



# **SFNEA CONFERENCE 2017**

**“You care for them all year and then you kill them”**

**How do schools connect School Farms and the curriculum?**

## **Educational Research Knowledge Exchange Project**

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Why bother with school farms

The project

Some findings and sharing experience

School students as researchers

A note on ethics

Advocacy?

## Why bother 1: the transformative learning justification?

- 1. An approach to learning based on promoting change*
- 2. Teachers challenge learners to critically question and assess*
- 3. Examine assumptions about how they relate to the world*  
*(Mezirow in Transformative Learning in Practice)*

*'disorienting dilemmas' (Mezirow)*

*Attributing meaning is learning, learning is making sense of experience (John Dewey in Democracy in Education)*

## Why bother 2? Building the case for school farms in school

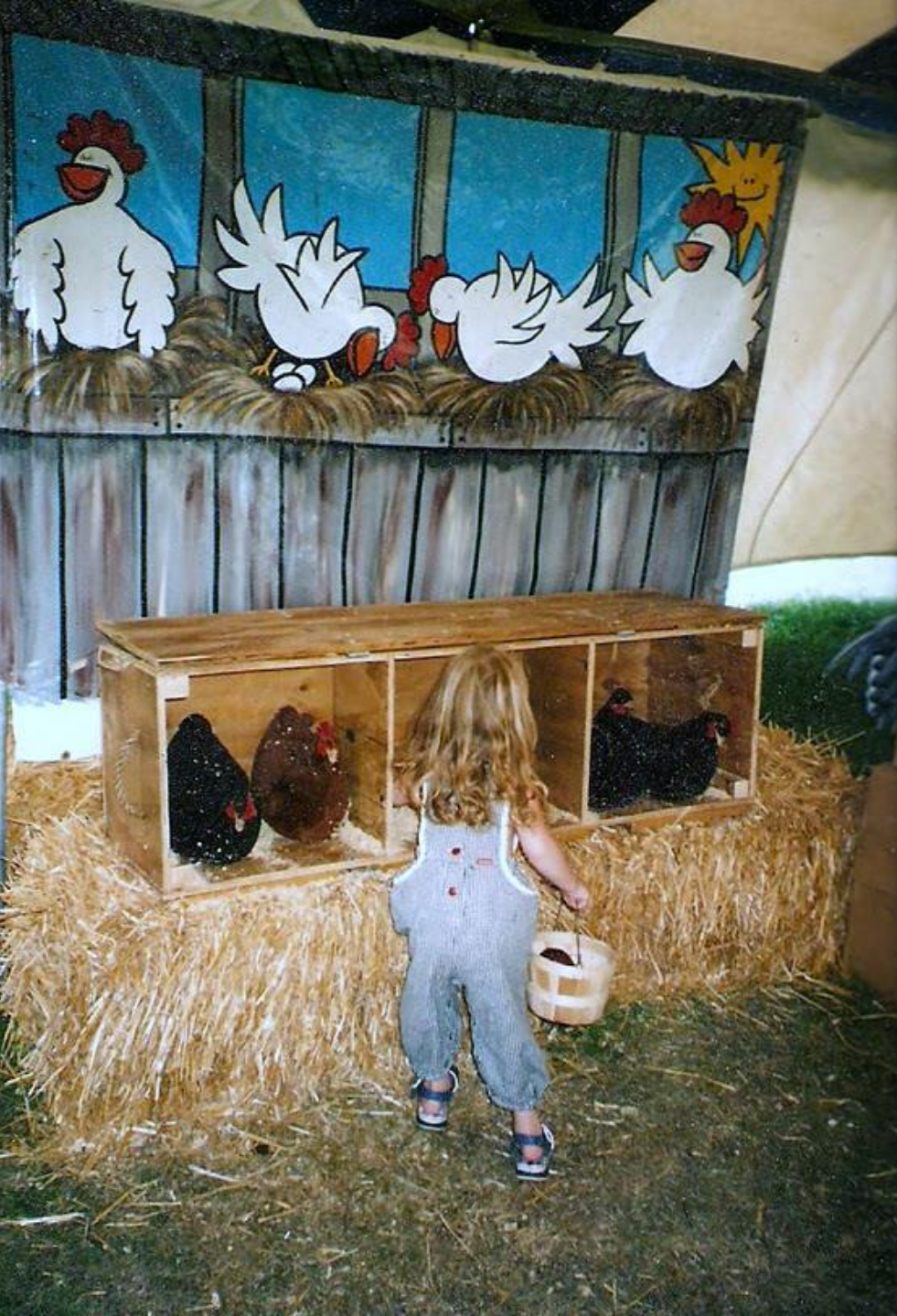
- There is an interest in healthy eating (Healthy Schools) as part of a brief to encourage broadly, *more healthy lifestyles, knowledge and understanding about where food comes from* school farms can provide first hand resources for diet, food types and cooking techniques that can be integrated into school curricula (*the obesity, sourcing scandal and waste debate*)
- Gains in *wellbeing, social and personal development are* often associated with working and learning with plants and animals.
- Do school farms contribute to more awareness of long term concerns about the distribution of food resources globally and, more recently, in the way climate change might influence how and where food is produced. These concerns have been brought together under the generic term '*food security*'
- There is increasing understanding and interest in the way working with wider communities (farming, food producers, other working environments, other curriculum areas) *enrich and embed learning effectively* for all young people but in particular those in danger of disengagement

