

FEATURE

TORONTO

'Using chess to educate young children about life skills, goal setting'

David Grossman

SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Tal Granite may have studied the science of languages while at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, but the linguistics he's been using the past 15 years have focused on another language. Try, chess.

The 38-year-old Thornhill man, and son of two Israeli diplomats, has been able to checkmate opponents in discussions that leave many convinced chess is much more than a game or sport.

And what really gets Granite fired up for a challenging discussion is when people refer to chess being something that is primarily played by retired people.

"Chess is the most played online game and it's also one that,

after four hours of intense play, can leave people as tired as if they had played 90 minutes of soccer," said Granite, whose goal is to rejuvenate the game in the younger Jewish community.

"I'm not trying to create the next world champ and, while it could happen, my mission is to use chess to educate young children about life skills and goal setting."

As vice-president of the Chess Institute of Canada, Granite is enthusiastic and making progress convincing educators and parents that chess can inspire learning and decision-making.

A certified World Chess Federation instructor, Granite was introduced to the game as a youngster. He became so fascinated that he eventually developed an academic program that



Tal Granite is trying to rejuvenate chess among younger Jews in the community.

uses chess as a tool.

"You could say that I am doing my best to change society for the better," said Granite, who recently spoke at an educational session in England giving his observations on how chess helps with goal setting.

The concept of using chess, for more than just a fun game may have started back in his early years living at Beit She'arim, a community farm in the lower Galilee.

Since then it has been his passion to promote chess in a way that is being accentuated at public, Catholic and private schools across Toronto. His focus is on students in elementary schools.

"It's way more than moving a pawn forward – it's about how to persist, be flexible, figure out options and overcome obstacles," said Granite, who has been a member of the Israel Chess Federation Instruction Committee.

"It's about teaching children at a young age about the strategies, the decisions that have to be made and the results. Even for

me, it's not about moving pieces on the board, but about setting myself up for success."

In his attempt to convince people "that chess will make you smarter," Granite has developed a curriculum that he hopes to embed in the school system showing that chess can improve literacy. Granite also has a club program for lunchtime and after school times. His goal is to get every Jewish school hooked on chess.

While Israel's educational system has endorsed his program of teaching chess in schools, Granite has worked diligently to convince Ontario educators to do the same.

"We have dozens of programs running in elementary schools in Ontario," said Granite. "I am working with the Toronto District School Board and there is an educational program in place at Bialik, Eitz Chaim, Heschel and Associated Hebrew Schools."

Granite, who has visited countries across the world

studying how chess is taught in communities, insists incorporating chess in elementary schools is not about competition, but using it to help change society for the better.

"We teach planning and respect in some fascinating ways," said Granite, who remembers his parents asking him if he could make a living promoting chess in an educational way.

"I don't regret it one minute. In fact, I find it very rewarding teaching children how to play, along with the benefits of watching them make important decisions.

"Children have so much potential and our challenge is to get them to use imagination, the thought process and make wise decisions for the future."

Granite, who is not an Israeli champ, does have his share of trophies from winning competitions. He insists his biggest award would come when he sees chess played in schools throughout the Greater Toronto Area.

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