

# THE IMPORTANCE OF ICEBREAKERS AND WARM UP ACTIVITIES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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## Abstract

Warm up activities play a great role in language teaching. They are the springboards for the new materials to be presented. Before going for a run, we do not force ourselves to jump out of the front door and sprint straight up the hill. Instead, we walk briskly for a few minutes before we break into a jog. Likewise, we should not start off English classes by plunging directly into a lesson. We should prefer a gentler approach of easing students into what might be their first English thoughts of the day. So, we start every class with a warm-up activity. Otherwise we cannot get the clear image when the right frequency is not found.

## DŮLEŽITOST PROLOMENÍ LEDU A ZAHŘÍVACÍCH AKTIVIT VE VÝUCE CIZÍCH JAZYKŮ

Zahřívací aktivity hrají významnou roli ve výuce cizích jazyků. Jsou odrazovým můstkem pro výklad nového učiva. Než se dáme do běhu, nenutíme se skočit ze dveří a běžet přímo do kopce. Místo toho vykráčíme zprvu pozvolna, než se rozběhneme. Obdobně bychom se neměli okamžitě ponořit do hloubky lekce. Místo toho bychom měli dávat přednost pozvolnějšímu přístupu, např. tím, že motivujeme žáky a studenty zabývat se svými prvními myšlenkami v angličtině ten den. Takovou přípravnou aktivitou začínáme každou vyučovací hodinu, abychom studenty náležitě získali pro učivo.

## DIE WICHTIGKEIT VON EISBRECHERN UND AUFWÄRMAKTIVITÄTEN IM FREMDSPRACHENUNTERRICHT

Aufwärmaktivitäten spielen eine wichtige Rolle im Fremdsprachenunterricht. Sie bilden ein Sprungbrett für neuen Unterrichtsstoff. Bevor wir zu rennen beginnen, zwingen wir uns nicht aus der Tür zu springen und gleich bergauf zu rennen. Stattdessen setzen wir uns erst langsam in Bewegung, bevor wir zu rennen beginnen. In analoger Weise sollten wir uns nicht gleich in die Tiefe des Sprachunterrichts stürzen, sondern einer allmählichen Annäherung den Vorzug geben, indem wir die Schüler und Studenten dazu anregen, sich mit ihren ersten englischen Gedanken des Tages zu beschäftigen. Mit einer solchen Aufwärmaktivität beginnen wir jede Unterrichtsstunde, um die Studenten auf den Lehrstoff einzustimmen.

## Introduction

Whenever we get the clear picture unless we find the right angel on a satellite dish? As in this example there is some ice to be broken in a class before starting teaching.

## **1 What is an icebreaker?**

As teachers when we see the students' readiness in their eyes, we feel more confident and ready to present our subjects. In a class we cannot expect everybody to be eager to receive whatever is presented to them.

When we go for a run, we don't jump out of the front door and sprint straight up the hill. Instead, we walk briskly for a few minutes before we break into a jog. Likewise, we should not start off English classes by plunging directly into a lesson. We should prefer a gentler approach of easing students into what might be their first English thoughts of the day. So, we start every class with a warm-up activity. We never run without warming up leg muscles first, so why would we ask students to start a lesson without warming up their English muscles first? Do you expect to see any smile on the students' faces as soon as the teacher comes in the class and say "Good morning kids! Open your books on page 19 and let's start our subject."? Of course, the answer will be 'no'. Students who speak their native languages most of the day often find themselves tongue-tied when they arrive in English class. So, moving between languages requires a mental regulation.

You cannot get the clear picture if you don't find the right angel on a satellite dish. As in this example there is some ice to be broken in a class before starting teaching.

