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[Return to Current Issue](#)

Educational Value of Horsemanship Clinics to Youth and Adult Riders

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Abstract: Surveys evaluating the Texas AgriLife Extension Summer Horsemanship School Program were gathered from the summers of 2006 through 2009. Data indicate a high percentage of individuals expressed improved knowledge about horse awareness and training, and greater thinking skills were developed after participating in a clinic. Positive responses indicate improved riding confidence, more overall competence, and enjoyment from working with horses. Furthermore, improvements were seen for the majority of riders in the areas of safety, effective riding, and equipment selection. Clinic participants experienced significant learning; thus, indicating that knowledge can be increased through participation in short horsemanship clinics.

Introduction

The Texas AgriLife Extension Service, as a part of the Texas A&M University system, has been responsible for the implementation and maintenance of a Summer Horsemanship School Program for each of the past 37 years. The goals of the Summer Horsemanship clinics have been to educate attendees on horse safety, general riding practices, equipment, and problem solving, and to improve overall confidence and ability when working with horses. In 37 years, approximately 45,161 clinic participants and spectators have participated in 1,275 clinics. In addition, this program has indirectly benefited 214 instructors, who have been trained to teach the clinics and then do so by traveling throughout the state of Texas. In the past few years, a select few of these instructors have had the opportunity to instruct people interested in western riding in European countries via funding from the American Quarter Horse Association. This opportunity has further expanded our Texas-based program to include equine enthusiasts in Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden, The Netherlands, and Austria.

Over the past few years, surveys have been distributed in order to analyze the effectiveness of this teaching program, with the intent to quantitatively measure the usefulness of such an educational program. Outcome measures are a useful tool in order to evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs because they were developed to document knowledge gained, adoption of new practices, and increased confidence and competence (Gibbs, Potter, & Vogelsang, 2003). Equine enthusiasts want to be educated in the proper ways to care for their horses, and in a recent survey studying the needs of horse owners, basic education on horse training was the most cited item that horse owners desired (Martinson et al., 2006). Additionally, programs that improve abilities, both physical and moral, are important; thus, recent studies have been conducted to illustrate the improvement in basic life skills when working closely with horses (Smith, Swinker, Comerford, Radhakrishna, & Hoover, 2006; Evans, Jogan, Jack, Scott, & Cavinder, 2009).

We believe that the value of the Texas Horsemanship program should be documented so that potential implementation by other equine entities can be executed with the common goal of increasing equine related knowledge of the public. Therefore, the objectives of the study reported here were to evaluate the effectiveness of a horsemanship clinic at developing and improving upon basic horse training ability in attendees. In addition, we sought to measure knowledge and improved competence gained through participation in the Texas Horsemanship program, thereby providing further indication of the impact that programs such as these can have on people associated with extension based programs.

Methods

In the years of 2006-2009, a survey (Figure 1) was created and distributed to attendees of either a 2- or 3-day clinic. Validity of the survey was established by a group of industry professionals to ensure proper interpretation of each question, as well as to secure the appropriate questioning for the research idea. In this way, face validity was established. Routinely used response criteria allowed participants to answer: No, Undecided, Probably, Definitely, and Already knew how to. Once the surveys were completed, the questions were broken into three main categories by researchers; Awareness (A), Training (T), and Competency and Ability (C). This was done in an attempt to better understand the main responses to questions regarding one of these categories. Additionally, in the data analysis, the survey response "Already knew how to" was separated from the rest of the responses. This was done to better evaluate how many people were actually gaining in their knowledge of horses versus those that already knew that portion of the material. All data are reported.

Figure 1.

County: _____

Age: _____

Did you learn more about how to:

- A. 1. be safe on and around horses
- A. 2. select and adjust bits and equipment
- A. 3. ride more effectively using 2 hands
- A. 4. protect your horse and equipment from theft

- T. 1. recognize the proper time to pull and release
- T. 2. effectively guide your horse through, around, and over obstacles
- T. 3. move the horse's hips and shoulders independently
- T. 4. correctly sidepass your horse
- T. 5. correctly two-track your horse
- T. 6. correctly bridle-up your horse to gain flexion of the poll
- T. 7. lope off in the correct lead
- T. 8. go over logs at the walk, trot, and lope
- T. 9. stop and back your horse
- T. 10. perform rollbacks
- T. 11. teach your horse to pivot/spin
- T. 12. control the speed of your horse
- T. 13. execute a simple lead change
- T. 14. execute a flying lead change
- T. 15. prepare for specialized events

Can you now:

- C. 1. recognize correct bit placement and action in your horse's mouth
- C. 2. do one or more advanced maneuver(s) that you were previously unable to do
- C. 3. better measure your daily riding progress
- C. 4. make more informed decisions on when/how to ask your horse to perform a task
- C. 5. recognize how to more correctly warm up and cool down your horse
- C. 6. ride with more confidence
- C. 7. solve a problem you were having before the clinic
- C. 8. recognize how to avoid a potential problem
- C. 9. recognize the relationship between basic and advanced maneuvers
- C. 10. feel more competent in working with your horse
- C. 11. enjoy your horse more

*Choices of answers to each question consisted of: No (1), Undecided (2), Probably (3), Definitely (4), and Already knew how to (5).

