

Strategy: Ice Breakers

Creating a classroom community is integral to allowing students to learn in a productive environment. These ice breakers build community and allow for student interaction through first-day activities (and these could easily be modified for content-based interactions later in the class).

Origin

Heimberg, J. (2009). Who would win? A guide to great imaginary showdowns. Sterling Publishing.

Zigmond, R. (2008). Ask a provocative question to break the ice. *College Teaching*, 56 (3), 154-155.

Application

Who Would Win? This book inspires icebreakers that can be used to get students interacting with one another. These warm-up activities ask students to choose a side. This is a great opportunity for students to move to a spot in the classroom to represent their position. Once there, the group can discuss their position and work together to share their point of view. Alternatively, you can randomly choose a student from each group to present their ideas. You can also adapt this model to allow students to think of their own X vs. Y. Here are some examples from the book:

Provocative Question: On the first day of class, assign students to come prepared for the next class with a few provocative questions that they will use to start a discussion with their classmates (they will also answer the question). For the icebreaker, write a standard list of questions you want everyone to answer on the board (name, major, career plans, etc.) and a space for the provocative question. Then randomly choose three students. Two of the students will answer only your provocative question but the third will introduce themselves by answering all of the questions. That student will then choose three students and introduce their provocative question. This continues until all students have had the opportunity for a full introduction. Examples of questions: If you became President of the United States, what is the first thing you would do? What is the best advice you've ever received?

Character Descriptions: Have students write down one or two adjectives describing themselves. Put these on a stick-on badge. Have class members find someone with similar or opposite adjectives and talk for a few minutes with the other person.

I've Done Something: Have each person introduce themselves and then state something they have done that they think no one else in the class has. If someone else has done it, the student must state something else until s/he finds something that no one else has done.

My Name: People introduce themselves and tell what they know about why they have their name (family names, named after someone, etc.). It could be the student's first, middle, or nickname.

Common Ground: This works best for small groups or for each small group sitting together as a team (4-6 learners). Give the group a specific time to write a list of everything they have in common. Tell them to avoid the obvious ("We're all taking this course."). When time is up, ask each group how many items they have listed. For fun, ask them to announce some of the most interesting items.

Me Too: This works best for small groups or for each small group sitting together as a team (4-6 learners). Everyone in the group gets 10 pennies/toothpicks/scraps of paper, etc. as tokens. The first student states something s/he has done (e.g. water skiing). Everyone else who has done the same thing puts one token in the middle of the table. Then the second person states something, and everyone who has done the same thing puts in another token. The group takes turns until someone runs out of tokens.

Reflection

- How does this compare to what you are already doing?
- What ice breaker ideas can you add to this list?
- How can you modify these ice breakers to include content and make these learning moments?
- What are the benefits of using warm-up activities in your course?