



TRAINING MODULE

Partner: CLUB MAGIC

Module's title: **Positive effects of chess in prison – Theoretical
Part**



Including **Chess As a Re-education Up-Skilling** tool

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BACKGROUND

Why chess in prisons?

The history of chess and prisons is incredibly extensive, with projects developed around the globe for many years. The reason behind this could be boiled down to the cost-effectiveness of this practice. **Chess offers an alternative way to spend time in prison and as an ideal tool for promoting strategic thinking for the social reintegration of prison inmates.**

The purpose of the terms of imprisonment is to reeducate and reintegrate into society the people who have committed the crime. Likewise, the Penitentiary Regulation establishes that prison treatment is configured as a subjective right of prisoners, thus it is included in their chapter of rights and responsibilities. Scheduled trips, therapy groups, specialised action programs in drug addiction, training, culture, sports and prison work, are the activities and fields that, according to the legislation, must be worked on with the treatment. Treatment is considered as “the set of activities directly aimed” at the reeducation and social reintegration of the prisoner. This treatment is inspired by the principle of scientific individualization, programming, continuity and dynamism, in order to achieve, through treatment, the re-education of the prisoner.

As it has been pointed out, chess is a sport and an ideal tool for education in values and training of intellectual abilities, due to its characteristics as an inspiring model of strategic thinking. It can be an extraordinarily effective activity to help achieve the objectives of the Penitentiary Law of re-education and social reintegration.

The prison context



Including Chess As a Re-education Up-Skilling tool

[First of all, we must start from a simple fact that is sometimes forgotten by trainers/facilitators who work in prisons: **prisoners do not constitute any homogeneous “collective”** with similar characteristics and demands: quite the contrary, the social and territorial origin, the causes that led to committing the crimes, the type of crimes, the motivation for future reintegration, the approach to life in prison... They are all extremely variable. It cannot be said in any case that there is a “typical prisoner” with certain characteristics and specific expectations. There can only be one exception to this, and that is the more or less numerous presence in each penitentiary centre of people who habitually reoffend in not very serious crimes and which frequently lead them to end up in prison.

The penitentiary centre has some characteristics that the trainer must always take into account, there is a certain “tempo” or pace, a precariousness of means determined by the circumstances and a variability with respect to the characteristics of the participants (motivation, personal circumstances, frequency of attendance) often unpredictable and difficult to control on your part. The material resources that you use, the complementary activities that you want to carry out and even the methodology, are also determined by the environment:

It is not possible to escape the characteristics of the prison, which in our opinion must be understood by the trainer.

The penitentiary system is the system established for the fulfilment of the sentences provided for in judicial rulings, and this whole system in its entirety - with its rules, internal regime and its operating characteristics - is a well-regulated machine that is subject to constant self-review. Therefore, the trainer must do everything possible to adapt to the environment, and also be aware that the people who most interact with the inmates – prison officers - have to carry out their daily work. Each professional within the penitentiary system - and within any system - plays a role: the trainer's role is only to teach the subject they are responsible for, in this case, chess. In other words, we have to respect the time and space that has been granted to us in such a closed environment. If we maintain this professional and respectful behaviour, our workshop can be a safe space for everyone who attends it.

A fact that must be taken into account and one on which we will focus especially, is **the numerous absences from the workshop**, temporary or permanent, that occur -often unexpectedly - **among the participants in the program**. The vicissitudes of the



prison regime and the particular prison situations of each inmate are the cause of this characteristic of a program in prisons.

Finally, the role of the trainer/facilitator is extremely important in this context. As we have pointed out, they need to be respectful and be aware of the prison environment at all times. As a trainer you have to know how to put yourself in the other's situation with respect to the inmates, but not establish excessively personal relationships or enter on specific issues of each inmate. Confidentiality and discretion are essential for anyone who works in this environment. They should never forget their example as a teacher and role model. They have to understand that it is relatively common to find emotional variability in inmates due to multiple issues of which the trainer is most of the time unaware. As much as learning or improving, it is important for inmates to enjoy pleasant moments in prison. The trainer must promote good relationships within the workshop, camaraderie, cooperation, optimism and a healthy sense of humour.

