



**Center for Leadership & Educational Equity**

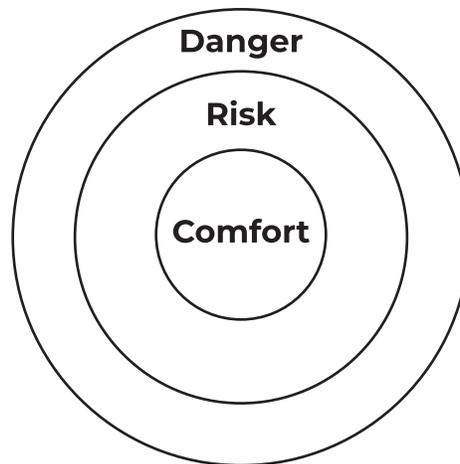
## Zones of Comfort, Risk and Danger: Constructing Your Zone Map

*Developed in the field by educators.*

*Note: The directions below include each participant drawing the zones on paper. Another variant to consider includes using yarn or masking tape to make large circles on the floor, big enough for the participants to step into the three zones.*

### **Process**

1. Draw a diagram of concentric circles in the following manner:
  - a. The middle circle is Comfort, the second is Risk, and the third is Danger.
  - b. Consider the various aspects of your work. Think about the aspects that feel really comfortable to you, those that feel like there is some risk involved, but generally positive, and those aspects that you know get your hackles up, make you feel defensive, cloud your judgment, or make you want to retreat.
  - c. Decide on the size of each Zone based on your consideration. Do you work a lot in your Comfort Zone, your Risk Zone? Do you work only a little in your Danger Zone? Make the size of the Zones reflect the quantity of time you work there.  
For Example:



2. Think about the tasks, people and places that make up your professional life.  
Write each of these into the Zone that best represents your sense of relative Comfort, Risk or Danger.
3. Look at the tasks/people/places you put in the Danger Zone. Write a question for each of these beginning with, "How do I...?" These dilemmas can later be explored in a consultancy protocol or journal writing.

## Observations on the Zones

- 1. The Comfort Zone** is usually a place where we feel at ease, with no tension, have a good grip on our environment, and know how to navigate occasional rough spots with ease. It is also a place to retreat to from the Danger Zone. For example, one of your Danger Zone aspects may be when people start disagreeing with passion and even disrespect. You might find that when that happens you retreat into your Comfort aspect of listening and not intervening, or even find a way to divert the conversation to a topic that is in your Comfort Zone. The Comfort Zone is a place to relax and renew yourself.
- 2. The Risk Zone** involves adapting to new circumstances, and it is the most fertile place for learning. It is where most people are willing to take some risks, to not know everything, or sometimes, to not know anything at all; where people clearly know they want to learn and will take the risks necessary to do so. It is where people open up to other people with curiosity and interest, and where they will consider options or ideas they haven't thought of before.
- 3. Generally it is not a good idea to work from either your own Danger Zone or anyone else's.** That area is so full of defenses, fears, red-lights, desire for escape, etc., that it requires too much energy and time to accomplish anything from that zone. The best way to work when you find yourself there is to recognize that it is a Danger Zone and work on some strategies to move into the Risk Zone (either on your own or with colleagues).

For example, if I feel my anger rising and my body getting rigid when someone says it's time we really clamped down on standardized tests and taught to them right now before the kids failed any more and it is suggested that our learning community should work in that direction as our main focus, I recognize the signs of being in my Danger Zone and know I probably won't be rational when I speak. Therefore I need a strategy. In this case, my strategy will be to ask calmly, "What are the advantages for the students if we do that? What are the advantages for teaching and learning? What are the disadvantages?" Then I have to listen and list. I can't trust myself to do more than ask questions until I become more rational and this isn't such a high level Danger Zone for me.

## How to Apply the Zones Productively:

### *The Consultancy*

1. Review your Zone Map and select a dilemma represented there.
2. Make some notes to give more detail to the dilemma. Notice what Zone the dilemma appears in, or if it is a complex dilemma and has aspects in several Zones.
3. Break into triads and plan your order and time for 3 Consultancies.
4. As you present your dilemma, use your Zone Map as a reference for the group. They may find fertile ground for probing questions or feedback in your Map, and can see how your dilemma relates to other aspects of your work.

### *Establishing Norms*

When establishing norms, ask the group what behaviors and attitudes will best support them in staying within the risk/learning zone.