

*Impressions from the TOK Curriculum Revision Committee,
October 2009*

NOTE: The comments here represent my own observations and ideas ONLY. I do not speak for the IB in any official capacity, and any errors or misrepresentations here are mine. Implications for any future work on the TOK curriculum cannot be considered to be authoritative. The official report on the curriculum committee meetings will be issued later this year (possibly May?), and that report will supersede any of my personal observations. For further information, contact Carolyn P. Henly carolyn_henly@ccpsnet.net.

Significant Facts/Conditions	Implications
<p>TOK is the only subject for which all examiners must be TOK teachers. There is no "TOK" at university, so no university lecturer is available to serve as an examiner.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a significant shortage of examiners, and an even more significant shortage of examiners with lengthy experience teaching the curriculum. • TOK cannot have more than one externally examined OR moderated assessment, as there are simply insufficient examiners to handle the load.
<p>The nature of the TOK curriculum is unique in the Diploma Programme (and possibly in high school curricula in general): of the ten topics required by the curriculum, any given TOK teacher is likely to have had professional training in no more than one--and that one is likely to have been a specific Area of Knowledge. Even with that one, it is rare that a prospective TOK teacher will have had training in the structure of knowledge-making within that academic field.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TOK teachers must spend a great deal of time learning the content of their curriculum, and must do so without access to content coursework. • It can take many years for a TOK teacher to develop the same level of expertise in the content of TOK as they have in the academic area in which they prepared to teach. • TOK examiners who without lengthy experience as TOK teachers are likely to have uneven expertise in the ten curriculum topics, and thus are likely to exhibit an uneven ability to assess the quality of arguments or the factual accuracy of assertions in TOK essays.
<p>TOK teachers are drawn from a wide range of academic backgrounds.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many TOK teachers have little or no experience with or training in teaching writing.
<p>A worrisome percentage of examiners fail moderation (that is, their scores are judged by moderators and/or senior examiners to represent ineffective application of scoring criteria OR an inconsistent application of scoring criteria).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since all papers from an examiner who fails moderation must be rescored, there is a heavy demand for experienced examiners to read a large number of essays. • The TOK essay is a very expensive component to score.

Significant Facts/Conditions	Implications
<p>A major focus of the curriculum revision effort, therefore, will be to resolve the problems of examining.</p>	<p>There are multiple potential long-term strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change or eliminate the TOK essay. (A wide variety of possible kinds of assessments were suggested, including a TOK exam.) • Revise the scoring criteria in a substantive way. • Increase the resources available to teachers in an effort to reduce the amount of time and work necessary to become expert in the content of TOK • Substantively revise the Curriculum Guide to provide more direction to TOK teachers about content. • Develop a new training workshop for TOK to address the content area problem that does not exist for other IB subjects. • Develop training protocols for examiners to shorten the time it takes to develop expertise in examining and to increase consistency among examiners. <p><i>NOTE: Decisions have not yet been made as to which of these strategies will be pursued; the process will take several years and will rely on input from teachers.</i></p> <p>There are multiple potential short-term strategies (things which could be implemented prior to the official implementation of a new curriculum):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardization exercises for examiners prior to the upcoming exam session. • Trial of scoring with a variety of different scoring rubrics. • Provide exemplars of scored essays for teachers (similar to the old Teacher Support Material) • Increase recruiting effort to encourage more experienced teachers to become examiners.