# The school farms and Department of Educational Research Knowledge Exchange Project

- This is a project to build joint understanding of how school farms might improve the experience of young people's learning. It is a partnership between the School Farms Network (SFN) and the Centre for Social Justice and Wellbeing in the Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University.
- Developed over two years and has identified a potential area of knowledge which focuses on ways in which increased understanding of food and its production through school farms. This may also have broader educational purposes.

# The scope of the survey dimension





**Some findings**



**Enhancing the environment for learning through the use of outdoor learning spaces:**

*“(The farm) has promoted a respect for animals and litter dropping has been reduced, especially around the animal areas. The experiences provided for many students could not be provided in a classroom environment and due to the cost could not be delivered as frequently by off site experts.*



## Contribution of the school farm (a word from the schools' policy texts)

**Positively informing and influencing the culture of learning and inclusion within the school:**

*“The farm enhances and enriches most curricular areas and can give students responsibility beyond their years. The farm has a very positive effect.”*

**Recognising the potential of school farms to use features listed (above) to address the needs of particular students:**

*“At break times it provides a sanctuary for a number of students that have social difficulties within the main school environment. It is also used for students who for various reasons might otherwise be excluded.”*

## From interviews with parents and governors

- 73% agreed that the school farm has proved to be a great educational opportunity
- The school farm needs to be available to more children
- Needs to be linked to the curriculum more, although appreciate the farm has only been running for just over a year
- Everyone agreed that it helps children understand where their food comes from
- 80% agreed that children are learning from the responsibility of being involved with the school farm
- Almost half of parents/governors interviewed were involved with the school farm in some way
- The majority of parents/governors interviewed agreed that the school farm was a positive experience for the children

Staff/Parent responses

*Is missing class time to work with animals at the start and finish of the day likely to impact on children's achievement?*

'It's a small fraction of the days learning, this time is recouped during booster sessions'

'Children gain more from having responsibility'

'Time lost from class is minimal compared to the skills it teaches the children'

*Do you use the farm as a learning resource?*

Overall positive responses farm used for Maths graphs, hedgerows, lifecycles, mini beasts, habitats, scientific processes, SEAL, Literacy, working with HLN pupils.

## **Transformative learning (staff)?**

“It encourages social and personal development through the children learning how to look after the farm animals”

“They learn about what the animals eat, their life cycle, different aspects of animal welfare and husbandry and how to give them a good quality of life. This is particularly important for those children who do not have animals/pets at home to look after.”

“It boosts their confidence and gives them the responsibility and a better understanding of themselves as a person, how we live and where our food comes from”

“Children sell the eggs in the playground to parents after school which is a life skill and teaches them how we make money. It brings elements of science, biology and maths into the curriculum. The younger children learn by watching the older ones carrying out their duties

## Teachers' Questionnaire

- 73% of teachers surveyed thought the farm adds to the school's attractiveness, while 76% think it helps with recruitment.
- All teachers thought that the farm is a useful teaching resource, and 84% have used the farm as a teaching resource.
- 93% thought that the farm raises students' awareness of the origins of food, and 95% that it helps with personal and social education.
- 96% thought that learning with plants and animals is useful for students of all abilities.
- Only 2% of staff didn't feel proud that xxx has a farm, and only 19% didn't want to get more involved.
- Everyone thought that the farm should continue.