Let's have a look at the term ice-breaker. The term "icebreaker" comes from "break the ice," which refers to special ships called "icebreakers" that are designed to break up ice in the arctic regions. And just as these ships make it easier for other ships to travel, an icebreaker helps to clear the way for learning to take place by making the learners more comfortable by helping to bring about conversation. As the name suggests, an ice breaker session is designed to "break the ice" at an event or meeting. The technique is often used when people who do not usually work together, or may not know each other at all, meet for a specific, common purpose.

In Wikipedia an icebreaker is described as a facilitation exercise intended to help a group to begin the process of forming themselves into a team. Icebreakers are generally presented as a game to "warm up" the group by helping the members to get to know each other. They often focus on sharing personal information such as names, hobbies, etc.

## **2 What is a warm up exercise?**

In sports the term warm up is often used. It is the act of preparing for an athletic event or workout by exercising or practicing for a short time beforehand. Warming up helps reduce your risk of injury and pains that come with exercise.

In teaching a language we also need warm up activities before the lesson. Because jumping right into an English lesson is difficult for some learners. They should be concentrated on the subject. As soon as the teacher enters the class he should do his best to draw the students' attention to adjust into learning mood. English teachers can help their students accomplish this goal by beginning their classes with simple warm ups. These engaging activities allow students to ease into English and prepare to delve into complex topics of study.

## **3 How should warm ups be? Their importance**

Warm up activities are essential teaching techniques for good teacher and trainers. Warm ups should always be success-oriented, as this is the feeling we want students to have in the beginning and end of a class. This feeling will make them more comfortable in trying new structures and taking risks. If a student is having a hard time, the activity should be

immediately shifted, as this student can be exposed in front of the group and have the opposite feeling of failing.

A productive warm up should always be related to our language objectives and involve relevant language. Warm ups should never be done for the sake of just doing nothing or filling time. In an English-as-a-Second-Language, beginning-of-class warm up is a great way to start class and get students in an English-learning frame of mind.

A warm up should be part of your everyday lesson plan and of course after greeting it is the first thing you do with your ESL students. It should be an easy exercise that all students can participate in. This participation is important because it creates a fun focus on English in the classroom and gets the students ready to listen to their teacher. It is also the moment when you start sailing as the ice is broken. An effective warm up serves as a springboard into the subject or target language of the lesson.

These activities should be well planned and serving the main goal .A well-planned, effective warm up offers more towards the lesson than just a bit of fun.

Because it's the first activity of the lesson, it sets the tone for the next minutes. An activity that students find too difficult, or even confusing results in a class of disinterested students. Similarly, a writing-based activity won't get the students communicating. This then translates into a quiet class session in which you have to prompt and push the students to volunteer examples or simple answers.

A fun warm up, on the other hand, raises energy levels. With the right warm up, a positive atmosphere is created to practice and experiment with the language.

We should be careful about the time spent on warm ups. If it takes too long, then valuable time gets lost from the main focus of the lesson. Students have less time to acquire the new subject. They should last about 5-10 minutes, so that they are assertive to their goal of preparing students for the transition of entering or leaving the class.

We should not correct the students. Assistance will be fine, especially if some people have difficulty participating in the activity. But we should keep in mind that our students still aren't in thinking in English, so they'll make mistakes even with familiar material. If you have ever studied a foreign language, do you remember how far into the conversation you began to feel comfortable? In addition, correction not only interferes in the flow of the activity, but also forms a teacher-centered lesson. As mentioned, the warm up sets the tone for the next minutes. If you participate in the activity, especially in a small-sized class, it turns the focus towards you, too.

Directions should be very brief and clear to achieve this goal. A warm up is usually a short, fun game that a teacher can use with students. The purpose of a warm up is to encourage the students, to wake them up – that is the first thing in the morning and after lunch people are often a little sleepy.

Prepare them to learn by stimulating their minds and their bodies.

The warm up opens the class session, sets the atmosphere and expectations of the lesson. It also helps us to reach important assessment opportunities, which will later determine the type of activities, who will partner with whom, and the content of the lesson. Always equal consideration should be given to the warm up as to other steps of the lesson. The result will be a more focused and positive group of students performing to your expectations.

