

For university students, walking beats sitting

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Olle Bälter (far right), lecturer in computer science, leads students from his seminar on media technology through a wooded park. Credit: Håkan Lindgren

Walking classrooms are better for not only for students' physical health, but classroom engagement, a study from Sweden's KTH Royal Institute of Technology shows.

What began in a response to a physical activity challenge for the computer science faculty at KTH has become a study in how education and fitness can be combined to improve both physical well-being, and classroom discussions.

University lecturer Olle Bälter improvised his "walking seminar" in

media technology at KTH during the spring of 2014, in response to a competition in which staff were recording the number of hours they and their students spent sitting, as opposed to being active.

Taking his group of 10 students for a stroll through a wooded park near the Stockholm campus, Bälter immediately began to see results.

"Students feel freer to talk when they are outdoors than when they are in the classroom," Bälter says. His experience seemed consistent with a paper that he cites as an inspiration—a Stanford University study linking creativity with [physical activity](#).

Now Bälter and his colleagues are adding their experience to the body of knowledge supporting more activity in education. In an article presented at the Lund Institute of Technology eighth pedagogical inspiration conference in December, Bälter and coauthors Björn Hedin and Helena Tobiasson reported that a significant majority of the students surveyed preferred the walk seminars over traditional seminars.



Olle Bälter (second from right), lecturer in computer science, leads students from his seminar on media technology through a wooded park. Credit: Håkan Lindgren

Notably, 21 of 23 students surveyed said that after the workshops they felt better than after typical, sedentary seminars; and no one thought they felt worse. Furthermore, 17 of the 23 students believed that communication was better.

"It is noticeable how much easier it is for individual students to express their views on these walking seminars, particularly when the class is split into smaller groups," Bälter says.

Second-year student Frida Haugsbakk agrees. "Everyone chipped in, even those who were too shy to speak in larger groups," he says. "On the walk, [students](#) can address another student directly, while the others

simply listen and enter the discussion later on."

Provided by KTH Royal Institute of Technology

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