



Teaching Bridge to 21st Century Learners- How does it fit in the NZ Curriculum?

By Jan Davidson and Caron Sullivan, Oamaru.

Caron is a bridge playing teacher. She and Jan have in two primary schools in the Oamaru area demonstrated and involved students in Mini Bridge, leading on to the full game of Bridge. Their experience over the past three years will hopefully encourage others in the education field of the benefits of having Bridge as part of a school curriculum. Many schools have bridge playing teachers on the staff. If there are not any, or those teachers do not have the time to take Bridge in their school, then a local bridge club would provide such a person. Bridge is relevant in our education system. Jan and Caron explain why. If you have any queries, please contact me on either 09 232 8494, or by email to rsolomon@xtra.co.nz.

Other schools around New Zealand are adopting Bridge. It is a game of relevance for the youth of our society. Richard Solomon, Bridge Development Officer, New Zealand Bridge. March 2013.

Bridge is a complex, 4 person card game that can be played at any age. It is social and competitive and a very logical game. People who learn bridge can travel throughout the world to play tournaments, or simply to join in a local club to find like-minded people, or meet the locals.

Bridge for Primary students begins by learning **Mini Bridge**. This has the fundamentals of Bridge play while avoiding the complexities of bidding. It still sparks competitiveness, yet allows them to learn the fun of this game.

Bridge as a game has two distinct phases, play and bidding. **Mini Bridge** focuses on just the play. In working with primary students over three years, we have found this is a natural lead into teaching bidding and have done so for the last year.

The NZ Curriculum and Mini Bridge- what we have observed with Totara and Weston schools

We ran the bridge classes for one hour each week with pupils from year 6 -8. It is timetabled within the school day, with non- participants taking part in other school activities.

We invited anyone who wanted to come and try and gave the option after 2 weeks of saying whether it was for them or not. Once they were “in”, they had to commit to the lessons and if they opted out, they were gone.

We invited local club players to help us, and got overwhelming support.

Once the pupils are proficient enough to play a set number of hands, a score can be obtained. This was printed in a bridge format showing percentages, and more importantly, the winning pairs. These were poured over when put up on the notice board.

Principles

- **High expectations.** The purpose is to win, so that the children themselves bring the desire to succeed to the highest level.
- **Treaty of Waitangi and Cultural Diversity_** In Bridge, to play is to be welcome. It has its language and yet it is possible to play well with no speech at all, regardless of language barriers, or even deafness.
- **Inclusion.** All students who wish to participate have the option. It was surprising how many students who struggle at numeracy were able to count points and subtract from 40 when needed.
- **Learning to learn.** The model fits well with current theory on learning. The pupils articulated their knowledge. They were immersed in the game and given time to reflect.
- **Community engagement.** Local adults joined in the teaching . We visited the local Bridge club to show them how it looked when adults played. We have a final day at the end of the year where students who wish to could play as part of the club.
- **Coherence, Future focus.** Modelled to students that what they were learning was what the adults do, in any place at any time of the game. The same rules applied. It gave them a vision of a life- long learning path that is social and competitive.

Values

- **Excellence;** to want to achieve the highest level ,you are seeking excellence (Kids win).

- **Innovation, inquiry, and curiosity**
- **Diversity_.** The children involved are groups that cross all academic, sporting, social groupings. As it is a game that pitches you against the whole room ,you are moving and playing different people.
- **Equity_** in Bridge, all things are equal except your play on that day.
- **Community and participation _** as mentioned within values.
- **Ecological**
- **Sustainability**
- **Integrity_** In Bridge, there are set rules to which must be adhered , or a director will be called. Watch out anyone who does not play to these rules.
- **Respect._** The rules and etiquette of Bridge insist on manners and respectful interactions with the players at the table, including your own partner. The adult helpers who have come into the sessions are there by choice and must be respected as visitors to the school.

Key Competencies

- **Understanding tests and symbols.** Cards symbols, hierarchy of cards, hierarchy of suits, bidding pads, scoring sheets , travelling sheets and numeracy of scoring are all as if another language that the pupils must apply past knowledge to. There is much literacy and numeracy involved especially in the jargon associated with the game of Bridge.
- **Thinking.** Every hand of Bridge involves thinking skills of analysing, evaluating, comparing, classifying, estimating, sequencing, predicting, translating, reorganizing, prioritising, goal setting, problem-solving, decision-making, making assumptions, imagining, logical deduction, observing, and interpreting.
- **Participating and Contributing.** Working as individuals to learn but always in the context of a partnership and as a game for 4 players. It can be a social game for four or a tournament for 200, or anything in between. You are part of the wider community while learning and are being modelled by life- long learners when adult helpers come into the sessions.
- **Managing Self:** Rules and etiquette of bridge as well as learning to work.
- **Relating to others:** Bridge is a partnership game always played against another pair.

In summary.

We began this adventure as a bit of an experiment but it was the love of the game and understanding how it could impact on children's learning that was driving force. What we thought would involve maybe 12 kids has never dipped lower than 36 kids and we have had rooms of up to 44 kids. It has sustained itself for three years and has now brought two schools together, thus breaking down school boundaries. The kids are very disappointed if Bridge is postponed or cancelled and has continued regardless of appealing options for the non -attendees.