UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Family Counselling: Theory and Practice (blended)

2425-1-F8501R005

Course title

Systemic pedagogy in action: eyes, relational dances and embodied reflexivity

Topics and course structure

This course will teach you to work as a systemic pedagogist with families, professionals. and organizations in a range of educational contexts, to promote everybody's rights and ecosystemic wellbeing. The approach is systemic and critical: it means that pedagogical counselling goes beyond the relationship with a single person, to take care of human systems, that is the interdependence of parts and circularity of actions and feedbacks within the dance of interactions where the pedagogist is but one element among multiple human and non-human agents. The pedagogist is part of complex cycles of interactions, to which (s)he contributes and from which (s)he is constrained. That's why critical reflexivity "in action" helps us to see ourselves in relation to others and the context, sustains us in taking position and helping others to do the same, especially when "others" are silenced subjects: children, older adults, persons "with disabilities" or other labels.
Systemic theory offers tools for dialogic and transformative intervention.
During the course, we will consider families, work teams, organizations, and human communities as networks of complex interactions that build borders and transindividual identities, that may engender individual freedom as well as sustain her/him in her/his emancipation. Working with systems requires specific observational, participatory and dialogic tools to explore, accompany, sustain, and transform the interactive processes using communication.
As a pedagogical counsellor, you will need to learn collaborative working to promote participation of all the involved actors. The course combines first level (educational) knowledge and skills with the development of second-level (pedagogical, organizational, coordination, training and supervision) communicative, relational, reflexive and research competences. The course aims at enhancing your capacity in reading systems and to adopt a mobile and open professional position, and a critical eye. To this end, the teaching method focuses on "thinking in stories", Gregory Bateson's idea that will help us to engage personally in individual and group exercises, develop awareness and creativity, recognize our cultural frameworks, presuppositions and prejudices and transform them in a useful direction for professional development.

Objectives

By constant participation to the course and its online activities, the following learning objectives are promoted:

Knowledge and understanding:

- the main concepts of systems theory and their applications in pedagogical counselling; definition of system, feedback, simmetry and complementarity, escalation, equifinality, pattern, scripts, problem-defined systems, reflexive questions, power forms, and other concepts from lessons and readings;
- learning in the systemic thepry: definition of concepts - relationship to knowledge, logical levels, structural coupling, collective mind, transformative learning;
- the context: institutional mandate, question, postures, reframing, metacommunication, coordinated management of meaning and contexts of pedagogical work with individuals, families, professionals, institutions, community, professional family;
- "thinking in stories": hypothesization and reflexive analysis of a concrete situation (case study).

Skills (knowing to do):

- reading a situation with systemic lenses and methods;
- asking questions to open possibilities (e.g. during an interview or network session);
- designing a counselling intervention using narrative, aesthetic and reflexive practices (spiral model of knowledge);
- teamwork to multiply stories, make hypotheses, and co-design.

Competences (reflexivity as a meta-competence):

- knowing how to act responsively in relation to the others and the here-and-now context;
- emotional self-awareness and reflexive positioning toward experience;
- learning to learn (transformative learning);
- caring (taking responsibility) for one's own work and learning, for the context, oneself, the other, and the world;
- cross-sectional competences: language, writing, designing, ethical, relational, communicational.

Methodologies

The course is taught with a blended modality: 20 hours out of 56 are online, so around 3 hours a week of self-directed work (videolectures and exercises to be uploaded in the platform), to facilitate learning for students who cannot attend regularly. To this end, lessons in presence will be recorded and uploaded to the elearning platform; they must be listened to, since many concepts and operative directions are not to be found in books.

The work in the classroom will be dialogic and participatory, with group activities and role plays. Group work in the classroom simulates a team; it will bring to a final analysis of a situation (story) brought by a student (case study), to verify the understanding and capacity of using systemic concepts and methods, not list to prepare the final exam.

The course applies a method for knowledge building based on students' experience and active exploration (learning by doing). Each topic is presented with (video)lectures and reading/writing tasks to augment personal reflexivity and develop a "satisfying theory". We will use different forms of writing (creative, autobiography, autoethnography, academic), analogic and aesthetic languages, critical dialogue and peer-to-peer feedback. So, the course is 100 per cent DI.

To prepare the final exam (reflexive essay), each student is invited to keep a log/portfolio of their activities and

experiences during the course, to facilitate the reconstruction of what has been learnt (see exam).

Online and offline teaching materials

Teaching materials are uploaded to the platform (video lectures, recorded lessons, readings, stories), some materials will be provided by the students themselves.

Programme and references

The course programme is the same for attending and non-attending students; it is articulated in 3 parts:

A) **Introduction to the systemic approach**, exploration of topics and systemic methods.

