

Circles of Action

A routine for organizing one's understanding of a topic through concept mapping.

What can I do to contribute...

In my **inner circle** (of friends, family, the people I know)?

In my **community** (my school, my neighborhood)?

In the **world** (beyond my immediate environment)?

Purpose: *What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?*

This routine fosters students' disposition and motivation to take action in personal, local, and global spheres and prepares them to weigh courses of action and their consequences.

Application: *When and where can I use it?*

This routine can help students to develop their sensitivity to opportunities to influence their environments, their capacity to do so in effective, informed, and responsible ways, and their motivation to take actions over time. When students learn about the world and feel inclined to make a difference, they can feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of issues like climate change, transnational consumption, or human rights violations. A mismatch between calls for global citizenship and students' perceptions of their own capacity to act can stifle motivation to engage. This routine helps students learn to recognize that actions can have multiple scopes (small-big) and occur in multiple spheres (personal-local-global). This routine can be used across disciplines (e.g., geography, science, literature, economics) and with a broad range of resources (e.g., films, narratives, photographs) typically addressing a conflict, problem, system, or design that can be improved through participation and engagement. This routine can also be used informally in daily school contexts and interactions in which students have the opportunity to change a situation or help to solve a problem (e.g., a conflict among friends, consumption patterns in the school or community, the integration of immigrant students). This routine works best when students have a moderate understanding of the issue, are primed to care about it, and have a sense of urgency or see the need for a response. This routine can be particularly effective when students sense the need but are having difficulty considering viable paths for action.

Launch: *What are some tips for starting and using this routine?*

You or your students might begin with a particular issue in mind, or you might involve students in selecting a topic through brainstorming issues that are concerning them and that they think require solutions. This routine invites students to map possibilities for action, so prior to the discussion, prepare a way for you or the students to document their responses. Typically, the "map" involves three concentric circles. You might draw these concentric circles (typically labeled *inner*, *community*, and *world*) on the board (for a whole class discussion) or invite small groups of students to draw them on large pieces of paper. Once students have had a chance (either as a whole group or in small groups) to brainstorm possible contributions at each of the levels (note that the order of questions can be inverted if necessary), you might invite the whole class to discuss: What are the barriers to students' capacity to take action at various levels? Drawing on a rich initial actions map, students may be invited to consider factors such as ethics, viability, personal interest, and potential impact as they decide what to do next.

Share your experience with this thinking routine on social media using the hashtags [#PZThinkingRoutines](#) and [#CirclesOfAction](#).



This thinking routine was developed as part of the Id Global & PZ Connect projects at Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

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