigidity with which a participant's awareness was split between past and present. In turn they also appeared to influence the nature of the historically related cognition and affect that participants also experienced. Another way that a splitting of awareness was signalled in this data was through participant descriptions of their physical experiences, which centred on their neck upwards.

The third core component that participant accounts demonstrated was meaning making. Participants described making sense of their experiences in ways related to their personal histories. Influenced by the initial shaping and, in turn, the split of their awareness between past and present, participants indicated variation in their meaning making: from novel yet historically related, to historically dominated. Novel yet historically related meaning making was associated with lower specificity shaping and a more even and fluid split of awareness between past and present. Historically dominated meaning making was associated with higher specificity shaping and a split of awareness that was weighted towards the past. Participants whose meaning making appeared historically dominated acknowledged this through reflectional awareness that their initial interpretations did not align with present

moment events. Meaning making and splitting awareness appeared to influence each other as awareness of the past impacted the sense made of the present, which in turn pushed focus further towards the past. Additionally, participants described engaging in the present moment through understandings developed by their personal histories. Throughout all participant accounts core contextual components of EFL, outlined earlier in this analysis, interacted with core components of the personalising process and therefore impacted participants' experiences.

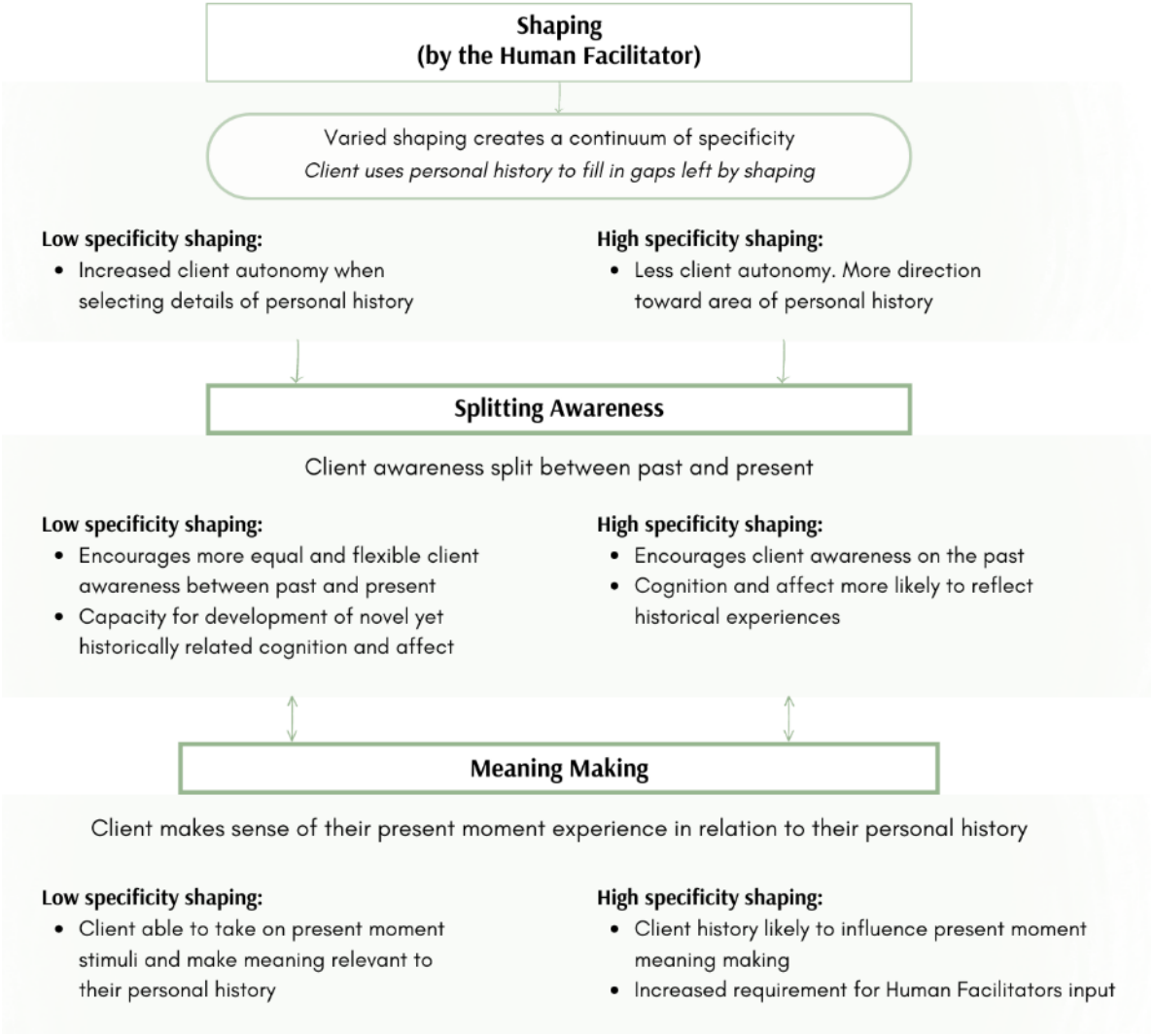
Although participants described highly personal experiences, their present moment interactions with the horses suggested that the process can be considered as occurring between client and horse. Additionally, their accounts suggested that connection did occur, but that participants did not perceive it as core to the process.

Human facilitators were shown to contribute to the personalising process in all relevant participant examples. However, only one participant's example suggested that the process occurred between client, horse, and human facilitator. The focus on client and horse experiences in this study may have impacted the lack of participant focus on human facilitators and therefore further exploration would be required to determine whether the process often occurs between the triad of client, horse, and human facilitator.

Ultimately, from participants' perspectives, the personalising process is characterised by the core components of shaping (by the human facilitator), splitting awareness, and meaning making. The process was shown to occur during EFL activities and contextual components impacted the core components of the process. Although experienced as highly personal, the personalising process can be considered a process that occurs between client and horse during EFL and is impactful from participants' perspectives.

Figure 5

The Personalising Process – Core Components Unpacked



Chapter Five: Discussion

This chapter seeks to theoretically integrate the findings of this study, highlighting their relevance and potential future utility. Firstly, the final analysis will be presented in the form of a tentative grounded theory. This will be followed by a discussion of the current findings in relation to pre-existing literature, before practical implications of this study are considered. Limitations of the study will then be addressed and finally, recommendations will be made for both future research and practice development.

The Tentative Grounded Theory

The Inextricable Nature of Client and Horse Processes During EFL

EFL is and involves complex systems of reciprocal influence. Core components of beings from two different species, personality of client and horse and space all connect and influence each other. Ultimately, they contribute to the formation of a novel context, within which processes can occur between client and horse.

As beings from two different species, the interactions of horses and humans influence contextual novelty through the inherent differences and similarities between them. Similarly, the personalities of the specific humans and horses offer variable and dynamic contributions. These have the capacity to influence the nature of occurring experiences. Additionally, both physical and non-physical components of space influence the overall context, impacting elements such as the intention and emotional tone. Furthermore, human facilitators are both a part of and influence the EFL context: often playing the role of maintaining the context in which experiences occur. The overarching context is dynamic and variable due to the changeability of components and their circular influence on each other. Throughout EFL, the context and the processes that occur between client and horse interact with reciprocal influence. This is all experienced by the client, who is both a part of and influenced by the

complex systems at play.

Within the EFL context, client and horse engage in a range of interactions. Their interactions take place both within and outside of participation in formal activities. During these interactions there is potential for at least two different processes to occur: *the relationship building process* and *the personalising process.* Each is characterised by connection, although the clients' experience of connection differs across each process.

The Relationship Building Process. Through the relationship building process clients begin building a strong, secure attachment to the horses. While engaging in this process, clients experience increased openness and connection to self. As a whole, this process impacts client openness to learning and their capacity to develop insight in the present moment. The overall process comprises three core components: *communicating nonverbally, connecting authentically*, and *becoming present.* Those components reciprocally influence each other, forming the resulting complex system. As with the core components, the relationship building process and the EFL context also connect in reciprocal influence.

Communicating nonverbally is a component of the relationship building process that offers the opportunity for clients to start developing connection with the horses. Clients experience the development of a reciprocal and co-created bond, noticing that physical communication is used by horses to both offer and respond to interactions. As this occurs, communicating physically aids clients in raising their awareness of themselves, drawing focus towards their physicality and capacity to relate with another being.

In addition to communicating physically, communicating energetically also impacts increases in client awareness. In this case, awareness of an alternative and intangible form of communication develops. While communicating energetically, clients experience the occurrence of a synchronicity between themselves and the horses that deepens their sense of

connection.

The reciprocity and synchronicity occurring during nonverbal communication facilitates distinction between the client and horse relationship in EFL and client and human relationships in other professional practices. Within the relationship building process, the horse does not function as a 'caregiver', 'therapist' or 'teacher' as humans might in related professional settings. Rather, horses establish themselves as facilitators who can effectively diminish clients' sense of power dynamics, thereby engaging in more equal relationships.

Also core to the relationship building process is the process of client and horse connecting authentically. Clients perceive that horses require authenticity from them in order to engage in interactions. Therefore, they cannot feign any part of their experience. Clients must offer their authentic self and experience in order for the relationship to develop. This may appear to conflict with the aforementioned equality offered by horses as facilitators. However, ultimately this requirement aids clients' experiences of 'pure' and 'true' connections to the horses. As clients contribute their authentic self to the experience the horse continues engaging with them in a manner that clients perceive as authentic. In this way clients are offered a reciprocal experience of being seen and accepted by another, while also being allowed to truly see the other. This strengthens the connection between client and horse while influencing continuation of the overall process. Additionally, by offering their authentic self and experience, clients must acknowledge who and what that is. Connecting authentically therefore raises a client's capacity for self-awareness while also affirming them through acceptance and a strengthened relationship with another.

