

**What Does it Mean to Teach Riding?**  
**A Snapshot of Contemporary Practices in England  
and Western Australia**

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I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Due account has been made in the text to all other material used.

The thesis is fewer than 100,000 words.

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## **Abstract**

Equestrian pursuits now largely focus on competitive riding, with the focus of most riders' being, on competing at some level. As a result teaching riding has changed from an instructional approach to a coaching model, with the associated language and paradigms being adopted. This study was undertaken to understand how these changes are being implemented by equestrian teachers working within six syllabi (the two used in England and Australia for formal accreditation and the four alternative syllabi that were used by my participants to supplement their formal qualifications). Qualitative methodology was used and data gathered through observations of a single, or multiple lessons, and the recording of an open-ended interview with each participant (based around six key questions). Forty-one participants, all involved in coaching equestrianism in England and Western Australia, were involved. The focus of participants' teaching practice was three disciplines: dressage, show jumping and horse trials (eventing). Participants held the first, second and third levels of mainstream accreditation to teach equestrianism and some were elite riders who coached. It was found that some participants also followed an alternative teaching practice to augment the mainstream accreditations and therefore, these syllabi also became part of the study. Research began by considering the theories that underpinned the six syllabi and consideration of the historical perspective of equestrianism to reveal that changes are taking place in the accreditation of teaching riding, with teachers adopting a coaching style. Further, participants developed personal curricula based upon their own riding skills and on replication of how they were taught. While the data indicated that it was widely believed that a good rider does not necessarily make a good teacher the accreditation bodies, who create the syllabi, assume that to be the case and offer teachers little support or information on teaching and learning theories. This means that the riding teacher is often reliant on their riding skills rather than on their theoretical understanding to inform their teaching practice, which can result in an impoverished riding curriculum.



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# **Introduction**

## **Background to the Study and Chapter Summation**

### **My Early Beginnings**

This dissertation is grounded in my praxis as a qualified Riding Instructor, Hatha Yoga Teacher and Tertiary Graduate with several education qualifications (Grad. Dip. Ed.; M. Ed.). In a nutshell the thesis is about teaching riding: how it is taught, why it is taught, why we do it the way it is now practised and the results of this practice.

I began riding at a very early age at the local riding schools where, in retrospect, the teaching was pretty poor. I can still remember my father running up and down the back lane with me on a pony trying to craft the rising trot. My father had learned to ride in the military during his war years in India and was passing on his skills, encouraging me to grip with my knees as I bounced around on the pony. At the age of ten he bought me my own pony and in hindsight I now know that this pony and my father were my first riding teachers. Both parent and pony not only taught me to ride, but instilled patience, confidence, selflessness and the pleasure and pain of equestrianism.

At the age of fifteen life decisions needed to be made and horses were still very much part of my life. It was a friend who gave me that eureka moment when she told me about training programmes to become a qualified riding teacher. I obtained the necessary scholastic qualifications and began what has been a lifetime occupation. The accreditation was with the British system which had derived from the military concept; albeit by the time of my training this aspect was diminishing, I still remember retired military personnel teaching me through the instructions and one way dialogue of commands.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly certain teaching formats are still used, for example, drills for formation riding (quadrilles and *pas de deux* in Pony Club competitions).

The riding theories I learned were an amalgamation of the traditional methods derived through the European lineages, which I formulated more fully after my qualification when I worked in Germany, Austria and Italy. Returning to England I undertook the next accreditation and became a British Horse Society Intermediate Instructor (BHSII) and began my competing career culminating in riding at Advanced Horse Trials (Eventing at three star level), whilst also working in the horse racing industry, and riding on the hunting field. Thus my pedagogy was based on traditional theories within a multidisciplinary practice which followed a decision made at a very early age.

