

This project came into being with the aim of making children the central figures in developmental game playing, progressively developing their motor-sensory capacity by requiring the use of active intelligence during game activities. These highly beneficial lessons take place in an exclusive and protected space: the chessboard. Experience shows that this becomes a magical experience for kids - a bridge between reality and imagination. Carefully structured game activities heighten children's self-esteem as well as providing a unique opportunity to build relationships with companions based on loyalty, responsibility and partnership.

Kids learn through the fun of play to respect and control their bodies, as well as being given the chance to express themselves and establish interpersonal relationships through movement, increasing consciousness and perception of their own physical self.

Indeed, the quality and awareness of movement that these exercises provide has a direct and significant positive effect on the entire range of a child's psychological resources: the ability to communicate, to perceive and resolve problems, to recognize him or herself as an individual - in short, they supply indispensable tools for successful interaction with others. The games and activities consolidate self-confidence and allow children to test the potential and limits of their physicality through sensory and perceptual experience, learning the risks associated with uncontrolled movement, the diverse sensations created by variations in posture, and the pleasure and satisfaction that comes from coordinating their activities with those of others in a harmonious and entertaining way.

The project aims steadily to develop in children the following essential skills:

- the ability to read, understand and interpret the messages that come from their own bodies and from others and to respect both.
- the ability to express themselves and to communicate so as to develop and sharpen perceptive capacity.
- the ability to orientate themselves in space and time, and to know and

experiment with different rhythms.

- the ability to read coordinates.
- through these games, children acquire greater psychomotor capacity, and by experimenting with the success of their own actions, are able to:
- progressively expand their personal experience, enriching it with new stimuli;
- increase their level of satisfaction;
- incentivise self-esteem;
- experience and manage both winning and losing in a healthy and responsible fashion;
- learn to know, express and control their own emotions.

The participation of each child in the class group also supplies the opportunity to share various experiences, promoting the inclusion of children with individual differences and emphasizing the importance of cooperation and group work for achieving common goals. In other words, a goal is to recognize and promote respect for individuality, which is seen as a positive contributor to the group dynamic instead of an obstacle.

In addition, the activities aim to promote respect for rules, be they for simple game playing or those required for the more structured game and team activities introduced by the teacher.

## TEACHING OBJECTIVES

- acquisition of self-awareness through listening and observation of one's body, mastery of motor and posture patterns, and knowledge of how to adapt to changes regarding time and space.
- stimulate the child's imagination and powers of conceptualisation and how to transfer these to reality.
- experiment with multiple experiences designed to supply children with specific skills such as orientation, direction, and spatial relationships.
- allow children to use body language to communicate and express states of mind and feelings.
- teach children to establish relationships with companions, respecting possible differences, including race and ethnic background.
- instil respect for appropriate safety criteria both at an individual and group level.

- teach through structured play the value of rules and their application.

## OBJECTIVES FOR THE CHILDREN

- gain command of lateral space and movement to improve time-space organisation.
- learn and experiment with single directions - vertical (forward and backwards); horizontal (right and left); diagonal - and directions in combination.
- learn letters and numbers through psychomotor experience.
- acquisition of an innate understanding of the chessboard's alpha-numeric coordinates
- learn and experiment with different rhythms.
- improve the capacity to concentrate and react to given stimuli.
- develop self-control and command over one's general possibilities and limitations.
- create a safe environment by respect for the rules.
- develop the capacity to resolve problematic situations.
- develop a strategy.
- enrich vocabulary and expressive precision.
- learn respect and collaboration through team play.
- see the pieces as characters and understand how they move on the chessboard.

## COURSE AND MANUAL STRUCTURE

This manual is designed for kindergarten and primary school teachers, as well as other educators.

The first course is made up of 15 early years skills (psychomotor education) chapters. The manual is based on lengthy practical teaching experience with children between the ages of five and six, but can be used for students up to the ages of seven or eight if the teacher believes it is appropriate for their level. A class lasts around one hour (possibly longer if extra variations given in this manual or variations developed by the teacher are used).

All of the activities take place on a giant 4 x 4 metre chessboard, involving the use of very simple pieces of equipment.

**The manual's text is presented as follows:**

- The chapter number and name.

