

Vladimir Grabinsky:

Methods of chess training

“I discovered something: the work you’ve done
always brings you a reward in the end,
although sometimes that can be definitely not in the game
you’d like or in the tournament you’d hope for...”
V.Anand

In this article I want to share my opinion about methods of training work in chess, some thoughts about building training process, peculiarities of training young players and especially emphasize attention on how did chess were changed in last few decades and how does it influence training work. All these aspects relate to the coaching techniques. It is no secret that many chess players become coaches just basing on their own practical experience as player and they just try to transfer it to their students. But it is very important to understand the peculiarities of child psychology, to choose the proper pedagogical methods of training and be able to plan the program of preparation for their students. It's not enough to find the good training material, but it's very important to present it in the form which is the most efficient! A coach's job is like a good cook's work, it is not only the matter to use high-quality products, it is equally important to be able to prepare from them delicious dishes and serve them properly. I witnessed many examples when excellent training material was demonstrated for kids with major pedagogical mistakes and that's why children were not able to digest it with maximum effect.

As we study the training process with youth, we must understand more about child.

1. That's why the first question of my survey is how children differ from adults, and how does this influence the training process.

Youth is the most sensitive period for improvement of player's skills during his whole career, like imagination, combinational vision, calculation of variations, memorizing. Teaching chess generally requires balance between explaining new material (acquiring knowledge) and developing skills of young player (ability to calculate variations, readiness for unexpected solutions, logical thinking when making plan, developing intuition, which would help to get better quality of move choice). On my opinion in young age it's much more important to train basic skills of player than to stuff him with knowledge! In the end one may study openings later, but it's would be much harder to improve one's thinking in older age! So it's important NOT to concentrate on some opening schemes with the goal to achieve immediate result or some trapping variations but to build foundation. In this case progress will surely come with growing up. One doesn't have to think that absence of title in youth makes further chess career impossible. As an example, I want to mention two of students Kryvoruchko and Oleksienko. Up to the age of 16 they were not among the Ukrainian TOP in their age category, but after growing up and making their play and character more stable they both became strong grandmasters. Yuriy Kryvorochko, for example, with his rating 2697 is top-50 in the world rank list. One other important point is to present rightly new material. Children like everything new and unknown. Coach has to surprise them with his training session! Invent something they didn't expect at all. Don't be afraid to take risks with new opening schemes. Even if it won't bring immediate effect this is important for developing their intuition. Force them to think and the result will be better than any expectations.

Children are very active. They cannot keep concentration and attention for a long time. So the coach must make the lesson as interesting as possible. Children would rather have interactive lecture with questions and answers than observe one actor's show.

So to keep children involved coach must:

- ✓ often change the structure of the lesson,
- ✓ change methods of giving the lesson,
- ✓ try to make a lesson competitive instead of boring lectures.

For example if you introduce new theme:

- ✓ suggest students to guess moves,
- ✓ make it in puzzles form,
- ✓ count competitive points.

It is aimed to make study an active process, so that children participate in it themselves, play and compete.

It's important not to teach how to play but to teach how to study chess. When I only started to train Yaroslav Zherebukh and once prepared him for the next game I found out that his opponent can play 3 different opening variations. Having explained what to do in two of them, I asked Yaroslav to prepare himself against the third one, which was the most expected. Of course I understood that player of 11 years unlikely can make most efficient preparation, but training his ability to work individually was much more important than the result of that concrete game.

2. The second question which I find important is which changes have happened in chess for the last twenty years and which corrections we have to make in our work because of this?

Of course modern chess have changed a lot for the last 20 - 30 years. First of all I would note that Swiss system tournaments became very popular and to be successful in such competitions one must score very high percentage of points. When for round-robin tournaments system it was enough not to loose, and strong player will always find how to win some games, for swiss system tournament you have to score 7,5 out of 9, 7 out of 9, which requires mainly ability to fight without compromise, he must play all the games till the end, look for all possible chances.

✓ **Opening repertoire must be built in the way to get complicated positions. Both for black and white. Kids like when it's hot!**

Computer has changed approach to opening strategy much of course. Before, we may remember time when players like Taimanov could fight long time with their favorite schemes, like his variation in Sicilian defense. Now of course with computers help we can learn any opening much faster. As well as to prepare exactly for some schemes much better. It's very important to be flexible in modern chess. To be ahead in opening preparation, anticipate events. It's too late to change opening when it started to bring bad results!

✓ **Young sportsmen must be ready to change opening often, learn new structures, be able to prepare concretely for an opponent.**

Also time control has changed. When in seventies Botvinnik could afford himself to avoid playing blitz for some principal reasons, believing that it spoils his style, makes it superficial. Now it is different. We must encourage young players to play rapid chess. Sometimes blitz also can be useful. It may help to study new openings, get experience with them before starting to use them in serious tournaments with classic time control.

