

Play and learn

with Minigames and Chess Variants

by Jesper Bergmark Hall, 2020

ft fri tanke

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Preface

In 2014 I was elected chair of the new commission for Chess in Education in the European Chess Union. The background was that all over Europe, interest was growing for chess as a pedagogic tool. The various activities of CIS (Chess in Schools) programs had shown that chess can reach across all boundaries, and children can meet each other regardless of gender, age, physical development, or language. From the very beginning, it became clear that a pedagogical method was needed not only to reach the various new target groups, but also to create a situation where everyone could participate on equal ground.

It was quite evident that playing games had to be the fundamental of this method, as almost everyone loves to play, whether you are a beginner of the game or a grandmaster. With this as a starting point, I have tried to collect and create new so-called Minigames and chess variants that train different aspects of chess. And even if this method was aimed for school children and young people, when I tested the ideas with success, from the youngest children in preschool classes to Sweden's junior national chess team, I soon realized that the method could reach much wider than that.

Therefore, I hope that this book can be a useful tool for anyone who wants to teach chess, whether the goal is to develop intellectual and social skills, or to develop knowledge of chess itself.

Jesper Bergmark Hall



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The second part is a presentation of the 45 best so-called Minigames and chess variants when learning, or practicing, chess.

The Minigames and chess variants are structured as follows:

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In the part with Minigames, there is an exercise for each Minigame. These exercises are suitable in a teaching situation to deepen the understanding of the Minigame. The different Minigames and chess variants are marked with 🟨, 🟨🟨 or 🟨🟨🟨 depending on the degree of difficulty. Minigames with one pawn 🟨 can be played by everyone, for Minigames with two pawns 🟨🟨 you need to have a little more knowledge, and when you see an exercise with three pawns 🟨🟨🟨, it means that you should preferably be an experienced chess player.

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The Playing Method

In recent years, chess is more and more used as an educational tool to develop social and intellectual skills. The new goal of the game has led to the development of multiple methods that are useful not only for teaching and practicing chess, but also for making students better chess players.

The most important method is the SMART method

- S** – Selflearning
- M** – Motivation
- A** – Adjustment of level
- R** – Range of activities
- T** – Technology

The SMART method is a further development of the MONA method, which the Swedish chess educator Robert Danielsson launched in the 1980s.

A summary of the SMART method: When you teach, you must remember that it is the student who should understand. This means that an important part of the teaching is to let the students try for themselves and to learn by themselves. To do so, the student must be motivated. An important role for a chess instructor is therefore to try to find each student's motivation and to find a way of teaching that keeps this motivation alive.



If you want to develop the student's natural interest and enthusiasm, you must adapt the tasks and exercises to suit them. To maintain the motivation for learning, you must present a range of activities, as there must be a variation in how the lesson is presented, in the activities that are carried out and in what types of interaction the students have. Finally, chess is also perfect for the digital world, and there are several opportunities to support teaching with technology for both training and games.

After reading this summary of the SMART method, you probably realize that a good way to follow the guidelines above is to base your teaching on letting students play as much as possible. Most students like to play, and when you let them, all the guidelines above come naturally. In addition, you test your skills as you play, and you can see what you need to develop. One key is to play with equal opponents, which is why it can be a good idea to play online.

The Playing Method is an important tool for the SMART method. It is developed from the knowledge that it is good to let children play as much as possible. But instead of just letting students play classic chess, the Playing Method has deconstructed chess into Minigames and chess variants that focus on different parts of the game. It involves training by playing. Another good thing about the Playing Method is that both beginners and more advanced players can enjoy the situation, which is something that instructors often struggle with, as the level of knowledge and interest often differ within a group. Finally, it is FUN to play, which means that you, as an instructor, create ideal teaching conditions with students who love what you do. Therefore, the first thing you need to learn as a chess instructor/ chess instructor is how to create good playing conditions.

How to Create Good Playing Conditions?

An important part of good chess teaching, whether the purpose is to develop skills for life or chess skills, is to create a good atmosphere in the group as well as

game conditions where it is possible to concentrate and think. The best way to do this is to establish a code of conduct, i.e. how you behave both within the group and towards individuals. In ECU, we use "The six rules of chess" when children play chess.

