



Continuing Professional Development Day (2) for Teachers

Defence

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Introduction

Welcome to the second ABF Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Day for Teachers. Completion of this day will give you 10 points towards accreditation.

After completing a Teacher Training Programme (TTP), the ABF provides further support for bridge teachers by offering days such as these, which concentrate on the “what”, as well as the “how”, to teach.

The first CPD Day covers Modern Competitive Bidding, and this, the second, offers ideas for teaching defence courses for your intermediate (and advanced) students.

Teaching (anything) is made easier if you use the best materials and methods. These are recommended on my website, the ABF website, and in the workbook. Your students will better understand the concepts you're trying to get across if the hands are well thought out.

(1) Defence

This is the area that almost all players find the most challenging, and a high priority for lessons in clubs.

For a recommended bridge curriculum to follow, and text books, go to joanbuttsbridge.com, and then Learn Online, and/or Books.

You don't have to be the greatest player to be a great teacher. Remember there are two, quite separate words: Teaching and Bridge!
I hope today gives you the confidence and ideas to teach these courses.

Contact me on joan@joanbuttsbridge.com

Good luck

Joan Butts (ABF National Teaching Coordinator)

The goal of the STEAM checklist is to keep focused on aspects of teaching that make sure our players are satisfied customers – pleased they have decided to invest in bridge lessons. The letters are not in order of importance; the word could have been TEAMS or anything else. STEAM seemed like the best choice.

Safety

It's critical to keep the participants comfortable. There are several important techniques to accomplish this:

- At the beginning of each class let them know that, unless they volunteer, they won't be asked a question
- Allow for different opinions and avoid the "right answer." For example, some players already know and prefer to play a 16–18 1NT range. Bridge Basics introduces the more popular 15–17 point range. The responses are the same, so respect the students' opinions and move the class along.
- Keep Away from the Table. A play-focused approach gives the participants a chance to experience the play of the hand. Don't watch them while they're playing, or come over to suggest a bid. This tends to make other players at the table uncomfortable.
- Give Clear Instructions. Take the time to become skilled at giving students the best instructions for constructing hands on the table so that they won't feel they aren't doing the right thing.
- Avoid interfering with the learning process by praising a student for work well done. It's one of the illusions of teaching that this enhances the desire to learn. Alfa Kohn's book, *PUNISHED BY REWARDS*, is an excellent resource if you still aren't convinced.

Timing

It's important to respect time.

- Start on time, have a short break after about an hour, and finish on time. It's that straightforward.
- Give the participants 7½ minutes to bid and then play as many cards as they can in a deal ... keep the class moving.
- End on time; it's just as important as starting on time. Giving extra value doesn't apply when we go beyond the advertised time.
- Balance the class with time for the students to listen, talk about concepts, read information, and play deals.

Energy

Energy is important. Keep the atmosphere upbeat.

- Provide an opportunity for the students to talk to each other. In the first lesson, there is an icon placed in several spots to give the general idea. After that, the teacher has to be aware to regularly ask the students to talk among themselves.
- Play at least four deals in every two-hour lesson; avoid too much attention to bidding in isolation.
- Use a microphone.

Attitude

Play the odds for customer service. Small, seemingly unimportant habits can make a difference.

- Most classes prefer the teacher to be professionally dressed.
- Avoid questionable jokes and remarks.
- Be prepared. No matter how many times we have given the lesson, review the plans before the class.
- Have the material ready.
- Do your best, even though conditions will change from moment to moment.
- Continue to learn.
- Be aware of how the class is being received by the students: does your attendance increase, stay the same, or decrease – and why.

Material

Use the best bridge material and teaching philosophy available

- Offer several methods for learning. Some students prefer to read and will read ahead and reread material presented in the lesson; others use the textbook sporadically.
- Some are note-takers, writing down reactions and the material presented by the lecturer, even though the information is in the text. They write in the text, underline key points, record notes in the margin. Others don't have notebooks and would never write in a text. Some students have highly developed listening skills; others find it difficult to hear.
- Some find talking a powerful tool for absorbing information; others don't like to share thoughts with others.

For all lessons, follow these educational concepts

- (1) **Student Involvement.** Let your students be involved in all steps of the learning process. Don't lecture to them, and expect their interest to be maintained. Let them discover the fundamental concepts themselves through active class participation.

- (2) **Spiral Approach.** Introduce basic concepts one at a time, and revisit them later. It's not necessary to cover everything that could happen the first time an idea is introduced. This is a spiral approach to the curriculum.