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Target

For project Icarus, **prisoners in the last 5 years before release** will be the target group. With a view to their return to free life, they need to acquire a set of relational skills that foster their inclusion in the social fabric and support the adoption of a lifestyle based on respect, dedication and understanding of self and others. The target inmates of the project are male, not only because they make up the overwhelming majority of prisoners, but also because research cited in other chapters shows that it is men who are most in need of emotionally stimulating activities. Among them, preference will be given to those under 40, who are considered to particularly benefit from this project.

This initiative exhibits a versatile framework capable of seamless adaptation and implementation across various demographics within the penal system, including but not limited to female inmates, juvenile offenders, and/or elderly populations. The transferability of this approach underscores its potential efficacy in addressing the

unique needs and challenges encountered by these distinct groups within carceral settings. By accommodating diverse populations, the initiative not only extends its reach but also demonstrates a commitment to comprehensive and inclusive rehabilitative practices within these facilities. Moreover, tailoring interventions to suit the specific circumstances of different demographic groups enhances the likelihood of fostering meaningful behavioural change and promoting successful reintegration into society upon release. Therefore, advocating for the expansion and application of this initiative across a spectrum of prisoner demographics stands as a prudent strategy towards advancing holistic and equitable rehabilitation efforts within the prison system.

THE BENEFITS OF CHESS

Description

Please describe the activities contained in the practice. If possible, try to divide them in Learning Units. Also, define how long the training practice will last (1 to 4 hours).

The game of chess may be unknown to many, but even for those who know it less it usually has a certain aura of mystery. Approaching chess from many more perspectives than the merely competitive one – the history of chess, its relationships with art and culture, the literature it has generated, its special language, the evolution of the game, the biography of some of its most important representatives, renowned games, the modern applications of chess, its psychological benefits - will only confirm the richness that this game contains.

It happens to many people who are in prison, who may lack formal or cultural education. Unfortunately, many haven't had the opportunity to observe life from a human point of view, in the sense that culture, education, art, make us appreciate life and also make us appreciate people, because we are all unique, like a game of chess...

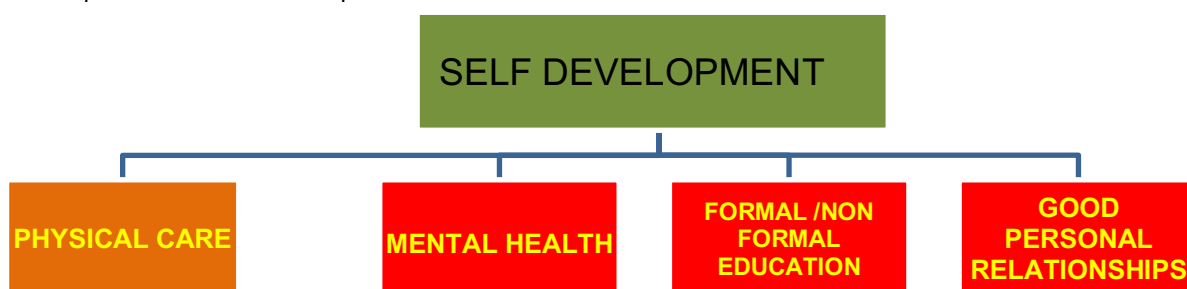
The reason there are so many games and methods to train our brain is due to the current demands of our society, which constantly demands an active, organised, powerful and effective mind to be able to react to the multitude of stimuli that come



to us from the outside. (advertising, Internet, social networks, music, phone calls, emails, training requirements). This avalanche of stimuli produces blockages and mental fatigue that translate into numerous cases of stress, anxiety, hypertension, etc.

We can find a similar justification in the prison environment, but in the opposite direction: brain stimulation activities are very necessary due to the absence of stimuli and the idiosyncrasy of the prison regime, which allows very few contacts with the outside world - obviously there is no Internet and external information flows are very limited - and due to the poverty of the relationships established there, very focused on the particular situation of the inmates, which refers again and again to the personal problems derived from the prison situation.

