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Bridge Improves Students' Test Scores

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Dr. Christopher Shaw, a researcher from Carlinville, Ill., recently completed a study that shows that children who play bridge perform better on standardized tests than their non-bridge playing counterparts.

Bridge players have long believed that teaching children bridge improves their critical thinking skills. The American Contract Bridge League recently made a presentation to the annual meeting of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. BridgeAtSchools, Inc., a Wilmington, Del., organization, has as its aims to motivate and engage children and foster social, emotional and intellectual growth.

According to Shaw's study, BridgeAtSchools is on the right track. Shaw selected six groups of fifth graders from the Carlinville Public Schools who were similar in academic ability. One group learned to play bridge as part of its math instruction, but the other five did not.

All of the students had taken the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in September, 2001 (before bridge instruction began), and then again in May 2003 (sixth grade) and May 2004 (seventh grade). The 15 students who learned to play bridge as fifth graders were mixed with other students in the sixth and seventh grades.

Performance on the ITBS, quite naturally, increases as students age; educators and parents pay great attention to the improvement of scores from year to year. What Shaw discovered was that students who learned to play bridge had a significant increase in their ITSB scores compared with their non-playing classmates.

The bridge-playing students showed the greatest percentage increase in science scores (39.11 per cent) and the lowest in language scores (13.39 per cent). Shaw believes that learning to play bridge has such a dramatic effect on the test scores because "bridge is a game that develops inferential reasoning skills, which are very difficult to teach elementary students. These skills appear to be used in all five subject areas (reading, language, math, science, social studies) in middle school."

The full article on this subject is available at the ACBL's web site, www.acbl.org. BridgeAtSchools can be found at www.bridgeatschools.org. Finally, the ACBL has created a new web site for young people that I wrote about in a column a few months ago. Its address is www.bridgeiscool.com.

Just recently, the 11th World Youth Bridge Team Championships were held in Thailand.