

## Around Wales - WBU Teaching from some Clubs

Issue 4

### Wrexham



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Age Connects is a charity set up to keep those over 55 out of mischief! It runs a series of classes throughout the whole week including art, mobility, sewing, and crafts such as card making. They had a vacant slot in their weekly programme and so asked me if I would be willing to start a Bridge beginners class. I readily agreed, partly because it would be an ideal grounding for new players to move on to my Bridge Club!

Having borrowed some card tables, cards and bidding boxes from my club I set about running the classes. As it happened it coincided with your new programme which, as you know, was a good outline for programmed learning. I produced a series of handouts using bits of your programme, bits from our own Bridge Club lessons, bits from 'Mr Bridge' and some of my own bits!

The classes are very successful and already some players have graduated to our Friday afternoon beginners session at the Bridge club proper. (They still insist on coming to my lessons as well, however!)

The sessions are from 1.00pm to 3.00pm on a Thursday afternoon and cost £3.00 per session. Each session consists of a quick lecture ( with printouts of the main points) on the day's theme and then guidance through several set boards on that topic.

Regarding the attached photo—they have all had a letter from their parents consenting to publicity!

### Bridgend

I had 15 students today, they keep rolling in, but it is difficult if they have not attended the first lesson. *Bridgend follow the WBU syllabus and use all the materials provided.*

### Monmouth

We have not, as yet, managed to recruit enough beginners to run a class. I think that this is, mainly, due to the rural spread of likely participants and the few people I have had some interest from can't all come to either afternoon or don't want to come to an evening session.

However, the "No Fear" afternoon is going very well. Dave and I started running it at the beginning of September and have managed to bring in 13 new players, 6 of whom have joined the club. I have great hopes that the others will join as members in the next few weeks.

The premise of the afternoon session was that the more competitive players in the club were asked to stay away. Some of the experienced players did help to support us by coming along but toned down any aggressive bidding/ playing eg. not doubling. This can be introduced later. We, also, made everyone feel very welcome by having a sociable tea/coffee break halfway which was accompanied by my home-made cakes.

This has gone down a treat and some of the players, old and new, have volunteered to bring along their own contributions for future sessions.

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## Rhiwbina & Cardiff Bridge Tutors

Cardiff Bridge Tutors run courses for Beginners, Improvers and Advancers using WBU materials. Not everyone aspires to Club play and they can "park" at the level at which they feel comfortable. However, over 40 have now joined Rhiwbina Bridge Club, boosting membership to almost 200 all of whom are members of the WBU.

We set up a No Fear evening over 12 months ago, and those new to Club play attend this. Some are now moving on to play on more competitive nights. Many experienced players now attend the No Fear session so that it has become the third most attended night of the week (up to 14 tables from an initial 4).

Experienced players are reminded that new players may not understand rules and etiquette fully and that they need to be friendly, understanding and helpful.

## A Teacher's journey

Retirement was looming. Someone asked what hobbies did I have? I needed to find an activity that was sociable but also challenging. Bridge fitted the bill! Being a complete novice, I joined a Beginners' class at the local Adult Centre. The first lessons were double dutch! The handouts were baffling. I was cheered that my classmates thought the same. I appreciated the teacher was an expert Bridge player, but it was a different matter actually teaching it to novices. As a school teacher with over 30 years' experience, I thought there must be a better way. Teaching methods had moved on and so had technology. I believed I could do a better job! I looked around for courses that taught you how to teach Bridge. The English Bridge Union ran a course and I promptly signed up. The course was quite onerous – it involved lectures by qualified Bridge teachers, assignments, tests, writing lesson plans and presenting on a topic to your peers on the course. I then had to go and watch a lesson by an EBU qualified teacher and write a critique. The final hurdle was being observed and assessed whilst teaching my students. Phew! But I gained my Qualified Bridge Teacher Status. I started my first Beginners' course 7 years ago, which, like Topsy, just grew and grew! Now my husband and I run 4 sessions a week, catering for all levels from Beginners to Improvers and beyond. Our emphasis is on sociable and mildly competitive play. Bridge should also be fun! We use technology to deliver our lessons, score our sessions and provide follow up handouts and quizzes etc. For our Improvers' sessions we use computer generated hands and our groups enjoy being able to access the hands on our website. So – my retirement 'hobby' has turned into a bit more! I have made new friends and I know many others in our groups have too. Finally, the overriding lesson I have learnt is that being a good teacher of Bridge is more important than being an expert player!

