

TO LEARN IS TO EXPERIENCE

In order for a student to learn to ride a movement, he must know how it feels when it is correctly executed. The student has not truly learned a movement until he can feel whether the movement was done correctly or not. As instructors, we can describe to the student how to apply the aids technically. But what the rider must achieve in order to learn, is a feeling: a successful experience that from that point on becomes a memory in his mind and body, giving the rider a goal to work toward again and again.

A physical feeling is hard to describe. It is almost like trying to describe how a banana tastes to someone who has never seen or eaten one before. There are certain things that must be experienced before they can be understood. To learn is to collect experiences: *“In this situation I feel this, in another situation I feel that.” A clever instructor can, through his teaching, guide the rider into the situations that lead him to experience these feelings.*

We can try, through example and comparison, to describe what the rider should feel when the horse executes the movement correctly, moves in balance, etc. But we can never replace the best teacher in this situation, namely the horse: the schoolmaster, who constantly communicates to the rider what works and what doesn't. This reminds me of the old saying:

*Young riders on old horses
Old riders on young horses*

This saying suggests that the best way to create an opportunity for horse and rider to learn from one another, is to pair them so that the experienced can teach the inexperienced.

In my opinion the competent and successful rider is the one with many different experiences behind him – and not only in the dressage ring. Those riders with jumping or eventing experience often have a clear advantage. The broad range of situations and challenges they have dealt with and learned from can often apply to those we experience in dressage.

As instructors, we need to help and encourage our students to develop a wide variety of skills, experiences and tools. These are just some of the possibilities you might consider:

- Work in two-point seat, as a means of developing balance
- Trail riding
- Work over cavalettis
- Longeing

- Long reining – but first and foremost be careful, this is not for beginners or novices to try without experienced help
- Work in hand
- Work with cones

See the section Training Techniques for more information on these topics.

I have often wondered what is more important: that I am a good instructor, or that the student is good at receiving instruction. Today there is no doubt in my mind that it is much more important for the student to be good at receiving. I remember that my old master said to us, I am not going to teach you anything...you have to keep your eyes and ears open, watch, think, and try to understand. At that time, I did not really understand what he meant. Today I do.