

EDUCATION AT CARE FARMS

Learning in an alternative setting

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Abstract

Background: Annually over 4500 children do not go to school for three months or longer in the Netherlands. School absenteeism can give children a damaged start in life and it is therefore important that measures are taken for children who have dropped out of school. Many Dutch children that are not going to school are waiting for an adequate substitute for their education. These children need so-called 'passend onderwijs'. A temporary solution for these children could be to receive education at care farms. However, social recognition is lacking for care farms that provide education to children. When it is known how children experience education at care farms and what it can offer them, authorities might sooner support these kinds of initiatives.

Objective: The aim of this study was to explore what education at care farms entails and how children experience education at care farms.

Methods: Qualitative data methods have been used for this research. A case study design was used, whereby multiple cases have been examined using semi-structured interviews and observations. Interviews have been conducted with 1) teachers, 2) care farmers, 3) children and 4) parents. These groups were chosen to get a more elaborated view of education at care farms.

Results: The main goal of the care farms is to make children feel comfortable and at ease again. Therefore, education comes in second at the care farms, right after the well-being of the children. A key characteristic of education at care farms is the tailored approach they use per child. Hereby, the interests and needs of the children are taken into account and therefore the children receive education that suits them. Children can learn with animals and by doing, for example by executing (farm) chores, by hammering or by learning in motion. There is a clear structure at the care farms, but there is room to deviate from the planning if necessary. Additionally, children receive a lot of freedom in the implementation of their program at the care farms. The personal tailored approach that is used to deliver education is valued by all stakeholders. Children like the personal attention they receive, to play and learn outside, and to be involved with the animals and chores at the farm. The green environment, the animals and the secure place that is created at the care farms can help children to relax and become at ease again. Children and other stakeholders indicate that children make a lot of progress at the care farms. At the care farms, children start to trust others and themselves, dare to be themselves, are more at ease, are more confident, are more eager to learn, learn to interact with others and are taught to be more independent.

Conclusion: There are several aspects of the care farms that make them different. These aspects are (1) that *education comes in second*, (2) that they have a clear, but loose *structure*, (3) that a *tailored approach* is used per child (4) that children can be involved in more *meaningful and realistic learning opportunities*, and lastly (5) that they offer a *secure place* for the children. This research shows that education at care farms is appreciated by the different stakeholders and can be beneficial for children. Future research into this topic should go in two directions: it should be investigated which outcomes lead to a successful re-integration into regular schools and it should be investigated if care farms can be used to prevent school absenteeism.

Keywords: school dropout, care farms, education, experiential learning

ABSTRACT	2
1. INTRODUCTION.....	4
1.1 BACKGROUND	4
1.2 RISK- AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM.....	4
1.3 OUTDOOR LEARNING	5
1.4 EDUCATION AT CARE FARMS.....	5
1.5 THE FARM SETTING	6
1.6 PROBLEM STATEMENT.....	7
2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS	9
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	10
3.1 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING.....	10
3.2 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AT CARE FARMS.....	11
3.3 THEORETICAL FOCUS OF THE RESEARCH	12
4. METHODOLOGY.....	13
4.1 STUDY DESIGN.....	13
4.2 CASE SELECTION.....	13
4.3 DATA COLLECTION	15
4.4 DATA ANALYSIS.....	15
4.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	16
5. RESULTS.....	17
5.1 INTRODUCTION OF THE CARE FARMS.....	17
5.2 CHARACTERISTIC OF EDUCATION	18
5.3 EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATION	22
5.4 EXPERIENCES OF THE FARM SETTING	23
5.5 EXPERIENCED PROGRESS.....	25
6. DISCUSSION	30
7. CONCLUSION	35
8. REFERENCES.....	36
9. APPENDICES.....	39
APPENDIX 1 – INTERVIEW FORMAT CHILDREN (IN DUTCH)	39
APPENDIX 2 – APPROVAL PROPOSAL BY THE WUR ETHICS COMMITTEE	40
APPENDIX 3 – DIFFERENT APPROACHES OF THE CARE FARMS	41

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In the past, children with a disability or a disorder like ADHD followed special needs education at another school. Since 2014 more and more of these children follow education at regular schools, whereby they receive extra support. However, this extra support might not be enough for these children to deal with the disadvantage their condition gives them (de Baat & Foolen, 2012). Consequently, more and more children with special needs are having a hard time to finish school (de Baat & Foolen, 2012). In the year 2018-2019, it was reported 4790 times that Dutch children did not go to school for 3 months or longer (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2020). This number consists of relative absenteeism (children who are still registered at a school) and absolute absenteeism (children who are not registered at a school anymore) and can involve children from primary schools as well as from secondary schools. A Dutch law, the 'Thuiszitterspact', has been introduced to facilitate adequate substitutes for children that are unable to attend regular classes (Rijksoverheid, 2016). To facilitate these alternative settings, the 'Varia law' got introduced in 2018. This law makes it legally possible to deviate from the standard teaching hours if a child has a physical or psychological disorder (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2018). The goal of the 'Thuiszitterspact' is that in 2020 no child has to stay at home for three months or longer without an adequate substitute for their education (Rijksoverheid, 2016).

School absenteeism can result in several health- and social problems. From a health perspective, it could lead to anxiety issues, depression and several risky behaviours like alcohol abuse (see for example Chou, Ho, Chen, & Chen, 2006; Denny, Clark & Watson, 2003; Guttmacher, Weitzman, Kapadia & Weinberg, 2002; Hallfors, Cho, Brodish, Flewelling & Khatapoush, 2006). Socially, school absenteeism could lead to a deprivation of contact with fellow students and many children who do not go to school suffer from social anxiety (Kearney & Bensaheb, 2006). Moreover, children who are regularly absent from school have a higher chance to develop learning disabilities and to drop out of school completely (Weitzman, Klerman, Lamb, Menary & Alpert, 1982). Lastly, children who are regularly absent from school have a higher chance of various economic, psychiatric, social and marital problems in adulthood (Kearney, 2008). Taken together, school absenteeism can give children a damaged start in life. It is therefore important to support children to go back to school.

1.2 Risk- and protective factors for school absenteeism

For many students who have dropped out of school, this is the result of a long series of problems and setbacks. Both factors on the individual level (gender, age, ethnicity, school performances, disabilities, disorders and several personality traits and behavioural issues) as on the environmental level (family characteristics, school characteristics and the behaviour of peers) can increase the risk of school absenteeism (de Baat & Foolen, 2012). The risk factors for school absenteeism might not lead to a drop out of school on their own. However, if they accumulate it can become too much for the children (WR voor het regeeringsbeleid, 2009).

Several factors influence school absenteeism. A key factor for school absenteeism is the school climate: to which extent students feel connected to their school and feel supported in their needs. This also entails to what extent a child feels safe, accepted, valued and respected at school (Kearney, 2008). The study of Kearney (2008) shows that school climate is significantly correlated with school attendance and inversely to school dropout. So, when a child feels connected to his or her school, school attendance will be higher, and the child has a lower chance to drop out of school. Several factors influence the school climate (Kearney, 2008). Class and school size are inversely related to school climate and therefore also with school attendance. When children feel victimized by others (teachers,

students, etc.) their fear of attending school increases. Other factors that increase the chance of school absenteeism are boredom and an inadequate school climate. This inadequate school climate can be caused by an unsuitable school curriculum that is not tailored to a child's individual needs, poor teaching, a bad student-teacher relationship, an inattention to diversity issues, an inadequate registration of school absenteeism and an unsafe school climate (de Baat & Foolen, 2012; Kearney, 2008). Additionally, children's performances at school influence the chance of school absenteeism. Children who perform poorly in school, or who have a language delay, or who have learning difficulties have an increased chance to drop out of school because it can negatively influence their motivation (de Baat & Foolen, 2012). Also, children who have a (physical) disorder can have a harder time at school, because of the disadvantages these conditions give them. Additionally, several personality traits (e.g. impulsivity and attention disorders) and behavioural problems can increase the chance of school absenteeism (de Baat & Foolen, 2012).

Protective factors for school absenteeism are based on personal achievements and aspects of the school- and home situation (de Baat & Foolen, 2012). When children perform well at school, have faith in themselves, have appropriate social skills and have a clear perspective for the future, the chance of school absenteeism decreases. Additionally, it is important that children feel connected to their school. Therefore, they must have a good relationship with their teachers, whereby they feel that they are supported and appreciated by their teachers. Instructions and teaching should match with children's needs and with their view of the world. Hereby, it is important that children are being challenged and do not get bored. Lastly, parents must be involved in children's educational achievements (de Baat & Foolen, 2012).

1.3 Outdoor learning

Children spend most of their time in classrooms whereby they follow structured learning activities. However, learning in outdoor settings have gained more interest recently. Research on these settings shows that outdoor learning can be beneficial for the academic performances of most children, but can also affect social, personal and physical levels (Barfod & Bentsen, 2018; Becker, Lauterbach, Spengler, Dettweiler & Mess, 2017). Outdoor learning can result in higher engagement of the children, a higher attribution of what is remembered from the learning experience and therefore to more enduring (learning) outcomes (Ballantyne & Packer, 2009). Also, outdoor learning settings can give children a chance to learn in a more fun way (Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019). Outdoor settings can boost the confidence of children since different skills are needed for outdoor learning practices compared to classroom teaching. Therefore, it can be especially beneficial for children with additional needs and those who are less successful in regular school settings, because outdoors they can learn in a different way (Berger, 2008; James & Williams, 2017).

1.4 Education at care farms

Many Dutch children that are not going to school are waiting for an adequate substitute for their education because they are unable to attend regular classes. These children need so-called 'passend onderwijs', a Dutch term for education that is tailored to a child's needs. Several initiatives in the Netherlands have been set up to take in these children. These so-called 'home-siting' initiatives are places where children that are unable to go to school can go to a few hours, or sometimes several days, a week. Prominent in these initiatives is the care demand of the children and not their educational obligations (van Houten, van Elswijk & van Deth, 2019). Several care farms in the Netherlands offer this place to children, whereby they provide care and education to the children.

Several farmers in the Netherlands already offered 'farm education' to schools, for example in the form of day trips or a week on the farm (Hassink, Haubenhof, van der Meer, van der Kamp, Schreurs,

& Schuler, 2009). Farm education, just like outdoor learning, has been proven to be beneficial for the learning development of children, and especially for those children who do not perform well at regular classes (Hassink et al., 2009). Education at a care farm goes a step further in educating children than farm education. Care farmers take in children that are unable to attend regular school settings and offer education to them for a longer period. Children can temporarily go to these farms, whereby they will receive education and they are supported in their process to return to regular school settings.

It is a fairly new initiative to offer formal education to children at care farms. Therefore, care farmers encounter various obstacles in providing education to children. Even though the Dutch law facilitates alternative forms to provide education, practically it is not easy to deviate from the regular settings. Anyhow, care farmers believe that education at care farms can be a (temporarily) solution for children who have dropped out of school. However, since it is a fairly new initiative, there has not been much research into the topic. For this reason, several care farmers together with the Wageningse 'Science Shop' started a project to investigate the opportunities and constraints of offering education at care farms (see Box 1*).

Box 1: Project of the Wageningse Science Shop

The current research is part of a project of the Science Shop called '*Ontwikkeling en professionalisering van onderwijs op de boerderij: leerarrangementen in het groen*'. The goal of this project is to investigate the added value of education at care farms for children who are temporarily unable to attend regular schools. Previous research in this project has investigated the scope and content of education at care farms, the type of children that follow education at care farms and the collaboration of the different parties involved (see van den Brink, van Bladel, Borgman, Elkhuizen & Gaasterland, 2019; Moolhuijzen, 2019; Roelofs et al., 2019). At the same time as this study, a study focused on the perspective of children. This study focused on how education is provided to children and how this education is experienced by them (Plug, 2020). Data collection methods of the current research have been made equivalent to this previous research for later comparison.

1.5 The farm setting

The learning environment wherein children learn is different for care farms compared to regular school settings. At care farms, children can learn in a green environment and the presence of several (farm) animals. This different setting gives children the chance to learn differently.