Carol Butler

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## Bridge in schools

### Teach Minibridge in your local school with WBU help.

Two schools (Llanishen Fach, Cardiff and Christ College, Brecon) have successful after school Bridge clubs.

Two other schools are about to join the initiative.

We teach the children and nominated teacher how to play Minibridge and the teacher then runs the group. We then attend every couple of weeks to teach the next topic.

Repeated studies in the UK and elsewhere around the world have shown the sort of enhancement which bridge can bring to the classroom. A [study commissioned by the EBU](#) at St Paul's School in Manchester showed that bridge and minibridge taught skills in numeracy, problem solving, probability, speaking, listening, rule following, team building, mental capacity and much more. At the time of the St Paul's study, David Milliband, then Minister of State for Schools Standards said, "Innovations such as Minibridge are to be encouraged...it was a pleasure to witness primary school children's complete concentration, whilst so obviously enjoying playing a game that is proven to improve their school learning ability."

In Wales, Huw Lewis said in the Assembly "Recent Welsh Government guidance on family and community engagement recognises the benefits to learners of schools working in partnership with community groups and learners' families. Partnership projects, which could be run either during or after school hours, help learners apply, practice and see the relevance of their learning. .... I am pleased that Llanishen Fach has chosen an innovative approach, really, to addressing those crucial skills and engaging young people in an innovative way. Improving literacy and numeracy skills do remain, of course, key educational priorities, and I'm pleased that schools are prepared to experiment and use engaging approaches such as, in this case, bridge, to develop those skills. That's all to the good. Every school, I would hope, pays attention to the potential that after-school clubs and school clubs in general can have in engaging young people in all sorts of agendas relevant to their education and, indeed, with an eye to broadening those young people's view of the world and their education in general.

**Contact Keith for a copy of a letter to send to your local school and help improve young people's skills and encourage more people into Bridge.**

## Other resources for Bridge teaching

- **Quizzes** Students may use <http://www.bridgequiz.co.uk> for free online quizzes on Minibridge and Modern Acol. It is used internationally and gets more usage from Ireland and England than it does from Wales!
- **Software** Beginners may download a free minibridge play and tuition program from <http://www.bluechipbridge.co.uk/minibridge.htm>
- **New Crib Sheets from the WBU**
  - Reflecting the WBU teaching syllabus
  - **Introduction to Bridge syllabus**
    - Minibridge on a three fold crib sheet
  - **Continuing Bridge syllabus**
    - Laminated, three fold crib sheet—reminders of all the topics covered

*Free for distribution to students of teachers following the WBU syllabus.*

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## Teaching tips

**We all learn in different ways and usually in a combination of them.**

**A good lesson** should include

- A visual element—a good, appropriately animated and eye catching PowerPoint is ideal.
- An auditory element—students must hear the tutor talk against the slide BUT do not just read the words! Include humour, ask questions, encourage participation
- A practical element—students need to put what they have learnt into practice

This is how I approach the practicals but you may have some suggestions too.

### **For Beginners:**

I prepare my boards and place a copy of the hand, a bidding summary and advised lead on a sheet into the traveller. This means that students are not dependent upon me to help them and then I can cope with larger classes.

### **For Improvers and Advancers:**

Recently, I have placed the same carefully designed board on every table and asked them to bid it.

The board will usually contain a combination of teaching points eg No Trump opening, use of Transfers, evaluation of a balanced hand etc,

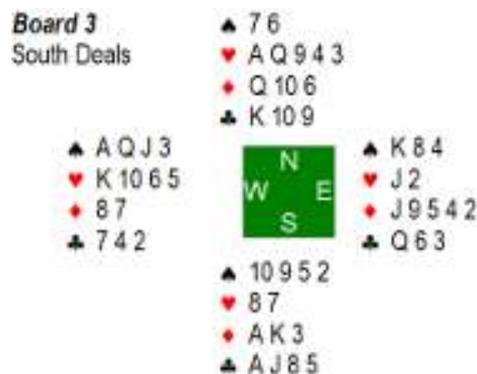
I then collect the results from each table. You would be surprised at the variation!

Next, I take them through how it should be bid and ask them to play the board in the correct contract.

Another review of the lead and the variety of results follows. I talk through how the hand should be played highlighting the techniques that were employed e.g. a finesse, ruff before drawing, cross ruff, end play etc.

I send the hand, lead and how to play the contract out by email.

Among the student comments have been adjectives like “brilliant” and “excellent” and even my most experienced students (good Club players) said they loved the format and content.



