



## CLASSROOM FURNITURE

by Bob Hill

### Active Learning Needs Active Solutions

If you picture a classroom or lecture hall, chances are the image you conjure will include rows of fixed chairs or desks facing the front of the room. The basic classroom design hasn't changed much in the last one hundred years. Educators have become conditioned to depend on standard-issue classroom, without challenging its effectiveness.

#### Turning to Movement to Improve Learning and Wellness

There's a one-size-fits-all furniture policy that doesn't end up benefiting educators or students. Even when it's clear the furniture is falling short, i.e. students forced to use desks that aren't the right size, chairs that are designed for easy stacking rather than proper spine support, or fixed stations that inhibit any form of group collaboration, often temporary solutions are sought, rather than addressing the root of the problem.

The underlying issue is that the average classroom is designed for students to sit. Forcing students to sit limits learning and results in sedentary behavior, which has been shown to have negative long-term health consequences. Something as simple as furniture designed for movement can have a big impact on an otherwise static learning environment.



## Linking Movement and Learning

Scientists have been exploring the link between movement and learning for many years, proving that physical inactivity can impair developmental behavior and skills. According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), movement can be an effective cognitive strategy to strengthen learning, improve memory and retrieval, and enhance learner motivation and morale.

Movement can also be credited with better health. Since the 1960s, obesity rates in the U.S. have tripled. Younger and younger people are now subject to diseases that were once associated only with older adults, and obese youth are more likely to have risk factors for long-term cardiovascular disease, such as high cholesterol or high blood pressure. Adding low-level physical activity such as standing into the classroom can make a difference.

Based on published studies of sit-stand desks with adults in office settings, adding even moderate amounts of movement can improve mood, reduce fatigue and promote an overall sense of well-being. For instance, Dr. John

Buckley with the University of Chester says that standing can burn 50 calories more per hour than sitting; just 4 hours of standing per day can add up to 20 pounds of fat in a year. Standing also increases blood flow and metabolism, burns more calories and improves focus and energy.

## Staying Stuck in Static Mode for Generations

The real question is why our classrooms have been static for so many generations. When evaluating today's educational learning environments, it is surprisingly hard to find examples of where the research encouraging movement has had any impact.

Even with the great technological strides of our times, students are still sitting in traditional classrooms with fixed chairs and furniture; such furniture has limitations that impact physical and mental development. Traditional furniture allows next to no variation in posture and leads students into a largely sedentary routine through significant portions of their day. Designing a well-integrated, collaborative, active classroom means moving away from fixed furniture.

## Rethinking and Reconfiguring

Educators and students have found that the effortless and natural reconfiguration of the classroom brings a new dimension to teaching and the curriculum as students move quickly to create various formations without wasting lesson time. Maintaining student attention also becomes less of a challenge; students report being more attentive and alert if standing.

Furniture designed for movement gives professors flexibility and adaptability in the way they teach, by enabling students to quickly and easily move about a classroom as needed. Desks with casters can be easily guided around a room to meet varying curriculums, from the 360 degree to the flipped classroom.

A traditional forward facing room can be reconfigured in just moments to allow for greater collaboration among students, without the typical chaos that happens in classrooms that are cluttered with stationary desks and chairs. Individual desks can be maneuvered and adjusted on a whim for the person or task at hand, and just as quickly returned to a starting position.

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## Using Mobility to Support Varied Learning & Teaching Styles

The mobility supports the shift between lecture, discussion and project work. Mobile furniture fits a variety of classrooms, learning styles and teaching techniques.

Switching positions and having the ability to channel restless energy is also a key to an active learning environment. In the classroom, it can be done with student standing desks that adjust to the height preference of individuals and change easily, on the fly, without help from the instructor or facility managers.

Many standing desks offer height adjustment, allowing students to stand in the way that's uniquely comfortable, as well as move or fidget during class in a natural and non-disruptive way. The height adjustability can also be used to adjust desks to a collaborative level. With the use of stools, students can sit or stand at will, as their bodies' demand, without breaking lines of sight to the instructor.

