



**MEADOWBROOK HIGH SCHOOL**  
**TOK NETWORKING SESSION**  
**11/5/07**

*NOTE: The following notes are from the TOK Special Subject Seminar in Los Angeles, April 21-14, 2006. These are personal notes from Carolyn Henly; this is NOT an official IB document! Errors are my errors of understanding.*

**SUMMARY OF CHANGES**

ITEM	OLD COURSE	NEW COURSE	NOTES
TOK Role in Program	TOK issues were limited to TOK class.	All new curriculum guides now incorporate a section on TOK in that subject area, and subject area teachers are expected to address knowledge issues within the content areas.	Should require closer cooperation among TOK and subject area teachers; this is probably new in most schools.
Course content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 Ways of Knowing</li> <li>• 6 Areas of Knowledge</li> <li>• Knower at center</li> <li>• Curriculum based in questions, rather than in topics as in other subject areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 Ways of Knowing</li> <li>• 6 Areas of Knowledge</li> <li>• Knower at center</li> <li>• Curriculum based in questions, rather than in topics as in other subject areas.</li> </ul>	Unchanged
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1/3 Presentation</li> <li>• 2/3 Essay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1/3 Presentation</li> <li>• 2/3 Essay</li> </ul>	Unchanged
Presentation	Internally assessed only.	Now moderated on demand.	Schools will be notified in fall of 1 <sup>st</sup> year of a cycle if their students are to be taped for moderation during the spring of their 12 <sup>th</sup> grade year.
Scoring Rubrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essay: 6 criteria, some 5 points, some 10 points</li> <li>• Presentation: 4 criteria, 5 points each</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essay: 4 criteria, 10 points each</li> <li>• Presentation: 4 criteria, 5 points each (all criteria new)</li> </ul>	All criteria completely revised See attached
Terminology	“Problems of Knowledge”	“Knowledge Issues”	Intention is to move students beyond skepticism and to eliminate dichotomous thinking that has evolved.
	“Knowledge at Work”	“Knower’s Perspective”	Intention is to focus students on their own experience, rather than on abstractions, as well as to ask them to seriously grapple with the idea that there are other perspectives.

**OVERVIEW OF CHANGES TO CURRICULUM GUIDE**  
**MIKE CLARKE**  
**GROUP MANAGER FOR TOK, EE, AND CAS**  
**IBCA**

TOK Curriculum Review: Mike Clarke, Mimi Bick, Craig Howard, Steve Hreha, Lucia Harvilchuck, and Mary Enda Tookey

Six meetings over three years; examiners and teachers over all four IB regions. Feedback and introductory questionnaire suggested that people were pretty happy with many aspects of the 1999 subject guide overall. Details were problematic, but general feedback was good. No cause to mess unduly with the content of the course.

However: continuing unease about assessment.

Basic structure of the assessment is unchanged: Essay 2/3 and presentation 1/3

Main Changes:

- New emphasis on knowledge issues as the focus of course (as opposed to “problems of knowledge”)
- Stronger links with subject teaching and TOK (can be stronger connections to the area of expertise of the teacher; ex. If subject teacher is History teacher, course can emphasize that. Each new subject guide incorporates more references to linking to TOK)
- Presentation requires identification and treatment of knowledge issue (widespread confusion about what was required in the presentation. Clearly hasn’t worked in a number of schools. This guide attempts to clarify the requirements, and there is now a mechanism built-in for feedback and improvement: verification of assessment, not moderation. New *Vade Mecum* will have this information in August. Schools will be notified in September of junior year as to whether they are going to be among those who are going to record and send in verification of assessment for presentation.)
- New criteria for essay and presentation—both featuring “Knower’s perspective” (hope that the criteria are easier to use. Should be more transparent. Should be more obvious when we read an essay what sort of score it should get. Current criteria are not functioning well in terms of teachers being able to apply them with accuracy. Enormous amount of effort went into this; two separate assessment trials involving marking of essays against the new schemes. “Assessment in TOK is not an exact science.”)

What we’re asking students to do is very complicated, and it is left open-ended. There are quite a few ways to write a good TOK essay and quite a few ways to write a bad one. But if we were to simplify it, we’d end up with a much less valuable assessment task. Trying to balance transparency with allowing for richness and complexity. Want assessment to support the curriculum and not the other way around. TOK by its nature is not a canned subject; not really possible to focus the criteria down to absolutes.

