**3.4 PEDAGOGICAL ADVICE**

**Background**

When the work with Minibridge started, the idea was to make a new kind if course material for younger players. Already while starting, it became as popular with older audiences. No matter what age the students are, they will be able to play after the first lesson, which means a very quick start.

Bridge is a Whole

In school, each subject is usually taught and tested part by part. Bridge is a bit different, because you have to remember everything while learning new knowledge, adding to the old. It is also less clear what “knowing bridge” means. It is being able to solve practical play problems, without really knowing exactly what is tested right now. Students who are well-trained in the standard way of examination may find bridge more difficult. Every time they play, it is a test of who-knows-what.

Bridge is partly about identifying logical patterns and to draw conclusions from these. A student who has difficulties memorizing names of capitals (no logical connection) may have a much easier task memorizing bridge because everything is connected. Different students may have very different opinions about whether bridge contains a lot of memorizing or not.

It is important that you make the students understand that bridge is a whole, consisting of many small pieces of knowledge, which are all connected. How much a student wants to learn varies, and so far, no player in the world knows everything.

Find Your Teaching Style

Before you start teaching, think about who you would want to be in the classroom. There is, of course, no correct answer to this question, and you must decide for yourself. But a good advice is to try and steal the best things from different people you have met in your life.

The author has created his own style by copying other in the following way:

My gymnasium teacher in economics knew the subject very well.

My sports teacher in grades 7-9 had a very nice attitude towards us, the students.

My language teacher in the gymnasium gave us grades in a very nice and fair way.

This same teacher kept us under control without being too harsh.

My father and one of my first bridge teachers were very good in talking in front of a group.

Start thinking about this!

Choices in How to Teach

Thera are several ways to learn how to play bridge:

* Play bridge
* Watch bridge
* Read about bridge
* Talk about bridge

In the start of the course, there are many new concepts, and a relatively high level of abstraction. It usually works well to have short presentations by the teacher (10-15 minutes) and then to let the students try to play. If they play well or not is not that important in the beginning. The important things are to know who starts to bid, who leads to the first trick, who leads to the next trick, how do we mark our won and lost tricks, etc. Good card play will develop more or less automatically.

Teaching at the Table

This is usually the best alternative, especially with young students. If you have enough assistants, it will be more or less automatic. Let the students play, whether they do everything right or not. The assistants should help them to bid in the correct order, lead to the next trick, and so on. It is more about the rules than the level of skill.

General Teaching Tips

*Tell the students when they are good*

Students grow when you tell them that they do good things. It is even better if you use their names. “Well played, Sara!” You have confirmed that she did well, and that you know who she is. Some students will be quicker learner than other, but share the praise. Everyone needs some. The more you know about your students, the better you can praise them.

*Show Your Own Limits*

As a (bridge) teacher, it may seem that you know everything and that you are a real expert in what is going on. It is important to break this feeling that you may be superior or even dangerous. Tell the students about when you make mistakes. Make them want to do the right thing, rather than being afraid of doing wrong.

*Create an Environment where Questions are Natural*

Always be open to the questions of the students. Encourage them to ask. Tell them that “no question is too stupid.”

*Teach Relatively Slowly*

Bridge may be easy or you to grasp and understand. However, what is obvious to you may not be obvious to your students. If you teach in a pace that you yourself feel is normal or quick, it may be too quick for the students. Ideally, your pace should feel a bit slow for you. Then you may have found a good speed for your students (unless you are very, very slow to grasp things yourself, of course).

*Be Prepared*

You may know very, very much about the topic you are going to teach. No matter what, read the material beforehand and plan what you will say and in what order. Sometimes your teaching is better if you are teaching something you do not know very well, simply because you prepare better. Make sure that you have the assistants, boards, etc., in place. The students notice more than you think (or hope).

*Use Different Ways to Teach*

A basic principle is to let the students play as much themselves as possible. But do not be afraid of, for example, giving them a problem on paper. In fact, this is good, because the deals are explained in the end of the compendia, and the students need to get used to *reading* bridge too.

Specific Pedagogical Tips for Bridge

*Math in the Bidding*

Help the students to realize how valuable it is to know that there are 40 hcp in the deck, especially in Minibridge, where you actually reveal your exact hcp count. Let us say that the bidding goes: 12 hcp, 13 hcp, 5 hcp. Interrupt and ask how many points the fourth player has.

In the same way, interrupt the bidding already after 13 hcp, 12 hcp, and ask the third player how many points the fourth player has. When this player answers, ask the other players how may points the third player has.

*Math in the Play*

After the bidding in Minibridge, everyone knows how many hcp the other players have. This gives good opportunities to train the students in subtraction. Say that declarer has bid 15 hcp, and plays an ace. Ask how many points declarer (and other players) still have in their hand. This is hard work for the students, but it is a good point to make, that there is a lot of information to use. You may even want to start counting everyone’s hcp during play yourself, if you do not do it already.

