

**Empowering Rural Elementary Students as Co-  
Researchers:  
A Panel of Grade 6 Students Reflect on  
Research as Experiential Learning and Personal  
Development**

**C2UExpo 2025  
MacEwan University  
May 14, 2025**

Funded by Alberta Education Research Partnerships Program

# Introductions



# Introductions & Acknowledgements

## Humble Researchers:

- Celeste Day
- Armony Huber
- Catharina Kuhn
- Ellie Olynyk

## In absentia:

- Una Carlson (Grade 6)
- Cydney Fleck (Grade 6)
- Jace Haak (Grade 7)
- Jessica Schlegel (Grade 6)

## Adult Researchers

- Leah Peters
- Dr. Bonnie Stelmach
- Dr. Rae Ann Van Beers

- Mrs. Dreann Wurban (Grade 1 Teacher)

# Introduction to NHCS



# **Introduction to NHCS**

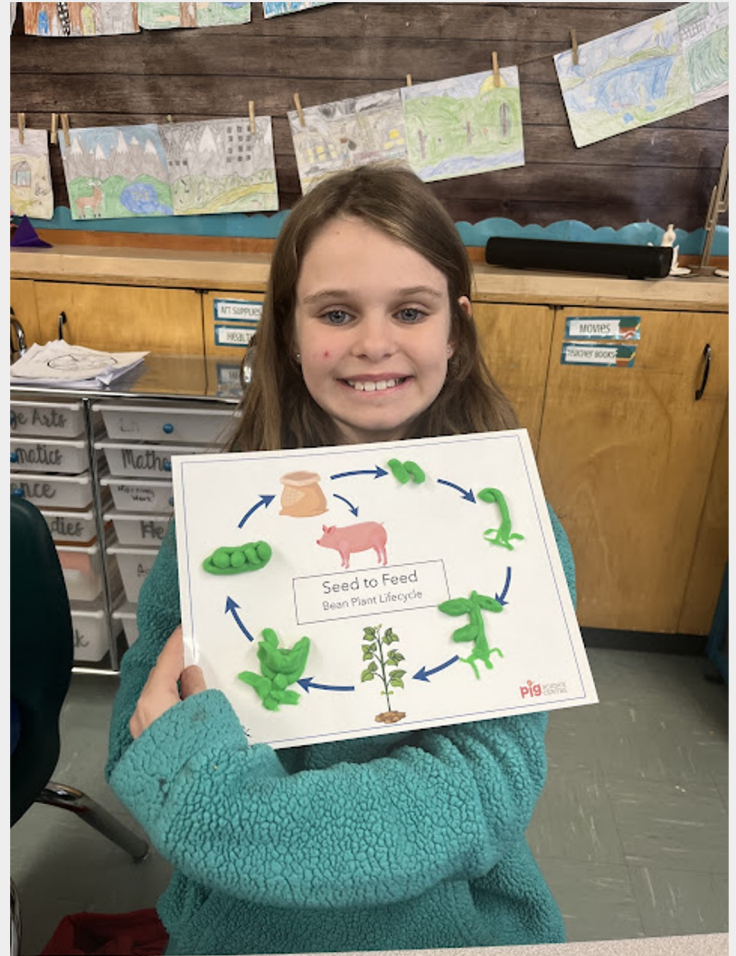
- **Where? South of Edmonton in Leduc County**
- **What? Rural charter school - agricultural literacy, land stewardship, experiential learning**
- **When? Over 100 years old, closed in 2020 due to low enrollment, reopened in 2021 as public charter school**
- **Who? K-6, barnyard animals**

# NHCS Expansion

- **Jr High opened in fall of 2024 with 31 students**
- **2024-2025 - 180 students**
- **More animals! Turkey and hog program**
- **2025-2026 projection - 200 students**



# Study Overview



# Methodological Motivation: Community-Based Research (CBR)

## Fundamental principles of CBR:

- **Collaboration**
- **Democracy**
- **Social Action**

Strand, K., Marullo, S., Cutforth, M., Stoecker, R., & Donohue. (2003). Principles of best practice for community-based research. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 9(30), 5-15.





***Growing Together* Community Dinner April 22, 2022**

# **“Triscuit & Pepper Go to School: Elementary School Students’ Learning With and From Animals”**

(Pilot Study February - March 2023)

***In what ways does learning with and from farm animals enhance children’s curricular and life skills development?***



# **School is Such a Chore!**

## **Agriculture as a Lens for Enhancing Learning and Life Skills**

1. How does experiential learning through agriculture foster curricular connections and life skills in K-6 students?
2. How does an agricultural learning environment shape students' relationship with school?

# **Benefits of Researching with Children & Youth: A Brief Inventory**

- Communication skills
- Confidence
- Agency
- Understanding of research processes
- Ethics
- Teamwork
- Perspective-taking
- Sense of purpose/belonging

# Student Research Group Formation

- Followed school's chore application process
- Shared information about the different roles with all classes and had students apply using a similar form
- Included technology because of potential use of GoPro as interview recording device
- Students were chosen based on their application and a short interview where they discussed their interest and the skills they would bring to the project

[Application Form](#)



# **Video Training and Editing**

- **GoPro Training with Mr. Shane Klein**
- **Mac/iMovie with Ms. Peters**
- **Storyboarding**
- **Chore Tutorials**
- **Use interviewing and new video skills**

# Humble Researchers' Focus Group and Celebration

- Discussed experiences as co-researchers
- Humble Researchers are:
  - Hard working
  - Supportive
  - Fun!



# Mock Interview



# Student Panel Questions





What was the most enjoyable  
part of the research process?



What was a  
challenging part of the  
research process?

What did you imagine  
about your research  
job that was different  
from your actual job?

What did you learn  
about your school  
through the research?

What did you learn  
about yourself?

What skills did you  
develop that you are  
using now?



What skills did you  
develop that you  
imagine will be useful  
for the future?

Are the Humble  
Researchers still  
working now that the  
study is complete?

What advice do you have  
for adult researchers who  
are considering involving  
students as researchers?

What is something  
adult researchers  
should know about  
working with student  
researchers?

Why did you want to  
participate in the  
research?

Thank you!





# Additional Questions

- What would you say to adults who do not really think that students your age can be real researchers?
- What skills and knowledge do you think students already have that can support them to be good researchers?
- Was there a time that you offered a suggestion or an idea that helped the adult researchers learn or try something in a different way? Did you teach the adults something about research?
- Did you feel like you were an equal with the adult researchers during this research project? What made you feel this way or what would need to change so that you could feel this way?
- If you were going to help other students your age become researchers, what advice would you give them?