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**CENTRUL ȘCOLAR PENTRU EDUCAȚIE INCLUZIVĂ**

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# Mediated Learning Experiences and Children with ASD

## Mediation through horse therapy

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## The children:

- grade 7<sup>th</sup> C, class for children with severe intellectual disabilities and ASD: Antonia and Georgia- twins, 16 years old, Alexandru and Vlad-14 years old
- 5 other children with intellectual disabilities, grades 1-7<sup>th</sup>



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## Mediated learning experiences

- we followed the S-H-O-H-R model
- mediators: the teachers, the colleagues (children), riding instructor, horses
- activities: horse therapy
- context: once a week group activities (1-2 hours) in a horse riding centre
- duration: a whole school year (aprox.35 weeks)



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## Goals

- to reduce high levels of anxiety regarding most of the children, anxiety related to interaction with animals, peers and new people ( riding instructor, volunteers, or even colleagues from other classes)
- to increase verbal expression for children with low level of verbal response, using the pleasant stimuli offered by animals ( physical contact)
- to help building social skills such as taking turns ( we took 9 children, but we used only 3 horses), waiting in the bus, playing in a small group
- to lower the rate of the time sequence regarding responses, especially verbal ones ( as most of the children were ASD cases, with a rather important latency for offering responses), as we used the horses and dogs as very pleasant stimuli



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### **Horse therapy:**

the horse (dog) as  
mediator for:

- emotional control
- taking turns
- following orders
- body control
- verbal expression





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Body and emotional control- mediated imitation, focusing, inhibition and control

The teacher/riding instructor acts as mediator and gives verbal instructions regarding sitting or moving on the horse back.





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Colleagues become mediators-skilled children mediate sitting and moving on the horse back-directing the children towards colleagues is the only task of the teacher/instructor.





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Following orders- mediated imitation regarding sitting on the horse,  
with teacher and later other child as mediators





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Independence-using only the horse as mediator –the child on the left image was riding only with the teacher at the beginning.





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## Results:

- all the children were riding independently by the end of the school year
- all the children were able to follow instructions from the riding instructor or teacher and do the required exercises- some of the children still needed the colleagues riding in front of them as mediators and some were completely independent
- horse riding postures and accuracy of performing exercises on horse back improved for all children
- taking turns improved a lot- frustrations and crises were rarely present by the end of the school year and when present, the moments were very short, the simple pointing or mentioning the horse was enough for redirecting behaviors
- spontaneous verbal expression improved, as well as verbal dialogue between children



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- waiting changed completely-the bus ride was quiet and with no frustrations by half of the school year already
- anxiety regarding dogs was still present at the end of the school year, but the level was significantly lower, the children with high levels of anxiety could tolerate the presence of dogs, although they were only touching them with the teacher as mediator ( colleagues were not effective as mediators here, apparently the presence of an adult was more efficient )
- peer interactions improved, children were talking while waiting, they were also playing in the yard of the riding centre, using the dogs, the cats the birds as “instruments” for behavioral and verbal mediation – free play improved on the highest level, as the teachers were less and less acting as mediators in this realm and by the end of the school year, they were only observers, the children were freely engaging in playing
- asking proper questions and giving proper responses also improved a lot, as children were highly motivated to find out when their turn was, what the name of the dogs/horses were and so on- so, also interactions with adults improved a lot ( although this only applies to the adults present there)



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Our mediators: Gelu, Vifor, Tigli, Ducky (the dog).

We chose them because they were all highly trained and already used in activities with children. Then, they were calm, with soft skin and eager to be caressed and we used this on purpose knowing that all our children have special touching issues, with good responses to soft and furry textures.





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Just smiles...