- **A very short lesson summary**
- **Equipment list.** All of the items should be easy to obtain or to make at very little cost. Ideally the latter should be done with or by the children as this is a highly enjoyable activity that stimulates involvement and curiosity about what lies ahead. Teachers can use alternative equipment to achieve the same ends, e.g. coloured rope can be used instead of ribbons
- **Fairy tale excerpt.** This supplies a very effective, memorable and magical context for the exercises
- **The main verbal instructions for the children.** These are in bold type with bullet points. The instructions are only some of the essential points to be told to the children - more specific details are provided in the activity details for the teacher. Very often, the written instructions for the children are not intended to be given verbatim but rather just to indicate the main content of the instruction. Teachers should use any wording or extra information they consider appropriate for better understanding. It is strongly recommended that an accompanying physical demonstration by the teacher is done every time activity instructions are given, as this will make things much clearer and easier to understand. Another excellent method is to demonstrate the activity by getting one or two children to do a quick rehearsal.
- **Activity information for the teacher.** This indicates activity content, teaching points, practical instructions and advice on how to conduct the activities and games. The use of **diagrams** for more complicated activities provides important information such as the location of equipment and how the children are positioned and their movements both on and off the chessboard. Sometimes possible variations are listed to enrich or increase the difficulty of the activity. These can be used when the composition or level of an individual class makes this appropriate.
- **Closing chant.** To finish the lesson nicely, children can be asked to form a circle and be taught a closing chant, which they then repeat aloud.
- **Observations.** The course has been developed in collaboration with child behavioural experts. Their observations are presented at the end of selected lessons, and are intended to assist and inform teachers by highlighting their experience of the psychological and behavioural dynamics that are present as well as supplying relevant background

information.

- **Photos of example equipment and materials.**
- **Sequence photos of how to execute the various steps.** These should make understanding the more complicated steps a simple matter and can be used with the video demonstrations available online at [www.....](#) Note that unless otherwise indicated children use the Castle Step for movements across the board.

To further aid teachers, **videos of selected activities** are available on the Internet at [www.....](#) Sometimes there are small differences between the way activities are conducted in the videos and how they are described in this manual. These differences usually relate to another toy or piece of equipment that was used for the sake of convenience, or small changes in the way equipment is placed or how an activity is conducted. This sort of flexibility is encouraged as long as it does not prevent the key psychomotor and teaching objectives being achieved (i.e. an activity regarding sideways horizontal movement must present that topic and develop the appropriate skills). Watching the videos before reading the game activity instructions is a good way to quickly get an overview of how activities are conducted. However, the manual instructions should always be read after watching a video as they contain important and detailed information.

## THE FAIRY TALE

In the first course of 15 lessons the children's involvement and curiosity is stimulated by the use of an ongoing fairy tale, the content of which is connected to the lesson at hand.

The use of the fairy tale has several advantages and contributes to the success of the lessons: it activates the children's imaginations and gives a context to abstract concepts and makes them easier to understand. In addition, it creates a thread that runs through each individual activity and the lesson as a whole. Another advantage is that the children closely associate fairy tales with play and relaxation, fostering enthusiasm to participate in the activities. The fairy tales also allow for the introduction of rules and facilitate both understanding and respect for them. The use of a fairy story makes it easy to instil the concept of active listening and favours periods of silence and observation; it stimulates concentration and mental visualization.

The requirement of a fairy tale for mental visualization and involvement means that it can be very effectively used during an activity on all of the occasions when it is necessary to regain attention, contain excessive emotion, noise and movement, and to foster listening, calmness and awareness.

The fairy stories have only been outlined so that the essential points can quickly be understood by teachers. Needless to say, teachers can enrich these a little with more detailed descriptions if they wish, e.g. 'wise and powerful king' instead of just 'king'

Appropriate changes can be made to the fairy stories so that available equipment can be used, e.g. if a suitable soft doll is not readily available for Boletus the Gnome, the fairy tale text would be changed to be appropriate for a soft toy at hand; however, information essential to the exercise must be kept. For example, an owl called Guffi is used instead of Boletus the gnome in the activity example video available on [www.....](#) - *the king's advisor was a very wise owl called Guffi... Guffi was so important and powerful\* that nobody was allowed to turn their backs on him... So remember children, always make sure you are facing Guffi the owl.*

## FORMING A CIRCLE

A mode of communicating that we would propose for promoting a good group rapport is the formation of a circle with the middle of the chessboard at its centre. The circle becomes a physical reference point for the presentation of the activity and an explanation of its basic rules.

