

# Chess and autism

Chess: a bridge between two worlds



Lecture Karel van Delft London Chess and Education Conference 2014

# Purposes of this lecture

- Understanding of aspects connected with chess and autism.
- Practical ideas of how to use chess for stimulating the development, empowerment and emancipation of autistic youth.



# Introduction

Karel van Delft

- Psychologist
- Chess trainer
- Journalist
  
- [www.chesstalent.com](http://www.chesstalent.com)
- [www.schaken-en-autisme.nl](http://www.schaken-en-autisme.nl)
  
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# More information in English

[www.schaken-en-autisme.nl/english-spanish](http://www.schaken-en-autisme.nl/english-spanish)

- Intro
- Artikelen
- Foto Video
- Poster Trix Meurs
- English Spanish**
- Links
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Click on the poster to see the lecture 'chess and autism' in English.

[Download](#) English article 'Chess and autism'.

[Download](#) Spanish article 'Ajedrez y autismo'.





# Many translations in English and Spanish

The screenshot shows a Windows Internet Explorer browser window displaying the LatestChess website. The address bar shows the URL <http://latestchess.com/showArticle.php?id=26>. The page title is "LatestChess - Articles - Chess and autism - Windows Internet Explorer wordt aangeboden door Hyves". The browser's menu bar includes "Bestand", "Bewerken", "Beeld", "Favorieten", "Extra", and "Help". The toolbar contains various icons for search, protection, and information. The browser's address bar shows several tabs, including "YouTube - Broadcast Yo...", "exd51 » Education", "Chess in Schools & at th...", and "LatestChess - Article...".

The website's navigation menu includes "Home", "News", "Interviews", "Articles", "Games", "Events", "Links", "Puzzles", "Feeds", and "LatestChess Blog: Express Yourself!". A search bar is located below the navigation menu. The main content area features the article "Chess and autism" written by Karel van Delft on 12 October 2009. The article's introduction states: "This article is taken from a book Developing Chess Talent - How to create a chess culture by coaching, training, organization and communication by Karel van Delft and IM Merijn van Delft. Article talks about kids suffering from autism spectrum disorder and how chess helped them. **Read an interesting article.**"

The article text continues: "Chess is a suitable sport for many children and adults with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Scientific research on this subject is lacking, also on an international level. Experience indicates that chess stimulates social, emotional and cognitive development."

A sub-section titled "A 'super championship' for Jaap de Vries" is also visible. It includes a quote: "'Mate', Jaap de Vries (9) announces firmly. After an attack on the enemy king, Jaap manages to score his third full point during national championships for chess pupils in Gouda. 'My rating is rocketing sky high!', he shouts."

Below the quote, the text reads: "Jaap is not very keen on a conversation with a total stranger. But this changes if he is allowed to play a game of chess with him. Then he talks incessantly between moves. 'If I play chess, I keep learning more and more. It's a fun sport, actually.' Jaap wants to learn to play good chess. 'This is a super championship!', he says."

The article is accompanied by an image of a human head with a glowing brain, and a promotional banner for the game "EVONY" with the text "Build your cities, Create your troops, Conquer your World!" and a "PLAY NOW" button.

The website's sidebar contains several sections: "Reviews" with a list of articles including "Tactical Tests to Improve Your Chess", "Grandmaster Interviews" featuring a photo of Viswanathan Anand, "Upload PGN games", "Express Yourself", and "Chess Develops The Mind".

The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the Start button, several open applications, and the system tray with the time 21:29.



# More in Spanish, just Google



Tamaño de las letras Más grande Más pequeño Reiniciar

## Ajedrez Iberoamericano

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### Ajedrez y autismo: desarrollando el talento

Sábado 31 de Octubre de 2009

Fuente : [chessbase.com/espanola](http://chessbase.com/espanola)

Traducción al castellano : Nadja Woisin

El ajedrez es un deporte muy apto para muchos niños y adultos con autismo, un trastorno del desarrollo del cerebro. El tema todavía carece de suficientes investigaciones científicas, también en el ámbito internacional, pero la experiencia muestra

### Frases célebres



"Es imposible comprender el mundo del Ajedrez sin mirarlo con los ojos de Capablanca"  
**Botvinnik**

### Top 10 Latinos - Marzo 2010

1.	Shirov, Alexei	Esp	2737
2.	Dominguez, Leinier	Cub	2713



# Conclusions

- Chess fits autistic children and adults.
- Chess stimulates the cognitive, social, emotional and metacognitive development.
- Chess brings a bridge between two worlds.





