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Playful Activities



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Éntroduction

Chess is not only the most highly regarded mind sport, but also a game that enhances learning. Teaching it to young children, one has to deal with a variety of difficulties, as it requires a great degree of concentration, which is rather difficult for children of a young age to attain. In addition, the fact that chess is a game that has to be played while sitting is at conflict with the physically active nature of most children. With the aim of minimizing these difficulties and bringing the benefits of chess to young children, we enriched our teaching method with the “games of our circle of friends” which we initially invented with the help (and for the benefit) of our own young learners. In time, we related chess to other forms of art, which we will also present. The implementation of the above proved worthwhile.

The playful activities we propose involve physical activity are fun to engage in and at the same time enhance memory, power observation, concentration and the process of synthesis. We present them according to their degree of difficulty in relation to the age of the children we have worked with throughout many years. For an activity to be successful, it is important for the trainer to be enthusiastic, but most importantly it is crucial that he/she does not present it as an obligation or requirement. Moreover we should take into consideration the ability of the children to respond to the game according to their age and to determine our expectations accordingly. It is also important to show our appreciation of the children’s participation (for example, by applause).

Finally, it is necessary to repeat the games increasing their degree of difficulty every time. If a child has failed once, we should encourage him/her to try again.

The children’s parents or the trainer himself/herself can experiment with the activities we propose and use them as a starting point in order to invent even more.

Enjoy!

1. Beginners.

1.1 Traffic Controller. Aim: to teach the notions horizontal, vertical, diagonal. The trainer is the traffic controller and the children must call out the correct direction. At the beginning the trainer moves his/her arm to horizontally, then vertically, and finally diagonally. The trainer moves his/her arm rather slowly and then gradually does it faster and faster. After a while only two children play at a time and whoever calls out the wrong direction sits down and somebody else takes his place and so on and so forth until there is only one child left who is the winner.

1.2 The visit. Aim: to learn and practice the above notions (horizontal, vertical, diagonal). You need to have a huge chess board or make one by sticking big black stickers on a light colored surface. You can also use big square tiles often cover floors. The children are the citizens of two cities and stand at the two ends of the board, visiting the other city one by one. To do so they have to move horizontally, vertically, or diagonally holding an object (a glass full of water, a piece of cardboard, etc). They can reach the other city moving in various ways: crawling, hopping, on all four, rolling a ball, on their back, etc.



1.3 The King's hiding place. A child leaves the room and the trainer gives the king to another child. The children scatter around and when the first child comes back into the room they say “hot” or “warm” when he/she gets close to the child with the king and “cold” or “icy cold” the further from him/her he/she moves. When he/she finds the child with the king, he/she must also find where exactly the king is hidden (e.g. pocket, sock, ribbon, etc).

1.4 The naughty pot. You place black pieces so as to form a pot on a magnetic chess board. The “flowers” are the white pieces, as you can see in the photo. Then you invite a child look at the board for some time and you ask him/her to turn around. Another child changes the places of two adjacent pieces of the same colour (adjacent horizontally, diagonally or vertically). You then ask the first child: “What has the naughty pot done again?” and he tried to spot the

changed pieces.



1.5 The playful nose. You place two pieces of opposite colour on a chess board as far as possible from each other, but in a way that each may capture the other. Two children play to see who can beat the other more times. The fun part is that the children must execute the capture using

only their nose and not at all their hands. It is essential that the piece should not stray from its course or fall. This activity has 3 stages: i) you use a Rook and a Queen (their required path should be horizontal or vertical), ii) you use a Bishop and the Queen (their required path should be diagonal) and iii) you use two Knights. Children take turns during each stage.



1.6 Maria's bag. Aim: identifying pieces just by touching them. You blindfold a child and you ask him/her to take a piece out of the bag and try to understand which one it is just by feeling it. Alternatively, you can hide the pieces under a tablecloth.

