EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS OF CHESS

The educational benefits of chess are many and varied. They are well documented by a large body of research papers from around the world.

There is so much evidence, that it is easy to miss the wood for the trees, therefore this document is intentionally brief.

If detailed evidence is required, please refer to the sources and links cited at the end of this document.

Presidents of Cuba and the United States agree:

“Playing chess helps students develop thinking and analyzing skills, concentration, greater self-control and self-confidence ... We have hard evidence that chess in the schools works.”
- William Jefferson Clinton

"El ajedrez debe formar parte del programa escolar." - Fidel Castro Ruiz

The most frequently cited general benefits include the development of:

- Cognitive abilities, such as attention, memory, and logical thinking; essential skills for the development of the individual.

- Creativity, through problem solving.

- Critical thinking, improving the ability to assess strengths and weaknesses, establish value judgments and make decisions.

- Ethical sense. Improvements in attitude and general behaviour are often noted.
Specific benefits that are often mentioned include:

- **Focusing** - Children are taught the benefits of observing carefully and concentrating. If they don’t watch what is happening, they can’t respond to it, no matter how smart they are.

- **Visualizing** - Children are prompted to imagine a sequence of actions before it happens. We actually strengthen the ability to visualize by training them to shift the pieces in their mind, first one, then several moves ahead.

- **Thinking Ahead** - Children are taught to think first, then act. They learn to ask themselves "If I do this, what might happen then, and how can I respond?" Over time, chess helps develop patience and thoughtfulness.

- **Weighing Options** - Children are taught that they don’t have to do the first thing that pops into their mind. They learn to identify alternatives and consider the pros and cons of various actions.

- **Analysing Concretely** - Children learn to evaluate the results of specific actions and sequences. Does this sequence help me or hurt me? Decisions are better when guided by logic, rather than impulse.

- **Thinking Abstractly** - Children are taught to step back periodically from details and consider the bigger picture. They also learn to take patterns used in one context and apply them to different, but related situations.

- **Planning** - Children are taught to develop longer range goals and take steps toward bringing them about. They are also taught of the need to reevaluate their plans as new developments change the situation.

- **Juggling Multiple Considerations Simultaneously** - Children are encouraged not to become overly absorbed in any one consideration, but to try to weigh various factors all at once.

“The main benefit being that it contributes to the development of strategic thinking as well as concentration, analytical skills and problem solving.”
– His Excellency President Jacob Zuma

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Ministries of Education around the world have been convinced. Among the more notable developments have been those in Turkey, the United States and South Africa.
In 2005, the Turkish Ministry of Education commenced a plan to teach chess to all primary school children, with the objective of making them more intelligent and better citizens. The Turkish Chess Federation, under its President (and Chairman of FIDE's Chess in Schools Commission), Ali Nihat Yazici, has trained 40,000 teachers and about 2,000,000 children are now learning chess.

This year's budget for New York City's Chess-in-the-Schools programme is $3,200,000. It is noted for its achievements in raising educational standards and improving socialization in inner-city schools in the Bronx and in Harlem.

The government of South Africa is the latest to announce a major programme. *Moves for Life* is a joint effort between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Sport and the Supreme Chess Trust.

### President Zuma said:

*In summary, the benefits that accumulate from the teaching and promotion of chess in schools include the following:*

1. *The game teaches patience. You have to give the opponent time and space to think and make his or her own move.*

2. *It teaches that a decision must be an outcome of a serious thought process.*

3. *Chess teaches discipline, for example as chess players would know, “touch is a move”. When you touch, you must move, you have to be disciplined.*

4. *Chess teaches fairness. You alert the opponent before you strike, and keep them informed of your moves and intentions.*
Numerous colloquia have taken place in the past few years, for example:

*Chess in the Schools and Communities Conference*, Aberdeen University 2007
http://www.abdn.ac.uk/rowangroup/cisccon.shtml

*Chess, a game to grow up with*, Turin 2009

*Chess as an innovative school subject in the education system*, Moscow 2010
http://www.moscowchessopen.ru/scientific_conference/resolution_eng.php

*El ajedrez, es una herramienta fundamental*, Mexico City, November 2010
http://www.ajedrezunam.mx/contenido/paralelas-coloquio.htm

The bibliographical references within the following works refer to many hundreds of books and papers.


O'Connell, K.J. (1997). *Sport and Education: transferability of skills, an in-depth examination of chess*.


Forrest et.al. (2005). *Chess Development in Aberdeen’s Primary Schools: a study of literacy and social capital*.

Laplaza, J. (2006). *Cuando hablamos de ajedrez escolar queremos decir...*


Kevin O'Connell, Secretary, FIDE Chess in Schools Commission, 2010.11.24