I cannot explain what makes me want to be outside in all the extremes of weather, for little monetary reward, or risk my life for the rush of adrenalin that jumping fences at speed gives, but it is what I continue to do despite trying alternatives. Although I have changed direction I always come back to teaching and riding horses, thus my desire to undertake this project. When considering a PhD subject the consensus of opinion from my peers was to work on a subject I was passionate about. Therefore, it was a logical decision to research a subject I have been totally immersed and embedded in (Moustakas, 1990). From the position of total immersion it is not always easy to see clearly what established practice is. Although I have been teaching riding for years, and have many friends and colleagues in the industry, I have not considered how I, or they, teach riding. Therefore, I began to unpack what it means to teach riding as a coach and instructor.

I am aware how my riding teaching has evolved through experience within my craft. The better rider I became, the higher competition level I was able to achieve, and this informed my teaching. Juxtaposed are theories derived from my background in tertiary education, which also enhance my practice. However, others teaching horse riding will have different experiences, and also different accreditations. When I began teaching in Western Australia I became aware that my title had changed from that of a riding instructor to that of coach.

In England the qualification accredits riding teachers as instructors, whilst in Australia the qualification to teach riding accredits riding teachers as coaches and in Europe equestrians are known as trainers. Although there is a difference in the

terminology neither can be totally associated with horses *per se*, and if the outcome is teaching horse riding why does the accreditation not imply this? If I taught English I would be an English teacher and yet neither accreditation allocates the title of teacher. Why the title is different, and what difference the title makes to the way riding is taught is the basis for the thesis. A comparative study between the syllabus of the British Horse Society, which awarded me my accreditation as an Intermediate Instructor, and the Equestrian Federation of Australia will ensue.

## **Thesis Structure**

### **Chapter 1**

Following from my introduction the first chapter outlines the framework for the thesis. I begin by outlining the importance of the thesis and the reason for the study. I then introduce the reader to the research questions that will be explored in the thesis. The questions are:

- What difference to the practice does the title of accreditation make and how does it manifest?
- As the syllabus and accreditation is drawn into the coaching paradigms how does this change the dynamic of the riding lesson?
- What impact does competition have on the riding lesson?
- If competition is a main focus in the riding lesson does the rider's expectation of the teacher change?
- Does the teacher become responsible in developing a horse that can perform?
- What is the role of a personal curriculum when teaching riding?
- What is the influence of lineage on practice?
- What role does the language have and has it changed in response to the changes?

If the rider has less accountability their riding skills are deemed less important to them, and therefore the riding lesson becomes the horsing lesson that de Kunffy (2002, 2003) discusses. So are riding lessons horsing lessons? The research will consider the change that is taking place in England in relation to the introduction of the coaching syllabus and will compare it to the existing coaching syllabus that has been in place in Western Australia since the national accreditation system was introduced in 1980s. The literature section outlines the need for the use of lay literature and how these texts will be used and why. To complement the literature published by distinguished riders, academic literature from the educational sector will be used to offer a theoretical understanding of teaching practices within the equestrian environment. At the end of the literature section I clarify how I use the term pedagogy: as a way of loosely describing the styles of instructing, teaching and coaching within the equestrian environment. This is not a thesis about pedagogy, as a deeply theoretical construct, although the links between teaching styles and various educational pedagogical theories is made. My interest, as indicated by my title, is whether the apparent change in pedagogical approach (from instruction to coaching) evident in the accreditation syllabi, makes a difference as to how riding is taught. The qualitative method I use to explore the topic is outlined towards the end of this chapter. Qualitative research allows for a people-oriented enquiry and the research will use recorded interviews that have open-ended questions, observations of the riding lesson to discuss the practice. The data will be analysed following Patton (2002) in which the transcripts will be checked and cross-checked to discover patterns and themes.

## **Chapter 2**

To begin to answer the question of whether or not the title given to equestrians who teach riding matters, I will provide an historical context for riding education using historical texts to understand past practices, against which present accreditation practices can be positioned. It is important to consider the history of the horse, its training and how equestrian pedagogy evolved. The second chapter will offer a brief history of the physiological changes as the result of breeding of the horse, the training processes it has endured and some of the influential riding masters associated with modern equestrianism. Identification of some of the influential riding



teachers will be taken from Gianoli (1969), and is included in the thesis to identify the theories which influence present day practice. The historical perspective discusses how the horse was initially used for military purposes and how the military influenced riding instruction. It moves to the present day use of the horse, which is predominantly within the sporting arena. The chapter will allow the reader to understand the legacies that influence modern equestrianism.

