UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Family Pedagogy (blended)

2324-2-E1901R111

Course title

Working with families: the case of ageing

Topics and course structure

What must an educator know, do and be to work with families in educational and social services? Which attitudes and competencies could you develop to be useful and favor the wellbeing of all family members? How can a specific theme - ageing - illuminate family life? Reflexive systemic competencies - collaboration, criticality, curiosity, creativity – sustain responsive, deliberate and trasformative actions of educators and services. That is why this course is research-based.
During the course, students will carry on a pedagogical research with an ecosystemic approach, working in groups and in relation to the environment and society where we live. In order to learn working with "families" (plural), we will try to overcome the dominant causal linear perspective and commonsensical understanding of family. Firstly, we will need to learn how to identify and transform our prejudices, stereotypes, blame and stigma, very frequent when it comes to families.
How? Firstly, learning to autonomously search data and reliable scientific sources, then analysing thoroughly the publications (in Italian, English, or other languages) that we will find, and learning to observe and to listen with method, bringing good arguments to our ideas and positions, using imagination and narrative-aestetic languages.
In the classroom we will work in groups, doing research on a general theme proposed by the teacher - this year the wide theme will be "ageing and the family" - to be explored through more specific research questions. We aim at transforming our idea of family, as well as ageing – too often presented as trivial and a-critical – into a rigorous, wide and deep theory. Personal committment, creativity and engagement in studying will be required since the very first day, to build “epistemic objects”, research questions and tools that will sustain critical reflection on our cultural frameworks and the hegemonic discourses that we unknowingly inhabit.
In doing so, we try to prepare ourselves to work with families and people of all ages in difficult and challenging situations, coping with the uncertainty and complexity of educational work with an open and adventurous spirit.

This year the blended program has 36 hours in presence and 20 online, articulated as follows:

1. Introduction to the ecosystemic and critical approach: concepts and methods
2. Families and aging: which research? Themes, research questions and literature review (e.g. services and educational work, interactions, memories and family identity, intersectionality, caregiver's role and proximal care system...)
3. The contemporary family in an onlife world: informal learning, digital ethnography, critical analysis of websites and platforms
4. Group works: review. method, analysis of cultural objects, presentations

Objectives

At the end of the course, after completing all the activities, you will show improved knowledge, skills and competence in the following areas:

Knowledge and understanding of the following main concepts (each concept needs to be referred to its scientific sources):

- families as systems: context, interactions, symmetric and complementary relationships, feedback, escalation/schismogenesis, roles and scripts, family paradigms, family narrative, myths, rituals, the family Us;
- the systemic approach in education: communication, learning levels, structural/coevolutionary coupling, micro, meso and macrosystem;
- services system: social policies and welfare, team as a collective mind, networking, guidelines and databases, educational and interprofessional work, participation and rights;
- the contemporary family and the aging society: personalized areas of knowing (each group will have its own contents).

Skills (knowing how to):

- finding/using sound information from different reliable and useful sources; identify certified sources;
- critically analysing a scientific text;
- analysing an observed situation using systemic lenses;
- using aesthetic and narrative languages in a critical framework;
- working as a team: multiplying stories, challenging the unique perspective;
- position oneself in the contex and bring arguments to sustain one’s own position.

Competences :

- reading a complex phenomenon using the systemic concepts
- recognizing one's own ideas, values and prejudices;
- self-positioning: first person discourse, speaking in the classroom;
- interacting in the group and classroom with a curious, creative, critical and collaborative attitude;
- communicating by calibrating one's action in the ongoing situation.

Cross-sectional competences (ESCO classification)

Many of them are relevant to this course, especially:

- mastering the academic language and foreign languages (English, or French/Spanish as an alternative);
- working with digital devices and applications to search in the web;
- processing information, ideas and concepts - critical thinking;

- self-management, self-reflexivity, self-knowing;
- social and communication - teamwork, accepting and transforming conflict into an opportunity; offering recognition to the other;
- active citizenship: learning methods and tools for participation, inclusion and rights

Methodologies

The course is *blended*: it means that a part of the didactic (26 hours, about 3 hours' work every week) is not in presence, but online, by individual and collective tasks to be done in autonomy within the signalled deadline. You will do a research with your group, entailing individual study and team work, collective presentations and discussion of partial and final results in the classroom.
Each topic (see calendar) will be introduced by short lectures, followed by guided tasks in the classroom and online, forums and classroom presentation with *peer-evaluation* and discussion (*flipped class* method).
Lessons in presence will be interactive and dialogic. Online individual activities will be tracked to certify attendance (at least 75% are mandatory).
From start, you will be asked to take an active and reflexive position, to keep a reflexive log that will be useful for the exam and to collaborate, also overcoming conflicts. The texts for the exam must be studied from the beginning and actively used to reflect, problematize and systematize knowledge.