Becoming present is the third reciprocally influential, core component of the relationship building process. Clients experience shifts in awareness that draw them toward the present moment and specifically to their interactions with the horse. Clients perceive

horses to be examples of present beings, and to require presence in order to continue connecting. Similarly, to connecting authentically, in the process of becoming present horses show that as facilitators they do have some requirements for ongoing relationship development. For clients, the effects of horses holding steadfast to their requirements mean that clients experience being truly in the moment and in connection. This positively influences the other components of the relationship building process and offers clients a break from distractions of the past or the future. This allows them to interact with their current reality and selves with enhanced focus, supported by the simultaneous development of secure attachment between them and the horses.

The Personalising Process. The personalising process occurs during the completion of formal EFL activities involving both client and horse. However, clients generally do not experience themselves as relational or connected to the horse when this process occurs. The core components *(shaping (by the human facilitator), splitting awareness,* and *meaning making)* construct a complex system that influences clients' experiences, appearing to decrease their perceived connection to the horses while increasing their connection to their personal histories. Additionally, reciprocal influence appears to occur between the past and the present. Present moment events are made sense of through the lens of the client's personal history, which then influences how the client reacts and responds in the present moment. In turn, this encourages personalised learning that is relevant to clients' lives outside of the EFL context. Connection to personal history also influences the clients' sense of the horses, impacting the nature of their roles as facilitators within the process. In contrast to the relationship building process, how a horse is seen during this process is malleable, unique to each client, and influenced by their personal history. Horses may become representative of a persons or animals known to the client, symbolic of a component of their personal history, or even represent a time within their life. During this process, the degree to which clients'

histories impact them and their experience varies. When historically dominated meaning making is particularly difficult for a client, they may become overwhelmed in the present moment, requiring human facilitator input in order to progress in a functional way. Where a client appears less aware of, or bothered by, a lack of connection between them and a horse this appears influenced by at least two factors: lower specificity shaping (explained below) and a history of working with that horse.

Shaping by the human facilitator serves to begin the personalising process and influence clients' experiences of the process going forward. Human facilitators provide instruction or purpose for the activity that varies in specificity. In doing so, they direct clients' focus towards their personal histories in varying amounts. Through shaping, human facilitators become an unextractable part of the personalising process. Their contribution influences the clients' ongoing experiences.

Influenced by shaping, clients' awareness is split between the past and the present. With varying degrees of specificity and fluidity, the connection between a client's past and present begins to take shape. As this connection strengthens, the client's capacity to be relational with the horse weakens. Instead, their cognition, affect and physical experience are influenced by the past and present connection. They lack mindful engagement with the present moment and generally experience their self and their interactions through ideas, beliefs, and narratives associated with their personal histories.

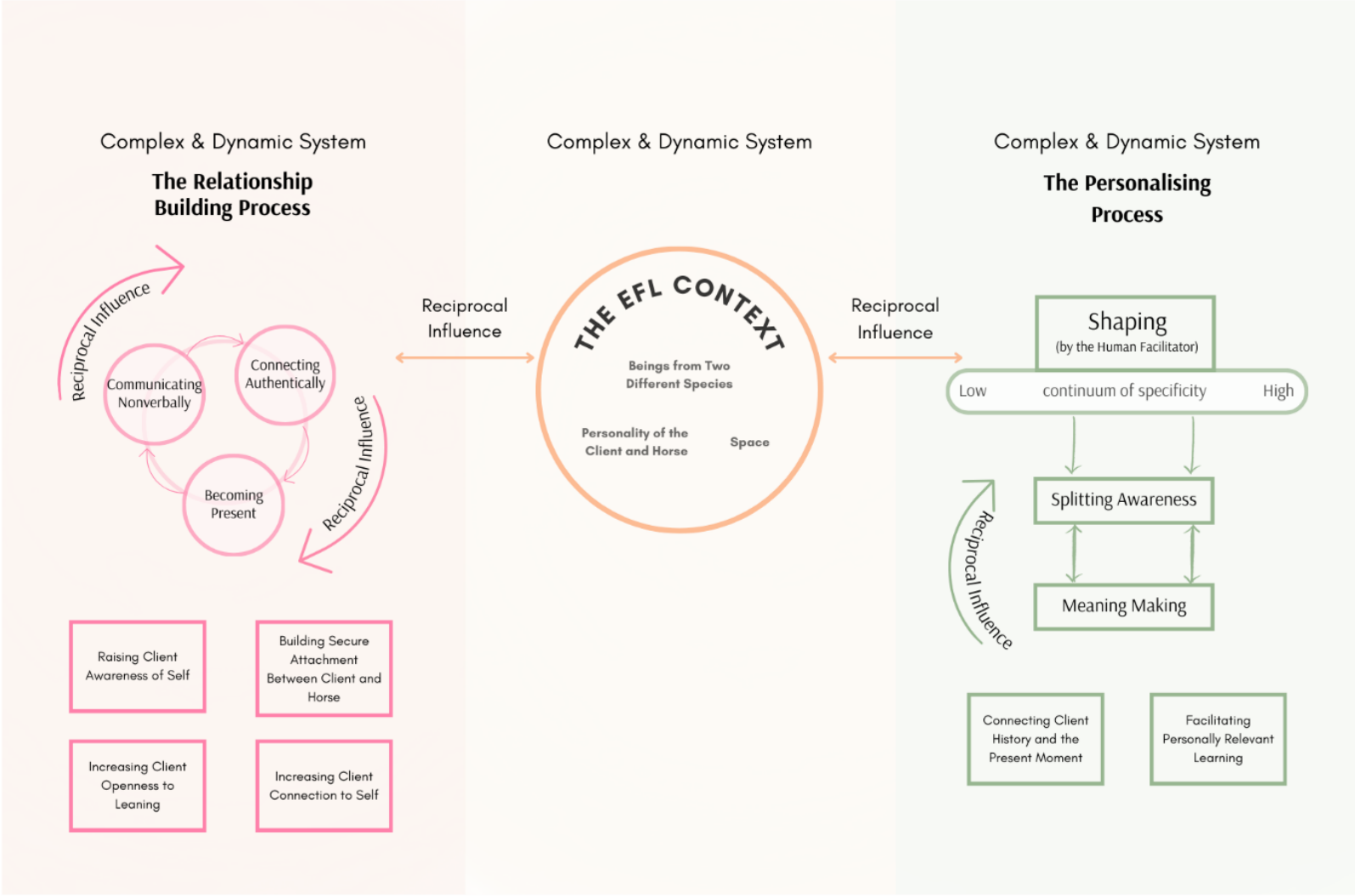
Occurring at the same time as splitting awareness, clients make sense of their experiences through the current connection between the past and the present. They learn in ways specific to them as they make sense of their present moment while influenced by their personal histories. Although the horse is a sentient participant within the experience, their relationship with the client is impacted by the client's understanding of them relevant to their

past.

To summarise, EFL offers a novel context for client learning. Through client and horse interactions there is capacity for at least two processes to play out. Experiences of connection run through each process, however, are experienced differently. The relationship building process offers clients the development of a secure attachment between themselves and the horses. The personalising process encourages connection to personal history, in turn inhibiting present moment connection between client and horse. Core components of context and process can be considered to function circularly. Through their reciprocal influence on each other they form complex systems of context and process. These complex systems also engage in reciprocal influence, impacting each other and the client, who experiences this as a part of the complex systems.

Figure 6

Visual Model of the Tentative Grounded Theory



Situating the Findings Within Current Literature

This Aotearoa New Zealand based qualitative study used a grounded theory approach to respond to calls for theoretically focused research on EFL practices (Bachi, 2013; Hallberg, 2018; Vincent & Farkas, 2017). A tentative grounded theory was constructed through exploration and analysis of adult clients' perspectives of processes occurring between client and horse during EFL, with two processes outlined in the final theory. In constructing this theory, the research ties together many components of EFL identified in previous research. Therefore, the findings offer a holistic understanding of possible processes occurring and in doing so provide support for certain components of available literature. Furthermore, through differences in the current findings and prior research, the theory offers additional insights with potential to refine previous applications of theory to EFL practices. Overall, this study adds an original contribution to the small body of Aotearoa New Zealand based research, and the larger body of globally based, EFL and AAT/AAI research (Ferlazzo et al., 2023; Lietz & Napan, 2020; López-Cepero, 2020; Serpell, 2010).

Completing this study within a Doctorate of Clinical Psychology programme automatically aligns it with the trend of providing scientific explanations to validate non-human animals' place in human healthcare (Serpell, 2010). However, studying the accounts of several EFL clients meant that discourse related to academic frameworks and terminology was not commonly featured in the data. Additionally, participants reinforced horses as crucial to the practice. They credited horses as influencing creation of a novel context, deep connection, and 'pure' experiences due to them simply being horses. Furthermore, they also used comparison with human and human relationships as a way of highlighting the value offered by horses. Acknowledgement of horses as having specific abilities does not go as far as suggesting that they hold mystical or spiritual healing powers, as was posited for other animals throughout history (Harvey & Wallis, 2016; Serpell, 2010; Toynbee, 1973). However,

emphasis on their distinct skills and facilitatory contributions does suggest that they have particular skills and value in enhancing human well-being and learning. Therefore, while this study is a scientific engagement, the findings avoid being limited to prior academic explanations of horses' contributions. Horses are not suggested to have 'healing powers' but rather 'power to heal' through the novel and non-human contributions that they provide.

The presented theory offers an understanding of EFL and two processes that occur between client and horse as complex systems. The complex systems are built through core components that influence each other in a reciprocal fashion, and ultimately contribute to the wider EFL practice. Consideration of human and non-human relationships as complex systems was previously suggested by Menna et al. (2019). The current theory extends this idea to include processes and the EFL context all as complex systems that in turn influence each other to build the wider complex system of the EFL practice. Furthermore, Menna et al. (2019) noted that complex systems are shaped by the living organisms that exist within them. Those organisms enhance the dynamic nature of the systems. Contextual components such as beings from two different species and personality of the client and horse highlight how the living organisms within EFL (clients, horses, and human facilitators) influence the complex systems and in turn the overall EFL experience. In particular, the personalising process emphasised how one process has the potential to be experienced differently by different clients, due to changes in part of a complex system. Understanding EFL processes as complex systems of reciprocal influence may have relevance to understandings of human and non-human relationships within Te Ao Māori, particularly regarding their interconnected, varied and nuanced nature (Dunn, 2021; Stewart, 2023; Woodhouse, 2021).

