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VERKSTADEN

# Children's Traffic school

Hands-on learning in traffic awareness in Helsingborg, Sweden

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# Children's Traffic school

Hands-on learning in traffic awareness in Helsingborg

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## About this example

The "Traffic School" provides a safe environment to children to explore the different parts of the traffic system promoting awareness and educating children on how to interact and behave in a traffic environment. It is a complete experiential learning approach involving all senses; body, emotions, and mind.

## Context and Challenge

The initiative has a long history, having been funded by Helsingborg municipality in 1955 and managed by the voluntary organization "Kvinnliga Bilkåristerna" until 2010. The traffic school is a physical space in a local park featuring modern traffic signs, pedestrian crossings, and cycling paths to simulate real-world traffic scenarios in a safe setting. It is maintained over the years as it is important for children to understand the traffic system.

Since 2011 the activity is managed by Miljöverkstaden (the Environmental Workshop). The Workshop is a Helsingborg's initiative to support environmental education in partnership with schools. The facility has recently been expanded to nearly 2,000 square meters with renewed and updated infrastructure.

The Traffic School for children is attended by every child at the age of seven, at least once.

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# General Process

Today the process is self-driven. There are 62 schools and about twice the number of 1st grade classes. The schools can book their interest online.

After the renovation in 2011, the Miljöverkstaden (the Environmental Workshop) staff facilitated the lessons within the traffic school. Over time, the school educators learned and have been willing to take over the facilitation so that the Workshop staff could develop and offer other programs.

Most Year 1 teachers are now trained to run the traffic lessons in the Traffic School. When they book their visit in an online system, they receive the latest version of the materials so that they can prepare if they feel the need, and don't have to look for them or ask for them.

The evaluation shows positive results. Students find the experience enjoyable. They often stop the facilitators on the street (when they are not their teachers) to chat about it; this also means that they keep the memories of the day, thus the learnings too.

In addition, Miljöverkstaden has developed a number of programs for the different school grades. Here are a few examples:

One reinforcing program for 1<sup>st</sup> graders is called "Sköj på hoj" (Have fun). It helps the young pupils to have the right posture and attitude when walking around in traffic situations. One of the exercises requires the students to walk across a road crossing while balancing a bean bag; on the pretext of preventing the bag from falling off the top of their heads, the students actually practice the right posture and concentration to be aware of their surroundings while walking across the crossing, and having fun at the same time: again creating optimal conditions for learning.

Another complementary program is focused on 3<sup>rd</sup> graders who are invited to a program called Cyklan är kul (Biking is Cool). In this program students deal with sustainability issues like the impact of active mobility on health, mood and the environment.

# Results and Benefits



Photo: Jan Rusek



Photo: Jan Rusek



Photo: Jan Rusek

## Multiplying effect

The positive experience has encouraged the kids to reach out to their parents – after the experience the children request to use more bikes and buy one if they don't already have one.

## A complete educational experience

Working in this way involves all the senses and abilities (mental, emotional physical) which increases learning and retention.

## Meaningful use of public space

When not in use by the schools (after school hours or at weekends) the Traffic School is open for everyone, and often full! The people have access and can switch on the traffic lights and use the whole area.

## Shared ownership of public assets

One evidence of the ultimate impact of the initiative is the absence of pixing and vandalism. Children value the experience and know that others will too.

# Lessons Learned

## **Ideal Group Size**

The ideal size for the workshop is around 14 children given the size of the facility. Too many and it gets crowded and some of the kids have no function, so they are preoccupied with something other than traffic dynamics safety and awareness. Fewer than 14 do not create an adequate flow.

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## **Maximize the outing**

Larger groups are divided into satellite activities outside the space (in this case they are organized by the schools themselves).

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## **Keep teacher motivated**

After a few years the teacher may have a dip in motivation, as it is repetition. But it is the same as the official curriculum and it is helpful to remind them how good it is for the 1<sup>st</sup> grade kids who are always going there for the first time.

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## **Natural age limit**

The natural age limit for this activity seems to be around 8 years. At this age, the play starts to become more energetic and harsh, and the space starts to feel too small for them compared to the other kids.

# Key Steps (Check list)

- ☐ Prepare the site,
  - If you don't have a permanent space, there are modular model signs, lights and crossings that can be installed in different locations and moved when necessary.
  - “Vehicle” availability (different types of tricycles and even smaller bikes)
  - Find the optimum number of students for your space
    - Make sure you have parallel activities if the classes exceed the optimum number for your space
  
- ☐ Prepare the curriculum and dynamics.
  - Define the experiential learning. Select scenarios, traffic rules and behaviours to be highlighted
  - Select which dynamics the children will experience
    - Roles:
      - Pedestrians
      - Drivers
      - Bikers
      - Traffic security /police
      - Public transport
      - You can include vehicle maintenance
      - Etc.
  
- ☐ Engage schools and their 1<sup>st</sup> grade student in the experience!