- (3) **Simple Approach.** Don't try to cover everything that could happen for fear that a simple idea is uninteresting to the students. The opposite is true: when students grasp a concept, however small, they feel a measure of success, and their confidence grows. They enjoy the learning experience.

Defence

A student's attitude towards defending is usually one of utter confusion at first. They can't see why leading any card of a suit is not ok (they can't really differentiate between their cards), and their first step is to play all their honour cards out, in a desperate attempt to keep the lead. Losing the lead looks as if they are not playing well, in their mind. (A new declarer feels the same way here!)

It's really difficult to teach them that you sometimes lose a trick early in order to gain tricks later, so leading out their aces is not always recommended. They are terrified of losing the lead, and cannot imagine how they will regain it. They might have vague ideas of the rules about leading fourth highest and top of a sequence, but they do not understand why they should do this. Even if they succeed in defeating a contract, they don't know why they did.

The more a teacher can show students via setting out card combinations on the table and using only one suit, the faster they will gain confidence. They will understand much quicker if you use the Cards on the Table method, and even go through each hand card by card.

Present the various techniques for winning defensive tricks one at a time (Promotion, Length and the Finesse in No Trumps, and adding Trumping Losers, and Discarding Losers on Winners for suit contracts), and tell them that these are the very same techniques that declarer is using to make tricks. It will never occur to them that declarer and the defenders are doing the same thing.

SHOW them how the techniques work eg leading the top of a sequence is to promote winners, leading fourth highest is to establish a suit through length, and taking a defensive finesse is the reason for leading a top card from AKJ, and waiting to see if partner wants you to continue that suit.

Best way to do this is to use one suit only, and show how it would work for declarer, and then show that it is the same method for the defenders, BUT it does not APPEAR to be the same as they can't see each others' cards. This should take at least half an hour, with the students playing an active role in this.

When teaching opening leads in no trumps, vs opening leads in suit contracts, tell the students that the philosophy is quite different, and that sometimes you need to take tricks quickly, and at other times, you can wait to develop tricks later. Letting declarer win tricks and being patient in waiting for your own (later) tricks, in no trumps will be hard to explain.

This will involve a discussion of maintaining defensive communications, and if they are shown how to do this, they will enjoy the concept instead of being afraid of it.

Opening Leads - Which Suit...and which card?

An easy way to show students how to think about the opening lead, is to say "First think about which suit looks best to lead". Usually it will be your long suit, but there are exceptions...

Once you've decided which suit, the next step is which is the correct card of that suit to lead in order to show partner what's in your hand.

Also tell them that making "textbook" leads will be best in the long run, even though some people are written up for brilliant leads, this doesn't usually pay.

Giving students the table of opening leads outlining the "correct" card in many situations will often be too hard. They can't memorise them, and even if they could, it would not make sense to them.

Explain that the goal of defence is to have partner playing cards which will help both defenders to build up a picture of what's in each others' hands, and ultimately what's in declarer's.

The concept of keeping entries to one or other defender's hand is so important in explaining defensive communications. Teachers need to show students the wrong way to do it (ie take your top trick early), and then the right way (maybe refuse to take an ace until you know partner can get back to your hand with that suit).

Defensive signals is not a topic for beginners, and will be difficult to teach unless you have a clear understanding of what each type of signal is showing and when it is used.

The worst thing for developing players is when they try to make one card mean too many things – attitude is the primary signal, followed by count (at different times), and at special times, suit preference.

When approaching the topic of signals, and what partner is trying to say, explain that the very first job of the defenders is to win tricks, but that when they are unable to win it, **now** may be a time to signal to partner what suit they might like led etc.

Stress from the beginning that all the rules in all the books do not make up for a player using their **own logic** at the table, and watching carefully how declarer plays a suit, and thinking what cards they must have to be playing in

a particular way. This will allow your students to feel that their own natural input is valuable.

I believe in a course on Defence, the essential lessons are

- (1) Opening Leads against No Trumps
- (2) Opening Leads against Suit Contracts
- (3) Signals – attitude, Count, Suit Preference
- (4) Keeping Defensive Communications

Resources:

ACBL Heart Series (Defence) + coded cards.

Click [here](#) to download the teaching manual for the Heart series from the ACBL website,

Audrey Grant's Opening Leads against No Trump Contracts

See my site, (joanbuttsbridge.com) and Module 4 Defence.