

From the Museum to the Hospital—Bringing Cultural Heritage Closer to Hospitalized Children

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20/04/2022

Abstract

This project is an educational proposal for social inclusion that, through museological education, intends to make cultural heritage accessible at hospitals. Thus, it highlights the importance of raising awareness and participation on the museums' part in order to ensure maximum accessibility to their museological content, creating an emotional link between culture and society.

1. Introduction

Museums, in general, have transitioned from being spaces in which a series of collections of different characteristics were displayed to being social institutions open to the public. Therefore, a change of role took place—collections have ceased to be the active principle in museums, and now visitors are. Education has become very important in this new trend, birthing the concept of museological education.

Museological education has been conceived as an educational tool for society. On the one hand, it is aimed at disseminating the general population's heritage, and on the other hand it intends to raise awareness among the population so that they contribute to this heritage's preservation, enabling it to serve future generations too. Finally, however, it also aims to provide the enjoyment of contemplating and understanding the value and meaning of heritage to help enrich people (Pastor, 2002: 18). Therefore, it is safe to say that there is an intention to promote knowledge, respect and esteem towards culture through the education of museums. At the same time, there is a will to develop certain cognitive abilities such as observation, comparison, correlation, synthesis or interpretation.

Currently, museum institutions present educational programs with a wide range of activities, most of which are designed for schools, families and adults. These offer new proposals and educational perspectives that push the public beyond books and school classrooms. They also allow them to be in a different space where they can experiment, create, reflect, and debate. However, museums do not always offer activities that are accessible to all audiences. This is why the exclusion of many, whose participation is limited by different barriers both physical and intellectual, makes the education through museums not accessible to the entire population.

If we focus on accessibility, we have an audience that are able to visit a museum as long as a set of specific needs related to infrastructure are addressed. However, there is yet another group of citizens who cannot travel and are therefore locked in a space which they are not able to leave. This could be the case for the elderly who are at home or in residences, or people who are suffering from an illness and are hospitalized, and so on. These people have their

rights too, including the right to keep having access to cultural education. So, if these audiences cannot go to a museum, why doesn't the museum do whatever it takes to achieve their necessary integration?

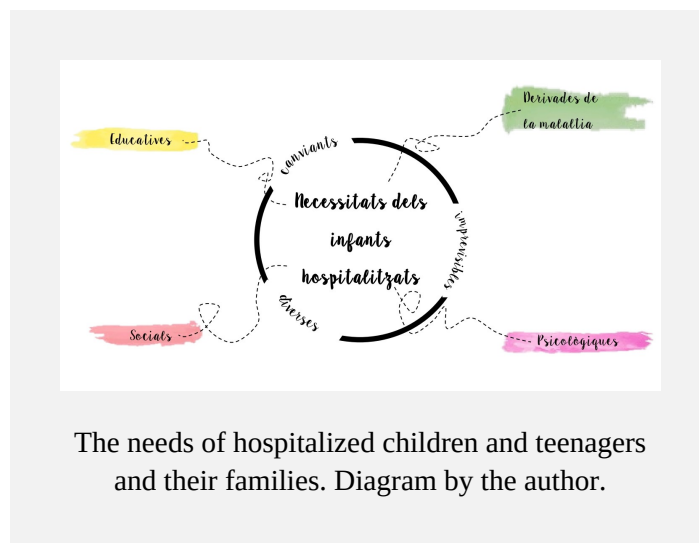
Thus, the project "From the Museum to the Hospital—Bringing Cultural Heritage Closer to Hospitalized Children" is an educational proposal for social inclusion created by the author of this article. It is focused on bringing to hospitals many activities that are carried out in museums, whether in the science, history, technology, anthropology, archeology, ethnology or whatever fields. So, the goal is to make cultural heritage accessible through museum education in this case specifically to hospitalized children. Therefore, this proposal takes on the organization, adaptation and mobilization of the knowledge and the activities of each of the participating museological institutions, following a set of parameters. As a result, it wants to ensure that hospitalized children can learn and enjoy their own cultural heritage.

2. Hospitalized children and their rights to education

Sick children or teenagers may find themselves in very different situations and conditions. It is important to keep in mind that each illness has its own characteristics, which can affect one's life in many different ways. Therefore, in order to know each situation and its particular needs, we need to ask ourselves what does hospitalization entail. A child or teenager may be hospitalized continuously or intermittently, depending on their illness and treatment status. One way or another, for them hospitalization translates into the separation from their family, into finding themselves in a strange environment, in discomfort, in pain, in fear of death, or in an everchanging familiar context. These factors do stress children.