## Cross curricular uses of school farms

31 open ended responses to this question:

- 11 identified its use in the arts and humanities (with three schools identifying drama and music),
- 10 schools identified its use with science
- 7 explicitly with maths.
- 2 schools identified therapeutic qualities
- 1 schools identified PSHE and citizenship objectives that school farms helped to achieve.
- 5 schools identified the 'sensitising' possibilities

*“It can be used in English and Maths sometimes as well as Science on occasions but not consistently.*

*Part of the schools inclusion policy*

*Used by TAs during PPA time. Voluntary farm club after school. Outdoor teaching areas on Farm used for teaching art, English, Numeracy, Citizenship and others”.*

## Contribution of the school farm



**Linking learning outside so called academic curriculum?**

**Integrating social and personal development with support of subject based learning?**

In your groups , use the proforma to share experience of using the school farm as a curricular resource

Curriculum Area	Used	Brief Example
Maths/Numeracy		
English/Literacy		
Science		
Personal/social/ethics		
Arts		
Geography/History		
Social Science		



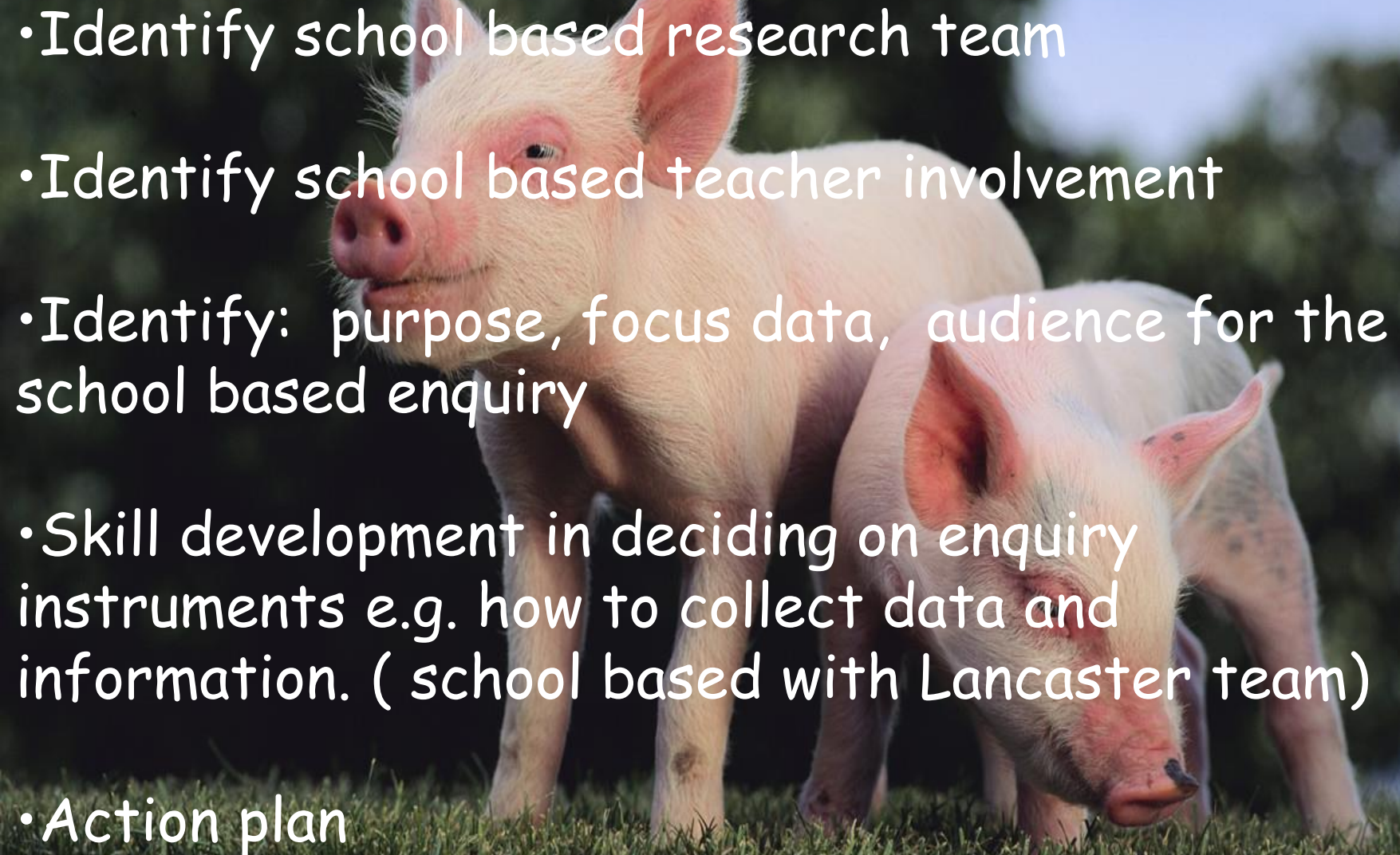
**Why involve students in research of their own  
experience?**

