

Opinion: Why make students sit still?

By Carolina Blatt-Gross, CNN

As a graduate student, I had the opportunity to observe a number of idyllic, progressive classrooms where students danced to the pencil sharpener or sprawled across beanbag chairs while completing their work. I read countless books and articles about research that supports physical activity as part of academic success. It made sense to me – theoretically – that children should be allowed to move their bodies. Asking them to do otherwise, I came to believe, could be detrimental to both the student and the teacher.

Then it got personal. I had two children of my own, two fearless boys who are so busy they don't have time to stop for uninteresting activities like eating, sleeping or potty training. Our eldest son lobbed himself out of his crib at 10 months and hasn't stopped climbing since. Putting clothes on our younger son currently involves a high-speed chase followed by a wrestling match and, if we're lucky, ends with at least one piece of clothing partially in place.

Obviously, it takes more than a little mental and physical effort for them to keep their bottoms in a chair.

This doesn't bode well for academic success in traditional classrooms, where sitting quietly is a prerequisite for nearly all instruction. I cringe in anticipation of the notes my sons' constant motion and chatter will prompt future teachers to send home. I worry that their intellectual prosperity will be curtailed by the simple, but daunting, expectation that they sit still for hours each day.

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