Building Educator Epistemic Agency Through Self Reflection

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My Authentic Challenge

While taking the fall CTL 1603: Introduction to Knowledge Building course, I was presented with the task of writing a self-assessment reflecting on my engagement with the 12 Principles of Knowledge Building in terms of maximizing contributions to community knowledge. Being relatively new to Knowledge Building, and the 12 Principles, I found this to be a challenging task. Literature on Knowledge Building identifies that moving to the principle-based approach of Knowledge Building is challenging for educators and it requires "a shift in teachers' practices and beliefs" (Scardamalia and Bereiter, 2007). In order to make this shift, teachers themselves will require a high level of epistemic agency (Scardamalia, 2001). Supportive tools are needed to assist KB educators in "building agency in assessing [their] own collaborative learning" (Chen & Hong, 2016) and to support the development of implementing the 12 KB Principles in their classrooms. I was very intrigued by the KB Progressions found on pages 66-69 of the Gaining and Sustaining Momentum document in the *Knowledge Building Gallery*. I felt that a progression outlining the vision of the KB Principles, as well as possible stages of development that one may go through as they work towards the vision of KB, would be useful and supportive for educators engaging with the KB principles in their practice.

Major Goal

A major goal would be to work with KB educators to build onto the KB Progressions outlined in the Gaining and Sustaining Momentum document (found in the Knowledge Building Gallery) in order for teachers to reflect on their KB environment, deepen their understanding of the 12 KB Principles, and to develop innovative ways of implementing the KB Principles in their KB communities.

Promising Practices

As Zhang and Scardamalia (2007) note, "[s]ustainable knowledge building requires working with emergent rather than fixed goal structures and opportunism in knowledge work rather than fixed routines. Thus a KB pedagogical model requires teacher innovation surrounding a principled rather than procedural approach to teaching." Educators should feel empowered to be creative and innovative when shifting to embrace the KB Principles. Making a shift to one's practice can be challenging without knowing the destination, or at least having some sort of map as a guide. A KB progression outlining early practice, developing practice, deepening practice and the vision of KB within the four areas of focus: Community Knowledge, Sustained Idea Improvement, Surpassing Ourselves and Taking Charges at the Highest Levels, could be that map. This progression would support reflective practitioners in identifying where they are currently at in their KB practice and where to go next. Being able to identify and set one's own professional learning goals leads to increased autonomy, mastery, and purpose, which according to Daniel Pink (2009), is what fuels motivation and drive. A KB progression could also be used as a tool by KB principals and leaders to support Professional Learning Communities (PLC) or Collaborative Inquiries (CI) focused on creating KB communities. Katz & Dack's research has identified that there are "three key enablers of professional learning that are the precursor to changed classroom practice: the practice of establishing and supporting clear and defensible *learning foci* for students, teachers, and leaders; the practice of *collaborative inquiry* that challenges thinking and practice; and the practice of *instructional leadership* (both formal and informal)" (Katz & Dack, 2013). Furthermore, Katz & Dack state that "Conceptual change happens when people make their current beliefs explicit, subject them to scrutiny from themselves and others, consider how new information either fits or challenges their existing beliefs, and then make permanent changes to what they know and do" (Katz & Dack, 2013). A KB progression could be used to support teachers and leaders participating in a CI in establishing his/her "learning foci" and then to consider what next step he/she would like to try in order to move student learning and KB forward in the classroom or school. This next step may require the KB educator(s) to deepen his/her understanding about a specific KB principle prior to trying a new approach. As Katz and Dack (2013) describe, "Classroom practice can't truly change in the areas in which it needs to until the *understanding* that is the foundation of the practice change". A KB progression may also be a useful tool for KB principals in providing feedback to KB educators around co-identified learning foci. The progression could provide possible "look fors" that could help bring focus to discussions and assist in identifying small next steps to support knowledge builders.

Advances and Challenges

Advances are being made in schools embarking on KB journeys. In a recent blog post on the *Learning Forward Ontario* website, Robert Iannuzzi and Monica Resendes shared a school's Knowledge Building journey using the Knowledge Building principles as a framework for professional learning. The blog identifies the following positive impacts for staff and students: increased sense of collective efficacy, an increase in student voice and student agency, teachers working as contemplative practitioners, and the deprivatization of practice (Iannuzzi & Resendes, 2019). I believe a KB progression could support students, educators, administrators, and KB leaders in this type of collaborative work. In terms of challenges, there are a few. As mentioned, KB progressions already exist within the KB Gallery on the Learning Exchange. How widely used are these progressions? Is there a way to determine how KB educators currently use these progressions? How could the impact of the use of a KB progression be determined and measured? When I proposed a KB progression for self-reflection in the CTL Knowledge Building course, the idea was not taken up by the group. Would a self-reflection tool be used by KB educators and KB principals or is it more suitable for students? Are there KB educators willing to work on developing a KB progression that would focus on deepening educator understanding of the 12 KB Principles?

Reflections and Next Steps

In order deepen understanding of the 12 KB principles, KB educators and principals need to know where they are currently at in terms of their own understanding of KB and where they are headed. A KB progression that would support self-reflection and provide possible next steps to deepen understanding of the KB principles is a promising idea. I believe this tool would be used by educators, especially if it was a web-based tool with links built-in throughout the progression that would connect to video examples, teacher reflections, and other KB research. In order to create this tool, the next best move would be to gather a group of KB educators (with varying KB experience) to begin collaboration on the progression.

References

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