

## **Bridge Responses During the Time of COVID-19**

The 'Bridging the Gap' research project aims to explore the experiences of new and returning players into the game of bridge and build a picture of what this journey looks like. Funded by University of Stirling, EBED, SBU, NIBU, CBAI and WBU, the project is interested in the transitions experienced during this journey and, as this picture will include a wide range of ages and experiences, it is hoped that each voice will be able to share their stories. Transitions represent an important feature to these journeys due to the challenges involved in learning bridge. The project, itself, has experienced a series of challenges over the past few months and I felt that it would be heartening to share how the research has transitioned.

As a researcher, I was very eager to observe the settings in which the bridge boards are played, and to get a sense of where the mistakes are made. Unfortunately, the impact of COVID-19 on this research project has meant that this unique study would need to be conducted remotely. It would have been very rewarding to see the regulars return week after week: Those who have been bitten by the bug that is bridge and watch as the community routinely gathered, played, learned, and dispersed.

Admittedly, I was very naïve at the beginning of my studies about the complexity and depth involved in learning and playing bridge. I had never played the game before and the fast-track lessons felt like a whirlwind of information. However, I soon realised that, like all satisfying, and equally frustrating games, engagement with bridge is founded on a set of basic rules that prompt intricate, and often, elaborate solutions.

Play depends on deep levels of problem-solving, rationalisation and thought. All the time a player will be reading positions, evaluating cards and formulating a plan from mental experiments, and, despite all this activity, the display of bridge can appear easy and sedentary.

Bridge presents a problem that requires commitment, experience and refinement. It could be argued that the answer may occasionally be arrived at through sheer luck, but these attributes need consistency for players to progress and, most importantly,

to develop a communication with a partner so that the game can be played successfully.

Over the course of my first year of study, I have managed to share these bridge experiences and stories in academic forums. Speaking at, both national and international, events has proven to be fantastic opportunities to broaden the image of bridge and widen perspectives that seem dominated by leisure and sport. It has also meant that academia and research has fed into the game with the publication of a journal article on the experiences of learning bridge and the development of a blogsite that captures the researcher's journey and (many) mistakes.

Despite working within the confines of lockdown, I have managed to adapt the project so it will deliver on the main aims. This could not have been done without the overwhelming support from the bridge unions and their clubs. In addition to the contributions to the survey and interviews, I have received many positive messages of encouragement and insight. These have made a huge impact on me, personally. The resilience of the bridge community, during a time that has affected everyone, has helped to galvanise my spirit and reconnect with this project. Dare I say it, you have helped to bridge a gap, thank you.

Thinking of others during these times of restrictions and uncertainty, many thanks go to Prof. Samantha Punch, Dr. Louise McCabe, and Dr. Dom Wilson, and, of course, Mo and Niamh.

The journal article is available from:

<https://spark.stir.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Article-3-Lessons-from-Bridge.pdf>

Please feel free to visit, and comment, the blogsite at:

<https://sociologyofbridge.wordpress.com/>