

Summary

Ethics

Subject	Year	Start date	Duration
Theory of Knowledge	IB1	Week 3, February	7 weeks 14 hours

Course Part

Knowledge framework - explore the role of ethics within various areas of knowledge

Description

We cannot talk about knowledge without talking, always, about *people* – the people creating and using the knowledge. Up to this point, we have been dealing with what people consider knowledge to be, how people shape it in diverse ways from different perspectives, with all their creativity and human bias, and how people develop methods of thinking critically to sort through knowledge claims to find the truth. There is no knowledge without the knowers.

We now turn to the frame that we as people place around all of our knowledge – ideas of good and bad, concepts of morality in how we pursue our knowledge and then apply it.

Inquiry & Purpose

Inquiry / Higher Order Questions

Type

Inquiry Questions

Debatable

Is seeking the truth a goal that is morally neutral – that is, neither good nor bad – or is it in some ways morally good in itself? Should the pursuit of knowledge use only methods of research that are moral? How do you decide what those are? Should know!

Curriculum

Aims

The aims of the TOK course are:

- to engage students with multiple perspectives, foster open-mindedness and develop intercultural understanding

- to prompt students to consider the importance of values, responsibilities and ethical concerns relating to the production, acquisition, application and communication of knowledge.

Objectives

Having completed the TOK course, students should be able to:

- identify and explore links between knowledge questions and the world around us

- demonstrate awareness and evaluation of different points of view

Syllabus Content

Core theme: Knowledge and the knower

This theme encourages careful and critical consideration of claims, provoking students to reflect on how we distinguish between claims that are contestable and claims that are not. It highlights the importance of not simply accepting claims at face value, and then explores how this can be reconciled with a recognition that many situations require us to make decisions without possessing absolute certainty.

Another interesting focus for discussions could be to explore how we perceive and construct our understanding of the world. This could include consideration of the way that culture can be seen as a lens through which we look at the world, or the impact of filters, image manipulation and propaganda.

Ethics

Are there responsibilities that necessarily come with knowing something or knowing how to do something?

As knowers, do we have a moral duty to examine our own assumptions and biases?

Under what circumstances, if any, do we have a moral duty to share what we know?

In what ways do ethical judgments differ from other kinds of judgments?

Is there knowledge that a person or society has a responsibility to acquire or not to acquire?

If moral claims conflict, does it follow that all views are equally acceptable?

What personal traits (such as taking seriously the knowledge of others) do we need in order to be ethical knowers?

Area of knowledge - History

Students could also consider the way that history is sometimes used to promote a particular dominant perspective or consider how specific groups, such as minorities or women, may have experienced events in the past differently. This could connect to reflection on recent controversies surrounding the historical events taught, and history textbooks used, in high school history lessons in various countries around the world. This could include how different textbooks can sometimes tell different versions of history.

Ethics

Is it unfair to judge people and actions in the past by the standards of today?

Should terms such as “atrocious” or “hero” be used when writing about history, or should value judgments be avoided?

Do historians have a moral responsibility to try to ensure that history is not misused and distorted by people for their own ends?

On what criteria could we decide whether people in the past have a right to privacy in the present?

Do historians have an ethical obligation not to ignore contradictory evidence?

Area of knowledge - The human sciences

Students could also be encouraged to consider the ways in which social, political, cultural or financial factors may affect the types of research that are supported and financed in the human sciences. For example, market research is often undertaken as a way for companies to increase their profits, and social science research sometimes seeks to influence public policy. This can raise interesting questions about the purpose and context within which knowledge is pursued in the human sciences.

Ethics

To what extent are the methods used in the human sciences limited by the ethical considerations involved in studying

human beings?

Do researchers have different ethical responsibilities when they are working with human subjects compared to when they are working with animals?

What are the moral implications of possessing knowledge about human behaviour?

Should key events in the historical development of the human sciences always be judged by the standards of their time?

What values determine what counts as legitimate inquiry in the human sciences? Can knowledge be divorced from the values embedded in the process of creating it?

Is the role of the human scientist only to describe what the case is or also to make judgements about what should be the case?

Area of knowledge - The natural sciences

Another rich source of material for TOK discussions relating to the natural sciences can come from the issue of funding. A great deal of scientific research is funded by private for-profit companies and by governments, which raises interesting questions around how the priorities for funding scientific research are determined and who it is that determines which research directions are pursued.

Ethics

Is science, or should it be, value-free?

Should scientific research be subject to ethical constraints or is the pursuit of all scientific knowledge intrinsically worthwhile?

Do we tend to exaggerate the objectivity of scientific facts and the subjectivity of moral values?

In what ways have developments in science challenged long-held ethical values? Can moral disagreements be resolved with reference to empirical evidence?

Do human rights exist in the same way that the laws of gravity exist?

Do scientists or the societies in which scientists operate exert a greater influence on what is ethically acceptable in this area of knowledge?

Area of knowledge - The arts

Students could consider examples of controversial works of art, such as Marco Evaristti's *Helena* or Sruli Recht's *Forget Me Knot*, considering whether there should be ethical constraints on the pursuit of knowledge in the arts, or whether artists or audiences have any particular ethical responsibilities.

Another focus for discussions could be the relationship between arts and culture. Students could explore art forms and art works that are strongly rooted in a particular culture or tradition, as well as reflecting on the diversity of the arts across time, cultures and contexts.

Ethics

In what ways are moral judgments similar to, or different from, aesthetic judgments?

Do the arts play a role in the development of our personal value systems?

How important is the study of literature in our individual ethical development?

Is the production and enjoyment of art subject to ethical constraints?

On what criteria could it be decided if the state has the right to censor art that is deemed immoral or blasphemous?

Do the arts have the power to challenge established moral values?

Are moral and aesthetic judgments more a matter of taste than a matter of truth?

Can we separate the moral character of the artist from the value of the artwork?

Area of knowledge - Mathematics

One interesting focus for discussions could be the status of mathematics as an area of knowledge. Students could consider why disciplines in the human sciences are often keen to cast their conclusions in mathematical terms, or why mathematical treatments of a topic are often taken by many to be a sign of intellectual rigour. They could also consider why mathematics is often given a privileged position in many education systems.

Students could also consider the role and significance of proof in mathematics, and how this relates to concepts such as truth. They could reflect on whether the term “proof” is used differently in mathematics compared to how it is used in our everyday lives or in other areas of knowledge.

Ethics

If mathematical knowledge is highly valued, does this place special ethical responsibilities on mathematicians when they are making claims?

On what criteria could we decide whether mathematicians should be held responsible for unethical applications of their work?

How are unethical practices, such as “data dredging”, used by statisticians to deliberately manipulate and mislead people?

Is it ethically justifiable for academic mathematicians to spend time doing research that does not have immediate useful applications?

Do mathematical judgments and ethical judgments face similar challenges in terms of the evidence available to support them?

Are mathematicians the people best placed to create codes of ethics for professional mathematicians?

ATL Skills

Approaches to Learning



Social

- In this unit, we will

have students work in small groups

allocate, or ask students to allocate among themselves, different roles in a classroom discussion or activity

have students peer assess their group performance or process

provide an opportunity for students to analyse the impact of their behaviour on the class or on a group performance

encourage students to consider alternative points of view or to take the perspective of others

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Communication

- In this unit, we will

have students give an oral presentation without reading from their notes

construct a task so that students practise their listening skills

assess or give feedback on speaking or writing concisely

provide opportunities for students to read and understand different types of texts

encourage or require students to plan a response before they begin

encourage all students to contribute to discussions



Developing IB Learners

☆ Learner Profile



Principled



Caring