

# LESSON 1

## EXPLORING THE CHESSBOARD SPACE

### BRIEF LESSON SUMMARY

- Explanation of the basic rules.
- Learn about their new workplace and the space around it (e.g. maintaining distance from the chessboard, black and white squares, and children can only go onto the chessboard for activities)
- Crossing the chessboard freely
- Going around the board; going on and off the chessboard
- Standing on squares near or next to classmates with and without physical contact
- Striking poses and thinking of names for poses

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**EQUIPMENT: GIANT CHESSBOARD – NAME CARDS AND HOLDERS –  
TAMBOURINE**

### THE FAIRY TALE

"Once upon a time there was a great and powerful king who lived with his queen, his subjects, and an army of soldiers to defend his castle. Every subject and soldier had to wear a card with their name around their neck. This is because the king had a terrible memory and could not bear to make a mistake with people's names. The castle had turrets and large rooms that were either completely black or completely white - these were separated by magic invisible walls. If you wished to enter a room, there were strict rules that had to be respected. The castle was surrounded by an enormous moat full of water that protected the castle from an attack by enemies..."

### ACTIVITY 1.

#### FREELY EXPLORING THE SPACE

#### Main instructions for the children

- Cross the castle in any way you want.

- You can enter or leave the castle using any room you want to.

### Activity details for the teacher

- a) The children freely cross the chessboard in turn, entering or leaving from any side they wish (involve all the children; if there is someone who does not want to participate, don't insist; usually they will want to participate when they see the others doing it). Repeat altogether the crossings that were the most interesting, bizarre, imaginative. If there are too many similarities, you can suggest new ideas.
- b) After everybody has made at least two passes, take some time to reflect with the children on the different ways of crossing: Is the path straight? Can you step on the walls? (the walls are invisible - if you are standing on a wall, you are not standing on a colour, etc.).

## ACTIVITY 2

### INSIDE - OUTSIDE

#### Main instructions for the children

- Move around the castle in a circle evenly apart.
- When you hear one or two beats of the tambourine, move as instructed.

#### Activity details for the teacher

- a) The children walk evenly spaced in a circle outside the chessboard. If the kids are energetic and need to let off steam, they can walk quickly or even run.
- b) One beat of the tambourine: everyone goes onto the chessboard (**inside** the castle).
- c) Two beats of the tambourine: everyone goes off the chessboard (**outside** the castle).

### ACTIVITY 3.

#### BLACK AND WHITE

##### Main instructions for the children

- Walk in a circle around the castle.
- On the beat of the tambourine (or when told), follow the instructions.

##### Activity details for the teacher

- a) The children go around the chessboard in a circle. If they are energetic and need to let off excess energy, they can walk quickly or even run.
- b) On the vocal command "White!", all of the children go onto a white square of their choice.
- c) On the vocal command "Black!", all of the children go onto a black square of their choice.
- d) On the vocal command "Out!", all the children quickly leave the chessboard and then sit around it evenly spaced.
- e) On a beat of the tambourine, everyone stands up and begins walking around the chessboard in a circle again.

##### VARIATIONS:

1. At Step C: the children go onto a black square balancing on one leg only.
2. Mix up the commands in a surprise order, e.g. black, black, white.

### ACTIVITY 4.

#### ONTO THE SQUARES, ONE CHILD AT A TIME

##### Main instructions for the children

- Sit evenly spaced around the castle
- When your names are called out followed by a beat of the tambourine, stand up and go one by one to a room of your choosing, but next to another classmate, and then follow instructions
- When the exercise is finished go back to where you were sitting

##### Activity details for the teacher

**NOTE:** For larger classes, there should be a maximum of 10-12 children on the chessboard for exercises that require them to all stay on the board at the same time; the first group of 10-12 children leave the board at the end of the exercise, and then the next group of children (again with a maximum of 10-12) do the same exercise, etc.

- a) The children are seated around the chessboard. Tell the children that when their names are called out with a beat of the tambourine, they stand up and go to a square of their choice.
- b) The first child can go to any square they wish. All the children that follow can choose a square, but it must be adjacent (vertically, horizontally or diagonally) to that of a classmate.
- c) The first child goes to a square of their choosing. The other children go onto the board one at a time. They can go to a square either adjacent or not, but they must be close enough to any other child to make physical contact (hand, foot, shoulder etc.).
- d) Once the first child is on the board, the other children can go to a square of their choosing, but they must be close enough to establish a point of physical contact with the child that preceded them onto the board.
- e) After the first child goes on to any square and adopts and holds a very expressive pose (animals, objects, any strange way of standing, etc.), the other children go to any square they wish one by one and adopt their own poses.

