

Activity 5.5 Identifying the Knowledge of the Community¹

Description

This activity opens up the question of where we locate knowledge in our community. Participants examine their own experiences and the kinds of knowledge they have gained through these experiences and encounters. They also explore how different kinds of knowledge have more power than others, therefore causing some voices to be deemed more important and valuable than others.

Learning Goals

- Participants will have a deeper appreciation for the multiplicity of knowledge in a community, ranging from informal to formal structures and personal to cumulative understanding.
- Participants will question how knowledge is valued in society and who or what is served by this ranking.

Practice (60 minutes)

Step One	<i>Begin with an open discussion</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What does the word “knowledge” mean to you? How is it different from intelligence, wisdom, experience? How might this word be expressed in other languages or contexts?• Where does knowledge come from? Can one be born with knowledge? How does one cultivate knowledge? Can knowledge be bought? Traded? Owned?• Who has knowledge? Who lacks it? Who is the most knowledgeable person you know?	20 min
Step Two	After the initial discussion, break into small groups of 4-6 . Each group will construct a tree using different colors of paper. Here are Sample Knowledge Trees (craft) and Sample Knowledge Tree (digital). If doing his in-person, you will need: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Orange/brown strips of paper = roots (what you learned from your family/socialization)	10 min

¹ **Citation for this activity:** Janice McMillan (2023). Identifying the Knowledge of the Community. In Hartman, Britt, & Byrd (Eds). *The Interactivity Foundation Collaborative Discussion Toolkit*. Retrieved from <https://www.collaborativediscussionproject.com/module-5-civic-collaboration-1>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pink strips of paper = stems (what you learned at school/formal knowledge) • Blue strips of paper = branches (what you learned from experience) • Green “leaf shaped”/oval paper = leaves (what you learned from nature) • Yellow circles = buds (what you hope to learn from this workshop) <p>Each member of the group can put their colors in different parts of the tree. This could mean that for one participant, the roots of their knowledge about the world comes from their family but for another, what they learned from their family is the stem of the tree. This is also metaphorical in how knowledge is located in relation to parts of a tree.</p> <p>Each person can have some time to reflect and write down some notes.</p>	
Step Three	<p>In small groups, begin by discussing what was experienced by learning from school, from experience, from your families etc. Once you have shared, write words reflecting what that learning was on the relevant bits of paper</p>	15 min
Step Four	<p>Tape your bits of paper to the appropriate sections of the tree, building the tree as a group (again, refer to these Sample Knowledge Trees).</p> <p>Once finished, place or hang the tree pictures for other groups to see.</p>	5 min
Step Five	<p>When all trees are held or placed on the wall, walk around the room viewing the different trees across the groups. Think and take notes about what was common, what was different, what was surprising between the trees.</p> <p>Tip: The key point here is for participants to understand that formal school/university knowledge, while important, is only one form of knowledge. Very often participants also say that what they learned through other modalities are in many ways more important to how they are in the world. It also helps participants understand that communities with whom they engage have a lot of very important knowledge even if not the traditional formal kind associated with university.</p>	10 min

Reflection

- What surprised you the most about your group knowledge tree?
- How might your tree look different if you completed it alone? What did you learn from others? What did you learn about knowledge?
- What were the most rewarding or memorable learning moments?

Practice Journal

This week, keep a journal of new things that you learn. Maybe it is a recipe, song, exercise, fact, story, etc. When you realize that you are learning something new, take a moment to write it down (you may need to do this at the end of the day). At the end of the week, create another knowledge tree that reflects how you learn or gather information. What does this say about you? About this moment in your life? How does it compare to other moments or eras of learning?

Dive Deeper: Additional Resources

- Forthcoming