# What is autism?

- Autism is a congenital neurological disorder.
- Symptoms are: limited social skills, a need for structure, and problems with emotions, empathy, self-image, language, imaginative powers and locomotion.
- Autists have trouble internalizing sensory stimuli as a coherent whole.
- Autists often have a limited field of interest, in which they can specialize strongly.
- To cope with the complexities of the outside world, autists seek refuge in fixed habits and patterns.
- There is a spectrum of autism disorders with category classifications.



Chess is combining rules and patterns.  
The game fits many autists.



# Needs of autistic children

- Rest, structure, obvious rules
- Safe environment
- Predictable procedures
- Clear, concrete communication
- Acceptation, empathy



# Chess stimulates

- **Cognitive** development  
Thinking, reasoning
- **Metacognitive** development  
Thinking about your thinking
- **Social** development  
Contacts with others, social skills
- **Emotional** development  
Selfconfidence, pleasure



# Why chess fits autists?

- Not physical
- Logical
- Safe
- Structured
- Quiet
- During game individual



# What brings chess?

- Social contacts
- Cognitive challenge
- Fun
- Success experiences
- Nice hobby



# With chess come all kind of skills



# Trix Meurs, mother of Tom



As a mother of two autistic sons she knows autists focus.

Via this focus you can get contact with them.





# This is a story about

- Tom
- Maarten
- Jaap
- Caspar
- Laurens
- Jeroen
- And many more autistic children and adults.



# Understanding

- They have problems understanding the world around them.
- People around them have difficulties to understand them.
- Results: misunderstandings, confusion, fear and frustrations.



# Prevalence

- Approximately one in every 100 persons has an autistic disorder.
- Boys suffer from it six times more frequently than girls.



# Environment

The better their environment is geared to their needs, the more autists are able to develop their qualities.



# How to recognize autism?

- Rigid behaviour, 'strange'
- Difficult normal contact
- No eye contact
- Very sensible for sensory stimuli
- Often alone
- More difficulties playing with other kids, compared with adults
- Language often different
- Mood can change fast
- Dealing with changing circumstances is difficult
- Fear, panic attacks, depressions
- Sometimes difficulties with futilities
- Not predictable
- Pure, friendly
- Incomprehensible



# Limitations youth with autistic disorder

- Social skills limited: no or a few friendships
- Communication, language
- Non-verbal communication
- Imagination
- Need for structure
- Emotions, empathy, fears
- Self-image
- Locomotion
- Internalizing sensory stimuli
- Concentration
- Physical contact threatening
- Limited field of interest
- Changing situations



# No autist is the same

- Different types of autism
- Level of disorder
- Innate character
- Intelligence
- Special talents
- Upbringing
- Social circumstances differ



# Strong aspects of autists

- Own logic, system thinker
- Can concentrate well on one topic
- Can work concentrated a long time
- Understands well schematical representations
- Has a strong visual memory
- Works well by him self
- Polite to others
- Reliable (agreement is agreement)
- Works well via plans and procedures
- Can reproduce many facts
- Eye for details
- Much knowledge about certain issues





# With autism you can participate in a chess training and tournament



‘Everything in the life of Laurens should be planned’, his mother says. ‘Except for chess. Then he likes to investigate.’



# You can influence level of performance

Create conditions:

- Talent: innate abilities can be improved
- Circumstances: good trainer, materials
- Motivation: grows by succes experiences
- Physical condition: improved by excercises
- Mental condition: created by respect, empathy



# Jaap de Vries



# Jaap and his Nintendo

Jaap has Asperger. Between rounds in a chess tournament, Jaap plays games on his Nintendo. This is precisely what does allow him to make contact with other children, who come to him to see what game he is playing. 'If you share his interest, he is open for contact', his mother Annemieke has noticed.



# Maarten Beekhuis at his chess club



# Quotes Maarten

- 'I think that I like chess because I am good at it.'
- 'I'm probably more self-involved than most people, but I like to have social contacts. My autism makes this difficult.'