Online and offline teaching materials

Diverse materials, readings, videolectures, and links will be uploaded in the Moodle platform of the course, as well as stories, video excerpts, and the record of lessons.
Other materials will be provided by the students through research activities.

Programme and references

The programme has 36 hours of didactics in presence and 20 online. It is articulated as follows:

Attending students will belong to a work group, upload their weekly tasks (at least 75%) and attend classes (at least 75%). Those who do not want to do group work or attend lessons can define themselves "not attending" but they will be able to follow the course at their own rhythm thanks to the materials in the elearning platform and recorded lessons.

Bibliography
Bibliography entails 2 books and 4-5 research papers (the latter have to add up at least to 90 pages), found during the course following the teacher's instructions.

Books:
Formenti L. (a cura di) *Re-inventare la famiglia. Guida teorico-pratica per i professionisti dell'educazione*. Apogeo, Milano 2012.
Formenti L., Cino D. *Oltre il senso comune. Un viaggio di ricerca nella pedagogia della famiglia*. Franco Angeli, Milano 2023 (in press).

Papers of students' choice
They are the outcome of the literature review done by the group; they may be in Italian, English, French or

Spanish; they may be parts of larger publications (e.g. book chapters). They must be analyzed and summarized for the group work, then studied thoroughly to be discussed at the oral exam.

For students who are not fluent in Italian, the whole bibliography can be in English, French or Spanish, made of books and papers (only scientific publications are admitted); the list has to be negotiated as soon as possible with the teacher. Here are some suggested books in English:

Burch, S., & Rembis, M. A. (Eds.). (2014). Disability histories (Ser. Disability histories). University of Illinois Press.
Butler-Wall, A., Cosier, K., & Harper, R. L. S. (Eds.). (2016). Rethinking sexism, gender, and sexuality (First, Ser. Ebsco academic collection). A Rethinking Schools Publication.
Cameron, G. (Ed.). (2014). Creating positive systems of child and family welfare : congruence with the everyday lives of children and parents. University of Toronto Press.
Coady, N., & Lehmann, P. (Eds.). (2016). Theoretical perspectives for direct social work practice : a generalist-eclectic approach (3rd ed.). Springer Pub. Company.
Dorr, C. (2014). Social work live : theory and practice in social work using videos. Oxford University Press.
Lishman, J. (2015). Handbook for practice learning in social work and social care, third edition : knowledge and theory (3rd ed.). Jessica Kingsley.
Mizzi, R. C., Rocco, T. S., & Shore, S. (Eds.). (2016). Disrupting adult and community education teaching, learning, and working in the periphery. State University of New York Press.
Quaid, S., Hugman, C., & Wilcock, A. (Eds.). (2022). Negotiating families and personal lives in the 21st century : exploring diversity, social change and inequalities (Ser. Sociological futures). Routledge.
Silver, L. J. (2015). System kids : adolescent mothers and the politics of regulation. University of North Carolina Press.
Travis, S., Stokes-Casey, J., & Kim, S. (Eds.). (2020). Arts education in action : collaborative pedagogies for social justice (Ser. Common threads : an anthology from the university of illinois press). University of Illinois Press.

Warning: novels, films or websites cannot be brought as texts for the exam, but, as cultural objects, they can be used for the research

How can not-attending students prepare the exam and achieve the course's learning objectives?

The program is the same for everybody and all students must write the reflexive essay, but working alone makes it harder. Reading books is not enough. Something concrete needs to be done. Doing a research is not mandatory: it could be too much for a single person. It is possible to analyse a cultural object (movie, series, website, novel...) or a professional or personal experience, being attentive to connect it explicitly to the ecosystemic and critical theory and methodology.
Advices: take regular times to study (e.g. fixed moments in the week); for each topic, start from your experience and question it; do the exercises in the book Re-inventare la famiglia; take part in the students' forums.

Assessment methods

The exam is oral, after uploading a reflexive essay, i.e. a text answering the question “what and how did I learn?”; the experience of the course is analyzed with explicit reference to the concepts, to the acquired knowledge, skills and competences, the experience of the course (or personal self-directed study, for non attending students), dilemmas or probrlems that emerged, not least in group work, and how they were overcome. The written essay and the oral exam can be in Italian, English, French, or Spanish.

