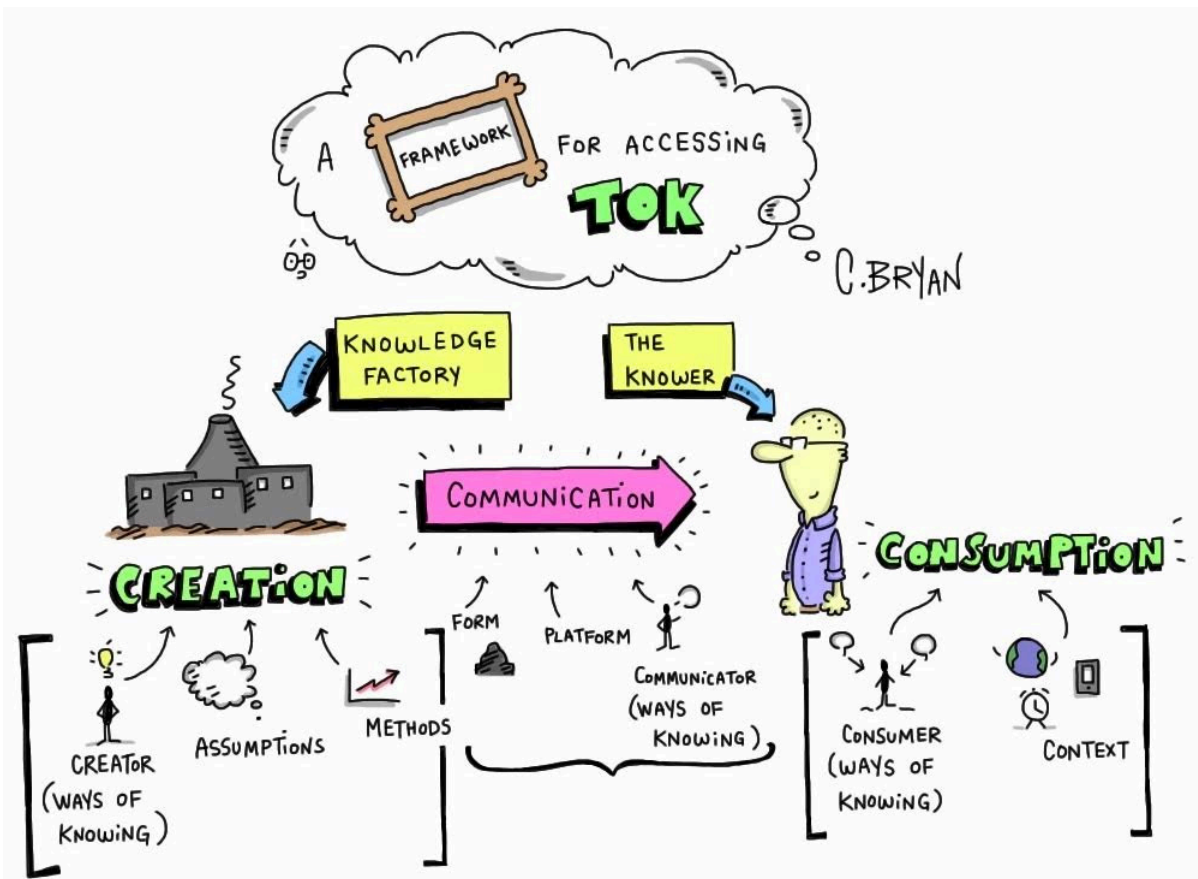


# Gateways to Theory of Knowledge

## Blog post 1

How is knowledge created, communicated and consumed?

Written by Christian Bryan and illustrated by Gary Goodwin



I first want to take you through the basic assumptions of the TOK course and offer a framework that allows students and teachers to view the subject in an accessible format. TOK deals with some potentially unwieldy ideas and it is essential to understand what is being addressed by grounding TOK in the underlying assumptions of the subject.

### The basic assumptions of the TOK course are:

Knowledge is not fixed. It is dynamic and therefore open to influence from a variety of sources, both inside the knower and out 'there' in the ether, as a shared construction between humans.



The processes that **create** knowledge (for example the assumptions or methods of the creator[s]) influence its 'appearance' and therefore influence what becomes known.



The processes that **communicate** knowledge (for example the type of language used, or the platform on which it is communicated) also influence its 'appearance' and therefore influence what becomes known.