**KNOWLEDGE ISSUES VS. PROBLEMS OF KNOWLEDGE**  
**MIMI BICK**  
**EXITING CHIEF EXAMINER FOR TOK**  
**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION**  
**SANTIAGO, CHILE**

Mimi Bick—from Montreal; lived in South America for 20 years.

Process of curriculum review that are invisible:

- Questionnaires as device for finding out what people really think about what is going on. In this case, it was extremely useful. At the first meeting, the individuals on the team had a whole bunch of ideas about what to change, some of them radical. One example: have a core with options, as with some of the other subjects. But the questionnaires indicated that this was not necessary. Teachers LIKED all the questions and didn't want them changed. (Sue Bastian was instrumental in establishing the focus of the 1999 guide.)
- Who sits around those tables at the curriculum review committees? Idea is variety of voices from different places with different kinds of students that will help to construct something that is flexible for teaching practice all over the world. Something that everyone had in common was that they came with their personal professional experience and that of their colleagues and spoke from that—from being examples of best practice of TOK. So that what is in the guide is based on teaching expertise. Example: best practice in the presentation was that teachers were meeting with students before they did the presentation in order to maximize time use in classroom and ensure that a real TOK presentation occurs. So now, instead of self-evaluation at the end, that has been moved to the front in order to build that practice into the program worldwide.

So: difference between “Problems of Knowledge” and “Knowledge Issues”: there was a problem with “Problems of Knowledge” that needed to be solved. That widening involves widening the vision from purely weaknesses to including strengths of knowledge. Instead of “what are the limits of trying to use a particular way of knowing?” we are now being asked to examine both “what are the limits” and “what are the advantages.” That is, however, the minimalist view.

On a grander scale, this change can be seen as something much greater. Source is all the voices she heard during her six-years' tenure as chief assessor. (180-200 reports from examiners each year.) The pattern she got was this: the negative part: “Essays are becoming more and more formulaic.” You either do a tour of the areas, or you set up contrasting visions: “Reason is good, emotion is bad. Nevertheless, there's a little something there, and now, the end.” There was, in other words, something limiting in the use of “Problems of Knowledge.” It did something wonderful in its day—instead of letting students believe blindly in Truth, we were encouraging students to doubt. That was something that was hard to do, and many educational systems don't try to do even that. This guide asks us to go beyond that, too, in order to help students not look at the world as black and white. Once students catch onto the idea that there are “good” and “bad” ways of knowing; “functional” and “problematic,” they will settle into that dichotomous paradigm. They don't think they have to go any further, and the guide didn't require them to. They could settle into a new, essentially comfortable and unsophisticated, paradigm. This guide intends to eliminate the ease with which we can settle for facile skepticism and easy relativism, thinking that that is enough for critical thinking. Now being pushed to first see those contrasts, and then get into the grey areas and wrestle with the complexities. Trying for a real conversation, as opposed to simulated discussion.

**KNOWERS**  
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**RIVIERA BEACH, FL**

Not much change in terms of the substance, but what has changed is part of the fabric of the change that has been going on for 20 years. TOK is not about the teacher. The new syllabus goes along with the trend of focusing the work and understanding in the students. “You don’t have to defend your intellectual manhood in front of a bunch of 17-year-olds.” He’s reading essays from this year’s term; “the essays look like they should work,...but somehow it’s like the image from Faulkner’s *Light in August* with the car going down the street with the headlights on and the windshield washers going but nobody’s in it. Reading these essays is like wondering whose words are these?”

We’re asking kids to do something pretty interesting: to identify knowledge issues (which is pretty hard in and of itself) and also to think independently about them. Not just regurgitate what they are being told. They don’t like to think independently about things in front of adults. Personal and reflective. And to demonstrate a significant self-awareness of themselves as a knower. That’s a tall order. “We are as aware of ourselves as a fish is....” Arthur Eddington (quotation incomplete)

We are also asking them to seriously consider different perspectives. What does that mean? Give lip-service to it? Or can you change perspective enough to see how that feels? Then we ask them to illustrate all that with effective examples from their own experience, which is VERY narrow, for most of them—far more narrow than ours. But their experiences are important and genuine. It’s easy for us, as jaded 58-year-olds to write off their experiences as too obvious.

The idea with the new guide is to push the students and their experience even closer to the center of the stage, toward that genuine conversation. Push them further toward full participation.

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