**Categories of questions pertaining to Awareness (A), Training (T), and Competency and Ability (C).

Results and Discussion

A total of 131 clinics were taught during the time period analyzed. Of the 131 clinics, riders at 102 schools were surveyed, and a total of 1,366 surveys were received and evaluated. Not all 131 clinics were surveyed due to time constraints or error on the part of the clinician in not distributing surveys. Clinics were taught by 37 trained instructors and were attended by a total of 2,298 youth and adults riders who were eligible to complete the survey (mean age and SD; 15 \pm 11 yr; ranging in age of 4 to 72 yr). An additional 1,265 non-riding participants watched but did not ride and thus could not accurately answer all questions on the survey. An estimated total of 3,563 riding and non-riding participants took part in the clinics studied within the years of 2006-2009.

Percentage of individual responses to each question, including asking if the participant already knew the material presented at the clinic, is listed in Table 1. Data show that a high percentage of individuals stated they learned more about horse awareness, training, and maneuvering their horses and that they developed greater ability to think through horse training problems after completion of a clinic; however, a fair percentage also answered that they "already knew" the material being presented (Table 1). This may be an indication that greater effort is needed in the future to allow for various rider levels (e.g., beginner, intermediate, etc.) or to pre-screen rider knowledge prior to beginning clinics.

Table 1.

Percentage of Answers Given to Each Survey Question Including Those Who Answered Already Knew

Question	No (1)	Undecided (2)	Probably (3)	Definitely (4)	Already Knew (5)
A. 1	0.4	2.1	11.3	39.8	48.9
A. 2	3.3	3.0	15.5	56.1	22.1
A. 3	1.9	4.0	12.1	53.8	28.1
A. 4	1.5	2.1	6.4	66.5	19.8
T. 1	1.1	3.2	15.0	53.7	27.0
T. 2	2.6	4.2	12.0	54.2	27.0
T. 3	3.8	4.7	15.4	62.8	13.3
T. 4	6.4	12.9	16.6	50.0	20.4
T. 5	9.0	7.5	16.3	54.0	13.1
T. 6	4.4	6.6	15.0	49.2	24.8
T. 7	4.4	4.4	12.8	48.2	30.3
T. 8	11.5	5.0	10.1	38.5	35.0
T. 9	1.1	0.9	5.2	39.7	53.0
T. 10	4.5	4.3	11.9	59.1	20.2
T. 11	5.7	5.0	16.6	52.5	20.3
T. 12	1.5	3.1	10.8	48.1	36.5
T. 13	7.0	5.3	13.5	50.7	23.4
T. 14	15.2	9.5	15.2	45.9	14.1
T. 15	9.0	8.4	15.7	47.4	19.5
C. 1	2.8	4.3	18.0	53.6	21.2
C. 2	2.5	3.3	14.0	72.2	7.9
C. 3	3.2	6.7	17.6	58.4	14.1

C. 4	1.3	2.8	14.8	65.7	15.4
C. 5	3.1	3.4	9.0	45.4	39.1
C. 6	1.4	2.3	7.0	65.1	24.2
C. 7	5.2	4.4	13.3	67.4	9.8
C. 8	3.2	5.3	18.3	57.6	15.6
C. 9	4.2	6.4	46.6	59.2	13.6
C. 10	1.8	2.4	8.9	70.7	16.3
C. 11	1.2	1.6	3.8	71.0	22.5

However, in order to more completely understand what participants are grasping, data excluding those who claimed to "already know" the material are listed in Table 2. Once the surveys answering "already knew" were separated, data reveal that a greater percentage of participants learned more about working with their horses. Perhaps most important, participants perceived greater gains in their overall competency and ability in working with their horse, as seen, for example, in 85.9% riding with more confidence, 84.5% feeling more competent in working with their horse, and 91.6% stating they can now enjoy their horses more (Table 2). Additionally, riders gained greater competency and ability, as seen for example, in 77.7% now able to make more informed decisions on when/how to ask their horse to perform a task. Also, 74.7% are now able to solve a problem they were having before the clinic, and 74.6% are now able to recognize how to more correctly warm up and cool down their horse. Furthermore, 78.4% are now able to do one or more advanced maneuver(s) that they were previously unable to do before the clinic.