Here is a recent hand produced using Bridgecomposer.  
3 NT by South is possible but only 2 from 14 tables succeeded.

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## What makes a good teacher?

**Enthusiasm for the subject.** Your students will be sensitive to your attitude. Your enthusiasm can inspire your students.

**Empathy.** Try to remember how it felt to start out. Bridge isn't difficult but there is an enormous amount to it. Sometimes putting the pieces together is confusing.

As we grow older our ability to learn is reduced. Keep lessons short (no more than 20 minutes), make sure a lesson contains the elements of

**"see, hear and do"**, keep your lesson to a single teaching point.

Don't teach Opening 1NT and balanced hand responses – that is two lessons with lesson two revising lesson one!

**A willingness to change.** Some lessons go well but others will go badly. Analyse what went wrong and be prepared to explain things differently next time. If one person is having a problem understanding they may well be speaking for the silent majority.

**A work ethic that doesn't quit.** It's a hard, draining job that will demand all that you can give sometimes. The rewards are seeing your students develop and become a force to be reckoned with when they play in Clubs.

**A willingness to reflect.** You've got to be able to ask why things went the way they did... both on the good and the bad days. And you have to be able to admit when the reasons it went badly were because of **what you did**, not what the students did. (Equally important is the understanding that often things go right because of what they brought to the table, not because your lesson plan should be written in stone.) Teaching requires a willingness to cast a critical eye on your practice, your methods and yourself. It can be brutal.

**Organization.** The WBU course gives you a structure to follow but little things can go wrong. I have forgotten to bring the boards I needed for the subject, when if I had used the Lesson Plan as a checklist I would have been well prepared and not arriving hot and bothered at the last minute.

**Understanding that being a "great teacher" is a constant struggle to always improve.** I think I've had a few moments of very good teaching, but I still want to get better... because I would like to be a great teacher every time.

I have always, but always, reviewed the lesson I gave and tried to find ways to improve it.

**Enough ego to survive the hard days.** The tough days will leave you curled up at night, convinced that you can't teach or the world is too hard for your students or the work is too much or whatever the problem was that day... you have to have enough sense of self to survive those days.

**Enough humility to remember it's not about you.** It's about the students. If your ego rules your classroom, if the class turns into "me vs. them" or if you can't understand that a seventy year old might be able to tell you something you don't know, or it becomes a vehicle for parading your superior knowledge then don't teach.

**A willingness to work collaboratively.** Teachers are part of a Bridge community. A great teacher should be willing to work to make the Bridge community a better place.

Your students all have different goals and will stop at the level they are happy with; repeating the course endlessly, playing socially, club play or congress. They are all part of the Bridge community.

**What about experience?** Well, that depends on what you are trying to achieve. Are you trying to coach your top players or Beginners? If it is Beginners and Improvers then enthusiasm, empathy and a lively teaching style plus a sound knowledge of the game at the level you are teaching will succeed.

**Humour.**

Research shows that the use of humour relaxes students whilst helping to build a cohesive group identity. It softens criticism.

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## Teaching Materials

An Introduction to Bridge and Continuing Bridge—Year 1 are available from Keith.

Continuing Bridge—Year 2's development is well advanced and being piloted by Cardiff Bridge Tutors.

Available to teachers following the WBU syllabus from Keith on memory stick (they have become too large for downloading).

These courses are supported by the WBU crib sheets, available to teachers using the WBU material.

## Preparing Hands

**Bridgecomposer** see <http://bridgecomposer.com/Download.htm> is an excellent tool for building hands and providing summaries.

Available on a 30 day trial but only \$19.95 to buy how can you refuse? It may be output to .pbn format for use in Duplimate or equivalent.

### What if you don't have a duplimating machine?

Print Curtain Cards from Bridgecomposer and cut each board into a "Strip" . You might even cut out each of North, East, South and West's cards.

Each table then "suits" their cards and each player takes the cards appropriate to them

It saves you a lot of work and increases the co-operation at each table.

## On a lighter side

My students have suggested the following additions to the Bidding Box

Use after an Invitational Bid

When the contract goes astray



### Discard Systems

I was called to a table to give advice.

There had been a discard by East and South wanted to know what they might do.

I suggested that they ask West what discard systems they played.

West, the husband in a married pair playing East-West, said with undue emphasis on the first two words

"**My wife** plays the ABC system".

South looked puzzled, I suggested they ask for a fuller definition.

West replied "**A**ny **B**loody **C**ard!"