

Continuing Education Seminar

for

Bridge Teachers

of Youth

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For the ACBL

2009

Seminar for Bridge Teachers of Youth

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**All information in the body of this material,
or links to it, is available on the web site:
Bridge Teachers for Youth
www.btfy.org**

A. Introduction

You are interested in teaching bridge to kids. Your son wants to learn, or maybe your granddaughter. A nephew's school is looking for a teacher for an after-school program. Most people begin to teach youth bridge for the same reasons they become little league coaches ...because they have a personal connection with someone who wants to learn.

B. Identify Your Goals

In recent years, there hasn't been that much of a reason to teach youth bridge. Parents of today's school children never learned bridge and aren't encouraging their children to play. Most of us today teach and look for opportunities to teach because we love bridge and want to share that with a younger generation. But that won't be enough for a long term effort.

So, if you love bridge and want to share that love, what do you do? First, you need to figure out what your real goal is.

If what you want to do is simply teach your grandson to play bridge, you don't need the ACBL or an organization or a school to accomplish that.

If what you want is to share your love of bridge with a new generation – to engender in them the elements of bridge that you find so fascinating – you will need to recognize several things:

- 1) Your young players will want friends to play with. Friends their own age. Someone they can play with besides you. There is no fun in playing with a bunch of old fogies, not in the long run.
- 2) If they don't have opportunities to play, if all they do is take class after class after class, they will lose interest.
- 3) You will not make a living teaching youth bridge.
- 4) You will need help – if you try to do it alone, you will burn out.

C. Getting Started

Assuming now that you intend to teach a group of students and pass on a love of bridge to these eager students, what should you do first?

There will always be a few youngsters who take to bridge at a young age and play (if not excel) for the remainder of their lives. They are the exception, not the rule. To keep a lot of young players interested, we must create opportunities for them to compete against other youngsters. They need a group their age to draw

from for partnerships. In addition, we must open our clubs and tournaments to these young people and provide classes and games that allow them to experience bridge.

Let's say you start teaching a class of 12 kids. First comes the predictable conflict with a soccer game. Another has band practice. Your neat three tables is always less with interchanging faces. And week after week of this will become boring to the students and drudgery for you. You need a better game plan.

I firmly believe that the first step in teaching youth bridge is to generate a group of teachers in a specific area who are willing to band together to teach several classes. They can support each other, sub for each other and provide a large class base, so that the kids will have a large group to draw from for partners and games. Even non-competitive kids like to test their skills among their peers, and this model provides enough players to lead to youth competition.

Adult players, clubs, Units and Districts need to be encouraged to support these efforts and work together to offer opportunities for the children to practice, with other children, what they are learning both at the club level and at local tournaments. Opportunities to enjoy playing the game outside of the classroom are a must, if your teaching efforts are to be meaningful and long-lasting.

Working alone, this goal would be next to impossible. Working together, it is not only possible but almost easy.

D. Recruiting a Team

At this point I hope you're convinced to form a youth bridge program in your area rather than just teach a class. You'll need to get some like-minded individuals motivated. How do you get started?

Begin by talking to friends at your local club. Tell them you are interested in pulling a few people together who would be interested in getting some youth bridge classes going. Ask if they are interested, or if they know someone that might want to join you in the project. See if anyone else has come to them with a similar idea.

Look up other people who are teaching in your area and see if they have time to take on an additional class – of young students. Place an ad on your unit web site asking interested parties to contact you. Does the unit or your club have a newsletter? Write an article and promote your ideas. You may be surprised by the number of people who want to help.

Once you have recruited a group of interested players who are willing to work with you, it's a good idea to train your teachers to make them more comfortable.

You can do this by offering a TAP (the ACBL Teacher Accreditation Program). The ACBL will work with you to bring this program to your area cost-efficiently. Consider offering the course free to your youth teachers and charge other locals to participate. Contact the ACBL Education Department for more information.

In general, it has been my experience that you will find that most Units and Districts are willing to do whatever they can to help you create bridge programs for youth in your area. Start by contacting your Unit or District Education Liaison and club managers.

E. Financial Considerations

What do you need for this area youth bridge program? Teacher fees (or volunteers), supplies (books, cards, bidding boxes, etc.), a free (hopefully) playing site, snacks (bridge players like to eat; kids like to eat more), special playing events to motivate and excite your new young students, advertising to recruit your students.

If your Unit/District has the resources, don't be bashful. Ask for stipends for teachers, money for supplies, whatever it is that you need. If your Unit or District doesn't think it can afford to help, think in small terms: loans of supplies or providing free games at tournaments. Ask your local club to allow you to use their space for lessons or to run a youth game alongside their regularly scheduled game. For free, of course.

