

Handz: A New Approach to Teaching

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have new players playing in minutes rather than days, weeks, or months? With Handz that is exactly what happens. Generally, in about fifteen minutes Handz enables newcomers, even young children, to play a simplified version of bridge and start having fun.

The Center for Bridge Education(CBE) in San Francisco has been teaching young players since 2007. And while we have had a great deal of success, we have always felt we were losing too many of the young people who initially show some interest in the game. The learning curve is simply too steep.

Former CBE President Richard Bellerose undertook to change that. He wanted kids to start having fun with the game quickly. So, he developed Handz. The game supplies erasable fact sheets on which each player writes down how many points they have and how many cards in each suit. The simplified auction progresses as in bridge with the dealer making the first "bid" for the contract. Since all players know exactly what the other players have, they can make a decent guess as to how many tricks they can take and what is the best trump suit (or notrump). In the simplest form of the game there is no incentive to bid beyond the one level, until an opponent bids higher. Play progresses as in bridge, with the player to the left of the declarer making an opening lead before dummy is tabled. The idea is to use the information from the fact sheets to make the contract.

Handz has eight levels. As a player masters each level they can move to the next. The decision as to when to move to the next level is the players'. At higher levels, information is withdrawn and scoring details and bonuses are introduced. Players who complete all eight levels absorb lessons about declarer play and defense. The players can decide to continue playing Handz indefinitely, or transition to bridge. If they decide to transition, bidding becomes more intuitive. If one understands how points and distribution affect outcomes, learning the language of bidding to get that information is much easier.

CBE has been using Handz at one of its school clubs, Chinese American International School for several months. We introduced it to seven and eight-year olds and they are really enjoying it. We have also tried it on adults and have received very positive feedback.

Detailed instructions on how to play Handz is on CBE's website center4bridge.org. It also includes game pieces. CBE hopes, with the help of fundraising, to have an online version of the game soon.