In this situation, training our mind should not be considered just as another complement, but rather something absolutely necessary to achieve well-being and personal growth, always in the context of each particular situation. We find four factors, which, when worked in a balanced and harmonious way, direct us towards adequate self development:



Chess can contribute two of these elements to personal development:

1. Effective preventive care for **mental health** in general and in very specific areas, thanks to the possibility of creating specific training programs.
2. A rich **non-formal training** in strategic knowledge, which facilitates "learning to think", in a similar way to how high-level chess players do, and which can be applied in our daily lives, and as we have already seen, in the penitentiary environment.

Many studies agree in their conclusions about the positive function that the application of sports activity programs in penitentiary centres plays at a general level. Chess, due to its characteristics and benefits, can be considered a sport for



all purposes. There have been many chess experiences in penitentiary centres that have generally lacked continuity, although there have been very meritorious ones and generally received with interest by the inmates. Typically, they are based on the idea of chess as a game-sport, without delving into its possibilities as an enhancer of strategic thinking and personal change.

A chess workshop in prison should not simply consist of private, free chess classes - this should be repeated frequently -: under these premises and seeing things like this, **there is a risk that our work will serve as a simple leisure activity**. If this game is so rich, let's take advantage of it, so we can change people. A transversal approach to chess can achieve a lot of this. For those who do not know anything about history, for those who do not know anything about literature, for those who are not interested in psychology or for whom hearing the word "values" moves them to laughter or indifference, the synergies established by chess are attractive and suggestive, and can very well induce reflection, to "figure out" things, something that is the prelude to change. This will be our objective when working on all these possibilities, but always focusing on them as something alive, something that has a real practical application.

Whenever anyone plays chess there is the chance you lose, and that losing is also good for yourself - it is something that must be insisted on in a prison chess program. Although we will focus on this when we give some guidelines on how to manage the chess time control in sessions inside the prison, in many prisoners there is a particularly low tolerance for frustration: people who experience this feeling do not usually tolerate setbacks or unpleasant circumstances: "if I am better than you at chess and I lose, I get angry, experience feelings of anger and humiliation, and attribute the defeat to external circumstances". What is behind this is that **the merits of others are not usually recognized** and in the face of several consecutive defeats, the strategy they adopt is avoidance: not playing against that rival anymore, or in other cases, reacting more aggressively: **teach your workshop students to manage and accept defeat**: they will have gained a lot in the change that we all want to produce in the inmates.

Let us remember: The approach of **a chess workshop focused on personal change should not only promote the practice of chess** as another sporting alternative, but its strategic potential, its power as an enhancer of values, its suitability for the best



personal knowledge and the improvement of emotional intelligence, and all this with a view to achieving better social reintegration.

Many inmates have adopted thought patterns throughout their lives based on not assuming responsibility for their own actions; manifest inability or, if not, a manifest disinterest in putting themselves in the place of others; lack of compliance with socially accepted rules and, in addition, a very marked lack of ability to plan and organise their own personal future. **Chess strategic thinking is absolutely incompatible with this way of thinking** and with these personal characteristics: there are a series of principles such as "accumulating small advantages, creating weaknesses in the rival position, occupying the most important positions on the board, setting short, medium and long-term objectives. long term, studying oneself and studying one's opponent, being patient and calmly weighing important decisions, constantly analysing the reality of the game, waiting for the best moment to make a decision, the approach that any movement must have an objective, thinking ahead short but also long term at the same time"... in short, **a very broad series of principles to be guided by, which teach how to be objective and take responsibility for one's own actions.**

These principles can be shown and worked on independently of chess practice, and should be taught by applying them to real-life situations. Acquiring a type of strategic thinking that allows objectively evaluating different life situations, becoming aware of the responsibility of one's own actions and adopting planning as a standard of action, can contribute to achieving the objective of authentic social reintegration.