Green environment

Care farms are located in outlying areas where there is a lot of greenery, which can have several beneficial effects on the children. A natural environment draws attention to a person's mind without any effort of the brain. This phenomenon is called soft fascination. During such an experience a person does not have to focus their attention on something, which can give a soothing feeling (van den Berg, Koenis & Berg, 2007). Therefore, a natural setting can help people to restore their attention fatigue (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). When people have to maintain their attention for a long time, it can get overloaded. This could reduce performances and can make a person irritable (Schuler, Elings, & Storm

* On the website of the Science Shop more information can be found about the project: <https://www.wur.nl/nl/project/Ontwikkeling-en-professionalisering-van-onderwijs-op-de-boerderij-leerarrangementen-in-het-groen.htm>

2011). A natural environment gives children the possibility to distance themselves from the routines and activities that overstimulated them in school (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). A view on nature can already generate these positive effects in people and increase the concentration of people (van den Berg et al., 2007). Natural environments can especially be beneficial for children with ADHD since studies show that contact with nature can decrease the symptoms of ADHD (van den Berg et al., 2007).

Additionally, playing in a natural environment can have multiple functions for children. First of all, it offers children the possibility to interact and connect with nature. This can increase children's sense of responsibility and increase their connectedness with nature (van den Berg et al., 2007). Second, natural areas can fulfil an important educational purpose; children can learn and experience the secret of nature by playing. Additionally, the green environment can have a beneficial effect on the development and health of children (van den Berg et al., 2007). Playing in a natural environment has several other benefits. For example, it can increase children's motor skills and physical resilience and it stimulates physical activity in children. Also, natural settings stimulate a more varied, social and creative way of playing. Lastly, natural settings can improve children's ability to concentrate, self-discipline, psychological resilience, emotional well-being, self-esteem and mood (van den Berg et al., 2007).

To sum, a natural environment can have a stress-reducing and soothing effect on children. Time in natural settings can influence children's mood and ability to concentrate, which can be beneficial for their learning and development.

Animals

At the care farms, children can engage with a lot of animals, which can be beneficial for them. Hassink, de Bruin, Berget & Elings (2017) conducted a literature review about the role of animals at care farms. This literature review shows that animals, among other things, can 1) provide meaningful day occupation, 2) generate valuable relationships (with other people) and 3) provide relaxation. For example, the study of Schreuder et al. 2014 shows that working with animals showed children the value of the things they did; if they did not feed the animal the animal would have died. Additionally, caring for the animals daily can help children to bear responsibilities in their lives and for the future (Wielink, Pothoven & Houwelingen, 2010). Interactions with animals can be very meaningful for children. In the study of Schreuder et al. (2014) youngsters explain this by the animals being 'relaxed' and non-judgemental. Contrary to people, animals cannot judge them on the things they do and show affection when the children feed them. The connection that children make with the animals, can also help them to create a relationship with other people. A shared interest in animals can stimulate a conversation with other people about the animals (Hassink et al., 2017). Animals can also have a therapeutic effect on children. The animals can open up doors and establish the trust that is needed for children to open up toward others (Schreuder et al., 2014). Working with animals can also help to make youngsters feel more relaxed (Hassink et al., 2017). Animals have a calming effect on people (Busch et al., 2016). Animals can especially be beneficial for children with ADHD or autism. Animals can decrease their symptoms and help them to engage and communicate with others (Ferwerda-van Zonneveld, Oosting & Kijlstra, 2012; Busch et al., 2016).

1.6 Problem statement

There is a lack of social recognition for care farms that provide education to children. The added value of education at care farms is not acknowledged (Roelofs et al., 2019). Some schools and municipalities do not want to cooperate with care farms who want to take in children that have dropped out of school. Since this initiative is created for children who have dropped out of school, it is important to get more insight into their perspective. Children's experiences about 1) the education they receive, 2)

the setting wherein they receive education and 3) the progress they make at the care farms could provide a scientific basis for the working aspects of education at care farms. When it is known how children experience education at care farms and what it can offer them, authorities might sooner support these kinds of initiatives. This could lead to a more professionalized sector; whereby more and more children can be taken in at the care farms and do not have to stay at home. To establish the experiences of children about education at care farms it is first important to know what education at care farms entails. Since it is a fairly new initiative to deliver education at care farms, this has not been investigated extensively.

Therefore, the aim of the current research was to explore what education at care farms entails and how children (and other stakeholders) experience education at care farms. This way, the added value of education at care farms could be established.

2. Research questions

To establish the added value of education at care farms and to articulate how children can benefit from education at care farms it will be investigated how children experience education at care farms. Therefore, the following research question has been formulated:

- What are the experiences of children with additional needs who receive education at care farms?

To answer this question the following sub-questions have been formulated:

- What does education at care farms entail?
- How do children experience learning at care farms?
- How do children experience being at care farms?
- How do children experience their progress at care farms?

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Experiential learning

Education is aimed to teach and learn children about several subjects and skills. A theory used to describe learning is constructivism. Within this theory, people actively construct knowledge based on their own experiences. This means that knowledge cannot simply be transferred from one person to another person, but instead has to be constructed by each individual on its own (Mcleod, 2003).

Experiential learning is a form of learning that fits in the constructivist orientation. The focus of learning is on an individual's construction of knowledge within a social context (Mcleod, 2003). Experiential learning offers a holistic perspective of learning that incorporates experiences, perceptions, cognition and behaviour (Kolb, 2015). A definition of experimental learning introduced by Kolb (2015) is:

“Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience”.

The most important aspects of experiential learning, according to Kolb (2015) are: 1) learning is a process, 2) these processes are grounded in experiences and 3) conflicts to deal with the world must be sorted to learn. Learning is, according to Kolb (2015), not an addition of thoughts that can be measured by accumulating the number of ideas a person has. One of the main purposes of education is to improve the skills of children to gather knowledge and not for children to memorize a ton of knowledge. According to this theory, ideas can be formed and re-formed and are never fixed. What an individual has learned in one situation is used to understand and deal with other situations. When expectations made about a situation do not come true, an individual learns. This process of learning is visualized by the Lewinian Experiential learning model (see Figure 1). Using this model, learning can be seen as a four staged model. Concrete experiences form the basis for observation and reflection. The made observations are adjusted into a sort of ‘theory’, which forms guidance for future action. This ‘theory’ is used in new situations, which can lead to new concrete experiences (Kolb, 2015).

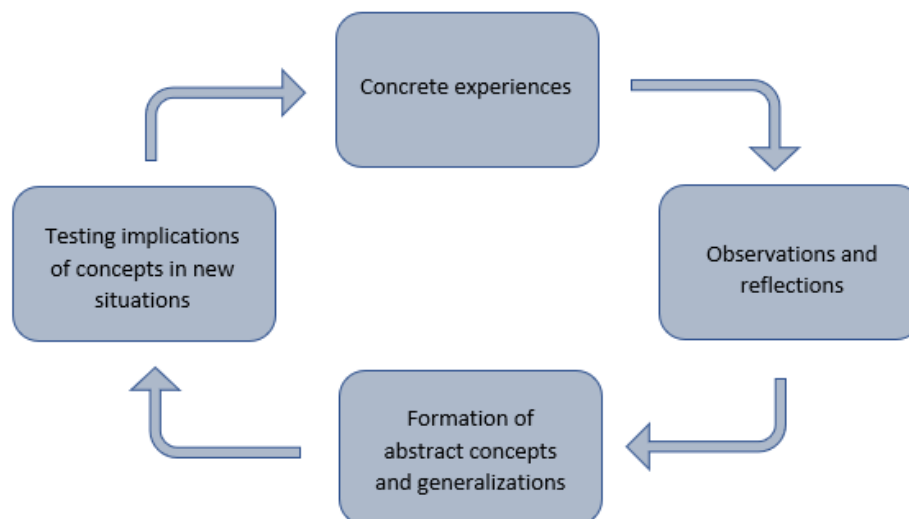


Figure 1: The Lewinian Experiential Learning Model (Adapted from “Experiential Learning”, by Kolb, D. A., 2015, p. 21, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.).

The definition of Ruikes (1994) of experiential learning is more elaborated than the definition of Kolb. He defines experiential learning as:

*“the creation of a **specific situation** that enables young people to gain **concrete experiences** on the base of things that motivate them and enables them to **reflect** on their situation. A good combination between the concrete experiences and the reflection on these experiences lead to new **learning processes** that, ultimately, activate youthful **autonomy**, giving a person a new **perspective for the future**”.*

In this definition, there are some specific elements, which according to Ruikes (1994) can be seen as basic characteristics of experiential learning. These are specific situation, concrete experiences, reflection, learning processes, autonomy and a futuristic perspective.

- *A specific situation*: this means that youngsters must be dragged out of their everyday situation and brought into a new situation. The new situation must be completely different from their regular situation, to enhance behaviour change.
- *Concrete experiences*: these experiences must be authentic experiences that are physically tangible and are processed both emotionally as mentally. Youngsters have to experience things individually and they have to be able to deal with all these experiences on their own. This way, youngsters can learn from any negative consequences that their behaviour induces.
- *Reflection*: thinking about the specific situation that one encounters forms the bridge between the concrete experiences that have been gained and the development of a perspective for the future. This reflection is not only individually, but it is also about discussing this reflection with others. A link must be made with past behaviour, the concrete experiences and desired behaviour for the future.
- *Learning processes*: the specific situation and the concrete experiences youngsters encounter trigger them to develop skills in cognitive, social, emotional and communication areas. The concrete experiences youngsters encounter stimulate overthinking and reconsideration about their behaviour. This might encourage them to adopt a new behaviour to better cope in their social life.
- *Autonomy*: youngster must be able to make decisions about their life. Autonomy can be created when a child’s development is properly completed, there is a basic feeling of security and children can experiment with their behaviour.
- *Futuristic perspective*: experiential learning must be aimed at supporting youngsters to be independent so that they will be able to take care of themselves in wider society. Youngsters have to start believing in themselves and learn that they can have a valuable function in society (Ruikes, 1994).

To summarize, experiential learning is about the process of learning. Learning takes places in experiences and is never the same.

3.2 Experiential learning at care farms

Education at care farms can facilitate all the aspects of experiential learning introduced by Ruikes (1994) whereby the green environment and the animals are being used to learn. Care farms have a natural place where children can learn, play and develop. It can facilitate different forms of outdoor learning settings which have been proven to be an effective way for children to learn (see Barfod & Bentsen, 2018; Becker et al, 2017; Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019; Berger, 2008; James & Williams, 2017). Previous research on youth care farms and farm education show working aspects of experiential learning at (care) farms.

Children that follow education at care farms have often dropped out of school, because of overstimulation at school. As mentioned in *the green environment* part, care farms provide children with a *specific situation* wherein they can reload, but also learn. Previous research whereby children

from special needs education worked on the farm shows that children like to perform 'real work' and to be engaged in useful activities that have value (Schuler, 2010). Youngsters often find lessons in schools too abstract, and the activities on the farm give them a concrete sense of why something should be done (Schuler et al., 2011). This shows that the performance of *concrete experiences* appeals to children and they appreciate it. Also, the animals at the care farms can help children to *reflect* on their life because animals can mirror their behaviour (Hassink, et al., 2017). Additionally, a care farm offers a more diverse play area for children. This way children can engage in more varied, imaginative and physical playing behaviour. Playing behaviour plays an important role in the cognitive, motoric and social-emotional development of a child (Schuler et al., 2011). The aspect of play can, therefore, influence the *learning processes* children encounter on the farm. Education at care farms can provide children with a sense of *autonomy*. Previous research shows that a farm provides children with a secure place, but also enough freedom to make their own choices, for example in which activities they want to be involved (Schuler et al., 2011). This gives children a sense of responsibility whereby they have to make valuable decisions about several situations at the farm. Research on youth care farms shows that the positive effects of a commuting program were still visible a year after the end of the program. The program provided significant improvements in the problematic behaviours and the self-esteem of the youngsters (Hassink, De Meyer, van de Sman, & Veerman, 2011). This program shows that a farm can help children to increase their self-esteem and to develop an improved *futuristic perspective*.

3.3 Theoretical focus of the research

The aim of this research is to investigate how education at care farms is characterized and experienced. The perspective of experiential learning is used to describe what education at care farms entails, what children's experiences are about the education they receive at the care farms, how they feel about being at the care farms and how they experience their progress at the care farms. Therefore, it was examined if care farms use experiential learning practices and how children experience this. Hereby, the focus was on the first stage of the Lewinian Experiential Learning Model of Kolb (2015), because experiences form the basis of experiential learning. Additionally, attention was paid to how children experience the farm setting (the green environment, and the animals) and how children experience their progress at the care farms.