Inherently, this theory offers a holistic framework that integrates a range of components. Through these components, the constructed theory also both aligns with and deviates from singular elements or concepts identified in previous research. Furthermore, the

processes outlined in the theory share similarities with previously applied theories, while also offering a new perspective of their relevance, practical utility, and potential limitations.

The relationship building process indicates the development of secure attachment between client and horse. In doing so it indicates the relevance of prior applications of attachment theory concepts to EFL practices (Bachi, 2013; Burgon et al., 2018; Dell et al., 2011; Hallberg, 2018; Siporin, 2012; Vincent & Farkas, 2017). Developing a secure attachment between client and horse, and experiences of acceptance, connection and openness to learning, can be likened to the concept of 'holding environments' being fostered during EFL, as was previously suggested by Bachi (2013). Furthermore, participants in this study provided single experience examples of the process occurring. These examples appear to align with previous findings that indicated an attachment bond between client and horse can be activated during short interactions (Törmälehto & Korkiamäki, 2020).

Within this study, communicating nonverbally was a core component of the relationship building process that served several functions, including raising clients' awareness of their own physicality. This supports previous research connecting non-verbal communication between client and horse to increased client embodiment (Ford, 2013; Hallberg, 2018). Additionally, it aligns with research connecting the biophilia hypothesis to EFL (Lee & Makela, 2015; Wilson, 1984). However, the current theory extends the role of communicating non-verbally, highlighting the process as reciprocally influencing processes of connecting authentically and becoming present. Clients experienced increased awareness of their physicality and overall self, as well as increased connection to self. These findings lend themselves to Bachi's (2013) suggestion of attachment theory as relevant to equine facilitated psychotherapy in part due to links between non-verbal communication and increased embodiment. Similarly, communicating non-verbally was shown to influence a client in becoming present. Becoming present during the relationship process can be likened

to previous suggestions of EFL as able to increase mindfulness, with horses an example of mindful creatures (Burgon, 2014). The current findings both align with and extend this idea, offering the perspective that becoming present (increased mindfulness) facilitates the development of secure attachment between client and horse and offers experiences of novel ways to be and relate to others.

Additionally, communicating nonverbally and connecting authentically were also shown to influence each other in a reciprocal fashion. A crucial component of connecting authentically in these findings was the perceived skill of horses to detect inauthenticity. This idea aligns with previous research that credited horses with skills of discernment, attributing that to their role as prey animals (Burgon et al., 2018; Hallberg, 2018; Latella & Abrams, 2015; Lietz & Napan, 2020).

However, prior research has also purported that horses then use reflective communication, offering individuals a chance to raise their awareness of themselves (Lietz & Napan, 2020). This idea has been used in applications of attachment theory and likened to the ABP concept of 'affect mirroring' (Bachi, 2013). The current findings deviate from this idea. Communications between client and horse were indicated as co-created and reciprocal. Horses were suggested to use communication to both initiate and respond to communications with clients, rather than simply reflect a client's current state. Synchronicity in energetic communication was indicated but again was posited as co-created rather than reflective of one party. The co-created and reciprocal nature of energetic communication may align with aspects of the PVT concept of coregulation (Esposito & Fournier, 2023; Schlote, 2019). However, conceptualising this finding within PVT would require ongoing investigation that considers the current critiques of PVT's core assumptions (Doody et al., 2023; Grossman, 2023). Overall, this finding expands the available understandings of horse communications during EFL. Specifically, findings suggest that horses can communicate reciprocally with

clients as opposed to simply communicating at clients in a basic format. In turn, this understanding posits them as skilled and active facilitators of the practice, therefore reinforcing their value in eventual outcomes.

The reciprocal communication and experiencing of synchronisation also appear to align with the emotional transfer hypothesis outlined by Scopa et al. (2019). Furthermore, the complex system that these communications contribute to is a process that facilitates development of an attachment between client and horse. This indicates an overall relevance of attachment theory to EFL but also notes some limited relevance in certain concepts typically applied in human-to-human practices. The varied relevance of attachment theory concepts in relation to the current study may speak to nuanced and inherent differences between human-to-human relationships and horse to human relationships. This further reinforces a need for careful consideration and reflection when applying theories developed for humans to practices involving non-human animals. The significance of the differential nature of the client and horse relationship was emphasised in this study through the core contextual component of beings from two different species. In this way, the current findings seem to highlight the value of increasing current perspectives of attachment in relation to EFL. Māori perspectives of attachment, that go beyond the infant and primary caregiver relationship, include extrapersonal attachments, and highlight the influence of such attachments on a person's sense of self and wellbeing, may be particularly relevant (Fleming, 2018; Mikahere-Hall, 2020).

Connecting authentically within the relationship building process was not only facilitated by horses' skills in detecting inauthenticity but also their requirement for client authenticity. Overall, connecting authentically supported experiences of high authenticity and also of acceptance. These findings can be linked to prior research that connected person-centered approaches to EFL practices (Nieforth & Craig, 2021; Thorne, 2003). However,

Rogers' six conditions of therapy emphasise that clients must to some degree perceive that the therapist is experiencing 'unconditional positive regard' towards them (Tudor,2011). Within the current findings, participants did not appear to hold that perception during the moments where horses avoided engagement, until the participant displayed authenticity and presence. Previous research has suggested that horses do show unconditional positive regard towards clients (Nieforth & Craig, 2021), and it is possible that the horses in this project did experience unconditional positive regard towards clients. However, previous research studied human facilitator perspectives, and therefore did not speak to the necessary condition of clients experiencing the horse's unconditional positive regard. In focusing on client perspectives, the current findings offer additional insight into the potential applicability of Rogerian theory in EFL.

In holding expectations of authenticity and presence, quick development of attachment and experiences of acceptance by another appeared to occur. Again, this may indicate an important difference in horse and human facilitators, offering insight into the unique contributions that each can make to EFL practices. When considering the capacity for horses to hold strong expectations of clients and still quickly develop connection with them, it is also worth considering the influence of the novel context. The core contextual components that build the overall EFL context likely influence the nature of an experience and contribute to horses having success while facilitating in a manner that human facilitators could not. For example, a client may remain engaged in a situation where a horse appears to be ignoring them, but they may be inclined to leave a situation where a human facilitator ignores them. As such, during EFL horses may have success facilitating client experiences by using strategies that would not be effective in a human-to-human context.

Clients experienced the personalising process very differently to the relationship building process. Outlining and acknowledging both within the presented theory emphasises

the potential for more than one process to occur between human and horse within EFL. It also highlights the capacity for clients to have very different experiences of EFL and the horses, with different processes occurring.

The core component of shaping highlights the potential influence of human facilitators on client experiences and integrates them into this process. Although this project focused on processes occurring between clients and horses, their significant contributions to the personalising process highlight the client, horse and human facilitator triad as core to this process. The lack of emphasis on a triad within the relationship building process further emphasises this. Previous literature has noted the importance of the human facilitator within EFL (Burgon et al., 2018; Hallberg, 2018; Nieforth & Craig, 2021). However, often the focus is on how the EFL environment and horses may positively influence clients' perceptions of human facilitators or aid human facilitators in their understanding of the client. Their significance in this process indicates potential for the reverse to happen, whereby the client's understanding and perception of the horse is influenced by the involvement of the human facilitator.

The core components of splitting awareness and meaning making emphasise the connection that occurs between client personal history and the present moment. In turn it shows the influence that a client's personal history can have on their engagement in the present moment and vice versa. The resulting tendency for horses to become representative of client personal history shares similarities with current practice models. More specifically, some models emphasise ideas of metaphors presenting within EFL that relate to other parts of the client's life and can be used to facilitate learning (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association n.d.-b). However, within the personalising process clients had capacity to experience affect, cognition, and embodiment that was directly reflective of past experiences. This finding may suggest the potential for client experiences during EFL to move beyond

metaphor and closer to re-experiencing past experiences. In turn, this could offer an opportunity to work through or at least perceive those experiences in a different light.

Regarding attachment theory, horses as representative of a client's personal history could be likened to prior conceptualisations of 'transitional object theory' as related to EFL. Vincent and Farkas (2017) suggested that the client and horse relationship can become representative of previous struggles. Those can be worked through due to the safety and support offered by the horses and the human professionals involved. According to the current findings and the previous suggestion by Vincent and Farkas (2017), interactions between client and horse are influential to clients' experiencing an association with difficulties of their past. Additionally, both horse and human facilitator had capacity to aid the client to move through their EFL experience and learn during it. The current theory does not address the potential impact that prior experiences of the relationship building process may have on clients' experiences during the personalising process. It is possible that prior experiences of the relationship building process with a horse may impact a client's experience of the personalising process when working with that horse. Again, this could have similarities to the application of transitional object theory as posited by Vincent and Farkas (2017), such as if prior relationship building influenced client capacity to separate the present moment from the past or to feel safer and more able to learn during the personalising process. However, I would argue that transitional object theory is not the most appropriate way to explain horses representing clients' personal histories and learning that occurs thereafter. The current findings clearly indicate horses as sentient beings and active participants within EFL processes. Certainly, they are not objects, and it is important that terminology does not accidentally encourage such ideas. Just as the EFL practice can be understood as a complex system, so too can the theoretical and scientific literature. The two can therefore be understood as having reciprocal influence on each other. In turn, use of terminology in

literature has the potential to impact real life understandings, attitudes, and behaviours surrounding horses. Use of the term ‘transitional object theory’ may be tempting, especially due to its significance to attachment theory concepts that align with the relationship building process. However, the potential real-life consequences of terminology used within this field are important to consider as EFL research progresses.