You will find that many of your local club members have skills that they can offer. Using available volunteers will save a lot of money. Post a volunteer list on your unit/district web site or at a local club outlining the jobs that need to be done and asking members to sign up to help. Once you start thinking about it, you will be amazed at how much there is to do:

- promotional posters need to be made,
- newspaper articles written,
- pictures taken,
- snacks supplied,
- someone to use their talents to simply talk up the program to other unit/district members,
- a lawyer could provide some free advice or help you organize a 501c3,
- your early classes can use helpers, one or two to a table to get the students started.

There's a wealth of talent at your fingertips – learn how to use it!

Ask for help; get your local players excited about youth bridge. The more people involved, the bigger the investment they will have in your success. Get these

people busy recruiting students – a child, grandchild, neighbor, relative – everyone will know someone. Never forget that even though you might start a program, the ultimate success or failure will depend on how fully your area buys in to the success of the program. You can not do it alone. We'll talk more about finances under the section on Funding.

F. Finding Class Sites

If you are not charging for your classes, the possibilities for class sites are endless. Libraries, churches and recreation centers like the YMCA are always looking for programs for children, and they all have limited budgets. An activity like bridge that offers academic, social and cultural benefits – one that requires no expenditure of money for supplies or uniforms – is a godsend.

If your local club has its own facility, they should be receptive to allowing you to run a free youth class during their non-game hours. Their cost is a few cents for utilities, and you are creating future customers for them.

If you are interested in school or after-school programs, it will be easier if you have a connection within the school where you would like to teach. The connection can be personal (you are a teacher there or have a child in the school) or extended (you know a teacher there, the principal, the counselor or have a grandchild that attends). Without that personal connection, it will be much harder for you as an individual to interest a school in allowing you to teach bridge, but many people have succeeded in starting school bridge classes.

The ACBL has a fully funded program and a packet of information to help you present your case to a school official. Check out the details at: <http://www.acbl.org/teachers/schoolBridge.html>. There is more information on other programs at the *Bridge Teacher for Youth* web site (www.btfy.org).

G. Selling Youth Bridge Classes

The four main selling points for bridge are: Academic, Social, Fun and Financial.

Academic. Chris Shaw's study¹ showing the academic value of learning bridge in standardized test scores is invaluable when talking with schools and school officials. The School Bridge League has a great article² on "How Bridge Can

¹ You can find the study at <http://www.acbl.org/documentlibrary/news/statisticalspeaking.pdf>. Frankly, in an era of "No Child Left Behind", educators should be drooling at the prospect of such an easy way to improve test scores. In practice it hasn't worked that way.

² See <http://www.schoolbridgeleague.org/case-for-bridge-in-school.aspx>.

Benefit Students.” The ACBL offers several articles that demonstrate the value of the lessons at <http://www.acbl.org/teachers/schoolBridge.html>.

Social. From the social aspect, emphasize that bridge is an activity that will give your children the opportunity to meet and work with a partner or team toward a common goal. They will learn to communicate information and ideas in new ways and learn how to support and encourage the children they are playing with to excel as well. They will be able to play, compete and make new friends all at the same time...in a safe controlled environment, and they will enjoy the experience.

Fun. Why do you play bridge? Yes, all bridge players have a little competitive streak in them, but it boils down to FUN. The fun of playing a game, meeting new people, being with our friends and, yes, Winning.

Financial. Bridge is one of the only sports that your child will play that has no equipment, no uniforms, no fees (if you offer your classes for free) and only a small fee to play in games. A couple of bucks for a deck of cards – that’s it. In most cities, the entry fee to play in a 3½ hour game is less than the price of a movie ticket – and way less than a movie ticket plus concession stand treats!

H. Advertising

Enlist your local players to help you advertise your classes. Have ¼ page postcards³ printed with the information for your new class. Ask your players to hand them out to the local businesses they frequent (drop them off at the health club, beauty salon, library, etc. – everyone has kids). Of course, ask them to recommend the class to their children/grandchildren and to other parents and kids that they know. Talk it up in your club. Make sure your posters are colorful. If you can’t afford the cost of color copies, use colored paper for your flyers.

If you are contacting young people directly (attending a school “choose a club” day or speaking to an assembly of kids), contact the ACBL and get some of the new promotional brochures (Youth4Bridge) to pass out. This piece was designed to help sell students on taking bridge lessons. Contact marketing@acbl.org.

Create a list of community and local newspapers. Most have a ‘calendar’ of local opportunities for classes, meetings and workshops. If you are not charging for your classes, they will allow you to advertise for free. (Consider offering the first lesson free if that will qualify you to put your class in the calendar. The free lesson will also attract more kids and will make the class appealing to parents.)

³ See BTfY, <http://www.btfy.org/adposters.htm>

The ACBL Co-operative Advertising Program will pay up to 75% of the cost of your flyers to advertise new classes, but they must meet the co-op advertising criteria⁴. Submit your flyer ahead of time and have it approved to make sure that you have dotted all of your “i’s” and crossed your “t’s.”

