

Education plan on Food Culture : Make Up Your Own Ice-Cream Flavour

This essay is the final deliverable for the elective Cultural education. Here I will present a cultural education plan for reflecting on food culture. The aim of this plan is to teach pupils to take up divergent and creative thinking. The origins are based on the concept of in-vitro meat ice-cream as is presented by the Next Nature Network. The Next Nature philosophy considers nature and culture to be intertwined. Therefore they draw the conclusion that we create cultures to become our next natures[1]. However, this takes generations of time as well as a lot of reflection on the way we see our current and future cultures [2].

Their concept of the in-vitro meat ice-cream truck is to make people think about the way we consume meat. There is a lot of debate on meat as there are problems in sustainability, production and animal cruelty. Still, the alternative of in-vitro meat is not met with a lot of enthusiasm; it still sounds sort of alien. In this project proposal I want children to explore this alien feeling. How can we change it to something creative and positive? Through the program pupils will use creative and social skills to explore the future food culture while reflecting upon their own.



The program :

The program takes up about a day or can be spread over two days to match other learning activities. The children will first get an introduction to the concept of in-vitro meat. There are video's on the website which can be viewed with a teacher. Another option is to let a representative of the ice-cream truck translate the concept to the pupils.

Next up are the video's of two haute cuisine chefs who present the pro's and con's of in-vitro meat from their professional perspectives[3]. The information and perspectives that are presented will lead to a discussion. Pupils are asked to take sides and explain why they feel that way. There should be room for emotions in the discussion as it is the challenge to describe personal feelings; about the alien feelings around in-vitro meat as well as other emotions that are linked to the borders of our comfort zones.

After the discussion there is room for a break. During this break the students can get an ice-cream from the in-vitro meat ice truck. They are confronted with ice-cream flavours like : meat fruit, polar bear, bacon, ice queen, dragon and chocopanda.

When they return to the classroom the following assignment is presented: In small groups the children are tasked to make up a future ice-cream flavour. The flavour needs to be presented by a testimonial at the camera boot that is implemented into the truck. Results from other pupils are shown as an example and inspiration.

As long as it is recordable and it requires minimum editing work, different approaches can be taken for the presentation. Pupils can make a live-drawing, stop motion or present a poster. They can also perform a speech or poem. The staff from the ice-cream truck will assist in the recording and editing (cut and paste fragments only).

At the end of the day the pupils receive a login code. Within a few days they can find their video's online and they can start voting on their favourite. The video with the most votes will be used in the next visit of the Ice-cream truck.



Now I would like to take the program apart in 5 parts : What, Where, Whom, How and Why.

What :

The goal of this planproject is to let children become aware of our own ways and culture, and to provoke creativity and divergent thinking in order to break away from these patterns every now and then. This is done through the theme of food culture: Next to our own culture there are many other cultures and futuristic and out-of-the-box concepts. By confronting the children with these concepts they gain awareness of their current culture (our comfort zone). With their new knowledge on our culture they can reason, explore and reflect on new cultures. This will take the pupils out of their comfort zone and/or at least confronts them with the borders of their comfort zones and creativity.

Reflection brings the children back to recognising their own behaviour and the reasons behind that behaviour. Therefore the reflective mode of cultural education was chosen for this education plan.

Where :

The in-vitro meat ice-cream truck already exists and is used to travel from event to event. Their usual events however are museums, festivals, city squares and universities. The small changes that I made to the in-vitro meat ice truck through this education plan make it possible for the truck to conquer a spot at the school yard and to take the information into the classrooms.

Whom :

The education plan suites the age group of children between 11 and 16. Of course puberty triggers children to question their upbringing and habits. The main reason to choose this target group however is based on the level of abstraction that is required to reflect on your own comfort zone. As of the age of 11 children are capable of prepositional thinking[4].

Now that the target group is defined it is important to name the stakeholders as well. The ice-cream truck is a project from the Next Nature Network. Therefore they are an important stakeholder in this project. Another important stakeholder are the schools. They need to pay for the visit of the staff and the truck (as well as for the ice-creams) .

How :

As food culture is closely related to our social structures the education theory of Vygotsky [5] is used to come to this education plan. The process of reflection is initiated by setting up an open environment where everybody's perspective can contribute to the debate. Through this debate most pupils can sharpen their opinion; some people will take over each others opinions (through imitation) or create counter arguments (by reflection). Both imitation and reflection are beneficial for the learning experience. More about the use of Vygotsky's theory will follow below. First I want to emphasise the importance of the role of the open character of the debate.

This is necessary to make room for the conversations about emotions. In the case of in-vitro meat it seems like the emotion of accepting or rejecting it often comes before we can reason why. (This is in line with the theory of Zajonc [6].) For the reasoning part to be addressed (as this leads to reflection) there needs to be room to speak about emotions.

Followed upon the debate are the video's of the other pupils that show the creative outcomes of earlier debates and reflection sessions. Because they are selected through a voting process the video's show the divergent and creative thinkers which are most supported by the age groups. Those pupils are transformed into the examples that the other pupils can use to learn from.

The above is in line with Vygotsky's theory but also with the theory of Nina Simon [7]. The use of video's that are made by participants of the projects are discussed under in her book the Participatory museum. Participation to a project is an valuable experience that should not just be an activity to keep the children occupied. By using the website to gather and display all video's the pupils can continue their explorations and discussions outside the classroom. The election's purpose is to generate pride from the votes on the pupils works as well as excitement for the works that win when they have contributed to that by voting.

Why

Through the parts above I have tried to substantiate my education plan. In this last part I will give a short conclusion on my goal, the plan and why I think it will work.

The aim of this educational plan is to teach pupils to take up divergent and creative thinking. The concept of in-vitro meat can be turned into a powerful experience that triggers the pupils to question their behaviour and/or feelings and reflect on their food culture. As all pupils are encouraged to participate and present their own divergent perspectives and ideas, the result is that they will all be exposed to new ideas. This will not only strengthen their creativity but also their own arguments for (self)reflection.

This cultural plan fits within the general perspective that art education (not only art education but also lessons in cultural education like : Cultuur Kunst Vorming or Maatschappijleer on secondary schools) is important to teach the intrinsic values of culture and arts. It is important to teach pupils that in some disciplines there is more than one right answer.

1. [For more information on the Next nature network please visit the website : www.nextnature.net]
2. [Mensvoort, K. van (2014) Pyramid of Technology: How Technology Becomes Nature in Seven Steps. Technische Universiteit Eindhoven,Eindhoven]
3. [The video's of the chefs are already on the in-vitro meat website. Please follow this link to take a look yourself : <http://bistro-in-vitro.com/en/chefs/>]
4. [L. E. Berk (2012) Child Development. Allyn & Bacon, US]
5. [L.C.Moll (2014) L.S. Vygotsky and education. Routledge, New York)
6. [Zajonc, R. B. (1980). Feeling and thinking: Preferences need no inferences. American Psychologist, 35, 151-175]
7. [Simone, N. (2010) The Participatory Museum. Museum 2.0, Santa Cruz]