Warm ups set the tone of the lesson and get students to begin thinking and focusing on English. It may have been a few days, a week, or even longer since they last used English. A little time here will improve receptivity later.

They also provide a transition into the topic. An activity at the start of the lesson activates pre-existing knowledge on a subject, and may even get students to use some of the ideas, vocabulary, or even grammar important to the lesson.

Warm ups permit the teacher important opportunities to evaluate character and ability. After all, some students work well together, and others don't. Some students have good days, and others bad ones. During the initial activity, the teacher can determine who will form the best groups for following activities.

We can summarize the importance of using warm ups in teaching a language like this:

- They have pedagogical importance in teaching a foreign language.
- They lessen the students' worries and help to learn better.
- They decrease the monotony of the lesson and increase motivation and interest.
- They encourage creative and spontaneous use of the language.
- Help to have student focus on learning.
- Bring freedom of movement.
- Help students to express their feelings.
- Help students to be in harmony with others.
- Develop vocabulary.
- Games help form permanent knowledge.

The students are naturally motivated and have the atmosphere to discover life and solve the problems they face easily.

## **4 Practical examples**

After talking about the importance of warm up activities I would like to describe a few of them for you.

### **4.1 Dirty Board Game**

Material: Whiteboard markers.

This activity can be done before or after a lesson. Students close their books and notebooks. The teacher asks them to remember and tell back what key words stayed in their minds about the lesson. For example if the lesson is about a story they come to the board randomly and write the related words on any space of the board. A few minutes later the white board will be totally full of words that it will be hard to find a word quickly. Then you may point at the words and ask them to tell the information about that word .So this is the revision part. As a final stage we can form 2 groups and ask them to come to the board 2 by 2.

They stand in front of the board facing their friends. You tell any word you choose and ask them to find first. Whoever finds and touches the word first gets the point.

From my own experiences I can say that this activity is one of the best ones for a revision of the previous lesson. Students do their best to remember what is left from the subject. While

running to the board they wake up and get into act which warms up for the next lectures. The childish feeling hidden in every individual comes to life again.

## **4.2 Shopping Bag**

Students are put in groups of 8-10 people.

The first student in the group starts by saying the following sentence:

“Yesterday I went to the market and bought some oranges.”

The next person in the group repeats the first sentences and adds another thing that they bought, e.g. “Yesterday I went to the market and I bought some oranges and bananas.”

Each person in turn repeats the sentence and adds another item. The students have to concentrate hard to remember all the things in the correct order. If they can’t remember the chain sentence they will be out of the game.

## **4.3 DJ Game**

A student is called to the board as a radio DJ. The headphone is put on his head. There on the table is a CD player with some songs. The student pretends to be a DJ by talking to any student he chooses in the class and chats for a while. He can ask him about his location, likes, dislikes. Then he asks to whom he would like to send the next song. Then DJ plays the song for a while. This goes on for 5 or 10 min. So the music relaxes them.

## **4.4 Secretary Game**

This activity can be done to form a competition in class. The teacher sticks a piece of paper on the board. The paper has short sentences at least as many as the number of the pupils in the class. The sentences can be about the previous lesson or preparation for the next one. Two or three groups are formed. Each student at the end of his group is chosen as a secretary. When the activity starts one student from each group runs to the board and reads the sentence. Then he runs to the secretary and dictates it. If he forgets the whole sentence he may come back and look at it again. When he is done with the sentence he asks the next student in his group do the same. The group which has more sentences with the correct spelling wins the game.

This activity forms a competition atmosphere between the students. Even the most passive student does something for the group to be the winner. If the teacher rewards the winning group of course it is more effective.

## **Conclusion**

The climate of the world is changing. In our childhood there used to be smooth transition between the seasons. We would know that after spring there would be summer. So warm ups can also be said to have the same role.