Activity: The Icebreaker

Activity Type: Small group discussion, student presentations

Goals: To help discussion leaders feel comfortable talking during training and to begin some working relationships

Abstract:

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Time needed: 50 minutes

Materials needed: index cards, poster paper and pens, tape, dry-erase markers, Taboo buzzer, candy

Before class:

1. Write on poster paper the shape of an index card and the indicated questions (see sample). Tape onto wall.
2. Place blank index cards on each desk

Sample:

1. Name / Preferred name
2. Favorite icebreaker

During class:

(12 min) Fill out cards, meet 2 other people:
Hi everyone! Thank you for coming in so early before the quarter begins. I think this will be a good way to get us ready for the quarter, before the stress really rises. We’re going to talk about both practical details and teaching techniques today, but first I’d like to start by forcing us to get to know each other better. Please take the index card off your desk, and write the following on it: 1. Name/Preferred name, and 2. What was the best icebreaker you’ve ever done?

Now, I’d like you to pack up all your supplies, and organize yourselves into groups of three people who have NEVER met before. Once you settle into your groups, introduce yourselves, and compare your “favorite icebreaker” comments. Then try to find something besides UCI that you ALL have in common. Every three minutes I’ll buzz you to make sure you move on to the next person. Go!

(30 min) Introductions to group:

Everyone get a chance to talk? Since I didn’t have a partner, I’ll introduce myself to you first. My name is Adrienne Williams, I’m working with Diane O’Dowd on an HHMI grant that is promoting interactive learning in large lecture classes. As part of that work, we have developed this training meeting that can prepare discussion leaders from many classes to
teach in a way that helps students to learn. My favorite icebreaker is a game I learned last year. Everyone stands in a circle, with one person in the center. It’s an excellent way to learn the names of people in a relatively small group. Maybe we’ll do it next week to see if you remember each other’s names.

Let’s take a few minutes and go around the room. I would like each person to introduce someone they met and name something you have in common with that person. (Pass out candy to interviewers.)

Excellent! Now, please pass all the index cards in to me.

(10 min) Wrap-up:
All of us here will be responsible for teaching discussion sections. Almost all of the things we will do in these meetings are designed to be activities that you can also use when you teach. So this activity not only introduces us to each other, but also demonstrates an icebreaker you can use on the first day of class.

As you can see, this activity can easily be adjusted to use your first day of class. It's a good way to start for several reasons:
1. Students often are still trying to find their classrooms, so if they trickle in a few minutes late, they aren't too disruptive during this type of activity.
2. It gives me a way of postponing the administrative things that I need to do, such as going over the syllabus and my policies, until most of them are there.
3. You can ask anything, but it’s not much use asking what their future plans are – they all want to go into medicine. I have them provide me with their student IDs and any other info I want. I collect the cards at the end of the activity for my records.
4. It's a fun way for them to learn a little about me (and that I'm actually a real person), and each other, and hopefully can help them feel comfortable talking in this group of people.

(10 min) Extra if time allows: small group discussions:
We have a few minutes, so I’d like you to process this activity a bit more. Please get back into your groups, and answer the following questions:
1. Name another icebreaker that you’ve seen that worked well to get a group happy and talking.
2. How would you adjust the introductions section if you didn’t have enough time to have every person introduce someone? (Ideas – draw names, ask for volunteers)
3. Why do people dislike icebreakers? How does recognizing the reason help you make a better one?