
KNOWLEDGE BUILDING IN ACTION INTERMEDIATE (7–8)



**A Knowledge Building Buffet!
Working with Ideas in Grade 7**

Written by Allison Kemper

Bringing IDEAS to life!

3.1 A KNOWLEDGE BUILDING BUFFET! WORKING WITH IDEAS IN GRADE 7

Written by Allison Kemper, Grade 7 teacher, HWDSB

INTRODUCTION

Allison Kemper teaches Grade 7 core at W.H. Ballard Elementary School in Hamilton. Ballard is an inner-city school with a very diverse population, and a focus on developing positive mental health strategies and well-being in its students. Allison wanted to make learning in her classroom relevant and engaging for her Grade 7s, and to bring student voice and choice to the forefront through both hands-on and minds-on projects and high-interest topics. She also wanted to deepen a culture of inclusion and respect along with her students.

START WITH THE KB PRINCIPLES

Improvable Ideas — there is no right or wrong answer, all ideas can be improved and built upon. To Allison, this meant that everyone felt empowered to share their ideas, even if they weren't sure they were on the right track, because this might inspire ideas and thinking in someone else. She wanted to model being a life-long learner to help students develop a growth mindset.

What was one of your deepest learnings?

Often students know more about a topic than I do, and that's ok. I don't need to be the holder of the knowledge in my room. I encourage my students to become the experts and ask adults in their community or home to share their insights.

Knowledge Building Discourse — This encourages students to justify their ideas and opinions with evidence; Allison typically ends learning time with KB Circles, and has found that short sharing time is more effective with her class (10 minutes) on a daily basis, rather than long sharing time. She has also found starting the conversations with the following prompts work very well to kick off student dialogue:

What did you learn today? Can anyone build on what _____ said?

Did anyone's research or anyone's ideas connect with what _____ shared? How has your thinking changed?

Real Ideas and Authentic Problems — Probably one of the most important things for intermediate students is the question: "Why are we learning this?" because they need to see an immediate connection between what they are learning and their personal connection to it. We are always looking for opportunities to extend the learning outside the classroom and into the community. Being in the city means Allison can walk her class to the local pizza shop to learn about heat in science, or take the city bus to the art gallery to meet an artist-in-residence.

CONNECTIONS TO THE CURRICULUM

Allison wanted students to engage with two particular reading expectations in the Grade 7 Language curriculum:

- demonstrate understanding of increasingly complex texts by summarizing important ideas and citing a variety of details that support the main idea
- extend understanding of texts, including increasingly complex or difficult texts, by connecting the ideas in them to their own knowledge, experience, and insights, to other familiar texts, and to the world around them (Ontario Language Curriculum Grades 1-8, 2006, pp. 127-128.)

KB PROVOCATION

Allison wanted students to engage the Big Ideas of social action and civic engagement through the question: What inspires someone to step up and take a stand? This question was inspired by the Step Up! unit in the Nelson Grade 7 literacy resource (Hume & Ledgerwood, 2007). The following is a brief outline of the teacher and student moves that propelled the Knowledge Building work forward from this initial question.

Move 1

We started with the question: What inspires someone to take a stand? Allison posted this question on a sheet of paper on one wall of the classroom. This post served as the visual anchor for the KB Wall that the class would build together on that wall. During a 60-minute period, Allison led a discussion to brainstorm topics and issues that represented things that the students did not like to see in their community, in their personal lives or in the media, something that they wanted to take a stand on or something that inspired them to take a stand.

Move 2

The students helped Allison group issues together into themes. She then wrote the main themes on separate sheets of paper, and posted them around the main idea on the KB Wall (see Figure 1 on the next page).

What surprised you?

How Knowledge Building can work for any student. My level 4 students can dig really deep, create complex theories and build on each other's thinking independently, while my students who are on IEPs or who have learning or behavioural needs, can focus on just one idea that interests or inspires them. I can easily modify for these students. For example, they can create one "I wonder..." card, and find research to help them respond to their question and deepen their ideas on the question.

Move 3

To demonstrate to the students how they ought to begin using authoritative sources constructively, Allison looked for current news events on cbc.ca and found an article and some video clips of Miley Cyrus taking a stand against the wolf cull in BC. Allison completed a modeled reading activity where she highlighted the important information and then summarized the information onto a Summary Card. This card would be used to elicit students' wonderings and questions related to the issue or problem they find personally meaningful.

