Getting all International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme teachers involved in the Theory of Knowledge course: Action research in a Southeast Asia IB school

Theory of Knowledge (TOK) is a course about critical thinking and inquiring into the process of knowing, rather than about learning a specific body of knowledge. The TOK course examines how we know what we claim to know.

Background:
• In addition to providing a strong academic preparation for university, the IBDP aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.
• TOK, through the awareness and skills that should be developed in its classroom, distils much that the IB seeks to develop in pupils.
• TOK is the lynchpin of the whole programme.

Rationale:
• TOK can effectively play its central role only with the active participation of all teachers. In reality, many in the IB community do not understand what TOK is all about or see how it fits within the IBDP as a whole.
• Initiatives led by the IB Organization in order to change the state of affairs have not been as successful as hoped.

Research Questions & Preliminary Findings

In what ways and to what extent can TOK help pupils’ learning in other IBDP subjects? 
TOK fosters appreciation of the pursuit of knowledge and the contributions of all areas of knowledge to our understanding.

How much do IB subject teachers know about TOK and its role in the IBDP model?
80% of teachers interviewed in my school stated that they did not know much about TOK, although some of them have read articles on TOK.

In what ways and to what extent can a training course develop teachers’ understanding of the role of TOK in the IBDP?
Teachers’ understanding can considerably improve with a well-planned training course that is not time consuming, delivered using simplified terminology and concrete examples from teachers’ specialisms.

How to teach teachers and make them genuinely excited about something they might think they do not need?
Teachers must be convinced that the training is important for the pupils, the school and for their personal (and possibly professional) growth.

Method: Action research
a. Survey of teachers
b. Training course for teachers
c. Classroom observations
d. Survey of students
e. Design of a sustainable set of practices

Next steps:
a. Analysis of data obtained from classroom observations and post-observation interviews of teachers.
b. Survey of pupils and analysis of collected information.
c. Design of a sustainable set of practices to secure all teachers’ involvement in TOK.

Reference list available upon request