

Council Meeting on Nursery School Meals

Abstract

A council meeting is held in Neustadt to decide about the future food supply for the local nursery school. Due to the approaching retirement of the previous supplier, a new one has to be found for the upcoming year. While a similar supplier with traditional Austrian food could be hired, local initiatives such as “we take care”, who work towards greater environmental awareness, and “a vegan day a week”, who advert veganism, contributed to a call for a modern, vegetarian and healthy diet (based on soy) for the local nursery school. The discussions and debates within the community led to this council meeting where the matter will be discussed.

Tags

Discipline: Biology

Target group: Lower and Upper Secondary

Age range: 13–17

Duration: at least 4 lessons

Inquiry learning dimensions:

- Exploring situations
- Planning investigations
- Interpreting and evaluating
- Communicating results

World of Work Dimensions:

- **Context:** Due to environmental (growing meat consumption) and nutritional aspects (high protein value of soy, progressively more unhealthy food habits) soy is increasingly used for human nutrition. Some public institutions try to implement a meatless diet which leads to caterers having to change or expand their repertoire.
- **Roles/Profession:** The students assume various roles within a community. They should study their roles and subsequently gather information. We propose the following roles: neutral roles (doctor, mayor, agricultural advisor), meat supporting party (livestock producer, traditional restaurant, parent, head of nursery school, strength athlete, butcher), pro-soy party (organic farm, vegetarian/vegan restaurant, semi-vegetarian parent, NGO environmental activist, vegan parent, tourist board).
- **Activities:** The students assume the roles and the respective points of view. Subsequently they should gather information about the topic and use it to elaborate their arguments during the discussion.
- **Product:** A list of pros and cons regarding the use of soy in the nursery school meal.

Task

In the municipality of Neustadt the traditional restaurant and food supplier for the local nursery school's cafeteria is about to close due to retirement. Several considerations on changing the children's diet led to the topic becoming a matter of great debate within the community. Particularly local initiatives such as "we take care", who work towards greater environmental awareness, and "a vegan day a week", who promote veganism, contribute to a much stronger call for a modern, vegetarian and healthy diet (based on soy) for the local nursery school. These discussions led to agitation within the community and finally to the mayor inviting all parties to participate in a council meeting.

Material

- Role cards and literature
- Internet

Task

Carefully read through the description of your role and try to write down bullet points describing your point of view. Which arguments will you bring forward during the discussion? How could you support them? What is particularly important to you?

Feel free to include your own point of view and suggestions. Be aware that there might be counterarguments as well. Take notes of the counterarguments, interesting questions and other thoughts to prepare for the second meeting. Finally, there will be a list of pros and cons which you can complete during the second meeting.

Check list

- Reading the task
- Assuming a role and its point of view
- Elaborating arguments and reasons
- Presenting the arguments in a council meeting
- Gathering ideas, suggestions and counterarguments which can further be elaborated
- Researching information to support suggestions and counterarguments
- Completing a list of pros and cons

Teacher Guidelines

The aim of this task is to enable the students to participate in a discussion by assuming different roles, views and researching information. Information material will either be provided beforehand or students will do their own research so they can form their own opinions. The teacher will provide support during the discussion by assuming the role of the mayor, which could alternatively be done by another student. During the second meeting, students have the opportunity to further explore the subject, to develop further arguments and find scientific evidence as well as bringing forward new suggestions. Students are encouraged to bring forward their own ideas. The aim is not to come to a decision whether soy should be part of the nursery school meals or not, but to gain an overview of the advantages and disadvantages.

Lesson structure:

Students receive the role cards and read them. Then, the first council meeting is held (led by the mayor). The different roles and their views are elaborated and a list of the pros and cons should be written. The counter-arguments from all parties should be written down as well. Subsequently, the research phase will provide the opportunity to study the different views in depth and to find answers for questions, to gather information and to develop new ideas. Finally, a second council meeting is held to complete or adapt the list.

- Aim: to develop arguments for a list of pros and cons.
- Topic: Students should gather information for their different roles in order to form their opinions and come to decisions based on the different arguments.
- Effects: This task could be done individually or to complete the MASCIL-series "Soy". It should serve as a possibility to develop social competencies and gain experience in holding meetings.

