How to Use Active Learning Resources

Games and icebreakers can create a positive atmosphere where relationships can flourish. I like to think of games and icebreakers as purposeful play.

Why should we use games and icebreakers in the classroom, pathfinder and adventure clubs, youth groups, or church gatherings?

- In the classroom, these activities can enhance your teaching and help students increase cooperation and collaboration skills. Students get to know each other in a casual, fun environment and actually learn quite a lot about each other's strengths and abilities. Participants may be more willing to work or study in a small group if they've played together first.
- Gaming in the classroom also teaches great negotiation strategies, critical thinking and listening skills. Students work together in a positive environment and come to value cooperation and the benefits of working together.
- In addition, gaming offers opportunity for students to try out leadership skills in a social environment.
- In the club or church group environment, games and icebreakers may play an important role in helping children or young people connect with each other or integrate into a group. Members can get to know other group members, and help newcomers feel more comfortable.
- Gaming can foster new friendships, and give seasoned members the chance to break out of their cliques. Gaming is a fun experience, which often increases the bonds between participants and helps build positive peer rapport. Gaming can also help link spiritual concepts to practical application.
- There are just so many good reasons to implement games and icebreakers with your students or young people.

Here is a quick checklist of gaming principles:

- Be enthusiastic… whatever happens, be enthusiastic! Believe in what you're doing, engage 100%.
- Choose volunteers carefully, and whatever you do, try not to embarrass participants. Remember that it's only fun if it is done in a safe environment.
- If something is not working very well, go on to another activity. Not every game or ice-breaker works with every group – it's okay.
- In the classroom, choose games that help meet course learning outcomes.

- In the social setting, choose games and icebreakers that are appropriate for the age of your group. If you have a multi-generational |roup, then choose activities that the youngest participants can do and the oldest participants will enjoy.
- Every group is different, so knowing your group will be a huge advantage in the success of your games and icebreakers.

There is one rule that is VERY important! The gaming principle. The success of a game often has to do with the timing of the game.

- The gaming principle is simple, play the game until everyone is having a GREAT time, and then stop it. Leave the participants wanting more. If played too long, a game can become a chore, and your participants may not want to do anything else. This is called 'gaming out'.
- For any activity with an end goal in mind, like a relay race or completion – finish the activity, don't stop in the middle.

How can you increase your success?

- Set up an approximate time frame.
- In the classroom, place the activity carefully within the class period for maximum impact. Create a need, perhaps by asking a good question, or by presenting a scenario or situation that needs a solution or several solutions.
- Don't be predictable with activity placement in a lesson; use beginnings, middle, and end of class times randomly.
- Read the room during the activity. Actively walk around the room engaging with students to assess their engagement.
- In the social setting, many of the same things apply, but usually games and icebreakers are used at the beginning of gatherings to help people get to know each other and create an atmosphere of fun and cooperation.
- For any game in any environment, stop it when the majority of participants are done. Watch for the peak of the game, and then carefully see when participants start disengaging… this is when it's time to stop.

In any setting, debriefing games is often when meaning is drawn from the activity.

- When you're done with a game, talk about it. Have the participants reflect on the activity, exchanging ideas about how the game may apply to their life. Have them share how it felt to play the game.
- If you don't debrief an activity, you may have lost a learning opportunity.

- There are 3 simple steps to debriefing:
    - Reflection – how do I feel?
    - Interpretation – what does this mean?
    - Application – what can I do with this?
- These 3 questions can help guide the debriefing process for almost any game, ice-breaker, or activity.
- To lead a good debriefing session, you should jot down debriefing questions PRIOR to the activity, so that you can facilitate quality debriefing. If you are trying to make a point or pull out responses from your group, then write out some responses that you're looking for. If participants come up with these on their own, great… if they don't, then these points become part of the debriefing YOU provide.
- Always write out your 'wrap up' comments, so there is closure to the activity when you're done.

Let's quickly look at an Adventist Learning Community games and activities resource, The Village, so you can see how each gaming document is set up.

- At the top of the page there is a line that tells you if you need any props for the game. It indicates how long the game might take. 'Audience' indicates the suggested age range. 'Physical' lets you know if the game requires physical activity and an environment where movement can occur or not.
- The next section is a brief introduction of the game. This will give you an idea if it's a game you'd like to use or not.
- There is a section that is called 'materials'. This will let you know what supplies you need for the activity.
- The next section is called 'procedure'. This is the game directions. Read carefully, so you know how the game should run and end.
- On some of the activity sheets, there is also a 'debriefing' section. This will help you debrief the activity if you are using it for a learning moment.
- The last section is 'function in class'. This will help you determine how you can use the activity and even when to use it during a gathering.
- Activities that require paper resources have these on the second or third page of the activity sheet.

Almost every activity, game, or icebreaker requires some kind of team, partners, or groups. Having dozens of 'sorting' methods is important!

- Sorting people can be fun and help create a positive environment. Instead of letting participants choose their own partners, groups, or teams, you can facilitate this process for them. Let's go over several sorting methods.
- You can partner people by color of shoes, birthday, eye color, favorite movie, music, season, holiday, store, major intersection, phone type, country or origin… the list goes on and on.
- For more ideas, see Grouping Gimmicks or Grouping Cards.
- By frequently sorting, participants get to know each other and build safety in the classroom.

Why are active games are important?

- Recent research by Loma Linda University in California is exploring 'sitting disease', a result of sitting far too long over the course of the day. The School of Public Health strongly supports an activity-based lifestyle, and champions change for reversing childhood obesity and preventive fitness strategies.
- In a recent Washington Post article, author Valerie Strauss suggests that far too many children are being diagnosed with ADD and ADHD as a result of the type of learning environment required in most schools… sitting and listening. She suggests that the developing body of a child needs literally hours a day of movement to correctly develop balance and processing centers on the brain!
- Classrooms across North America are installing transitional classroom furnishing including pedals on small children's desks, standing or leaning desks, and movable workstations. Some inner city schools have implemented mandatory treadmill workouts for every student during the school day in order to stimulate the mind and maximize learning! The use of active learning strategies, combined with increased physical movement in the classroom, are urgently needed.
- God has created us in his image. We are wired to move and interact!
- Purposeful play can make a lasting impact on your students. The students who play together, stay together.

References (including a couple great online links for games and icebreakers):

- Knox, Grahame, (2014). 40 Icebreakers for small groups. Retrieved from http://insight.typepad.co.uk/40_icebreakers_for_small_groups.pdf

- Medina, Ernie. (2014). Lifelong lifestyle prevention, assessable to all. Retrieved from http://conference.healthministries.com/speaker/ernie-medina-jr
- Strauss, Valerie. (2014). Why so many kids can't sit still in school today. Washington Post. Retrieved from www.washintonpost.com
- The Source for Youth Ministries, (2014). Games and Icebreakers. Retrieved from http://www.thesource4ym.com/games/