During experiences of the personalising process, clients tend to experience a lack of connection to their horses, and increased connection to their pasts. This finding is interesting when compared to experiences of the relationship building process and considered alongside previous research into horse and human interactions and heart rate variability (Guidi et al., 2016). This preliminary research suggested increased variability occurred between horses and humans’ heart rates during interactions of closer proximity. Scopa et al. (2019) suggested the finding may indicate that increased variability between humans and horses’ heart rates occurs during increasingly stressful interactions. Compared to the relationship building process, clients’ affective experiences during the personalising process were more connected to their personal history and had capacity to reflect difficult past experiences. Although not measured within this study, it is possible that due to the historically related and more stressful experiences had during the personalising process, heart rate variability between horse and human was increased. If this were the case, variability in heart rates may contribute to explanation of why clients experience less connection to horses during the personalising process, especially when compared to experiences of synchronicity and connection as described within the relationship building process. However, research regarding coupling processes, heart rate variability, and possible explanations is preliminary and not yet generalisable (Guidi et al., 2016; Scopa et al., 2019). The above suggestion is included as a hypothetical discussion point and would require extensive research to confirm it as valid. PVT (Porges, 2022) may explain the experienced lack of connection as influenced by the

specific state of the client's autonomic nervous system during the experience. For example, PVT may consider that during some experiences of the personalising process, a client may become triggered by an element of their past. In turn, they may perceive increased threat in the world around them, causing an increase in activation of their sympathetic nervous system and making them less able to connect with others (Esposito & Fournier, 2023; Schlote, 2017, 2019). An alternative explanation may be that in shifting their focus towards their personal histories participants naturally became more introspective and therefore less relational.

At the time of writing this thesis there appeared to be only one other grounded theory study focusing on EFL practices. Therefore, it is important to compare the two, and consider any preliminary indications of similarity or generalisability. O'Hanlon's (2021) doctoral study appeared to be the first study to heed the call for grounded theory approaches within this field. The study was based in the United Kingdom and considered the role of horse- human interactions in equine assisted therapy/learning with a population of disadvantaged young people. The prominence of connection within the current findings mirrors a central process of connecting that O'Hanlon (2021) reported. In particular, clients' strong connection to horses experienced during the relationship building process, along with the associated increases in their connections to self and awareness of their own bodies, are similar to the themes of connecting with my body and connecting with horses identified in O'Hanlon's (2021) study. Communicating non-verbally through physical and energetic communications was also indicated as influential in both studies. However, while the adults in this study emphasised experiences of 'being seen', increased connection to self, and openness to learning during the relationship building process, the young people in O'Hanlon's (2021) study emphasised the development of a valued identity. The differences in these benefits may speak to the differing developmental stages of the populations studied and associated values or priorities. Either way, the findings of these two studies, conducted on opposite sides of the world and with

differing client populations, emphasise connection as important. These similarities may be an early indication of a generalisable core component of horse and human interactions within EFL practices. Furthermore, the differences may speak to varied impacts that the same or similar EFL processes may have on diverse client populations.

Implications

In addition to the theoretical implications noted above, the current findings have several possible implications for EFL as a practice. These implications can occur at both an industry and individual level, informing areas such as practitioner understanding and education as well as informing the development of EFL practice boundaries and definitions. Furthermore, the findings may be useful for practitioners in developing the services they offer (such as through specific activity development) and in using language that is meaningful to clients.

The presented theory has the potential to influence the EFL industry, including how human practitioners understand and carry out EFL. As noted earlier, the current theory aligns with, deviates from, and integrates various components of EFL and previously applied theories. For practitioners, this provides a chance to reflect on and increase their current theoretical understanding of what occurs between clients and horses during EFL. This holistic theory offers opportunity for EFL practitioners to move towards cohesive understandings and to step away from possible disjointed and/or ill-fitting concepts. Engagement with the current theory may also allow practitioners some freedom to re-consider previously applied theories as stand-alone, instead accepting them as mutually relevant, influential to and a part of wider processes. Understanding both processes occurring and the EFL context as complex systems of reciprocal influence has the potential to inform practitioner understanding of the nuanced changes that may occur to the nature of processes and experiences, based on the living beings involved (i.e., the horses, clients and human facilitators).

When considering education and certification programmes for future clinicians, the current processes and the visual models may be a helpful resource. For example, explanation of the relationship building process in comparison with ideas of prey theory and horses as reflective communicators may assist in expanding future practitioners' knowledge bases. This may be particularly useful for individuals who are experienced in other equine related fields such as competitive riding or training, but who are wanting to move towards accreditation in learning or therapeutic practices. Additionally, the historically reflective experiences that clients can have during the personalising process may hold implications for practitioner competency and scope limitations. For example, if a client's experience can move beyond drawing metaphors and towards an experience reflective of difficult past experiences, human facilitators may require additional skill and knowledge to safely facilitate those experiences.

At an industry level, consideration of the detailed findings has potential to shape wider understanding of what constitutes EFL as a practice. For example, the personalising process was shown to occur during formal EFL activities. However, the relationship building process was shown to occur both within and outside of formal EFL activities. Therefore, it is worth considering and questioning the boundaries of what can be deemed EFL. It may be that EFL could be considered as an overall experience that includes every moment between a client entering and leaving a facility. Ultimately, the posited rationale for any newly developed definitions would need to be carefully considered in order to maximise their relevance. Careful consideration would also be important to avoid misunderstanding or premature dismissal by those outside of the practice. However, these findings suggest that widening understandings of what constitutes EFL may enhance overall learning and better reflect clients' experiences. Additionally, understanding the reciprocal influence of context and process could allow practitioners to utilise these novel opportunities for client wellbeing. Awareness of this novelty may help practitioners to both understand the value of their service

and in turn secure EFL's place as a growth and learning modality.

The constructed processes could also be used to inform the development of EFL activities, sessions, and programmes. Considering the differences between the relationship building process and the personalising process may help a human facilitator to remain flexible and vary the focus and nature of their practice at different times. For example, a client new to EFL may benefit from a human facilitator purposefully limiting their involvement in a session and attempting to facilitate the relationship building process to occur. This may aid openness to ongoing learning through the development of a secure attachment between client and horse and experiences of increased connection to self and being seen and accepted by another being. Alternatively, a client seasoned in EFL or with a specific goal for a session may benefit from purposeful shaping that encourages occurrence of the personalising process and therefore offers opportunity for a more specific experience. In a wider sense, practitioners could use the current theory to inform their specific style of practice. For example, a practitioner may place most value in the client and horse relationship and hold a belief that learning through that relationship will be most beneficial. In contrast, another practitioner may place value in focused learning, viewing EFL as a chance for direct exploration of specific issues, with facilitators shaping to suit the client's experience. In this way the current theory has potential to inform the nature of EFL both within and between different facilities.

The current theory shows the value of including clients' perspectives in EFL research and has both theoretical and practical implications. As the presented theory is grounded in data that was constructed with clients of EFL, it has potential to inform how practitioners can make their facilitation as meaningful as possible through use of language. When educating clients, providing rationale for EFL, or helping them make sense of experiences, it is important that the words used are meaningful to the client. As the evidence-base for

theoretical understandings progresses, practitioners may find it useful to draw upon this theory when selecting terminology grounded in client perspectives as opposed to, for example, terminology reflective of previously developed theoretical frameworks or theory built through facilitator's perspectives.

As mentioned in the previous section of this discussion, differences in the processes outlined in the presented theory serve as a reminder that theory building in this field is new and requires ongoing exploration. For practitioners, this may add confusion and a temptation to hold tightly to previously learnt theoretical applications. However, commitment to following (and ideally contributing to) theory development will likely deepen the practice at an individual and industry level.

Limitations

The following sections describe limitations of this study and aims to increase transparency of the research process, facilitating overall understanding of the findings and their utility.

The current study was my first using a grounded theory approach and at the time of writing this thesis appeared to be only the second grounded theory EFL study. Additionally, there was a general lack of theoretically focused EFL literature available. In certain ways the lack of relevant prior grounded theory and theoretically focused literature was a benefit to the study. It assisted openness and flexibility throughout the process, and the development of novel terminology, heavily grounded in the data. However, when combined with my lack of experience completing grounded theory research it also increased the challenge of effectively implementing grounded theory methods. In particular, when moving from the focused to advanced coding stages of analysis, the already challenging process of selecting and applying theoretical codes was made harder by the lack of directly relevant theoretical literature. I

recognised this early on during the analysis process which meant that I began considering the relationships between codes and categories while still completing the focused coding stages. Due to this, I did not have to rely heavily on theoretical codes to explain the relationships between codes that ultimately formed the processes. Instead, I mostly used them to inform increased abstraction and theoretical integration. However, the lack of literature and my lack of experience with grounded theory may still be a possible limitation of my research, particularly at the theoretical integration stage. This limitation may naturally be addressed in future grounded theory EFL studies as the available literature builds, in turn increasing the availability of relevant coding families.

Limitations of scope impact the generalisability of this study. This study is qualitative, representing the specific experiences of a small number of adult participants at one EFL facility. Due to this it would be inappropriate for findings to be generalised across other populations of EFL clients, such as adolescents or even other adults. Similarities between the current findings and O'Hanlon's (2021) study do provide early indications that consistencies in client experience across populations and nations is worth considering. However, there is currently no substantial evidence to generalise the findings of either study. Additionally, the final participant sample did not include any Māori participants. A lack of indigenous data is a limitation as the research may be missing insights specific to the Aotearoa New Zealand context within which it was produced. Finally, participants were recruited after they expressed interest in participating. All participants appeared to have a generally positive attitude towards EFL, which may have biased the data collected. Although some participants did choose to share experiences they had not enjoyed, the inclusion of participants that expressed negative attitudes towards EFL may have increased the insights garnered through the data.