# Principles of emancipation and empowerment

- Everyone has limitations and disabilities
- We have to make the best of it
- If possible: together
  
- Speak about limitations
- Create conditions for discussion about it
- No shame



# Perspective

- Autism can not be cured
- You can learn to deal with it
- There is room for development of personal qualities
- Autists and people around them can learn to deal with handicaps
- Important: recognize and accept limitations
- Talk with autist in a normal way





# Perspectives of better life quality via

- Behaviour therapy
- Psycho education
- Medical treatment
- Creating predictable circumstances
  
- And:
- Join activities like chess to stimulate qualities



# Qualifications of a trainer

- Know chess (limited level already enough)
- Empathy
- Didactical skills
- Understanding autism
- Social skills



# How to develop as a trainer

- Read, talk, get experiences
- Understanding, expertise, patience
- Consistent attitude and procedures
- Offer structure and make this clear
- For example via week schedule
- Personal contact
- Work with small groups



# Principles for a trainer

- Start with possibilities of autists, e.g. intelligence, eye for detail, strong memory, possibility to focus.
- Give own responsibility where possible and help where necessary.



# Be practical

- Be practical if there arise difficulties.
- For example make agreement with autistic kid and group you give him a 'time out' if he gets very angry or panics.
- Time out is not a penalty, it is a practical solution.
- Because: if somebody has a headache he also needs some rest.
- Ask the kid why he shows this behaviour. Maybe things can be done different next time.



# Tips of trainers

## A lot to think about: develop routines

- Small groups, individual attention
- Unambiguous use of language
- Quiet environment
- Enough time for tasks, avoid stress
- Announce clearly what you will do
- Immediately interfere when problems arise
- Mention wrong behaviour and explain why Useless to get angry, tell what you expect
- Clear structure in lessons and programm
- Don't stop fast self study (Aspergers)
- Emotional support, explain situations
- Check always if the kid understands what you are saying
- Watch the situation by the eyes of a autist