B) **Pedagogical systemic work in different contexts,** group activities and role plays on different aspects of the pedagogical job with different typologies of users and services.

C) **Thinking in stories,** group work on a concrete situation (story). Presentations and discussion in the class.

Bibliography for the exam

The standard program for the exam entails **2 books** and a third book or **4-5 research papers ** or book chapters (in Italian and/or English). Students may propose an alternative program to the teacher.

Mandatory books for the students who read Italian

Formenti L. (a cura di) LE REGOLE DELLA BELLEZZA. Pedagogia sistemica in azione Franco Angeli, 2024. (in uscita a ottobre)

Formenti L. Formazione e trasformazione. Un modello complesso. Raffaello Cortina, 2017.

Alternative books (third choice)

Sclavi M., Arte di ascoltare e mondi possibili. Come si esce dalle cornici di cui siamo parte, Bruno Mondadori, Milano 2003.

Luraschi, S. Le vie della riflessività. Per una pedagogia del corpomente. Armando, 2021.

Formenti L. Re-inventare la famiglia. Guida teorico-pratica per i professionisti dell'educazione. Apogeo, 2012. (only for students who did not attend Pedagogia della famiglia at Laurea Triennale in Scienze dell'Educazione)

For students who are not fluent in Italian, here are some suggested books in English that may be connected to the course:

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. 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. 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. University of Illinois Press.

About papers:

See the reference lists uploaded in the e-platform or look for scientific sources to explore more deeply your interests. Most papers are in English. To allow personalized learning, it is possibile to agree motivated changes to the program with the teacher.

Assessment methods

**The exam is oral, after delivery of a reflexive essay. **

What is a reflexive essay? A text which answers the question "what and how did I learn?" using arguments and academic evidence; it is not an academic essay, BUT the reference to concepts must be there, as well as using sources appropriately (as in a dissertation) and showing concretely, through examples, the achievement of the knowledge, skills, and especially competences signaled in the syllabus.

The essay, uploaded in the platform Moodle repository by 10 days before the exam session, receives a qualitative commentary and an evaluation on a level scale. A low evaluation does not prevent from sustaining the oral examination, which is a discussion of the learning outcomes documented by the reflexive essay, and, if texts are insufficiently used inside the essay, some questions to assess study. Evaluation is communicated online the day before the oral session. If a student decides to re-edit or re-write his/her text, he/she should discuss it during the oral session with the examiner.

The oral exam is a thorough discussion about the achieved learning outcomes and limits of the reflexive essay. All texts must be brought to the exam session to allow consultation.

Evaluation criteria are: correctness and accuracy of the essay; knowledge and correct use of theories, within the essay and during the interview; conceptual clarity and richness of quotations from the texts; basic skills and competences in reading experience with systemic, critical and reflexive lenses in the essay and oral discussion.

The evaluation of the reflexive essay is formative: it offers a realistic feedback about the achievement of the course objectives declared in the syllabus. The final mark will consider both the quality of the reflexive essay and of the oral session.

Warning: the reflexive essay is not an academic text but personal (written in the first singular person, self reflexive); however, it is not about subjective opinions, but bringing arguments, using alla the publications in the bibliography. Sources must be quoted in a correct academic way. Bibliography has to be correct and complete (2 books, 5 research papers, it can contain extra sources too).

Features: 8-10 numbered pages, WORD FORMAT, free readable font, size 12, interline 1 e 1/2, 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 is it delivered: The upload is within 10 days before the exam session. The repository in Moodle is visible some days before the deadline.

WARNING: please avoid e-mailing copies to the teacher, avoid using Moodle Messenger (the teacher does not read it). If you have questions on the course or exam, please use the general forum in Moodle.

Office hours

Prof. Formenti receives upon appointment and only if strictly necessary. Students' tutoring (e.g. about exames) is delivered through the forum in the Moodle platform and during the dedicated meetings in streaming.

Programme validity

Programmes' duration is 2 academic years.

Course tutors and assistants

Valentina Calciano, pedagogist, coordinator Lab'O
Davide Cino, PhD, fellow researcher
Antonella Cuppari, PhD, psychologist, pedagogist, responsible disability servicesAndrea Di Martino, teacher, external collaborator
Marcella Lisi, pedagogist, coordinator "Signori bambini" service for children and families
Silvia Luraschi, PhD, pedagogist, independent researcher, Feldenkrais teacher, systemic counsellor
Sonia Mastroeni, 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
Ludovica Sebastiano, PhD student, pedagogist
Federica Vergani, pedagogist, systemic counsellor, psychomotor therapist

Sustainable Development Goals

GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | QUALITY EDUCATION | GENDER EQUALITY | REDUCED INEQUALITIES