## Uncovering Pedagogical Opportunities

The opportunities to use this type of furniture in a classroom are broad. A professor can give

students a small group assignment and, within moments, students can be reconfigured into breakout groups, all of their materials and belongings traveling with them and immediately collaborating on a project.

Professors can also respond to the energy in a room and recapture student attention by encouraging students to stand up or quickly reconfigure their desks, since standing has the ability to renew focus and reduce disruptions. Enforcing a behavioral change that it's acceptable to stand, and the mentality that standing and movement is encouraged, is the best solution of all; movement will happen naturally, whether the curriculum directly encourages it or not.

## Leveraging Natural Energy of Students

Creating a healthier classroom that's more conducive to learning requires leveraging the natural energy of students with curriculum that integrates movement and furniture. Adjustable height, mobile classroom furniture has earned its place as a strong option for health and performance.

Integrating low level physical activity, like that of using a standing desk, into the classroom can have a positive impact on student health, classroom engagement and academic performance. An active classroom also fosters frequent physical movement and the ability to easily interact with others, bringing movement—however subtly—into classrooms and learning environments during lecture periods, group projects, test taking or studying. Furniture that facilitates movement can finally give schools a means to achieve what research has already proven.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Bob Hill, Ergotron's Global Education Manager, is building greater awareness for how students, classrooms and schools benefit from adjustable standing desks. Ergotron is empowering smart learning with mobile device charging systems, height-adjustable student and teacher desks and AV mounts. To learn more, visit [education.ergotron.com](http://education.ergotron.com).

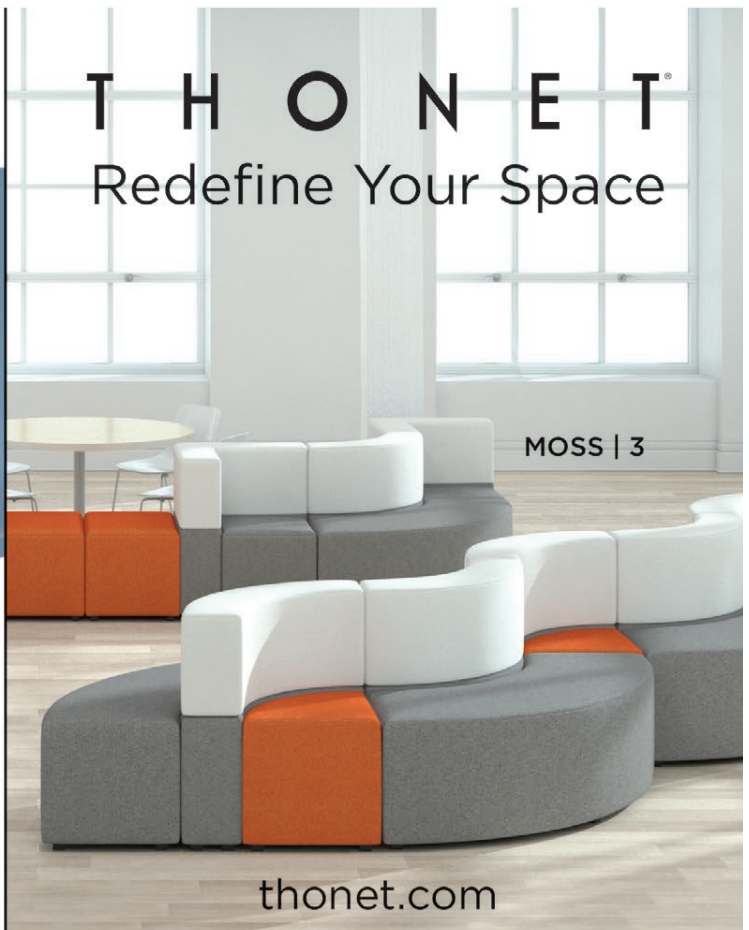
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