Once you get a few classes started, your students and their parents will become your best advertisement. Take pictures of the kids playing and hang them at the local club or post them on the unit’s web site. (Be sure to get release forms signed by the parents.) These pictures will be noticed by your local players and will help them get excited about your youth bridge program. Encourage everyone to let you know of new opportunities for starting classes and ask club and unit members to pass the word along to all their friends that “BRIDGE IS IN.”

I. Teaching Methodology

You’ve decided on your approach, lined up and trained your teachers, found a site and advertised your classes. Now you have to decide what and how you are going to teach. There is one system that is hands down the best you can hope for...the one you are most comfortable with.

Teaching kids is almost exactly like teaching adults. Marty Nathan wrote an excellent article⁵ for the ABTA (American Bridge Teacher Association, www.abtathome.com) about teaching bridge to kids. The main differences are in their attention span, vocabulary and focus. The most important thing you can do is to make sure the kids have fun while they are learning and that they get their hands on the cards as soon and as much as possible. What you teach is not nearly as important as keeping the students interested in the game as you go along.

It’s a good idea to teach the Standard American system with five-card majors and to use Fred Gitelman’s “Learn to Play Bridge” software⁶. You may find that many of your students will get on their computers and download the two programs, LTPB-1 and LTPB-2. If they do, it will be a plus if what you are teaching agrees with that information.

There are many curriculums available: The ACBL Bridge Series teacher manuals, the Kitty Cooper School Manual (shortened lessons designed for schools and based on the “Bidding” text), the Donna Compton Lesson Plans (for very young students), School Bridge League, BridgeAtSchools, Easybridge!, Better Bridge...all have the same basic rules for opening and responding. Some people use Jude Goodwin’s “Teach Me to Play” for homework assignments and

⁴ The program is fully described at <http://www.acbl.org/marketing/coopAdvertising.html>

⁵ See “Kids Can Play Bridge too” at BTfY, section Teaching / Methodology.

⁶ BTfY, Section Teaching / Lessons.

some use one-page handouts for reinforcement. (Check out the Atlanta Junior Bridge handouts at www.btfy.org.) Pick the course material that fits your style the best.

You can download for free all of the ACBL teacher manuals. (For Kitty Cooper, go to: <http://www.acbl.org/teachers/schoolBridge.html>; for the official series teacher manuals, go to: <http://www.acbl.org/teachers/materials.html>. Links to all of the other course materials mentioned below can be found at www.btfy.org.

J. How to Keep Them Playing

In past attempts to build the ACBL youth membership base, keeping the students playing has been our biggest wall. We teach the kids bridge, they take the classes, they enjoy playing, then they're gone. Oh yes, we all know of the few youngsters that learned to play bridge as kids or preteens and have continued to play their whole life (I'm one of them). We have had a few of those that excelled and many are our stars of today. But that is the exception; not the rule.

The key is to have opportunities to play and learn **year round**, and to build programs that have **groups of kids** playing, not just a handful. The ACBL needs to have programs in place that recognize the young player's accomplishments and sportsmanship. Opportunities must exist for games where they can compete with their peers and be part of something more than their own local class or area.

Yes, we want our kids to have fun, but we also live in a complex society that recognizes competition, success and rewards as desirable goals.

If we want to keep the kids playing bridge, we have to give them what they want: friends, fun, competition and recognition. We also have to make their parents understand the value of what is being offered.

The ACBL is developing opportunities for kids nationwide...it's up to YOU to generate opportunities at home. Here are some ideas to consider:

- * Start a weekly class that runs year round.
If you work with a group of teachers, this is easy to do.
- * Have summer workshops for the kids.
A two hour to a half day week long program at your local club or library is very appealing and let's you get in enough bridge quickly to have them playing. Send for the ACBL Camp Promo packet (education@acbl.org).
- * Hold a monthly junior game at a local club.
- * Offer a junior game at every local tournament (work with your local tournament chair or IN Coordinator to schedule).

- * Arrange for the schools where you have classes to compete against each other once or twice a year.
- * Introduce your students to online bridge.
Learn how to teach a lesson on Bridge Base Online or hosting a game for your students. Use the Bridge Base “help” button for more information.
- * Sign up to participate in the nationwide competitions sponsored by the School Bridge League (www.schoolbridgeleague.org).
- * Get your students interested in participating in the Youth NABC (North American Bridge Championships). Raise funds to send your students to this annual event.

K. Funding

Providing funding for your classes can be accomplished in several ways.

If you simply want to run a class at a local school, the ACBL School Bridge Lesson Program, administered by the ACBL Education Department, will be your best source of funding. They offer books, t-shirts for the kids, a trophy for an end-of-the-class game and a stipend for the teacher. Check the ACBL web site for full details of the program (<http://www.acbl.org/teachers/schoolBridge.html>).