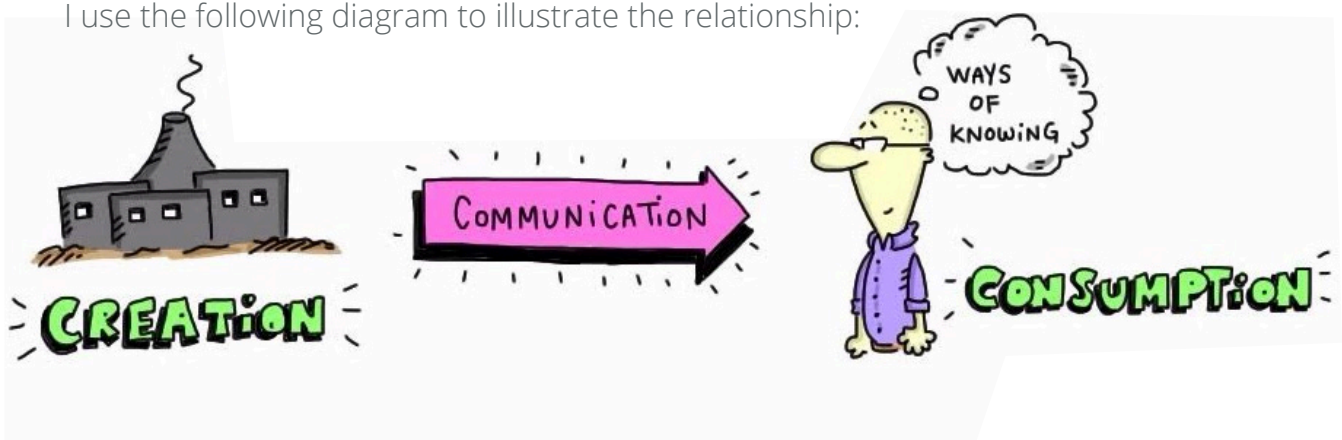
The processes that act on the knower when knowledge is **consumed** (e.g. emotions, perceptions, culture, values) influence what becomes known.



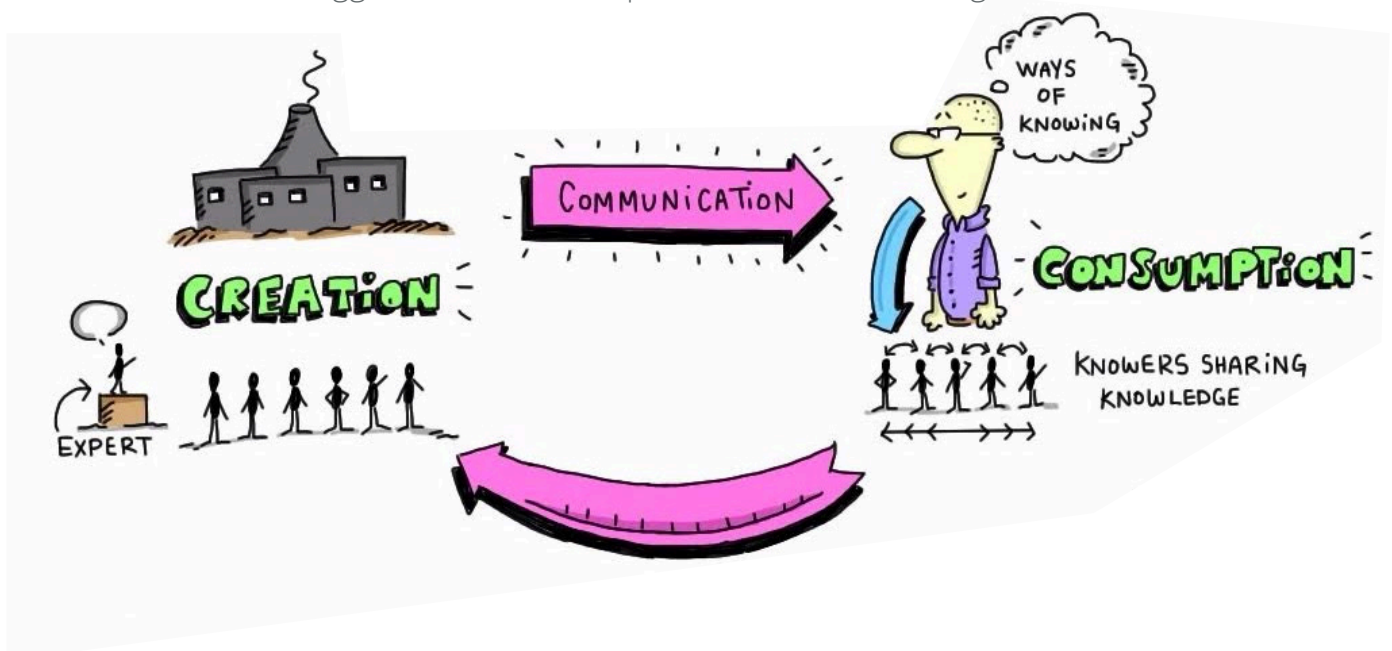
# A framework for accessing TOK

A basic approach is to focus on the three main notions: how knowledge is **created**, how knowledge is **communicated** and how knowledge is **consumed**. I use these words because they are easily said and easily understood. And because alliteration helps us to remember. Most importantly, the words convey the separation between knowledge being produced externally to the knower as well as showing how knowledge is dynamic and therefore open to influence. But yet again, an alert and intelligent reader will no doubt have a problem with each of these words and be able to offer alternatives.