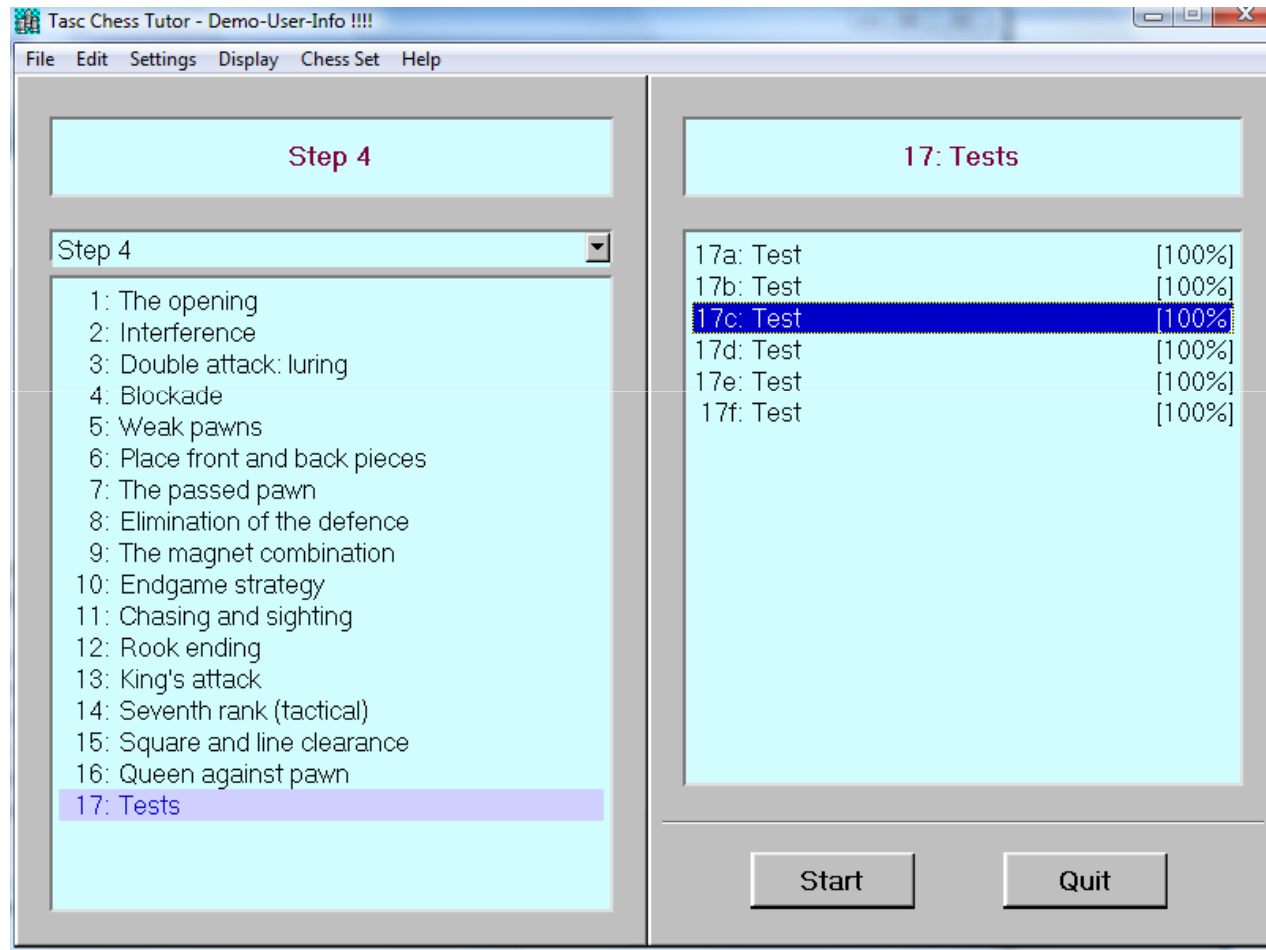
# Content of lessons and training

Same as with other people

- Play games
- Analyze games
- Tactics study
- Study commented games
- Various
- Computer / internet very usefull (no emotions)



# Steps method: very structured method





# With explication



The screenshot shows a window titled "Tasc Chess Tutor - Demo-User-Info !!!! (Stap 1 - les 1)". The menu bar includes "File", "Edit", "Settings", "Display", "Chess Set", and "Help". The main area is divided into three sections:

- Chessboard:** A standard 8x8 chessboard with a light blue and dark blue checkerboard pattern. The top two rows (rank 1 and 2) contain black pieces: Rook, Knight, Bishop, Queen, King, Bishop, Knight, Rook. The bottom two rows (rank 7 and 8) contain white pieces: Pawn, Knight, Bishop, Queen, King, Bishop, Knight, Rook.
- Navigation Panel:** Located to the right of the board, it has a title "Schaakbord en -stukken" and a subtitle "De schaakstukken". Below the title are four buttons: "terug" (left arrow), "meer" (plus sign), "verder" (right arrow), and "einde" (minus sign).
- Text Panel:** A scrollable text area containing the following text:

Op het schaakbord komen de **stukken** te staan, **witte** en **zwarte**. De witte stukken zetten we aan de onderkant; de zwarte aan de bovenkant. Een van de twee spelers neemt plaats achter de witte stukken, de ander achter de zwarte.

De stukken worden verderop in deze les voorgesteld.

At the bottom right of the window, there is an "OK" button.



# And exercises with direct feedback

The screenshot shows the 'Tasc Chess Tutor' application window. The title bar reads 'Tasc Chess Tutor - Demo-User-Info !!!! (Stap 1 - oefening 3b)'. The menu bar includes 'File', 'Edit', 'Settings', 'Display', 'Chess Set', and 'Help'. The main chessboard displays a king on e3 and a rook on b6. The board is labeled with files a-h and ranks 1-8. To the right of the board is a panel with a row of numbers 1-10, where '8' is highlighted. Below this, a light blue box contains the instruction 'Val aan!' (Take!) and statistics: 'Punten:0 (0)', 'Score:0%', 'Opgave:00:00.18', and 'Totaal:00:00.25'. Below the statistics are four buttons: 'terug' (back), 'score' (highlighted with a blue percentage icon), 'verder' (forward), and 'einde' (end). A large empty light blue box is below these buttons. At the bottom of the interface, a text box contains the instruction: 'Val een stuk van de tegenpartij aan. Zorg ervoor dat het eigen stuk niet kan worden geslagen.' (Take a piece from the opponent. Make sure your own piece cannot be captured.) with an 'OK' button. The bottom right corner features four icons: 'hint' (lightbulb), 'hulp' (question mark), 'fout' (hand with red X), and 'antw.' (person icon).



# How and where can you train

- Self study
- On a club
- Via the computer and internet
- With friends and family
- With a qualified trainer



# 15 year old pupil, gets individual lessons, says I learned via chess:

- Perseverance
- Taking into account different things at the same time
- Knowledge and technique of chess
- More pleasure in the game
- Proud because I win more often
- Dealing with loosing a game
- Concentration on a task
- Doing research
- Discussion with another about things
- Verbalizing matters
- Self study

