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# Formal prescriptions of a socially acute question in the curriculum of agricultural vocational training courses : the case of farm animal welfare



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## Farm animal welfare, a socially acute question

The concept of farm animal welfare (FAW) has emerged in 1960's in European debates. The evolution of an animal's status in human societies and of breeding conditions are the main factors which have contributed to the development of acute exchanges about FAW (Dantzer, 2002). The controversies have taken place in and between multiple domains and concerned multiple issues (figure 1).

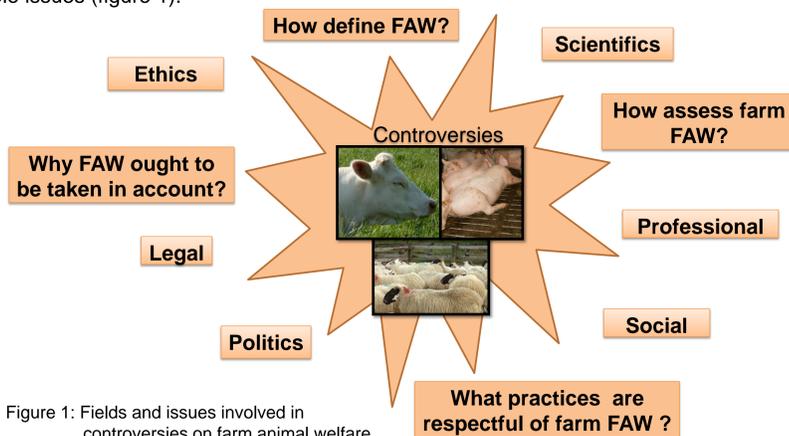


Figure 1: Fields and issues involved in controversies on farm animal welfare

Concept of FAW is :

- multidimensional
- based on knowledge and *social practices of reference* in construction (practices taking as referee in school activities and characterizing by knowledge, objects, tools, problems, tasks, contexts and social roles (Martinand, 2001)).

FAW is central to European strategy especially where the training of breeders is concerned. The French agricultural vocational course "Bac Pro CGEA Conduite et Gestion de l'Exploitation Agricole" (A level) is especially targeted because this diploma prepares students to manage their own farm. Educating future breeders to better take into account animal welfare is not only a question of values, feelings, beliefs, knowledge but also concerns the transformation of professional practices in the breeders' daily activity.

## Aims and framework

This study takes part of a PhD work which objective is to describe and understand how teachers and students transform their activity in educational settings when they take into account FAW. As FAW is a socially acute question, ie is a controversial concept in society, in the knowledge of reference and potentially in school (Simonneaux and Legardez, 2011), teaching or educating for this concept involved delicate choices for teachers. Indeed, "for over forty years French agricultural education was used as an instrument for explaining and promoting French and European agricultural policies", but now social demands have led inclusion of acute issues in agricultural curricula and teachers have to deal with this dilemma (Simonneaux & Legardez, 2010).

In the perspective of a french-speaking ergonomic approach of the activity, the first step of our research work is to analysis the *prescribed task* of the teachers (Leplat, 1997). This presentation is focused on the analysis of formal prescriptions contained in *Bac Pro CGEA* curriculum :

- What are the learning objectives related to FAW ?
- What dimensions, controversial and consensual points of FAW issue are included in Bac Pro CGEA curriculum?
- Is an approach with the didactic of socially acute question promoted or rather inhibited?

We consider curriculum as a cultural artefact which is full of "historic compromises, and carries memory, accumulated experiences in a given professional environment/collective" (Amigues & Lataillade, 2007, p.9) .

## Methods

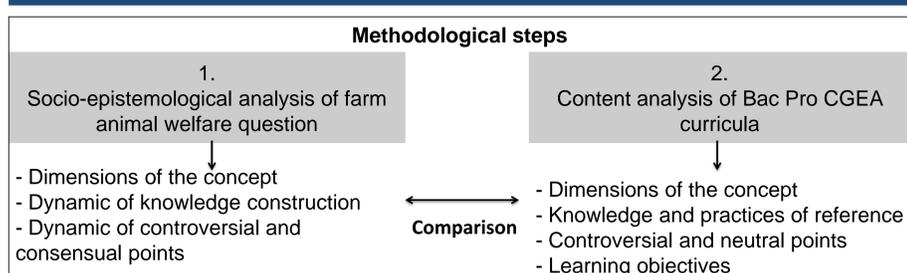


Figure 2: Methodology

With a socio-epistemological approach, we realize a classical content analysis of the successive curricula of Bac pro CGEA between 1996 and 2010. The curricula are divided in four parts: i) professional part (description of the professional environment and activities) ; ii) certification part (abilities which have to be acquired by the students) ; iii) training part: learning objectives characterized by contents and pedagogical recommendations.

