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The School Meals Service: Past, Present and Future? (ESRC, 2023–2025)– Strand 3

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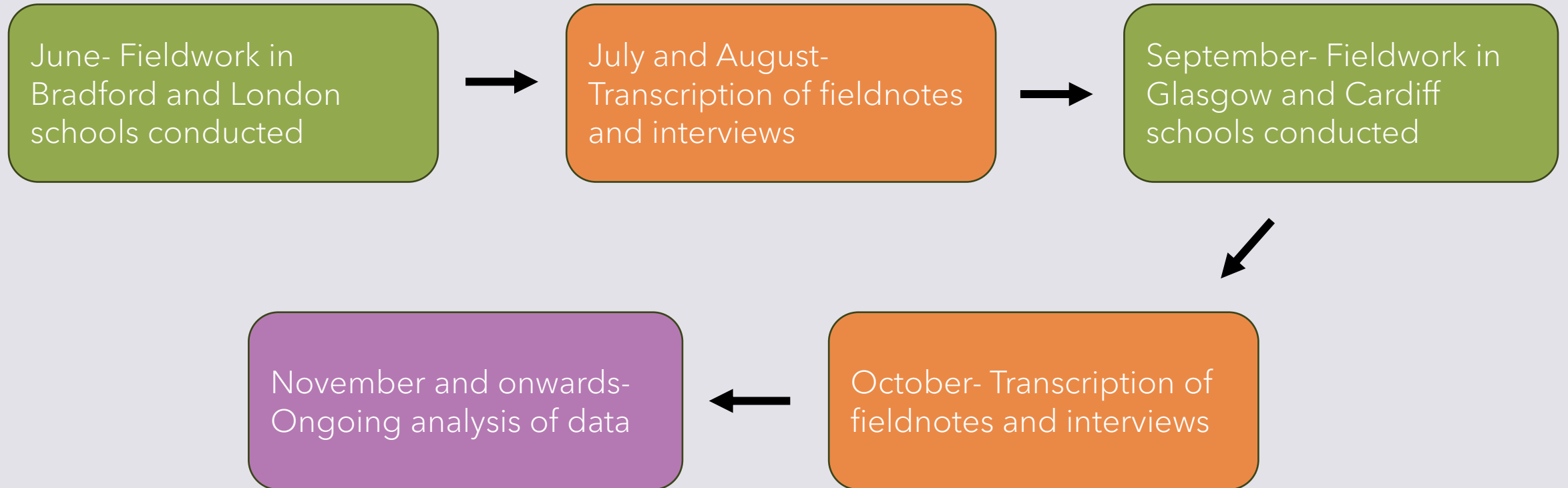
HISTORY OF EDUCATION
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SHEFFIELD, NOVEMBER 17-19, 2023

Strand 3– Overview

- Four partner schools in Bradford, London, Glasgow and Cardiff
- A set of targeted ethnographic case studies involving schools today
- Observations in the partner schools in dining spaces, playgrounds and classrooms; 'hanging out' sessions designed to capture the informal conversations and social interactions of participants
- Approximately 20 semi-structured interviews at each school, with pupils, teachers, head teachers, catering staff, and parents
- Intended to capture emotional and sensory responses to school meals



Strand 3- Timeline



Case Study Schools



- Selected to allow to gauge experiences of SMS across northern & southern England, Wales and Scotland
- All four cities are post-industrial with high levels of socio-economic deprivation and diverse cultural and ethnic communities
- Bradford is where school meals were first trialled
- It is particularly in cities that school feeding has become a flashpoint for societal anger and frustration over wider issues of poverty and inequality
- Each of the schools has developed a specific food-based ethos reflected in the management, curriculum and daily activities of the school

Case Study Schools

Bradford

8.6% FSM, Food for Life school (Soil Association), food prepared on site, menu set by local authority catering provider

London

22.5% FSM, school employs caterers directly, recruited via Chefs in School, food prepared on site, flexible menu set by chefs, primary and secondary school with separate kitchens & dining halls

Glasgow

60% FSM (including P1-P5 FSM), food prepared on site, menu set by local authority catering provider, schools cooks and sends out food to five other schools

Cardiff

45% FSM, food prepared on site, menu set by local authority catering provider, school kitchen is shared with neighbouring school

