Making links across the curriculum (St Eunan’s Primary) - Transcript

**Shona Gardiner [Principal teacher, St Eunan’s Primary**]: The hen project came about as a result of a funding opportunity by Education Scotland. When we realised that there was funding available, we sat down as a kind of smaller group within the staff, to look at ideas of how we could develop food education with children, and also to take that more innovative approach with the aim of engaging more learners.

**Anne Docherty [Head teacher, St Eunan’s Primary]:** Just to set our work in some sort of context: St Eunan’s Primary is situated in Clydebank, which is an area of deprivation, and, if we look at the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, we see that 60% of our children actually in the bottom, the lowest two deciles. And I do mention this purely to set our work in context. We never use it as an excuse – it’s there.

**Pupil:** Every morning, we come out and collect eggs from the egg box , and usually we get one or two eggs per day. This one was laid by JR, because it’s brown. And then this was laid by Betty, because it’s smaller and lighter. And then this one was probably laid by Bonny, because it’s bigger and lighter.

**Shona Gardiner:** I think this project ties in really, really closely with learning for sustainability and the agenda, I think it meets many of the different aspects, for example, first off the fact that we’re in a Rights Respecting School and that the children know, they’re very aware of all the different articles, for example Article 24: that children have the right to nutritious and healthy food. They’re able to make those links with… that this is a food education topic. They know why we’re studying this, why we’re learning about it. And there’s also depth there in their learning because they’re not only learning themselves but they’re able to share that with others, whether it’s visitors in the school, whether it’s their parents, when they come in for a parent workshop, or whether it’s younger learners that come in from the nursery and from the Infants.

**Pupil:** We love coming out to feed the hens. Each day, we make sure that they have the essentials, like mixed corn, [unclear] pellets and oyster shells.

**Shona Gardener:** When we went to embark on the hen project, it was a steep learning curve. You know, every day was, we were learning something new. And what we did was, we looked for support from other people who had kept hens, so working closely with the farm, and using them as a kind of sounding board and as a support. And we also used a lady from the local community centre, who was able to come up at the early stages and keep us right in terms of establishing the project, and things that we should be doing on a daily basis to ensure that we were looking after them and doing a good job. So, she was able to show us how to be weighing the hens at the beginning to make sure that they had a healthy weight gain, keeping us right with what we should be feeding and what we shouldn’t be, and just really the maintenance of the coop. And she was a big part in term of training the kids, of doing their jobs on a daily basis.

**Pupil:** Different…We usually get about two to about six maybe … to get sent out to do jobs while … depends on what’s needed. Some get certain things like sweeping, some get certain things like filling up the water and the food, and then the toilet change as well, some have to clean up a bit. And some feed the hens, like that.

**Shona Gardiner:** This project has had a really positive impact on all learners in the class. It’s certainly engaged all learners, and it’s motivated them. And it’s been really rewarding for me, you know, to teach.

**Pupil:** We loved being peer educators to the younger children in Primary 1 and the nursery. We have taught them about the egg recipes, the benefits of eggs and life-cycle about an egg.

**Shona Gardiner:** Some children have developed skills within their literacy, their numeracy, and obviously within health and wellbeing. For children, maybe, with particular needs regarding behavior, it’s been a great motivation for them to go out and access the curriculum beyond the classroom, and having opportunities for outdoor learning, which this topic really does provide.

**Pupil A:** We did a poem to encourage people to eat more eggs. And it’s called…

**Two pupils speaking together**: … An ode to an egg.

**Pupil B:** Eggs are fluffy, eggs are neat, eggs are health, what a treat

**Pupil A:** A boiled egg is truly fine – I could eat them all the time

**Pupil B**: Tomato sauce, but just a dash. Tasty scrambled in a flash

**Pupil A:** Give the shell a solid whack. Soon you’ll have a healthy snack.

**Pupil B**: High in protein, low in fat – eggs are really where it’s at.

**Pupil A:** Eggs are cooking on the stove, a culinary treasure trove.

**Both pupils together**: Eggs are great for you and me, I always have them for my tea.

**Anne Docherty**: In terms of looking at the whole IDL approach, I suppose our main aim is to look at it with a creative eye and to think differently. We try to make it more interesting and more exciting for children, and I think that you probably would imagine that having a hen project with live hens on the premises, that’s one way of certainly getting children’s attention.

**Shona Gardiner:** The other thing I think this project develops and encourages is the development of lifelong learning skills, and working really closely with their business partners down at Ardarden. - the children have had the opportunity to go down there - and exploring the role of the farmer, and to be doing jobs down there. That’s allowed them, you know, a good experience of the world of work and an insight into jobs that, maybe, otherwise they wouldn’t have considered.

**Pupil [holding hen]:** I worked with the hens last year, when I was in Primary 6, and it really made me consider wanting to be a vet when I grew up. And I love working with animals that you don’t usually see on a daily basis like cats and dogs and things, so it really made me consider what I want to be when I’m older, so like being a vet or working in an animal shelter. And I’m going to show you how to do a health check, that we learned last year from our business partners in the farm. So, we have to check their eyes, to make sure they’re not runny or water, ‘cos that means they might have an eye infection. And we need to check their wattles and their combs to make sure that they’re not getting too dry when it’s cold. And we also need to check their wingspan, to make sure their wings are growing right and that they’re not sore, or if they try to flap away when you’re doing it, ‘cos that can mean there’s something wrong with their wings. And we also need to check their skin, to make sure they’ve not got mites. And if they have got mites, we have things that we put in their wood chips to stop them coming again. And we also learned how to flip them but they don’t really like that. But you flip them to check their breastbone, to make sure they’ve not got a blocked egg, because that can be quite dangerous and quite painful for the hen. And we also have to check their beak to make sure it’s not getting weared down because, when they’re eating off the ground with the mealworms and things, it can wear it down and it can be quite sore. And we also need to check their nose to make sure that’s not runny.

**Anne Docherty:** I suppose, if you look at our journey in terms of sustainability, learning for sustainability, that’s taken us – to get to this point – probably five years. So, I think, for people starting out, if they have a timescale on it, it’s not something that has to be completed in three terms or four terms. It’s something that you have a longer-term plan for. And that, I think, takes the fear out of it, because you can then do it in small steps.