1.7 Let's change. Aim: to teach child to place the pieces on the board correctly. All the pieces are off the board and two children try to place them in the correct initial position. Whoever finishes first is the winner. Then they take different colours and play again. The game starts when the referee blows the whistle.

1.7 Caught you off your guard. Both younger and older child who know the moves enjoy this activity. The more players participate, the better. Children are divided into two teams (black and white) and stand facing each other in such a way that they can also see the demonstration board. The trainer places the pieces on the board and moves a white piece. The white team must react: if the move is not legal, all the players raise their hands and call out "no" or, alternatively, they hop on their seats. If the movement is legal, they bend down and call out "yes" or, alternatively, they fidget on their chairs. Then the trainer moves a black piece and awaits their reaction. He/she gradually moves faster and faster as an accelerated rhythm is more fun. The trainer may also try to confuse the children by moving pieces of the same colour in succeeding moves, to catch them off their guard.



1.8 True or false. Aim: to understand the control (P power) of the pieces over the squares. You place a Rook on an empty board and point at a square. If the square you point at is controlled by the Rook, the children must raise their hands; if not, they must touch their nose (which they particularly enjoy). With time, you may add pieces and make the activity more difficult. Alternatively, you can chose two players who sit back to back and look at the board sideways. Or you can divide the children to two teams and have a member of one team play against a member of the other. The team whose players have won more times is the winner.

1.9 The "Chase". Played in pairs, after the children have learnt the concept of "Check". You place a Queen and King of different colours on the board, in such a way that there is no Check. The Queen is "chasing" the King, as she threatens him from various squares and he manages to get away. The player who Checks six times first wins. Then you can do the same with two Rooks, Knights, Bishops or Pawns that "chase" the King.



1.10 The “airplane”. Played in pairs. Each couple holds a ball of string, or a small bag of rice, or another light object which we call the “airplane”. They stand at either side of an empty board where they must place their pieces. The player with the white pieces starts first. He/she places a piece of his/her choice as close to its proper original square as possible, but outside the board. He/she then tosses the airplane up in the air with one hand, while trying to put the piece on its proper with the other. He/she must place the piece while the plane is in the air and catch the airplane before it falls. The winner is the one who will make fewer failed attempts while placing all the pieces. We advise the children to start with Pawns, for which we

make the exception of allowing them to initially place them on an adjacent square in the board to the one they are aiming for. The “airplane” is an activity in which older children are better at.

1.11 Tell me which piece I have moved. Two children start playing a game of chess, while the others are watching. After a while you stop them and ask one of the “audience” to go to another room or turn around. The child whose turn it was makes his move and asks the chosen child from the audience: Which piece have I moved? The other children try to confuse the child by suggesting



wrong moves. Alternatively, the trainer executes moves on the demonstration board and the children try to guess them. Whoever finds the most correct moves wins. The children can play in pairs or even bigger groups.



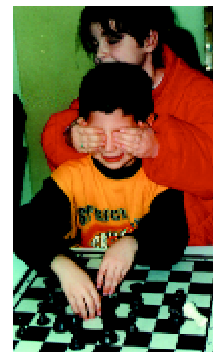
1.12 What is Jane hiding? You place black and white pieces on a board, at first 5 or 7 and gradually adding more. A child looks at the pieces for a while and then closes his eyes. A child that we call “Jane” hides a piece in his/her pocket and another child (her assistant) shuffles the remaining pieces. The first child opens his/her eyes and must find what “Jane” has hidden before they count from 10 to 0, or from 1 to 10.

1.13 John’s map. Aim: familiarization with the board. You give out photocopies of chess diagrams (without pieces) and crayons. Then you make a route with same colour pieces on the demonstration board, for example a vertical line, and ask the children to do the same on their photocopy, colouring the squares with one colour only. The itinerary must be identical. Then you make it more difficult: you give them a diagonal itinerary or a zig-zag path with both black and white pieces which they must copy with their crayons. You can even choose



itineraries in the shape of capital letters, geometrical shapes or any shapes at all (e.g. the body of a cat).