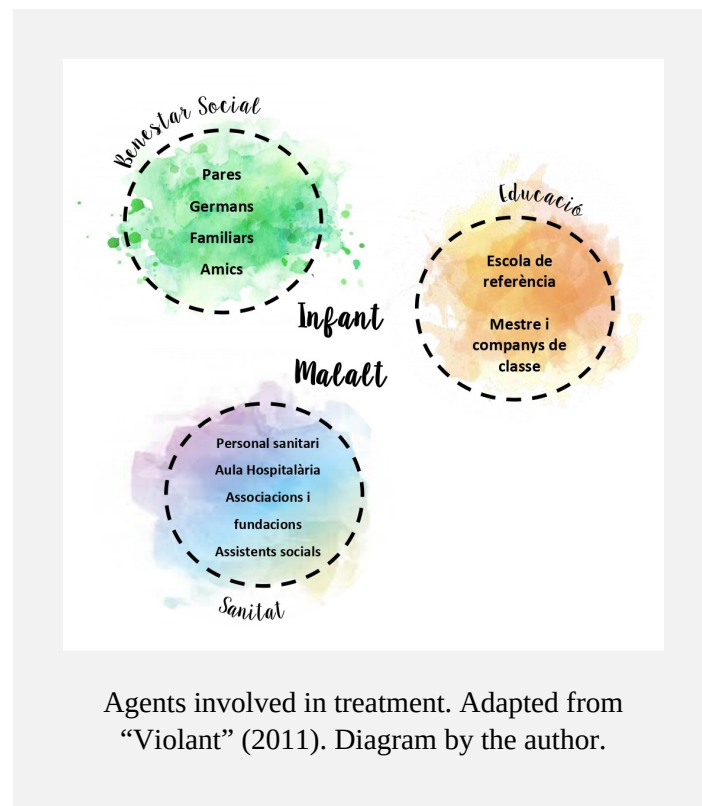
It must be noted that these children or teenagers and their families have needs that are characterized by their changeability, diversity, and unpredictability (Violant *et al.*, 2011: 45).

- Illness-related needs -> related to illness, health care, medical care, information.
- Psychological needs: cognitive needs (understanding and transforming negative thoughts into positive and emotional ones), feeling accompanied in their isolation.
- Social needs: parents, brothers, sisters, friends. -> Both are related to the emotional and social adjustment of the child and its family to their illness and hospitalization.
- Educational needs: continuing to learn what is curricular and ludic from the promotion of health and prevention related to schooling: curricular adaptation.



Hospitalization includes breaking the school environment and routine. A sick child must be cared for comprehensively, that is, coordinating the work of health, education and social professionals. It is especially important to respond to the ill minor's whole set of different needs with the immediate goal of developing their well-being and quality of life through playful and educational initiatives (playing, having fun) as well as psychological and social ones (expressing feelings, interacting with others) in order to normalize their situation and reduce the impact of their context of disease.

Therefore, children need time and space within the hospital or during their illness to encourage personal development and make hospitalization easier and more endurable. Games and education are, therefore, two very useful tools to carry out this task and prevent their childhood from prematurely ending at the moment of their diagnosis (Mas, 2016: 28).



Therefore, after realizing the educational need in hospitals, playful and educational action has been encouraged in different hospital spaces, especially in those specifically designed for this purpose such as hospital classrooms, day hospitals and playing spaces. The goal is to enable hospitalized children to meet their educational needs during this stage.

2.1. Rights and laws on hospitalized children

Inpatients have a set of laws and rights that represent them. In 1986, the European Parliament approved the Charter of the Rights of Children in Hospital, which sets out twenty-three rights of hospitalized minors. Here are the ones related to education. Any child admitted to a hospital is entitled to:

- Have rooms in the hospital that meet safety standards and are equipped with the necessary materials so that they can be cared for and educated, and where they can play.
- Keep on studying during their stay in the hospital and have the necessary teaching equipment provided by their school, especially if their hospitalization is meant to be long. Studying should not impair the well-being of the child nor interfere with their medical treatment.
- Keep on studying when hospitalization is partial, or convalescence is carried out at home.
- Have age-appropriate toys, books and audiovisual media.