We remember that **with respect to cognitive processes**, it is already commonly accepted by psychologists and pedagogues that **chess favours general reasoning**, contributes to the maintenance and improvement of **memory**, encourages creativity, improves the ability to pay **attention**, enhances the ability to **analyse** and of **mathematical calculation**, improves the ability to **concentrate, planning and organisation skills**, in addition to promoting and enhancing many other cognitive and psychosocial factors. In an environment such as the penitentiary centre, which due to its characteristics as a forced confinement place it is not "stimulating", the practice of this game under certain circumstances will contribute to the improvement of intellectual processes. **The inmates perfectly assume that they need**



to work on their mental abilities, and the game of chess is ideal for this because it hones these skills while having fun, which undoubtedly facilitates this training.

The objectives set are achieved more easily if the competitive aspect of the game is minimised, and in contrast, guidelines for cooperation, knowledge, help, personal improvement and overcoming erroneous behaviours are established. The role of the trainer/facilitator is basic in the success of the activity, and their actions must be characterised by being a catalyst for change and creating a climate of optimism, respect and mutual trust.

Aim/goal

Please describe the aim(s) and goal(s) of the practice: what are the objectives that the practice wants to reach?

The goals of this initiative are:

1. To present the game of chess as a very healthy recreational and educational alternative to spend time in prison. This game constitutes a magnificent tool for intellectual training that also amuses and entertains.
2. To promote especially recommended values through the practice of this game: respect for the rules and for the rival, stimulation of the desire to improve, promotion of self-responsibility, improvement of self-esteem and self-control or promotion of self-criticism.
3. To induce in the prisoners a more strategic way of focusing their lives through this game, in which they are aware that every action they take, has consequences. To have beneficial consequences, they must embrace planning and strategic thinking systematically in the medium and long term.

Learning Outcomes

What learning outcomes are expected from the practice in order to consider it successful? What will the participant learn? How will the training help their behavioural competences?

Through this module, participants are expected to achieve:



A) Learning chess as an alternative for actively occupying time in prison and developing skills

Chess serves as an excellent sporting alternative for leisure time engagement due to the following reasons:

1. It is a sport, fostering healthy competition, personal growth, interpersonal interaction on an equal footing, a desire for improved understanding and practice, among other benefits.
2. It is an excellent leisure time activity alternative, requiring minimal resources for practice, accessible to individuals for solo play and practice, and becomes an attractive game-sport once its rules are understood.
3. It provides outstanding intellectual faculties training, as evidenced by studies demonstrating its positive impact on cognitive abilities such as attention, concentration, logical and spatial reasoning, memory, among others. This aspect is particularly beneficial within the penitentiary setting, where intellectual stimulation for inmates is often limited due to the inherent constraints of incarceration.

B) Gaining the strategic principles in which this game is based

Throughout its history, chess has developed a significant corpus of strategic principles that nowadays have been proposed as applicable to sectors such as business, entrepreneurship, and personal and professional development. Chess strategy fosters, among other aspects:

1. Awareness of individual responsibility for one's actions.
2. Planning as a guide for both professional and personal life.
3. The value of personal analysis as a method for continuous improvement.
4. Recognizing both weaknesses and strengths present in any situation and within any person.
5. Objective analysis of reality to achieve our goals.

An important objective of this project is to teach these principles and explore their application possibilities in real-life situations, encompassing personal, pre-employment, and professional realms. This will contribute to a reassessment of inmates' outlook on their future and how they approach problems and situations beyond the confines of the penitentiary.

C) Promoting ethical-civic values provided by chess

There are several values, some inherent to sports in general and others specific to chess, that we aim to promote throughout the duration of the project:

1. Respect (towards rules, others, and oneself)
2. Self-criticism (learning from mistakes)
3. Self-control (in adverse and/or important situations)
4. Self-esteem (gracefully handling victories and defeats)
5. Self-motivation (desire for personal improvement)

These five major blocks of values entail working specifically on responsibility, physical and mental health, knowledge and norms of social coexistence, citizenship, human rights, communication, empathy, etc. The innovation embedded in this project lies in inmates becoming aware of these values indirectly through gameplay and group interaction while engaging in a sport they are drawn to due to personal preference. This approach overcomes prejudices against direct value teaching attempts.

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TRAINING APPROACH

What kind of training/teaching methodology is implemented in this practice? Is there a literature/bibliography (not mandatory)?