1.14 The “ambulance”. The player is the ambulance that tries to find “the injured” piece. A blindfolded player stands near an empty board where another child places pieces randomly. One of the pieces has fallen (that’s the “injured” piece) and the “ambulance” tries to spot it just by feeling the piece. If he/she drops one of the standing pieces he/she loses.



1.15 Ha, Ha. You blindfold a child and ask him/her to place the pieces on the board. The black pieces are on the right side of the board, while the white ones are on the left. The other children act as his/her assistants and say “ha” when the player plays the piece in the centre of the right square and “ha, ha” when he/she plays it near the edge or outside the square.

1.16 Puzzle. The trainer needs to prepare some materials before this activity: you photocopy an empty chess board and you enlarge it. Then you cut it into pieces: Depending on the age of the children’s you cut into 3, 4, 5, 6 or more pieces. You ask the children to do the puzzle. You help (if necessary) by pointing out that i) black and white squares alternate, ii) the board must be 8 squares long both horizontally and vertically. You can even help younger children spotting the edges of the pieces you hand out. Alternatively, you can have this activity with a mate in 1 move position on the board and ask the children to solve the problem after they have finished the puzzle.



1.17 The “train”. You divide the children in two or more teams. The players of each team sit



one behind the other like the wagons of a train. The referee makes a move on a board that nobody can see. The first player of each team (the “engine”) approaches the board and sees the move. Then he/she whispers the move in any way he can. This is most interesting with beginners who don’t know chess writing or with players who speak different languages. In the European tournament in Litohoro, in 1999 I played it with young champions who mimed the move! Then the last player

of the “train” executes on the board of his team the move he/she ...heard and moves to the front, where he/she checks whether the move is correct, In this way, he/she also becomes “the engine” for the next round.

2. *Advanced*

2.1 *“Planted” check*. Can be played both on a regular chessboard and on a demonstration board. i) Demonstration board / team game: Children are divided in teams. You place on the board just the King and some pieces of the same colour, for example white. One team must plant black pieces in order to make check, while the other team is trying to protect the King from the checks in any way possible. The goal of the team who is trying to defend the King is to capture as many enemy pieces as possible. When all the available pieces have been placed on the board (you may choose to use no Pawns or just a few) you count the pieces that have been won by the defending team. The teams change places and at the end the team that captured more pieces is the winner. ii) Alternatively, on a regular chessboard: played either with teams or just two players (it is more interesting with teams, though). You just place the two kings on the board. One team attacks, while the other defends. The attacking team adds pieces in such a way as to give check in every turn, while the defending team must avoid the check. All the pieces must be used, including the pawns. Check must be given with every single added piece until the very last one. Check can also be given with the pieces that have already been placed on the board, by executing a regular move. The team that uses first all their pieces can then play without any restrictions (while the other one must also use all their pieces in order to do so). When the game is over the teams or players can change places. NOTE: After the teams have added all their pieces, they can play regular chess until a legal ending of the game is achieved (for example, checkmate or stalemate).

2.2 *Simultaneous domino*. A simultaneous exhibition, in which any move executed in one board, influences the next board. Whatever is captured on one board is also removed from the next one. The player whose piece is being removed can choose which piece to remove, provided he/she has two such pieces. If he/she does not have the specific piece, he/she does not remove anything. If a Pawn is promoted on one board, then the same promotion will be executed on the next board as well. The promoted piece will be placed on the last rank, on whichever square the promoting player wishes. Transferring the move to the next board must be done before the next move. Warning: when the players want to get back at their neighbor, they may play completely irrationally. This activity provides an important opportunity for the children to beat the trainer or make a draw while playing on equal terms. However, the trainer has an advantage when he/she plays one move on each board. In this way, whatever he/she wins, he/she can spare in the next round.