Methods

- gathering information
- reasoning and critical thinking
- studying a role in depth
- reflection of the task

Suggestions for Implementation

During the first lessons, students read the descriptions on the role cards they received. They can either draw the role cards or choose them, which might help them to identify with the role. They then have about 30 minutes to recall their knowledge about soy, to gather new information and to familiarise themselves with the role's points of view. Then the first meeting is held. The lesson closes with the meeting being adjourned until the next lesson. The second lesson deals with the decision-making process regarding the nursery school's meals. A list of pros and cons is developed which will then help them to come to a decision. Breaks for reconsideration are a possible option. **Übersicht der Rollen**

Neutral roles

- Mayor
- Doctor
- Agricultural consultant

Soy supporting roles (positive)

- Local farm
- Local vegetarian/vegan restaurant
- Flexitarian/semi-vegetarian parent
- Environmental activist
- Convinced vegan and parent of two nursery school children
- Tourist board member

Soy opposing roles (negative)

- Local livestock farmer
- Local traditional restaurant
- Parent of two children
- Strength athlete and parent a child
- Head of Nursery School

- Butcher

Additional Information

We expect the students to use the provided information combined with their own internet research to form their own opinions as experts. To start with, they should find out more about their role, then react to the first list of pros and cons and collect suitable statements. The result of the discussion will therefore depend on the quality of internet research done by the students. Particular attention should be paid to new sources.

Didactic Note

It is important to enable the students to come back from their roles smoothly. Doing a written reflection of their experiences would be a possible debriefing-method. Depending on how the meetings went, another method might be of value. To learn more about this, consult the following sources (in German):

- https://www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/1_08a.pdf
- http://zms.dhbw-stuttgart.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/Planspielplus/Literatur/2008/Kriz_Noebauer_2008_Debriefing_von_Planspielen.pdf



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Roles

Mayor

You have been the mayor of Neustadt for five years. The town lives on its qualitative agricultural products and tries to increase its popularity with tourists. By offering a variety of options like “vacation on a farm”, encounters with nature, farmers’ markets and high quality pubs and restaurants you hope to increase the number of overnight stays in town. However, for a while now you have had to deal with a very different debate. The nursery school’s food supplier for many years, a traditional restaurant, is about to retire. Some of the citizens are therefore asking for a change in the children’s diet, which led to the formation of two parties. One party demanding a modern and vegetarian diet based on soy, the other wanting traditional Austrian food as well as hiring the other traditional restaurant in town as the new supplier. As you prefer to deal with tourism matters you want a democratic decision on this. In order to do this, a list of pros and cons for both offers should be made. You therefore invite a variety of people interested in this matter to participate in a council meeting. The first meeting is meant for the gathering of views and ideas as well as creating the list of pros and cons. The second meeting will allow the different parties to elaborate their views and respond to the collected objections. Finally, you will hopefully have a full list of pros and cons which will enable a democratic vote. You are allowed to bring forward your own opinion during the second meeting.

Doctor

During the past weeks you have been repeatedly consulted on the discussed issue of the nursery school’s food. The town’s mayor also invited you to the upcoming council meeting to discuss this issue. You prefer a balanced and healthy diet. You are equally open for animal based and vegetarian food as long as they are combined with physical activity. Your goal is to get an overview of the different suggestions and reservations mentioned during the first meeting. Afterwards, you will investigate the most conclusive arguments and thus present your findings in the second meeting. However, people’s health remains your main concern in this discussion. At the end of the second meeting you are allowed to bring forward your personal arguments and pick a side.

Agricultural consultant

Your job is to advise farms. Therefore, you are very surprised the mayor invited you to the council meeting to participate in the discussion about the local nursery school’s meals. Your field of interest is marketing regional products and the market in general. You were asked to participate in the first council meeting and check the arguments presented for their economic correctness. You further present the advantages and disadvantages of using local products for the region during the second meeting. Apart from researching information you will be able contribute to the discussion based on many years of professional experience.

Local Farm (+)

Your farm is a traditional, family run business. Since you took over the farm your focus is on organic agriculture. Not only does this earn you a higher profit but it also benefits the environment. Moreover, switching to organic farming increases the value of your products. You just started to cultivate soy and were happy about a successful harvest last year. Your products are also promoted by initiatives like “a vegan day a week” or “we take care”. You are hoping that you will be able to improve your sales if the nursery school’s food will change to a soy based diet. For the upcoming years this would mean having a regular buyer for your products as well as partial financial security. Switching to organic agriculture could further benefit the local economy. For the council meeting, think about sound arguments to convince the community that a soy-based diet is the best option for the children. Try to collect the counterarguments and prepare for the second council meeting.

