Game: Ice Breakers -- 12/01/2011

Meetings and programs are often more successful when they begin with an icebreaker. Icebreakers are techniques that reduce tension and anxiety, and serve as a method to engage participants. Use an icebreaker because you want to, not as time fillers or because teaching guides say one should be used. Listed below are some examples of icebreakers.

INTRODUCE MYSELF. Participants introduce themselves and tell why they are there. Variations: Participants tell where they first heard about the class, how they became interested in the subject, their occupations, home town, favorite television program, or the best book they have read in the last year.

ME TOO. This also 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/scrap of papers, etc. The first participant states something he/she has done (e.g. water skiing). Everyone else who has done the same thing admits it and puts one penny in the middle of the table. Then the second person states something (e.g. I have eaten frogs' legs). Everyone who has done it puts another penny in the center. Continue until someone has run out of pennies.

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 (perhaps 5 minutes) to write a list of everything they all 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.

HOW DO YOU FEEL? Ask the participants to write down words or phrases that describe their feelings on the first day of class. List the responses on the blackboard. Then ask them to write down what they think you as the teacher/facilitator are feeling. List them on the blackboard in a secondcolumn and note the parallels. Briefly comment on your feelings and then discuss the joint participant/facilitator responsibilities for learning in the course.

MY NAME. People introduce themselves and tell what they know about why they have their name (their mother wanted to name me after her great aunt Helen who once climbed Pike's Peak in high heels, etc.). It could be the first, middle or nickname.

FAMOUS PERSON. People write a famous name on a piece of paper and pin it on someone else's back. That person tries to guess what name is pinned on his/her by asking others around the room yes or no questions. Variation: Use famous place instead of famous person.

FIND SOMEONE. Each person writes on a blank index card one to three statements, such as favorite color, interest, hobby, or vacations. Pass out cards so everyone gets someone else's card. Have that person find the person with their card and introduce themselves.

I'VE DONE SOMETHING YOU HAVEN'T DONE. Have each person introduce themselves and then state something they have done that they think no one else in the class has done. If someone else has also done it, the student must state something else until he/she finds something that no one else has done.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS. Have participants write down one or two adjectives describing themselves. Put these on a stick-on badge. Have everyone find someone with similar or opposite adjectives and talk for five minutes with the other person.

INTRODUCE ANOTHER. Divide the class into pairs. Each person talks about him/herself to the other, sometimes with specific instructions to share a certain piece of information. For example, "The one thing I am particularly proud of is..." After five minutes, the participants introduce the other person to the rest of the class.