2.3 *Pawns*. Played only with Pawns from their starting position. Whoever reaches the end first, wins the first “battle”. Then the players change colours and start over again, but the winner of the previous “battle” is now playing with one Pawn less. The game continues with the winning player every time removing a Pawn, until someone is left with three Pawns only. He /she is the final winner.

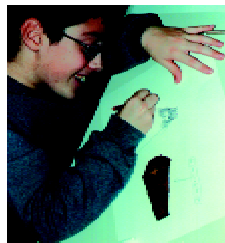
2.4 Blindfolded teams. You divide the players in teams of four children each. Each team stands in front of a chess board and calls out the move that they have all decide on. The team members take turns in calling out the moves. The teams cannot see the other team's board. If they make a mistake, that is their problem. The trainer has a separate board, so as to act as the referee. Alternatively, each team play for themselves only.



2.5 Turn taking. Played with children 3-9 years old. The players stand around a table where a board has been placed with all the pieces in place. The player who stands in front of the white pieces plays first and the player standing in front of the black pieces responds. Then the next player standing in front of the white pieces plays the next move, and so on and so forth. In this way, you have a game during which players' turns going round a table clockwise. Whoever plays out of turn, or executes an irregular move, or plays the wrong colour, is out of the game. When there are only two players left, they continue the game as usual. The activity is ever more interesting if you set a time limit: (e.g., 3 seconds per move).

3. For all

3.1 Treasure hunt. Depending on the level of the participants, you can organise a treasure hunt with hiding places to be found after the player have solved chess problems.



3.2 Drawing. Most children love drawing, since by doing so they depict their thoughts and mainly their imagination. To make this a successful activity, however, you must first offer the child appropriate stimuli. Throughout the game's long history, there have been chess related sculptures and engravings, even sketches, cartoons or paintings. Therefore, you should present all these to the children through photos slides or videos. This will not only charm, intrigue and fascinate them, but it will also provide them with the necessary

stimuli to become creative themselves. An example from our long experience: we asked children to hold a piece and remodel it in whatever form it reminded them of – as if it was made of dough. Regarding their shape, the Queen is like a star, a Christmas tree, or a felt-tip pen, the Bishop is like a rocket, a table–lamp or a submarine, the Pawn is like a little child, the Rook is like the White Tower of



Thessaloniki, the King is like a hospi-

tal or a prince, the Knight is like a circus, etc. Regarding the role of the pieces, we have been told by the children that the King is like a priest, a coach or a teacher and that the Pawn is like a servant or a foot-ball player or Robin Hood! This way, we have acquired around 250 drawings which we present at chess meetings under the title “Chess as seen trough the eyes of children”.



3.3 Miming - Dramatization. Children are divided in teams of 4-5 members and after they have prepared, they present their mime. Some children are more aware of dramatisation, while others less. It is a way of expressing yourself, in which body movement and facial expression is of the outmost importance. Through miming, any topic acquires imaginary dimensions and becomes an expression of the child's creativity and sociability. Chess offers many of topics for dramatisation, without even using the board, as children themselves take on the parts of the pieces. Here are only some of the plays our student teams have presented: the “court” where the Pawns put the King on trial, the “ambulance” where – after a severe battle among the pieces – an ambulance comes



to collect the injured, the “elections: where the pieces vote for their leader, the “tavern” where the soldiers drink and forget about war, the “walk” where the Queen takes a leisurely stroll in her royal wagon with all her entourage. NOTE: It will prove helpful to have some props that the children can use in their plays: e.g. hats, a broom, spears or swords etc.

3.4 The show. The human chess game. You play a chess game with human pieces. Such “human chess games” have often been presented abroad, but rarely in Greece. Each child is a different piece and they play a chess game standing on a huge chess board. It is usually necessary to have two children standing outside the board and calling out the moves. The children should be wearing black and white T-shirts. It is an activity that you need to rehearse and it is beautifully accompanied by music. It is ever better if you can dress the children with appropriate costumes. Alternatively, you can use huge pieces that you can buy or make yourself but the latter option is time consuming and requires appropriate skills. However, the show as a culmination point of the children’s effort throughout a year and an unforgettable experience for all.

