

Supporting Educators in Symmetric Knowledge Advancement through Collaborative Professionalism

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Our Authentic Challenge

During the fall of 2018, I participated in the CTL 1603 course: *Introduction to Knowledge Building*. Early in the course, the class self-organized into groups based on particular areas of interest. I became part of a group focused on pedagogy and teacher education. Our group's authentic design challenge became focused on how to make KB more accessible to educators. As noted in the literature on KB and professional learning, this is an area of KB work that needs to be given increased attention:

If our goal is to develop students as adept knowledge workers in the knowledge era, it is *important that teachers themselves become knowledge builders*— they need to engage in progressive inquiry working towards improvable ideas and collective advances. Hence there is an emerging need to *develop new models of and approaches to examining how teachers create knowledge collectively for 21st century new educational goals* (Chan & Song, 2010).

The literature also notes that in order for principle-based pedagogical innovation to take place in classrooms, educators will require professional development or access to participate in “*innovation networks*” that will move practice beyond sharing. *Thus the KB professional development challenge is to create KB innovation networks* (Chen & Hong, 2016). Our group took on this challenge as our authentic problem and focused on exploring models for KB innovation networks that prioritize collective knowledge creation. The idea of *visionary leadership* (Scardamalia, 2018) was the foundation of our group's work. A *visionary leader* builds community. Not only does the visionary leader envision the possibilities of what the KB community can be, she/he creates and fosters the conditions for each member of that community to be successful (Scardamalia, 2018). As a group, we identified two key elements that would be critical to the success of a KB innovation network: 1.) Re-envisioning the identity of the teacher and 2.) Creating a community opportunity to reinforce and build that new identity. With respect to re-imagining teacher identity, we were driven by the question: “What if we approach the construction of teacher identity from the point of view of who teachers want to be, not who they already are?” Creating effective and sustainable KB communities in classrooms and schools requires *visionary leadership* from teachers and administrators. This will require a shift in mindset. Supporting opportunities for teachers to re-imagine their identities together as they engage with KB principles would be a powerful way of engaging teachers in building a community of *visionary leadership*. It would be a natural fit for engaging teachers in “collaborative professionalism”, which is a current priority in Ontario. As described by Hargreaves & O'Connor (2018):

[C]ollaborative professionalism is about how teachers and other educators transform teaching and learning together to work with all students to develop fulfilling lives of meaning and purpose and success. It is evidence-informed, but not data-driven, and involves deep and sometimes demanding dialogue, candid but constructive feedback and continuous collaborative inquiry.

Certainly, moving to the principle-based approach of Knowledge Building is challenging for educators, and they need to be able to support each other in this endeavor. A network, that provides opportunities for collaborative professionalism among KB educators in which they can meet and engage in KB principles as they work through challenges of moving towards a KB community, would be essential to the success of any initiative working to increase the scalability of Knowledge Building in school systems.

Major Goal

Our group's major goal was to imagine a model for professional knowledge creation that would provide KB educators opportunities for collaborative professionalism through “*innovation networks*”. Through KB discourse both in class and on Knowledge Forum we worked to narrow, define, redefine and reframe our ideas. Our ideas progressed from creating a website for teachers in order to develop a better understanding of KB, to a website that could be the virtual meeting place for educators, to the development of a national professional association (if only imagined). The model that we proposed was the *Canadian Association of Knowledge Builders*, an organization that would allow educators to engage in and reflect on the principles of KB as they deepen their understanding of these principles in their own KB classrooms. This network would provide opportunities for educators to: “(a) focus on problems as starting points, (b) engage in inquiry and dialogue with others, (c) work collaboratively as a community, and (d) build agency in assessing teachers' own collaborative learning”(Chen & Hong, 2016).

Promising Practices

There are many successful professional associations for educators in Ontario and Canada, such as the Canadian Assessment For Learning Network (CAFLN), the Ontario Association for Mathematics Education (OAME) and Learning Forward Ontario (LFO) to name a few. Often these associations have memberships that provide members with classroom resources, professional learning opportunities, conferences, publications, and newsletters, specifically for educators. Some of these associations, such as OAME, have a “strong voice with the Ministry of Education” (www.oame.on.ca) which helps to inform and shape educational decisions. The challenge is knowing where to begin and how to grow a grassroots organization/association in order to have a larger impact.

Advances/Challenges

While developing the model for the *Canadian Association of Knowledge Builders*, the importance of the ability to change and influence educational policy became clear. How to incorporate this important endeavour into our Association model became our new focus and challenge. We still felt that an association for Knowledge Building teachers would definitely bring about awareness and provide opportunities for KB educators, and others in the field of education, to deepen their understanding of KB. However, we began to wonder- is there a way to synthesize an association and educational policy change? We believe having a *Canadian Association of Knowledge Builders* is one step towards informing and mobilizing educational stakeholders.

Reflections/Next Steps

Literature regarding KB implementation in classroom practice notes that the formation of a knowledge building community among teachers is necessary to foster teacher innovation. To implement knowledge building communities, teachers must have the opportunity to exchange ideas regarding activities, challenges and possibilities (Zhang, Scardamalia, 2007). Would the *Canadian Association of Knowledge Builders* provide an “innovation network”, a KB community, where KB educators could meet to deepen their understanding of the KB principles? Could Knowledge Forum be a part of this innovation network, allowing KB educators the opportunity to collaborate, inquire, question and engage in meaningful dialogue on a regular basis? Could there be “local chapters” of the Association, providing opportunities to meet face-to-face on a monthly basis? Could an association offer professional learning opportunities through an annual conference, or a summer learning workshop or through something more formal like offering Additional Qualification courses in KB through an affiliated university? Professional learning provided through an AQ course is a promising idea as it would provide educators with the opportunity to learn about KB, “give-it-a-go” in their classrooms and participate in KB themselves as they form a KB community to collaborate and work through problems or challenges they are encountering. This could also be a starting place for an Association of Knowledge Builders, as these educators may need a meeting place, to continue to network and deepen their KB understanding, after the course is over. Innovation networks, whether through in-school collaborative inquiries, an Association for KB, an additional qualification course for KB or some other network that has not yet been developed, is needed to support educators in deepening their understanding of KB and to provide a space to exchange ideas and insights as well as advance best practice in KB. The next best step would be to gather a small group of KB educators and leaders interested in developing an innovation network to begin the planning process of organizing a grassroots Association for spreading Knowledge Building on a larger scale.

References

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