

Schools and Bridge in Nova Scotia

By

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I am writing this in response to an earlier article where Nick L'Écuyer described his efforts to introduce bridge to schools. While it was not easy I did manage to get in with some schools and it is well worth it.

How I got there

I teach bridge to elementary students in South West Nova Scotia. It all started with my wife wanting to move back home to be closer to her mom. So in 2011 we packed up from Victoria BC and moved to Yarmouth NS. I had great retirement plans but those went out the door when my wife found a great job she could not turn down. Needing something to do, I went and checked out the local Bridge Club. We had played for a year or so in Victoria, but we stopped because I was not a nice player.

I have mended my ways and enjoy playing bridge with different partners, including my wife, when she can find the time out of her busy work schedule. One article in the Bridge Bulletin caught my eye a few years ago. It was about an 8 years old from Dartmouth NS who just spent 10 days in Las Vegas playing bridge, during his summer holiday. 'Wow that was great!' I thought. But what could I do so that our kids here could get the chance to join in the fun? And would keep me busy.

I qualified as Director in 2013 and took the instructor clinic in Montreal that summer. In April 2015 I left the Maritimes on my Spyder, literally between two snow banks, to head to Gatlinburg for the regional and the special clinic on how to teach bridge to kids.

Back in Nova Scotia I tried to get in with several local schools and it took quite a while before one Principal in Pubnico decided to give it a try. It was really good, with lessons during 30 or 60 minutes, once a week, with up to 20 kids. It was a great start. The kids enjoyed it, and we all had fun and learned a lot.

The Present

This year I tried to get in with more schools and now I teach in Pubnico, Wedgeport and Belleville, all elementary schools, once a week. I even did a couple of weekly blitz with the local Acadian High School, teaching one math class for grades 7 through 10. That was great but it seems that the elementary schools are more interested in regular lessons.

The three programs are all different. In Pubnico I get them for one hour after their lunch. They lose 30 minutes of class, but it works a lot better than the 30 minutes I used to get. In Wedgeport I teach them for one hour after school on Wednesdays, and in Belleville I have two classes once per week where I teach them bridge instead of their regular class. That program is supported by ACBL and it is great! We have a total of 46 students in two classes, and I am hoping it goes well.

The interesting aspect of my program is that only schools that are part of the Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial (CSAP) have shown any interest. The Tri-County school board for the English schools did

not even reply to my inquiries. Maybe that will change if the program at CSAP is successful. According to material we covered in Gatlinburg, Bridge can help students improve their grades by 10 to 35% in Math, Sciences, Reading, Languages and Social Sciences. With the program being offered totally free of charge, there really is no risk and so much to gain. I do not expect any of these kids to join the local bridge clubs any time soon, but who knows. If it helps them in school and they enjoy it, then why not?

South West Nova Scotia is home to a large group of Acadian villages. Pubnico is even the only village in Nova Scotia that was always Acadian. It was far away from other communities and very rocky so it was not appealing for settlement at the time of 'The Grand Dérangement'. Today Pubnico is a prosperous fishing village with a thriving Acadian flare.

The area around Yarmouth is called the French Shore and consist of 'Par-en-Bas' and 'Par-en-Haut' respectively for Up and Down the shore. It is a great place to visit, with fantastic beaches, wonderful seafood and especially delicious lobsters that each area prepares differently. And the bridge is good, with some very good players. And hopefully, soon to be, aspiring great young players!