

Robinson-Zañartu, C., Doerr, P., & Portman, J. (2015). *Teaching 21 thinking skills for the 21st century: The MiCOSA model*. NJ: Pearson.

Mediation in the Classroom: An Open Systems Approach to Develop Critical Thinking and Learning Skills

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Robinson-Zañartu, Doerr and Portman are three authors who started from very different experiences in education and yet found themselves on a common quest to help students develop thinking and learning skills in meaningful contexts. *Teaching 21 Thinking Skills for the 21st Century: The MiCOSA Model* stands out as a powerful teaching resource that shows educators how to facilitate the development of critical thinking skills by linking “mediation” of thinking skills within curriculum and the common core standards, building on students’ diverse cultures and linguistic backgrounds, and helping students learn to transfer their learning in an era of rapid change.

This book starts by introducing the MiCOSA model which is an acronym that stands for *Mediation in the Classroom: An Open Systems Approach*. MiCOSA encapsulates three key ideas: M is for Mediation, IC for in the Classroom and OSA for Open Systems Approach. The book begins in Part I, *Contextual and Conceptual Frameworks* (Chapter 1), by sharing foundational ideas behind the work and explaining how the three MiCOSA components influence and empower one another and interact as parts of a system.

Part II, *Critical Components of the MiCOSA Model*, provides detailed descriptions, classroom examples and support strategies for each of MiCOSA’s core components via chapters 2 to 6. For instance, chapter 2 explores what culture, language, and community have to do with learning and how MiCOSA helps educators to link students’ cultural backgrounds, prior knowledge, and experience to their learning. The authors’ creative use of a psychological technique “Reframing” which although is not unique to a specific psychotherapy, its unique application here is applauded. The concept of reframing comes from the idea of “frame” of mind, and how frame of mind colors perceptions of the world. By helping another person “reframe,” you help him or her see things from another perspective. Reframing problems as opportunities, or perceived weaknesses as unique features or strengths, are common examples.

The authors also argue for the importance of mediating conflicts between cultural and school practices, and emphasize three areas that a new student without the social and verbal contexts has to negotiate. These include: (a) content learning, (b) the new rules of the school culture, and (c) the social-emotional challenges of not having the familiar social-emotional supports that framed his or her learning. Correspondingly, this increases both cognitive and affective demands for the student with a cultural “mismatch.” In other words, when the demands of school become overly complex for students with weaker learning foundations, these students may not have an equal chance to succeed. Hence, Chapter 2 provides an “appetizer” of how MiCOSA’s five mediating conversations and interactions help facilitate meaningful engagement, support motivation, and change in classrooms with diverse students.

Chapter 3 highlights five types of mediating conversation, namely (1) establishing intent and reciprocity, (2) mediating meaning, (3) bridging thinking, (4) guiding self-regulation, and (5) building competence are thoroughly illustrated with appropriate strategies, activities, and vignettes

and individually discussed with sample mediating conversations to support the mediator's work. We believe that using mediating conversations require a conscious and deliberate effort on the part of the mediator. Building up their listening, eliciting, acknowledging, and questioning skills would require rigorous practice and supervision by an experienced mediator and this would go beyond the scope of this book. Nonetheless, chapter 3 allows readers to understand the critical differences between a mediator and the cultural role of an educator. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 focus on elaborating MiCOSA's 21 thinking skills that are briefly explained under *bridging thinking* in chapter 3. The authors organized the thinking skills into three phases, namely "for gathering information," "for transforming information" and "for communicating information" which are seen as a parallel to Reuven Feuerstein's recognizing and improving of deficient cognitive functions in the *input, elaboration and output phase*, and Oon Seng Tan's cognitive functions disc (CFD). The purpose of CFD is to highlight the information processing model called the 3Cs—collecting information, connecting information and communicating information.

Part III, *Implementing MiCOSA* (Chapters 7 to 10) delves into implementing the critical components of MiCOSA within the school curriculum. Chapter 7 provides an outline of how to identify the common core standard that educators use to teach the thinking skills and build upon the core concepts. The authors introduce the differences of understanding, developing and using both Content Big Ideas (CBIs) and Broader Big Ideas (BBIs) for bridging of contents and bridging across contexts respectively in Chapter 8. Chapter 9 introduces assessment tools to provide feedback on the students' current knowledge of the 21 thinking skills. Essential questions are used both to provide constructive feedback to students so they can monitor and regulate their own progress, and to allow educators to assess students' thinking and progress. The MiCOSA's *Teacher's Guide to Planning Instruction* and the *Lesson Planning Guides* are presented in chapter 10 which guide and help educators effectively implement the MiCOSA model in the classroom.

Part IV, *Motivating Tomorrow's Learning* ends with a final chapter of using the MiCOSA pedagogic framework as guides for educators to build positive relationships with students, and the chapter also emphasizes the importance of partnerships with parents to help promote students' resilience and improve their school performance.

This book has evidently demonstrated how research impacts practices and policies in schools. The authors referred to the work of both Reuven Feuerstein and Mogens Reimer Jensen, who proposed and researched specific process of mediation that had produced clinical evidence of helping facilitate change in thinking skills. Another strength of this book is revealed by how the authors systematically build up from foundational ideas to specifics with abundant resources for practitioners to adapt and use. Conversely, readers who prefer to select and adapt certain segments of the MiCOSA framework need to be cognizant of the theoretical underpinning and its core components (Part I and II) in order to maximize the potential of the MiCOSA framework to enhance students' learning.

In conclusion, this is a comprehensive text for educators to help students develop critical thinking skills for the 21st century. The authors further provided an online subscription-based resource that supplies the tools educators would need to effectively plan and implement instruction. We strongly recommend this book to educators who are looking for a hands-on guide in learning how to develop students' thinking skills across the curriculum.