The Government of Catalonia wanted to respond to this set of rights and therefore the Ministry of Education created ten hospital classrooms in Catalonia to guarantee education for students admitted for a long period of time.

2.2. Hospital classrooms

Hospital classrooms are unique educational spaces, the result of the collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, from where it was decided to incorporate educational action in hospitals to ensure the comprehensive care of children and the continuity of their educational process. Therefore, in these educational areas, the continuity of the educational process of children or teenagers aged between 3 and 16 years old who are hospitalized for more than ten days and who following their disease cannot continue at their school temporarily is guaranteed (Violant *et al.*, 2011: 101).



Interior of the Doctor Antoni Cambrodi hospital classroom at the Arnau de Vilanova Hospital (Lleida). Photo by the author.

Hospital classroom activities can be classified into three branches [\(1\)](#):

1. Curricular activities: These are activities that reinforce the school learning and favor the achievement of their corresponding curricular contents.
2. Specific activities in the hospital classroom: These are activities aimed at knowing the hospital environment and the diseases that are treated in its premises, and also at learning how to manage emotions and feelings in order to deal with the disease suffered by each particular child.
3. Leisure activities: These are activities that complement and reinforce the learning of the curricular contents. In addition, they encourage creativity, generate a pleasant and motivating atmosphere, and enhance social relationships.

Therefore, the set of dynamics and contents that can make museums accessible for these children would fit in the leisure activities specified in this classification.

3. What actions have museums taken in hospitals?

This project wants to bring museums closer to hospitals and make activities and content accessible to hospitalized children. It is true that many similar initiatives have already been carried out, nationally as well as internationally, by some museological institutions. But what we want is to generate an established program that provides a stable and continued connection between museums that does accompany children and teenagers for real during their hospital stay, thus fulfilling their rights to receive a museological education.

The following collaborations are highlighted below:

- “Art workshop at the Sant Joan de Déu Hospital”: The Picasso Museum collaborates with the volunteer

department of the Sant Joan de Déu Hospital, which organizes art workshops for hospitalized children. These are taught by artist Anna Obon, who helps creating a world of collages, stamps, drawings and words that become an enriching memory of children passing through the hospital [\(2\)](#).

- “Filling the children's hospital with color”: The National Art Museum of Catalonia (MNAC) together with the company DKV Salud y Bienestar proposed to the Vall d'Hebron Maternity and Children's Hospital to participate in an artistic creation project with BOA Mistura, an international group of mural artists. The activity took place in early-2018. Artists painted a mural in a space of the building with the help of hospitalized children. They took an artistic piece from the museum as inspiration, the emblematic Modernist work by Ramon Casas “Ramon Casas i Pere Romeu on a tandem” [\(3\)](#).
- “Hospital Museum”: In 2012 the Museum of Lleida developed a program to carry out educational workshops in the psychiatry classroom of the Santa Maria de Lleida Hospital which is currently installed in the Sant Joan de Déu Hospital. They were also joined three times by the Arnau de Vilanova Hospital. They developed an educational project with the aim of caring for children with special needs. Therefore, the aim of the proposal is to make the educational experience that takes place in the museum accessible to all children who are admitted to a hospital due to illness [\(4\)](#)
- “From the MUPE to wherever you are”: The Cidaris Foundation, which manages the Paleontological Museum of Elche, launched in September 2016 this initiative with the children of the Vinalopó Hospital. The goal was for the museum to travel to different hospitals to pay a visit and explain what a fossil is and what the purpose of the work of paleontologists is. They also held a dinosaur drawing workshop. This project was carried out thanks to the Pascual Ros Aguilar Foundation [\(5\)](#).
- “Newcastle Museum visits John Hunter Children's Hospital”: In April 2017, twenty children from the John Hunter Hospital School participated in a program organized by the Newcastle Museum in which attendees conducted various scientific experiments. They learned how to create their own sorbet, how to make small explosions and eruptions, or how to produce glue [\(6\)](#).

4. From the Museum to the Hospital— Bringing Cultural Heritage Closer to Hospitalized Children

This work undertakes a line of educational and social action based on the approach of the cultural heritage of Catalan museums for children between 3 and 16 years old who attend hospital classrooms.

The purpose of the proposal is for museums to be sensitive to other audiences who are unable to attend their activities and who are now therefore actively involved in this project. So, this proposal is responsible for organizing, mobilizing and adapting knowledge and activities to the needs of hospitalized children so that their rights are met. Rights that are based on education and access to cultural heritage.

