

## FEEDING OUR CHILDRENS' FUTURE: CASE STUDY TWO

### Ardleigh St Mary's Primary School, Colchester, Essex

This case study is written by Marina O'Connell who runs the Apricot Centre in Essex as a small market garden and education centre. She became part of the Schools in Transition primaries pilot for food web mapping when she agreed to try the programme out at her local school in 2014, where she had already done permaculture design. She worked closely with Richard Tucker, deputy head and form teacher.

#### The Context

Ardleigh primary school is small, with just 100 children in four classes. Ardleigh village is on the edge of the beautiful Constable countryside and the Stour Valley. It is still fully functioning with a church, pub, couple of shops and a post office, a Doctor's surgery and a tractor outlet. Surrounded by arable fields growing wheat and rape seed, it is just down the road from the local land settlement of 80 small holdings specialising in early glasshouse strawberry production. Not really a hot bed of all things Transition – but almost because of this a really good place to have a go at doing it.

The real driving force behind this pilot was the school staff themselves. The deputy head Mr Tucker has a strong interest in sustainability and having been born and brought up near Totnes he was familiar with the Transition movement. Ms Parker the head was keen that the school be more sustainable in its infrastructure. Together they have developed the school so that the children have a wide range of outdoor learning, vegetable gardens, forest schools and an incredibly strong sports provision. Daily feeding of chickens has become an integral part of the Community award, but requires literacy and art work to illustrate it. And the meals are cooked from scratch every



day with good quality ingredients, by the wonderful Ruth. The school also uses a system called “learning power” developed by Guy Claxton for children to learn different methods of problem solving and creative thinking. For example, Spider thinking is about making connections, the Cat is about curiosity, the Tortoise is about taking time and reflection.... in effect the children are given the tools to be creative and how to think from a very early age. They are also taught group skills.



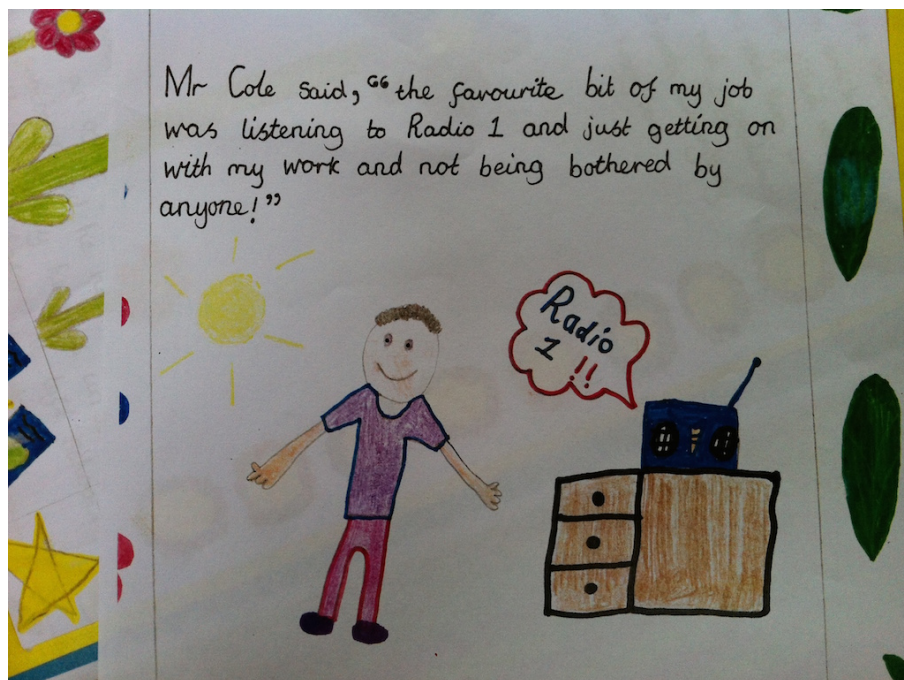
### **The Project**

I live locally and my children have gone to Ardleigh school. Last year we ran the Transition Suffolk 30 miles for 30 days food challenge across East Anglia, and Ardleigh school joined in, giving out charts and stickers to the children to map their local food intake. Ruth the school cook cooked a local lunch one day (quite an achievement in a school locked into a procurements system). I went in and pressed apple juice with the year 1 and 2 children. Now I was going to be working with children aged 8 to 10 years old to test out Feeding our Childrens' Future.

*Richard Tucker with the school chickens, an integral part of daily learning*



First we explored the local food in a session in the hall. I had bought a huge basket of local food and carefully chosen non-local food. (It was March, so I had local rhubarb, bananas and blackberries from Mexico, lamb from round the corner and lamb from New Zealand, a tub of margarine made from rape oil and other staples). I also had a shoe, bike helmet, toy car, toy boat and a paper plane as transport props. And on the floor we made a huge map of the local area, with large labels and props to show where farms and shops were. Around the walls were large cars with place names: New Zealand, Mexico, Peru, Dominica, India. The children ran around the hall emptying the basket, choosing the appropriate prop to transport the food to the place it was from. We then put the food into a shoe pile, a bike pile, a car pile, boat pile and plane pile. This led to a discussion of why some food came from hot countries like bananas and tea, and why we were buying blackberries from Peru in March. They then made menus from the food in the boot and bike pile. This led to further sessions on making a local food directory a few weeks later.



Mr Tucker used this topic to develop the concept of eco-literacy with the children. They studied the plants growing in the playing field, made cordial from elderflowers, and used Jean Giorno's novel "The Man who Planted Trees" as a basis for their own illustrated version based in the village.

Mr Cole the lollipop man (who sees children safely across the road) came and told stories of how he used to work in the local cucumber nurseries and with the Land Settlement Association's site at nearby Foxash. We made a clay oven and the children celebrated with a meal. They also created games for local food and Mr Tucker developed methods of integrating ecology and eco-literacy with local food. In particular, in one session he played the game of the "Web of life" with the children, giving them roles as trees, blackberries, owls, worms and fungi etc. with a length of string to connect them all up.

## The Outcome

At the school open evening (in July 2014) I saw the whole room full of wonderful written and illustrated stories, of reports of Mr. Coles and his cucumber glasshouse, elderflower cordial recipes, soil samples, and slide shows of the clay oven making. The children were proud, the parents interested, there was a buzz in the room.

The next step is for the children will design their own 30:30 food challenge and take it home to their parents with games and recipes and local suppliers – even if only for one meal.

On reflection it has been quite a journey, to translate what are in reality incredibly complex ideas around local food, and where it comes from and why we should eat it so that an 8 or 9 year old can understand it and then explain that to another in order to introduce the ideas of eco-literacy in theory and practice. It has been done in a way that has been a huge amount of fun, has delivered good standards of literacy and maths and numerous other skills at the same time.



**Marina O'Connell** is Director of the Apricot Centre (MsC Env, BsC Hort), an organic and biodynamic farmer/horticulturist, a Permaculture designer and a teacher of sustainability and sustainable agriculture as well as a Transition trainer.

*Schools in Transition was led by Isabel Carlisle, Educator Coordinator for Transition Network*

*Phone: 01803 847976 and email: [isabelcarlisle@transitionnetwork.org](mailto:isabelcarlisle@transitionnetwork.org)*