Local vegetarian/vegan restaurant (+)

You are one of the new citizens and want to fully integrate into community life. Your local restaurant which exclusively offers vegetarian and vegan dishes has not proved to be popular yet. You are partially still looking for ideal suppliers and farmers that comply with your concept. Landing the job for the local nursery school would be ideal to boost your business. Modern dishes, specifically designed for children's taste as well as high quality products are most important to you. Regional products could further enrich the menu. As a convinced vegetarian and partially vegan you are sure of the health benefits of this diet and want to convince others of it. Think about sound arguments which you can bring forward during the meeting and why the community should pick your restaurant for the job. Maybe you could even find a produce supplier for your kitchen. For the second meeting, collect all counterarguments. Which of them will you be able to refute and how could you comment on them?

Flexitarian/semi-vegetarian parent (+)

You have a health conscious diet and frequently avoid animal products, especially meat. Due to rising populations and the impossibility of living a western lifestyle globally, you decided to actively contribute to the sustainability of the community. You want to be a role model for your children by abstaining from animal products on a regular basis and motivate them to take up a flexitarian lifestyle. You are welcoming a change in the children's diet at the local nursery school as it reflects your personal beliefs in a public setting. You are actively participating in the discussion as you regard a vegetarian diet (based on soy) during school hours as exemplary. You also see various health benefits such as high protein values and other nutritional components in soy, which would improve the children's diet a lot. Additionally, this would avoid mass meat consumption. Your own children love the varied dishes and like this lifestyle a lot.

Environmental activist (+)

As an environmental activist you want to promote changes which are positive for the environment. You are particularly concerned about biodiversity and natural habitat conservation. You support the local farmer who wants to cultivate organic soy. This local cultivation would avoid imports of genetically modified soy from abroad. Moreover, this would save a lot of CO₂ emissions. You have a vision of the local nursery school becoming an important example for sustainability, which could even make the town famous as a "green" community in Austria. This could further boost the local tourism and other sectors. You strongly oppose conventional soy cultivation with the use of Glyphosate as an herbicide. You regard a vegetarian nursery school as an important step in the right direction. Sustainable development should be implemented actively and one's carbon footprint should be reduced. For you, environmental protection is directly connected with locally sourced products.

Convinced vegan and parent of two nursery school children (+)

Many years ago you came to the resolution that humans today have the possibility to decide what they want to eat. To you, living in an affluent society means being able to avoid animal products as you have enough other sources of nutrition. You chose a vegan lifestyle years ago and also provide your children with the same food. They are well nourished. The nursery school's food has been bothering you for years. As you will send both kids off to nursery school the upcoming year you don't want them to be forced to eat meat. Traditional Austrian food contains animal products in almost every dish and you hope society will soon realise this issue and rethink this. Feeding your children meat is the same as having to sit next to a smoker and being forced to inhale their smoke because you have no other choice. Things urgently need to be changed! Additionally, you are a fan of the new local (vegan) restaurant and find their food exceptionally delicious.

Tourist board member (+)

You work as a tourist manager, as part of Neustadt's tourist board. Ever since the local archaeological excavations from the Iron Age were closed you hardly had anything to do. The town's tourism has practically disappeared. A vegetarian nursery school and the respective public attention would be an opportunity for the town to increase its popularity and boost the local tourism industry. You can already imagine scientists coming into town to conduct studies about the children's health. In addition, there will be more and more initiatives in town and people will want to see the "green" community themselves. The town could also become self-sufficient by using locally sourced products and thus earn several labels and awards issued by the state. You are convinced that more and more parents would want to send their children to this school and the community would grow.

Local livestock farmer (–)

For generations your farm has been a part of Neustadt. It has always been important to you that your products are regionally promoted and you are therefore well respected in the area. The retirement of the restaurant owner creates an opportunity for you to sell your meat. During the discussion you emphasise your emotional relationship with every one of these living beings and the exceptionally good food you feed them with. Therefore, your meat is of excellent quality and is praised by many gourmet chefs. You know the local traditional restaurant and collaborated with it on several occasions. You are sure to emphasise the prime boiled beef served at the last autumn fête, which was made with your meat. Moreover, you are familiar with the discussions about soy and its negative effects on the environment. You do not really like soy because it causes rain forest deforestation and genetically modified soy is everywhere. You do not believe soy cultivated in Europe would be any different.

