

Sitting Does Not Equal Learning

Dear Parent –

Were you expected to sit still – in desks in neat rows – when you were in school? Has that experience caused you to believe that learning can only take place when your child is also sitting still?

During my presentations, I often exclaim, “Children do not exist only from the neck up!” It may seem like a silly statement, but our education decision makers apparently believe that a child’s head/brain is the only thing that matters. If they didn’t, they wouldn’t implement policies that keep kids sitting in school!

I have serious objections to the idea that learning supposedly only comes via the eyes, the ears, and the seat of the pants. Schools – and policymakers – have for too long adopted the belief that learning best occurs while kids are seated (and quiet, of course). The theory may have been understandable back when they didn’t have the research to prove otherwise. But today we do.

Today we have research showing that

- The more senses used in the learning process, the more information we retain.
- The brain is far more active during physical activity than while one is seated.
- The learning brain can only absorb information for a handful of minutes.
- Sitting for more than 10 minutes reduces our awareness of physical and emotional sensations.
- Sitting in a chair *increases fatigue* and *reduces concentration*.

Perhaps you’ve had days where you were forced to sit at a conference, in meetings, or on a plane for endless minutes or hours at a time. And perhaps you’ve wondered at the end of those days why you were so exhausted, when all you did was sit. Imagine if you had been expected to learn something important during those endless minutes or hours. Imagine how impossible it is for the brain to perform optimally under such conditions!

If sitting makes us tired and interferes with concentration, why would we want children to sit *more*?

In the words of teacher Dee Kalman,

“When the bum is numb, the mind is dumb.”

Playfully yours,
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