

EDUCATION REVIEW



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The furniture in your classroom is more important than you think: opinion

By: [Steve Dimotakis](#) in [Health+Wellbeing](#), [In The Classroom](#), [Opinion](#), [Top Stories](#) March 2, 2021 [Q](#)

Over time, we've understood that traditional classroom furniture and traditional classroom design simply [no longer facilitates](#) the most effective, engaging and productive learning environment for students.

Studies have highlighted that the physical classroom environment has a [direct relationship](#) with the academic performance of students. Notably, that classrooms that accommodate for children's innate need to move produce higher quality learning outcomes.

As Eric Jensen writes in his article *Moving with the Brain in Mind* (2000), "brain research confirms that physical activity – moving, stretching, walking – can actually enhance the learning process". This is because movement performed by any student activates their brain which improves their concentration and productivity levels, keeping them engaged throughout the day.

What these studies highlight is that for every foot bounce and leg swing, students are actually stimulating their brain. So, if you wish to see your students reach their academic potential, educators must not suppress their students' instinctive nature to move within the classroom.

With this in mind, telling students to 'sit still and pay attention' is actually doing the exact opposite of what you're asking the student to do. Rather, teachers and educators are encouraged to accommodate for their movement in the classroom with activities and flexible furniture that allows them to wiggle and wobble as they please – without disrupting their classmates, of course.

Flexible furniture refers to furniture specifically designed to facilitate and encourage movement in the classroom is most effective when used within a flexible seating plan. A flexible seating plan allows students to choose where they would like to sit, with the core objective of reducing the amount of time they are sedentary.

By replacing generic classroom furniture, with specially designed, ergonomic, flexible furniture, like swizzle ottomans and dynamic activstools, you'll be able to promote active learning and reduce distractions which can help educators minimise off-task and disruptive behaviour.

But not everything that wobbles is good. Classroom furniture still needs to provide ergonomic support for all students. Ergonomic, height-adjustable school furniture is known to [improve student performance](#). The more tailored a desk or chair is to a student, the more comfortable and productive that student will be – that's ergonomics.

Studies have revealed that comfort can [positively impact learning](#), productivity and creativity. Whilst the aim is to reduce the amount of sedentary behaviour in the classroom, ensuring that they're ergonomically supported when they are seated for longer periods of time will prevent back and neck pain that could increase fatigue, irritability and reduced concentration in the classroom.

With ergonomic, flexible furniture, students feel more relaxed, comfortable and focused which contributes to an improvement in their cognitive function, allowing them to better retain information.

Movement in the classroom is particularly important for students living with some neurodevelopmental disorders including ADHD. In 2015, [a study](#) conducted by researchers at the *UC Davis MIND Institute* found that the hyperactivity seen in students with ADHD increases their arousal level which makes them more attentive – overall, improving their cognition and academic performance.

Professor of psychiatry and director of the UC Davis ADHD Program, Julie Schweitzer, said that restricting ADHD students who need to move in order to maintain cognitive function from moving could actually be limiting their academic potential.

"Parents and teachers shouldn't try to keep them still. Let them move while they are doing their work or other challenging cognitive tasks," she said. "It may be that the hyperactivity we see in ADHD may actually be beneficial at times."

Though not all students are kinesthetic learners, flexible seating gives each student the option to choose a desk or seat that works best for them, so each student is receiving the best attention and facilities they need to maximise their academic performance.

While flexible furniture focuses on physical movement, a flexible classroom is all about adaptability. To facilitate a flexible classroom, educators are encouraged to use flexible, adjustable furniture to not only encourage physical movement, but collaboration. Using tables and chairs that can be easily reconfigured and moved to form small groups plays an important role in the learning process.

Studies have shown that collaboration between students helps develop higher levels of thinking. Being able to consolidate knowledge with peers whilst extending their knowledge through active discussion significantly improves information retention.

It becomes clear then that flexible furniture is critical in curating a learning environment that students not only feel comfortable in, but enables them to actively engage in classroom activities and discussions. By being a willing participant in the classroom, students feel more confident to question and clarify educational material which contributes to an improvement in their overall performance in the classroom.

Needless to say, the furniture you implement into your classroom is paramount to the quality of learning outcomes students produce. Thus, if you are to expect students to stay focused, engaged and active within the learning process, it's the educator's responsibility to facilitate an environment that enables them to do so.

So, as research into the significance of enabling movement for students continues to surface, classrooms should be adapted to facilitate the needs of all students by creating a universal, flexible classroom that allows them to maximise their academic potential.