

Summary

Perspectives

Subject	Year	Start date	Duration
Theory of Knowledge	IB1	Week 2, October	7 weeks 14 hours

Course Part

Knowledge framework - perspective of knowledge through various areas of knowledge

Description

In the physical world, your 'perspective' is the angle from which you see something. Your own eyes give you one set of observations among others possible. In metaphor, your 'perspective' is what you think about a topic; one set of thoughts among others possible. Perspectives are not static: they can change with knowledge.

Inquiry & Purpose

Inquiry / Higher Order Questions

Type

Inquiry Questions

Concept-based

Whose perspectives? In your own region, whose perspectives would you seek out in the following cases, and why? You are helping to put together a book to celebrate 100 years of your region or town's history, using interviews and archives. Who will you se

Curriculum

Aims

The aims of the TOK course are:

to encourage students to be more aware of their own perspectives and to reflect critically on their own beliefs and assumptions

Objectives

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

identify and explore links between knowledge questions and areas of knowledge

develop relevant, clear and coherent arguments

Syllabus Content

Core theme: Knowledge and the knower

Perspectives

What shapes my perspective as a knower?

How much of our knowledge depends on our interactions with other knowers?

Is the truth what the majority of people accept?

How do empathy and imagination help us to understand other perspectives?

Presented with the belief system of a community of knowers, how can we decide what we personally believe?

Are there types of knowledge that are specifically linked to particular communities of knowers?

How can we know that current knowledge is an improvement on past knowledge?

Area of knowledge - History

Studying history involves exploration and inquiry into the past. This raises questions about whether it is possible to talk meaningfully about a historical fact, or how far we can speak with certainty about anything in the past.

As we cannot directly observe historical events, documentary evidence plays a vital role in helping historians to understand and interpret the past. This raises questions about the reliability of that evidence, particularly given that historical sources are often incomplete and that different sources can corroborate, complement or contradict each other.

In addition to being heavily evidence-based, history is also an interpretive discipline that allows for multiple perspectives and opinions. Students could be encouraged to consider the role and importance of historians, particularly in terms of why their interpretations may differ or how we evaluate conflicting interpretations of past events.

Perspectives

If it is difficult to establish proof in history, does that mean that all versions are equally acceptable?

Are historians' accounts necessarily subjective?

Is empathy more important in history than in other areas of knowledge?

How might the existence of different historical perspectives be beneficial to historical knowledge?

Can the historian be free of bias in the selection and interpretation of material?

Is it inevitable that historians will be affected by their own cultural context?

How can we gauge the extent to which history is being told from a cultural or national perspective?

Are we more prone to particular cognitive biases (such as hindsight bias) in some disciplines and areas of knowledge rather than others?

Area of knowledge - The human sciences

The diversity of the disciplines included within the human sciences can itself be a stimulus for interesting TOK discussions, as can the coexistence of different approaches within a single discipline (for example psychodynamic versus behaviourist versus humanistic approaches in psychology).

Perspectives

To what extent is it legitimate for a researcher to draw on their own experiences as evidence in their investigations in the human sciences?

Is it possible to eliminate the effect of the observer in the pursuit of knowledge in the human sciences?

How might the beliefs and interests of human scientists influence their conclusions? How can we know when we have made progress in the search for knowledge in the human sciences?

If two competing paradigms give different explanations of a phenomenon, how can we decide which explanation to accept?

What forms of protection against research error and bias are available to human scientists?

Area of knowledge - The natural sciences

The natural sciences are often seen to rely on evidence, rationality and the quest for deeper understanding. Observation and experimentation play a key role, and terms such as “theory” have a special meaning in the natural sciences compared to how they are used in daily life and in other areas of knowledge.

Students could also consider the role of consensus in the natural sciences, and the role and importance of the “scientific community”. For example, they could consider the role of peer review as a method of scrutinizing scientific claims and the extent to which this is an effective and objective form of self-regulation.

Perspectives

How can it be that scientific knowledge changes over time?

What role do paradigm shifts play in the progression of scientific knowledge?

How does the social context of scientific work affect the methods and findings of science?

In what ways have influential individuals contributed to the development of the natural sciences as an area of knowledge?

Does the precision of the language used in the natural sciences successfully eliminate all ambiguity?

Does the list of disciplines included in, or excluded from, the natural sciences change from one era to another, or from one culture or tradition to another?

Does competition between scientists help or hinder the production of knowledge?

Area of knowledge - The arts

“The arts” is used in TOK to include a diverse range of disciplines such as visual arts, theatre, dance, music, film and literature. The forms and methods of these disciplines are often dissimilar, so the diversity within this single area of knowledge can itself be an excellent stimulus for TOK discussions.

The arts provide rich material for discussions of concepts such as interpretation. For example, students could consider how we ascribe meaning to works of art, or whether the intention of the artist is what determines meaning.

During these discussions, students could be encouraged to draw on their experiences from their DP studies in language and literature classes, where they are required to understand and interpret a range of texts.

Students could also consider the role of the audience in the arts. This could include, for example, whether art requires a response from, or an emotional interaction with, an audience. It could also include the role of critics and experts, and whether everyone is an equally competent judge in the arts.

Perspectives

Is there such a thing as “obsolete” knowledge in the arts?

Can a work of art have meaning of which the artist themselves is unaware?

How does knowing more about the social, cultural or historical context of a work of art have an impact on our knowledge

of the work itself?

Can art change the way we interpret the world?

What are the justifications for, and implications of, claiming that there are absolute standards for “good art”?

Who determines what art is valued, and on what criteria?

Should your judgments about art be given the same weight as those of an expert?

What role does the history of an artform play in evaluating present work?

Area of knowledge - Mathematics

Mathematics is sometimes seen to have a degree of certainty that is unmatched by other areas of knowledge or is seen to be founded on a set of more or less universally accepted definitions and basic assumptions. This makes mathematics an excellent source of material for TOK discussions.

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.

Perspectives

What is it about mathematics that enables mathematical results to remain unchanged over time?

How significant have notable individuals been in shaping the nature and development of mathematics as an area of knowledge?

What is the role of the mathematical community in determining the validity of a mathematical proof?

Is mathematical knowledge embedded in particular cultures or traditions?

Does personal experience play any role in the formation of claims in mathematics?

Is progress harder to make in mathematics than in other areas of knowledge?

If mathematics is created by humans, is it still possible to accept mathematical truths as objective facts about the world?

Are all of the areas of knowledge in the TOK course themselves embedded in a particular tradition or bound to a particular culture?

ATL Skills

Approaches to Learning

Communication

- In this unit, we will

ask students to explain their understanding of a text or idea to each other

construct a task around the use of different vocabulary and examples when speaking to different audiences

have students give an oral presentation without reading from their notes

ask students to monitor and check the quality of their writing

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 all students to contribute to discussions

Developing IB Learners

Learner Profile



Thinkers



Communicators