

Knowledge Builders Podcast

Episode 3 – Every Voice Counts in Creating New Knowledge

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>> Welcome to Knowledge Builders, a podcast about education for innovation.

If you're just joining us, we suggest you go back and listen to episode 1 for an introduction to knowledge building principles and practices.

In this episode, you'll hear how students begin creating new knowledge by building on each other's ideas. Students will share how language and feedback play an important role in their classroom, and Jason will share how he observes students digging deeper as new ideas begin to emerge.

A little bit of laughter is always part of the learning in Jason's classroom community. He had an idea of what he was looking for, coming into today's lesson.

>> I have a goal of action, and that was to really move knowledge through and really build on pervasive knowledge, and getting my students to really dig deeper with their knowledge. Coming to today's class, we are going to put my improvable ideas board into action.

Here I've used all of the concepts and ideas that we have been touching upon in the unit, to come up with an improvable idea, because we already know everybody's ideas in this room are good ideas, and they're ideas that are workable, and that can be improved at any given time.

>> Jason's students cluster around the improvable ideas board on the back wall of their classroom, and each pulls a sticky with another student's idea off the wall. Here's Anthony's choice.

>> I chose Nora's theory, because it looked kind of interesting. She said that, "My theory is that fluids take the shape of their container. An example, when in a square glass, water/or fluid will take the shape of a square, its container." I'm going to go more in depth about why fluids take the shape of their container. I know a lot more about that, so I can expand on it a little bit better.

>> The class grabs their binders and pencil cases and spreads out across the classroom into groups of about four or five. They then begin smaller knowledge building circles. They're working together to improve a peer's original idea, and prompt each other with questions that begin to shape new knowledge.

>> I have another question about what Sophia was saying. When the oil is mixing, is it only in rough water? Because I know not all fluids or liquids actually mix. So, like, if it was in a calm water, would it be on top of the water and just sit there? And would that make clean-up easier than if it was in rough water?

>> What I read was is that if it's really rough, wavy, I think it makes the oil and water, like, really well to mix together. But if it's, like --

>> Some students see the benefits of smaller knowledge building circles.

>> Usually with bigger knowledge circles, we can't really go in depth with all of our ideas. So having, like, four or five people in a group, it was really nice because we could really dig deep into the idea and go further and build more questions that we could go and research further. And also, being able to share with everyone that the atmosphere was super comfortable.

>> Well, I like to share my ideas a lot, so I felt that I didn't have to wait such a long time to share my next idea, because when other people are talking, you start processing more ideas and you want to expand. So I felt that with less people, it was, again, easier to get your thought around, and everybody else was able to just expand on your idea, and it just kept growing and growing.

>> Both Marlene Scardamalia, our resident KB expert, and Jason note that it's important to use both sizes of KB circles in the classroom.

>> This notion of different formats being cultivated in a flexible context is really super important, so having students be able to go talk in their small groups, it was really interesting that they experienced the ability to go in greater depth under those conditions. Sometimes small groups, as small as two, seems to be just one of the really important pieces, as is being able to work in the larger group.

>> I think it's really important to have the larger circles, because you got to hear a wide variety of ideas. And then those ideas are still sitting out there, and then students can bring those other ideas in a larger knowledge building circle to the smaller knowledge building circles. So I think as valuable as the smaller knowledge building circles are, I think it's very, very important to still have the whole class larger ones, because there are more ideas flourishing, and more ideas being thrown out there.

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>> Since today we were in the smaller groups, people felt more comfortable in that environment, so they would actually contribute. So I thought it was

interesting to hear that people who don't usually share much in class had so many good ideas that we could just build off of.

>> Selina, who you remember from our last episode, was the student at the back of the class who did not always feel comfortable participating. But now she's reached a level of comfort in Jason's class and shares ideas openly with her peers.

>> If it was [INAUDIBLE] went into the [INAUDIBLE], so that's why it's good --

>> She's a student who calls herself "shy" for the most part. But she says the small KB circles allow her a safe space in order to build new knowledge with her group.

>> Because I get we're going by special skills as well, because I have parts of it. So it's better for that as well.

>> So shy students report time and time again that the chance to talk to somebody individually, oftentimes in small groups, to be able to write down an idea, to be able to reflect, take time to write about it -- really important. Again, they report that once they see that people appreciate their ideas, it helps them move from those quieter, more private formats to the larger group activity.

>> Language has become another important tool in Jason's classroom. He's taught his students that all ideas are valuable, which allows them to give feedback to each other in a meaningful and constructive way.

>> Well, you say something good to them first. So it gives them self-confidence. And then, you know, say, maybe next time, kindly, respectfully, and say maybe next time what I would do, and explain it to them; give them examples.

>> We don't talk and use lingo like, "That's not right," or, "That's wrong," or, "Hey, correct it." "I would like to build off of her," "I think her idea can be improved upon because..." Right? So every student is seeing that even the smallest, simple idea is an idea that's valuable in my classroom community, but that ideas grow and flourish, and may be improved all the time.

>> I feel like Mr. Frenza always looks upon all of our feelings. So when he does that, it really helps us out and makes us comfortable in our classroom, so that when we talk to each other, it's not, "Oh, you know what, you messed up, it's not good enough, mine's better." It's always, "Oh, you know what? You could have improved it, here's how." "I need to improve my own ideas so we can work on it together." It's really nice to just look at it and when you give them feedback, they see it through your perspective so you can combine ideas and make it even better than it was before.

>> Everybody needs expanding on their ideas, including myself. When you have other people and you see how other people think and how they can expand on your own idea, it makes you think more.

>> Jason says he can also see students improving their ideas when they start to rise above their earlier understandings.

>> I can definitely see how improvable ideas are flourishing and growing in my classroom community. They're connecting ideas and they're synthesizing ideas together, and they're rising above. And I really see now how the principle of "rise above" is really starting to develop in my classroom. I'm really, really excited because now I'm starting to see how, and I'm starting to think about where am I going to go next with the principle of "rise above."

>> So students need to realize that in order to rise above, they have to find ideas that, oh, well, if that one's right, that one couldn't be right. So how do we put together something that comes up with a coherent explanation that makes sense of all of the facts that we've come to understand in our studies? Rise above is really difficult. So seeing his students being able to take multiple ideas and find a coherent explanation that dealt with that idea, diversity, that is really powerful.

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>> Knowledge Builders was produced by MediaFace on behalf of the Ministry of Education Student Achievement Division. For more educational resources, including a listening guide to accompany each episode, all of the episodes in this series and a photo gallery of Jason's classroom, visit TheLearningExchange.ca.

Coming up next time, students take back their original sticky and see how their ideas have grown. And Jason talks about the different ways he conducts assessment in his class.

Thanks for listening!