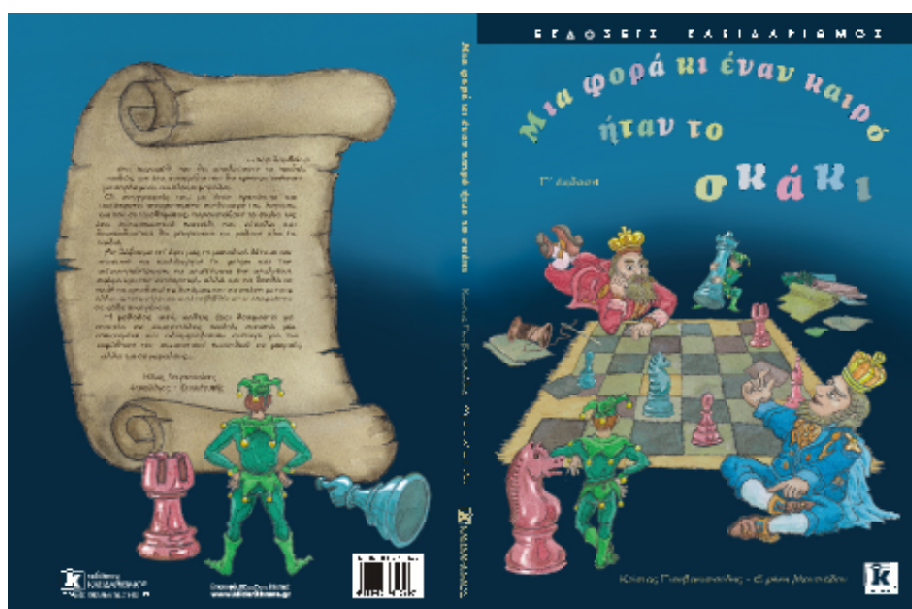


4. Our two chess books

Last but not least, I have to mention that me and my wife Eirini Mousiadou (also chess trainer and player) have written and published successfully in Greek two chess books for children, in which our method is presented in detail.

The first book, *Once upon a time there was CHESS* (3rd Greek edition 2011) is an amusing tale about Peace, during whose plot the young reader practices the rules of chess. As far as we know, it is the only book in the world that uses a fairy tale to teach chess.

4.1 Once upon a time there was chess – 1st Greek edition 1999. Our book is an original method for learning chess by children of kindergarden and primary school age. Most of all, we wish to make children love chess, as we consider the game extremely useful and of great educational value.



Our book has three parts:

The first part is a fairy tale on the theme of peace. The child follows the plot through beautiful and lively drawings that accompany the text. At the same time, we present chess diagrams on which the child can work to better assimilate the rules of the game.

The second part includes necessary guidance that will assist adults to teach productively, even without any prior knowledge of the game. Chess is taught through diagrams that demonstrate theory, where the child needs to practice actively.

The third part presents playful activities (mostly psycho-kinetic), inspired by the game of chess.

The second book, *Chess and Imagination* (6th Greek edition 2011) includes 750 chess diagrams in the form of labyrinth-like exercises, as well as 12 miniature games. Its method has proven especially attractive and effective with children, as it provides chances for testing at many different levels.

4.2 “Chess and Imagination” Exercises and problems for children 5-95 years old – 1st Greek edition 2003. Our second book is a tool that assists children and adult beginners to dig deeper into chess. Using 750 diagrams, we bring all students in touch with each and every 1-move tactical and strategic motifs. Their originality and attractiveness is derived from the playful approach and the increasing difficulty of successive diagrams.



The book has proven valuable as a teaching instrument for trainers and parents, but mostly effective for young pupils, because it keeps their interest active all the way to the end! Solutions are provided at the end of the book.

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