**NOTE:** A good rhythm should be maintained throughout the exercises (beating the tambourine assists this).

## ACTIVITY 5.

### LIVING SCULPTURES ON BLACK AND WHITE

#### Main instructions for the children

- You are artists that use your bodies to create living sculptures with your friends.
- Go to a room of your choosing and make a sculpture by holding your body in a way that represents something (fruit, a flower, an elephant, etc.) or somebody (a soldier, an athlete, a dancer etc.).
- After creating the sculpture – give it a name.
- Those who are outside of the castle must give a name to the entire group of sculptures as a single work.

#### Activity details for the teacher

- a) The children are told that they are artists who create living sculptures that represent people (a soldier, an athlete, etc.), objects (a tree, flower, chair, etc.), animals etc. The children go one at a time onto the chessboard and adopt a frozen pose.
- b) Each child must give a name to their sculpture when asked.
- c) Once all the children on the chessboard have adopted a pose, those outside the chessboard must find a title for all the sculptures as a single work, (if needed, give them some help).
- d) Once the title has been decided, ask those not on the board to give a big round of applause.

**CLOSING CHANT: “Black – White! White – Black! We learn about the castle by going forward and back! 1 - 2 - 3 yeaaaaaah!”.**

#### OBSERVATIONS

The giant chessboard is opened and laid flat in front of the children, with an introduction to the new space that has been created: the teacher comments on its

size and characteristics, and how it is to be used, as well as speaking about some of the basic concepts and rules for the activities ahead.

### **FREELY EXPLORING THE SPACE**

When the individual children move around and across the board the teacher will establish different psychomotor parameters and make sure they are observed:

#### **1) Rhythm and pace: slow, fast, varied, stop-go, jerky or fluid/coherent.**

Rhythm and pace vary from individual to individual: There are children that need to think before moving, others who are spontaneous, and still others who are instinctive. Some movements will be smooth and regular, others constrained and deliberate, and still others that are free and fluid. Occasionally, getting the children to do quick movements or to race around gives them the opportunity to let off steam. It also takes the pressure off children who have difficulty when required to deal with the space in a slower, more deliberate, coherent and logical way.

#### **2) Movement strategy: with or without one or more specific directions, direct or indirect use of the space, involvement of the child both in the space and the group.**

There will be many strategies and they will involve a certain degree of independence by the child, namely freely choosing a method and direction for navigating the space.

Direct use of the space: well defined direction using squares of the same colour.

Indirect use of the space: children leave the chessboard after an exercise and go around it to resume position for the next one. This defines the work space as 'belonging' to the children; periodically leaving the board takes pressure off some children as they are no longer under scrutiny.

#### **3) The type of energy used in movement.**

The way energy is used for movement supplies indications of how the child responds to given stimuli: some use a large amount of energy to make a small movement, others move lethargically, still others' movements seem to freeze, with a great deal of energy spent thinking about how to move next; some act without thought or choosing first what they really want to do.

#### **4) The use of creativity to execute new movements.**

The use of creativity fosters transforming imagination into practical action, producing in the child positive emotions connected to self-esteem and giving them the courage to express themselves in a group. In this phase, there is often the tendency for some children to behave like leaders. In this context we can see creative expression in those who experiment with new ideas; in contrast, there are children who only do what others do (in particular leaders) out of fear of being judged.

Observation of the energy dynamic is essential for obtaining useful indications regarding the relationships individual children have with each other and the group as a whole within the work space

## INSIDE – OUTSIDE: **DOING EXERCISES** AND **BEING OBSERVED** IN THE SPACE

In this phase, the children do movements that will be observed by all their classmates.

Various emotions will come into play such as embarrassment or shame, fear of judgement and physical contact with others (in group activities), as well as concern about physical encounters in the shared space.

This is an appropriate opportunity for the teacher to emphasise that all emotions we feel can be either negative or positive, depending on how we use them. For example, embarrassment becomes an opportunity to overcome and to take risks. It should be stressed that judgement by the group should not be seen as personal criticism, but rather constructive observations and suggestions that provide an opportunity to improve.

On the chessboard, all activities are done in the context of mutual respect, without deriding the difficulties of others and in the positive and joyful spirit of play; everything that we create individually and as a group is a shared resource for all and inspires collaboration and gaining knowledge.

## BLACK AND WHITE: A TEST OF CONCENTRATION.

As the word suggests, concentration is the capacity to focus a thought on an objective and then act on it (like an arrow drawn back in the bow aimed at a target).

Even when the children are experimenting with simple alternation between black and white there is awareness that they must stay focused while the body makes different movements (coordination). In addition, focus on this thought allows children to monitor and correct themselves: 'If I make an error, I can correct how I am doing things'.