### **Chapter 3**

The six syllabi (the two used in England and Australia for formal accreditation and the four alternative syllabi that were used by my participants to supplement their formal qualifications) will each be discussed individually with regard to the aims they are trying to achieve. A discussion of the content will be considered and an evaluation and comparisons will then be made.

The chapter brings pedagogy into the present day by considering the syllabi in place in England and Western Australia. Analysis of the syllabi will help to understand the difference between the two, how they inform practice from which the title coach or instructor is given and consider the pedagogical theory that informs the practice. Whilst undertaking the field research I became aware that some of the participants were following a syllabus other than the one for which they were accredited. Gaps in the mainstream syllabus were cited as a reason for creating other syllabi however the new syllabi have the potential to create different philosophies. The chapter will consider the mainstream system and four alternative syllabi that were identified. The alternative syllabi derived from the participants who, whilst holding the mainstream accreditations, also chose to study in areas that specialise in specific aspects of equestrian teaching. Therefore syllabi from equestrian science will be considered as well as three models of equestrian biomechanics. From the military beginnings, discussed in the second chapter, the research considers the changes that have taken the pedagogy from its origins to present day practices and how they are reflected in the different syllabi. The implication of the horses' role within the coaching paradigm will be discussed to review how riding involves three brains those of the rider, the coach and the horse. The impact of the horse makes

equestrianism exceptional amongst sports and this aspect will be reviewed with regard to the coaching model that informs the syllabi.

#### **Chapter 4**

The chapter will further consider the concepts of coaching and instructing pedagogies and how they inform actual practice. I will discuss both systems in more detail as well as the alternative approaches to consider how the pedagogical theory might be adapted and classified within the equestrian context. The chapter will explore how the horse can change the pedagogical context of the syllabi and how this may then affect practice. This is then followed with an outline of a generic riding lesson to consider how instruction and coaching paradigms can be used. Following the discussion I offer a theory proposing that the alternative syllabi could easily be incorporated into the mainstream syllabi and demonstrate this using a personal experiment. I argue that using aspects from the alternative syllabi in conjunction with the mainstream syllabi may augment practice.

#### **Chapter 5**

The chapter introduces the participants and then reviews the interviews. I begin by introducing the participants and the method undertaken to recruit the people helping the enquiry. Following this, the chapter reviews the discussions that took place during the recorded interviews. I begin this process by considering their views on the syllabi they are accredited to teach and the changes being made to them. I then consider their understanding of instruction and coaching and other issues arising from the open ended questioning process. The final part of the review is a discussion of the six key questions that all the participants were asked. An analysis of the data reviews the patterns that emerged to conclude the chapter.

#### **Chapter 6**

The sixth chapter takes the research out into riding arenas and discusses the observed riding lessons. Exploration of the data considers the effectiveness of the syllabi in practice with analysis from the field research to review the participants'

implementation of the syllabi in their lessons. For example, safety in the lesson and planning the lesson are mainstream syllabi expectations, and therefore how and if these are used in practice will be considered. The language used in the lessons is also analysed to evaluate how it has been affected by changing pedagogy. As in the previous chapter, the participants' views are used as the primary data with which to discover patterns of teaching practice. Perspectives of a small sample group are also evaluated as a separate case study to augment the data. The chapter concludes with the summary of the overriding themes that have emerged.

## **Conclusion**

The final chapter closes the thesis by reviewing the results and their relation to the general world of equestrianism. I review how through this research a particular depiction of pedagogy has emerged. Recommendations are offered with regard to how the research can be taken forward, and how the research augments existing research. The thesis offers suggestions for how formal equestrian teacher accreditation can be enhanced.

