

The 3 Whys

A routine for nurturing a disposition to discern the significance of a situation, topic, or issue keeping global, local, and personal connections in mind.

1. Why might this [topic, question] matter to me?
2. Why might it matter to people around me [family, friends, city, nation]?
3. Why might it matter to the world?

Purpose: What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?

Intrinsic motivation is a key engine of deep learning. As humans we are motivated to learn when we come to believe that a topic or body of knowledge matters. However, gauging significance — i.e. determining whether something matters and why — is a capacity seldom taught. Significance is not a fixed quality of objects, places or events. Rather it is attributed, constructed by learners. Assessing global and local significance requires the mind to operate at several levels at once. The 3Y's routine invites learners to move step by step across personal, local and global spheres. This routine encourages students to develop intrinsic motivation to investigate a topic by uncovering the significance of the topic in multiple contexts. The routine also helps students make local-global connections and situate themselves in local and global spheres.

Application: When and where can I use it?

You may find this routine useful early in a unit after the initial introduction of a theme, when you want students to consider carefully why a topic might be worth investigating further. Teachers have also used the routine to expand on a given topic (e.g. local elections, goods consumption) to help students become aware of how such a topic, issue, or question has far-ranging impact and consequences at the local and the global levels. In other cases (e.g. studying poverty in Brazil), the routine is used to create a personal connection to a theme that seems initially remote.

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

The routine can be applied to a broad range of topics (from social inequality, to a mathematician's biography, balance in ecosystems, writing a story, to attending school). You may use a rich image, text, quote, video or other inviting materials as provocations to ground students' thinking. One important consideration in using this routine is to ensure that the students have clarity about the focal point of the analysis. For example, you might ask, "Why might understanding social inequality matter to me, my people, the world?" as opposed to "Why might this image matter?"

Students will need initial clarity about the phenomenon to be explored, e.g. the meaning of social inequality, in order to unveil its significance. When using an image or text, you may choose to prepare students for this routine by asking them what they think the image is about and why and then focusing their attention on the theme to be explored through the 3Ys.

What are some tips about how to carry out the routine? Use the questions in the order proposed or in reverse order beginning with the more accessible entry point. For instance, students might unfold the purpose and significance of a story they are writing by first reflecting about why the story matters to them, and then moving out to the world from there. In other cases, a teacher may seek to construct a more personal connection to a distant event (e.g. the holocaust), thus beginning with the world working inward. It is recommended that students work on one step at a time as interesting nuances and distinctions between the personal local and global may be lost if they work with the three questions in mind at once. If time allows, you may compare and group students' thoughts to find shared motivations and rationales for learning the topic under study.

Share your experience with this thinking routine on social media using the hashtags #PZThinkingRoutines and #The3Whys.

The 3 Whys, cont'd

What is Global Competence?

Global competence can be defined as the capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance (Boix Mansilla & Jackson 2011). Globally competent students prepare for complex societies and a global economy by learning how to investigate the world beyond their immediate environment, framing and making sense of significant issues. How do migrant populations adapt to their new places of work and living? What tools do governments have to promote economic development and eradicate extreme poverty? What is an ecosystem and how do different ecosystems around the world work? Globally competent students also learn to recognize their own and others' perspectives, articulating and explaining such perspectives thoughtfully, empathically and respectfully. Globally competent students can communicate across differences, bridging cultural, linguistic, economic and religious divides – two additional capacities that are especially important to today's fragmented and interconnected societies. Most importantly, in order to be prepared to participate and work in today's world students, must learn to take responsible action. They need to learn to identify opportunities for productive action to develop and carry out informed plans. Prepared students, this framework suggests, view themselves as informed, thoughtful, compassionate and effective citizens and workers in changing times (Boix Mansilla & Jackson 2011).

Global competence is cast as a capacity to understand – meaning, broadly speaking, to use disciplinary concepts, theories, ideas, methods or findings in novel situations, to solve problems, produce explanations, create products or interpret phenomena in novel ways (Boix Mansilla & Gardner 1999). It focuses on issues of global significance and action to improve conditions; learning must be visibly relevant to students and the world. When significance is considered, global competence curricula becomes a call for authenticity, for carefully looking to the contemporary world for topics that matter most to examine (Perkins 2015).

Finally, “global competence” as a disposition speaks of student ownership and long-lasting transformation. Thinking dispositions, Project Zero researchers have proposed, involve the ability to think with information, the sensitivity to opportunities in the real world to do that, and the inclination to do so over time (Perkins et al 1993, Tishman et al 1993). Dispositions are about the “residuals” of learning beyond formal contexts (Ritchhart 2014); they are about the “kind of person” a student will become (Boix Mansilla & Gardner 2000). Broadly considered, global competence dispositions include:

- A disposition to inquire about the world (for example, engaging with questions of significance, exploring local-global connections, and seeking information beyond familiar environments, describing, explaining and developing a position about the world).
- A disposition to understand multiple perspectives--others' and their own (for example, considering cultural contexts, resisting stereotypes, and valuing our shared human dignity-- especially as students interact with others whose paths differ greatly from their own).
- A disposition toward respectful dialog (communicating across differences listening generously, sharing courageously, openly and appropriately given their audience and context).
- A disposition toward taking responsible action (being inclined to see and frame opportunities to improve conditions, and collaborating with others, and mobilize themselves to act).

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

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