

Teaching children to play chess – world wide

Chess is good for children. They should learn the game at an early age. It teaches them rule-based activity, strategic thinking, responsibility for your actions, and above all the ability to concentrate on one particular task for a protracted period of time.

It has been shown that learning chess at an early age, e.g. in elementary school, generally leads to improved results in many subjects – math, sciences, but also language, arts and other areas that have no apparent connection with the game of chess.

Implementing chess as a school subject, as has been done in a few Eastern European countries, is an ideal way to get children started on the game. It is the goal of national federations, school authorities and private sponsors. However, they always encounter the same problem: you need chess teachers, who are not readily available, and often quite expensive. Some ambitious projects have failed on this one point: no qualified teachers to execute what the authorities or sponsors have planned.

Chess teaching software



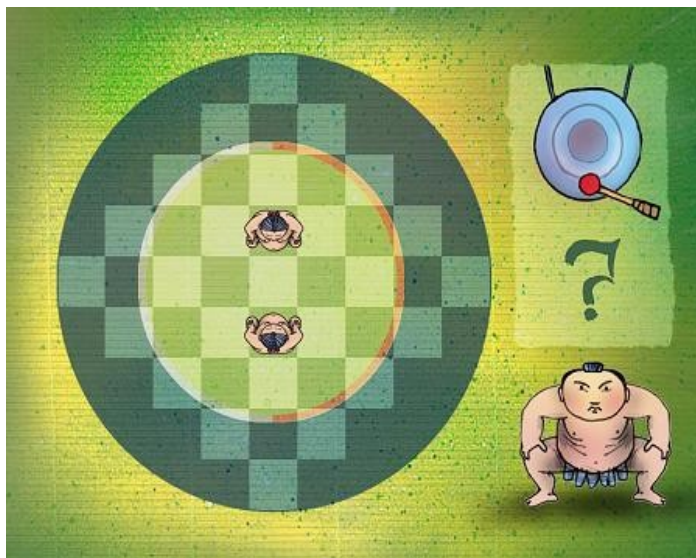
There have been a number of attempts to teach children to play chess using computer programs – with generally modest results. The most successful by far is *Fritz & Chesster*, a teaching suite on CD, running on Windows, Mac and Nintendo DS, developed twelve years ago by ChessBase and the German publishing house Terzio. *Fritz & Chesster* has been recommended by many chess federations and has won numerous awards, e.g. Parents' Choice Gold Award, USA Today (five stars of five), Bologna New Media Prize, top ranking in Amazon for all children's software.

Fritz & Chesster, which has animation and spoke dialogue, has been translated into 17 languages, e.g. English, Spanish, Russian, French, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian, etc., with full sound and dialog. The program has sold over half a million copies in its CD form. We estimate that this has generated one and a half million new chess players – based on the legal copies of the program alone.

The story line (disk one)

Together with Prince Fritz and his cousin Bianca children learn how to play chess. This is achieved by playing non-chess games to understand the individual pieces: Sumo wrestlers make it clear how the kings move; a pac-man like game to illustrate the rook, etc.

Fritz and Bianca then test and increase their knowledge in a whole range of games and situations. How do you set up the board? What's stalemate? When do you call it a draw? What does "opposition" mean? And what's an "up the stairs mate"? Children find the answers to these questions and many more in animated games and contests. Tips and tricks are given, techniques are explained step by step. In the end they can practice their skills in exciting games and tasks. And once the students have got the hang of everything, they can join Fritz to take on the King Black in the grand finale.



It has been our experience that children as young as four years can learn chess with Fritz & Chesster in a few months. It is also ideally suited for schools, where there is no requirement that teachers must be proficient in chess. In fact they learn to play the game together with their students, which is a unique and highly enjoyable experience for the teachers. Pilot projects in three German states have proved this.

Running Fritz & Chesster on multiple platforms

Our most recent development is to convert Fritz & Chesster to run not from a CD as an application program, but in standard browsers, without the need to install any software. It now runs on almost any platform: Windows, Mac, Linux, Apple iPad, Android tablets, etc., even on smart phones. The program starts as easily as a video on Youtube, and is fully interactive. [There is a demo here](#). The conversion has been completed for the German and English versions. The other 15 languages are expected to be undertaken in the coming year, with new languages to come.

There are also two work books with instructions for [students](#) and for [teachers](#). These are currently only available in German, but the PDF can be easily translated into different languages and printed locally.

With this development it becomes feasible to make Fritz & Chesster available to an extremely wide audience – an order of magnitude larger than the CD users. Instead of shipping optical disks we send users serial numbers, and they can start the course from any browser that is available to them. Schools can get packages of serial numbers which they then distribute to students, who can use the program in class or on their computer or tablets at home.

The chess server

Once the children have learnt to play chess they can join a special children's version of the Playchess server and participate in training and lessons, but also in regular tournaments, e.g. between schools in different countries. The children's server rooms are carefully monitored to prevent any kind of misuse.

Sponsor-driven Chess for Children

It is best to start children on chess is to make Fritz & Chesster available to an entire region (or the schools of a particular state) with free and uncomplicated access. The program can run in a window on a sponsor's web page, with any kind of branding surrounding it. The partner is assured that children and their parents will see their brand for many hours (in fact many weeks or months) while they are learning the game.

The cost for sponsoring a country or region depends on the

number of children one can reasonably expect to use the software. This is estimated for the first year and then adjusted for subsequent years. Usually access can be restricted to a specific country, but we can also define a region by tracking the IP addresses.

Chess School partnerships

We have always been interested in getting chess groups in schools to play against each other, especially internationally, without the expense of travelling to a different city or country (except maybe for a sponsored final round). The Internet makes it feasible to have chess encounters on a weekly basis for no cost at all. The matches foster communication between children of different regions and even countries.

Latest development: private rooms on Playchess

Until recently it was necessary for such encounters to be organized by giving the players accounts on Playchess, with log-in data and passwords. To simplify the process we have now implemented a much quicker way: anyone with Fritz 16 and a Playchess account can start a temporary room that allows him or her to run a tournament. Setting this up takes just a couple of minutes. After that the participants – the students playing the match, visitors and parents – receive emails or Skype messages with a simple URL. It will take the player or visitor into the Playchess room that was set up for the round, where they can start playing. No installations, no accounts or passwords, simply start playing the game in your browser. This makes starting a match between two school teams in remote locations trivially easy. It can be done in a matter of minutes.

If you are interested in participating in this world-wide effort to bring chess to children in an uncomplicated way, free of charge, please contact us. We can provide further information to expedite matters. Here are the relevant contacts.

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