


The bridge revolution: Mind sports reshape Scotland's educational landscape

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Mind sports education is gaining momentum in schools. Researchers at the University of Stirling are investigating the ways that strategic games like bridge can enhance skills development and academic engagement

As Scotland overhauls its Curriculum for Excellence and reimagines its assessment practices following the 2024 Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment, could a deck of cards prove to be an unexpected yet valuable tool for educational innovation? Armed with only a deck of cards, educators show that classic card games like bridge could lead the way to curriculum enhancement.

In schools across Scotland, children gather in groups of four and concentrate on the 'task at hand': winning tricks at bridge and outsmarting their opponents through strategic thinking. As the young players consider their opening moves, it is so quiet that one could hear a pin drop. Soon, there are triumphant moments and cheers as clever plays succeed. This is more than traditional classroom learning; it is game-based education through bridge, fostering essential life skills.

Bridge: The cognitive powerhouse in our schools

The latest research of Bridge: A MindSport for All (BAMSA) paints a compelling picture of educational innovation. Their report, *Landscape of Youth Bridge in Scotland*, reveals that bridge develops not one but three critical skill domains: social cooperation, mathematical thinking, and strategic reasoning. "The game teaches you good arithmetic skills," noted one teacher in the study, who observed how quickly bridge improved some pupils' mental arithmetic. Other teachers highlighted that bridge helps students develop a specific kind of abstract thinking that is not "something you get taught at school".

Perhaps most striking are the social benefits. In an era where digital interactions often replace face-to-face ones, bridge creates ample opportunities for structured socialisation. The principle here is 'partnership', where communication is key. Through its partnership-based structure, bridge teaches children to respect and cooperate with each other in what one bridge teacher called "a sort of microcosm of life."

Bridge: A MindSport for All's groundbreaking study captured the insights of experienced bridge teachers, whose work exemplifies the 'flipped classroom' pedagogy (i.e. inviting pupils to work on collaborative problem-solving at school and complete most of their theoretical readings at home). Rather than deliver lengthy talks on bidding theory or card

valuation, the teachers immerse students immediately in the tactile experience of play. This yields remarkable results for youth engagement, with pupils describing bridge and mind sports education as “mind-blowing” and a “workout for the brain”.

Playing the winning hand: Educational integration

At present, bridge and mind sports education is available in a dozen Scottish schools, spanning both the primary and secondary provision and encompassing both public and independent institutions. The clubs are led by expert bridge teachers – many of whom are active or retired schoolteachers. The bridge clubs are freely accessible and are supported by the work of dedicated volunteers who generously devote their time to the after-school enrichment activities. Several additional schools are set to begin offering bridge in autumn 2025.

But could there be some untapped potential in also incorporating the principles of bridge and mind sports education within the curriculum? According to the bridge teachers interviewed for the research, bridge can be used to enhance students’ learning, creating opportunities for increased engagement, critical thinking, and team-based problem-solving. BAMSA’s goal is to equip schoolteachers with a basic knowledge of bridge so they can use it in different parts of the curriculum.

Yet despite its promise, bridge and mind sports education is not immune to some of the systemic challenges inherent in the educational system. Academic demands, particularly in secondary schools, impose timetabling constraints that can hinder integration.

Moreover, without committed internal advocates, bridge clubs risk losing momentum. This prospect is particularly exacerbated by the occasional departure of key figures coordinating the promotion and scheduling of mind sports initiatives.

The current curriculum reform presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to integrate the benefits of bridge and game-based learning into educational frameworks. Imagine mathematics teachers using bridge to make abstract concepts concrete, or social studies teachers using bridge to illustrate decision-making. The potential extends far beyond the cards themselves.

The BAMSA Learning & Teaching Hub: A game-changing resource

BAMSA has launched a new [Learning & Teaching Hub](#) – a centralised resource for students, parents, and teachers to facilitate the integration of bridge and mind sports education in schools. This innovative platform offers a structured ten-lesson programme developed from successful practices in Norway and Denmark. The materials include animated tutorials, printable lessons, and weekly exercises, which are free to use and share. Each of the ten beginner lessons focuses on a specific aspect of the game, from basic concepts like tricks and trumps to more advanced elements like card sequences and bidding.

Lesson 1: Taking Tricks

The first lesson in the Learning Hub embodies the engaging, hands-on approach that has proven most effective for youth bridge education. Teachers are guided to show a brief video explaining tricks and then facilitate a short discussion about the topic. The lesson plan moves quickly to the hands-on component, dividing students into tables of four.

Educational leaders interested in introducing bridge to their schools can now access all necessary resources through the [BAMSA Learning Hub](#). Are you interested in exploring how bridge and [mind sport education](#) could be integrated into your school? Email bamsa@stir.ac.uk for an informal discussion – we'd love to help you get started.

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