

How bikes transform students and the classroom environment

By Bryan Cinti, Principal, St. Timothy Elementary School

A common issue that many educators and administrators face is how to keep students who are often distracted, disruptive, or those that just need to get the “wiggles out” focused and engaged in lessons. There is a deep connection between the brain, physical activity and focus—the more you exercise the better your ability to concentrate.

If you were to read my grade three report card from Ms. Moore at St. Gregory Elementary School, you would see that the recommendations for success for me were to: “*Stay seated and while seated, sit still!*” Although this report card was written 36 years ago—and I’ll admit at the time I was in today’s terms, a “spirited child”—the challenge for teachers to find solutions for active learners still exists.



Bryan Cinti in grade three

It was Dr. John Ratey’s work on exercise and the brain that helped me to understand why I struggled to follow my Grade Three Teacher’s advice despite my desire and effort to do so. His book *SPARK* also helped to explain why I feel better prepared for a day of work as an elementary school principal after a workout in the morning:

The real reason we feel good when we get our blood pumping is that it makes our brain function at its best—the point of exercise is to build our brains. Building muscles and conditioning the heart and lungs are side effects (Ratey, 2012).

Movement does more for children than help get their “wiggles out”. Movement helps children stimulate their brain’s corpus callosum (the part of the brain that allows communication between the two hemispheres); the bundle of nerve fibers that connect the right and the left sides of our brains often referred to as the message exchange center. Movement stimulates the brain and that provides and assists with the transfer of messages. Exercise allows children to focus and retain information longer and process information at greater speeds.

Movement does more for children than help get their “wiggles out”. Classroom bikes allow students to move, self-regulate, focus and feel good about themselves.

As a Principal of an inner-city school, our school team struggled to find a strategy that would meet the needs of six active, aggressive, often off task, disruptive boys. Out of six, four were diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder and one with Oppositional Defiance Disorder. You name it and we tried it. We had great support from parents, lots of consultants and board staff who all were involved on an ongoing basis. We tried absolutely everything and had little success with everything except exercise.

After much thought and discussion, we needed to provide an effective exercise solution that could be done in the classroom with minimal distraction to other learners. The answer: a classroom bike designed for kids. Classroom bikes allow students to move, self-regulate, focus, feel good about themselves, adopt a healthy active lifestyle and so much more.

Classroom bikes have been tested and integrated in the classroom by my school and we have seen great success.



We purchased six classroom bikes and had the boys cycle for forty-five minutes a day, often first thing in the morning. In a short time they were having fewer issues in the yard and were able to focus for longer periods of time during lessons and activity tasks in their classrooms. They reported feeling better. They experienced less conflict with their peers and overall reported feeling happier. Classroom bikes have since been tested and integrated in the classroom by my school and we have seen great success.

Fast forward three years later. The boys were attending the same high school and shared many of the same classrooms together.

In October of their grade nine year, they got together and with the help of their physical education and guidance teachers they presented to their school's Parent Council asking for classroom bikes. They shared their story of how the bikes positively impacted their well-being and their ability to be successful in school. Within a month's time they were cycling again in English and Math and were meeting success.

So how can teachers feed the movement (some) students require when not every subject throughout their day is on a court, a field or in the gymnasium? The solution is simple: The Self-regulation Classroom Cruiser. It's quiet, it's adjustable and we've been told by many of our elementary students that it's comfortable.

What to look for in a classroom bike:

- Designed for children
- Proper ergonomics for safety
- Quiet while in use
- Easy to adjust
- A place for students to continue to work
- Easy to move
- Durable build



Researching bikes can seem overwhelming. It is important to look for a child/classroom specific bike to ensure safety and proper ergonomics. Look for bikes that have been tested by children. Their feedback is invaluable. If there are product reviews, case studies or testimonials from other educators, it can help to have a recommendation from a peer who has the same needs and requirements as you do.

When looking into purchasing a bike for your classroom, ensure it has features specifically designed for children: ease of adjustment for students to adjust to fit their bodies, a tabletop to be able to continue studies, easily transportable to make adjustments depending on what is taking place in the classroom with a durable frame and components to keep up with frequent daily use by students. A bike that is quiet while in use is very important. The

bike will be used as another place for student work to get done, and a bike that makes minimal noise is important when the instructor is conducting a lesson.

The results we experienced very shortly after implementation were positive.



Integrating bikes into the classroom will be beneficial to some if not all students. The results we experienced very shortly after implementation were positive and we continue to see students benefit from exercise in the classroom daily. Some might say my Grade Three Teacher, Mrs. Moore, was onto something when she asked me to stay seated, however had she offered me a bike to sit on I may have sat longer, kept quieter and may have been more successful at meeting her expectations as well as exceeding my own.

For more information about the Self-regulation Classroom Cruiser by Copernicus Educational Products please visit: www.classroomcruiser.com

References

Ratey, J. (2012). *Spark: The revolutionary new science of exercise and the brain*. New York, NY: Little Brown and Company