A circle favours communication and the creation of new relationships: it is a powerful symbol of inclusion, connection, collaboration, continuity, and trust, as well as representing the group as a whole.

In addition, the nature of the circle promotes trust between the teacher and the children through face-to-face speaking, listening and visual communication.

## NAME CARDS

To foster a sense of participation, we suggest giving the children coloured name cards to hang around their necks or clip to their clothes (with plastic holders). On these they can write their first names in capital letters. Writing their names helps reinforce the idea that they are coming together for something new and special. The use of name cards helps establish a 'new' identity for the child and adds a sense of occasion. This could contribute to



the establishment of new qualities and help them to overcome previous limits. The use of name cards is helpful during the early stages of a course when teachers are still learning class members' names.

## THE GIANT CHESSBOARD

The giant chessboard is the most important piece of lesson equipment. In the first course the chessboard is presented to the children as a castle that has black and white rooms separated by invisible walls.

The board should be approximately 4 x 4 metres in area with each square measuring approximately 50 x 50 centimetres (for a class predominantly made up of younger children (e.g. around 5 years of age) the board can be a little smaller - 3.2 square metres with 40 x 40 cm squares). Giant chessboards can be bought at a reasonable price from most chess retailers or they can be made. It is important that the chessboard is made of durable material and is able to stand up to repeated use.

Ideally, coordinate letters and numbers will be printed on the edges of the board. Most boards have coordinates on one side only. Until Lesson 6 coordinates are not displayed and the board can simply be turned over until this point. Sometimes the reverse side of the chessboard is not suitable for use because of the presence of heavy stitching or dried glue used in the manufacturing process, or simply because it is unsightly. In this event, the coordinates on the main side of the board can be covered with easily removable tape until Lesson 6.

## CHILD PLACEMENT

This fundamental aspect is relevant to the entire course; there are three main points regarding the placement of class members on and off the chessboard:

1. Establish a no-go area around the chessboard (represented by the castle moat in the fairy tale), which is maintained for all the activities. This area prevents the children from lying, sitting or putting their hands on the chessboard. The children must maintain a distance of 30 cm from the edge of the board.
2. When the children listen to the teacher, they must sit evenly spread out around the edge of the chessboard and not stand up.
3. Only children directly participating in an exercise can go onto the chessboard.

## HOW TO USE THE MANUAL

The suggestions and activity descriptions in this manual have been written in detail to assist as much as possible in bringing them to life in class. Everything suggested has been used in the past with great success. However, this does not mean that they are written in stone. Without doubt, there are innumerable possibilities for creating new game activities within a lesson, or modifying those presented here or to create a new activity with new goals. Every educator must continuously renew what they offer to 'their' children by following their own inspiration in order to bring something new of quality to light.

When we refer to the teacher, we mean any qualified member of school staff, a chess instructor or an outside teacher; in short, a figure suited to and capable of conducting these activities.

**Feedback and questions are very welcome. Please use the following contact information:....**

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## GETTING STARTED

### GREETING THE CHILDREN

The teacher introduces him or herself if not already known by the children. This is followed by a brief explanation of what they will be doing together.

### EXPLORING THE CHESSBOARD AND ITS USE

The giant chessboard is laid out before the children and we begin to look at its characteristics together: What can you see? (A big magic carpet! A giant chessboard! Lots of black and white squares! etc.). Direct their attention to the alternate black and white squares of equal size. Talk about the main rules, e.g. placement of children.

**N.B. THE CHESSBOARD DOES NOT HAVE NUMBERS AND LETTERS (ALPHA-NUMERIC COORDINATES) ON ITS BORDER AT THIS STAGE.**



## INTRODUCTION OF BASIC RULES.

The children's names are written on name cards that can be attached to their clothing or hung around their necks. The castle moat is explained and defined so that the children maintain the correct distance (60cm) from the giant chessboard when they sit or stand around it.

