

Chess ~ The World's Greatest Problem Solving Activity

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Despite its illustrious history, chess, perhaps like soccer, is still seen as a poorly understood import to Canada, but it is gaining recognition in the classrooms of Ontario, especially in the classrooms of Hill Street School.

One does not have to be a chess master to teach this game. Like any good teacher or coach the most important skill needed in getting young people involved is enthusiasm on the part of the instructor. Children love to play games and in game playing the learning is often so subtle that we as parents and teachers often do not see, initially, what has transpired.

I have been involved in teaching and coaching this game for 32 years, having taught over 600 students, and have worked with over 1300 chess enthusiasts. During this period of time I have made some interesting observations.

What can chess teach our students?

- concentration
- long range planning
- predicting outcomes
- drawing conclusions
- memory skills
- common sense
- quiet activities can be fun
- importance of controlling numerous variables
- analyzing situations
- spirit of true sportsmanship
- appreciation of the talents of others
- computer skills (Chessmaster 2100)
- lasting and long range friendships (by mail, by computer)
- significance of body language in communication
- point of view

value of changing one's point of view to find solutions

What conclusions do I draw from my observations?

- chess can bring families together
- chess should be an integral part of the school curriculum
- chess can and should be taught to every student in our schools beginning at grade three
- chess can change a physically aggressive student's behavior
- chess can elevate self-esteem
- chess playing puts people of different cultural backgrounds on equal footing

Research has shown that chess playing can improve reading scores as well as math scores.

No computer chess game can match the power of the human mind. World chess champ Gary Kasparov said, "Deep Thought (the name of the computer game) lacks tactical vision and above all, common sense. You need fantasy and intuition."

Why not make an effort to bring this game into your classroom? Who possesses a greater realm of fantasy than an eight year old child? Let's capitalize on it. Check and Checkmate!