



**INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE ORGANIZATION**

**Diploma Programme**

**THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE**

**Curriculum Review Report**

**February 2003**

For the attention of Theory of Knowledge teachers

*Theory of Knowledge  
Curriculum Review Report*

*February 2003*

© International Baccalaureate Organization 2003

International Baccalaureate Organization  
Curriculum and Assessment Centre  
Peterson House  
Malthouse Avenue  
Cardiff Gate  
Cardiff CF23 8GL  
WALES  
United Kingdom

# Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Participants	1
3	Aims of the meeting	1
4	Perceptions of the current TOK course	1
5	Format of the revised TOK guide	2
6	Nature of the discussion	2
7	Issues identified	4
8	Next meeting	4
9	Questionnaire	
	(In the centre for removal, completion and return to IBCA)	
	Appendix 1	5
	TOK questionnaire responses (summary)	

# 1 Introduction

The first meeting of the TOK curriculum review was held on 21–23 October 2002 at the International Baccalaureate Curriculum and Assessment Centre in Cardiff. The meeting comprised teachers from around the world together with TOK senior examiners, representing the four IBO regions. The review of the current TOK course will take place over three years, with the intended date for commencement of teaching being September 2005.

A summary of teachers' responses to the preliminary questionnaire issued in February 2002 was circulated to participants before the meeting. It is attached to this report as appendix 1.

## 2 Participants

Nick Alchin	Geneva International School—La Châtaigneraie	Switzerland
Mimi Bick	chief assessor, TOK	Chile
Mike Clarke	curriculum area manager	UK
Anita Holt	Markham College	Peru
Steve Hreha	Champlain Regional College	Canada
Mandy McLachlan	academic administrative officer, the arts	UK
Matthias Rosenberg	former TOK teacher, Mahindra UWC	UK
Ric Sims	deputy chief assessor, TOK	Czech Republic
Manjula Salomon	deputy chief assessor, TOK	Indonesia
Tim Sprod	The Friends' School	Australia
Mary Enda Tookey	Lincoln Park High School	USA

## 3 Aims of the meeting

The broad aim of this meeting was to exchange ideas and thinking on the current TOK course and to consider areas of the course that might require changes. Specific aims were:

- to look at the curriculum and assessment models
- to evaluate the current course
- to maintain the integrity of the course
- to conserve what is valuable in the course
- to decide to what degree changes need to be made
- to identify issues that the review needs to address for inclusion in the next questionnaire.

## 4 Perceptions of the current TOK course

The initial observations of the participants on the TOK course were as follows.

- The critical thinking aspect of TOK is good.
- It is easier for students to obtain a grade 7 in other subjects than it is in the TOK course.
- TOK teaching needs to be included more fully in other subjects.
- The fact that TOK does not require an examination at the end of the course is positive because it allows the teacher more time to teach.
- The TOK assessment criteria are not clear and coherent, and therefore equity across the IB Diploma Programme world is difficult to achieve.
- Some ways of knowing and areas of knowledge may be missing from the guide.
- The C grade boundary for the presentation is unrealistic at 13 to 13. How can a “satisfactory” presentation have such a narrow mark scope?
- The grounding and centring of the knower is good.
- The question approach of the guide is not always used well.
- TOK students are not being excited by the course. They are producing dull essays and are working in a mechanical mode.
- The flexibility of the guide places heavy responsibility on the teacher.

## 5 Format of the revised TOK guide

Lucas Walsh, online curriculum centre (OCC) manager at IBCA, presented changes in document production and the new OCC site to be launched in 2003.

In future guides are to be produced electronically using extensible mark-up language (XML). While they will still need to be able to be published in hard copy, the electronic format will provide greater flexibility for the use of non-linear web-based formats that may be particularly appropriate to TOK. For example, it could be very useful to be able to click on a question in the electronic version and be taken to a list of pointers relating to it: such pointers might be expansions on the topic to which the question relates, suggested readings or hyperlinks to relevant web sites.

A much improved OCC site is due to go online early in 2003. It is intended that it will be simpler and more attractive to use. Prior testing will include using a standard modem dial-up connection, to ensure that schools with basic technology will still be able to access material on the site.

It is intended that exemplar TOK oral presentations will be posted on the OCC early in 2004.

## 6 Nature of the discussion

The participants were broadly content with the aims and objectives for TOK, although some minor amendments might be needed. This feeling was also reflected in the response to the first questionnaire (see appendix 1).

There was substantial and wide-ranging discussion of the TOK diagram, since it encapsulated many of the issues that might need further attention. Participants were mindful of the fact that there were no university courses in TOK and therefore no teachers with degree level qualifications in TOK. It could be argued that there is a particular need for clarity in what is required in the course, especially for teachers new to the subject.