Local traditional restaurant (–)

Your restaurant was one of the first to open in Neustadt. You prefer traditional Austrian dishes. You want your restaurant to represent traditional home cooking and regional values. People should enjoy their time and cosiness is a top priority. As many trends have also arrived at your restaurant you even opened up to the idea of offering vegetarian dishes. Chips and salads are in the menu section marked "for plant eaters". However, you believe that today's wealthy society should manifest itself in the things we eat. Animal products that were once a luxury are available to us every day and should also be consumed as a sign of respect and gratitude to this luxury. Back in the day, only poor people would eat vegetarian food. Therefore you do not understand why you should not buy meat although you can afford it. In addition, the nutrients in animal based diets are important for child growth. Children need meat and shouldn't be malnourished. You also hope for your own financial gain by becoming the nursery school's next supplier.

Parent of two children (–)

As the parent of two nursery school children it is your given right to participate in the discussion about the children's lunch menu. After all, it is about your children's health! You would not have cared who gets commissioned to provide the children's food, but once you heard of the discussion about a soy based diet for your children you could no longer be quiet. You do not see why your children should not eat meat. Not eating meat during the day would mean you would have to cook meat for them every night at home. First of all, this would be even worse for the environment if every parent had to cook at home instead of the lunch provider doing it for all children in one turn. Second of all, you do not really fancy having to cook a nice meat dish every day after work. Your children need nutrients which are mainly found in animal products. Moreover, eating together is an important social factor and substantially contributes to the development of social competencies in your children. When you serve something new and unknown some children will not want to eat and then others would follow. This would lead to all

children being malnourished. You prefer serving them their favourite dishes such as pizza, schnitzel, liver dumpling soup or spaghetti. You also do not understand why soy was mentioned above all things. Soy is genetically modified and extremely harmful. It causes the feminisation of men and you cannot even begin to imagine what effects this would have on boys before puberty. Further, the cultivation of soy is harmful to the environment because of the mass use of herbicides, which can still be detected in food containing soy. You really hope this idea will soon be gone and the children will get good traditional Austrian food.

Strength athlete and parent a child (–)

You are a strength athlete and work as the manager of a gym in the neighbouring town. This calls for a healthy and protein rich diet. Your priority is to build muscles. This is why you and your child live on the Paleo diet, focusing on raw ingredients and meat. This protein rich diet provides you and your child with the most important nutrients for an athletic and trained body. Your child is very active for which animal fats provide the necessary energy. You are very pleased with this. You are of the opinion that it is particularly important for children to consume many animal products and additionally exercise, at least for two hours daily. You believe an athletic physique is the basis for a successful life. In order to achieve this, carbohydrates should be reduced to a minimum. The amount of pasta dishes served at the local nursery school should definitely be reduced. Instead, children should eat steaks, pork chops, scrambled eggs or similar things. After all, healthy muscles at this age, so you believe, prevent future illnesses of the musculoskeletal system.

Head of Nursery School (–)

As head teacher of the nursery school you hope to make the final decision about the school food. However, as the discussion increasingly began to have great repercussions, the mayor as well as the rest of the town had to become part of the decision making team. Yet, you see yourself as the expert as you are the only one who really knows what the children like. You are familiar with the food fights going on when vegetables, salad and vegetarian dishes are on the menu. The flying peas from June remained on the ceiling until September. So up until now you tried avoiding vegetarian dishes with the exception of sweets. The children only accept but do not favour “real” meats, like steaks or pork chops. Instead, they prefer ground meat or sausages. Other than that you mostly serve pasta, chips and gratinéed dishes. The less healthy the food is, the more you can be sure that the children will eat it. Switching to vegetarian food would lead to many problems: children would not eat anything and then hardly take naps, and the teachers would be overwhelmed by the situation. This would only cause trouble in the different classrooms – the children will become hungry and aggressive.

Butcher (–)

It is almost a miracle that you were able to keep up your business, as you are the only one left in this area. All neighbouring towns appreciate your locally sourced, high quality products and you have many regular customers. The closing of the local restaurant still means a loss of income for you, which also affects the local livestock farm. You support traditional home cooking and hope they will continue this style of cooking at the local nursery school. You want to collaborate with the other traditional restaurant in town.