

Can Chess Improve Student Behavior?

A [new study](#) conducted in the U.K. produced a surprising finding: teaching elementary age children chess doesn't improve math scores on standardized tests.

This finding made waves as many [previous studies](#) have shown that learning chess brings significant boosts in math and science scores, particularly for older students.

But in fixating on this negative aspect of the study, U.K. news organizations overlooked another, more positive finding buried in the study's conclusion. According to researchers, "School teachers were very positive about the intervention and its impact on pupils' skills and **behaviour**."

Such a finding is interesting, because according to Ben Franklin, behavior is the very area which chess is supposed to benefit.

Franklin expressed this opinion in a 1779 essay entitled [The Morals of Chess](#). According to Franklin, learning and playing chess enabled an individual to grow in the following four areas:

- 1. Foresight, which looks a little into futurity, and considers the consequences that may attend an action: for it is continually occurring to the player, 'If I move this piece, what will be the advantages of my new situation? What use can my adversary make of it to annoy me? What other moves can I make to support it, and to defend myself from his attacks?'*
- 2. Circumspection, which surveys the whole chess-board, or scene of action, the relations of the several pieces and situations, the dangers they are respectively*

exposed to... the probabilities that the adversary may make this or that move... and what different means can be used to avoid his stroke, or turn its consequences against him.

- 3. Caution, not to make our moves too hastily. This habit is best acquired by observing strictly the laws of the game, such as, if you touch a piece, you must move it somewhere; if you set it down, you must let it stand. ...*
- 4. And, lastly, we learn by chess the habit of not being discouraged by present bad appearances in the state of our affairs, the habit of hoping for a favourable change, and that of persevering in the search of resources. ...*

Today's schools struggle in the areas of math and science, and because of this, it's natural that they might want to dismiss chess when they find it doesn't always boost achievement in those areas.

But today's schools are increasingly struggling with behavior as well. Many students experience hasty impulses to get into fights, grow discouraged and give up in the face of difficulty, and often fail to look ahead and consider the consequences of their actions.

Is it possible that the re-introduction of this age-old pastime could help to focus student minds and teach valuable life lessons in the process?

"The game of Chess is not merely an idle amusement. Several very valuable qualities of the mind, useful in the course of human life, are to be acquired or strengthened by it, so as to become habits, ready on all occasions." – Benjamin Franklin