4. Methodology

4.1 Study Design

To investigate what education at care farms entails and how education at care farms is experienced, qualitative data methods have been used. A case study design was used, whereby multiple cases have been examined using semi-structured interviews and observations.

4.2 Case selection

A network approach has been used to identify potential care farms for this research. A care farm was selected for this research when: 1) they facilitate a place for children who have dropped out of school, 2) they offer education to these children, 3) a certified teacher is present at the farm and 4) the goal of the care farms is for children to return to regular school settings. Both children from primary schools, as children from secondary schools, were chosen for this research, because children can drop out of school at any stage in their school career. A certified teacher had to be present at the farms because the education inspectorate will sooner accept care farms as a place to offer education when a certified teacher is present (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, n.d.). Care farms were not selected for this research when they solely offer 'farm education', because this research is interested in a temporarily substitute for regular education, and not in an additive of regular education in the form of day trips or similar activities. Care farms had to strive for a return of the children into regular school settings because education at care farms should be a temporary solution for children that are unable to go to school.

A contact person of the Science Shop provided a list of care farms that offer education to children. Via this list, several potential care farms could be identified. In total 21 care farms were e-mailed or phoned to participate in this research. In total seven care farms agreed to participate in this research. Reasons for nonparticipation of the other farms were: a lack of response (4 times), there was not a certified teacher employed at the farm (3 times), at the approached moment there were no children at the farm (2 times), it was not possible to interview children (2 times) or other (personal) reasons (3 times).

This research made use of data triangulation by including different sources of information (Denzin, 2017). Multiple stakeholders have been included in this research which resulted in four groups of respondents: 1) the teachers at the care farm, 2) the care farmers, 3) children who follow education at a care farm and 4) the parents (or caregivers) of these children. These groups were chosen because children alone might not give a clear picture of what is going on at the farms. Generally, children will withhold their feelings, because they do not want to arouse a negative response from the interviewer (Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999). Therefore, other stakeholders were also included in this research, to get a more elaborated view about education at care farms.

Participants have been recruited via the care farmer or in some cases via a contact person of a national institute for education at care farms. The care farmers were asked if the children at their farm were able and willing to participate in this research. The care farmers contacted the parents of these children for the permission forms. Care farmers also approached parents for participation in this research. Inclusion criterium for children in this research was that the child had a minimum age of eight. From age six children possess the cognitive and language capabilities to be interviewed (Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999). However, the ability to remember past events increases with age (Docherty & Sandelowski, 1999). Therefore, children aged eight and older were included in this study. Children who at that moment were following education at a care farm and children who have followed education at a care farm in the past were asked to participate in this research. However, it was not possible to get

in touch with the last group. The inclusion criteria for parents/ caregivers were that they take care of a child that meets the above-mentioned criteria. For care farmers and teachers, the inclusion criteria were for their care farm to meet the above-mentioned criteria for the care farms. All participants were informed about the content and the aims of this research when they were being approached.

In total 20 people participated in this research. At two care farms, interviews have been conducted over the phone, because a visit was not possible. Therefore, observations could not be used as a data-gathering technique for these care farms. An overview of the interviews and observations per case is given in Table 1.

Table 1: *Interviews and observations per case.*

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7
Interviewed teachers?	Yes, 1	Yes, 1	Yes, 1	Yes, 2	Yes, 1	Yes, 2	No
Interviewed care farmers?	No	No	Yes, 1	No	No	Yes, 1	Yes, 1
Interviewed children?	No	Yes, 2	No	Yes, 1	Yes, 2	Yes, 1	No
Interviewed parents?	No	Yes, 1	No	Yes, 1	Yes, 1	No	No
Observations?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

In total eight teachers have been interviewed for this research, including one teacher who was also the care farmer of the farm. Additionally, three care farmers and three parents were interviewed. Lastly, six children were interviewed for this research, including one child that was over 18 (see Table 2 for an overview). This girl was included in this research because none of the parents from that care farm filled in the consent form and otherwise no data could be gathered from the perspective of the children at that specific care farm. At four other included care farms it was not possible to interview children because either parents did not give permission, or the employees of the care farm thought it would be too stressful for the children. Interviews lasted from 10 to 40 minutes. The interviews with the children lasted around 10 minutes, while the interviews with the adults lasted on average 30 minutes.

Table 2: *List of interviewees*

Interview	Case	Participant	Information	Location
1	1	Teacher	Female, certified	At home, videocall
2	2	Teacher	Female, certified	Care farm
3	2	Child 1	Female, 12 years old	Care farm
4	2	Child 2	Female, 16 years old	Care farm
5	2	Parent	Mother of a non-included child	Care farm
6	3	Teacher	Female, certified	Care farm
7	3	Care farmer	Male	At home, videocall
8	4	Two teachers	Females, certified One teacher was also the care farmer	Care farm
9	4	Child 1	Male, 9 years old	Care farm
10	4	Parent	Father of child 1	At home, videocall
11	5	Teacher	Female, certified	Care farm
12	5	Child 1	Male, 9 years old	Care farm
13	5	Child 2	Male, 10 years old	Care farm

14	5	Parent	Mother of child 1	Care farm
15	6	Two teachers	Male and female, certified	Care farm
16	6	Child	Female, 19 years old	Care farm
17	6	Care farmer	Male	Care farm
18	7	Care farmer	Female, also a certified teacher	At home, videocall

4.3 Data collection

In this research, methodological triangulation has been used. Methodological triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods to study the same phenomenon (Denzin, 2017). This research has used interviews as well as observations to investigate how education at care farms is characterized and experienced.

4.3.1 Interviews

A semi-structured interview guide was made to investigate what education at care farms entails and what concrete learning experiences are. An interview format was made beforehand similar to the interview questions of the other research within the project of the Science Shop (Plug, 2020). For each stakeholder group a specific guide was made (see an example in Appendix 1). Questions were for example about the personal situation of the children (e.g. why they are on the farm) and the personal reflection of the education that the children receive (e.g. what they like about the farm, how the farm influences the children). For the interviews with the children, special attention was paid to make a child feel comfortable. Therefore, two interviews were conducted while walking around on the care farm.

Interviews were conducted at the care farms or via skype or facetime. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interview (special arrangements have been made for the interviews with the children, see *ethical considerations*). Not all interviews were recorded, because it was either impossible to record it, or the participant preferred only taking notes. For these interviews, the written notes of the researcher were used. The other interviews were transcribed by the researcher. For all interviews, the personal information of the participants was made anonymous.

4.3.2 Observations

In addition to the interviews, open observations have been conducted. A regular day (or in some cases multiple days) at the care farm was observed. To do so, the observers as participant technique was used. With this technique a private setting can be studied, whereby the researcher can interact with the persons under study and become part of their community (Driscoll, 2011). This technique was used because it could be too stressful for the children if the researcher would observe them from the sidelines and not engage with them. Therefore, the observer was involved in several activities.

At the end of the day fieldnotes were made. The structure of the day and the activities related to education were written down together with things that stood out. At four care farms, the observer was only present one or two days, so the main focus was on the interviews. At one care farm, the observer stayed four days and therefore broader observations could be made. For this care farm, activities have been described in more detail.

4.4 Data analysis

An inductive content analysis was chosen as the data analysis method of this research. This technique is often used when there is not enough former knowledge about a phenomenon (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Since it was not known how children experience education at care farms, this was the most appropriate

technique for this research. With an inductive approach, data can be moved from the specific (in this case, the different cases), to the general (all education at care farms) (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

The first step of the coding was to make an overview of the data and to select relevant units for analysis by reading through the material. Units were selected based on their relevance for the research questions of this research. Thereafter, the selected units were openly coded, whereby different themes and categories were made. The first few interviews were completely coded inductively. For the interviews that followed the previously used themes were used to label similarities. Additionally, new themes were added to the list if perceived relevant. Some concepts appeared more often than others (for example, animals and a tailored approach) and were therefore used to structure the results. Transcripts were reread and coded several times. Also, a supervisor of the researcher openly coded an interview. This supervisor found similar themes as the researcher. Observations were coded using the themes of the interviews. This way it was investigated whether the same aspects were found in the observations as in the interviews. Saturation in the coding was reached when no new relevant themes could be found in the data.

During the coding similar themes were found in the interviews with the different stakeholders. No significant differences in how stakeholders experience education at care farms were found. Therefore, the perspectives of the different stakeholders have been taken together to give an overview of how stakeholders experience education at care farms. The fieldnotes of the observations were compared with the interviews. Therefore, in the result section, the observations have been used to further clarify several characteristics of education at care farms and to support the experiences of the stakeholders.

4.5 Ethical considerations

The children that participated in this research are from a vulnerable group. Therefore, special arrangements have been made for the interviews with this group. Ethical consent has been obtained for this research before the data collection started (see Appendix 2). Informed consent was acquired verbally with children, instead of on a written paper. This way, it could be explained to children in words what they could expect, and they could ask any questions they wanted. Additionally, written permission was acquired from a parent or caregiver of the child. Before the interview, the researcher got acquainted with the children by playing and talking with the children to increase trust. Also, children could take a break from the interview any time they want. However, the interviews did not take that long, so this was not necessary. The interviews with the children that took place during a tour on the farm did include breaks because also other topics not related to the interviews were discussed.

5. Results

All care farms have their own approach for taking in and caring for children who have dropped out of school. In Appendix 3 an overview of the main aspects of the care farms is given, which shows some similarities between the care farms, as well as some tremendous differences. This result section will distinguish the similarities and differences of the care farms, however not per specific case. First, the care farms are shortly introduced. Thereafter, the different sub-questions are handled. Starting with the question 'what does education at care farms entail?', whereby the main aspects of education at care farms are discussed. Secondly, the question 'How do children experience learning at care farms?' is discussed, whereby children's and other stakeholders' experiences about the approach of education are discussed. After that, the question 'How do children experience being at care farms?' is handled. Hereby, the physical aspects of the care farms, as well as the ambience at the care farms are being discussed. Lastly, the question 'How do children experience their progress at care farms?' is handled, whereby the experienced progress that children make is being discussed from the perspectives of all stakeholders.

5.1 Introduction of the care farms

In the following parts, the care farms will shortly be introduced. More information about the children that go to the care farms is given as well as the vision/ aim of the care farms for the children.

The children

Care farms take in children of all ages, so from 4 till 18. However, children are not sent away when they turn 18, so some of them stay longer at the farm. Some care farms take in children from all these ages, while others only take in children from primary schools or from secondary schools. Children went to all kind of schools prior to their time at the farm, but mostly the children attended special needs education. Most children have spent some time at home prior to their time at the farm. The backgrounds of the children differ. Though many children have a diagnosis (like ADHD or autism), or they have a form of dyslexia, or they have attachment issues, or they suffer from trauma. Both children with a high IQ and with a low IQ go to the care farms. Most children have a reasonable intelligence. However, for some reason they have fallen out of regular education.

The reasons why children go to the care farms are diverse. Some children experience a lot of irritations at school, because groups are too big, or they get bullied at school. Also, children can experience a lot of pressure at school, which can make them anxious. Furthermore, children can have concentration issues related to the group size and the number of stimuli in the classrooms. Some children have anger issues and are not able to control their anger in school. Many children also feel very stressed at school, which makes that they could perform less in class. Some children that go the care farms also experience a lot of problems at home. For example, when parents go through a divorce, children can experience a lot of stress.

The number of children present at the care farms differs per farm. While most care farms have less than a handful of children per day on the farm, some farms offer education to 10 or more children. At one care farm, there are per day around 40 children present at the farm, however less than half of them follow education at the care farm. At another care farm, only one child follows education at the farm regularly.

Vision/ aim

At all care farms, education comes in second, right after the well-being of the children. The goal of education at care farm is, in first instance, to make children feel comfortable and at ease again. Their

second goal is to help children return to regular school settings, if possible. Therefore, they try to give the children enough baggage for the future.

