Franklin University

FUSE (Franklin University Scholarly Exchange)

The International Institute for Innovative Instruction Blog

International Institute for Innovative Instruction

8-10-2017

Why Should You Use an Introductions Activity in Every Course?

Erin Wehmeyer
Franklin University

Follow this and additional works at: https://fuse.franklin.edu/i4blog

Part of the Instructional Media Design Commons

Recommended Citation

Wehmeyer, E. (2017). Why Should You Use an Introductions Activity in Every Course?. Retrieved from https://fuse.franklin.edu/i4blog/43

This Blog Post is brought to you for free and open access by the International Institute for Innovative Instruction at FUSE (Franklin University Scholarly Exchange). It has been accepted for inclusion in The International Institute for Innovative Instruction Blog by an authorized administrator of FUSE (Franklin University Scholarly Exchange). For more information, please contact karen.caputo@franklin.edu.

Why Should You Use an Introductions Activity in Every Course?

August 10, 2017 | By Erin Wehmeyer
Teaching Effectiveness

Introductions and icebreakers are very popular activates but they are also dreaded by participants (and leaders). I recently read a blog, Icebreakers that Rock (www.cultofpedagogy.com), which explains what is wrong with most icebreakers and gives three examples of icebreakers that don't have the "cheese" factor that tends to make us cringe. Icebreakers can be effective tools to create a sense of team or community in a group. But most icebreakers require some type of physical interaction (e.g., grouping, lines, circles, physical characteristics). How do we make these activities correlate to the online classroom (or meeting)? What's missing from the online course experience that is present in the face-to-face experience?

I am in a post-baccalaureate teaching license program at a university that doesn't have a centralized curriculum, and I have found that there is a big difference in the class environment for each course that I have taken (not in terms of class rigor, but in terms of knowing the other learners). The class where I felt the most connected to my classmates had several community-building activities throughout the course (can we say modeling?). My other classes have not been as connected as I would have liked – these students are my peers, make up a huge part of my learning community, and could be my coworkers in the future—but I can't tell you who they were.

From these experiences, I have created a list of activities that I would like all (especially online) teachers to use to help foster a learning community in the classroom (whether it is physical or virtual):

- A welcome letter/email: Let your students know that you are looking forward to having them in class and that your virtual class space is ready. Include your preferred communication methods and when you have office hours (virtual or in-person). You may also include some introductory information about yourself.
- An introduction activity or discussion forum or synchronous meeting: If your classroom doesn't already have an introduction activity, create one. And be creative – go beyond the normal five questions (who, what, where, why, and how). Use an icebreaker that is not cheesy.

At work, we recently did a "where in the world" activity. All departmental employees wrote on a bulletin board the countries they have visited (or added tally marks) and our distance employees sent an email and their countries were added to the list. It made a fun break when people came over to add their countries to the list and it was nice to talk about the countries we had in common. And then to make this more interactive for the distance employees who didn't have the

bulletin board, we made a heat map of the world and where we had visited (www.openheatmap.com). It was a great team building activity and since it was announced on Monday and we had until Friday to respond or visit the board, it didn't take much time. This activity can be directly transferred to an online course environment and there are other icebreakers and team building activities that can be used to create a sense of team or community without taking up a lot of classroom time.

Other communication tools that help create a learning community from a class are also helpful. Here are a couple of ways that my professors have created a sense of community.

- Weekly summaries: If you have discussion forums, you can do the summaries in the discussion forum. If you have face-to-face meetings, take the last five minutes to summarize the learning that just happened (or that you expected to happen). If you don't have either of these, send out a blast email summarizing what was due and highlighting what is due next week. Students need contact.
- Blast responses: When you get a question that doesn't have a FERPA factor, respond to the student by emailing the whole class. Other students may have the same question.

In conclusion, as a student, I would hope that all my classes include some of these activities and experiences. As an adult learner, I don't need an instructor to "hold my hand," so to speak, but I do expect an appropriate and commensurate degree of communication. I want to know what the expectations are for any given class and an assessment of the extent to which students are meeting those expectations. I don't want to feel as if I am lost in a void or simply part of a crowd— I need to know that I am an integral part of the educational experience. I want to develop a sense of collegiality with my instructor and my classmates. Only through an inclusive, participatory learning community can I truly grow as both a student and a professional.