
KNOWLEDGE BUILDING IN ACTION

PRIMARY (K-3)



KB in Primary — What Makes a Community?

Written by Mubina Panju and Angela Hoffman

Bringing IDEAS to life!

1.2 KNOWLEDGE BUILDING IN PRIMARY: WHAT MAKES A COMMUNITY?

Written by Mubina Panju and Angela Hoffman, Senior Kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers, HWDSB

INTRODUCTION

After being introduced to the principles of Knowledge Building at an information session, Mubina, a Full Day Kindergarten teacher and Angela, a Grade 1 teacher, looked through both their curricula to determine a commonality where both classes could participate in a Knowledge Building Journey.

KB PROVOCATION

Mubina and Angela: As we went through the curriculum, we landed upon the social studies expectations of the local community.

- **Kindergarten Education:** Overall Expectation 3: demonstrate an awareness of their surroundings
- **Grade One Expectation:** B2. Inquiry: use the social studies inquiry process to investigate some aspects of the interrelationship between people and different natural and built features of their local community, with a focus on significant short- and long-term effects of this interrelationship.

We combined the two classes and asked the question, “**What makes a community?**” One of the theories was that “People make a community.” From there, we invited guest speakers from the community (parents) to discuss their jobs. Some of our guest speakers’ jobs included: pizza maker, produce manager in a grocery store, engineer, personal support worker in a nursing home, paramedic, volunteer at Good Sheperd, actor, etc.

STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINING IDEA IMPROVEMENT:

Move 1

As each speaker came in, the two classes were combined and as one teacher facilitated the discussion, the other teacher documented students' ideas and questions in the Knowledge Forum (see Figure 1). One of the ideas that students were really interested in was about recycling in the grocery store. The parent who worked as a produce manager had explained what happens to all of the boxes when produce is unloaded and put on the grocery store shelves. During a Knowledge Building Circle, students indicated that they wanted to know what happened to the boxes in the grocery store. This led to a discussion about recycling and garbage. Students then inquired about what happened to the garbage in our school. Students conducted a 'garbage audit' of our school playground. Students went outside and sorted the type of garbage they found on our playground into either 'garbage' or 'recyclable material.' Afterwards, the findings were tallied (we incorporated a lot of math during this time!), and another Knowledge Building Circle revealed that students wanted to know where the recycling and garbage ended up. Students watched videos and read books about garbage collection, landfills and recycling stations. This led to deep discussions about reducing, reusing, and recycling. We continually added students' ideas and questions to Knowledge Forum.

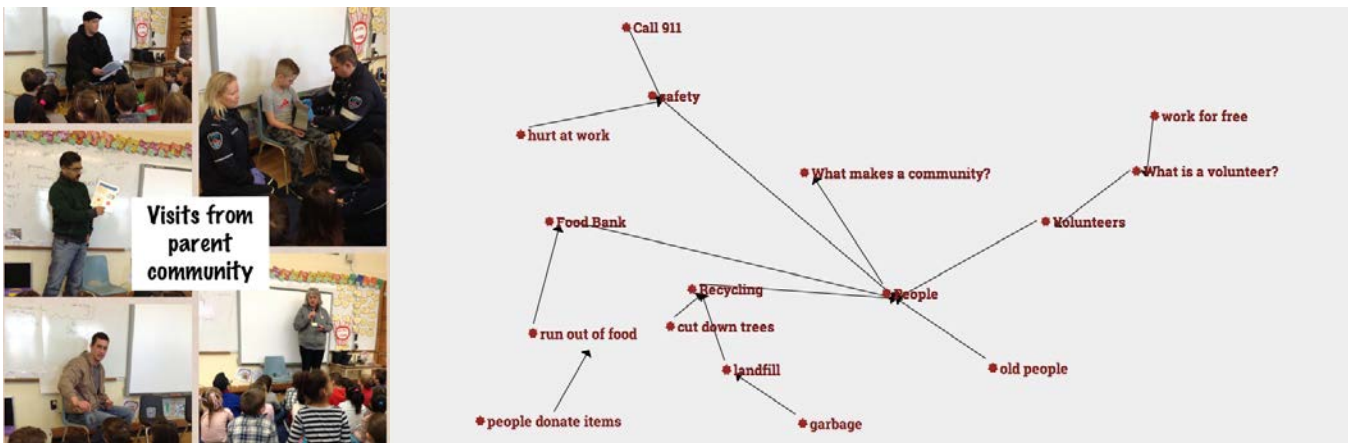


Figure 1. Parents visited the classroom to talk about their jobs in the community (left) and our Knowledge Forum "view" exploring the question, "What makes a community?" (right).