This led to extended debate about whether it could be said that there was a “core curriculum” for TOK. On the one hand, most teachers and examiners thought that there were topics that were essential to a TOK course. In other words, a course that did not include X or Y would not be recognizable as a TOK course. The problem with this argument was that it was not clear that there was agreement, world-wide, as to what these essential elements might be. The counter-argument was that the strength of the course lay precisely in its flexibility, allowing it to be adapted almost infinitely according to teachers’ and students’ interests and in response to events that raised TOK issues. It was thought that any attempt to prescribe a core content would place at risk the whole nature of TOK. This issue was not resolved.

Discussion then focused on the three regions of the TOK diagram. Was the guide clear about each of these, and were they appropriately defined? It was argued that some rethinking was necessary in order to show that the areas of knowledge and ways of knowing identified do not represent the only ones available for use by the teachers. These components of the diagram are not intended to be prescriptive or exclusive. The ways of knowing identified in the diagram might be thought of as umbrellas under which many other concepts can appear, depending on the perspective adopted by the teacher. Despite this, the message of the diagram appears more definite. Questions were also raised about the status of the “(s)” in knower(s), at the centre of the diagram.

The assessment scheme, and the tasks within it, led to extensive discussion including straightforward assessment issues of fairness and reliability. It was noted that discussions on the online curriculum centre suggested that the use of the essay criteria was not well understood, and doubts were expressed about whether there was consistency in the way the criteria were applied by examiners. The assessment exemplars, due to be mailed to schools in November, might help to some extent but there was clearly a case for looking further at the criteria in a later meeting. Despite these questions about the criteria, and some concerns about prescribed titles, the essay was generally regarded as a satisfactory task.

In contrast, the oral presentation was attacked from several directions. It was thought to be too time-consuming (especially in large teaching groups); to place too much emphasis on a one-off performance, as opposed to contributions during the course; to be inequitable, because it was unmoderated; and to be poorly defined and understood. Defenders of the task admitted some of these charges but argued that the presentation had been introduced to try to involve students more directly in TOK lessons and to try to make more apparent the connections between TOK and contemporary issues. There was some evidence of success in these aims. It was further argued that a balance needed to be struck between occasional assessment, which can be quite detailed, and frequent assessment, which has to be more superficial, unless the assessment process is to involve a great deal of extra work. A more “heavyweight” assessment scheme would add to the burdens of both teachers and students, and would not necessarily lead to better assessment, or better learning.

Another matter of concern was that some schools appeared to be misusing the criteria. A few schools seemed unduly severe in their marking of oral presentations of candidates who showed excellent understanding of problems of knowledge in their essays. Other schools were giving uniformly high marks to all their candidates, even those whose essays were very weak. Although IBCA was taking steps to try to deal with this, it remained an issue.

Following lengthy discussions, the consensus was that the assessment tasks, the essay and the presentation, should remain, but that the instructions and criteria needed further consideration. In the case of the presentation, the question of how to try to ensure greater uniformity in the interpretation of the criteria was also noted as requiring further consideration, although the publication of exemplar presentations on the OCC during 2004 should help.

## **7 Issues identified**

Three topics were identified as requiring advice from teachers in time for the next meeting. These topics, which form the bulk of the accompanying questionnaire, are:

- the TOK diagram
- the form of the TOK guide
- useful resources for TOK.

## **8 Next meeting**

The next meeting of the TOK curriculum review committee will take place in the first half of 2003.

# Appendix 1

## TOK Questionnaire Responses

### Summary of responses to the preliminary questionnaire, 2002

A total of 247 teachers from 197 schools responded: 99 from IBAEM, 37 from IBAP, 40 from IBLA, 71 from IBNA. Fifty had been teaching IB for one year or less; 111 for 2–5 years and 86 for longer (6–26 years). Twenty-seven responses were in Spanish, with five in French and the remainder in English.

#### On the **syllabus**:

- 232 respondents were happy with the aims and objectives
- 199 respondents thought the syllabus parts were “good, needing little or no revision”; 37 thought they were “satisfactory, though with some significant changes needed”; one thought they were “poor, needing radical revision”.

#### On the **assessment**:

- 179 respondents thought the division of the marks in the assessment scheme was satisfactory; 55 did not
- 222 respondents thought the essay was appropriate; 17 did not
- 185 respondents thought the external assessment criteria for the essay were satisfactory; 52 did not
- 199 respondents thought the presentation was appropriate; 34 did not
- 188 respondents thought the internal assessment criteria for the presentation were satisfactory; 45 did not
- 35 respondents had some difficulty in completing the questionnaire.

**Note:** not every respondent gave a response to every question, so the total number of responses for each question varies slightly.