Table 2.

Percentage of Answers Given to Each Survey Question Excluding Those Who Answered Already Knew

Question	No (1)	Undecided (2)	Probably (3)	Definitely (4)
A. 1	0.7	3.4	17.9	77.9
A. 2	4.3	3.8	19.9	72.0
A. 3	2.6	5.6	16.9	74.9
A. 4	1.9	2.8	8.4	86.9
T. 1	1.4	4.4	20.6	73.6
T. 2	3.5	5.8	16.4	74.3
T. 3	4.4	5.4	17.8	72.4
T. 4	8.1	8.2	20.9	62.9
T. 5	10.4	8.6	18.8	62.2
T. 6	5.9	8.7	19.9	65.5
T. 7	6.3	6.3	18.3	69.1
T. 8	17.7	7.6	15.5	59.3

T. 9	2.4	1.9	11.1	84.6
T. 10	5.6	5.4	14.9	74.1
T. 11	7.2	6.2	20.8	65.8
T. 12	2.4	4.9	17.0	75.8
T. 13	9.2	6.9	17.7	66.2
T. 14	17.7	11.1	17.7	53.5
T. 15	11.2	10.5	19.5	58.9
C. 1	3.6	5.4	22.9	68.1
C. 2	2.7	3.6	15.2	78.4
C. 3	3.7	7.8	20.4	68.0
C. 4	1.5	3.3	17.5	77.7
C. 5	5.0	5.7	14.7	74.6
C. 6	1.8	3.1	9.2	85.9
C. 7	5.7	4.9	14.7	74.7
C. 8	3.8	6.2	21.6	68.3
C. 9	4.9	7.4	19.2	68.5
C. 10	2.1	2.8	10.6	84.5
C. 11	1.5	2.0	4.8	91.6

Some of the percentages displayed in Tables 1 and 2 show higher responses of "No" as compared to others, especially in the Training category questions. For example, 15.2% of people surveyed said they did not learn more about executing flying lead changes (Table 1) and 17.7% revealed this same answer in Table 2. Many times, due to weather, facilities, etc., some training items on the clinic agenda do not get taught. Therefore, it is hypothesized that the respondents indicated they did not learn about how to do the maneuvers to which they were not subjected. While this is true, it is somewhat misleading when reading the data.

Once responses were grouped into a category (Awareness, Training, and Competency and Ability), results conclude that participant's knowledge in each category increased. The average response for questions concerning Awareness was relatively high at $3.67 \pm 0.54/4.00$, indicating that the majority of participants improved their ability in the areas of safety, effective riding, and equipment selection. Although the reliability measure of internal consistency for Awareness is only 0.61, this was still acceptable because there were only four questions that comprised that category. Additionally, results from questions concerning the categories of Training and Competency and Ability were also very positive and indicate a high level of improvement in respective categories (Table 3). Survey analysis reveals that participants of the clinics did experience significant learning.

Table 3.

Mean Response for Each Category of Questioning Concerning Perceived Improvements Upon Completion of a Horsemanship Clinic

Response Category	Mean±SD (/4.00)	Cronbach's alpha
Awareness	3.67±0.54	0.61
Training	3.44±0.59	0.89
Competency and Ability	3.63±0.51	0.85

Summary

The results of the study reported here indicate that many people can be reached and that knowledge can be increased through participation in programs such as the Texas Horsemanship program. The type of information being taught is well received and quickly learned. It is important, for a number of reasons, that equine related programs teach a broad spectrum of horse-related material to consistently reach equine enthusiasts. It is well documented that working with horses can create positive changes in adolescents (Smith, 2004) and possibly even improve basic life skills of young adults (Evans, Jogan, Jack, Scott, & Cavinder, 2009). Additionally, those participating in horse-related activities can experience beneficial improvement in self-motivation, responsibility, confidence, and self-esteem (Iannone, 2003; Saunders-Ferguson, Barnett, Culen, & TenBroeck, 2008).

Finally, in an era where many people do not come from a rural, horse-owning background, thus having minimal experience in horse ownership and care, it is vital that Extension programs continue to provide effective, educational opportunities to interested persons. Horsemanship programs that reach our clientele are beneficial to all who are interested in improving their own abilities as horse men and women and ultimately will improve the quality of life for horses.

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