“I think education is a bit secondary there. And certainly if you look at T. He’s not there to really learn, so to speak. And the element of becoming at ease is more important at the moment than the element education that he follows. So yes, it is all a bit minimal. But that is what he needs right now” (Male parent case 4, 2019)[†]

5.2 Characteristic of education

In the following paragraphs, it is discussed how education is shaped at the care farms. First, the planning, structure and approach for education are discussed. Thereafter it is discussed how children learn and are being taught at the care farms.

Education time

At two care farms education is provided all day long when the children are on the farm. All the activities the children are involved in are related to education, except for the standard break times wherein the children can eat and play. At two other care farms, education is given every day however, not all day long. These children are 1,5-2 hours per day involved in educational activities and the other time they work on other activities. At the three other care farms, the children do not receive education each day they are on the farm. The education time is spread over the week, and on the days that they are not receiving education, they are involved in other activities or farm chores.

Structure

For each day on the farm, there is a clear program. At the beginning of the day, the children hear or see on a schedule, what they will be doing on that day. One boy mentioned the whole day planning by heart during the interview. This indicates that there is a clear structure for the children. However, at all care farms, it is possible to deviate from the planning. During the visits at the care farm, teachers and supervisors deviated from the planning several times. This was mostly done in consultation with the children. For example, it was observed that a boy was struggling to name the provinces and capitals of the Netherlands. Therefore, the teacher decided that the boy could work on his self-crafted house. A similar situation was observed in another case. A boy who had a bad start was allowed to tinker a horse, instead of working on his schoolwork. When he felt like working again, he started working on his school tasks.

Freedom/ choice

At several care farms, children are involved in the planning of the day and in which activities they want to do. This was also observed at the care farms. At one care farm, the planning for the next educational session was made by a boy at the end of the day. At another care farm, children had the choice to work individually on a school task or to do it classical. Also, they could choose where they wanted to work on their tasks: at the table, or for example on a bean bag. Also, teachers asked children on which school tasks they wanted to work that day and in which order. Children are also involved in the topics and the fulfilment of projects on the farm. Children can choose their own topics, which can be anything, for example, things they have found on the farm. This way, the education at the care farms is focused as much as possible on the children’s interests.

“The most important thing is that they can choose it themselves. What subject do they want, how will they present it? Are they going to make a PowerPoint or a poster? So, it gives them

[†] An overview of the quotes in Dutch is given in Appendix 4.

some control over what they are doing. And it gives them a lot of success experiences because you can jump in on the things that they are already good at” (Female teacher case 1, 2020)².

Personal/ tailored education

Even though the farms differ in the number of children that are present on the farm, education is never given to a large number of children at once. At some care farms education is given one-to-one. When one child receives one-to-one education, the other children are with supervisors doing other activities at the farm. In addition to one-to-one education, education can be given in groups. Some care farms do not provide one-to-one education. However, they do help the children individually while others are working on their tasks. On these farms, one teacher gives education to three or four children at once. At the care farms, teachers can focus their attention on just one, or sometimes a few, child(ren). This small number of children ensures that they can use a tailored approach for each child.

Teaching techniques

The personal tailored approach gives teachers the opportunity to understand the child and his or her needs more. The researcher observed that all teachers take the time to make the children feel comfortable and to educate the children. For example, one boy started to cry because he answered a sum incorrectly. The teacher started to comfort him and told him that he did take all the right steps but only made one small mistake at the end.

When a regular approach is not working for a child, teachers can try out several other things. When children are struggling with a task, teachers can either personally guide them or they can change the task into an exercise wherein the child is already good at. For example, it has been observed that a boy was struggling with a certain exercise and therefore the teacher made him do an exercise that was less difficult afterwards. This way, the focus was removed from the exercise that was a bit more difficult for the child. Another boy, who is continuously supervised by his teacher, immediately hears if he is doing something right or wrong so that he knows that he is making progress. This boy also had difficulties with reading. Therefore, the teacher used mathematic exercises, whereby he first had to read an entire story to answer the sum.

“However, at the beginning reading was not possible at all, because there was a lot of fear and a frustration threshold because of his inability to do it. And then he was not willing to read. So then, for example, I did a mathematic exercise following a story. And then he was forced to read the story, otherwise he would not be able to know what to do. So, in that way” (Female teacher case 3, 2020)³.

Responding to the needs of the children

Teachers can take into account all the different needs of the children. This can especially be beneficial for children with additional needs. At one care farm, the teacher educates a child while the child is standing or walks back and forth. This girl has ADHD and is unable to sit still for a long time. Also, at the care farms children can work at their own pace. For example, at one care farm, a boy is working on mathematics at the level of group 5/6, while he works at the level of group 8 on traffic lessons. The teachers check at which level the child is at the moment, instead of at which level he or she should be. For instance, at another care farm, the teachers discovered that a child could not handle the materials from his previous group. Therefore, the teachers took a step back at now educate him at a lower group level.

“Yes, the eldest student came her in group seven, but he was already not going to school at that time. So, he actually didn’t do group seven. And we did continue with that material. And then we discovered that is was too difficult for him. So now we are back to group six. He makes all the tests from group six. And when he is struggling with something, he receives an explanation about that. And so on we continue” (Female teacher case 4, 2019)⁴.

Children are supported to create their own learning experiences. For example, it was observed that a girl wanted to plant an avocado seed after she cut the avocado for a salad. Together with a supervisor, she searched on the internet how that should be done. Teachers and supervisors try to respond to the interests of the children. So, if a child is really interested in a certain topic, they will build a lesson around this topic. This way, children are being challenged to learn things again, because it involves a topic that they like.

“We also have a teaching assistant, and she is so good at this. We get a new child from primary school, and then she always looks where he or she is interested in. And then she goes to the library and gets books on that topic and starts reading these books with them. For example, there was a boy who wanted to know everything about the forest and then she got those books. Those kinds of things. We are always busy with education” (Female care farmer case 7, 2020)⁵.

Furthermore, when a child is not able to return to school and therefore not able to acquire a certain start certificate, they try to see if the child can get another diploma. They help children to discover their interests and then help them to acquire a diploma within that field.

“We have another girl who will go to a lunchroom one day a week. She will start this week to see if she can get diplomas there. We are, of course, not a restaurant or something. We do prepare many things, but there she can really work in a lunchroom. The lady who runs it is specialized in that” (Female care farmer case 7, 2020)⁶.

“And that farm employee is another example. He once was a participant here. But now he has a paid job with us, you know. I think it is so beautiful that another boy of fourteen now says I want to be him” (Female care farmer case 7, 2020)⁷.

Learning outdoors

At the care farms, teachers also use the farm setting to teach the children. Outside the standard teaching hours, most care farms use the farm environment to teach children things without them knowing that they are learning.

“And when you look at the food bags of the animals and you see that the soy is coming from somewhere in Latin America, then you look where Latin America is located. This way you also make connections between learning and the reality” (Male care farmer case 3, 2020)⁹.

“Well, you walk past a pig shed, and you ask how many pigs are there right now? And what if tomorrow that many go to a slaughterhouse, how many are there left? This way, we are always busy with education” (Female care farmer case 7, 2020)¹⁰.

Some care farms have a standard educational program outside for the children. Hereby, lessons are taught in an outside box for horses whereby the horses are used to learn. Other care farms use the outdoor farm setting when a child is struggling to learn (inside). Lessons can be moved outside, whereby children can learn in a more playful manner. Children also learn things outside by doing and by playing. For example, at one care farm children dug up bones in their break, and the lessons that followed discussed their findings.

“And we handled bones once. They had dug up bones. So, also a bit what comes out of them. And M once made a mind map about the sheep. What they were eating and also, he made a graph about the births of the lambs. Which colour they were, and their sex” (Female teachers case 4, 2019)⁸.

Learning with animals

Animals are used at the care farms for educational purposes, but also to teach the children other skills. For example, one girl had difficulties with braiding her hair or doing anything with her hair. So, she could practice at the care farms with the horses. They started with making tails in the horses’ manes and thereafter started practising braiding the manes. This way the child could practice with braiding the manes of the horses, for her to do it independently with her hair later.

“For example, there is a girl here who struggles with braiding her hair on her own or doing whatever with her hair. So, we said, let’s start braiding horses on the care farm. She is completely horse minded. So, we started making ponytails with rubber bands. And slowly we try to make braids” (Female teacher case 1, 2020)¹¹.

For educational purposes, several animals at the care farms are being used. Children can learn anything they want on the back of the horses. For example, one child has studied for all her exams on the back of a horse. Another child was taught to tell time by using the horses and the outside box as references. Additionally, horses are used to calculate.

“Yes, learning the tables with the horse, whereby I had to search for the correct numbers. I had to guide the horse to the correct number. It was a lot of fun to learn the tables like this” (Boy 9 y/o case 4, 2019)¹².

Dogs are also used at the farms to teach the children. For example, projects can be done with the dogs. Children learned what a dog eats via the internet, and by observing the dog while he or she ate. Additionally, children searched on the internet how one can best train a dog and they used this technique on the dogs. Projects are also done with or about other animals. For example, one boy was interested in frogs. The care farm was located near a pond, so they went frog catching and thereafter inspected the frog and searched for information about the frog online.

At the care farms, children also learn how to care for animals. For example, they learn how (much) to feed the animals and how to walk a dog. Also, when something is wrong with an animal, the children have to help. For example, at one care farm, a sheep was laying on its back and the children had to come into the meadow to see what was wrong with this sheep and help the sheep back on its feed. At this care farm, they also learned how they can train sheep. The children had to herd a group of sheep and move them from the meadow to the stables. The children received a herding certificate for this.

“They have obtained their sheep herding diploma. You know, these are just things that you can do. For example, someone else acquires his table diploma at school, a cognitive diploma so to speak, and they can do this” (Female teacher case 4, 2019)¹³.

Learning by doing

Some lessons at the care farms are designed to teach the children things by doing. For example, at one care farm, a child has learned mathematics skills by baking a pie. Also, by working on different projects children learn by doing. For example, one care farm created a project about flowers. The child had to search for different flowers in the neighbourhood. These flowers were thereafter sealed and put into a book and then the child had to search for information about these flowers online. Children can also

learn about flowers, fruits and vegetables in the greenhouses at the care farms. In summer times, these greenhouses are used to educate children about different crops, for example by growing crops with them. Furthermore, children are taught manual labour skills by doing. They can craft all kinds of things, for example, an insect's cabinet.

At regular school settings, children exercise during school gym hours. However, at the care farms, they do not have a gym teacher. At most care farms, they try to keep the children physically active during the activities that they do. For example, in the lessons with the horses in the outside box, children had to exercise a lot. Children had to run to plates to make a certain sum or multiplication. Or they had to do the same exercise, however then on the back of a horse. Another teacher has used a tandem to actively teach a child. While biking on this tandem together, the child had to read directions and do several assignments, mainly to help him read.

“Or, for instance, I would set out a route, and then we would cycle this on the tandem. And then he had to read where we had to go to and do several assignments along the way” (Female teacher care farm 3, 2020)¹⁴.

Reflection

At most care farms, teachers or supervisors evaluate the day with the children. Hereby, attention is paid to what they have learned that day or in the past week and what went well and what went less well. Also, after a activity teachers and supervisors reflect with the children on how that particular activity went. Furthermore, (learning) goals are made per child and evaluated timely. Part of this, are the skills children need to possess to go back to school. Some children can receive a sort of diploma for things they do well. For example, when they sit still during a lesson, they receive points for this.

“I also ask questions. Like, when you go back to school, what are you already good at and what do you still have to work on, what can you do less well. So, then we make a sort of report for school skills. Can you sit still, can you learn well, can you make new friends, things like that” (Female teacher case 1, 2020)¹⁵.

When children misbehave, they reflect on this behaviour with them. Questions as ‘What happened?’ ‘What did you do, and what did someone else do?’ are used to reflect on the situation.

The included parents also talk with their child about their day. They do not specifically reflect with them on their day, but they do ask them how their day went and what they have done that day.

5.3 Experiences of education

In the following paragraphs, it is described how the stakeholders experience several aspects of the education children receive at the care farms that are described in the above paragraphs.

Freedom/ choice

Children appreciate the approach of the farm, whereby they have a lot of freedom and can make several choices themselves. At schools, everything is arranged on time and things that should be finished in that time, while at the care farms, most of the time, children can decide themselves when they work on their tasks. However, one teacher mentioned that it can be difficult for children when there are changes in the schedule or group.

