



# Bridge: A MindSport For All

## *Connects People, Challenges Minds*

### **Bridge, Youth, and Mindsport Education**

New participatory and collaborative approaches will enable the global bridge community to recruit and retain more young players. There is a need for robust academic evidence that explores the skills and wide-ranging benefits that bridge can offer young people. In contrast, chess has decades of academic research and consequently chess is perceived by schools as a beneficial activity for children. Some schools are wary of introducing bridge as it has negative associations with cards, poker and gambling, or is assumed to be a game for older people.

Scientific research is needed to promote and market bridge differently. All National Bridge Organisations (NBOs) can benefit from the results arising from this collaborative approach. By undertaking research in schools where bridge is taught, subsequent published academic work can be used to persuade more schools to take bridge as seriously as chess, and mindsport education as seriously as physical education. We will also explore cases where bridge has failed or is absent in schools in order to understand the obstacles and how to overcome them.

The project, *Bridge, Youth and Mindsport Education*, aims to work with bridge organisation to use academic research findings to:

- 1) Attract more young players via evidence-based tools from youth and child-centred research
- 2) Raise awareness, visibility and recognition of bridge as a mindsport
- 3) Increase the probability of government funding and accessing schools.

The research will explore youth engagement in social interaction and face-to-face communication at the bridge table, away from digital devices, whilst also considering the best ways to integrate digital tools to facilitate play and learning. The key goal is to investigate the best means to grow the global youth bridge community in sustainable ways that will contribute to the future survival of bridge as a competitive mindsport and social leisure activity. For example, the research will:

- Use academic findings to convince teacher training colleges to train school teachers in mindsport education as well as physical education.
- Investigate the inclusiveness of bridge via diverse social groups, including children from deprived areas (e.g. Barbara Clark's work in the USA), children with autism and children with disabilities.

The four-year project includes three inter-related research phases, each with practical outcomes.

#### ***Phase 1: Bridge and Mindsport Education (2023-2025)***

This research will explore the benefits and challenges of teaching bridge in schools using several international case studies, including the USA, the UK (Scotland, England and Northern Ireland), Scandinavia (Denmark and Norway) and The Netherlands. It will examine what enables and constrains children and young people's process of learning and playing bridge.

By using focus groups, we will study children's bridge experiences of learning and playing. Their teachers and some parents will be interviewed to discuss the role of bridge in their pupils/child's life. We will also research the reasons why children, parents and schools do not engage with bridge, and what might convince them to do so.

BAMSA will learn from best practices of bridge education for younger players through international case studies. A mixture of elementary and high schools will be included. The international scope will allow for comparisons of what is currently working well and the challenges around teaching provision in schools.

- a) What enables and constrains the teaching of bridge in schools? Why do schools not teach bridge or why have past attempts failed?
- b) What are children's likes and dislikes about playing bridge and what benefits does it offer them?
- c) What are the opportunities and challenges of teaching bridge to school pupils from the perspectives of school teachers, bridge teachers and parents?
- d) What are the enablers and barriers regarding the transitions of learning bridge between elementary and high schools?
- e) What hinders the take up of the game as pupils age and what potential solutions might mitigate this?
- f) How can schools best be convinced to introduce mindsport education?
- g) How and in what ways are parents supporting their children's engagement with bridge?

The research will also include a survey distributed to a larger number of bridge youth teachers, junior training leaders and school volunteer tutors to capture a wide variety of views across all NBOs to complement the in-depth country case studies. A key aspect of the research is that it will be co-produced with stakeholders from the global bridge community to ensure relevant, practical outcomes.

### ***Phase 2: Attracting and Retaining Youth Bridge Players (2024-2025)***

This project phase will focus on the recruitment and retention of children and young people as bridge players. It will produce data relating to how digital technologies and social media might best be used to promote bridge to children and young people. Short videos will be created, based on young people's recommendations, to engage children's interest in bridge. The BAMSA team will deliver an Instagram/social media based marketing campaign to entice younger players to the game through the digital. The key research questions are:

- a) How do children think bridge should be promoted to other young people?
- b) In what ways can a sustainable youth bridge community be developed at local, national and international levels?

Workshops will bring children and young people together to discuss various avenues that bridge could be promoted in new and creative ways. Small teams will work together to tackle key challenges identified by stakeholders during the first project phase. The ideas from some of the teams will be developed, tested, implemented and evaluated using input from a professional designer. These practical outputs will be complemented by the creation of short videos relating to the project findings tailored to different audiences.

### ***Phase 3: Online and Offline Pedagogies of Teaching Bridge to Youth (2025-2027)***

At present there is no credible research exploring the methods used to teach bridge to younger players. A major part of the appeal of bridge has been in its face-to-face contact during a game. Nevertheless, in order to attract the attention of children and young people, the bridge community needs to embrace the digital world to a certain extent. The key question for this phase will be:

- a) What are the best methods of teaching bridge to children and young people, including both online and face-to-face approaches?

The third phase will examine different programmes and platforms used to teach youth bridge and develop youth communities: BridgeWhiz (using Shark Bridge), RealBridge and IntoBridge. A best practice guide will be produced alongside practical examples of innovative teaching methods.

#### **International Advisory Group**

BAMSA has been working with international stakeholders to design this project to ensure its usefulness and relevance to the bridge community: Patty Tucker (Atlanta, Jump Start Initiative, USA), Robert Todd (ACBL Educational Foundation, USA), Anshul Bhatt (Youth player, India), Darwin Li (Youth player, Canada), Tim Anderson (English Bridge Union), Alan Shillitoe (Youth coach, UK), Marianne Harding (Norwegian Bridge Federation), Morten Bilde (Schools bridge, Denmark), Johan Pieters (Dutch Bridge Federation, NBB), Sue Johnson (New Tricks Bridge Club, UK), Adam Parrish (Bridge teacher, USA) and Marina Evans (Education convenor, Scottish Bridge Union). The advisory group will guide project progress and coproduction of resources.

#### **Outputs and Impact**

1) The development of accessible resources based on the international research evidence will draw on the most successful strategies for encouraging more young people to play and continue playing bridge. The co-produced materials will include visual leaflets targeted at parents, schools, teachers, children and young people, and top tip guides for teachers, bridge clubs and tutors as well as promotional videos. Templates will enable all NBOs to adapt resources to local contexts. Videos, podcasts and animations based on different aspects of the findings will be created for different users.

2) BAMSA will host online seminars for academics, bridge practitioners, policymakers and the interested public. Face-to-face presentations of the findings will also be delivered at policy, practitioner and academic conferences.

3) Academic papers will be written and published in journals, with accessible summaries and podcasts available on the BAMSA website. Policy briefings will be developed to engage policymakers in relation to mindsport education in schools and universities.

The findings and resources will be shared widely with all NBOs via the WBF. The academic evidence and tools can be used by bridge organisations, clubs and teachers to lobby governments and schools to support the expansion of bridge teaching and the provision and funding of mindsport education.

**BAMSA Project Lead: Professor Samantha Punch**

[BAMSA Background and Credentials](#)



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