01 First rule **PLAY QUIETLY**

To be able to concentrate, there must be "a room for concentration". Students should avoid talking while they play, and if they must ask something, such as how a game is going, they must do it by whispering. It is difficult for smaller children to be silent for a long time, but when it comes to a game situation, it is easier to create concentration in the group at the start of the game. One trick is to use "a sign of silence" if someone is talking too much and too loudly. A common sign is to put your thumb up in the air if someone is talking too loudly, instead of shushing them.

02 Second rule **THE INSTRUCTOR SAYS WHEN TO START**

The instructor is responsible for the game, and an important task is to ensure that all games start at the same time. Otherwise, it is difficult to create a room for concentration.

03 Third rule **SHAKE HANDS**

In chess you show your opponent respect, and you do it by shaking hands before and after the game.

04 Fourth rule **TOUCH A PIECE, MOVE THE PIECE**

If you touch a piece, you must move it.

05 Fifth rule **REMOVE FINGER, END OF MOVE**

The move is completed when you have moved a piece to a square and taken your hand away from it. Then it's the opponent's turn again.

06 Sixth rule **SET UP THE PIECES AT THE END OF THE GAME**

After the game, you line up the pieces in their starting position, especially before you put them back in the chess box. It is important to make sure that no piece is missing.

Many instructors have created posters with "the six rules of chess" and put them up on the wall where the chess training is held.

In addition to following these rules, I always make sure that the players have good chairs, good tables, good lighting on the board, and that the players are placed opposite each other when they play.

1-2-3 points system

In the traditional chess world, you get 1 point when you win a game, $\frac{1}{2}$ if it is a draw and 0 if you lose. This is a poor scoring system for young players, not least if you want to encourage them to participate in a tournament. Instead, many have started using the 1-2-3 system.

This means that you always get
1 point for participating,
1 extra point if there is a draw and
2 extra points if you win.

With this system the losing player gets 1 point, and the winner gets 3. I strongly recommend that everyone working with kids use this system to encourage participation.

How do You Pair Players in a Chess Tournament?

Free play

The easiest way to pair players is to let the students decide themselves who to play with. The problem is often that students only pick their friends, or even worse, that they just want to play with someone they always win against. Therefore, as an instructor, you should arrange the pairings.

The teacher's choice

A simple method for deciding the pairings is the "Teacher's choice". After the first round of free play, you let those who won their games raise their hands, and then you pair them in the next round. After that you do the same thing by asking who has lost. A pedagogic tip if you work with children is to name the winners "**Han Solo**" and the losers "**Darth Vader**" (or some other cool names). It makes it easier for those who lose their games to want to raise their hands when they are to be paired.

All-play-all

A good way to create tournaments is to use sheets for all-play-all tournaments. The most common all-play-all tournament is with four players, as three rounds are suitable for one hour chess lessons.

No.	Name	1	2	3	Sum	Place
1.		4	2	3		
2.		3	1	4		
3.		2	4	1		
4.		1	3	2		

In an all-play-all tournament, all participants play with each other, as you could easily guess. With four participants, this means three rounds, which is normally suitable for one lesson. The pairings work like this:

Write the names of the participants under the heading Name. The small number inside the boxes shows who to play with and with what color. If the small number is on the right, you play White, and if it is on the left, you play Black. To make it easier, we also show the color in the chart above by making the square transparent if you play White, and gray if you play Black. In the first round, player number 1 is White against player number 4, and player number 2 is White against player number 3.

There are all-play-all tournaments for up to 24 players. Just remember that such tournaments consist of 23 rounds, since the number of rounds is always the number of participants minus one.

You could use an all-play-all tournament with multiple participants as a "Break Tournament" for a class. You just have to hang the schedule on the bulletin board, so that the students can take on the challenges themselves and fill in the results of their games during breaks.

Ladder tournament

Another pairing system is the “Ladder tournament”. Each child has its name written on a sign on the wall or on a magnetic label on the whiteboard. The higher up you are on the ladder, the higher the ranking you have in the tournament. The students challenge each other, but they can only challenge someone who is higher on the ladder than themselves. If the student with the higher ranking wins, or if the game is a draw nothing will happen with the placings on the ladder. If the one who is ranked lower wins, the loser's sign is put one step down, and the winner's sign takes the loser's place on the ladder. Before the first round you put the signs up randomly.