“At school, everything is boring and neat, and you have to behave and be on time. And here it is just very loosely, but you do have to listen. It is all very clear” (Girl 12 y/o case 2, 2020)¹⁶.

“I like it. It is quieter than a normal school. There I had 30 other children in my class. Furthermore, at school everything is on time and agreements, here I can decide for myself” (Boy 9 y/o case 4, 2019)¹⁷.

Teaching

All teachers said that they like to teach at the care farms. One teacher mentioned that she likes to see the children flourish and become willing to learn again. Another teacher said she enjoys that she can really pay attention to the children and respond to their specific needs. She also likes that the pace of the education is much lower so that she can respond to those things the child still finds difficult. Another teacher mentioned that she likes to teach at the care farm, because of the effect it has on the children and she can see the progress they are making. Another teacher mentioned that he likes to teach at the care farm, because there is a lot of freedom to teach and because the necessity is high.

Tailored education

All teachers and care farmers highlight the importance of a tailored approach. According to one care farmer, it is important to not get into a rut of things that have to be done, but instead follow the child’s pace; what does this specific child need and what can he or she handle. Children appreciate the personal guidance they receive at the care farms. Children mentioned that learning is easier on the farm, because education is done step by step, the teachers listen to them and teachers try to solve problems with the children instead of for them. Additionally, one girl mentioned that she is happy that she can and is working on schoolwork again. A parent stated that her son does not see the things he does at the care farm as education, which she believes is a good thing.

Learning outdoors

Children like to learn outside at the care farms. Children stated that this way of learning is less dull, compared to regular school lessons. For some children, the tasks on the farm are very fitting for their learning style. For example, one boy who has dyslexia and dyscalculia typically learns by doing. He, therefore, gets to do extra activities on the farm and can make all kind of things with his hands, for example, a cage for a rabbit. This boy said that he does not want to go back to school because he is struggling at school due to his dyslexia and dyscalculia and at the care farm he has it good.

“I made a cage for the rabbits myself. That cage was actually made for the kittens, but then the rabbit became ill and therefore the cage belongs to the rabbit now” (Boy 10 y/o case 5, 2019)¹⁸.

5.4 Experiences of the farm setting

In the following paragraphs, it is discussed how children and other stakeholders like being at the care farms. First, it will be discussed, how they like the different aspects of the farms; e.g. the green environment, the animals and the farm chores. Thereafter, the atmosphere at the care farms is discussed.

Green environment

Teachers believe that the green environment is beneficial for the children because it helps the children to relax. Children spend a lot of time playing outside, as well as working outside on different chores. Children talked a lot about the possibilities the farm gives them to play. For example, they can dig in a ditch and there are a lot of places to hide when playing hide and seek. Also, children appreciate the space they have on the farm and they like to help with the different chores on the farm.

Animals

At some care farms, there are standard animals in the 'classroom'. This can be cats, dogs and or a rabbit. At other care farms animals (almost) never enter the classroom. However, animals can enter the classroom when a specific child needs it to relax. When children are not motivated or not willing to learn during a certain day, they can use the animals on the farm to get them back into a learning mood. For example, they can pet an animal and work with the animal on their lap. Also, the children regularly start the day by walking the farm (with the dogs) and during the day the dogs can also be walked.

Most children mentioned that they like the animals on the farm. They like to play with the animals and to care for them. However, not all children mentioned the animals as an important aspect of the care farm. One girl mentioned that she sees the animals, but she rarely engages with them. Teachers, care farmers and parents also mentioned the working effect of the animals on the children. It was also observed at all visited care farms that children spend a lot of time engaging with the animals.

"The animals and the surroundings are also nice. Sometimes we help with the animals: feeding and mucking out stables. I don't mind mucking out stables, because it makes the animals happy" (Boy 9 y/o case 4, 2019)¹⁹.

Farm chores

At a (care) farm a lot of things are being done. Animals need to be cared for, and several other farm chores must be executed. At all care farms, children are involved in these daily practices of the farm and help with the different chores at the farm. At the care farms where children do not receive education every day, or all day long, they spend more time working on farm chores. Children are offered to do relatively small tasks on the farm for which they are responsible. These tasks can be feeding the animals, mucking out the stables or brushing the horses. Since these tasks are relatively easy to do for the children, they can successfully execute these tasks. Children like to work on the chores, as mentioned in the example above in the Animals part. At most of the visited care farms, children also have other fixed chores. Children are supposed to help with lunch by setting up the table or clearing the table after lunch. Additionally, at some care farms children can help with the grocery shopping and cooking.

Secure place

At the care farms, special attention is paid to create a secure place. This secure place is a place where children can be themselves and a place where they can make mistakes. One teacher thinks that a safe place leads to a sense of security whereby children feel seen and heard. That children can be themselves at care farms is, according to two teachers, one of the most appreciated parts of education at care farms by the children. Additionally, several teachers and care farmers believe that a sense of security forms the basis of everything else, so all other learning.

"That is more or less my vision. If you are feeling tense, anxious, then you won't be able to learn. Then you will block. So, we first ensure peace. I think that they appreciate this and that they can be themselves and relax" (Female teacher case 1, 2020)²⁰.

Care farmers indicated that children are not being bullied at the care farms and one girl mentioned the same. The positive ambience at the care farms can take away a lot of stress in the children.

"Hmm, I think how we treat each other here. Of course, sometimes children fight with each other. However, I haven't been bullied since I got here. And I really appreciate that" (Girl 19 y/0 case 6, 2019)²¹.

A parent mentioned that the care farm is the place where her son is (finally) being heard. He has now learned that it is good to tell other people how he feels.

Even though care farmers think that the children are happy with the place they can have at the care farm, they also worry about the children not feeling like a normal child. Education at care farms is not very common and can, therefore, be seen as strange and get stigmatized. Also, one parent mentioned that he believes that his son likes to be at the care farm, however that deep down he prefers to be a regular boy.

“He is at a good place here, so he is okay with that. However, I think deep down he just wants to be a normal boy in a normal class, with normal classmates and just a normal school. However, he says that he is also okay with this” (Male parent case 4, 2019)²².

Also, one care farmer mentioned that a lot of parents see the care farm as a paradise. Their children are happy and learning things again, which for a lot of children was not possible for a long time. One parent believes it can only go better with her son from hereon, which is in line with the view of the care farmer.

Relationship

One teacher mentioned that without a good relationship, children will not do what you ask of them. Therefore, time is also spent on creating and improving the relationship between teachers, care farmers, supervisors and the children. Children were asked if they like their teachers and the care farmers. All children said that they like the teachers. One girl mentioned that one teacher stimulated her to work on schoolwork again. Not all children are in contact with the care farmer of the farm. However, the children like the care farmers and one girl even calls the care farmers her second mom and dad.

“I can just go to anyone, if necessary” (Girl 19 y/o case 6, 2019)²³.

“I always call this place my home and I always say that B and A are like a second father and mother to me” (Girl 19 y/o case 6, 2019)²⁴.

5.5 Experienced progress

At all care farms, education is not the most important thing they want the children to learn. The main focus is on making the child feel at ease and helping the child to start to like things again. When children feel good again, they can start learning things again. In the following paragraphs, the experienced progress that children make are discussed.

Being yourself

Teachers start the education of a child by getting to know them. Therefore, when children start at the care farms they can first get used to the new environment and learn to relax. This way, they try to increase children’s trust. Trust in others, but also trust in one’s self. When children trust others, it is easier to trust themselves and to be themselves. Attention is also paid to ensure that children do not feel bad about themselves and learn that they have a bright future ahead of them. Knowing that they can be themselves is an important learning goal for the children.

“Most importantly, they learn that they are just normal. That they are not crazy, or a loser, or whatever they have named themselves in their head. And that it teaches them that they do have a perspective for the future again and they will end up well” (Female teacher case 1, 2020)²⁵.

Well-being

It is also important for children who go to care farms that they can become at ease again and feel better in their skin. For this to happen, it is important that they can relax and do not feel too much pressure. This relaxation is stimulated by the green environment of the farm and the animals on the farm. The farm is a place where they can recover from things that happened at school or home. Also, the small number of children on the farm and the adjusted lesson times ensure that children experience less pressure.

Some of the teachers believe that the part of well-being is the most important aspect of the care farms for the children. Two parents mentioned that their sons are happier since they go to the care farm. Most children mentioned that they feel more relaxed and at ease at the care farm. One child mentioned that she now has less trouble getting out of bed. A parent mentioned the same for her son; he is ready to go to school, while in the past he always had a stomach-ache and delayed going to school. Also, everyone in the family sees improvements in the behaviour of her son; he is happier, and he can accept and give compliments. Another parent mentioned that her son has fewer compulsions because he is more relaxed. Children give as reasons for this change the environment, the animals and the fact that they can be themselves at the farm.

“And that is also the case with him, if I take him to the pony and he starts stroking the pony, you see that all the bad feelings disappear. And then you see a very gentle boy. That is very special” (Female teacher case 4, 2019)²⁶.

Confidence

For teachers at care farms, it is important that children start believing in themselves, get confident and are not afraid to try new things and make mistakes. Within the secure place at the care farms, children learn that it is okay to make mistakes. It is important that children know their capabilities, which skills they possess, and that they can show it. Children at the care farms may lack this confidence. For example, one boy was afraid to give an answer to a certain sum and therefore used a notepad to make sure that he would give the correct answer. To remind children about their capabilities, teachers can respond to the attitudes of the children like mentioned before in the Teaching techniques part. It is important that children often hear that they are doing things right since that can give them a lot of success experiences. This can be done by immediately telling if a child did something right or by letting the children work on an exercise that is easy for them after they have worked on a difficult exercise. When a child works on a task that is easy for him or her, the child can experience success again.

“You could see that this afternoon with B. He did one exercise with you, and he thought it was very complicated. Then you can just say at that moment, well we also do an exercise that he finds easy. And then he thinks: well I can do it” (Female teacher case 5, 2019)²⁷.

As discussed in the Learning by doing part, children have to work on tasks that they are already good at or like to work on. The successful execution of these tasks gives children concrete success experiences which can boost their confidence. Along the way, children have to work on more and more tasks and also on things they find hard. This experience wherein limits are exceeded help children to learn and to feel confident about their capabilities. Hereby, they must learn that they cannot always do everything right, and it is human to make mistakes.

“In the beginning he was afraid, he had the feeling that he couldn’t do anything. And that limit is being pushed more and more, so now I can also offer more and more new things. In the beginning, that was not possible, then I really had to be in his safe spot and then at a certain

point you won't come towards new things. However, now I can take steps in that direction. So, daring to make mistakes, and accepting that you don't have to know everything, that you can also do things wrong" (Female teacher case 3, 2020)²⁸.

The herding certificate children obtained at one care farm was also meant to improve their confidence. One child had to take on a leadership role and herd the sheep to another place. When the sheep ran another way, he had to discover what went wrong and solve that problem. When the sheep were successfully moved to another place, he could say that he had done that. This experience can give the child the feeling of success and confidence in the different skills that he possesses.

Eagerness to learn

All previous aspects (*Being yourself*, *Well-being* and *Confidence*) are requirements for children to become eager to learn again. Education at care farms is aimed at this: to remove any bad feelings children associate with school, for them to be willing to learn again.

Yes, if they feel better, they will learn more. That gives confidence that they can do something" (Female teacher case 5, 2019)²⁹.

To enjoy learning again. And to stand open to learn things again. And especially to dare to follow their own interests (Female teacher case 2, 2020)³⁰.

All aspects that stand in the way of learning are removed before teachers start with the actual education. Therefore, education comes in second at the care farms. When children are eager to learn they are happy to go to the farm and to work on school again. Children are then motivated to learn things. Two parents mentioned that their sons are more eager to learn, because they are more relaxed and feel better in their skin.

By letting the children practice over and over again with things they cannot do well yet, they slowly start to get more confident about their abilities and therefore get motivated to do it even better.

"Like with our youngest, he came to the farm and he said I can't read, I can't do math. And he really couldn't do it. And then we practised, practised, practised, and suddenly he realised that he can read. And then he started reading the texts on packs of sprinkles, and he really reads all kind of stuff. And, you know, then the confidence is there. Then the motivation is there, and you can take steps in the right direction" (Female teacher case 4, 2019)³¹.