**Across the curriculum?**

# Why involve students in research of their own experience?

- Opportunities for transformative learning
  - Authentic voice
  - Developing research skills
- Developing social and team based skills
  - Insights and forming questions
- Used by school for planning purposes

## Aspects of the research process

- Identify school based research team
  - Identify school based teacher involvement
  - Identify: purpose, focus data, audience for the school based enquiry
  - Skill development in deciding on enquiry instruments e.g. how to collect data and information. ( school based with Lancaster team)
  - Action plan
- 
- A photograph of two piglets in a grassy field. The piglet on the left is standing and looking towards the left. The piglet on the right is standing and looking down. The background is a blurred green field under a blue sky.

# Aspects of the research process

- Begin to collect data
- Evidence collected
- Analysis and reports completed by end of spring term
- Synthesis by end of summer term



# **Simple interview instrument**

# Simple interview schedule: 6<sup>th</sup> form

Which A level subjects are you teaching?

Do you use the school farm in any way in your teaching?

If yes could you tell me a little about how you use it, if not, what are the main reasons for not using it?

What kinds of subject might benefit?

Is it important that the school has a farm?

What do you think the future of the farm will be?

# **Simple survey instrument**

1. Are you involved in the School Farm in any way?

Yes

No

2. How regularly do the Farm and Farm activities come up in lessons?

Always

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

Not sure

3. What proportion of students do you think the School Farm is a resource for?

All students

Most

Some

None

Not sure

4. How much time do you spend on the Farm during an average week?

Under 1 hour

1 – 5 hours

6 – 10 hours

11+ hours



## **What are the Advantages of these two Methods? Mia (year 9)**

The advantages of doing a questionnaire is some people are more likely to tell the truth. This is because they won't be ashamed, embarrassed or afraid to tell the truth when they're writing their answers. When we read it we will understand what they mean., but will not know them or their names. As well as this, that way we also can't tell what gender or age they are. This means we can't put them into groups or stereotypes of what they would be put into.

The advantages of doing interviews is people put more detail and explaining their answers and why. Plus when you are doing interviews you can get what you want out of people, and on questionnaires people don't always put what you want, or make sense, or they put notes or short phrases and you don't exactly know what they mean. As well as you could interpret wrong to what they meant or had in mind.

"The experience of taking part in the research project for the University of Lancaster has been great fun. All the farm ambassadors really liked working with Murray and Mason and coming up with ideas/questions that could be used for the interviews/questionnaires and getting the evidence."

"Doing the research really made us think"

" We will continue to follow-up on this work"

# Transformative learning as ethical debate (school students)?

“I don’t like to eat meat from a pig I have looked after but they have had a happy life here”

“I’m sure the pigs don’t like being killed!”



‘We send our pigs to get made into sausages’

‘It is unique and we are very lucky to have it’

‘The animals are more like our friends than animals’

‘I don’t like that the pigs get slaughtered because children love them and the pigs trust them and they get killed!’

‘I don’t like to see them go but I do like pork!’



# Transformative learning?

Active learning across the whole curriculum (Dewey and the reconstructivists)?

- Research process as core in active learning

Ethical, advocacy and sustainability discussion points?

Esteem and well being?

Sanctuary and social learning?

Students as researchers?



# Workshop Tasks

In smaller groups, discuss the following:

School based research?

1. Which students would you involve in a school based research team?
2. What do you think you would focus on (identify three themes)?

Cross curricular use?

1. What are the barriers to cross curricular use of school farms?
2. What kinds of support (materials etc) would be most useful?
3. How do we advocate the use of school farms for learning across the curriculum?
4. Do the four arguments for wider use of plants and animals (slide 7) stand-up, which is the most persuasive, can they be used for a school policy?