✓ **We need to develop player's fast thinking to make him adopted for the playing tournaments with different time control.**

I would like to bring profound quotation of Anand which exactly characterizes the modern chess. "How computers have changed chess:

Chess has become more dynamic, piece play has become more effective. The ability to defend oneself in bad positions or against king attacks has increased dramatically. General principles are moving more and more into the background, calculating move sequences is more important.

How they have changed my thinking: I have become more critical in my decisions, and don't allow myself to be guided by a few general strategies. I look for special moves, for exceptions to the generally accepted principles. The exceptions of course have their own logic, but we have not been able to understand it so far. With growing understanding we are often confronted with moves which would have previously be rejected out of general considerations. This is the merit of computers – they point to many new and unusual ideas. People are afraid to think out of the ordinary, computer forces you to do so.“

So Anand pushes us – coaches - to the point, that we first of all must develop original thinking, concrete approach to position in our students' play, but not only following well-known rules. Please read again Anand's phrase and think whether you teach your students modern approach in chess.

3. No doubt, when planning his lessons for a longer period each trainer starts to think - how to share training time between opening, middlegame and endgame.

Why do coaches pay most of their attention to opening preparation? Because this is the only kind of material which they have prepared and systematized from own their practice as players. I find it logical to decide this question coming from the fact where the most frequently is decided the result in children games. Of course young players rarely come to equal endgame. Once my student asked me how it's called when one player has endgame and another middlegame still. This is a joke of course, but I really think, that most attention at training session must be focused on middlegame, since ability to play it good is most precious in youth chess. In addition to this, boys and girls usually prefer complicated positions, where there is space for imagination and combinations. Endgame, where accuracy is important and opening, where knowledge is needed, are more boring for young players. So, my answer is: about 15% of time for the opening, 15% - for endgame and 70%- for middlegame. With help of middlegame positions it's best of all to teach to calculate variations, choose plan etc.

4. The forms of training sessions tailored for lessons with children

Let us proceed to the forms of leading trainings. Here I would like to support a little group lessons. Certainly, individual trainings give chance to build opening repertoire, focus on individual drawbacks and work better to remove them. But even working with players of grandmaster's level you can use group form of training very efficiently. It brings element of competition, communication, sharing of experience. Not in vain, Australian swimming coach, who prepared the number of strong swimmers (including Ian Thorpe), answering the question what is his secret, told that the main thing is to create atmosphere, where everyone can find his motivation for success. The contest of solving combinations, guessing the moves, student's speech with analysis of his game in front the group (lecturer is opposed by another student who was prepared in advance + eventually the audience makes conclusions who was more precise and deeper). I like much to invite famous grandmasters, giving before his certain games to my students to make first their own analysis (without computer of course) and then during the lectures audience is not just listening to one actor speaking, but takes full part in analysis and discussion.

For the end some practical recommendations:

✓ *about choosing opening repertoire* - Young player must follow evolution chess history. I heard this rule from the famous coach Viktor Kart, whose students were A. Beliavsky, O. Romanishin, A. Mikhalchishin, M. Litinskaya. Better to start with gambits, where he sacrifices pawn, after gets initiative and development advantage. This improves feeling of initiative, ability to attack. Volokitin, Zhrebukh, Kravtsiv, Oleksienko and other my students played Goring Gambit, Sicilian Wing Gambit, Two knights defense etc. This is interesting for other players. By the way I recommend not to learn theory by heart, but explain main principles, ideas. It's important to make them create over board! And only after slowly come to classical schemes of Ruy Lopez, Sicilian etc. Do not teach them your openings, any child is a personality who has no experience of adults. As student level grows higher, opening must repertoire must be built basing on personal features. For example, A. Volokitin and Y. Vovk are very self-confident, so they can mate in Kings Indian Defence. This guys will have no doubts in their attacks! M.Oleksienko is very flexible person. So choice for him – Benoni Defence, one has to be really inventive there. The main rule is never to stop in improving!

✓ *Choose tournaments up to level* - better where young student can teach from others. It means stronger tournaments are preferable. Children are more concentrated when play with stronger players, and get relaxed when play with weaker.

✓ *Concerning number of tournaments* - there are 2 approaches: by Botvinnik (who recommended 60-80 games per year) and by Ivanchuk (who played practically non stop). It depends on wish and energy of a young student. **Tournament is the highest form of training!**

✓ *How long must be training* - it must not take more than 3-4 hours. Children get tired and bored. Better make lesson more intensive, with higher tempo and this way do more on a lesson.

Intensity prior to duration!

✓ *About individual work* - individual tasks are necessary! This teaches child to work on chess individually. This is very important for his progress

✓ *Everyday training of calculation variations and combination view.* Once Bronstein wrote that tactical vision - is training, training and training again. It's enough to bring number of puzzles you solved to few thousands as you inevitably would spot the progress. This is maybe the simplest way. The best helper for this - are numerous combination puzzles collections.

"Strategical play is complicated thing, I often noticed that it's support by short calculation. When Karpov's play went down, it was not because he stopped to understand something, he just miscalculated in short variation, thus he made one step in one direction, another aside. One might got such impression" V. Kramnik