Boundary Breaking

Overview

Boundary Breaking is a group interaction experience that encourages community building. This exercise aims to speed up the process of becoming aware of others. Questions used encourage more than superficial interaction. This exercise also encourages and reinforces the skill of listening.

Time required: 1 class period

What you need

Boundary Breaking Questions (included)

What you do

1) Have the students sit in a circle on the floor, as all persons should be in view of all group members. If a participant has a disability that prevents her/him from sitting on the floor, have all students sit at that person’s level.

2) For privacy, close the classroom door.

3) Instructions for facilitating this activity follow.

Most students feel comfortable when people share information about themselves freely and feel uncomfortable in groups when people refuse to share information. Over time, classes often develop a sense of community, but with encouragement, this process can be accelerated.
BOUNDARY BREAKING
Adapted for Freshman Seminar

Listening is basic to learning. Boundary Breaking practices and reinforces the skill. Past Freshman Seminar students have reported that the questions provoke thought, and encourage personal sharing but are not “too personal” to share with peers and the teacher.

Leadership for Freshman Seminar groups:
The teacher or peer leader works best as the leader of the exercise. It is important that the teacher participate fully in the experience.

Setting:
All persons should be in view of all group members. A circle works best.
Sitting in desks is O.K., but the informality of sitting on the floor works very well. (Should a participant have a physical disability that prevents him/her from sitting on the floor, have all students sit at the disabled person’s level).

Close the classroom door to create a sense of privacy. Form the circle as tightly as possible. When conducted outdoors, the sense of privacy may be lost, and answers may be more difficult to hear.

Length:
The game easily keeps students’ attention for a full 50 minute period.

Special instructions to the leader:
Placing name cards in front of participants helps people learn names. The leader must present a serious face in introducing and conducting Boundary Breaking. Be especially careful of side conversations and jokes. Don’t be afraid to share information about yourself.

It is important that the leader encourage students to give honest answers, to express sincere feelings, and to respect the thoughts and feelings of others. One joker will ruin this experience for all. Laughs, funny answers (when truthful and sincere) are delightful and natural expressions. These can also be defense mechanisms that hide us from others.

Do not explain the questions. Simply read the question again if asked for an explanation. Ask students who speak softly to repeat answers so all can hear.
Read these instructions to participants:
1) Each person is to answer all questions.
2) You may pass while you think, but we will always come back to you. (Leader may wish to appoint a helper who keeps track of people who pass).
3) No one is allowed not to answer.
4) “I don’t know” is not an answer.
5) We are here to listen.
6) We are not here to debate.
7) We are not here to disagree.
8) You may not comment on the answers of others or ask for explanations until the end.
9) The key word is listen..listen..listen.
10) I will read a question, and the person to my right will answer, then the next person and the next...until everyone has answered the question. I will then read another question and the second person to my right will begin. Everyone will have the opportunity to answer first.
11) Don’t repeat the answers of others unless it is truly what you wished to say. (If students say “same as him/her,” ask them to state the answer in their own words).
12) You may give any answer you wish, but answers must be honest and truthful. I request your sincere thoughts and feelings.

BOUNDARY BREAKING QUESTIONS
(May be presented in any order)

1. What is your favorite “toy” at this point in life?
2. What is the title of the last book that you read?
3. What leisure time activity pleases you most?
4. What is the ugliest thing you know?
5. What is the greatest problem in the United States today?
6. What is the best regular program on television?
7. If you could smash one thing and only one thing, what would you smash?
8. If you could travel to any place in the world where would you go to first?
9. What emotion is strongest in you?
10. What do you think people like in you the most?
11. What do you think people like in you the least?
12. Who has most influenced your life?
13. What would you like to be talented at that you are not at the present time?
14. What TV advertisement bothers you the most?
15. What color is love...if you had to paint love?
16. What one day in your life would you like to live over?
17. What delights you most about being at Radford?
18. What is your strongest fear about being a college student?
19. If you were shipwrecked on a desert island, what one item would you most want to take (You cannot take electronic entertainment, e.g. radio, TV, or a friend)?
20. If you could have a dinner conversation with anyone alive today, who would it be?
21. If you build one thing, what would you build?

SYNTHESIS SET

Instructions: Answer the next questions as you think about the experience of the last half hour...

1. What answer (yours or others) surprised you most?
2. I want to know more about___________‘s answer.
3. This group...(complete the sentence)
4. I promise this group...(complete the sentence)
5. How do you feel now?

Leader should thank the group as an ending to this exercise. Groups often physically relax during the game, and the leader might note the success of the experience by calling attention to body positions. Invite people to ask questions, find someone they want to know better, ect. as class ends.

Possible follow-up assignments:

A. Write a reaction to the exercise. What did you notice about yourself during the event?
B. Write a reaction paper about friends. How do you pick your friends? What defines a good friend? Do you initiate friendships or wait to be picked as a friend?
C. How did high school change you?
D. Who will influence you most during your college years and why?