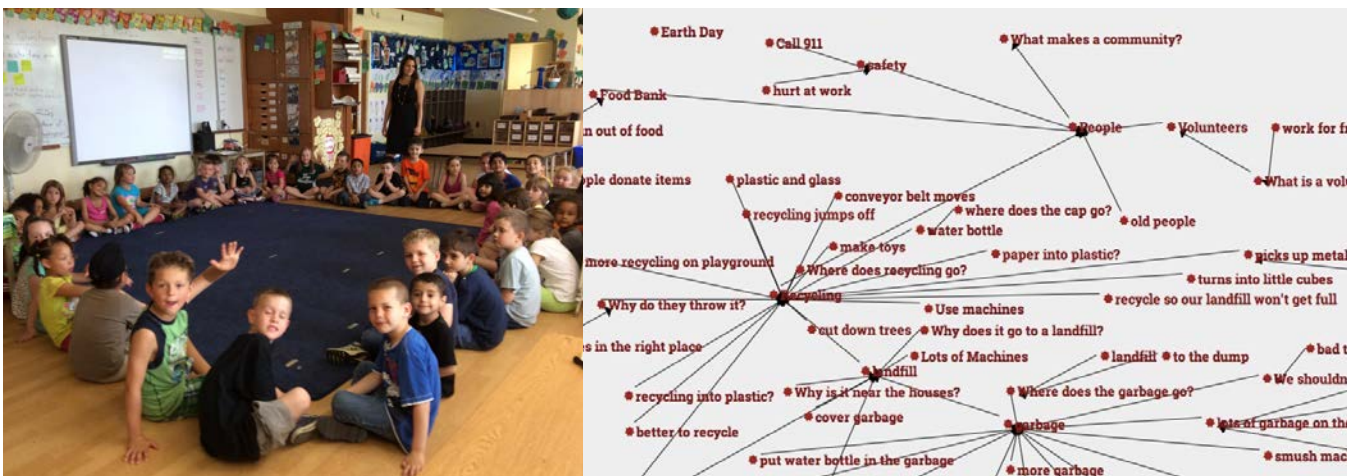


Figure 2. A Knowledge Building Circle (left) and our Knowledge Forum view exploring recycling and garbage (right).

Move 2

We decided to investigate another question that the students had asked earlier, "How do they keep the workers safe at work?". A Health and Safety expert in the electricity field came to the class and presented how his job helps monitor workplace safety. He brought equipment, showed pictures and discussed the importance of his job. This led to various questions and theories about electricity. We added students' thinking to the Knowledge Forum. While the inquiry began with the Grade 1 Social Studies strand: The Local Community, the focus changed to the Grade 1 Science strand: Energy in Our Lives. Students investigated how electricity is used in their daily lives. They also shared their ideas about how to stay safe around electricity.

Move 3

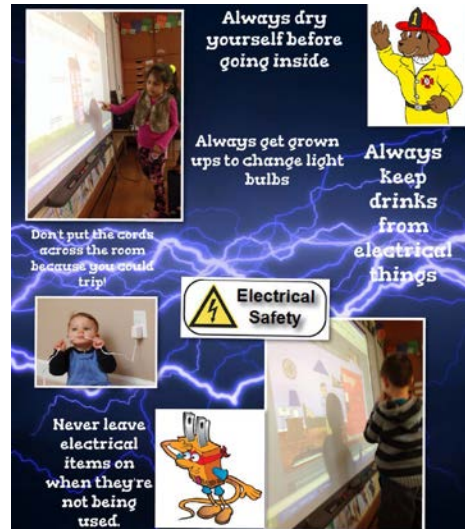
Students then began to ask questions about how to save electricity and energy. We ran a Knowledge Building Circle and student ideas and theories were added to the Knowledge Forum. These discussions led the classes to investigate ways to save energy and to learn about renewable and nonrenewable resources.



Student work on renewable energy (left and right).



