

## Teaching with Hans Christian Andersen\*. Insegnare con Hans Christian Andersen.

Mette Kronborg Vedel Kiilerich, Museum Odense.

### ABSTRACT ITALIANO

La Nuova Casa di Hans Christian Andersen è stata inaugurata nel giugno 2021. Essendo un museo molto poco tradizionale, non offre visite didattiche tradizionali. Non ci limitiamo a mediare su Andersen, ma lo facciamo anche come Andersen. Utilizziamo i metodi artistici e letterari di Andersen, traducendoli in metodi di mediazione e insegnamento. Facendo del dipartimento didattico del museo "L'Universo dell'Apprendimento", abbiamo creato uno specifico profilo didattico anderseniano attraverso una grande quantità di ricerche e di sviluppo di metodi. Ne sono scaturiti percorsi di apprendimento ludici, spontanei, coinvolgenti, particolari e basati sulle riflessioni e le interpretazioni dei bambini, proprio come accade nel mondo delle fiabe di Andersen. Poiché sono gli eredi delle fiabe di Hans Christian Andersen, lasciamo che siano i bambini a crearne il significato e l'importanza.

### ENGLISH ABSTRACT

The New Hans Christian Andersen House opened in June 2021. Being a very untraditional museum, it does not offer traditional learning tours. We do not only mediate about, but also as, Andersen. We use Andersen's artistic and literary methods, as we translate them into mediation- and teaching methods. Making the museum's teaching department "The Universe of Learning", we have created a specific Andersenian teaching profile through a large amount of search and method development. This has resulted in learning tours that are playful, spontaneous, immersive, peculiar, and based on children's own reflections and interpretations – just as it is the case in Andersen's own fairytale world. Because they are the inheritors of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, we let children be cocreators of the meaning and importance of them.

### Introduzione

Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales are known and loved around the world. In Denmark both his life, his methods, and his fairy tales are all considered immeasurable cultural heritage. His fairy tales are read to children before bedtime, they are paraphrased in cartoons, books, and in illustrations, and they are mandatory in primary school as part of the Danish-curriculum. Common for the mediation of Andersen's fairy tales is that they are often served with an already established morale (Juncker, 2006). These are morals that adults have agreed upon for generations; and which children grow up to learn to agree with as well. Following the premise that Andersen and his works are cultural heritage, then children are the ones, who will inherit them. Should they then not be given a voice in the definition of their importance? When it comes to an artist, for whom one of the most important messages was that adults have a lot to learn from children, who are we as adults, to tell the children how and why Andersen's fairy tales are still relevant? Are they still relevant? We in the Hans Christian Andersen House think so, of course.

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Autore per la Corrispondenza: Mette Kronborg Vedel Kiilerich - Museum Odense.

E-mail: [METVK@odense.dk](mailto:METVK@odense.dk)

Andersen's life and works present important views on self-presentation, self-worth, social inequality, gender issues and nature (Mortensen, 2007). But adults alone cannot define how children and young people should take Andersen to heart. We must join the children in the exploration of Hans Christian Andersen's inexhaustible fairytale universe with an open mind and with open questions.

## Background

In June 2021, we opened the new Hans Christian Andersen House. Here the main thinking is that we do not only mediate about Hans Christian Andersen. Just as much, we wish to mediate as Hans Christian Andersen. This means that we have considerably translated his artistic methods into museum mediation methods (Lübker & Bøggild, 2020). This applies to The Universe of Learning, which is the teaching department in Hans Christian Andersen's House as well.

Andersen's fairy tales are playful, spontaneous, surprising, varying between immersion and reflection, and always presenting different, but always equal perspectives on the world.

Most importantly, as one of the first of his time, Andersen had faith in children as readers in his fairy tales, when it came to interpreting complex and ambiguous material (Mouritsen, 2016). Having the ambition to meet children as Andersen sets a high standard for the Universe of Learning. A standard which we do our best to meet every day.

## An Andersenian teaching profile

The universe of Learning has eight different, but all very ambitious, learning tours. Seven take place in the museum and one takes place in a digital Thumbelina realm in Minecraft Education (1). Four Permanent staff-members and two free-lance staff members carry out up to eight learning tours a day.

We have our own entrance, so the students are not disturbed by the other guests. Or so that the other guests are not disturbed by the students, depending on who you ask. We value being able to personally welcome the students and to give them the initial feeling that this is a place to create, learn, have fun, and feel safe.

We, of course, are crazy about Andersen. We share his stories, his life, and his methods through storytelling. The activities, in which the students participate, are always based on Andersen's own artistic methods and unique perspective of the world around us that we think we know (Drotner, 2006).