Practical constraints impacted the overall design of this research project and in turn

limited its scope. Time constraints were imposed by the professional doctorate programme within which the study took place. Furthermore, the research project constituted half of the overall degree requirements, with clinical training serving as the other half. These factors limited the realistic size and length of the project and sat in tension with the complex grounded theory method. In conducting and analysing the data, practical steps such as an application for extension of thesis deadline were taken to maximise quality in the use of grounded theory methods. Additionally, in writing the thesis care was taken while writing and editing to ensure the most salient information was captured in the final document. However, it is important to bear in mind that construction and presentation of the final theory may have been impacted by practical limitations such as timeframe and limited word count.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 global pandemic influenced additional practical constraints. As mentioned above, methods of data collection were reduced due to national lockdowns which limited access to the EFL facility and its clients. In addition to preventing observational data collection, several participant interviews had to be carried out over audio-visual (AV) platforms such as Zoom. This influenced the interview processes in ways such as changing ways of rapport building, disconnecting mid-way through interviews, and in one case through corruption of an audio file and therefore the loss of data. As a researcher training in clinical psychology and seeing clients during lockdowns, I had a certain level of skill in areas such as engaging others, assessment, interviewing, and navigating the relevant technology. I attempted to minimise the impacts of AV data collection by using those skills. However, as exemplified by the corrupt audio file of a participant's interview, it is still possible that my final data sample was impacted negatively by such practical constraints.

Future Recommendations

EFL is an ever-evolving field, both scholastically and practically. The current evidence-base is not strong enough to support EFL as a primary practice for client growth and

learning. However, current literature offers promise and a wealth of opportunity both for future researchers and providers of EFL services.

It would be beneficial for future EFL researchers to prioritise theory building. Doing so can enhance the theoretical foundations, in turn building rationale that is specific to EFL. Specific theory and rationale can then signal what and how different client populations may be best served by EFL services. Theoretically focused research that addresses the limitations outlined earlier would be valuable. Gathering a variety of data types through multiple collection methods would support a fuller understanding of this experiential practice. In turn this would likely aid in minimising the inherent reductionism present in this research. Addressing limitations of scope by addressing factors such as time constraints and researcher inexperience would likely enhance the quality of theoretically focused studies. Experienced grounded theory researchers in particular could be beneficial to this field. Whether through direct research or supervision, a grounded theory researcher could aid proficient use of these methods. Additionally, studying a variety of populations and facilities in various countries would help to inform the appropriateness of cross-cultural generalisation of developing theory.

It is important that efforts are made to include indigenous voices in theory development. Failing to include indigenous perspectives may lead to the development and delivery of culturally irrelevant or unsafe EFL practices. Those practices could then serve to disadvantage indigenous clients, unintentionally promoting colonial ideals and further perpetuating current wellbeing disparities amongst indigenous and non-indigenous populations. As was noted in the literature review, Te Ao Māori and Mātauranga Māori offer holistic and interconnected understandings of all that exists, including the interactions of human and non-human animals. From my perspective, the complex and reciprocal nature of the findings of this project may align well with such understandings. Further consideration of

Mātauranga Māori in connection with EFL practices may deepen the theoretical basis of EFL, and emphasise a holistic understanding that avoids taking a hierarchical approach to human and non-human animal relationships. Furthermore, completion of EFL research by kaupapa Māori researchers would hold potential to positively shape the practice going forward and enhance understandings of the value of relationships outside of human-to-human relationships. Inclusion of Māori research participants would also assist in informing EFL as it relates to an Aotearoa New Zealand context.

The findings of this study represent the early stages of theory development in the EFL field. A consequence of studying a relatively novel area of this practice is that the findings may leave more questions than answers. Future researchers can use this study as a springboard to explore, develop, and refine EFL's theoretical foundations. The findings highlight the value of taking a holistic approach to research and there is an ongoing need for this. Future research could focus on the relationship building process, the personalising process, both or alternative processes, or perhaps a more comprehensive exploration of the EFL context. I encourage researchers to take a critical lens to the presented theory: supporting, expanding, modifying, and dismissing elements when new information supports doing so. This will aid in the solidification of useful theoretical understandings. Additionally, researchers should continue to reflect on the potential relevance of novel scientific developments, both in the EFL field and in other areas. However, in general I would recommend that researchers avoid overreliance on pre-existing theories not developed specifically for EFL. Remaining aware that relevance may be limited will assist researchers in avoiding the dismissal of EFL's unique qualities. Openness to variation, anomalies, and novelty will inform valuable theory development and is crucial in these early stages. Including client voices in theoretical research will aid insight that is less influenced by current academic ideas, and help to ensure that theory reflects experience.

As EFL's theoretical evidence base increases it would also be useful for researchers to investigate the relationship between different processes. For example, perhaps the relationship building process has potential to mitigate the intensity of client experiences during the personalising process. Perhaps developing a secure attachment with a horse enhances clients' senses of safety during the personalising process: facilitating increased presence and capacity for novel insight development. Additionally, exploration of learning differences across differing processes would hold potential to inform practice models. For example, if different processes can have similar impacts on client learning, growth and wellbeing then perhaps a highly specific and personalised approach to EFL is not necessary. A more generalised approach may facilitate benefits without requiring clients to delve deeply into potentially distressing personal histories. Alternatively, a more generalised approach may remove useful idiosyncracies of each client and horse experience. Either way, increased understanding of the relationship between different processes would likely be helpful in shaping the practice going forward.

It is necessary that the field remains realistic about the practicalities of completing research, as well as open to the value of a range of research approaches. While ongoing holistic research would be beneficial, it will not always be feasible or even appropriate. Researchers wanting to study EFL through smaller projects, such as within an Honours programme, may struggle to produce sound, holistic findings. Similarly, funding and access may prevent such research. If that is the case, then a more atomistic approach may be appropriate. The isolation of a specific component of a process or area of EFL could increase understanding and future theoretical integration of that component. Furthermore, the current study focused on processes occurring between clients and horses. While holistic in its approach and findings, the study does only speak to one part of EFL. Holistic approaches within isolated areas of EFL, such as context, the human facilitator and client relationship,

and post EFL debriefs have potential to increase theoretical understanding. By increasing theoretical understanding in particular areas, the relevant projects can lay the foundation for increasingly holistic theoretical integration and understanding.

EFL practitioners across the world are already offering a variety of services, with outcome research indicating some of the benefits. However, a lack of clearly defined practice boundaries and definitions, as well as practice labels, makes it confusing to determine the value and validity of many services. Going forward, continued streamlining of labels and clear definitions of practice would provide clarity for service-users, researchers, current and potential practitioners, and the wider public. The terms equine assisted mental health and equine assisted learning have been used previously and may be useful umbrella terms to begin separating factors such as the qualifications of practitioners, the scope of services offered, and the intended client populations. Under those umbrella labels it may then be possible to further delineate the services offered. This could occur by developing and assigning labels that represent the specific models and theories informing a specific practice approach. Practitioners could then choose to use a specific label based on their own qualifications, theoretical preferences, service design, and business model. Ongoing development of the theoretical evidence base may help practical development of EFL in this area. However, before researchers and practitioners advocate for any particular streamlining, I would recommend that careful consideration is made regarding the words ‘assisted’ and ‘facilitated’. ‘Assisted’ may not afford enough credit to the horses involved in EFL, positing them as adjunct to the ‘more valuable’ human facilitators. This could hold ethical consequences regarding how horses are understood and treated within the field. However, that word may be useful for the general public, who may understand ‘facilitated’ as meaning a service run by horses. On the other hand, the word ‘facilitated’ may function to center horses and emphasise their value within the practice, which could have positive consequences

for horses involved in this work.

Within wider growth, wellbeing, and learning fields it would be beneficial for EFL to be promoted as a complementary service to practices with a stronger evidence base. Currently the evidence base does not support having EFL as a primary intervention for areas such as mental health or learning. However, findings from this study, such as developing secure attachment facilitated by components such as communicating non-verbally, support prior research that indicates the potential utility of EFL for clients averse to (or not benefitting from) practices such as talking therapies. Positing EFL as a complementary service may cause concern for service providers within and outside of the EFL field. More specifically, practitioners may worry about potential risks of parallel services such as provision of opposing ideas or ill-fitted timelines of intervention. However, with communication, planning, and clarity of scope it may be possible to address those concerns. An example where EFL could be a useful complimentary service in Aotearoa New Zealand is with the Youth Justice Population. Young people involved with youth courts in Aotearoa New Zealand typically have service plans that target a range of areas designed to encourage movement toward more pro-social choices. EFL may be a useful addition to a youth justice plan. For example, a young person opposed to engaging with human professionals, or who would benefit from engaging in a less formal activity before attempting talking therapies, may benefit from EFL.

To sincerely increase the credibility of current EFL services, the field may benefit from a registration board. This would further encourage clear parameters of services. It would also offer ethical and skilled providers the opportunity to affirm themselves as such and to be held accountable to high standards of practice. Registration boards would in turn aid understanding of EFL services and assist clients and other institutions in determining appropriate providers.

A crucially important and ongoing need is reflection regarding equine involvement in human growth, wellbeing and learning. Both researchers and practitioners need to be mindful of how horses are conceptualised and looked after within the EFL field. Continuous reflection will aid insight into the roles and functions of horses as a species involved in EFL, and as individual beings. Research regarding the impacts of this work on horses could inform ethical guidelines and service adaptations. Practitioners need to be reflective and honest about their personal ethical beliefs and how their welfare practices reflect those. For example, claiming horses should have autonomy and choose their level of involvement in EFL may become difficult to adhere to if a client arrives for a session and no horses enter the session space. However, such an occurrence could also be viewed as a learning opportunity and incorporated into the practice by a human facilitator who views their role as working with any situation that presents (as opposed to adhering to a pre-determined agenda or client expectations). Both researchers and practitioners would likely benefit from early and ongoing reflection about personal values and priorities as they relate to EFL. Engaging in the field with the understanding that there may come a time when they need to choose one value at the expense of another could not only help at that moment but inform decisions in the lead-up.

Just as experiencing connection was core to the findings of this study, it will be core to scientific and practical developments going forward. Researchers and practitioners will benefit from working alongside each other and acknowledging the specific value and perspectives that each can offer. EFL services are and have been provided for a long time. The current lack of a strong evidence base should not necessarily undermine or stall the provision of EFL services. However, service users need to be mindful of who they engage with, what they hope to get out of engaging, and what claims are made by an EFL provider. Additionally, prioritising the strengthening of the EFL evidence base would likely be unhelpful without development of clearer practice boundaries, labels, and regulations. By

working together researchers and practitioners can simultaneously advance the evidence base and the practice. Connection to clients and horses are also important as they are the essential components of EFL and as with researchers and practitioners they can offer specific value and perspectives.