Methodological approach & Literature

Methodological approach

- Educational ethnographic case study

Key literature

- Free School Meals failing families (Yang et al., 2022)
- The reliability of FSM eligibility as a measure of socio-economic disadvantage (Taylor, 2017)
- Collaborative participation and school meals (Janhonen et al., 2023)
- Contrasting approaches to food education and school meals (Andersen et al., 2017)
- Dinner ladies and junk food mums: Gender, class and school meals (Pike and Kelly, 2014)

Initial Insights– Emotional and Sensory Experiences of School Meals

- Sight
- Sound
- Smell
- Touch
- Taste
- Feel/ Emotions



Sound- Dining Hall

"It would probably be even louder back in the days because it wasn't staggered lunches. Now we have staggered lunches. There are some children that eat a lot quicker than others, so obviously what are they going to do once they've eaten? They're going to talk. Times that by 120 and not the best for the sound in there, the acoustics are not great... when you go to a restaurant you do socialise and you do talk... not making it where you've got to come in quietly, get your dinner, basically shut up and sit down and don't talk. You know, there might be some people who would like that, but [we're] trying to create, replicate real life, which is when you do go to a restaurant you do talk, you do socialise". (Teacher, Bradford school)

Pupil complaints about noise levels, lunchtime as a social occasion, dining hall experience aims to replicate restaurant dining

"it is very loud and it makes me have a headache" (Pupil, Cardiff school)

"I think it's because like everybody has a lot to talk about, and they don't talk about it at playtime because they play at playtime" (Pupil. Bradford school)

Sound- Dining Hall

Noise levels can be overwhelming for some pupils (particularly younger or neurodivergent), lunchtimes can be uncomfortable/ exclusionary- many neurodivergent pupils ate in classrooms instead - extends to food education spaces too

"Our lunches are big and they are noisy places. Some in nursery find that quite overwhelming as well"
(Lunchtime supervisor, London school)

A teacher from the resource base accompanied 3 pupils into the hall for lunch, the pupils are wearing ear defenders. He said he's trying to get them integrated into the dining hall. He comments that the hall is very loud for them and said it is partly the echoiness that is the issue. (Fieldnotes, Cardiff school)

One of the pupils is scared of the kitchen, particularly the oven, taps, and noise of the pipes if the heating is on, so the pupils do the food prep in the nurture group classroom and the teacher puts it in the oven in the kitchen.
(Fieldnotes, Bradford school)

Smell- Dining Hall and School Food

"You just walk past a dinner hall, even on a morning - they haven't started on it yet, but I don't know, just walking to that hall, it just like takes you back. When we were little we had like smiley faces and stuff. You have the same thing at home but it's so different. It doesn't taste or smell the same". (Teacher, Bradford school)

- Particular smells bring back memories for teachers of their own school meals, nostalgia
- Feelings of jealousy amongst some pupils with packed lunches around those who have school meals
- Also unpleasant feelings associated with scents

"Even when you smell stuff now, like custard and that, oh, remember from school." (Teacher, Cardiff school)

"Those carrots are bad. Every time I smell them, I get nausea". (Pupil, London school)

"Normally, when I go in with packed lunch, I can smell all of the foods being cooked" (Pupil, Cardiff school)

Touch- Heat of Food



Pupils- hot food important, many complaints about school meals not being hot enough

"the Spaghetti Bolognese has a good taste but it's kind of cold sometimes" (Pupil, Glasgow school)

"I've got a good idea. When the food is cold, how about we get a refund" (Pupil, Glasgow school)

"Quite often the food is cold. It's a basic right, isn't it?" (TA Supervisor, Cardiff school)

Heat as a metaphor for emotional response

"I like school dinners because like it fills me up and makes me feel like really nice inside and warm and like cosy" (Pupil, Bradford school)

Touch- Heat of Food

Parents and pupils- value having a hot cooked meal from school over packed lunches and discuss the issues of keeping food hot in packed lunches

"The reason I don't like packed lunch is because when you make it in the morning or the night before, it gets cold over time. Then when you eat it, it tastes normally warm but in packed lunch it is cold" (Pupil, Bradford school)

"My dad sometimes bring a panini, and it tastes nice, like warm. But when you open it in the lunch, like when you're going in the hall, it's actually quite cold and you can't enjoy it as much" (Pupil, Bradford school)

"it's like if she gives the Maggi noodles [in a thermos], that's also getting cold, it's like a sticky... so that's a big tension for me as well... it's still warm, lukewarm, but the steam as well, it's like a runny, soggy... I get some like kebabs in the hot container, but it's like all watery because if it's all steamy" (Parent, Bradford school)

"he like, like warm things, they are eating here, like a jacket potato is a warm, I can't give him by the packed lunch" (Parent, Bradford school)

Possible cultural differences over value of hot food?