Because we do not only mediate about, but also as Andersen, our development work circle around the concept of something being "Andersenian". The learning tours are constructed like his fairy tales, we get into dialogues with the students, like Andersen did with his readers, and we, like Andersen, help them find the questions that are right for them - instead of only giving them answers (Lübker & Bøggild, 2020).

We make sure to always be clear and conscious about how and why we position ourselves and the student. The students always know when and why they are supposed to listen, as for example when they are our audience in an artistic story telling. They also

know when the activity is based on them, their thought, and their creations. This way the students feel safe in sharing and creating, knowing that the mediators are genuinely interested in their view on the given subject.

As a part of the Andersenian method we keep the students alert and aware by changing the premise of their visit or by showing them sides of Andersen that they did not know. As a writer Andersen would change plots and premises and change between being the omniscient storyteller and being in dialogue with the reader (Lübker & Bøggild, 2020). When we present the exhibition, we are therefor often explicit of the reasoning behind the mediation choices, to make them aware of their own critical museum sense. We also welcome the initiative when they surprise us with new angles to different subjects. The students and the world around us are just as complex as Andersen's works, and we learn something new, and hear new interpretations, from the students every day.

Like Andersen, we do not compromise when it comes to aesthetics and arts for children. On the contrary, we take children's ability to navigate complicated material and beautiful art very seriously. They meet high level arts in the form of storytelling, light- and sound design, exhibitions and of course Andersen's complex and ambiguous fairy tales.

Philosophical dialogue (Worley, 2010) is one of the methods we use in the dialogic parts of our learning tours. Here – every thought and perspective are valuable. Through specific conversational techniques we create an arena where it is not about finding the correct answer, but finding your own answer and listen to, and understand, your classmates' point of view.

Improvisational theatre (Johnstone, 2005), collage arts (Heltoft, 1977), and Open Questioning Mindset (Worley, 2010) are some of the other methods we use to let children contribute at their own pace and in their own way. Each theatrical performance or each exhibition, which the children create with us as facilitators is unique, because every student and every school class is unique - no one can be replaced.

13.000 students have already visited the Hans Christian Andersen House, and we cannot wait for thousands more to come. There are so many questions yet to be asked.

### **Conclusion, results and futher ambitions**

The universe of learning is ambitious with regard to two aspects: firstly, how the Andersenian mediation permeates the learning tours, and secondly, in the way we work hard to create activities in which every student can play, learn, create, and succeed on their own premises. Andersen himself had very difficult school years (Andersen, 1847). If anything, this shows us that every student, also the ones struggling, hold precious perspectives on not only Andersen's fairy tales but on the world. Our most important ambition is to have the students see themselves as relevant in the museum world and cultural field and to help them gain awareness of their own communicative and cultural worth (2).

In creating and developing the Universe of Learning, we ask questions as well. Not only about teaching, but about the concept of empowerment. How can we create a museum space, in which every child and young person feel relevant and comfortable? How can we prepare children and young people to not only take ownership of relevant cultural

heritage subjects, but also to use it to position themselves in the arena of the relevant discussions of today? These questions have so far made the teaching profile in Hans Christian Andersen House into what it is. Luckily, this has brought us many valued opportunities.

Aside from being able to present our methods in national and international conferences, we are now so privileged to be starting a collaboration with the national Save the Children's local welfare department. With them, we are going to learn more about reaching new and vulnerable groups of children, giving them rewarding museum experiences and build bridges between these experiences and their everyday life.

In September 2022 the Hans Christian Andersen House and the Universe of Learning received the DASA award, which focuses on educational programmes, and is annually presented by the European Museum Academy. Among other things the judge's report stated: "The various and multi-faceted educational programmes empower young people to discover the power of creativity, to translate it into an expressive language and thus become more mature and confident human beings. This is a role model from which adults can learn much". This is a statement of which we could not be prouder. Except maybe in the following scene that took place recently in the Hans Christian Andersen House.

During an evaluation of one of our learning tours a 6th grader expressed his favorite element of the visit: "The best part of it all was, that we were allowed to say, what was on our mind". With Hans Christian Andersen in our minds, this is maybe the most rewarding result of them all.

### Note

- (1) Se more here: <https://education.minecraft.net/da-dk/user/hans-christian-andersen-s-house>
- (2) Information about the history of Nordic Children's Culture in both broad and narrow sense is found in Juncker, B.: "Om processen", 2006 and Toft, H. et al.: "Mouritsens metode", 2016.

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