



Inclusive Educational Initiative in Art Museums: Educational Program for Disabled People

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Introduction

The museum as a public institution must aim not only the preservation of the cultural heritage but also the promotion of cultural initiatives that *focus on its educational and socially inclusive potential*, acting therefore as an agent of knowledge and enjoyment of our historic heritage, as well as of self-recognition and affirmation of a cultural identity for all citizens, independently of the diversity.

According to this perspective, the knowledge and enjoyment of the cultural object present in museums, following a *democratic and multicultural point of view*, should contemplate all audiences, without distinctions, what demands a series of adaptations when it comes to *special visitors* (people with sensorial, physical, intellectual or mental disabilities), being them physical (architectonic and installment accessibility) or sensorial (communication, spatial and aesthetic apprehension of the cultural object), as well as a specialized educative initiatives program, which mediation work, conducted by a facilitator agent, is to provide a better understanding and a sensorial experience about the cultural assets of the institution.

Therefore, it falls to the Education Department, as part of the museum's communication, the concretization of this important social and cultural attribution, which doesn't restrain itself to *expanding the frequency* of different audiences to the museums, but also has the important



task of developing cultural actions that have *political, social and also economic impact*. According to this principle, the museum's educators are the professionals that, without any doubts, better possess the comprehension ability of both the *general public* and the *special public*, being also the ones with more direct access to the *institutions* they belong to.

However, to enable the developing of inclusive educative initiatives for special visitors in museums and cultural institutions, it is necessary to take in consideration the current conceptual assumptions regarding the *inclusive education movement* and its applicability at the non-formal education.

While proposing an *Educational Program for Disabled People* the theoretical base should be the Inclusive Education movement, intrinsic part of a broader ideological conception - of the *Social Inclusion*.

The movement for the inclusion of students with *educational special needs* at regular schools, as an educational public policy, is relatively recent in the history of educational policies, especially in Brazil, and, as such, it should pass through changes and transformations processes, since the inclusion movement, besides its social issues, implies also the redefinition of educational paradigms, something that demands objectively a long period of adaptations and evaluations based mostly on preexistent assumptions, implemented mostly on specialized schools.

However, it is important to emphasize that the mere opening of schools for a inclusion process and the integration of students with special needs (being them social, cultural or due to physical or learning disabilities) doesn't assure a quality educational system, an inclusive education and, far less, an inclusive society.

Teachers, educators and pedagogues are exhaustively debating these issues, so complex and unsettling, and an extensive scientific production is arising. The most important



aspect, though, is that initiatives contemplating structural and pedagogical changes can be considered but, above all, that these changes respect the *human being*.

Finally, it is important to highlight that the inclusion process can't and never will be of sole responsibility of the educational public policies, since it has to be present in all instances of all our public policies as a permanent process of dialogue and a will for change and transformation.

Educational Program for Disabled People

As an example of a inclusive educational initiative, which are specialized actions for attending special audiences and training professionals of the education and inclusion fields, we'll present here the *Educational Program for Disabled People* created in 2003¹ by the Pinacoteca's *Education Department* and in which the author works as educator and coordinator.

The initiatives developed in this program can be considered a reference of a institutional cultural policy that aims an interdisciplinary participation of all of its departments and respective professionals. This program effectively enabled the implementation, seven years later, of a permanent art exhibition, the Tactile Gallery of Brazilian Sculpture of Pinacoteca's Collection, which contemplates the *multisensory perception* and the *installment accessibility* concepts of the cultural object for special audiences, with emphasis to the visually impaired.

One of the *Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo* priorities is expanding the educative initiatives that can deepen the understanding of its Collection's artworks. This goal indicates its

¹ The program was implemented during the Marcelo Mattos Araújo's term as director, when Mila Milene Chiovatto coordinated the Educational Initiatives Department.



contemporary view of museology, which defends the necessity of making art collections more accessible to the public. According to this concept, the *Educational Program for Disabled People*², as part of the Pinacoteca's Education Department, has the goal of attending *special groups*, formed by people with sensorial, cognitive, physical and emotional disabilities, as well as *inclusive groups*, composed by visitors with or without these disabilities, and therefore stimulate and expand the access of these visitors to an important Brazilian cultural and artistic heritage, represented by the Pinacoteca's collection.