This tournament can be played over several training sessions, and is a useful way to keep track when not every child attends each session

Maria

Alex

Soraya

Hugo

Li Wei

Pairing Cards (Swiss Tournament)

If you want to organize tournaments with 20-80 players, you can use pairing cards. A pairing card can look like this:

Pairing card					
No:	Player:				
Ranking	Rd	Opponents	W/B	Result	Total
	1				
	2				
	3				
	4				
	5				
	6				

Each participant receives a card. You fill in the name in the box "Player". Then you randomly place all the cards in a pile, and give the cards a starting number 1, 2, 3, etc. in the box marked "No.". Then you do the pairings. No. 1 plays with No. 2, and so on. You fill in the opponent's number and what color the player will get with W = White and B = Black. The player with the lower ranking has the white pieces. Then lay out the cards at the different chessboards.

When a game is finished, you fill in the result of the game, as well as the total number of points the player has won. After the first round, the result of the game and the total number of points will be the same. You then place the cards in different piles depending on the total amount of points the players have won. When all the cards are in the right piles, you can put the different piles together into one, with the highest ranked ones at the top. You then perform the following procedure:

- 1) Start by pairing the player with the highest total score with the second highest unless they have already played. Then you work your way down through the pile and pair all the players together.
- 2) If there is an odd number of players in the tournament, the lowest placed will get a free round.
- 3) The player with fewer white games plays white.
- 4) If the number of white games of the players is equal, the lower ranked one will have white.

In this way you make the pairings for each round.

A good thing about pairing cards is that you can use them for tournaments that run over several days or weeks. If a participant is absent, simply put his or her card aside until the next opportunity.

Pairing with computers

A computer pairing follows the same procedure as pairing cards. The difference is that it will only take a few seconds. Therefore, few people need to use physical pairing cards today, but I believe that everyone who organizes a chess tournament should have done it at least once, so they understand the procedure for a pairing. Also, it is useful to have a back-up for when something goes wrong with technology. There are several good pairing systems, both for computers and



apps. Swiss-Manager is the most common one, but there are also free versions to download.

Clocks

One problem when playing chess is that some think fast and others slow. This might cause some troubles when organizing the rounds, whether it is a tournament or free play. In competitive chess, this is solved with the help of a chess clock. A chess clock consists of two timers, one for each player. When you have made your move, you press a switch that starts the opponent's timer and stops your own. If a player's time runs out, he or she loses the game. A chess clock can be quite expensive, but there are also several free apps that can be used for smartphones or iPads. For beginners and the youngest chess players, I do not recommend a chess clock, as children are often more interested in the clock than the game itself.

Adjudication

Therefore, it is better to adjudicate the games after a certain time. For example, the instructor can judge the games that have not been completed within ten minutes by calculating who leads based on points. How many points has White scored? How many has Black scored? The points are then compared, and if one of the players is in the lead by 5 points or more (if you play a regular chess game), that player has won. The points in a chess game refer to the value of the pieces:

 King – priceless  Queen – 9 points  Rook – 5 points
 Bishop – 3 points  Knight – 3 points  Pawn – 1 point

If the difference is less than 5 points, the game will be a draw.

For most of the Minigames and chess variants in this book, you probably will not need to adjudicate the games, but, if necessary, you may use this system of points to determine the winner.

Naming the squares

The squares on the chessboard are inserted into a coordinate system: a–h and 1–8. This means that each square has a name. When moving on from the beginner stage, it is good to learn the "chess language" because in discussions, it becomes

much easier to identify which piece you mean, or where to put your pieces when you move. A good way to teach the coordinate system is this:

"On the chessboard you have streets: The a-street, the b-street, the c-street down to the h-street. In these streets, there are houses with different numbers. I live on Central Street 3. That means the c-street, and on that street, it is number 3."



"In chess, you always say the name of the street first, and then the number."

Then you can point to different squares and invite the students to look at the 'street' and then the number. In a minute, they will have learned the "chess language". From this moment you can refer to the knight on f5 (see the knight on the f5 square) or suggest moves with coordinates, which makes it so much easier when you teach. Below, the square c3 is marked with a cross.