## Results

- In the **professional part** of the curriculum, no occurrence of animal welfare
- In the **certification part**, since 2010, students must acquire the ability to "manage the animal production process respecting animal welfare"
- In the **training part**, general, vague and not clarified prescriptions (Table 1)

	Bac pro CGEA 1996	Bac pro CGEA 2008 and 2010
<b>FAW is related to ...</b>	animals' behaviour, mode of perception, social organization and needs	Animals' sensibility; adaptation abilities and social demand
<b>FAW has to be taken in account in...</b>	the breeders' interventions and manipulations on animals, the design of barn and the human-animal relationship	the quality of products
<b>FAW should be taught via ...</b>		a definition, the reglementation , the assesment criteria, the breeding conditions respectful of animal welfare

Table 1: Evolution of the formal prescriptions in the training part of the curricula of Bac Pro CGEA between 1996 and 2010

Our results show the inclusion of new knowledge related to FAW between 1996 and 2008 as animals' sensibility and social demand. These notions promote a reduced vision of FAW. Indeed, animals' sensibility does not necessarily include the ability to have subjective experience unlike to the notion of animals' sentience used in English language. Furthermore, the social demand is presented to justify the taking in account of FAW and no reference is made about ethical or moral justifications. But the introduction of FAW in certification and training parts of the curriculum reveals a political and educational choice because professionals still do not include this concept as a guide for their daily actions. What is surprising in the 2008 reform, it is the pedagogic recommendations. FAW concept could be taught in order to promote the change of student's actions with a definition of FAW, assessment criteria and breeding conditions. But no indication specifies what definition, what assessment criteria and what breeding conditions. However, this neutral presentation hides the current controversies shown in our socio-epistemological analysis results. Teachers' formal prescriptions do not present the multidimensionality of FAW concept and avoid the dynamic of knowledge construction with its tensions and consensus (table 2).

Missing dimensions of the FAW concept	Partial dimensions of the FAW concept	Limited, vague and neutralized knowledge and practices of reference
-Ethic - Politic	-Scientific - Professional -Social -Legal	-Ethology : animals' behaviour and social organization - Biology : Animals' sensibility, needs, modes of perception, adaptation abilities -Professional practices : interventions, manipulations, observation

Table 2: Differences between the content of the Bac Pro CGEA's curriculum in 2010 and the results of socio-epistemological analysis of the FAW question

## Conclusion and discussion

Current formal prescriptions addressed to teachers in Bac Pro CGEA curriculum require that students learn to manage animal production process respecting FAW. But even the last reform of curriculum reflects the difficulty to take distance from a reduced conception of animal welfare derived from regulations. Similarly to many other controversial issues, the prescriptions "cool down" FAW concept including a small part of its complexity and avoiding debated points (Simonneaux & Legardez, 2010). They do not promote a further didactic approach which take in account complexity, uncertainty, dynamic of knowledge construction. We consider that FAW concept should be included in curriculum in an educational perspective with axiological dimensions and not only in a learning perspective in order to change students' attitude and way to act with farm animals (Simonneaux & Simonneaux, 2009).

But what brings this analysis of prescriptions from curriculum knowing that there is an incompressible gap between the prescribed task and the realized activity in situation (Leplat, 1997). The re-design of prescriptions implemented by teachers is considered as a "full activity" generating multiple professional questions and places the prescriptions not as external norms but as consubstantial of the realized activity (Amigues & Lataillade, 2007). In our research we will study: i) what dimensions, controversial issues or neutralized notions the teachers and the students use when they deal with FAW in teaching-learning situations ; ii) how they transform their activity in order to develop ways to act respecting farm animal welfare.

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