The *Educational Program for Disabled People* develops the following initiatives:

1. **Welcoming of special and inclusive visitors**

Guided visits, under appointment, in which the special visitors, accompanied by a specialized educator (who belongs to the program's team)³, are introduced and invited to explore the Collection's selected artworks, not only visually but also through multisensory means, like touching, listening, smelling and kinesthetic. This initiative also includes educative visits for hearing impaired groups, guided in sign language by a specialized educator, who creates circuits and activities focusing on the needs and interests of the group.

At these visits, the following resources and mediation formats are utilized:

1.1 Sensory appreciation of original tridimensional artworks. These groups, mainly composed by people with visual disabilities, are specially allowed to touch the selected original artworks, under the educator supervision.

² In 2010, the *Educative Program For Special Audiences* was supported by Santander.

³ The program's team is currently formed, besides the author, by Margarete de Oliveira (coordination assistant), Maria Christina Costa (educator), Sabrina Ribeiro (educator and Brazilian sign language interpreter) and Natali Coutinho de Souza (intern).



Along with the Restoration and Preservation team, 30 bronze sculptures considered appropriate for touching, according to size, safety and forms and texture criteria, were selected to be part of this initiative and they can be touched by these groups of visitors. They form a selection of 19th - 20th century's sculpture history (national and international) and highlight especially the human figure, main theme among of the Collection's bronze sculptures.

1.2. **Sensory appreciation of bi and tridimensional artworks** that, for not being appropriate for touching, are complemented by support multisensory materials, such as:

* **Artwork reproductions**⁴ in relief made of acrylic resin, which represent the original works' more prominent elements, like images, objects, forms and schemes of images and background, its forms and textures, including reproductions in relief made with textured rubber on contrasting background.

The use of these materials aim to increase the understanding and the enjoyment of the bidimensional artworks by the visually impaired, as well as providing an enriching new way of experimenting and recognizing by touch the images that are predominantly appreciated visual.

A selection of 30 paintings were reproduced in that way and they were chosen accordingly to their importance to the Brazilian historical panorama and the museum's Collection, representing artists from the 19th – 20th centuries.

* **Sensory games and articulated models**⁵, in an exploratory and interactive way, stimulate the recognition and the perception of formal and interpretive elements present in artworks.

These tridimensional materials encompass the multisensory perception complexity, that is, the recognition made from the stimulus and the exploitation of different senses (visual, tactile,

⁴ Project and realization: Alfonso Ballesterro - Assistant: João Batista de Oliveira

⁵ Project and realization: Dayse de Andrade Tarricone - Assistant: Magda Pianowski



auditory, olfactory and sinesthetic⁶). Therefore, it increases the understanding and the enjoyment of the bi or tridimensional artworks by proposing, in the case of bidimensional works (paintings), a transference of a flat representation of the elements to a spatial representation, with the purpose of, besides the acknowledgement of the formal elements, the stimulation of knowledge and perception of *deepness* and *perspective* (characteristics of pictorial construction, often complex and difficult to translate, especially for people with congenital visual disabilities.)

Besides the characteristics and specificities cited above, the use of these multisensory materials and resources also have the goal of enabling a better memorization, as well as working as tools for the developing of interpretation and recreation activities, because they propose the articulation and reconstruction of the formal tridimensional elements, as well as its positioning in space, which is conceived as a setting of reduced proportions.

A set of 30 tridimensional materials (models, epoch outfits and articulated games) was elaborated following the same selection criteria of the bidimensional reproductions. For a matter of technical diversity, very representative of the second half of the 20th century's artistic production, it were also created models and articulated games inspired in some sculptures and tridimensional objects belonging to the Collection that represent the same period.

⁶ Synesthesia: A combination of two or more sensations coming from different sensory domains, eg, songs, smells or tastes that provoke association with images, shapes, or sensations associated with the vision, touch, taste, hearing and smell.



Multisensory support resources. Reproduction in relief and articulated model of “Antropofagia”, 1929, by Tarsila do Amaral. Photo: Maria Christina da Silva Costa

* **Sound design of artworks**⁷ elaborated from the edition of instrumental music’s fragments and nature, daily life and urban sounds, this feature has the function of complementing and stimulating the perception of the artworks during the visits through hearing.