Of course, the similar is true about declarer’s distribution. Assume that declarer chose to play notrump and dummy has five spades. Ask how many spades declarer must have in his hand!

The math in bridge is not advanced. But there are a lot of calculations to do, and often in parallel. In the bidding you subtract from 40. Looking at suit and hand distributions, it is all about thirteen. Keeping track of hcp during play means remembering cards played from four different hands.

*Wording and Bridge Concepts*

Here you will face a difficult balance between using words that are easy for the students and teaching them the bridge vocabulary and thereby also part of the history of the game. Try saying things in different ways and see how it works out. If you have grownup students, who have a good grasp of the language, be extra careful to use the right word for the right thing. Many of those who start playing bridge later in life, will take what you say very literally.

*One Thing at the Time*

The difficulty of a particular deal is often decided by how many different problems it contains. For example, of you exemplify how to hold up an ace in a notrump contract, you may make your point. But if you, in the same deal, bring up how to play the short hand honors first, you will confuse your students and make it much more difficult to understand either message. Combining techniques creates new problems and challenges the students. Simply try to introduce things one by one and then create problems where the technique are combined.

*Working with Six or Eight Cards*

Think about reducing the number of cards when you give examples. When working with really young kids, it may be that they simply cannot hold all cards in their hands at the same time. But the more obvious advantage is that you can simplify problems and make techniques easier to understand, by using fewer cards. It is easiest to use two suits (♠+♥).

♠ K J 6

♥ A 8 4

♠ A Q 5 2

♥ 7 2

This example can be used to show how you should cash the high cards in the short hand first.

The obvious exception is when you want to illustrate a crossruff, because you need three suits. Sometimes you need to use up to eight cards. For example, here is a spade contract and you are in North’s hand, and need to win the rest of the tricks.

♠ K J T 8

♥ A 8 4

♦ 2

♠ A Q 9 7

♥ 2

♦ A 8 4

*Positive and Negative Inferences in the Play*

Try to make the students work with positive and negative inferences. This is actually an excellent opportunity to teach them the basic of classic logic (for example, modus ponens and modus tollens). Let us say that the opening leader plays ♦K. The positive conclusion is that he has the ♦Q and the negative conclusion that he does not have the ♦A. Then connect this knowledge with the known hcp of each player. Of course, this kind of reasoning can be very advanced, but the students may grasp the basic idea quite quickly.

*Remembering Deals by Heart*

You do not have to know the deals in the course by heart. However, it will be easier for you as a teacher to handle many tables at the same time and to ask the right questions if you do not have to look at specific hands. There is both an upside and a downside to knowing the deals too well. Assume that you pass one table and you see the correct lead of ♣Q (and you know it is correct). “Well played, Sara!” you say, and continue “Who has ♣K and ♣J?” The course will proceed rapidly, but it may be a bit scary for the students when you know the deal and ask tough questions.

*Free Deals*

A difference between Minibridge and bridge is that you can deal and play without limitations in Minibridge, from the first lesson. Make sure that the students feel safe in dealing themselves and testing their playing ability. This is a condition for them playing at home or with friends, etc.

*Deals from the Bridge Club*

Bring a few deals from this week’s club game. Let the students challenged the seasoned club players!

DONT!

So far, we have told what we think you should do. However, there are a few things we would like you not to do, or rather not to say.

Do not Contradict the Compendium

There are many bidding systems in the world, and you, the teacher, probably have your own favorite system. No matter what you think of the material, **do not say:**

*“This is what is says in the book, but this is how I do myself.”*

You have to give your students simple and clear information that is consistent and makes sense. If curious students ask, of course, you should tell that there are many alternatives, but recommend that they stick to what is in the course material. When you talk about alternative ways of bidding, you must be certain that you are correct.

One of the most difficult things is to forget and re-learn. You may have opinions about the course material and the bidding system used, but we need to start somewhere. The idea is to create an environment where our bridge juniors can thrive, and it is very important to have a common bidding system and carding agreements that everyone agrees with and uses.

All lf the students that hold on to their interest in bridge will experiment on their own. Now you, as a bridge teacher, can act as a discussion partner and talk about different methods. But this is rather far into the future. And you must be certain that your ideas make sense. First give your students a simple and strict structure, and then let them go and create themselves.

Do not Say that Bridge is Easy

This statement can be dangerous. You may think that bridge is easy to grasp, but any concept may be difficult for someone else. The danger is that your students feel stupid if they do not understand, especially when they fail, and we really do not want that. A much better view is that bridge is a challenge and that different people will do differently well.