Teachers also increase children's eagerness to learn by responding to their interests. As with the example whereby the teachers started lessons about the bones the children had dug up (see *Learning outdoors*).

Prosocial skills

At the care farms, the children do not have a lot of 'classmates'. According to one parent, it is, therefore, harder for the children to make friends. However, it is a learning goal for the children to collaborate with other children. When education is one-to-one, children do not learn how to work with others. Therefore, a balance must be made between one-to-one, tailored education and education in a small group.

"For example, this morning we went outside with a small group of children. Then you cannot respond to everyone's specific educational needs. But I think the fact that they are learning in a group again, is a very big learning goal. So yes, if you really want everyone to have tailored

education, you should work one-to-one all day. I do not think that has an added value” (Female teacher case 2,2020)³².

Even though children are mostly guided individually, they do spend a lot of time with others on the farm. The children have to learn how to play together and also do several activities together, for example cooking and grocery shopping. Also, at some care farms, there are daycare programs for adults or youngsters. Children are regularly in contact with these people. Contact with these (adult) persons creates a different kind of harmony at the farm. These contacts with grown-ups can also improve the contact children have with peers.

“Yes, the great thing is that these children are supervised individually, but they do come in contact on the farm. You see that they make contact. We also have a fourteen-year-old girl who really had no contact with peers at all but did have contact with us adults. And now you see that she also connects with children of her own age” (Care farmer case 7, 2020)³³.

Being together at the farms is not always going very well. Sometimes, children suffer from each other’s behaviour. One child does not feel well anymore since a new boy arrived at the farm. The researcher observed tension between these two and saw how they struggled to cope with each other’s behaviour. Two other boys also mentioned that sometimes they get annoyed by their peers at the farm. However, one of these boys said that contact with peers did improve since he goes to the farm. At his previous school, he was always mad or in a fight with a classmate, and at the care farm, he feels less mad. All the interviewed girls said that they enjoy working with other children at the farm. One of them also mentioned that she finds it slightly easier to make contact with children at the care farm compared to at school.

Independency

Another learning goal of education at care farms is to increase the independence of the children. Children have to do several chores like cleaning and grocery shopping to learn how to be self-reliant. One girl mentioned that since she goes to the care farm, she has made a lot of progress in her independency. She can indicate her limits and stand up for herself and is more socially skilled. Additionally, she takes public transport nowadays:

“Well, I took a few steps forward with school. However, also in my independence. I never wanted to use public transport and now I come by public transport every day. I am much more independent, and I can better stand up for myself. I can also better indicate my boundaries to people if they do something I don’t like or things like that” (Girl 19 years old case 6, 2019)³⁴.

Especially for children who will not be going back to school, extra attention is paid to make them more self-reliant. As mentioned in the Responding to the needs of the children part, this could be to see which other diploma’s they can achieve, and which qualities and skills they need for a certain career.

Reintegration

The progress of the children is discussed with several stakeholders and also with the children themselves. Also, a potential re-integration is discussed with the children. However, this is only done when they believe a child is able (or getting there) to return to school. Therefore, three children mentioned that they have not talked about a possible return to school with their teachers or supervisors. One girl did mention that she discusses her steps for the future with her teachers and supervisors. In her case, this means not returning to high school. In total 4 out of the 6 children said that they do not want to go back to school. However, a father of one of these children believes that

his son said this, because of his trauma's with school and that deep down he does want to go back to school. One girl said she hopes to return to school to obtain a diploma.

Teachers, care farmers and a parent mentioned that not all children can and will return to school. For example, when professionals believe that a child is not able to function at school, they will search for another solution. Also, some children are not returning to regular school settings, because there is no place for them in special needs education.

6. Discussion

This study describes how education at care farms is characterized and experienced by children and other stakeholders. As only seven care farms have been included in this research, the results of the study might not be generalizable to all care farms that offer education to children in the Netherlands. However, it has become clear how education at care farms can be shaped and what this form of education can mean for children who have dropped out of school. The care farms of this research all use their own approach to educate and care for the children. Some care farms take in many children, while others will not take in more than five. Also, some care farms offer education to children every day, while others offer education a few hours per day or week. This research does not show significant differences in the characteristics and experiences of the stakeholders between these different approaches of the care farms. Therefore, it cannot be said that one particular approach is more beneficial than the other. However, it can be said that care farms, in general, contribute to the well-being of children and help children to become interested in educational activities again. The experienced progress children make at the care farms could help children to make the transfer back to school.

While this research mostly shows positive aspects of education at care farms, it must be noted that there are also some barriers. Previous research on this topic shows some barriers that are experienced in giving education at care farms (Roelofs et al., 2019). One of these barriers is the image that people generally have about (care) farms. A typical view of care farms is that it is a place where you can cuddle small animals and it is not a place to learn (Roelofs et al., 2019). In the current research, this issue has also been brought forward by some stakeholders. It results in stakeholders being afraid that children do not feel 'normal' at the care farms, because of the stigma care farms arouse. Additionally, it is feared that, because of this image, the initiative is not being taken seriously as a temporary solution for education for children who have dropped out of school (Roelofs et al., 2019). However, care farms are a very varied place to learn. Different working spheres can be found at the care farms (e.g. horticulture, animal husbandry, wood workshop and services in the kitchen), which gives children a lot of opportunities to learn practically. So, the image of 'a place to cuddle animals', does not justify the load of care farms. The last issue that has been brought forward in this research is that at care farms children do not have many 'classmates'. Consequently, it can be harder for children to make friends. However, the natural setting of the care farms does encourage more social interactions between the children (van der Berg et al., 2007), which could counterbalance this negative aspect.

Scientific implications

The findings of this research are consistent with previous research on farm education, youngster projects at farms and different initiatives for outdoor learning. First of all, children can learn in an authentic environment at the care farms. Previous research shows that this authentic environment gives the opportunity to provide meaningful and realistic education (see for example Smeds, Jeronen, Kurppa & Vierankivi, 2011). The practical tasks children can execute at the care farms are linked to their development and aimed to help the children to rediscover their interest to learn things. The execution of farm chores has proven to be meaningful for farm education (see for example Smeds et al., 2011) and for youngster projects at farms (Schreuder et al., 2014) and for this research as well. Also, this research shows that caring for and interacting with animals are important aspects of the care farms for the children. This is in line with previous research that also indicates that children like to interact with the animals at the farm (Schreuder, 2014; van Ferwerda et al., 2012). However, this research has also shown that the animals are not important for all children. So, it is person dependent if animals contribute to the progress of children. The environment and the clear program of the care farms provide children with a predictable and safe environment, in which they have the freedom to

withdraw from the planning. Previous research shows that this gives children peace (van Ferwerda et al., 2012), and in the current research, this is also appreciated by the children. Outdoor learning practices have shown to be effective to increase children's self-esteem, confidence, independence and their sense of responsibility (see Berger, 2008; Christie et al., 2016; Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019; Smith et al., 2018; White, 2007). Stakeholders of the current research also experience that children make progress in these aspects. Children are starting to become more confident because they can work on tasks that they are interested in. Also, children are partly responsible for the planning and activities they are involved in at the care farms, which can enhance their independence. Appreciated aspects of outdoor learning initiatives are that children can be their child-like self and learn in a fun way (Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019). This is in line with the results of the current research. Children indicated that they find learning less dull at the care farms, compared to education at regular schools. Also, attention is paid to create a secure place at the care farms where children feel that they can be themselves.

Since this initiative is created for children who have dropped out of school, it is interesting to see if the different risk and protective factor for school absenteeism can be identified at the care farms. A risk factor for school absenteeism can be an inattention to the diversity issues of children, while protective factors of school absenteeism include that instructions and teaching match with children's needs and with their view of the world (de Baat & Foolen, 2012). The personal approach they use at the care farms can be seen as a protective factor for school absenteeism. Education is tailored to children's needs, to their interests, and also children's specific issues are taken into account. Improved school performances and that children have faith in themselves are also protective factors of school absenteeism (de Baat & Foolen, 2012). At the care farms, it is important that children experience success again. Therefore, children can work on tasks that they like, and they are good at, for them to feel success again. This can give children the feeling that they can do things and might increase their confidence (to take on more learning tasks) which can increase their school performances. A protective factor for school absenteeism is a good relationship between children and their teachers (de Baat & Foolen, 2012). At the care farms, attention is paid to create a secure place for the children and to improve the relationship between the children and the professionals. When children do not feel connected to their school, the chance of school absenteeism increases (Kearney, 2008). In the current research, children seem to feel connected to the care farms they go to since they indicated that they liked to be at the care farms.

Theoretical implications

The goal of this research was to get a general view of how education is characterised and experienced by children. In the following paragraph, results are reviewed in the light of experiential learning. How the different aspects of experiential learning introduced by Ruikes (1994) play a role in the experiences of children were not in the scope of this research. However, with the current results some comments can be made on these different aspects.

According to Ruikes (1994), children have to be in a *specific situation* that is completely different from their regular situation, so that the children cannot fall back into their old habits. Natural settings can help children to distance themselves from the routines and activities that overstimulated them in school (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). According to the stakeholders, the green environment of the care farms is one of the aspects that help children relax and become at ease. According to Ruikes (1994) *concrete experiences* should be authentic experiences that children can experience on their own. At the care farms, children can be involved in many authentic experiences. For example, the different chores they have to do at the farms give children life experiences whereby they can work with real animals. Additionally, lessons can be designed to let children learn via experiences. For example,

children have learned mathematic skills by baking a pie. Weighing the different amount for the pie allows children to learn in a more visible way. Another important aspect of experiential learning is that children *reflect* on their experiences (Ruikes, 1994). At all care farms, reflections form an important factor in their approach. The above-mentioned aspects should trigger *learning processes* whereby children develop skills in cognitive, social, emotional and communication areas (Ruikes, 1994). Stakeholders experience that children make progress in all these areas. For example, children are more confident, can interact better with other children and learn to be more independent. According to Ruikes (1994), it is also important that children are able to make their own decisions. The *autonomy* of the children is addressed at the care farms by giving the children a lot of freedom in their schedules and the activities they do. Lastly, it is important that children have a *clear perspective for the future*. This is the main goal of the care farms; e.g. to give children enough baggage for the future. For children to believe that they can have a valuable function in the future, it is important that they are independent and believe in themselves (Ruikes, 1994). All stakeholders experience that children make a lot of progress in their independence and self-confidence, which could influence their perspective for the future.

Limitations & strengths

In terms of the quality of this research, several notes can be made. First, it was difficult to find care farms that wanted to participate in this research. Multiple cases have been approached, however, some of them did not want to participate in this research, because they feared it would be too burdensome for the children. In future research, this could possibly be prevented by including a researcher who has a pedagogic background and has experience with children with additional needs. This way, care farmers might feel more confident letting their children participate in the study. The care farms that have been included in this research, could be those care farms that are generally doing well. Stakeholders from these care farms could be more satisfied and positive about the care farms, which could have made the results too positive compared to the reality. Secondly, selection bias can be found in the children that have been included in this research. Children were asked to participate in this research by the care farmers or teachers of the included care farms. Some care farmers and teachers asked all parents to grant permission for their children to participate in this research. However, at most care farms only a few responded. Other care farmers or teachers chose those children that they believed would participate in the research and for whom it would not be too burdensome. Consequently, it could be that the children that have been included in this research are the children who are generally doing well at the farms and have a more positive view on the care farms, compared to children that have not been included in this research. Therefore, for future research it could be interesting to also include those children that are not doing (or did not do) so well at the care farms. Lastly, data has been gathered in one, two or four days at the care farms. Therefore, the results might show a snapchat of what is happening at the farms. It could be that the researchers observed a specifically good or bad day at the farm, which does not hold justice for how things normally go. However, in the interviews participants were asked to give their general opinion about education at care farms, which includes the good and the bad. Since the interviews formed the basis of this research, this limitation probably had a small impact on the results.

