

EDUCATION THROUGH CHESS IN SCHOOL – INTRODUCTION AND TEACHERS' TRAINING PROGRAM

**Magdalena Zielinska, Poland, Warsaw, Polish Chess Federation, Coordinator of the
Project of the Polish Chess Federation "Education through Chess in School"**

International research PIRLS and TIMSS conducted in 2011 and published in 2012 have both shown serious lack of competence in mathematic skills of Polish children. That outcome combined with the Written Declaration of the European Parliament (0050/2011) on "chess in school" inspired the Polish Chess Federation to launch a project that will change the odds and introduce chess to Polish schools on a nationwide scale.

We called it "Education through Chess in School" because the main goal of the Project is the improvement of mathematic competence of Polish students, especially regarding: logic, spacial orientation, analitical thinking and problem solving as well as developing such positive characteristics as responsibility, concentration, intuition and courage.

As well as being myself a chessplayer and chess enthusiast, I'm also a professional teacher that is why I believe that the best way of achieving this goal is to teach as many children as possible to play chess. The game itself together with chess training will support their general developement as well as their educational career.

For this purpose the Polish Chess Federation has initiated the project of introducing teaching chess as a regular, obligatory subject to official school agenda in elementary schools throughout the country.

The Project, it's conduct and success is based on three pillars, with Polish Chess Federation and it's regional affiliates and all the chess community standing as the first one. The second are both the national and local governments that supervise and finanse the system of public education (the Project obtained approval of the Polish Ministry of Education). And last but not the least – and perhaps the most important – the third pillar consists of schools, their teachers and students and all the school community.

There are five main rules of the Project:

1. every participating elementary school introduces chess as obligatory lessons (at least one per week) for all the children in at least one class (first or second) per school for a period of minimum two schoolyears;
2. school certificates include grades from chess lessons;
3. an important part of the Project is research on the influence of chess on kids' general developement;
4. extra chess tournaments are organized for kids taking part in the Project;

5. lessons in schools are conducted by a teacher of that particular school – Polish Chess Federation trains all the teachers involved in the Project, we also supply them with school textbooks, activity sheets for students, chess equipment and didactical and methodical support.

In addition, the Polish Chess Federation provides every participating school with free chess equipment, so it was very important for us to find sponsors and donors to the Project. We succeeded in obtaining both public and NGO financial support yet we are still trying to find more sources of funds for the schools to benefit from. It's crucial for the European Parliament to follow its Written Declaration of 2012 with a proper funding solutions for the "chess in school" programs throughout the European Union and associated countries. Since my colleagues will provide you specific informations about the development, organisational aspects and events of the Project, I would like to focus on the point concerning teachers and their training.

The concept of training teachers to teach children chess in school instead of using chess instructors and trainers used to be revolutionary or even controversial in Poland but since day one we've decided that's the right path to follow, keeping in mind the main goal of our Project. The main goal of the Project is not to train professional chess players but to teach chess basics to kids to help them improve their mathematical and analytical skills. Age six or seven years old at which children in Poland start obligatory education is a very special moment in their lives. At this point of their intellectual and social development the person that knows them best and has the best abilities of working with them is actually their **teacher**. A small child who is just starting his or her chess adventure doesn't need a professional trainer to work with him or her as a professional player, focused on achieving success in sport. It's just a child who needs a good and patient teacher with professional pedagogical training who can show him or her the basics and, what is most important, who can develop in them passion and love for chess.

What is also very important is that a teacher is a person who has professional as well as his or her own personal pedagogical skills, competences and experience. The teacher is already equipped in all the "tricks of the trade" that help him or her work effectively with a full schoolclass of – for example, as in Poland – thirty students. Those students each and every one of them represent completely different characters, competences and abilities, also chess abilities and levels of progress. They also have different speed of work and learning, different interests, problems and difficulties. The teacher is able to adapt his subject and methods to suit all of them. All the teacher needs is just to fill his set of teaching skills with

new, chess content. In the same time a chess instructor or trainer is normally used to work and is efficient in working in a chessclub environment, with small groups of players with matching advancement levels and all highly motivated to achieve success in the sport of chess. The methods of training two contestants in World Youth Championships are not exactly the best way of teaching thirty children aged seven or six what a chessboard is. And it's precisely that difference of experience and methodical approach that convinced us to base and build our Project on teachers.