[The training and teaching methodology implemented in this practice can be characterised as follows:



1. **Experiential Learning:** Participants learn through direct experience and reflection on that experience. By actively engaging in chess games and group activities, they internalise strategic principles and ethical values.

2. **Interactive Instruction:** The teaching process involves interactive sessions where instructors demonstrate strategic concepts, discuss ethical values, and engage participants in discussions and exercises to reinforce learning.

3. **Hands-on Practice:** Participants are given opportunities to apply strategic principles in chess games and real-life scenarios. This hands-on practice allows for immediate application and reinforcement of learning.

4. **Incorporation of Ethical Discussions:** Ethical-civic values are woven into the fabric of the teaching process. Trainers facilitate discussions on respect, self-criticism, self-control, self-esteem, and self-motivation, encouraging participants to reflect on how these values apply both in chess and in their lives outside the prison environment.

5. **Tailored Instruction:** The methodology is adapted to meet the diverse needs and backgrounds of the participants. Instruction is tailored to accommodate varying skill levels and learning styles.

6. **Promotion of Autonomy:** The methodology emphasises autonomy and self-directed learning. Participants are encouraged to take ownership of their learning process, make decisions during gameplay, and reflect on their progress.

7. **Integration of Group Dynamics:** Group activities and gameplay foster camaraderie, teamwork, and social skills development. Participants learn from each other, share insights, and support one another in their learning journey.

Overall, this methodology aims to create a dynamic and engaging learning environment that promotes skill development, ethical awareness, and personal growth among inmates within the prison system.

ECAM METHOD

Through the years, Club Magic has developed a methodology called ECAM method (cognitive training through chess) which has been implemented in several social collectives and has also been adapted to the prison environment. **This methodology can be considered as essential to the long run of their prison programs in Spain.**

The main distinctive element of this innovative cognitive training-rehabilitation technique is the use of the chess board and its pieces as a work element, and a didactic methodology with which it must be coupled so that the ECAM System achieves its maximum effectiveness. This training approach works with a completely different conception from the usual one of chess, in the sense that the objective in no case is to improve the participant's playing skills, but rather to improve cognitive functions.

For many of the exercises proposed in ECAM, **it is not necessary to have knowledge of the game of chess.**

In this way we can summarise the differentiating characteristics with respect to chess and the classical pedagogical purpose of chess:

It is not conceived in any case as a competitive activity or as learning chess, but rather as individualised personal improvement of cognitive functions.

- For many of the exercise batteries, it is not necessary to have knowledge of the movement of chess pieces.

- The necessary knowledge taken from the game of chess is only: knowledge of the coordinates of the chessboard and name of the chess pieces.

The use of chess has never been conceived in accordance with these principles of specificity (acting on specific cognitive functions) and with this nuance so different from its functioning as a game; quite the opposite, the purpose of Club Magic's method is to train and, if necessary, rehabilitate cognitive functions, through numerous sets of exercises, which are presented according to the principles of constant practice and repeated practice, through tasks of increasing difficulty, focused on specific cognitive abilities, and therefore always taking into account the principle of specificity: its design is devised to stimulate specific cognitive areas and components.

Summarising all these points, the ECAM method is based, among other principles, on **errorless learning**, that is, ensuring that the user has a high likelihood of

responding correctly to the majority of tasks presented by the monitor, creating in them expectations of self-efficacy that **will boost their self-esteem and therefore their motivation for subsequent sessions.**

The work will be tailored to the user, based on their characteristics and abilities. It is always carried out gradually, starting with tasks of lesser difficulty and then progressing to those of greater complexity, saving the simplest tasks for certain users, and vice versa. In this way, development is progressive and gradual, and **any user can access it without any inconvenience, allowing the incorporation of new users into the workshop at any time.**

Over time, those who initially struggled significantly begin to experience significant progress and eventually become the ones selected for the more complex exercises. The combination of all these training methods plus the incorporation of other methodologies applied to the use of chess to develop our soft skills and emotional intelligence will be the defining point of project Icarus.]

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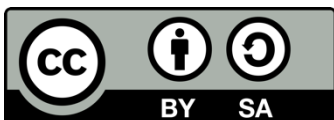
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Authors

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