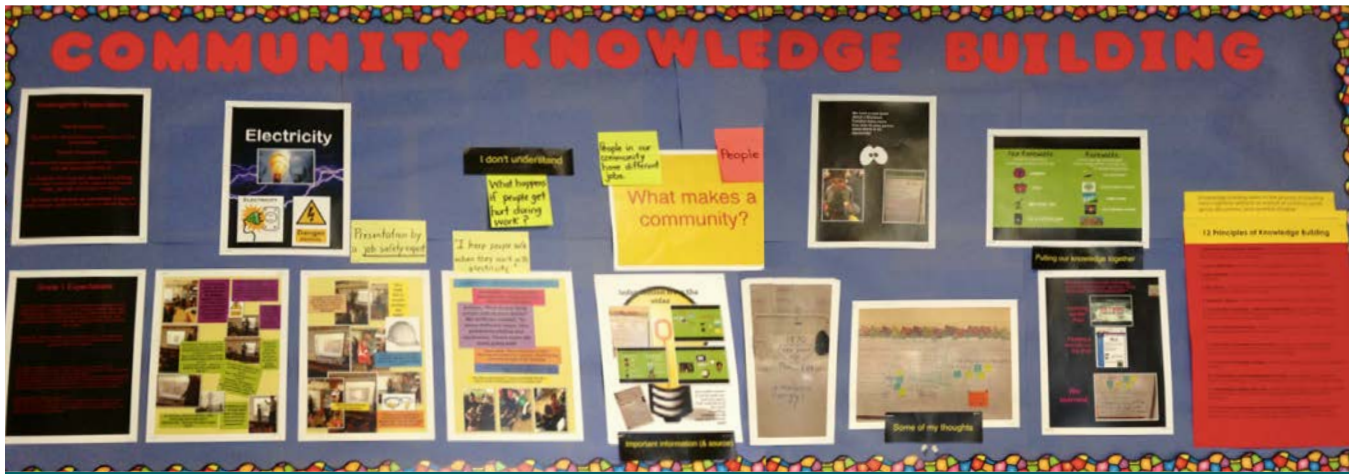
The Health & Safety expert showing the class some equipment used to keep workers safe.



Staying safe around electricity.

Move 4

We created a Community Knowledge Building Board in the main hallway of our school. The intent was to highlight student thinking and explain more about the process of Knowledge Building. Parents also enjoyed the visual display and it fostered a stronger connection between home and school learning.



The Knowledge Building Bulletin Board

REFLECTING ON THE KB PRINCIPLE(S)

Idea Diversity: Students were encouraged to contribute their ideas throughout the process and their ideas were all documented on the Knowledge Forum. Students felt a huge sense of empowerment when they saw their ideas represented on the Forum; it made them feel like their thoughts were valuable and important for the whole class. Having their ideas presented in a visual format also helped springboard other students' ideas.

Democratizing Knowledge: Getting a range of ideas was important as it helped students understand that everyone was a contributor in this process. As teachers, we modeled this throughout by adding our own ideas to the Knowledge Forum and being participants in the learning.

Real Ideas, Authentic Problems: "Identifying problems to understand the world": Students are highly engaged when they can relate the issue to their daily lives. Exploring the garbage in our school playground and discussing electrical safety as applicable in their own lives, really motivated students to take charge of their own learning.

What Did our Students Learn/Gain from the Knowledge Building Process?

- We learned how to listen each other's ideas
- We learned to question and build upon ideas
- We changed our thinking
- We raised awareness in our school community about waste management

- We advocated for litterless lunches
- We learned that what happens to the Earth is in OUR hands
- We developed empathy and awareness for people who use food banks
- We collected food to donate to our local food bank
- We wondered how people stay safe at work and who keeps them safe
- We questioned our energy sources and wonder why we don't always use renewable sources
- We wondered if we can make our own renewable energy
- We learned not to be wasteful of electricity to protect our environment
- We learned how to research ideas
- We worked to improve our ideas
- We shared our knowledge with each other and other classes
- We took ownership over our learning

Integrating the learning into report cards was initially a challenge as we had amassed a lot of documentation. Learning Skills are a great place to document observations about students during a Knowledge Building Inquiry.

Sample Report Card Comments

Kindergarten

(Science and Technology) _____ is encouraged to communicate her ideas clearly so that others can understand her thought processes and build/respond to her ideas. This helps to solidify understanding of concepts and will help _____ think of new ideas for further inquiry. _____ investigates and uses the computer and iPad with assistance, and is working to build independence when using these tools for Knowledge Building.

Grade One

(Learning Skills) _____ is able to use his own ideas and experiences to support his learning. _____ demonstrates curiosity and an interest in learning about the world around him. He is also open to new ideas and takes appropriate risks. During our Knowledge Building Inquiry Unit about the community, _____ readily participate and provided interesting and insightful comments and questions. _____ will be encouraged to think of new ideas to further inquiry.