A strength of this research is the number of cases that have been included in this research. In total, data is gathered from seven care farms, which gives an elaborated view of how education is shaped at the care farms. Additionally, data triangulation has been used for the participants. Data is gathered from different stakeholders which make the outcomes of this research more elaborated. Additionally, the results were quite similar for the different stakeholders. When results are similar, the internal validity of a research increases (Denzin, 2017). However, some professionals that are also present at

the care farms have not been included in this research. Children also spend a lot of time with these supervisors, so their perspective could have further elaborated the outcomes. Another strength of this research is that methodological triangulation has been used. Data has been collected through interviews and observations. The observations were compared with the results from the interviews and showed similar results. This increases the internal validity of this research because similar conclusions establish the validity of a research (Denzin, 2017). Additionally, for all the interviews the same interview format has been used per stakeholder, which also increased the internal validity of the research.

Practical implications

The findings of this research generate several practical implications. On the short-term, care farms can be expensive for municipalities since at the care farms there are fewer children per professional compared to regular schools. However, it can help children to become at ease and to become eager to learn again. The results show that for most children the transition towards regular schools is feasible after some time. Back at school, children can get a diploma and thereafter start working. So, even though education at care farms can be expensive in the short term, in the long term it could save money when children find a suitable place in society. Therefore, municipalities should consider letting care farms take in more children who have dropped out of school, to help children get back on their feet. Additionally, schools could cooperate with care farms to prevent children from dropping out of school in the first place. At the care farms, there are relatively more protective factors of school absenteeism compared to risk factors. The tailored and personal approach they use at the care farms could increase children's confidence and motivation to learn (de Baat & Foolen, 2012). When children who are having a hard time on school temporarily go to a care farm to follow education, it could be prevented that they drop out of school. However, for some children, it is not desirable to go back to school at all. One of the main functions of education is that children are trained towards a good position in the labour market (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2019). Care farms could take on this role for children who are unable to go back to school. These children should be supported in discovering their interest and talents at the care farms, which can help them to find a fitting place on the labour market.

Future research

The current research focused on the characteristics of education at care farms and on how this is experienced by different stakeholders. To strengthen the evidence that education at care farms can be beneficial for children, further research could focus on the outcomes of education at care farms. Extra research could help to ensure that municipalities and different school organisations want to collaborate with care farms. In this research, several aspects have already been identified wherein stakeholders experience that children made progress. However, the specific outcomes for children have not been thoroughly investigated. For example, this research has not focused on the school performances of children. Previous research on outdoor learning practices shows that learning in an outdoor setting can increase children's school performances (Ballantyne & Packer, 2009). It could, therefore, be interesting for future research to follow children their entire trajectory at the care farms. This research shows that experiential learning can be a suitable theory to better understand education at care farms. The care farms offer many possibilities to learn via authentic experiences. Additionally, this research shows that several protective factors for school absenteeism can be seen at the care farm. Future research could use the aspects of experiential learning introduced by Ruikes (1994) and the protective factors for school absenteeism to examine how children develop over time. In this longitudinal research, it can be measured at several points in time how children perform on certain tasks. With a pre-test and post-test, it can be measured how children's performances change over

time. However, this research has shown that one of the strengths of education of care farms is that the focus is not specifically on education. Therefore, it should also be measured how several cognitive, social, and emotional factors change over time and how these factors could help children in their return to regular school settings.

Additionally, it could be interesting to explore if education at care farms could be used to prevent children from dropping out of school in the first place. As mentioned in the *Practical implications* part, this study shows that several protective factors of school absenteeism are visible at the care farms. So, care farms could be used as a time-out place for children who are at risk of falling out at school. It should, therefore, be investigated which factors predict an early dropout of children out of school, to intervene at the right time. In this way, it can be prevented that children end up at home and fall behind on school. The sooner measurements are taken, the smaller the consequences have to be for the children.

7. Conclusion

This research has investigated how education at care farms is characterised and experienced. There are several aspects of the care farms that make them different. These aspects are (1) that *education comes in second*, (2) that they have a clear, but loose *structure*, (3) that a *tailored approach* is used per child (4) that children can be involved in more *meaningful and realistic learning opportunities*, and lastly (5) that they offer a *secure place* for the children.

The main goal of the care farms is to make children feel comfortable and at ease again. Therefore, *education comes in second* at the care farms, right after the well-being of the children. There is a clear *structure* at the care farms, however, when children do not feel well there is room to deviate from the planning. The most important characteristic of the education care farms offer is that they use a *tailored approach* per child. Education is given one-to-one (or in some cases one-to-three or one-to-four), whereby the children receive a lot of personal attention and guidance. Hereby, the interests of the children are taken into account and therefore the children receive education that suits them. Children learn with animals and by doing, for example by executing (farm) chores, by hammering or by learning in motion.

All stakeholders value the tailored approach they can use or receive at the care farm. Children like the personal attention they receive, and they think learning is easier at the farms. Children like to learn outside or with animals, which makes *education more meaningful and realistic*. The green environment and animals can help children to relax. Moreover, the *secure place* the care farm offers and the good relationship between the children and the professionals ensures that children feel seen and heard. Children like to play outside and be involved with the animals and chores at the farms. Children and other stakeholders indicate that the children make a lot of progress at the care farms. At the care farms, children start to trust others and themselves, dare to be themselves, are more at ease, are more confident, are more eager to learn, learn to interact with others and are taught to be more independent.

Future research on this topic should go in two directions. It could be investigated what different outcomes of education at care farms are on cognitive, social, and emotional levels and if, and how, these outcomes lead to a successful re-integration into regular school setting. Additionally, it could be investigated how care farms can be used to prevent children from dropping out of school in the first place.

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9. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview format children (in Dutch)

Algemeen/ persoonlijke situatie:

1. Hoe oud ben je?
2. Hoe lang zit je al op de boerderij?
3. Hoe vaak per week kom je op de boerderij?

Vorm van onderwijs:

4. Hoe ziet een typische dag op de boerderij er voor jou uit?
 - Volgende punten bespreken tijdens gesprek:
 - Hoe lang krijg je per dag les?
 - Met hoe veel andere kinderen krijg je les?
 - Van wie krijg je les? (E.g. docent, boer)
 - Wat leer je allemaal tijdens een les?
 - Wat moet je allemaal doen tijdens een les?
 - Wat doe je verder allemaal op de boerderij?
 - Leer je op verschillende plekken op de boerderij?
 - Leer je ook wel eens buiten?
 - Wat vind je hiervan?

Ervaringen:

5. Wat vind je van het onderwijs/ de educatie die je krijgt op de boerderij?
 - E.g. rol van mensen (persoonlijk contact), rol van dieren (zorgen voor), rol van de omgeving (rust, ruimte, natuur) of afwisseling in onderwijs
 - Volgende punten bespreken tijdens gesprek:
 - Kom je ook in contact met dieren op de boerderij?; Vind je het leuk om de dieren te verzorgen?
 - Kom je ook in contact met planten/ moestuin etc. op de boerderij?
 - Hoe vind je het om samen te werken met andere kinderen op de boerderij?
 - Wat vind je van de onderwijzer(s)?
 - Wat vind je van de boer(in)?
 - Kun je tot rust komen op de boerderij?
 - Wat is het verschil tussen het onderwijs dat je krijgt op de boerderij en dat wat je op school in een klaslokaal krijgt?
 - En wat is ongeveer hetzelfde?
6. Heb je het gevoel dat er iets veranderd is sinds dat je bent begonnen op de boerderij?
 - Gaat het leren makkelijker?
 - Vind je het makkelijker om contact te leggen met andere kinderen?
 - Etc.
7. Zou je weer terug willen keren naar school?
 - Denk je dat het straks op school anders gaat zijn na je tijd op de boerderij?
 - Waarom?
 - Praat je over het teruggaan naar school met
 - Je docent?
 - Je ouders?
 - De zorgboer?
8. Hoe voel je je over het algemeen op de boerderij?
 - Hoe voel je je als je thuiskomt?
 - Is dit anders dan toen je nog op school zat?

Appendix 2 – Approval proposal by the WUR Ethics Committee



6706 kn Hollandseweg 1 Wageningen | The Netherlands

To whom it may concern:

The following project proposal has been reviewed by the Social Sciences Ethics Committee (SEC):

Title: Education at care farms – learning in a green and free environment
Project team: Vera Buunk
Funding: WUR Science Shop
Period: October 2019- February 2020
Location: Care farms in the Netherlands

The Committee has concluded that the proposal deals with ethical issues in a satisfactory way and that it complies with the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

With kind regards,

Professor Dr Marcel Verweij
Chair Social Sciences Ethics Committee

DATE
30-10-2019

SUBJECT
Ethical approval of research project

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Wageningen University & Research is specialised in the domain of healthy food and living environment.

Appendix 3 – Different approaches of the care farms

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Case 6	Case 7
Daily schedule	Monday – Friday Morning - Afternoon	Monday – Friday 9:00-15:00 (Wednesday half a day)	Monday – Friday 9:00 – 16:30 (Wednesday half a day)	Monday – Friday 8:45 – 13:45	Monday – Friday 9:00 – 14:30 (Wednesday free)	Monday – Friday 9:00 – 17:00 (possible to spend the night)	Monday – Friday 9:00 – 15:00
Students	Four in total, however only two are present at the same time (primary school and high school students).	± Ten children (primary school and high school students)	One child fulltime education. Several children from special education who come to the farm for a few days to relax	Three children (primary school students)	Four children (primary school students)	Sixty children on two locations – fourteen who follow education (primary school and high school students).	Unknown (primary school and high school students)
Background of the children	Mostly special education. Children with diagnoses.	All schools. Children with diagnoses.	Special education. Child with a trauma.	Special and regular education. Children with diagnoses and traumas.	Special and regular education. Children with diagnoses.	Mostly special education. Children with diagnoses and traumas.	All schools. Children with diagnoses.
Employees	One certified teacher. Rest unknown.	Two certified teachers. Many supervisors.	One certified teacher. Some supervisors.	Two certified teachers (one present at the time).	One certified teacher. Some supervisors (however, for a day-care program).	Three certified teachers (two present at the time). Many supervisors.	Two certified teachers. Rest unknown.
Learning goals/ vision	To make a child comfortable with learning again.	To see what is feasible for the children.	To give children a certain baggage for the future.	To offer child a different form of education.	Major development goals (e.g. social and physical).	To make sure that children start to like school again.	To help children return to school.

		To help children return to school.					
Involvement	Contact with a school as soon as a child can return to school.	Close contacts with schools, proximity guidance when a child returns to school.	A collaboration with special needs education.	A collaboration with a national institute for education at care farms.	A collaboration with a national institute for education at care farms.	A collaboration with schools for children that are not able to fully go to school yet.	The previous school of the children determines which subjects are being treated.
Learning environment	Classroom inside.	Classroom inside. Learning outside on the farm.	Classroom inside a 'pipo' caravan. If necessary, learning outside.	Classroom above the stables. Learning outside on the farm.	Classroom inside.	Classroom inside. If necessary, learning outside.	Classroom inside.
Education	Three morning in the week 1,5 hours education. Individual, one-to-one education. Tailored education fitting for each child.	Tailored education per child; slowly more and more schoolwork is being done. Individual one-to-one education as well as education in a group (inside and outside).	Three mornings in the week 3 hours education. Individual, one-to-one education tailored to the child's needs.	Everyday education whereby children work on weekly tasks. Tailored education; what they can handle per day.	Every day tailored education whereby children work on their online tasks. Explanations in the group and individual guidance.	One-to-one education 45 minutes per child. Tailored education for each child.	1,5 to 2 hours education per day. Individual, tailored, one-to-one education. Education time spread over the day.
Independent working	Close guidance thorough the day. Little individual working.	Children who are able to work independently work independently in the classroom.	No individual working, everything needs guidance.	The children work individually on their tasks and can ask the teacher for help.	The children work individually on their tasks and can ask the teacher for help.	Children can use the 45 minutes to work individually on their task and ask for help	Little independent working. Teachers or supervisors always there.