This exam modality aims at favoring personal learning, bridging theory and praxis, experience and concepts, favoring personal, critical and (self)reflexive thinking. Learning to write in a correct and effective way is important for an educator.

Evaluation is based on the learning objectives declared in this syllabus.

For the essay: knowledge, skills and competences are evaluated on a scale; there will be consideration of overall linguistic correctness (orthography, syntaxis, punctuation, vocabulary); academic appropriateness (argumentation, quotations from scientific sources, bibliography), conceptual clarity and adherence to the systemic theory (concepts and language must mirror the readings and course), pertinence and richness of the addressed topics and quotations (all the readings must be used in depth and critically in the text), and reflexive/sefl-reflexive competences (capacity of analysing one's own position, values, ideas and prejudices).

For the oral, the same criteria apply, with two further aspects: the student's capacity to take the feedback and critically reflect on one's learning and on the specific limits of the essay, and the capacity to answer in articulate way to questions on readings.

Practicalities
The essay must be uploaded in the "Task" folder of the e-platform within 10 days before the exam session, it receives a qualitative commentary by the teacher or a collaborator, and an evaluation on a scale. Everybody can access the oral exam, no matter their evaluation. With an evaluation of "scarce" knowledge, there will be some more questions on the readings.
The essay's evaluation is communicated the day before the oral session through the platform. In order to re-edit or re-write the reflexive essay, the student has to discuss it during the oral session with the examiner.

What are the most common issues? The essay shows if texts have been really studied and understood. The systemic model is counter-intuitive, simple commonsense does not apply. So, superficial study does not help, readings must be studied thoroughly during the course, taking notes and developing one's own thinking. In writing the essay, avoid copy-and-paste from books, internet or other works: the platform has an anti-plagiarism software that alerts on the rate of copying. Plagiarism is a felony: it will be reported to the academic authority.

Some students show scarce habit in de-centering, reflecting critically, or writing academically. These capacities can be developed during the course, or even afterwards. So, do not worry: suggestions will be offered to you in order to improve these competences, which will be useful for the final dissertation and for your future job.

Features of the reflexive essay:
8 numbered pages, WORD FORMAT, readable font, size 12, interline 1,5 - margins 2,5 on all sides. Cover and bibliography do not count.

Cover page must contain: degree course and name of course, teacher, academic year, student's name and code, title, optional image, attending/non attending student. The text can be enriched and personalized with images, graphics, poetic and literary inserts, etc. It must be accurate.

Where and when to deliver:
The upload is possible until 10 days before the exam session. The repository in Moodle will be visible some days in advance.

WARNING: avoid e-mailing copies to the teacher and using Moodle's messenger. For questions about the course and exame, use the general forum.

Office hours

Prof. Formenti receives upon appointment (write an email), however for most issues related to the course the best thing to do is writing in the dedicated forum. Only in very exceptional and motivated cases it will be possible to do personalized interviews to prepare the exam (being non attending student is not such a case - with 400 exams in a year, this is not sustainable, sorry).

For Erasmus incoming students, it is advisable to fix a meeting as soon as possible to orient them and decide a

personalized program together.

Programme validity

Programmes have 2 years' validity

Course tutors and assistants

Course's tutors are:

Davide Cino, PhD, fellow researcher, vice-president of the Exam Commission
Silvia Luraschi, PhD, pedagogist, independent researcher, Feldenkrais teacher, systemic counsellor
Ludovica Sebastiano, PhD student, pedagogist

Other collaborators and examiners:

Valentina Calciano, pedagogist, coordinator Lab'O
Antonella Cuppari, PhD, psychologist, pedagogist, responsible disability services
Andrea Di Martino, teacher, external collaborator
Marcella Lisi, pedagogist, coordinator "Signori bambini" service for children and families
Sonia Mastroeni, pedagogist, external collaborator
Chiara Morandini, pedagogist, external collaborator
Martina Paoli, pedagogist, external collaborator
Silvia Pinciroli, pedagogist, systemic counsellor, trainer Lab'O, lecturer (laboratories)
Mara Pirotta, pedagogist, systemic counsellor, traineeship tutor, lecturer (laboratories)
Andrea Prandin, pedagogist, systemic counsellor, trainer and supervisor
Maddalena Rossi, teacher, external collaborator
Federica Vergani, pedagogist, systemic counsellor, psychomotor therapist

Sustainable Development Goals

QUALITY EDUCATION | GENDER EQUALITY | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS