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## Well Begun: Icebreakers as an Effective Tool for English Language Teaching

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*Improvising teaching –learning strategies seems equally interesting and challenging for the educationalists since ages. Teaching and learning English are still a herculean task for the average Indian. Every effective facilitator is on the lookout for fresh methods to make their teaching deliverance effective. Novel methods are on the move to make ELT classrooms pretty interesting. Any novel method for teaching demands a convenient atmosphere for successful transmission. Creating a ready- to-receive motivated group is a great hurdle in ordinary classrooms. Motivating a heterogeneous group is not an easy go. When one in the class is naughty, another one may be a villain, a third one may be an attention seeker, a fourth one may be silent and passive – why a student does what he does? What can bring him back to the channel? This problem of ‘why’ focuses the need of motivation. To steer a group under a common roof, to get set for the session, an attention seeking device should be employed. As the proverb expresses, well begun is half done. Launching an idea by spreading an impressive aura creates a better receptive group to work with. To create an invigorating target group, we need to have a well loaded starter. Icebreakers are potent arms to reach that end. How did the elephant get its trunk? (Let’s have wild guesses!) Six sick hicks nick six slick bricks with picks and sticks. (Let’s try a Tongue twister.)*

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### Introduction

Find the energy these icebreakers bring into the classroom! Ice breakers play a significant role in the English language teaching –learning process in which communication and student comfort level are important factors. They help you ensure that all students are equal participants. Teachers can use icebreakers within their classrooms to create a connected and comfortable learning environment for their students. Icebreakers are powerful aids for a successful classroom. An icebreaker allows the group to become emotionally connected with the venue and increases motivation. Icebreaker activities are the best way to help individuals to feel comfortable and ready to work, spurring an intrinsic motivation. More than an activity or a game, icebreakers prove to bring in huge impact on productivity and help to boost morale.

Let’s see what an Icebreaker is?

An ice breaker is an activity, game, or event that is used to welcome and warm up a group. When the class demands an aura that requires students to comfortably interact with each other, teacher can apply an icebreaker that best suits the situation. An effective ice breaker will warm up the

conversation in your class, reinforce the topic of the session, and ensure that participants enjoy their interaction and the session. When participants don't know each other, the ice breaker will help them introduce themselves to the other participants.

### Why we use Icebreakers?

- Individuals learn better when they are involved physically, mentally and emotionally. Icebreaker activities provide this kind of active, practical learning.
- Icebreakers offer a jovial platform to share their knowledge and learn from each other.
- Individuals learn differently. Some learn best by hearing, some by seeing, some by reflecting, some by interacting, and some by doing, some by talking, some by incorporating music or rhythm, and some by solving problems. Icebreakers offer an opportunity to help individuals with diverse learning styles to look as a group on a topic or issue.
- The facilitator can use an icebreaker as a quick assessment of the group to gauge how much they know about the topic, how comfortable they are in groups, what is their background, expertise and so on.

### Purpose for an Icebreaker

In essence, an ice-breaker prepares the group for its purpose. Without this necessary grounding, the group is less likely to be as 'successful' as it could. So, this brings us back to what makes an ice-breaker an ice-breaker. Simply putting an activity or game at the start of a session does not constitute it as an ice-breaker. To truly qualify as an ice-breaker, an activity or any experience must reflect most, but hopefully all, of the following five criteria:

- It must be fun.
- It must be non-threatening.
- It must be highly interactive.
- It must be simple & easy to understand and it must be success-oriented.

Icebreakers serve a particular purpose. In their ideal form, they start getting people engaged with each other and the topic of the session. Too often, the focus is just to get people talking instead of being mindful about how the activity relates to why a person is attending it. Many do not enjoy pointless activities. So, they need to have a reason beyond sheer enjoyment to appeal to a wide range of people.

Icebreakers need to be designed so everyone can be thriving. Icebreakers should help people get comfortable, not to embarrass them. Overall, the aura should energize the group to feel engaged and ready to embrace the actual content at the end of the icebreaker.

- Successful icebreaker needs step-by-step instructions and then needs to be demonstrated (Instant Icebreakers).
- Icebreakers are most effective when they are thought out, practiced, and have clear instructions (“Beat the summer heat,” 1998).

Not all students will like or want to participate in icebreakers, but it is important to keep in mind that most people do like them and not to be discouraged. Teachers need to read their class; if something is not working the teacher can adjust or try a different approach to an icebreaker. A facilitator should make sure the room is silent before speaking so that they have full attention of the group. A teacher can use a noisemaker like a drum or a whistle to get the student's attention.

One of the hurdles of an icebreaker is timing. It should not be too long otherwise the serious part will not be given enough time. It should not be so short that participants feel it was a perfunctory exercise. Timing also depends on the size of the group, the overall length of the event, and the purpose of the event.

### Types of Icebreakers

According to the purpose of usage, icebreakers can be categorized into two – Facilitating introductions and Topic Lead-ins. Facilitating Introductions are used to help participants to ease into the group and to get acquainted with each other. Topic Lead-ins are used to identify needs and goals, share information and resources.

#### Facilitating Introductions

The introduction icebreakers are best used on first days of school when trying to learn student's names and a little bit about them. Here are some excellent Facilitating Introduction Icebreakers:

#### Fruit Talk

Fruit talk is a game that helps to sharpen listening skill and improve select vocabulary. It is a game of giving and following directions. Before commencing the game, instruct the group to follow the directions if and only if it is prefixed with the name of a fruit. It goes like Apple says Stand up, Orange says smell a flower, Pineapple says..... The students should not follow the direction unless it follows the name of fruit. To muddle up teacher can use the name of vegetables or flowers.

#### My Name is?

Here each one should introduce oneself by stating his/her name along with an adjective that not only describes a prominent character, but also starts with the same letter of his name. Example: dynamic Dave, generous George.

#### Birthday String

Descend in a line in the order of birthdays. Go around the class like a train. (Improvise it with height, length of hair etc.)

#### Topic Lead-ins

These will direct the student into the content that will be taught. The icebreakers can be used to generate interest in a topic and activate the student's prior knowledge. Topic Lead-ins will encourage the sharing of information and resources (Dover, 2004). Some examples for topic lead-ins are cited below.

## Multiple Choice Tests & True/False Quizzes

Giving multiple choice tests or true and false quizzes before introducing a topic or reading engages students, activates a student's prior knowledge, and will encourage the sharing of information and resources. The teacher can discuss the answers with the class before and after the lesson in order to focus on the important parts of the topic being taught.

### Personalize it

The teacher talks about a topic by relating it to a personal reference or story. The students are then to figure out how they can relate the topic to a personal reference or story.

### Role Play/Skit

The whole group can be split into small ones. Each group is encouraged to come out with an enacting of the topic given that may be related to the theme.

### Picture Story

To each group give a set of four or five pictures cut out from magazines, and get them to create a picture story – teacher can keep the context very open, or have them focus on a particular tense or function. If we focus on oral communication, let them form the story extempore. If we want to focus on writing, have them write. When they've finished, have each group tell their story to the rest of the class.

Icebreakers are used for teaching and learning the language in a creative and critical way. Right application of apt methods serves a lot for a successful classroom. Intention of each method should be to motivate the learner to proceed further. A motivated group gives a positively receptive result in the classroom. Icebreaking is an effective method that can produce a motivated starting to proceed further. The motivation that is acquired from appropriate icebreakers can energize and can provide a sustain behaviour. The energy acquired can be channelized for better performance. Not only energy but also assures the students' interest and behaviour for longer period in the activity.

According to the veteran psychologist Hebb, efficiency and adequacy are increased in motivated state of behaviour. Motivation can direct and regulate behaviour. A motivated group can be described as guided, directed and goal oriented. A motivated group can be specifically directed in a purposeful and persistent way. In a motivated condition, the target group can be easily controlled by a facilitator to reach the desired end. It does not move in haphazard way.

To conclude, icebreakers are a sort of starters. It just warm ups the entire session. If the warm up is perfect, the continuing sessions will be successful else, it will get jerks and perks at turns. Normally, an icebreaker does not demand any higher order settings. It is the attitude, planning and enthusiasm of the facilitator that is transmitted as motivation to the target group. Once the facilitator reaches the goal, he is sure to have a safe and receptive platform to work with the core part of the session. Icebreaking sessions are often misunderstood as mere waste of time or distractions. If used wisely, it is a powerful staff in the facilitator's hand to lead the group further. Games are no more mere games. They are galleys to reach one's Goals.

Reference

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