

BENEFITS OF ICE-BREAKER ACTIVITIES DURING ENGLISH CLASSES FOR CREATING POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Introduction. Icebreakers can be an effective way of starting a training session or team-building event or students' classes. They help people get to know each other, because it is interactive and often fun activity. If such activity is well-organized, it can really help to have a great beginning of any type of meeting. Especially it is true about English classes and students studying foreign languages. Starting a class with an entire group of new students can be a stressful experience for both teacher and student. Students feel the nerves during a first class, as they may not have spoken foreign language (English) for a very long time or their previous English teacher was very strict and too grammar-focused – always correcting mistakes, so classroom environment wasn't friendly and favorable. This may cause problems with students' confidence, their fear to make a mistake. So, teachers incorporating some fun icebreakers during lesson have a chance to ease the first-day jitters and promote positive learning environment.

The basic objectives of the article are: to determine “icebreaker” as a term and concept in classroom methodology; to analyze different types of icebreakers; to highlight the benefits of using icebreakers for creating positive communication; to suggest some examples of the most popular icebreakers.

Presenting main material. The term “icebreaker” comes from “break the ice”, which in turn comes from special ships called “icebreakers” that are designed to break up ice in arctic regions. And just as these ships make it easier for other ships to travel, an icebreaker helps to clear the way for learning to occur by making the learners more comfortable and encouraging conversation. Icebreakers are commonly presented as a game to “warm up” the group by helping the members to get to know each other.

Icebreaker may be applied when:

- Participants come from different backgrounds.
 - People need to bond quickly so as to work towards a common goal.
 - Your team is newly formed.
 - The topics you are discussing are new or unfamiliar to many people involved.
- involved.
- As facilitator you need to get to know participants and have them know you better.

What's the "ice" that needs to be broken?

1. If you are bringing together like-minded people, the "ice" may simply reflect the fact that people have not yet met.

2. If you are bringing together people of different grades and levels in your organization for an open discussion, the "ice" may come from the difference in status between participants.

3. If you are bringing together people of different backgrounds, cultures and outlooks for work within your community, then the "ice" may come from people's perceptions of each other [3].

You'll need to handle these differences sensitively. Only focus on what's important to your event (remember, you want to break some ice for your event, not uncover the whole iceberg and it's always best to focus on similarities rather than differences).

There are many different types of icebreakers. Some of the most common are:

Introductory icebreakers. Often, when people get together for the first time, they do not all know one another. Introductory icebreaker games and activities not only help people begin to know each other, but also help them recognize and appreciate differences and similarities. Introductory icebreakers can be as simple as asking each person to tell the group their name and one fact about themselves, or they can be complicated exercises designed to build trust and a desire to work together.

Getting-to-know-you icebreakers. Icebreakers are frequently presented in the form of a game to “warm up” a group by helping the members to get to know each other. They often focus on sharing information such as names, personal facts, hobbies, etc. Getting- to-know-you icebreakers also help people who already know each other become more acquainted.

Team-building icebreakers. Many icebreaker games are intended to help a group to begin the process of forming themselves into a team or teams. Some teamwork icebreakers, such as building activities, aid group dynamics by building trust, communication, and the ability to work together.

Party (fun) icebreakers. Party icebreakers introduce guests (students) to one another. Use icebreakers that are simple and entertaining to coax people to converse and laugh. This sets the right mood for the rest of the party.

Icebreaker questions. As the name implies, icebreaker questions simply elicit information from people in an effort to get them comfortable and relaxed. Icebreaker questions can be serious or funny. The best icebreaker questions are designed specifically for an identified age and purpose and prepare people for activities or experiences that follow.

So, what makes a good icebreaker?

➤ Firstly, a good icebreaker is fun and it should appeal to your students, get students out of their shells and make them more comfortable with speaking in class, so you’ll need to use an icebreaker that interests them.

➤ Make sure that the icebreaker you choose is level-appropriate and that while pushing students to share more, you don’t go overboard and make them uncomfortable by asking them to share too much or things that are too personal.

➤ Icebreakers that only have a few rules are typically easier to explain to English learners and ensure that you spend less time going over instructions and more time actually conducting the activity.

➤ A really good icebreaker doesn’t require too much preparation and additional materials but rather focuses on oral participation and fun.

Icebreakers are beneficial in many classroom situations:

- teachers often use them on the first day of class to get students comfortable with one another and to establish a relationship between them and the students;
- icebreakers are also a way to build confidence and trust and allow students to see the classroom as a safe space for practicing English, asking questions, and even making mistakes;
- icebreakers are a lot of fun and can also be used to give students a break from more structured class activities, whether teaching young learners and teens or adult students;
- they can be implemented at the beginning of class or anytime during the lesson to boost energy levels and recapture students' attention;
- if you find you have a few extra minutes, icebreakers can also make a good, productive way to fill the time [2].

Here are only some examples of the most popular icebreakers.

1. Two Truths and a Lie. One student thinks of three statements about herself that she will share with the class. Two are true and one is a lie. For example, the student may say something like, "I have five dogs, I've lived in three countries, and I'm a ballet dancer." Then, the other students must guess which statement is a lie and if they can, explain why they think so. At the end, the student will reveal whether the others guessed correctly or incorrectly. If used on the first day, the teacher can start by demonstrating the game as a good getting-to-know-the-teacher activity!

2. Positive, Negative, Crazy. Write a discussion topic on the board (for example, food, pets, social media, or dating) and then start passing a ball or "hot potato" from student to student. As students pass the hot potato around, they must stop when they hear you say the words positive, negative or crazy. When you say, "positive," the student holding the potato must stop and make a positive statement about the topic. For example, If the topic is food, their statement might be "My favorite restaurant is Ichiban Sushi." If you say, "negative," they

must make a negative statement about the topic, e.g. “I’ve never eaten Chinese food!” And, if you say, “crazy,” the sentence they create can be anything they like, such as “One time I ate a whole pizza myself!”

3. Lost on a Deserted Island is a valuable teambuilding activity. It is an approachable way to get people to open up and share a little bit about themselves and what they enjoy or value. The first part of this icebreaker is simple: each person is asked to describe what object they would bring and why. This need not be realistic. If someone loves music, he or she might choose to bring a guitar, or an animal lover might choose to bring a dog, a food lover might choose to bring steaks or hot-dogs, and so on. Encourage people to be creative. After everyone has introduced their object and why they have chosen that object, the teambuilding portion follows. Divide into smaller groups and ask everyone to work together to improve their chances of survival by combining the various objects that they introduced. If necessary, you can add more objects, but be sure to use all the objects that everyone mentioned. If you wish, you can reward the most creative group with a prize [1].

Conclusions. So, icebreakers play a significant role in creating comfortable communication atmosphere and breaking down the different barriers. A good activity will encourage bonding, participation, motivation, build confidence and allow students to relax both mentally and physically. However, icebreakers aren’t just for the first day only!!! Throughout the term, English students might be coming to classroom tired and exhausted after a long day or groggy and sleepy-eyed, so if you want to get them engaged and energetic, use creative icebreaking activities!

REFERENCES

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