

Theory of Knowledge – TOK



The aims of TOK

TOK has many aims and purposes. Within the DP, it acts as the means of drawing together all the different strands of the programme. It also aligns to many aspects of the Learner Profile, such as being open-minded, taking risks, and being reflective. The course itself helps students to think critically, communicate ideas, work collaboratively, and be creative in their approach to understanding the world.

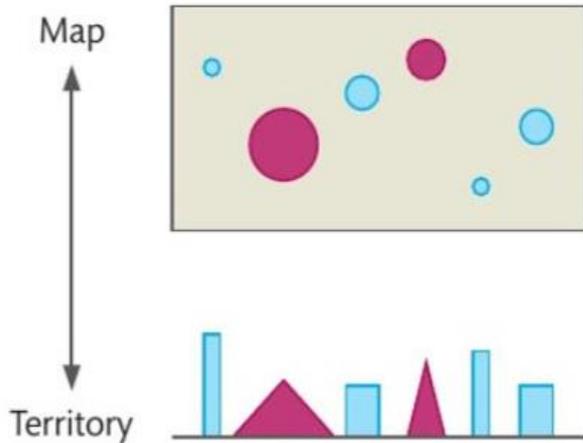
How many types of maps can you name?

When we say “map”, which one of these do you imagine the first?



Can you think of more types?

The very first unit of our course focuses on us, individuals, as people acquiring knowledge. The *Knowledge and the knower* chapter in our textbook approaches the scope of knowledge metaphorically through the concept of a map and a territory.

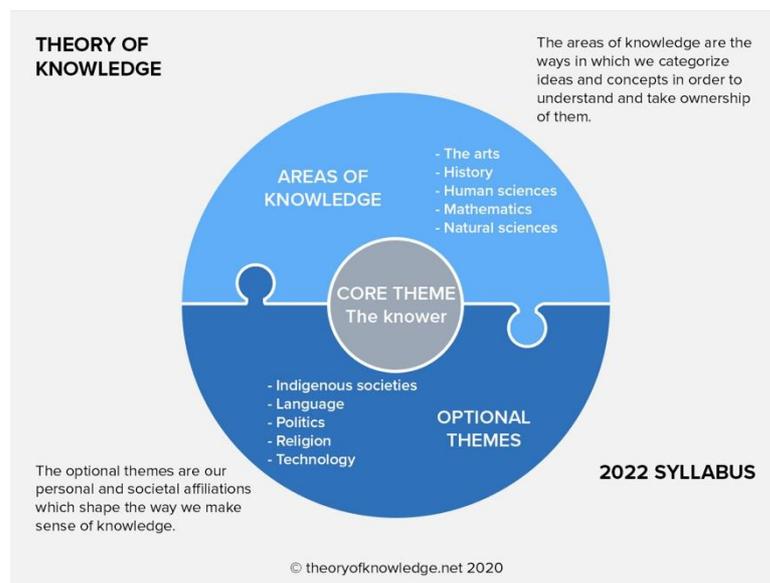


The map and the territory are two distinct things. The map can never be absolutely correct, or else it would become the territory itself and hence lost its value as a tool. The map is a mere scaled representation of the territory.

But how many types of maps do we know? Our approach to knowledge is similar to mapping – every map will show us different aspect of that given territory, the same way as different approaches and methods will show us different aspects of certain knowledge.

Key concepts of TOK

Twelve key concepts have been identified as having particular significance to TOK: certainty, objectivity, perspective, explanation, interpretation, power, culture, responsibility, truth, evidence, justification, and values.



Exploring Knowledge Questions

The different aspects of the course are explored via 'knowledge questions'. Knowledge questions are questions related to how we produce and use knowledge about the world. Knowledge questions are implemented in every single unit that we will be dealing with, therefore they encourage us to explore different fields, different subjects, in many different contexts.

Examples of knowledge questions would be:

How do different perspectives shape the way we understand the past?

*How and why does mathematical knowledge develop over time?
What constitutes an expert knower of the human sciences?*

Considering real-life situations

TOK is all about applying the concepts and ideas from the course to the real world. We therefore draw on 'real-life situations' to justify arguments and explore knowledge questions. Real-life situations can be anything going on anywhere in the world - at a personal, local, or international level. Students should bring their own experiences into the classroom and be ready to discuss them.

Exploring different perspectives

One of the key aspects of TOK is considering different perspectives, and how they affect the ways we acquire and use knowledge. Perspectives might include our gender, cultural background, an academic tradition, or the point in time when we are looking at the world. Rather than developing an approach which trains us to value and aspire to absolute, definitive answers, TOK trains us to realize that truth often depends on the perspective we approach a question – but without falling into the trap of relativism.



Assessment

TOK assessment consists of only two major assignments – The exhibition and the essay.

The exhibition

Students design and deliver the TOK exhibition at the end of DP1. Exhibitions are based on an internal assessment prompt, which is explored by presenting three 'objects', linked to either the core, or one of the optional themes. Students write a 950-word commentary

explaining their choice of objects, and linking them to the prompt. The aim of the exhibition is to show how TOK concepts manifest themselves in the real world. Schools are encouraged to hold a 'TOK exhibition day' in which students publicly present their work to a whole-school audience. The exhibition represents $\frac{1}{3}$ of the mark for the course.

The essay

Students write the TOK essay in the second year of the course. They choose their essay from a list of six prescribed essay titles (PTs). Essay titles provide them with an overall knowledge question, which they typically explore within the context of two different areas of knowledge. Good essays include analytical and relevant discussion, supported with original real-life situations, and include a consideration of different perspectives. The essay represents $\frac{2}{3}$ of the mark for the course.