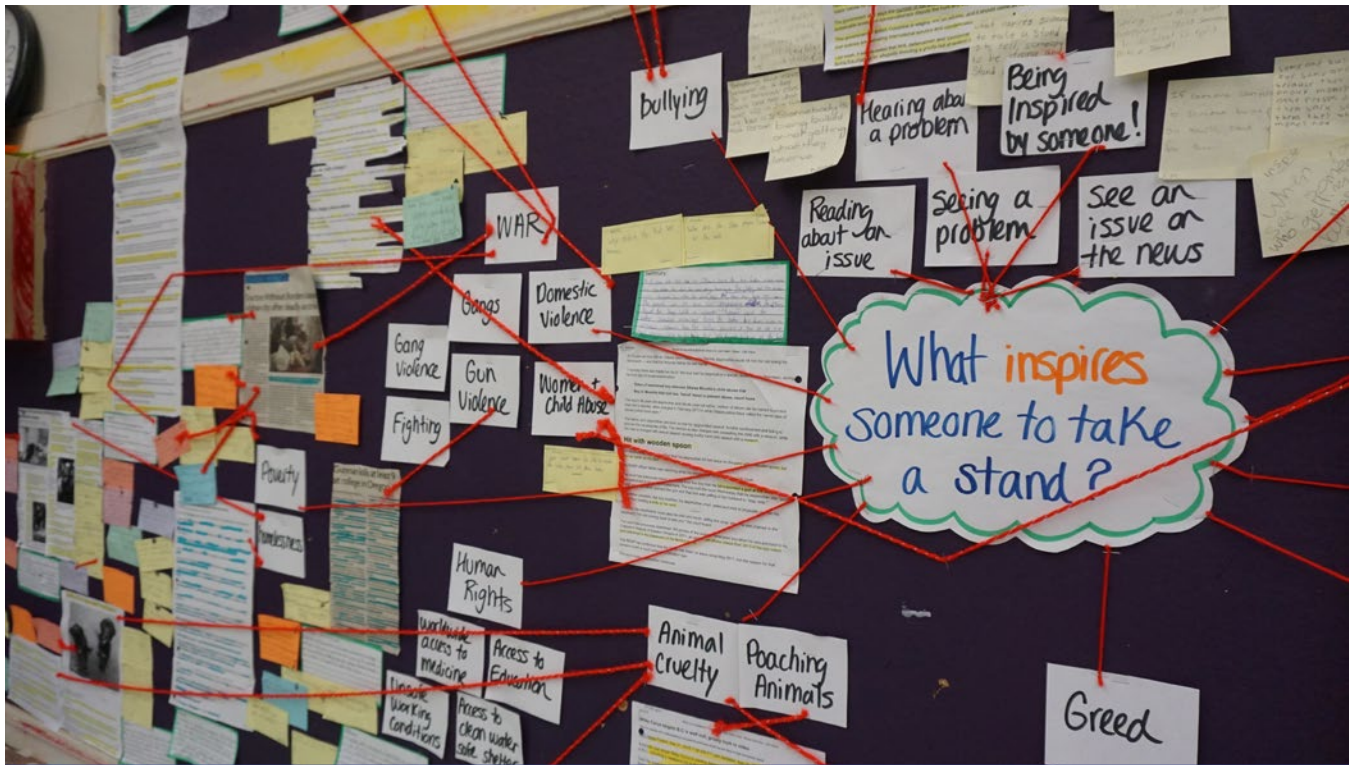


Figure 1. The Grade 7 KB Wall focusing on the Big Question: What inspires someone to take a stand?

Move 4

Each student then picked an issue that they were interested in or had a personal connection to, and then went onto cbc.ca to find an article about their topic. They printed off the article, highlighted the important information, and summarized the main ideas onto the Summary Card.

Move 5

Students then had to create three "I wonder" tags and post the tags beside their articles.

Move 6

Students spent the next three periods, answering their own questions or moving onto their peer's articles and questions. Students were encouraged to look for connections between articles posted by their peers and also use the "Connection" tag to make a text-to-text, text-to-self, or text-to-world connections.

STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINING IDEA IMPROVEMENT

Move 7

In order to encourage students to engage in sustained Knowledge Building Discourse, Allison gave students sustained opportunities to post their ideas and research discoveries on the classroom KB Wall. To help students do this, Allison created colourful paper “tags” based on the Knowledge Building Scaffolds in the Knowledge Forum online platform (see Figure 2). These “tags” included space for students to write as well as the KB Scaffolds, which included the following dialogue moves:

- I Wonder...
- My Theory is...
- Evidence to Support:
- Evidence to Discount:
- Building On/New Learning:
- A Definition:
- Did You Know...



Figure 2. The Knowledge Building “buffet” comprised of squares of paper colour-coded with different KB Scaffolds.

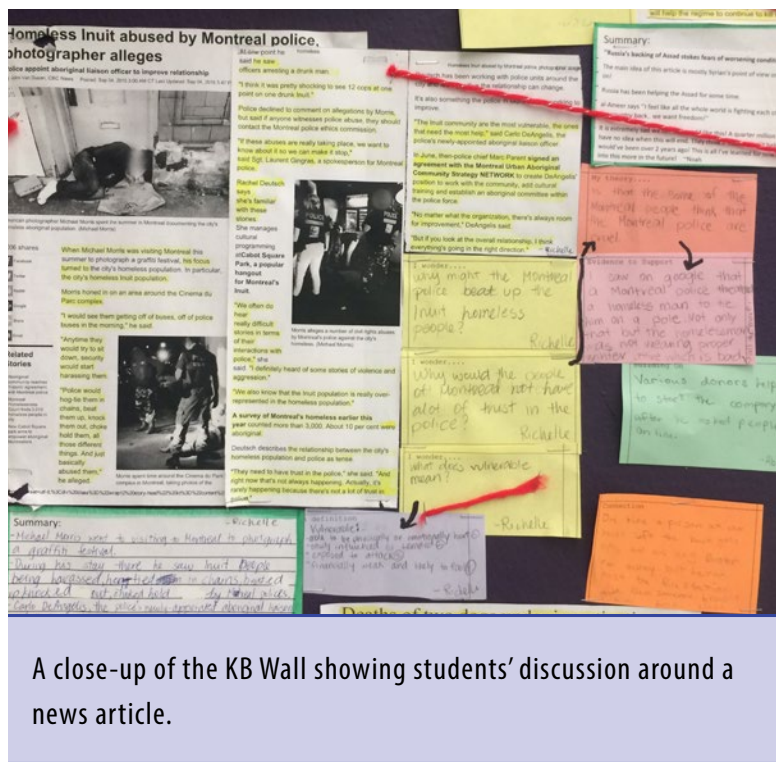
Allison organized the coloured tags into trays, which she coined their “Knowledge Building Buffet” (see above.) Each group of students got a Knowledge Building Buffet tray.

Move 8

Students were encouraged to create contributions to post on the KB wall to help them advance their ideas about the central question, “What makes someone take a stand?”

Students selected the correct tag/scaffold to help share their thinking and learning.

Students needed to be concise, and summarize or synthesize their ideas when writing on the tags. Students were encouraged to build on the ideas of others, make connections, keep posing wonderings, find their own evidence to support or discount theories, and continually dig deeper and build collective knowledge on their shared question.



A close-up of the KB Wall showing students' discussion around a news article.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Conferencing: Conferencing was one main assessment strategy Allison used to understand depth of student understanding, to identify student misconceptions and to help students deepen their ideas.

Written Response: Additionally, students were asked to respond individually in writing to a final question, as posed in the Nelson resource: What inspires you to step up and take a stand? Allison added one element to this question, and asked her students to “use evidence from your own research and the work of others in the class to help explain your thinking.” At this point, every student in the class was able to respond to this question and had tools for how to lay out and structure their ideas in their written response.

Culminating Assignment: The high engagement with different kinds of media text helped students to prepare them for their summative assignment which incorporated persuasive writing. The goal was to apply their ideas and understandings about what causes social action and change and to create a media text to inspire others to take a stand on an issue.

REFERENCES

Hume, K. & Ledgerwood, B. (2007). *Nelson Literacy 7: Student Book 7A*. Nelson Canada ELHI.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2006). *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8, Language*.

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