						when they need it.	
Subjects	All subjects.	All subjects. Start with Dutch, spelling and math.	All subjects. Special attention to reading.	All subjects.	All subjects.	All subjects. Main focus on spelling, maths and reading.	All subjects.
Materials	Materials from a previous school (barely used). Mostly material from the internet is used.	Materials from the children's previous schools. Materials to learn while moving.	Materials from the child's previous school. Additional worksheets.	Materials from the children's previous schools. Additional stuff from the internet.	Digital materials from a national institute for education at care farms. When children return to school also materials from that school.	Materials via a collaboration with a school.	Materials from the children's previous schools.
Projects	Yes, for example about storks.	Yes, the other activities children do can be seen as projects.	Yes, for example drying plants.	Yes, projects based on aspects of the farm (e.g. the birth of lambs)	Yes, for example a project about volcanos (also about making things).	Yes, several educational projects outside the regular education time.	Yes, for example about frogs.
Evaluation	Yes, weekly evaluation (e.g. how did this week go).	Yes, daily evaluation (e.g. how was your day) and weekly evaluation (e.g. how did this week go, what did you learn).	Yes, unknown how often (e.g. how did this go compared to before).	Yes, daily evaluation.	Yes, during the day.	Yes, after the lessons.	Yes, during the lessons and timely evaluations (e.g. how are you doing).
Reward system	Yes, report of school skills (e.g. sitting still).	Yes, for example children can choose their own reward	Yes, working towards small diploma's for	Yes, they can receive a diploma for farm	Unknown.	Yes, a rapport with points for things they did well during the	Unknown.

		when they manage all their multiplication tables	certain learning goals.	skills (e.g. herding).		lessons (e.g. sitting still, working neat).	
Farm chores	Yes, various chores on the farm.	Yes, mucking out stables, taking care of the horses, working in a vegetable garden, walking the dogs, feeding the animals.	Yes, various chores on the farm; e.g. feeding the animals and gardening.	Yes, taking care of the horses, feeding the animals, walking the dogs and herding.	Yes, the children receive chores from the care farmer.	Yes, taking care of the animals.	Yes, taking care of the animals, gardening.
Other activities	Yes, unknown which activities.	Yes, various activities among which cooking, team building games and dog training.	Yes, e.g. grocery shopping.	Yes, playing outside on the farm.	Yes, playing outside on the farm and physical activity lessons.	Yes, for example dancing, making music, crafting.	Yes, for example preparing the lunch.

Appendix 4 – List of quotes in Dutch

Quote #	Passage in Dutch
1	Ik denk het onderwijs daar een beetje ondergeschikt is. En zeker als je kijkt naar T. Hij zit daar niet omdat..., om echt te leren zeg maar. En het stukje rust is op dit moment belangrijker, dan het stukje educatie die die volgt. Dus ja, het is allemaal een beetje minimaal. Maar dat is wel op zijn lijf nu geschreven zeg maar.
2	Het allerbelangrijkste is dat ze het zelf mogen kiezen. Van welk onderwerp nemen ze, hoe gaan ze het uiteindelijk uitwerken. Gaan ze een PowerPoint maken of een poster? Dus het geeft ze wat controle over wat ze aan het doen zijn. Het geeft ze heel veel succes ervaringen, ook omdat je in kunt springen op dingen waar zij al goed zijn.
3	Maar aan het begin was lezen ook helemaal niet mogelijk, omdat daar een heel groot zeg maar angst bij zat en een frustratie drempel door het niet kunnen. En dan was die niet bereid tot lezen. Dus dan deed ik bijvoorbeeld een rekensommetje, maar dan met hoe heet dat, bijvoorbeeld reactie sommen naar aanleiding een verhaaltje. En dan werd die gedwongen om het verhaaltje te lezen anders wist die niet wat die moest doen. Ja, dus op die manier.
4	Ja, de oudste leerling die zat in groep zeven dat die hier kwam, maar hij zat al thuis. Dus hij heb eigenlijk groep zeven niks gedaan. En wij zijn wel met die stof verder gegaan. En toen kwamen we toch echt tot de ontdekking dat het te moeilijk voor hem is. Dus nu zijn we terug naar groep zes. Alle toetsen van groep zes maakt die. En waar die moeite mee heb daar krijgt die uitleg over. En zo gaan we weer door.
5	Wij hebben ook, onze onderwijsassistent is daar zo goed in. Die krijgt dan een nieuw kind van de lagere school. En dan kijkt ze altijd hé waar ligt hun interesse. En dan gaat ze ook boeken in de bibliotheek halen voor hen, die ze met hun gaat lezen. Er was bijvoorbeeld een jongen die wou alles over het bos weten en dat haalt ze dan. Dat soort dingen. Je bent altijd met educatie bezig.
6	We hebben nog een meisje die gaat nu naar een lunchroom één dag in de week. Daar gaat ze deze week beginnen. Om te kijken of ze daar zeg maar diploma's kan halen. Want wij zijn geen restaurant ofzo. We maken wel veel dingen klaar. Maar daar is echt een lunchroom. Die dame die dat runt is daarin gespecialiseerd.
7	En die boerenknecht is ook weer een voorbeeld. En hij was ook ooit deelnemer. Maar hij heeft nu een betaalde baan bij ons, weet je wel. Vind ik zo mooi, dat die jongen nu van veertien zegt ik wil hem worden eigenlijk.
8	En we hebben een keer met botten gedaan. Ze hadden botten opgegraven. Ook een beetje wat uit hun komt. En M heeft toen een heel web, woordweb, gemaakt van de schapen. Wat eten ze.
9	En op het moment dat je naar voerzakken kijkt en je ziet dat de soja uit, ergens uit Latijns Amerika komt, en dan kijkt waar ligt Latijns Amerika. En zo maak je ook verbindingen tussen het leren en de echte werkelijkheid.
10	Goh je loopt langs de varkensschuur, en hoe veel varkens zijn er nu? En er gaan er morgen zo veel naar de slacht toe, hoe veel houd je over? Dat blijft ook altijd. Op die manier ben je ook altijd bezig met educatie.
11	Er zit hier bijvoorbeeld een meisje die moeite heeft met zelfstandig haar haar invlechten of wat dan ook. Iets doen met haar haar. Dus daarvan hebben we gezegd, nou laten we dan maar op de zorgboerderij beginnen met vlechten met paarden. Ze is helemaal paarden minded, dus dan kunnen we beginnen met paardenstaarten maken met elastiekjes. En langzamerhand proberen we vlechten te maken.
12	Ja, tafels met het paard waarbij ik naar de goede getallen moest zoeken. Met het paard moest ik naar het juiste getal rijden. Het was heel leuk om zo de tafels te leren.

13	Ze hebben hun schapen drijf diploma gehaald. Weetje dat zijn gewoon dingen die kun je doen. Kijk een ander haalt op school misschien zijn tafel diploma en hè, een cognitieve diploma zeg maar hè. En zij gaan dit doen.
14	Of dan ging ik een route uitzetten dan gingen we fietsen op de tandem bijvoorbeeld. En dan moest hij zeg maar lezen waar we naar toe moesten en onderweg allemaal opdrachten doen.
15	Ik stel dan ook vragen, van nou als je dan weer naar school zou gaan, wat kun je al goed en waar moet je misschien nog aan werken, wat je nog minder goed kan. Dus dan maken we een soort rapport voor schoolvaardigheden. Kun je goed stil zitten, kun je goed leren, kun je goed nieuwe vrienden maken, dat soort dingen.
16	Op school is het allemaal saai en netjes en moet je je gedragen en op tijd zijn. En hier is het gewoon heel losjes, maar je moet wel gewoon luisteren het is wel heel duidelijk.
17	Goed en leuk. Omdat het rustiger is dan gewone school, daar zaten 30 andere kinderen in de klas. Verder is op school alles op tijd en afspraak, hier mag ik zelf bepalen.
18	ik heb zelf een hok gemaakt voor het konijn. Dat hok was eigenlijk eerst voor de kittens, maar toen werd het konijn ziek en is het hok voor het konijn geworden.
19	De dieren en de omgeving zijn ook fijn. Soms helpen we met dieren verzorgen: eten geven en stallen uitmesten. Stallen uitmesten vind ik niet erg om te doen, omdat het dier er blij van wordt.
20	Dat is een beetje mijn visie. Als je gespannen bent, angstig, dan kun je niet leren. Dan blokkeer je. Wij zorgen dus eerst voor rust. Ik denk dus dat ze dat wel op prijs stellen, dat ze zichzelf kunnen zijn en kunnen ontspannen.
21	Hmm, ik denk euhm hoe we hier met elkaar omgaan. Er is natuurlijk wel eens een akkefietje met kinderen rondom elkaar. Maar sinds ik hier ben word ik niet meer gepest. En dat vind ik heel fijn.
22	Hij heeft het nu prima zeg maar, dus dat vindt die ook goed. Maar ik denk diep van binnen wil hij ook gewoon het liefst een normaal jongetje zijn in een normale klas, met gewone klasgenootjes. En gewoon een normale school. Maar hij vertelt nu dat hij dit ook wel prima vindt.
23	Ik kan gewoon bij iedereen terecht als het nodig is.
24	Ja ik noem het ook altijd mijn tweede thuis en B en A noem ik ook altijd met tweede vader en moeder.
25	Het belangrijkste is dat ze leren dat ze gewoon normaal zijn. Dat ze niet gek zijn, loser zijn of wat dan ook wat ze in hun hoofd hebben gehaald. En dat het ze leert dat ze wel degelijk weer een toekomstperspectief hebben. En dat ze gewoon ja goed terecht komen.
26	En dat is bij hem ook zo, als ik hem mee neem naar de pony en hij gaat de pony aaien, dan zie je het van hem afgaan. En dan zie je een heel zacht jongetje. Echt dat is echt heel bijzonder.
27	Dat zag je vanmiddag met B. Kijk dan heeft die één oefening met jou gedaan, dat vond die gewoon heel ingewikkeld. Dan kun je gewoon op dat moment zeggen, nou we doen ook een oefening die die makkelijk vindt. En dan denkt die hé ik kan het wel.
28	Hij was aan het begin ook bang, hij had het gevoel dat die niets kon. En die grens wordt steeds meer verlegd, dus ik kan ook steeds meer nieuwe dingen aanbieden. Dat was aan het begin niet goed mogelijk dan moest ik echt in het veilige zitten voor hem en dan kom je op een gegeven moment niet tot nieuwe dingen. Maar daar kan ik nu steeds wel een stapje inzetten. Dus ook het durven falen zeg maar, of het van jezelf van je accepteren dat je niet alles hoeft te weten, maar dat je het ook fout mag doen.
29	Ja als ze zich beter voelen dan komen ze wel meer tot leren. Dat geeft natuurlijk zelfvertrouwen dat ze iets kunnen.

30	Weer plezier krijgen in leren. En weer open staan om dingen te gaan leren. En vooral ook hun eigen interesses te durven volgen.
31	Zoals bij de jongste dan, die kwam hier en die zei van ik ga niet lezen ik kan niet rekenen. Hij kon het ook echt niet. En toen hebben we echt oefenen, oefenen, oefenen en ja toen ineens zag ie van he ik kan lezen. Hè ging die op de pakken hagelslag, en ja hij leest van alles. En weet je dan is het zelfvrouwen er. Dan is de motivatie er en dan kan je stappen maken.
32	Vanochtend waren we bijvoorbeeld met een klein groepje naar buiten willen gaan. Ja dan kan je niet bij iedereen heel specifiek, alleen maar bij die onderwijsbehoefte aansluiten. Maar het feit dat ze wel weer in een groepje leren, vind ik ook wel een heel groot leerdoel. Dus ja wil je echt dat iedereen passende lesstof heeft, dan moet je heel de dag 1 op 1 gaan zitten. Ik denk niet dat dat een meerwaarde is.
33	Ja het mooie is dat die kinderen wel individueel begeleid worden, maar dan soms wel op de boerderij in contact zijn. Je ziet ook dat ze contact leggen. We hebben ook een meisje van veertien, die echt totaal geen contact met leeftijdsgenoten kon hebben, maar wel met ons volwassenen. En daardoor zie je dat ze ook wel weer met kinderen van haar leeftijd, weet je.
34	Nou sowieso heb ik een paar stappen vooruitgezet met school. Maar ook in mijn zelfstandigheid. Ik wilde nooit met het openbaar vervoer en nu kom ik elke dag met het openbaar vervoer. Uhm, ja ik ben gewoon veel zelfstandiger ik kan beter voor mezelf opkomen. Ik kan mijn grenzen nu ook beter aangeven aan mensen als ze iets doen wat ik niet leuk vind of dat soort dingen.