



School Bridge Lesson Series Program

A School Bridge Success Story by Kitty Cooper

In Albuquerque NM, we started a school bridge lesson program in fall 2002 with five schools, three middle schools and two high schools. So far, it appears to be easier to get into the middle schools. They need after-school programs and can give us an hour and a half every week, while high schools seem to have more trouble fitting it in. One of our schools gets 30 minutes, the other 50 minutes but has low attendance.

Anne Kanapilly, the "boss" of *After School Initiative* for the city of Albuquerque, visited Felix Reid's middle school bridge class. She was most impressed and has since put her thoughts in writing. Here is a quote from that experience:

"Eight eager learners sat around a card table learning the complex game of bridge. The American Contract Bridge League (ACBL) provides enthusiastic teachers and is beginning to infiltrate the middle schools. The students were totally engaged in learning the game and with time not only will develop strategies for winning but are as well potentially acquiring a lifelong pastime."

The Albuquerque Action Plan

- **Organize a group of teachers and helpers**

We have a core group of about five totally committed people plus a list of 20 teachers willing to teach and substitute.

I talked to everyone at our local bridge club about my interest in starting a program for teaching bridge in the schools. Then several of my recruits talked to more people and recruited others. My friend Janet Youngberg sat down and called every ACBL accredited teacher in Albuquerque (you can ask for a list for your area from the ACBL Education Department). We collected a list of people willing to teach, as well as those willing to help in other ways (make posters, make phone calls, go around to the schools, collect materials). Make sure everyone has a master list of phone and e-mail addresses.

Find your local unit or district education liaison to the ACBL and ask for their help/support and include them in your meetings and your e-mails. They are a valuable liaison back to the unit to get donations of cards, bridge tables or whatever for your program. Our liaison, Bill Isham, was invaluable, creating the master list, finding the central person in the school system and getting the support of our Unit board, including funding for supplies.

- **Contact the schools and sell the program**

Get started contacting people in the school system several months before your proposed start date so that budget money can be set aside. Start in the early spring for the following fall.

Look for bridge players with contacts in local schools. See if you can find someone central who can push it with a large number of schools. It may be possible to do a presentation for a group of after-school administrators like we did in Albuquerque. My PowerPoint presentation is yours to use. It is all about why learning bridge is good for kids in the schools.

We also put posters around at about 20 middle schools, spoke to school administrators at about 10 schools and had a mention in the local paper. Of the five schools we have going now, three came from personal contacts and two from the presentation plus newspaper mention.

For each school that signs up, you will need a sponsoring teacher and a school administration supportive of this effort. Most middle schools have after-school programs and are interested in this free program. Many already have chess clubs, so a bridge club is logical. You need to get them excited about this, because they are the ones who will recruit the kids, which leads to the next topic.

- **Help the school publicize the class**

Some schools needed no help, others needed posters and ideas. Best is if your sponsoring teacher is encouraging the kids she thinks will like it to come. Remember bridge is not cool these days. I always mention Bill Gates and James Bond as lovers of this game.

Be sure they make an announcement in assembly on the day you start. At schools with other mind game clubs, e.g. chess, be sure to be scheduled on a different day. Get the chess teacher to announce and recommend the bridge club also.

- **Decide on a curriculum**

The ACBL Educational Foundation will sponsor either a *Club Series (Bidding)*-based lesson program or an Easybridge! program with books and a stipend for the teacher. In Albuquerque, we were excited by the layout of the Pre-Club Teacher Manual: 16 one-hour lessons which go through the *Club Series* hands twice, the first time with no bidding.

However, one of our teachers, Norma Casey, had been to a MiniBridge presentation at the Toronto NABC and was very keen on that. After looking at those materials we realized that it would not be too hard to combine the two programs. So we put together a curriculum of 16 one-to one and a half-hour lessons (most of our middle schools have at least one hour and 15 minutes) using the *Club Series* hands and MiniBridge for the first half of the course. This lets the kids learn to play, count high card points and score without having to bid yet. (Now, the new ACBL School Bridge Lesson Series Teacher Manual by Kitty Cooper is freely available to all at the ACBL web site and replaces the original Pre-Club Teacher Manual.)

For those of you who have never heard of MiniBridge, it is bridge without the bidding. First of all, everyone announces their points in turn. The player with the most points is declarer and their partner puts dummy down. Declarer now picks a contract and the play commences as in Bridge. Scoring is bridge scoring. This is a wonderful way to teach the play and scoring of the game without bidding.

- **Get the materials**

You need lots of decks of cards. Many of these students may not have cards at home so we like to give each student a deck of cards. Ask your unit or bridge club to replace their decks a little early and give you the old ones. Or if you have a local casino, they give away their used cards also. (The ACBL will supply one deck of E-Z Deal cards for each estimated table of lessons.)

One of our people had a laminating machine, so we made each student a laminated card with the rules of MiniBridge, as well as a laminated card with the rules for opening the bidding (responding to 1NT on the flip side).

Sign up your school program with the ACBL Education Department so that once you know how many kids you have, the books will be sent to you.

Make some card holders or get them donated or see if the shop teacher at your school can make them. We use a simple piece of wood with one long slit, slightly diagonal, across it. Some fifth and sixth graders have very small hands and really do need these, at least for a while.

- **Bridge teacher support once you get going**

Every teacher has a partner. Make sure everyone has a list of all the teachers with phone numbers and e-mail addresses; these are the substitute teachers. Since many of us retired folk have weekly commitments, also indicate on the list what days are good.

Have regular teacher support meetings to discuss what works and what didn't. Audit each other's classes and give each other positive feedback. When you want to criticize something, be sure to dish out the praise first.

- **The students**

They love to do, not listen. Give them lots of worksheets (some can be optional homework) and have them learn by playing. Don't try to show them hands on the table like you would adults. Do use the blackboard if you like to, they are used to that.

- **Be flexible**

After-school programs will get new kids every week for many weeks; figure out how you will handle this. We usually had the assistant run a separate table for newbies after the first few lessons. Sometimes only a few kids show up because of a holiday or other issues, so you don't want to run a lesson that other kids will miss. Be ready to rerun old hands (the fourth hands from every week), review mechanics and just play.

You will not be able to stay on schedule. Some lessons may need repeating or stretching to two weeks. Don't worry about it. Cover the “left-over” material next semester in the *Pre-Diamond* classes. The kids who love the game will read about it in the book or go online.

Be sure to run a competition at the end even if you have to run it MiniBridge-style.

Remember **your objective is to leave these kids with a love of cards** and a taste of bridge. They do not need to learn every detail now.

Kitty Cooper is a world champion bridge player and independent consultant specializing in web site design, programming and training. Visit her web site at <http://www.kittycooper.com/teacher.html> to download her PowerPoint presentation for schools and other materials.