Be a Bridge, Not a Barrier: Key Points

Areas in Which an Intervener Serves as a Bridge

- Accessing information
- Understanding concepts
- Participation
- Independence
- Motivation
- Socialization
- Self-determination
- Success
- Communication

General Tips for Being a Bridge

There are many ways to be a bridge between a student and the people, places, and things around him.

- Make the student aware of his environment and the people in it.
- Don't do for a student what she is capable of doing on her own.
- Let your student have the pleasure of making a mistake and dealing with the consequences. We all learn from our mistakes.
- Provide opportunities for hands-on, direct learning.
- Know how she communicates a need for help and make sure that means of communication is always available to her.
- Time the student to see how long it takes her to do an activity or part of an activity. What seems like a very long time may actually only be a minute or two.
- Don't offer more prompts and cues than she needs. Give her time to remember or figure out what she should do.
- Provide “pre-teaching” to make it easier for a student to be fully engaged during classroom activities. (Remember the example of Matt and the catapult lesson from the Inquiry Challenge.)
- Step back when you no longer need to be a bridge. In the slide presentation for this learning activity, there is an example of how Dylan’s intervener knows when to step back while Dylan is playing a game with his friend Quinn.
Questions to Help Determine the Level of Support a Student Needs

1. Is this something the child can do independently?
2. If not, can the activity be modified so the child can do it independently?
3. Is it something the child could do with a peer partner?
4. Is adult support the only way the child can do this activity?
5. If yes, how can the adult support be made “invisible”?

Tips for being a bridge to others

- Encourage the student to seek help from peers or a teacher. Facilitate interactions only as much as necessary.
- Provide opportunities for her to have conversations.
- Teach others to interact directly with the student, even if you have to be the “interpreter” for much of the interaction.
- Keep an eye out for peers who seem to have a real interest in your student. Explain to them how to interact with and make friends with her.
- For some students, technology and social media provide ways to communicate that allow for independence and privacy.
- Be aware of when you no longer need to be a bridge.

Ways We are Sometimes Barriers to Our Students

- Not allowing him to make choices or simple decisions.
- Answering for him, when someone asks him a question.
- Picking up items that she drops without waiting for her to ask for help.
- Not providing information about what is happening around her.
- Not providing exposure to new things (e.g., teaching a route to a classroom on only one set of stairs instead of also using a different set to expand learning).
- Walking her directly to something instead of letting her use her mobility skills.
- Moving objects (e.g., a chair) out of the way instead of letting him encounter obstacles.
- Not realizing that socializing and communication are as important as a specific activity (e.g., learning to knit).
- Assuming that the student is not interested in other students.

References