The vision of the proposal is that every hospitalized child, apart from being able to acquire new knowledge based on culture, also forgets for a while the illness they are suffering from and participates in the proposed activities together with their peers. In short, we want to promote these children's personal and social development through the activities proposed by each museum. Thus, they can facilitate coping with hospitalization, generating opportunities for learning and having fun and developing creativity and socialization through the material provided.

4.1. What should activities be like?

The ensemble of “From the Museum to the Hospital” educational proposals applied to the field of health must consider the person, the process, the product, and the medium or environment in order to respond to the needs of hospitalized children, to the type of illness they suffer from, to the context in which the action is directed, and to the moment in which the educational activity is to be carried out.

It is important that every pedagogical action is rigorously planned and scheduled. First, it is necessary to take into

account the health and emotional state of hospitalized children, and then to think about the variation in the number of students that may be in the hospital classroom in a matter of days. Therefore, all activities must be flexible and adaptable in order to effectively respond to the children's needs as a whole. All these aspects imply a constant evaluation of the actions to be carried out in this educational proposal.

Hospital classrooms are governed by a set of methodological criteria. For this reason, each proposed educational activity must follow each of the characteristics that encompass this pattern.

- Universalize: All proposed actions in this project are based on a global approach, on our culture and on our cultural heritage.
- Customize: All activities are aimed at children and teenagers from 3 to 16 years old.
- Participate: The importance of student participation in the classroom is paramount. However, family members, health care professionals, and hospital teachers are also relevant.
- Motivate: Motivation must be achieved in all educational activities.
- Socialize: All actions are planned to be group activities. With regard to the age difference, we want to encourage socialization among older students, who can help younger ones.
- Flexibility: Taking into account these children's situation and the diversity of school levels and ages, flexibility is an indispensable feature and will lead to maximum adaptation to the needs of each child.

4.2. Museum collections as learning tools in hospitals

Museums in Catalonia have great potential for collections and movable and immovable cultural assets. Pieces with more or less antiquity that add information and great value to society, and above all tell us very different stories. A history related to its value, whether historical, archaeological, ecological, industrial, ethnographic, or cultural. This allows us to enjoy a wide variety of pieces that can be used as a pedagogical tool, whether archaeological, natural or geological elements—fossils, paintings, artistic works, photographs, documents, and so on.

The University College London (UCL) created the “Heritage in Health. A guide to using museum collections in hospitals and other healthcare settings” [\(7\)](#). As a result of their research program, researchers took objects from the collections of different museums to a variety of healthcare facilities that are part of the London NHS Foundation Trust. The project explored the health and wellness benefits of the sessions in which they could handle these pieces. Therefore, their study made it possible to define the advantages of using this dynamic, the health requirements of hospitals and finally a set of tips to establish the proper functioning of this pedagogical session.



Dynamics of the object with the reproduction of a fossilized fish from the Museum of Alcover's collection with children. Photo by Cecília Lorenzo.

In order to develop a dynamic of the object, it is necessary to follow an analytical methodology. The first thing is to ask what a particular object is like, how it behaves, what its function is, how was it technically made, what its economic implications are, and what it means to history and society. This analysis requires a close look at all details to deeply understand them. In addition, it helps to introduce other concepts that are related.

What are the benefits of using collections? Although authentic pieces are not brought out, as replicas can do the work too, they all allow people to experience and feel a whole set of sensations that are characterized by the following virtues:

- Objects can be unusual and mysterious. Therefore, this will create a sense of surprise and curiosity, prompting comments such as “I’ve never seen this before.”
- The variety of objects that can be used gives patients the opportunity to participate in different ways.
- Getting to know the meaning of objects that were initially unknown can lead to a sense of wonder and fascination.
- It is not common to have the chance to touch museum objects. This can motivate a sense of privilege.
- Natural heritage objects can be aesthetically pleasing and stimulate the senses.
- Objects can evoke experiences of prior visits to other museums and heritage spaces.
- Handmade objects can encourage participants to appreciate the skills and craftsmanship of ancient cultures and civilizations.

5. From the Museum of Alcover to the Hospital and Home Sant Camil

Before finalizing the design of the project, a pilot test was conducted in order to evaluate it. The Museum of Alcover voluntarily provided one of its activities altogether with all necessary materials. Thus, it was possible to share it with the hospitalized children at the Hospital and Home Sant Camil in Sant Pere de Ribes.



