Why Chess Should be Taught in Schools

Picture this; Norwegian chess player Magnus Carlsen, sits with his back to ten chess boards, playing blindly against ten different opponents simultaneously. He cannot see the boards, yet he remembers the location of every piece on every board as well as his next moves. He proceeds to win every game. I am not saying that playing chess would allow everyone to do this amazing task, but chess does positively affect thinking skills, such as the visualization and memorization present in this example. Chess is a game that has been around since the 6th century, invented by people in India to teach upcoming generals about war tactics and thinking ahead. To this day, chess still demands critical thinking, deductive reasoning, and perseverance. That is why I am here to tell you, the members of the Board of Education, that chess should be in the school curriculum because it sharpens mental skills, teaches valuable life lessons, and ultimately improves test scores.

According to an article on the Huffington Post by Dr. Shmuly Yanklowitz, “Researchers have shown that most students today are weak in critical thinking skills. They do poor on simple logical reasoning”. And how can we fix this problem? With chess, of course since it sharpens these cognitive abilities that students lack. As an elementary part of the game, chess often requires the player to think several moves ahead. First, the player needs to find the best move for themselves. Then the player must anticipate his opponents move, and find a counter to that move as well. This constant practice improves thinking skills such as visualization and problem solving. Now, back to why it should be in schools. In September of 2011, Armenia made chess a required subject in schools for children who are over the age of six. According to an Armenian
chess teacher, “Chess trains logical thinking. It teaches how to make decisions [and] trains memory” (Berezow). According to another article written about these Armenians, “Studies conducted by Western scientists and chess masters in primary schools have confirmed that learning chess at an early age improves the reading performance of children, strengthens their problem solving skills, and has a positive effect on concentration, memory, and calculation” (“Armenia Introduces Chess as a Mandatory School Subject). So, if chess has proven successful for the Armenians, why is chess not in American school curriculum?

Another reason why chess should be part of school curriculum is that it enhances simple life skills, such as perseverance, dealing with defeat, and teaches respect. Sometimes in chess one may feel behind or pressured by the position on board. Persevering through these situations teaches children not to give up. This simple skill can be applied to almost anything in life. Chess also teaches about responsibility, such as taking responsibility over one's moves. If a player makes a mistake, he must accept it and find the next best move in his situation. Then if one proceeds to lose a chess game, they learns the skill of accepting defeat and learning from it. After losing a game, a student can look back at the positions on board to find the better moves for the next time they play. This can be applied to school, for example, if you do poor on a quiz, you should learn what you missed and apply that knowledge to the test. Another life lesson that chess teaches is respect. Since chess can be played by anyone, young or old and of any ethnicity or gender, it influences people to think the same way about life, too. Chess players would be influenced to treat everyone with great respect, knowing that they are on the same playing field as everyone else.
Not only does chess affect a person's mind and people skills, but chess also raises test scores. The idea of chess being taught in the classroom attracted the interest of Dr. Yee Wang Fung, so he began teaching it to his classes in the University of Hong Kong between 1977 and 1979. Results of his study directly show that there was a 15% increase in both math and science test scores from the years before he taught chess. Another study done by Philip Rifner of Purdue University included two classrooms from each of five schools played a role in his experiment. One class had a “chess period” with which to learn and play chess, and the other class had extra time for reading, math, and social studies teaching. However, the classes with the chess period all showed better test scores than those classes with the extra teaching time. These three reasons are why chess should be taught in schools.

Interestingly, there are $10^{120}$ possible chess games. That is 10 followed by 120 zeroes. Yet the benefits of practicing chess in school are infinitely better than the number of possible games, since chess teaches valuable mental skills, priceless life lessons, and improves test scores in schools. So, if there are all these benefits, why isn’t chess taught in schools?
Works Cited