Every teacher involved in the Project takes part in teachers' training program run by the Polish Chess Federation. The training takes seventy two hours and consists of three parts.

The first and longest one is a basic and intermediate chess training. But it's also more than that. Already by teaching the teachers chess we give them a sneak peek of the methodics – we teach them using the methods, ways and tools that should and can be used by them to teach the children in turn. This way they not only assume the roles of students but they can already start building their chess teachers' work system from the very first hour of their training.

The second part is all about the methodics: how to teach chess in full schoolclass, what methods, forms and exercises to use (how and when), how to work with able and overachieving students, how to support the weaker or even disabled ones. This is also the moment when we acquaint them with the tools we've prepared for them. Those are: two school teaching programs (one regular and one for the students who have special educational needs), a series of textbooks specially adapted to the Polish educational system and realities and ways of work in Polish elementary schools, extra activity sheets for kids and computer programs for teachers and many more such as films, multimedia presentations etc.

The textbooks are a really special feature in all the Project. First one in the series was also a very first Polish chessbook truly adapted to teaching small children. It includes many chess colouring pages, nursery rhymes, tales and legends, crosswords and riddles all to show kids that playing chess is fun. It's also worth of note that it's been the biggest bestseller in the history of the Polish Chess Federation's publications, reaching over twenty thousand sold copies. However, we are not trying to make money on it – children and teachers taking part in the Project can buy the textbook for a small price of 10 zloty (less than 2,5 euro). The textbook is also a very convenient tool for the teacher, allowing him or her to find a suitable exercise or activity for every child in the class.

The third part of the teachers' training program deals with the organizational aspects of introducing chess in school. We teach them and show them step by step how to organize a school chess tournament, how to set up a youth chess club, how to involve parents in their

kids' hobby and how to promote the idea of "Education through Chess in School". During the training the teachers even play a chess tournament among themselves. And some of them have already earned chess categories!

After completing all the training the teachers are equipped with both chess competences as well as new methodical skills and tools. Across the country over five hundred teachers have already been trained and more than three hundred of them have already been teaching.

The Project of the Polish Chess Federation, titled "Education through Chess in School" has started in 2012 in three provinces (a. k. a. Voivodeships). A very special place among them is the Capital City of Warsaw. Its government has responded very enthusiastically to the Project and supported it ever since what resulted in seventy two of Warsaw schools participating in our Project. In September 2014 the Project "Education through Chess in School" has already encompassed twelve of Poland's sixteen provinces, involving about three hundred schools, six hundred teachers and nine thousand children. In June 2014 we have organized the first Final Tournament of the Project with about five hundred kids aged six, seven and eight taking part, many of them for the very first time in their lives. Our goal of course is to introduce the Project in every elementary school in all sixteen provinces of the country and we are well set on the path to achieve it, with the support of Polish Ministry of Education, first consultations being already on the way.

Bibliography

Analysis of data collected in the PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), 2011-12, www.timssandpirls.bc.edu

Analysis of data collected in the TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), 2011-12, www.timssandpirls.bc.edu

Written Declaration of the European Union Parliament (0050/2011), issued on March 15th 2012

Summary

The purpose of this thesis is to explain the idea and vision as well as the basic rules of the Project of the Polish Chess Federation titled "Education through Chess in School". The main goal of the Project is to use teaching chess (as obligatory lessons) as a tool of improvement students' general development in elementary schools. We believe that teachers have the best competences and abilities to work with young children, that is why we've developed a training program for teachers equipping them with both chess and methodical skills. For the moment in the Project of the Polish Chess Federation there are involved about

three hundred schools from twelve Polish provinces with about six hundred trained teachers and abouth nine thousand children.