

Knowledge Builders Podcast Episode 4 – The Power of a KB Community

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>> Hi. 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, our final episode, you'll hear rich reflections about how knowledge building has impacted student learning throughout the unit. Jason will share how his assessment practices have changed, and the many benefits he's seen in student confidence and achievement by taking the KB approach to learning.

>> I want to take a look at how our ideas have grown over the course of the unit. I would like to concentrate on how have your ideas changed, how have they improved? Are there still ideas that are still flowing out there that you're still wanting to know more about?

>> As class begins, students get back their original idea about fluids, plus the stickies from the two peers who improved it. The class then gets into their final KB of the unit for deep discussion and reflection.

>> So Anthony, why don't you tell us about your initial theory?

>> Okay. So my initial theory was that by using certain physical systems, you can change the state of a liquid. So obviously I went back two units, to physical systems and social systems. And then my idea was improved by Zane, and he said that there are different types of physical systems that can have its own effect on liquids. For example --

>> After going around the circle, students start to share their thoughts on the power of community knowledge in their classroom. Let's listen in to their discussion.

>> Building off of Abby's knowledge when instead of all of us just researching one topic, we all learned more about each and every topic, which lets us go deeper into what we're learning about.

>> Building off of what Michael said, if we were to use a textbook, we'd have the exact same information in front of all of us, and we wouldn't really have a variety or anything to share. So when you go and use the inquiry process and search it on your own, coming back together and airing out the ideas and talking with other

people and improving them makes it -- there's a bigger variety of what we can talk about.

>> Everybody in the community is giving a little bit of help. A little help can go a long way. That means typically 30 people helping as opposed to one person being in charge, and the notion that those little bits of help have put together this powerful community, I think, is just lovely.

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>> As a student who self-identifies as shy, Selina reflects on how knowledge building has changed the way she sees herself.

>> I just talked to everyone, and I don't really do that very often on my own. It feels like my opinions more valid, and I find that it just boosts my confidence, knowing that people listen to me.

>> But Knowledge Builders also taught new skills to more vocal students, like Abigail.

>> Well, even though knowledge building is a confidence booster, for some people it also gives them an understanding of when they should be quiet, because I was always a really outgoing student; I have an answer for everything. But through this knowledge building experience, I've been able to understand when I need to be quiet and let somebody else answer the question, because not only will that help them learn and feel more confident, it will help the knowledge building circle run smoothly.

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>> The group reflects on how knowledge building principles will help them in many different ways beyond the classroom.

>> I think that this knowledge building circles and improvable idea cards, they show us that a lot of the stuff we learn here must relate to the real world and what's beyond these four walls.

>> I think that it prepares us because in the future, a lot of jobs, you need to work together. So a lot of it is collaborative. So you need to be able to know how to work in a group.

>> I believe that the knowledge building circles have also improved my communication skills, that I'm also able to express my ideas more, and I think that will be very important for the future when I have to explain something.

>> When we think of how we're going to develop a twenty-first century thinker, they are our future, right? So they're really seeing the work that they're doing now and really recognizing that, hey, what I'm doing in my classroom is so important, because it's going to prepare me for my future.

>> Jason's role has been integral to helping students expand their thinking, and feel safe taking risks in his class.

>> Well, it feels really good because I'm really taking a step back from direct teaching, and I'm really taking a step back from textbook style teaching, and allowing them to really be the drivers of their own learning. A lot of the inquiry that we've done in the class was from them. And just me setting the stage and setting those learning goals that have been co-created with them, but them really meeting regularly and having many knowledge building circles and gaining a better understanding of how fluids are part of our world.

>> I think it's pretty safe to say that you're not like all of the other teachers, you're more of, like, a guiding hand to everybody in this classroom. You encourage everybody to speak and to share their ideas, because it can bring so many great things that not everybody could have thought of.

>> This notion that if we need you, you'll be there but we don't need you all the time, so we can move forward on our own. And I thought that was a really interesting reflection.

>> His rule is so much about the creation of the knowledge building community itself, and that I think if teachers get the sense that when you have such a community, the community itself can start helping you in many ways, so that you don't have to be the centre of every conversation. The students actually are emboldened and actually have a great deal of agency in the conduct of the classroom.

>> Jason shares how his approach to assessment has changed as his KB practice has evolved.

>> Assessment and evaluation ties really nicely into knowledge building, where teachers are setting the stage for students to engage in inquiry, but that inquiry has driven from the curriculum document which also outlines the overall and the specific expectations. And from there on in, it's the students being the drivers and really researching the learning goals, and tying in everyday concepts that support those learning goals.

My assessment so far has really been concentrating a lot on one-to-one conferencing as students are engaged in their research and building that knowledge for their inquiry assignment. So one of the main goals of this unit in

the curriculum expectations is, the first unit's really to investigate various types of fluids and how they both positively and negatively impact the environment, and also looking at the cost involved in cleaning up those spills. So I spent a lot of time with the students building, spending one-on-one time with them, rolling around on my "Really Chair," as I always call it, meeting with students and having them meet with each other.

My improvable ideas board is the next phase of my assessment, so I will, once they're done, I will go to the board and I will make some anecdotal notes. I will look at are there any misconceptions from some of these ideas, and is there any direct teaching that I need to do to steer them in the right direction.

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>> Students say they've come a long way since they've first started with knowledge building in their classroom.

>> Well, when we first started doing knowledge building, I didn't participate at all. And now I'm participating little bit by little bit; maybe not as much as some people are, but I still am participating. I get to be able to talk to someone that maybe I probably won't talk to them on my own. And this way, it's just everyone gets to listen to me and understand me.

>> Earlier in the year when we did our very first knowledge building circle and not too many of us were very fond with what was happening, I feel that there were certain students who did step up and just kind of vocalize what they wanted to say, voiced their opinion. And then some students left, and they were, like, wow, that was really cool, right? So the next knowledge building circle we had, more students stepped up because they know that if they start stepping up along with the other students, it'll be greater, and it'll just be overall better and a better learning opportunity and experience. So I think that's how the knowledge building circles have also grown since the beginning of the year.

>> I feel like when you go into the initial process of a knowledge circle and start to talk, or are waiting to talk, it's kind of nerve-wracking. But once you get over it, it boosts your confidence and also makes you feel like you know, when you leave at the end of the day, that you contributed and you helped in a person's development and knowledge.

>> A teacher really hopes to and wants to make a difference for the lives of their students, and help them reach their fullest potential, and for me, through knowledge building, I set the stage for students to really motivate them to want to learn. And I allow them to reach their fullest potential. And that's what a knowledge building classroom community does; it really encourages students to become lifelong learners and to really reach their fullest potential. As a teacher, that's the greatest gift that you could ever want.

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>> Throughout this series, you've had the opportunity to peek inside a knowledge building classroom, and see first-hand how students' ideas evolve. We hope you've enjoyed this inside look into Jason's class, and hearing the power of knowledge building in action. Maybe it's even inspired you to start integrating a KB principle into your classroom community.

Knowledge Builders was produced by MediaFace on behalf of the Ministry of Education Student Achievement Division. For more education resources, including a listening guide to accompany each episode, all of the episodes in this series and a photo gallery of Jason's classroom, along with some of the tools he has used in his assessment -- thanks for listening!