Learning Situation

Rethinking the Daily School Commute

Cities are increasingly confronted with mobility challenges that affect both the environment and people's daily lives. Congestion, air pollution and rising transport needs make commuting more stressful and energy-intensive, especially during peak hours. At the same time, growing attention to public health, climate goals and liveable urban spaces has encouraged many cities to rethink how students and families move through the urban environment.

Sustainable mobility approaches — such as walking, cycling, shared transport and improved public transit — show that even small changes in everyday travel can contribute to cleaner air, safer streets and better quality of life. These solutions also demonstrate how transport behaviour, urban planning and community choices are closely connected.

This Learning Situation invites students to look at mobility challenges in their own city and explore how the daily school commute could become safer, cleaner and more sustainable through realistic and locally relevant improvements.

Driving Question

How can we redesign the daily commute to school to make it cleaner, safer and more sustainable for everyone?

Scenario

Many municipalities report growing concerns linked to school mobility. During morning and afternoon peak hours, heavy car traffic creates bottlenecks around school entrances, increasing air pollution, reducing visibility and making streets unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists. In some areas, public transport may not be frequent or reliable enough, and safe cycling or walking routes are missing or poorly maintained.
To address these issues, the municipality has launched a call for ideas inviting students to examine their own travel experiences, identify local challenges and propose practical improvements that make everyday journeys safer, more efficient and environmentally friendly.

Task

Students explore mobility in their local context and examine how the daily commute to school could be improved to make it cleaner, safer and more sustainable. Working in groups, they select one route, area or mobility challenge and develop a clear, evidence-based proposal that responds to the Driving Question. Their work should reflect realistic and meaningful ideas based on local needs.

This activity implies a holistic approach.

Students explore the Driving Question by considering several interconnected aspects of proposing a viable mobility solution — such as analysing travel patterns and safety issues, identifying community needs, assessing environmental impacts, and evaluating the feasibility of realistic improvements to the daily school commute.
This learning situation is intentionally broad and flexible, allowing each group of students to take agency in choosing which space to focus on and what type of transformation to propose. This encourages students to lead their own inquiry, make creative decisions, and explore topics and solutions according to their interests.

To support this process, teachers may use the Lesson Plan developed for this topic, which guides the activity step by step and structures this holistic exploration.

Link to Lesson Plan

Alternative Approaches

In addition to the approach described in the Task above, we also propose alternative ways of implementing the Learning Situation. When choosing one of these alternative options, the Lesson Plan developed for the main Driving Question can still serve as a reference, but it should be adapted to match the different structure and focus of the chosen approach.

1. Single-Challenge Approach

Teachers may choose to focus the activity on **one single specific mobility issue** that is particularly relevant to the local context.

This option is often easier to manage because:

- **it may require less time**, since the class concentrates on a single well-defined challenge;
- **it simplifies planning**, as all students work within the same theme;
- **it increases local relevance**, allowing teachers to select a challenge that is meaningful and visible in the school's immediate surroundings.

In the single-challenge approach, all student groups will work on the same overarching urban sustainability challenge. To provide focus and structure, each group can be assigned one of four perspectives to guide their investigation:

- **Where:** Investigating and describing the current state
- **Who:** Exploring community needs and preferences, including residents, schools, and local businesses.
- **Why:** Examining and describing the specific environmental challenges
- **How:** Identifying feasible types of mobility, design interventions, or other practical solutions.

This structure allows students to **specialise in one dimension of the challenge** while maintaining a shared focus. At the end of the research phase, the groups will **come together to combine their findings**, creating a comprehensive understanding of the issue and collaboratively proposing informed, well-rounded solutions.

Suggested Local Challenges (What can be done…?)

Improving pedestrian safety

Students analyse walking routes and identify dangerous crossings, missing sidewalks or poor lighting.
What can be done to make walking routes safer, more accessible and more comfortable for students?

Encouraging cycling to school

Students examine cycling routes, intersections and bike-parking facilities.
What can be done to support cycling — through safer bike lanes, secure parking or improved road sections?

Reducing congestion around schools

Students analyse car queues, parking conflicts and drop-off patterns.
What can be done to reduce traffic during peak hours and create a calmer, safer environment around the school?

Strengthening public and shared transport

Students evaluate buses and shared mobility services in terms of reliability, overcrowding and connections.
What can be done to make public or shared transport more reliable, accessible and attractive for students?

2. Developing Your Own Learning Situation

Teachers may design their own Learning Situation within the mobility topic. The examples provided above are suggestions and can be adapted or replaced with other local challenges that better reflect students' environment and community needs. Teachers may also consult local authorities or stakeholders to identify a meaningful and realistic focus for their students.

A good Driving Question should:

- be relevant and motivating for students;
- be feasible within available time and resources;
- support structured group work;
- involve accessible stakeholders (families, municipality, transport providers, community members);
- be linked to at least one of the five project competences.

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