Touch- Seating

- Pupils- positives and negatives around various seating arrangements and chair types, extends to emotions

"the seats, so uncomfy, plastic" (Pupil, Glasgow school)

Fear of injury and not wanting to touch the floor- perceptions of it not being clean

"It's nice, yeah, the space. It's fun, like, there's, like, 12 people can sit, so, there's enough" (Pupil, London school)

Seating arrangements allowing pupils to socialise, have fun, and feel included

"The seats, because you can't lean back. Normally when I go into the dinner hall, sometimes I fall off the chair because I always think there's a back" (Pupil, Cardiff school)

"Yeah, I love the inside and before you could just sit inside, but now you can sit outside, it's better" (Pupil, London school)

Choice of where to sit, feeling trusted and given responsibility

Sensory Experiences– Food Education

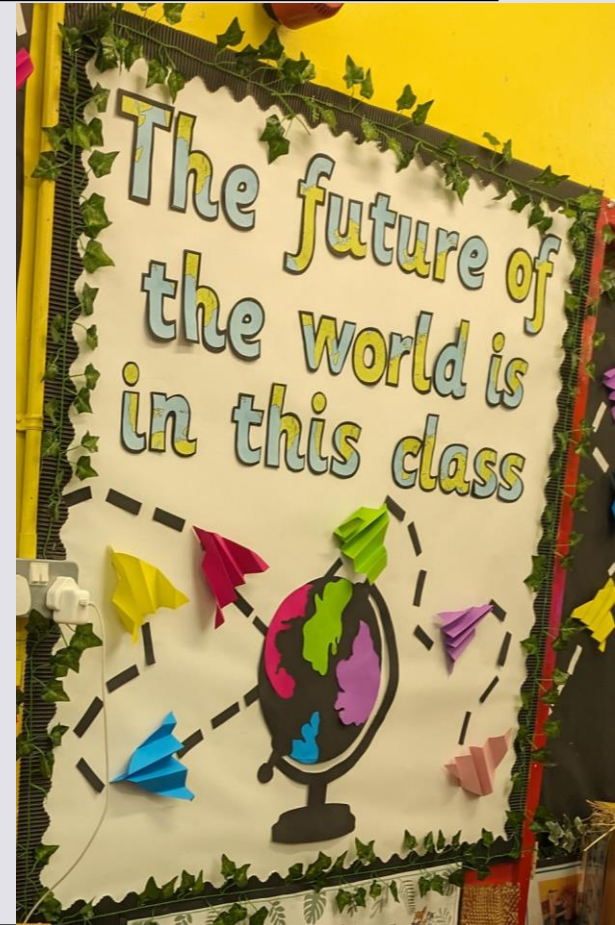
“We use quite a lot of food in different ways the actual having a food but also as a nice activity to build relationships or to fulfil needs and things like that – not just food needs but sensory needs” (Teacher, Glasgow school)

“They’ll just grab it and eat it, oh it’s really nice, yeah it is really nice. So they know they’ve grown it, and they’ve tasted it, they’ve eaten it, they’ve taken it home and actually, it’s really delicious. So it is definitely influencing what they will be eating and the choices” (Teacher, Gardening Club, Bradford school)

“I think getting kids back in touch with food growing, knowing where their food comes from, being able to see and touch and smell” (Caterer, London school)

Conclusions and Next Steps

- Different priorities around school meals and food education for different actors in schools (pupils, parents, teachers, catering staff etc)
- Detailed analysis of research data from strand 3, cross-checked with strands 1 and 2
- Considering how contemporary school ethnographies connect to historical experiences of school meals, methodologically and empirically
- What lessons can be learned from the past and current lived experiences of the SMS for future provision of school meals suited to the conditions of the 21st century?



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