* **Visual and tactile models**⁸ of the Pinacoteca’s building and its surroundings, including a floorplan of the museum’s exhibition rooms. It’s a very important support material, especially for the visually impaired, because it’s the only spatial reference of the museum’s space, which is part of the architectonic heritage of the city. During the exploitation of these models, the educators not only explain the technical and aesthetic information about the architecture from the time it was built but also talk about the area’s and the building’s history since its construction in the late 19th century.

⁷ Project and realization: Izabel Bertevelli

⁸ Project and realization: Dayse de Andrade Tarricone and Regina Martinelli.



Model of Pinacoteca do Estado building. Scale: 1:100

Photo: Alfonso Balletero

2. Specialized Publications

Informative brochures about the Program are available for the public, as well as catalogues accompanied by audio CDs, which are distributed free of charge to the visually disabled visitors and partner institutions.

The catalogues were elaborated to provide historic information about the museum, the artists and artworks part of its Collection, and contain texts and images adapted for reading by the visually impaired and people with difficulties at reading comprehension.

In 2010 the Department created a new publication, the Pinacoteca's Collection *Visiting Guide for People with Hearing Impairment*, which has the purpose of orienting and accompanying the hearing disabled audience that choose to visit the museum without an educator's guidance.



3. The Brazilian Sculpture's Tactile Gallery Educative Program

Implemented in 2009, the Tactile Gallery of Brazilian Sculpture Educative Program was created to provide the visually impaired visitors with autonomy to visit and enjoy the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo.

The exhibition allows the visitors to explore and recognize, by touching the artworks, twelve bronze sculptures that belong to the museum's collection, presented according to judicious accessibility's standards and complemented by other support resources, like tactile paving, double reading texts, maps and labels (Braille and print), as well as informative brochure and catalogue in double reading, with images in relief and an audio CD.

The visually impaired visitors might also make use of an audio guide, which contains orientations about the exhibition circuit, descriptions and exploratory texts, all of which aims to instigate them to recognize and interpret the selected works as well as its thematic and narrative.

The selection of artworks took in consideration the suggestion of the disabled visitors who took part in guided visits in the last five years. Other factors that impacted the choice were dimension, form, texture and aesthetic diversity, which facilitate the comprehension and artistic appreciation of the artworks to be touched. The selection also counted with the advice of visually impaired professionals that were invited to be part of this process.



The Tactile Gallery of Brazilian Sculpture

Photo: Leandro Roman

4. Trainings, Partnerships and Consultancy

The Education Department offers courses, lectures and consultancy projects with the purpose of training professionals acting in the museum, arts, inclusive education and health's fields, as well as establish partnerships with cultural, social and educational institutions. The aim is to develop art education methodologies for inclusion, accessibility projects and educative and inclusive initiatives from the experience acquired by the program. Among the partnerships are the Sao Paulo's Municipal Secretary for the Disabled and People with Reduced Mobility (SMPED in Portuguese) and the Culture Secretary's Unity for the Preservation of Museum Heritage (UPPM). Together these partnerships resulted in the Program for Accessibility Training and Inclusive Education in Museums, which has the purpose of offering subsidies for the specialized technical training of educators and museum employees, mainly those that work at the UPPM's museums, located in Sao Paulo State.

Also, believing that a program for a specific audience should be shared to those directly and indirectly related to the institution's public, the Department periodically carries out *Functional Conscience* encounters for receptionists, security guards and other employees of the museum.



Final Considerations

Since October 2003, when the permanent attending of schools and specialized institutions at Pinacoteca began, the *Educational Program for Disabled People* has been welcoming every week special and inclusive groups, besides performing periodical meetings with employees, educators and students and professionals of arts, education and health fields interested in art programs that take diversity and special needs into consideration.

A survey about these groups frequency between 2003 and 2009 showed that 1200 people with disabilities were attended at Pinacoteca, in limited groups of up to 15 people, in guided visits that sometimes last a whole morning or afternoon.

At last, it is also important to highlight the importance of the partnerships and the support provided by other cultural institutions, companies and NGOs to the projects we have in common, which arise from the conscience of a need for commitment and social responsibility in our country. These partnerships assured the quality and durability of the mention programs, that are dedicated to the less acknowledged groups of our society, and contributed to this inclusive cultural policy, making of Pinacoteca a reference both in educational initiatives and at the Brazilian museological scenery.

The equality is an universal right and it's concretized through policies that, by treating everyone equally, also recognize their differences, providing the necessary opportunities for everyone to develop their potential and to be assisted in their needs also as independent citizens.”



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