Conclusion

This study used grounded theory methods to explore the processes occurring between client and horse during Equine Facilitated Learning, that made the process impactful and effective from clients' perspectives. The topic was chosen to help address the current gaps in theoretical knowledge surrounding EFL. A theoretical focus that included client perspectives was considered important due to the unique position that clients have within EFL practices. Eight participants took part in the study, and a total of 12 interviews were completed. I used an informed grounded theory methodology (selected in part due to its roots in social constructionism, relativist ontology, and pragmatist epistemology), and grounded theory strategies for analysis. A central category of experiencing connection was identified throughout the early stages of analysis. The final analysis aimed to increase theoretical integration of early findings and was presented as a tentative grounded theory in the discussion chapter of this thesis. Being a qualitative study, this project did not aim to provided conclusive and generalisable theoretical explanations. Rather, the final theory was grounded in data constructed between myself and my participants. It represents perspectives and experiences of EFL, shared by the participants of this study at the time of data collection.

The presented theory offers an understanding of EFL and processes occurring within the practice as complex and dynamic systems that are reciprocally influential. Two possible processes that can occur between client and horse during EFL are outlined within the theory: the relationship building process and the personalising process. The core components of communicating nonverbally, connecting authentically, and becoming present interact and

form the relationship building process. Shaping (by the human facilitator), splitting awareness and meaning making are the core components that make up the personalising process. The core components of each process all interact with and influence each other. In doing so, each process can be considered a complex system that interacts with another complex system: the EFL context. Core to the EFL context are the components of beings from two different species, personality of the client and horse, and space. Again, these components interact with reciprocal influence to form a complex system. As the EFL context and the two processes reciprocally influence each other they can be considered to contribute to a wider complex system of EFL as a practice. Both context and process always remain dynamic due to the living organisms within them. The nature of a system and the resulting EFL experience can change as any small change from a core component has an influence on every other component. Overall, the EFL context was indicated as novel and to offer novel opportunity for experience and learning. Through the relationship building process clients begin developing a secure attachment to the horses, and experience acceptance, increased awareness of and connection to self, and openness to learning. Through the personalising process, learning is more personally relevant to each client. Less connection between client and horse is experienced. Instead, client personal history connects to the present moment and influences client engagement, experience, and learning.

This study is an original contribution to the current body of EFL literature. The findings add a piece to the EFL theoretical puzzle and as such have several important implications. The value of a holistic approach to theory building is emphasised through the framing of context and process as complex systems. The theory integrates several components of EFL previously suggested as important. It also supports the relevance of previous applications of theories to EFL practices, while offering possible limitations to applicability. Ultimately, this emphasises the importance of recognising client and horse

interactions during EFL as having unique qualities due to the connection of the two different species. The broad relevance of the current findings across pre-existing literature highlights how novel specific EFL theory building is. The implication of this is a wealth of opportunity for future researchers, who can use the current theory as a springboard for further theory development and refinement. In particular, the current findings support a focus on the client-horse relationship as beneficial to growth and learning. Additionally, increased focus into the triad of clients, horses and human facilitators would likely expand understanding of the complex systems at play during EFL. When completing such research, addressing limitations of this project, such as sample size and lack of indigenous voices, would strengthen the evidence-base and generalisability.

Practically, the current theory has potential to inform development of EFL at both an industry and individual practice level. The theory can be used to inform areas such as definitions and boundaries of EFL as a practice, as well as to inform individual practitioners' education and service development and delivery.

An ongoing connection between researchers and practitioners is vital so that both the practice and the evidence base can strengthen each other. As this occurs, it is likely that EFL will solidify its place as a useful modality for growth and learning. Client voices and the experiences of horses will also be an important inclusion in both theoretical and practical development. It is important that horses are recognised as active facilitators in EFL practices. Continual reflection regarding the appropriateness of including this non-human species in practices primarily designed to benefit humans is important to mitigate the risks of welfare issues for horses.

Crucially, the core category of experiencing connection, and the understanding of complex and dynamic systems of reciprocal influence can inform ongoing engagement with

EFL. Researchers, practitioners, and clients of EFL and other learning and wellbeing domains, should aim to transcend any illusions of separateness. Instead, they should strive to understand the power and potential of connection and reciprocal influence between them.

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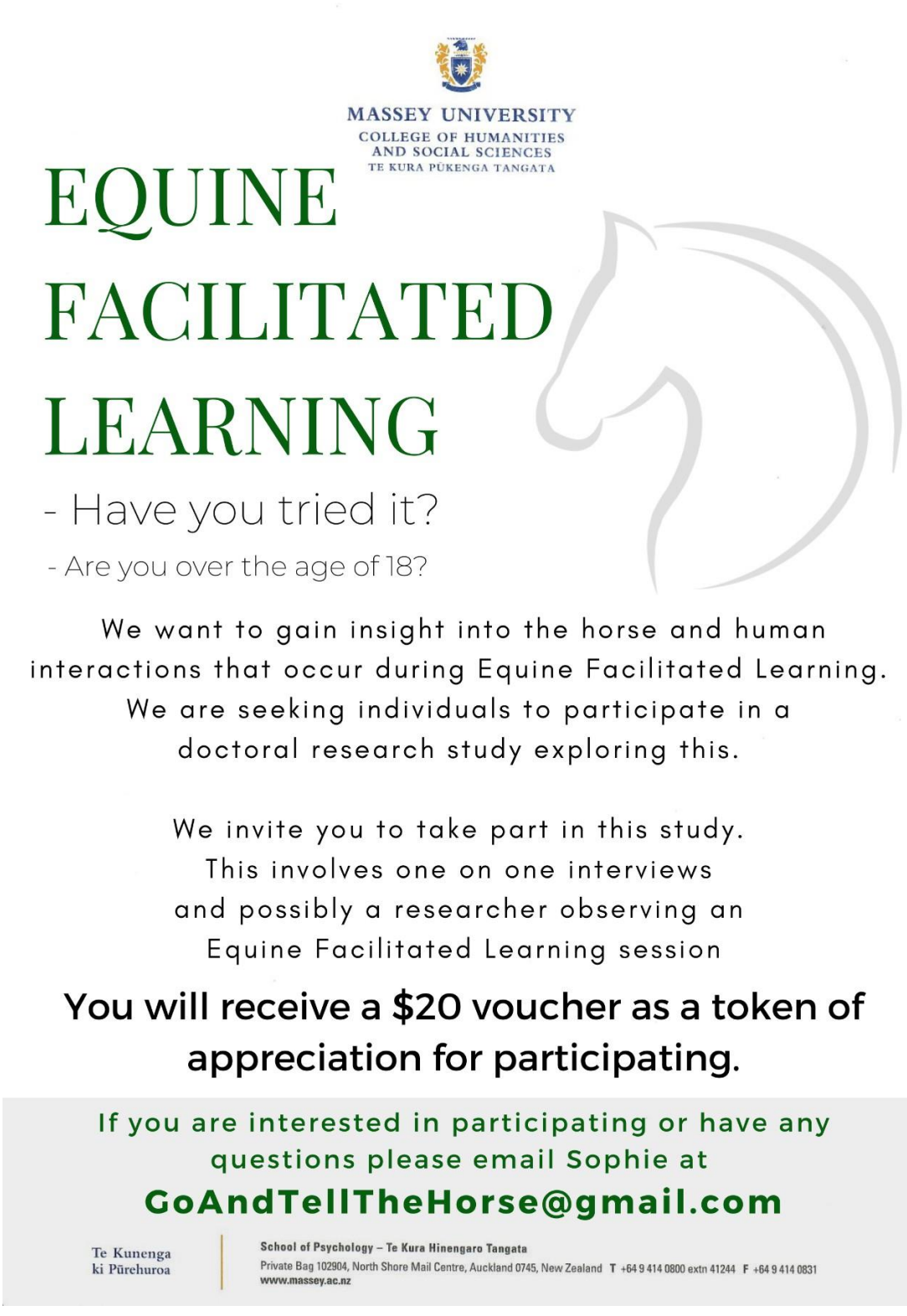
Appendix A: Research E-Poster



Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Interview Schedule

(The interview will begin with the interviewer/ researcher offering to open the space in a particular way, explaining a bit about themselves, the research and purpose of the day's interview, and checking in on the client's understanding of the consent form/ their rights etc.,)

- Why don't we start by you telling me a bit about yourself?

- Lets talk a bit about some experiences you've had with the horses you've encountered during your EFL Journey? You can choose where to start.
    - Sub-question(s) (if participant is struggling with what to say): Why don't we start with you telling me a bit about the first EFL horse you worked with? Can you think of any impactful interactions or experiences you had with them?
    - Explore components of participant's experience as relevant and indicated by them
    - What did you make of that experience?
    - Who played a part?
    - Was that experience impactful? What made it so?

- If you think of one particular horse that you've had a relationship with through EFL, can you describe what that relationship was/is like? –
    - what part does the horse play?
    - How does the horse communicate with you? (what is noticeable about the horse's communications?)
    - How has that relationship impacted you? (why do you think it has been so powerful? What is it about this relationship and interactions that makes it so powerful?)

- Can you think of any stand out moments you've had with the EFL horses that had an impact on you? Tell me about it?
    - What about that interaction made it impactful?
    - Why?
    - How did the horse communicate with you? How did that experience feel?

- What do you see the horses' role to have been during your EFL sessions/ journey?
    - What is it that has given you this understanding?

    - Did the horse do something? Is it a sense you got? The way you felt when with the horse? Something physical/ tangible?
- What do you see as the human facilitator's role? (can be asked as a general question or throughout as part of experiences)
    - Explore how they contributed to experiences and the effect of those contributions from participants experiences.

