



Barriers or Bridges: A Matter of Perspective and Attitude

Adapted by John Pieper, Oshkosh, WI, from a presentation by the Wisconsin FACETS Parent Involvement Group at the 2004 Fall EOCA Conference

It is easy to identify the many obstacles that create frustrations in education. It is just as easy to identify what we feel would be the solutions to eliminate those barriers. The trick is to learn how to create the bridges between the barriers and the solutions.

We may not be able to knock down the walls created by institutionalized practice, prejudice, and bureaucratic mandates, but we can learn how to open windows of opportunity within the existing framework. Even small rays of light can become empowering. Collaboration and communication are the brick and mortar we can use to reshape the wall into bridges of diversity, equity, and meaningful learning.

Purpose: This activity can be used as a way to help a group focus on the importance of perspective and attitude. It also serves as a reminder to participants of the need to build relationships if we are going to create meaningful change. (Recommended for groups of 20 – 50 people)

Procedures for the activity: (Approximately 5 - 10 minutes)

Materials: Markers and two lunch bags for each participant

Each participant is given two lunch sized paper bags. On one side of one bag the participant will write down a word or phrase related to barriers facing education. On the other side of the same bag, the participant will write down a word or phrase related to bridges for success in education.

Both bags are opened up. Slip the blank bag inside the bag with the responses. You now have a brick. Participants will build a “wall” out of the bricks. Barriers should all be on one side of the wall, and bridges should be on the other side. There is a brief sharing of the identified barriers and bridges.

The wall will remain as a visible reminder of the work the group is doing. For closure at the end of the meeting or activity, participants can choose to knock down the barriers, create windows, or open doors.*

*As a stand alone activity, the protocol could be modified in any number of ways:

- It could be used as a springboard for brainstorming strengths and weaknesses
- Participants could reflect on their own perceptions and attitudes in regard to barriers and bridges in their own work
- Students could create bridges of understanding, or break down walls of inequity
- Teams might physically construct action plans based on the activity