



IB Theory of Knowledge Networking Session Annandale High School November 1, 2010

John Hawes: Facilitator

Session Agenda:

How best to get students (a) to recognize, insofar as possible, the limits to and imperfections in their current knowledge of the world, across multiple areas of human knowledge; and (b) how best to inspire them to broaden and deepen their own ways of knowing as tools for understanding an increasingly complex world. The canonical IB “ways of knowing,” i.e. sense perception, emotions, language and reason. The multiple “areas of knowledge,” e.g. history, ethics, literature, science. TOK presentations. The TOK essay. Holistic vs. sequential approaches to the course.

Session Minutes/Discussion Notes:

In the course of the seminar discussion, the following materials and/or issues were discussed in terms of their usefulness in promoting student understanding of contemporary knowledge issues:

ARTICLES AND HANDOUTS:

- Significance of the discovery of a so-called “Goldilocks” planet as an example of the continuing evolution of knowledge; paired with “When E.T. phones the Pope” by Marc Kaufman, *The Washington Post*, November 8, 2009, and a series of Brewster Rockit cartoons on the discovery of the planet from recent editions of *The Washington Post*.
- The formal definition of “knowledge issues” as understood by the IB, and how to present that in terms intelligible to high school students.
- “What Makes Us Moral?” by Jeffrey Kluger, *Time Magazine*, Dec. 3, 2007, looking at the paradox of human moral sensibilities and our demonstrated capacity for inhumane action
- The world as seen from New York, classic cover of *The New Yorker* for March 29, 1976, and the world as seen from Beijing, a take-off on the earlier *New Yorker* cover, on the cover of *The Economist*, March 21-27, 2009, as examples of the problems of looking at the world, or any issues within it, from a single perspective or “bubble”.

- “What will future Generations Condemn Us For” by Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Washington Post*, September 26, 2010, a capsule presentation of his new 2010 book, *The Honor Code*, on how and why societies overcame long-standing practices that are now universally regarded as evil, including the Atlantic slave trade, Chinese foot-binding, and dueling.
- “China’s Economy Overtakes Japan in Real Terms,” *The Economist*, August 16, 2010, statistical presentation of world economies over the past 2000 years, emphasizing the differing perspectives that today’s rising societies, India and China, have on their own past prominence

BOOKS:

- *When China Rules the World*, by Martin Jacques, 2010, a discussion of the potential differences that China’s growing influence and its own traditions might bring to future world order
- *Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior*, by Ori and Ron Brafman, 2008, on why we so often mislead ourselves
- *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error*, by Katherine Schultz, 2010, on similar theme, why we have such difficulty admitting mistakes
- *Proust was a Neuroscientist*, by Jonah Lehrer, 2007, on artistic revolutions, and the ways in which they anticipate scientific and other changes
- *When Religion Becomes Evil: Five Warning Signs*, by Charles Kimball, 2008, a post-9/11 treatise on the need for understanding among the world’s religions and the obstacles to achieving it
- *A Treatise on Efficacy: Between Western and Chinese Thinking*, by Francois Jullien, 2004, a treatise on the differences in strategic approach to issues in classic “western” thought, going back as far as Greece, and classic Chinese thought, going back as far as Confucius.

FILMS:

- *Men in Black*, directed by Barry Sonnenfeld, 1997, in which an organization deliberately encourages and recruits individuals for thinking “outside the box”
- *Alice in Wonderland*, directed by Tim Burton, 2010, in which Alice grows up and faces real “knowledge” choices in an artificial Victorian society on the brink of change, played out in a sub-conscious underworld.
- *Before the Rain*, directed by Milcho Manchevski, 1994, in which Macedonia is torn apart by ethnic conflict between its Orthodox Christian and Muslim populations
- *Triumph of the Will*, directed by Leni Reifenstahl, 1935, the classic of political propaganda, shot at a Hitler Youth rally in Nuremberg

ON-LINE TALK:

“Jennifer Lee Hunts for General Tso”, *TED* conference, San Francisco, July 2008, highlighting what we don’t actually know about “Chinese” food

SAMPLE TOK PRESENTATION:

“Crisis, Melodrama, and TOK,” February, 2010, on the risks of “band-aid” approaches to serious issues, taking off from the world response to the earthquake in Haiti.