Note: It is important to acknowledge that as this is a semi-structured interview for an exploratory qualitative project, the interviewer/ researcher is largely guided by what the participant chooses to speak about. The above questions are an overall guide to help maintain the flow and purpose of the interview.

Appendix C: Memo Extracts Outlining Evolving Analysis

Memo Extracts	Explanation of Evolving Analysis
May 2020 – *The story I tell myself* One thing I have found interesting about the last two interviews that I have coded, is they have both expressed this idea to the sentiment of 'the story they tell themselves' about what happened, but that it is not the actual story of what happened for them. Zara expressed the story she would tell others about what happened between herself and Austin, which was a story that fit a very streamline narrative, that although special, was a logical narrative which fit within the physical space that we exist. Yet she also expressed that what she would tell people, is not what happened. Her experience was more transcendent, and as such does not have a logical explanation, nor easily accessible words to describe it in a way that makes it easy to understand for others. Raven had a similar sentiment for some of her EFL experiences, stating that her 'horsey brain' has horsey explanations of what has happened during her EFL experiences but that it feels as though it is more than that… [content redacted for current presentation of memo] ...This also makes me wonder if clients with more EFL experience may describe their experiences in less transcendental or mystical ways, and more so in structured narratives that utilise already accessible human constructs and concepts.	These extracts highlight my early recognition of participants noting a difference in the meaning they made of an experience versus what they really believed occurred. As these extracts allude to, I initially queried if my participants might be searching for readily available constructs to explain experiences that did not actually describe what they experienced. I wondered if increased EFL experience might aid clients in developing more 'coherent' narratives (and possibly in ignoring less easily explained elements of their experiences) Further analysis and data collection helped me to explore these early queries and better understand/ conceptualise my participants' experiences.
December 2020 – *Relational vs. non-relational experiences* Initially while analysing my participants' experiences I thought that I was seeing two distinct types of experiences; those that transcended the horse and human binaries, and those that were grounded in those	These extracts highlight the ongoing development of my analysis of the data. Although not fully conceptualised, these extracts show how I began to

binaries… However upon further exploration that idea began to fade… [content redacted for current presentation of memo] ….something a participant said got me thinking.. She mentioned that during a particular experience, which was very different to the other experiences that she has had, she was very shut into her own head and being projective. Upon exploration she had the insight that during her projective experience she was not in relation with the horse. Quite the opposite, she actually felt as though due to being 'shut in' she could not possibly be in relation, she was not available for relationship because she was preoccupied with trauma… so here lay a new perspective, a new separation between experiences; relational and non-relational experiences…	understand that participants were not necessarily finding coherent ways to explain some experiences. Rather, during some experiences they were making meaning that fit personal narratives. Those narratives appeared related to experiences of preoccupation that inhibited relationship with the horses. In this extract I have used the words 'transcended' and 'grounded,' but ongoing analysis highlighted the qualities I was conceptualising as 'transcending', as the experiences of deep connection and authentic expression that were later included in the relationship building process. 'grounded' experiences were later conceptualised within the personalising process.
November 2022 – A story of two tails In collapsing codes and identifying core categories my initial interpretation was that I had identified two groups of core categories, that were signalling to two different processes. The first of these were categories that I believed identified the relationship building process. The second group identified the personalising process… [content redacted for current presentation of memo] … I thought that this data told a story of two tails. That is to say, I thought that this data highlighted such distinct processes that no clear relationship existed between them. However, in thinking about this the constant standout word or idea for me is RELATIONSHIP. Relationship, or a lack thereof, is the central theme throughout this research. In an interview process that allowed participants to decide which experiences they had that were most important to talk about, they split between extremes of **connection** – strong and positive relationship AND experiences that	These extracts, from a memo written approximately two years after the above memos, highlights the development of my understanding of the core category of the analysis. It shows my recognition of a core category that explained data that sat across the two processes I had conceptualised. Furthermore, in developing this understanding, I was also increasing the conceptual and theoretical relationship of my data and recognising that although not connected in one neatly packageable process, all data was linked through varying experiences of connection.

were personal and in which they did not experience much connection to their horses… [content redacted for current presentation of memo] … Previously I was unsure about the core category of this data – but now I wonder if it is 'experiencing connection'... From participants' perspectives, the important processes that occur between themselves and their equine are those that enhance or impact connection	

Appendix D: Support Contact Sheet Provided to Participants

NEED SOME EXTRA SUPPORT?

Occasionally after participating and reflecting on interviews, things may come up that we need to talk about or get some extra support around

If you are feeling like you want to talk to someone in person, your GP is always a good place to start.

Want to talk to someone now? Try one of these helplines

Need to talk?	Free call or text 1737 any time for support from a trained counsellor
Lifeline	0800 543 354 (0800 LIFELINE) or free text 4357 (HELP)
Anxiety Helpline	0800 269 4389 (0800 ANXIETY)
Healthline	0800 611 116

If you would like to speak to [redacted], you can contact them on [redacted]

Not what you're looking for? Go to https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/in-crisis/helplines/ For more helplines and services available

Appendix E: Research Case Study

Massey University Clinical
Psychology

CASE STUDY

Similarities and Differences in Experiences of Interviewing Research Participants and Interviewing Young People in a Youth Forensic Service

Candidate : Sophie Stanford

Clinical Psychology Programme Massey University Student ID :
[redacted]

Setting : Te Toka Tumai, Te Whatu Ora Primary
Supervisor : Dr Heather Kempton

This case was completed during internship at [redacted] in 2021 and represents the work of the candidate.

Supervisor	**Student**
Dr Heather Kempton **Primary Supervisor**	**Sophie Stanford**

Abstract

This case study (written in 2021 during the writer's clinical internship) outlines the parallels between the writer's experiences of doctoral studies and their clinical internship. The case study provides an overview of the research purpose, design, and process. Following this, the writer focuses on experiences of interviewing participants for research and interviewing young people for reports for the Youth Court. In particular, similarities and differences of 'speaking the unspoken' are noted between experiences. For confidentiality purposes, identifying details of people and places have been redacted from this copy of the case study.

Doctoral research overview

This research project sought to explore the practice of Equine Facilitated Learning (EFL). EFL is one of several terms that describes a practice in which human facilitators bring together humans and horses, the ultimate aim being to achieve a learning experience for the human (Latella & Abrams, 2015). The project took a qualitative approach, and utilised an informed grounded theory methodology (Thornberg, 2012). The below overview will outline the project before exploring key parallels and differences between the writer's experience in the project and their clinical internship at a youth forensic service.

Study beginnings

In 2016, I visited [redacted]. The founder and director of the facility and her herd of non-human animals (horses, dogs, cats, and at the time a fawn [redacted]) hosted human visitors at their farm, and facilitated learning experiences for those humans. At my first visit to [redacted] I witnessed other individuals having what appeared to be very profound emotional experiences as they interacted with the horses, and it sparked a curiosity to learn more about this practice. I began to volunteer at [redacted], helping out wherever I could, but mostly becoming a regular facilitator of the youth camps run in school holidays. At these camps I was also privilege to witnessing the transformational experiences had by the young people who attended, many of whom had backgrounds that included trauma.

Noticing that EFL was not commonly recognised, and that few Aotearoa New Zealand studies existed on the practice, I was unsure that it would be taken seriously as a research project within the clinical psychology scope. I first contacted [redacted], as I knew she had been to [redacted]. [redacted] saw the potential in a project that explored a practice currently sitting outside of the mainstream clinical psychology scope, and placed me in contact with [redacted] who also saw potential. With two supervisors on board, the final supervisor needed

to be a clinical psychologist. [redacted] had taken lectures in papers I attended, and his acknowledgement of being both a neuropsychologist and a critical qualitative researcher stood out to me. I had not heard of that combination before, and it suggested to me that he may be the right fit for pairing a novel practice, within the clinical psychology scope. Following meetings with the four of us, the project and direction began to take shape.

Study rationale and aim

The aim of this project was to qualitatively explore participant perspectives of the important processes that occur during EFL, with a view towards theory building. Specifically, the research question utilised was; from the participants' perspectives, what processes play out between the human client and the horse during EFL sessions, that make this practice impactful and effective?

Contribution towards theory building was chosen as a key focus of this research due to the limited availability of theory behind the practice of EFL, despite significant outcome research (Lee et al., 2016). EFL had been shown as effective with a variety of populations and experiences, such as at-risk children and youth (Burgon, 2011), war veterans (Romaniuk et al., 2018), and women who have experienced interpersonal violence (Schroeder & Stroud, 2015). Theoretical studies that did exist, largely focused on the voice of the human facilitators (Burgon et al., 2018; Lietz, 2018). The lack of representation of participant voices in theory building studies provided motivation for the other key focus of this research; the participant voice.

Methodology

This project primarily utilised an informed grounded theory methodology (Thornberg, 2012). Differing to classic grounded theory, informed grounded theory takes the viewpoint

that a researcher holding prior-knowledge of their intended research topic can assist in the development and quality of their research (Thornberg, 2012). Prior knowledge allows researchers to study in their area of expertise, and can aid directions for exploration and topics for literature review. Informed grounded theory encourages the researcher to stay flexible and reflexive, allowing the literature review to inform the research project, and the project to inform the literature review (Thornberg, 2012). This particular version of grounded theory was appropriate for use in this project as it allowed me to research and theory build in an area I already had some knowledge of, and two complete a literature review in advance of data collection as was necessary within the clinical psychology programme requirements. As per processes of grounded theory methods, data was collected and analysed simultaneously, with early analysis informing the development and focus of further data collection.

Participants

This project sought participation from individuals who were 18 years or over, and were currently participating in, or had previously participated in, EFL at [redacted] as clients. Participants were recruited through the [redacted] database, and via word of mouth. The study aimed to recruit participants who together varied in their levels of experience with EFL. There were no specific criteria applied to the participant's reason in engaging with EFL. This was purposely left open to encourage a mix in participants.

Procedure

The total data sample consisted of 12 interviews, from eight participants. Four participants completed two interviews. Recorded, semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility in regards to topic exploration and the rich analysis that can be achieved when both language content as well as participant tone, body language and affect can be analysed.