The “The Stone Fish” activity at the Hospital Sant Camil. Photo by Oriol Vigo.

“Triassic for families” is an activity that consists of using a short story to get to know marine fossils and the Triassic right before the expansion of the great dinosaurs of the Jurassic. This was the chosen activity to be adapted to the parameters designed for this proposal. The materials used were the story “The Stone Fish,” written by Àngels Ollé and illustrated by Maria Espluga, the chalk replica of the fossil fish and an image of the real one, plasticine and further material specifically designed for this project. The goals proposed by the dynamics were getting to know the Stone Fish, understanding what a fossil is and noticing the changes in the landscape of the Earth.

The activity was divided into three parts, which is considered important to do in all activities:

1. Introduction (heart-on): presenting the main theme and the Museum of Alcover and proposing the unknown in order to find out what the activity is about, for example: “How do we know their stories if they existed before humans?” and “Who told us?”
2. Development (hands-on): explaining the short story “The Stone Fish” and the didactics of the object with the plaster replica of the real fossil and the plasticine, and the image of the latter. It is interesting to understand that the sea was once where now there is a mountain, as is the case of the mountains of Prades (Alcover).
3. Conclusion (minds-on): sharing ideas, thoughts, and opinions arose during the activity. It is important to present all ideas that emerged during the session, related experiences and new ideas that emerged as a result of the topic.

5.1. Evaluation

The pilot test entitled “Triassic for families” presented a very good development and participation. In this case, both the children's families and the pediatric staff were very receptive. However, we also encountered the case of a child who did not want to participate. It is important to keep in mind that not everyone will be willing or in the right place to do the activity. Similarly, there was not a large number of kids, as their stay in the hospital may be very variable. Finally, I would also like to reiterate once again the term “adaptability.” The situation in which children found themselves involved a whole set of characteristics, such as fatigue, discomfort or nervousness, which made the activity adequate to their needs.

To evaluate and analyze each of the items that make up the activity, the rubric developed by the Community of Practice Heritage and School (CoP) was used. At the same time, a survey of the project was conducted on all participating children, families and health professionals in order to find out their level of satisfaction. But above all it was also important to make suggestions that would help us refine the needs of our target audience.

“Triassic for families” had a very satisfactory rating overall. Both the internal analysis and the surveys showed that it was an enriching activity, with a very good fit for its audience. Although some work with the head of pediatrics was done beforehand to validate the action to be taken, it was proved that the use of the museum's collections (in this case the plaster fossil) in conjunction with a didactic dynamic allowed us to stimulate the children's senses, to develop their curiosity and to provoke fascination. Therefore, it is now safe to say that movable assets that make up museum collections can be used in different ways—in this case, to help hospitalized children. Lastly, comments of appreciation and suggestions for such activities were collected, confirming both the good reception by hospitals and the low mobilization of cultural content by museological institutions to reach audiences that do not have access to it.

6. Conclusion

“From the Museum to the Hospital—Bringing Cultural Heritage Closer to Hospitalized Children” is an educational proposal for social inclusion aimed at bringing the cultural heritage of Catalan museums closer to hospitals. It is a project intended to relocate activities in museums to hospital classrooms as a resource for children who are hospitalized, thus ensuring that each of them can learn and enjoy their cultural heritage.

Raising awareness among museums for their active participation in this project is essential to ensure maximum accessibility to their museological content, creating an emotional link between culture and society. This link that will be the result of each smile gifted by hospitalized children— smiles that should make our museum institutions understand that they also have the right to an education and to access their cultural heritage, a heritage that belongs to each and every one of us.

It should also be borne in mind that this proposal sets out a structure to be followed both for carrying out museums' educational activities in hospital classrooms and rooms, and for their corresponding choice. And even for their evaluation and planning in order to ensure their proper development.

Due to the health situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the process to push forward “From the Museum to the Hospital—Bringing Cultural Heritage Closer to Hospitalized Children” has been paused. It is important to establish

a good link between hospitals, museums and the project's management, and this cannot be guaranteed at the moment.

Finally, it is paramount to take this line of educational and social action. And, in our case, it is important to have the active participation of museums to make this possible. We not only want to offer hospitalized children the opportunity to learn new knowledge based on cultural heritage— we would also like to help them get over their stay, and to achieve that for an instant not everything revolves around their disease. We want to mark this activity in their minds as a very good memory within a little nightmare.

Notes

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