

Implementing Education for Sustainable Development in the context of hospital teaching

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Background

For hospital teachers, hospitals have great potential as physical learning environments to develop competencies for climate action. On one hand, hospitals generate significant environmental footprints through their energy consumption, waste production, and as major consumers of industrial food production. On the other hand, hospitals prevent and cure diseases in a time when climate change is considered the biggest global health threat of the 21st century. Accordingly, there are a number of possibilities for students to become active participants in the local and real-life environmental issues that concern the hospital, as part of the learning activities at hospital schools.

What is Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)?

ESD is a teaching and learning approach that “empowers learners with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society empowering people of all genders, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity” (UNESCO, 2020, p. 8). A holistic approach that integrates social, environmental and economic aspects is crucial within ESD (Sandell, Öhman & Östman, 2005) and central to this implementation.

Three ESD projects at the Oslo Hospital School

The hospital school received funding for three years from The Sustainable Backpack, which is a national initiative in Norway to promote ESD in schools. All projects in the project period were developed to answer one over-arching question: Should the hospital be more environmentally friendly? The funding made it possible to create partnerships in and out of the hospital and to make time for planning and professional development for teachers.

Project 1: Making a rooftop garden

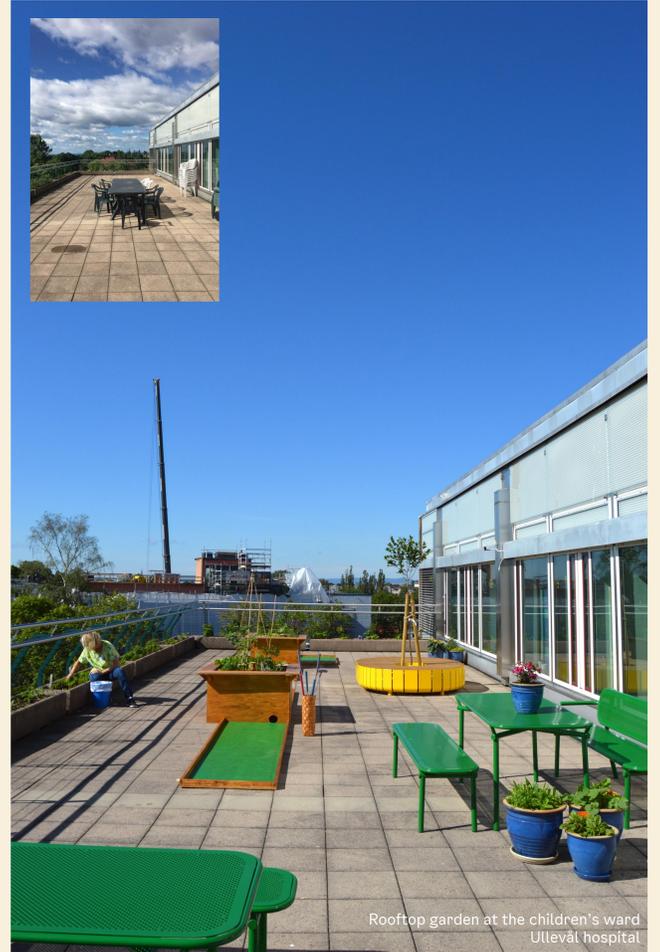
Students from 6 to 18 years old participated in developing a small rooftop garden at the children's ward of Oslo University Hospital's Ullevål hospital. They designed their vision of a hospital rooftop garden, chose specific models and colors of climate-neutral outdoor furniture, planted vegetables and bee-friendly flowers, and participated in acquiring additional funding for the project.

Project 2: A greener hospital

We invited our students to suggest environmental measures for the hospital in collaboration with environmental leadership at Oslo University Hospital. The students could explore relevant issues and submit their proposals to the environmental leadership, who reviewed and attempted to implement them. For example, our students suggested that the hospital buys eco-friendly whiteboard markers, reduces plastic waste, and serves food with a lower carbon footprint.

Project 3: Creative writing

By using creative writing to co-create with our students, we attempted to affect people through art and literature and explore how poems about sustainability and climate change could empower our students and have their voices heard in the hospital. Inspired by the Swedish project Sustainable Poetry, we shared poems and illustrations in elevators and hallways at the hospital and worked towards a poetry exhibition on World Poetry Day.



Rooftop garden at the children's ward
Ullevål hospital



Translation:
Alone
I stand alone
Like the snow owl in the middle
of the arctic tundra
Don't want to be affected
Don't want to disappear
But suddenly I was red listed too

Written by a 10th grade student

Evaluation

- The roof top garden is now used by the school, patients and hospital staff. 68 student suggestions for the roof top garden were considered.
- The students stated that the opportunity to be outside and to distract them from being in the hospital was the most important reasons for having a roof top garden at the hospital.
- The hospital received 88 environmental measures from students and the hospital school has put up birdhouses, bumblebee homes, and a green house with students.
- 31 poems, written by students, were featured in our main poetry exhibition.
- Feedback from the students themselves indicates that the level of actual student involvement was an important and positive feature.

Conclusions and implications

Taken together, the three projects demonstrate ways in which hospital schools can collaborate with hospitals to create meaningful learning environments for exploring complex issues of sustainability. Key insights for implementing ESD in the context of hospital teaching were, in these cases, centered on partnering with environmental leadership at the hospital and other community actors, securing funding, interdisciplinary teaching and learning, time allocation and school organization. From the student perspective, it was important to work with real-world issues that impacted them in the situation they were in at the time, and many expressed that these were important issues for them to work with.

And maybe, as one student said about the hospital: «We can go from concrete and sad to green and healthy.»

References

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