Initial project planning posited that a first round of interviews would be completed and analysed, with analysis pointing to future interview directions. Initially it was planned that a second group of participants would be chosen to complete the second round of interviews, again based off of the gaps/needs highlighted in the initial data analysis. However, it was later decided that initial participants would be invited back to participate in the second round of interviews. The rationale for this was that those individuals were the experts on their own experience, and were therefore best placed to speak to them in follow up interviews. Additionally, participant discourse in the initial interviews highlighted the power that reflection had on making sense of their experiences, and therefore it was possible that reflection between the first and second interviews would deepen participants' understandings and ability to speak to their experiences.

Project planning had also intended for the participant sample to include a mix of experienced EFL clients, as well as clients new to EFL. The rationale for this was to gain an understanding of the ways in which participant reflections and perspectives may change over time, as experience was gained. However, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, [redacted] were unable to engage new clients during the year in which participant data was collected.. Additionally, project planning had also included observation and analysis of EFL sessions with some clients. However this was also interrupted due to COVID-19, and was therefore dropped from the final project.

Data analysis

In line with the grounded theory methodology utilised for this project, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously (Birks & Mills, 2015). Informed and constructivist grounded theory processes of analysis were utilised (Birks & Mills, 2015; Braun & Clarke, 2013; Charmaz, 2015; Thornberg, 2012). Coding, memo writing and storylines played the

most important roles in analysis of interviews, with theoretical sampling occurring between the first and second interviews.

For this project, three types of coding occurred; initial, focused, and theoretical coding [note: this case study was written during the writer's 2021 clinical internship, prior to theoretical coding taking place. Therefore, the case study does not include an explanation of theoretical coding]. Initial line-by-line coding was first to be used, and utilised both gerund and in-vivo codes. This type of coding was utilised to encapsulate the range of experiences described by participants as well as the concepts constructed during interviews (Birks & Mills, 2015). Codes across interviews were constantly compared, and ultimately codes were grouped into those speaking to similar experiences or concepts. Memo writing occurred both during and following this process, and will be outlined later in this case study.

The second type of coding employed for this project was focused coding (Mills et al., 2006). The process involved re-coding the interviews utilising a set of codes deemed to be those that were either most frequently coded during line-by-line coding or which spoke to prominent analytical areas evidenced during the first round of coding. Each interview was re-coded, this time incident by incident, with the goal of comparing and contrasting codes and incidents, ultimately getting an idea of analytical gaps (Mills et al., 2006). These gaps in the first interviews would become focus areas for the second interviews where select participants were invited back to partake in a second interview with a specific question focus, a process known as theoretical sampling (Birks & Mills, 2015). Focused coding in the second round of interviews signalled to areas of possible research limitation and need for further research.

Memo writing was utilised throughout to expand thought processes and conceptual constructs. Sometimes memo writing was used to take apart codes or concepts, exploring what formed them. At other times memos were utilised to compare different interviews or

ideas. And at others, memos allowed me to write with complete freedom, exploring ideas as they came up. All of these strategies were engaged to help me stay 'theoretically playful' throughout (Mills et al., 2006), and to move the analysis from coded interviews towards theoretical concepts (Birks & Mills, 2015).

Ethics

Working with both humans and animals, the ethical considerations in this project were many. In regards to human participants, it was important that all participants were able to give informed consent. For this to occur, all human participants were provided with a project information sheet, were encouraged to engage in dialogue about the project and any questions they had, did not have to answer any question they did not want to, were able to have any part of their transcript erased before coding, were requested to give both written and verbal consent to participate, and were able to retract their consent up until a month following their final interview. Selection criteria was purposely kept wide, so as not to have participant voices excluded due to past experiences they may have had, or diagnostic labels they may have been given. Additionally, considerations were made around having participants of different cultures and my responsibilities under Te Tiriti. Te reo Māori was utilised in greetings across communications with participants, karakia were offered to open sessions, and kai was offered as part of holding the tikanga of the interview process, and in returning to noa following interviews.

The ethics of involving horses in both this work and this project was also carefully considered. The work occurred no matter my thoughts or reflections on it, however a section of the literature review was dedicated to ethical considerations of the horses, and throughout the project I have remained reflective about working with horses and possible dilemmas around this practice. In regards to the research, all horses were given pseudonyms to

anonymise them and to protect the purity of the EFL experience for other participants. Being a facilitator of EFL myself, who is knowledgeable on the horses at [redacted], was deemed an asset for this project as I had rich experience of these horses, their personalities, and their experiences as facilitators. Therefore, I was well placed to theorise about experiences that involved them.

Internship at [redacted], and the way my research has informed it Speaking the unspoken

While conducting the qualitative interviews for my doctorate research project, I quickly became aware of the difficult task I had set my participants. Together we were exploring experiences that previously have not had spoken words attached to them. We navigated our way through long interviews; me trying to ask helpful questions, and them trying to find words that truly captured the realities and meanings of their experiences. I would watch my participants sit and struggle to articulate themselves. Sometimes they would appear slightly exasperated, and often they would make comments that they could not quite explain themselves, or that it was difficult to capture the experience with words. During these interviews I was highly aware that I was sitting with them in what was most likely the first time they had attempted to do this, and I felt the responsibility of respectfully holding the space for them to do so. My role seemed to have many purposes in those moments. One was to collect information from my participants, to later make sense of and write their story into a wider document (my thesis). Another was to aid the participants' abilities to express themselves by asking them questions, theorising with them, and encouraging them to tell their stories. And a third was as I mentioned earlier, to hold space for them as they spoke about their experiences in such depth for likely the first time.

Working at [redacted] I have noticed direct parallels to my research interviews, and the assessments that I carry out with the young people engaged in our service. Part of my role as an intern psychologist is to complete assessments and reports for the youth court. The reports are thorough and involve delving into many aspects of the life of the young person. The ultimate goal of this process is to develop a psychological formulation and make recommendations to support the young person to move forward in a pro-social way. Through this process I have noticed that it often appears that this is the first time the young person has spoken to their life's experiences in such depth. This provides similar challenges to those experienced by my research participants. Once again, the individual in the room often struggles to put language to something previously unspoken about, and once again I attempt to ask questions that aide the individual in doing so. Additionally, a large part of my role is to collect information that I will later make sense of and write into a wider document (the court report). However a key difference in this process is the autonomy of the participants. The court report process is something strongly encouraged to the young person, and often they are not particularly willing participants. Unlike my research participants who have generally had positive, transformative experiences through EFL and strongly desire to contribute to furthering the field, the young people I see have often had various experiences of trauma throughout their entire lives. Holding space during these interviews takes on a different quality to that of the research interviews. While with the young people, I am holding space for the words to be spoken, but also attempting to respectfully and safely hold space for the trauma experienced by the child in front of me.

In both research and court report writing I get the sense that no matter the efforts that go into it, the final products will always be somewhat reductionist. The experiences had by my research participants are visceral, transformative, transgress binaries, and exist largely without spoken words. Putting their words on paper, while useful in furthering understanding

and ways forward, cannot help but lose some of the true essence of the experiences. This seems to be the same when writing the experiences had by young people into court reports. Their experiences are also often visceral, transformative, transgress binaries, and largely exist without spoken words. Many of their experiences seem to hold these qualities in ways you would not hope for anyone to experience or truly understand in the same way. In that sense, I think that being unable to avoid reductionism in this process, is possibly serving a positive purpose for those who read the reports. However I also think that the reductionism and the blocking of true understanding may also aide further systemic problems in approaches to the young people going forward.

When designing the participant criteria for my research, and submitting ethics applications, I purposefully left the criteria wide. Anyone over 18, who had previously participated in, or was currently participating in EFL at [redacted] was invited to express interest in participating in the research project. My rationale for this was that I did not want any participants to be excluded because of any experiences they may have had in the past. For example, I did not want an individual with a 'trauma history' to be deemed too vulnerable to participate. For me, this would be pathologising, fragilising, and unnecessary. The research would not focus on their trauma directly, but rather their experiences with the horses. I also felt that no past experiences could take away from the importance of an individual's voice, and the expertise they hold over their own experiences. Should any participant require support following the interview, the founder and director of [redacted] was on hand to assist, and contact numbers for support were also given.

Inclusion despite past experiences, is something that parallels in my work at [redacted]. We interview young people and adults who have had varied histories. This may, for example, include a mother who has struggled with drug addiction, or a father with a criminal history. In these interviews, their voices and perspectives are not deemed less

important or irrelevant, due to their history. Their expertise and particular perspective as 'parent' is valued in helping us to understand the young person, and in deciphering what will be most helpful for this young person and their family moving forward. A key difference between the process engaged in with research participants, and individuals participating in assessments at [redacted], is that at [redacted] we do often place some focus on those difficult past experiences had by the participants. In this way there is more potential to re-traumatise or unsettle the participants throughout the process. However, this process is also engaged in carefully, and respectfully, with a view of gaining only the information that is necessary. Additionally, unlike in the research process the outcomes or recommendations can be made to directly support that individual. In this way, I think that the assessment process ensures it is not asking participants to look at their history without intention of that being useful to that participant, or their family, going forward.

Overall I have noticed several parallels between processes and experiences that occur in my research and my work as an intern. However there are also differences, and because of those I am grateful to have done my research first. Largely my research participants were speaking to positive experiences. My awareness of the above learnings were raised through active participation and reflection with research participants. Learning in this way, with participants who're speaking largely to positive experiences, does not seem to have impacted them in negative ways. I think that had I completed my internship first, not having the above insights already developing, more space would have been left for errors in the service I provide. Internship is full or learning, stumbling blocks, and mistakes. I am sure I have been a very imperfect intern, and I have definitely made mistakes. I also think that all of the learning and insights mentioned above have set me up well by improving my ability to respectfully and humanly engage with people's experiences, consider processes from different angles, and critically weigh up how my participation impacts wider outcomes. Ultimately, my research

project has been an experience of connection which requires me to bring my genuine self to the process. In that way, my internship is no different.

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