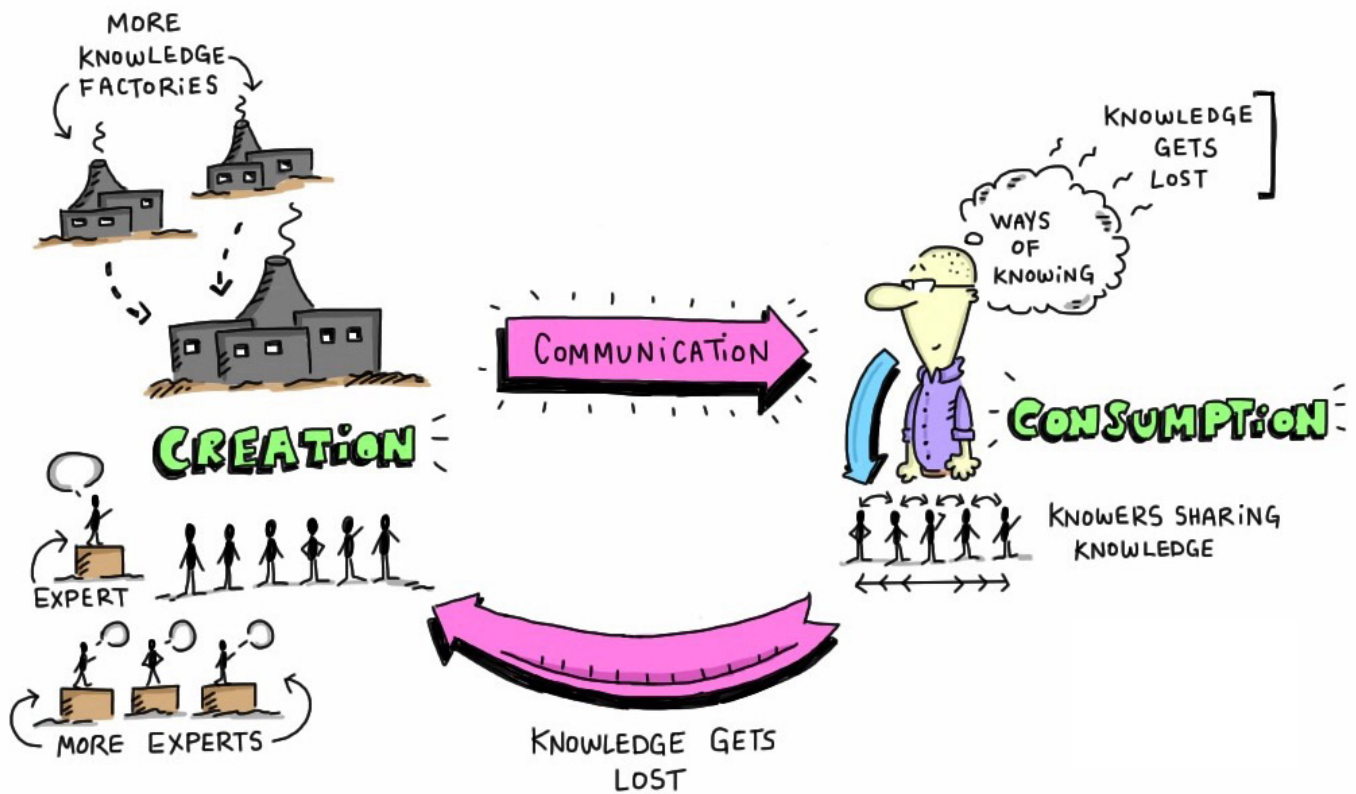
I use the following diagram to illustrate the relationship:



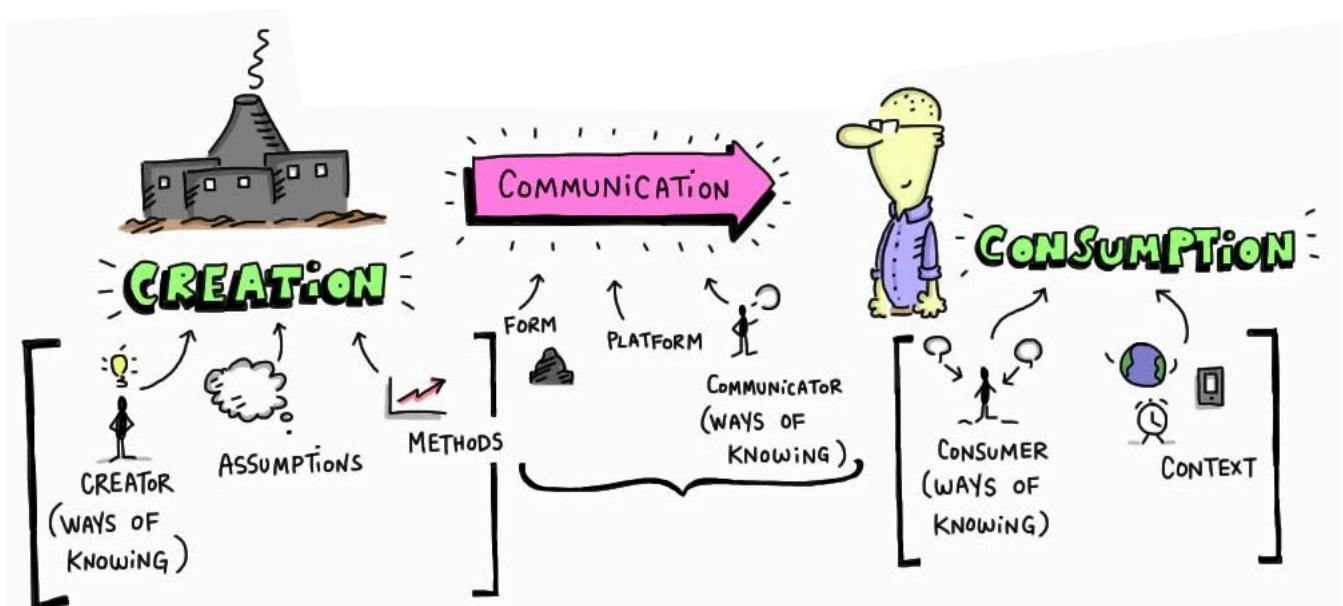
A good exercise is to **draw up alternative diagrams and analogies**. My students often point out how the factory analogy is missing humans (so we draw in some humans). They also point out how humans do not simply consume knowledge and then move on, they consume it, debate it, re-communicate it, change it, edit it, etc. This is missing from the diagram, so we draw an arrow from the consumer back to the creator to suggest a feedback loop of information exchange.



But this then suggests an isolated and closed circle - so we **draw other agencies, knowledge factories**, supply lines and humans that might be added to the process.



The end result is something of a spaghetti junction. But **the process is the point** - understanding how knowledge is dynamic, open to review and has various forces at work on it as it is created, communicated and consumed.



# Language and TOK

The following assumptions set out at the start of this post illustrate both how interesting a discussion of language can be in the context of TOK, while at the same time illustrating how that discussion can be an inhibitor to further learning. Look again at the words 'appearance and 'known' below:



Knowledge is not fixed, it is dynamic and therefore open to influence from a variety of sources both inside the knower and out 'there' in the ether as a shared construction between humans.



The processes that create knowledge (for example the assumptions or methods of the creator[s]) influence its 'appearance'\* and therefore influence what becomes known\*\*.



The processes that communicate knowledge (for example the type of language used or the platform on which it is communicated) also influence its 'appearance'\* and therefore influence what becomes known\*\*.

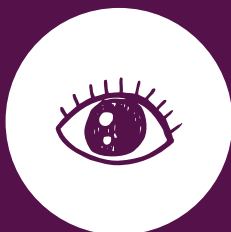


The processes that act on the knower when knowledge is consumed (e.g. emotions, perceptions, culture, values) influence what becomes known\*\*.

I often use the issues surrounding language use as a TOK strategy, and invite multilingual students to offer alternatives. Showing how language impacts knowledge and knowing is perfect TOK.

\* The reader can see how the English word 'appearance' is not necessarily the best fit for this sentence. It suggests the only important aspect of knowledge is the 'surface'. I could have used the phrase 'structure of knowledge' but that would suggest a rigidity to knowledge that I did not want to convey.

\*\* The English word 'known' has a definitive, past tense, end-point quality to it. Readers should suggest alternatives and whether it is the best fit for this sentence. I could not say 'therefore influence what becomes knowing' because that would not be grammatically correct.



## Watch this space

This is the **first** TOK blog **out of six**.

In the next blog I will look at what factors influence knowledge.



Send us examples of language you currently use for TOK.

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