If you decide to organize your program on a larger scale, you have a few options. You can apply for 501c3 status and become a charitable organization, in which case all donations become tax deductible. Or you can simply form an organized group and request funding from the ACBL Educational Foundation (educational.foundation@acbl.org), the Foundation for the Preservation and Advancement of Bridge (fpab@acbl.org) and/or from your local Unit and District.

The Foundation for the Preservation and Advancement of Bridge (FPAB) is a newly-formed ACBL foundation. It is a 501c3 organization. Contact them about accepting charitable funds, earmarked towards youth efforts in your area.

If you acquire 501c3 status, you also open doors to donations and grants from businesses, family trusts and private individuals. You can raise money by running fundraisers, like raffles, auctions, bake sales and car washes, if you are a charity. And best of all, once your local clubs meet their ACBL charity obligations, they can make your organization the beneficiary of their charity games.

When asking for support from organizations and individuals to help fund your classes, think in terms of specific programs and matching funds. Don't expect any one source to supply everything you need. Instead, think of either specific areas in which you need help (like bidding boxes) or of how you can split what you need amongst several donors.

L. Help and Information

Your biggest source of help and information is going to be your local bridge membership. The ACBL has within its ranks some of the most intelligent, well-connected, clever, successful and talented people in the world. In your own bridge club, you will have teachers, lawyers, bankers, business owners, advertising executives and publicists and a myriad of other professionals, active and retired. They may not be willing to take on your bridge program as a second job, but many will be able to find time to take on one chore or give you an hour or so of help or advice.

In addition, you have the resources of the ACBL to give you information and advice and the *Bridge Teacher for Youth* web site (www.btfy.org) which has a tremendous amount of information, forms and links to other sites. Everyone interested in and working with Youth Bridge has the same goal, the same purpose....to get young people involved in bridge. You will find that they will do anything they can to help you.

M. The ACBL Youth Bridge Program

Unfortunately, bridge skipped much of the last generation and many parents of today's kids not only don't play bridge, but don't even play cards. Today's parents are not used to thinking of card games as an intellectual, cultural or social benefit.

The ACBL is working to educate parents about the benefits of bridge and to show them how bridge differs from other activities and games in which their children are involved. It will require a massive and ongoing effort to recover the allure and popularity that bridge held from the 1930's to the 1950's and to see it generate a desire in today's parents for their children to learn to play bridge...but we'll get there.

One of the first steps taken by the ACBL was to create a Youth Division for players under the age of 20 in addition to a Junior Division which now focuses on players age 20 to 25. This new grouping has provided an opportunity to create youth programs that will recognize young players' excellence in play, sportsmanlike behavior, ethical demeanor and positive attitude.

The ACBL has also established a new volunteer position, known as the Youth Advocate. This youth representative will interact with our youth members to collect ideas regarding improvements and changes they would like to see in the ACBL youth bridge programs

When creating the Youth Division and youth bridge program, the ACBL

recognized certain general goals that needed to be addressed. They are:

- 1) To create a program that will keep the interest of our young players until they move into the Junior Division.
- 2) To create a division that will help parents view bridge as an important and integral part of their child's growth and development.
- 3) To establish ways to recognize our young players and acknowledge their contributions.
- 4) To create a division that is self-sustaining.
- 5) To encourage interest in eventually participating in the International competitions sponsored by the USBF.

Here is an overview of the new ACBL Youth Division and the programs being finalized. Expect to see a lot of news over the next month as these programs are implemented.

ACBL Youth Division

Eligibility:

- Under 20 years of age
- ACBL member in good standing

Goals:

- To recognize that Youth players may have different goals, resources and opportunities than the majority of the older players in the Junior division.
- To promote opportunities for children to learn bridge through the School Bridge Lesson Series administered by the ACBL Education Department

Special Events/Benefits:

- Youth NABC
An annual national championship hosted by the ACBL.
- A class for area youth at each NABC, if the sponsoring organization has an interest in promoting youth bridge in their city.
- Teacher of Junior Bridge workshops/receptions at each NABC for bridge players interested in starting youth programs and classes in their areas.
- Funded ACBL school program.
- King and Queen of Bridge scholarship.
- Teaching scholarships for youth and junior players.

Awards/Positions:

- **Sportsmanship Player of the Year**
Awarded annually at the Youth NABC, this player is elected by the participants for good sportsmanship.
- **Youth Player of the Year**
Awarded annually to the youth player who earns the most masterpoints during the calendar year.
- **Youth Ambassador Membership**
The best of the best, an honorary position – nominated and selected for membership by the respective District Directors.
- **Youth Advocate**
A volunteer position, elected by the youth membership, to represent the ideas of the group to the ACBL Board's Junior Committee.