

PARENTS FIND AN AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITY WITH SURPRISING BENEFITS: THE CARD GAME BRIDGE

In discussions with parents, Bridge: A MindSport for All (BAMSA) inquired about the benefits of the mind sport bridge for young people. The findings position bridge as the ideal sport for less ‘sporty’ children

Parents are frequently on the lookout for the perfect after-school activity: something that keeps children off screens, builds friendships, develops transferable skills, and holds their attention. In new research conducted by Bridge: A MindSport for All (BAMSA) at the University of Stirling, a compelling all-rounder activity for children has emerged: the card game bridge. It offers many of the recognised developmental benefits associated with sport – teamwork and cooperation, emotional resilience, patience and focus – but without a distinct requirement for athleticism.

The Scottish Government set out [its vision for out-of-school care in 2019](#), positing that it should provide not just basic daycare but also enrichment, thereby improving children’s health and well-being, attendance, and learning. Could bridge be the after-school activity parents have been searching for?

Competition without the physical demands
For many parents, bridge is an excellent after-school option, providing a competitive and stimulating activity for their children without demanding too much physical exertion. This is particularly significant for children who feel excluded from conventional team sports. John, a parent from England, explained that his son had little interest

in sports: “He doesn’t like sport much, team sports like football or rugby and things like that. I tried to find something for him, so he has a chance to make new friends. He is alright with bridge.”

Parents spoke about the importance of inclusivity and accessibility, and of developing not just physical but also mental stamina: “It is important that there is a sport available for people who may not be the greatest runner or best hockey player. They may have disabilities and yet still they can compete in a type of sport and show their strengths with their mind”. (Julie, parent, Scotland).

It was suggested that bridge can address a gap in the current provision of youth activities pertaining to the emphasis of physical sports in the after-school landscape. Whilst valuable, this emphasis can inadvertently exclude children who are quieter or whose strengths or dispositions are more intellectual.

Parents shared stories of how children with ADHD, autism, and visual impairments thrive in bridge, being particularly appreciative of the structure of the game and the relaxation and contentment that it brings. A father from Scotland noted that his visually impaired daughter faces no disadvantage at the bridge table, where her exceptional memory is a real asset.



What makes bridge unique?
Parents’ insights suggested that they view bridge as more than just a card game. The term ‘mind sport’ resonated strongly with the parents interviewed, who viewed bridge as a different kind of sport. Having had little prior experience of playing bridge themselves, many assumed it was something their grandmothers might play. Yet once their children began playing bridge at school, the same parents reached surprising conclusions about the game. They quickly realised that bridge is in fact quite sophisticated and reliant on skill and strategy over chance, and in this way much more similar to another mind sport – chess – than games such as Go Fish or Snap.

“I thought all the card games are kind of lucky sports rather than brain sports. In

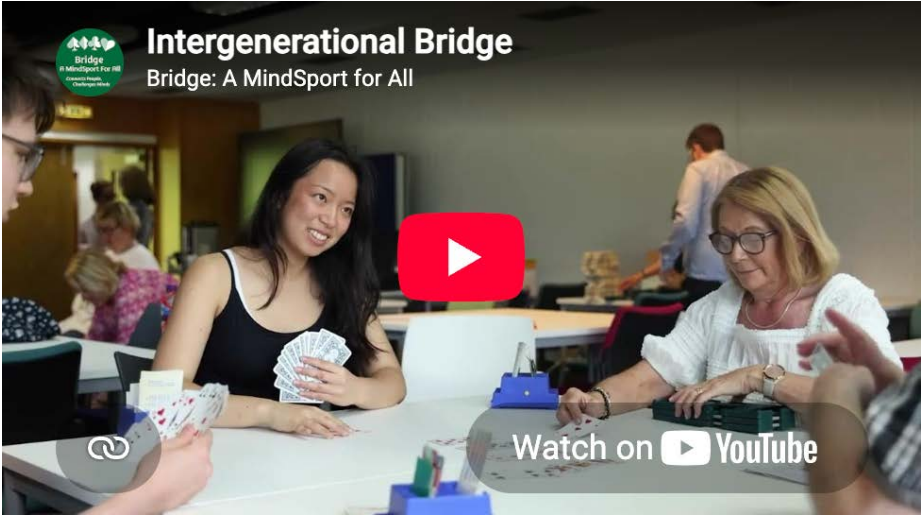
bridge if you do not have good cards, you can still do very well. So this is one of the attractions of bridge. It’s not all luck; you have to use your brain”. (Gloria, parent, England).

What makes bridge a mind sport is its complexity and competitive integrity, since cards are not dealt out randomly, but instead drawn from pre-dealt decks. Parents liked that different tables of players play the same set of cards at the same time, and players’ performance is fairly compared. Nadia, a parent from Scotland, elaborated on how bridge is different to other card games: “I think bridge is more complex. You need to think more moves ahead. You need to count how many points you have to start with and then how many you need to win to be the one to make the bid, and are you going to do it with Trump or No Trump”.

The cognitive demands of the mind sport bridge were directly related to observed improvements in children’s mathematical confidence, decision-making, and ability to cope with setbacks.

Parents learning bridge – and bonding with their children
An additional and very welcome benefit of bridge emerged when children started teaching their parents to play, creating a new dynamic in the family. Children’s capacity to learn the rules, systems, and strategies of bridge often exceeded that of their parents, creating a reversal of the parent-child hierarchy and ‘levelling the playing field’.

Many parents reported that bridge had spilt over into broader family life, prompting the rediscovery of other games, replacing screen time during



holidays, and bringing siblings together as one taught the other. According to Emelia, a parent from England, this made a real difference to how the shared time as a family is spent: “When we were away for a few days in Norfolk last week, I took some cards with us and we played lots of card games...it was a really positive thing to be doing. And it felt like we came together a bit more as a family”.

These findings suggest several avenues worth considering. Schools might explore bridge clubs as an accessible and inclusive after-school option, particularly for children who feel less engaged by physically demanding activities. Parents looking for screen-free, developmentally beneficial activities for their children, or for ways to spend more time together as a family, might find that classic card games like bridge are more relevant than ever.

Furthermore, policymakers interested in youth well-being and social development may find in bridge a useful case study for understanding how mind sports may complement traditional sports, supporting young people’s growth in multifaceted ways.

If you’d like to begin learning bridge or partner with us to introduce bridge to young people, we’d love to hear from you. Get in touch at bamsa@stir.ac.uk

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