UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Family Pedagogy

2627-2-E1902R015

Course title

Families in transition: a systemic-critical approach

Topics and course structure

In educational work, there is always a family. Maybe it’s not visible, not acknowledged. To truly understand how to interact with a person — a child in daycare, an elderly woman in a nursing home, an adult in difficulty, a person with a disability — we need to know their context, their network of meaningful relationships.
If you want to work with families in educational, social, or community contexts, be aware that caring for family relationships is neither a “natural” nor neutral issue. It requires, first and foremost, moving beyond clichés, prejudices, and the tendency to blame parents (especially mothers) for their children's difficulties.
This course will guide you in working with real, complex, diverse families. The theme of intergenerationality will help us include at least three generations in our educational thinking and reflect on the transitions that family systems undergo throughout life stages.
We will develop reflective and systemic skills: collaboration, critical thinking, curiosity, and creativity.
We will explore the diversity of families, going beyond linear and stereotypical views.
We aim to challenge common assumptions about families: perhaps you think you already know what it means to be “good parents,” how to “properly” raise a child, or how to deal with complex topics such as parenting, couple life, family vulnerability, and longevity.
A research-oriented and "service-learning" approach will support us: during the course, you’ll be asked to engage personally and carry out a study, a field experience, or design an activity inspired by the course themes.
We will learn to identify and transform our biases, blame, and the stigma often present in how educators talk about families.
We will examine the dynamics of power — across genders and generations, between professionals and users — and explore together what it means to build participation.
We will focus on transitions — in roles, identities, and life phases — and how each family faces them, whether by adapting or not to individual trajectories.

You will learn to:

- independently search for reliable scientific sources
- critically analyze publications
- observe and listen methodically
- bring arguments to support your ideas and positions effectively
- use imagination and narrative and aesthetic languages to open new possibilities.

During the course, we will work in teams to offer feedback for individual projects. such as:

- analysing a cultural object with critical-systemic lenses
- creating a game or activity, creating a performance, podcast, or creative product.

This course requires creativity and personal engagement, tolerance for uncertainty, active commitment, and openness to dialogue and exchange.
You'll need to start reading from day one, as the texts are essential for developing strong research questions and equipping yourself with the right tools for the work.

Course Structure: 40 hours of in-person teaching (with active, interactive, dialogic methods) + 16 hours of asynchronous online learning (video lectures and individual exercises)

Contents and Timeline

1. Introduction to the systemic approach. Collaboration, meaning recognizing and nurturing the collective mind within families and teams (approx. 2 weeks).
2. Curiosity, meaning moving beyond the pre-conceived, adopting a research-oriented posture, and practicing systematic doubt (approx. 2 weeks).
3. Creativity, meaning using imagination, improvising, and doing something new (approx. 2 weeks).
4. Critical thinking, meaning developing a deep, differentiating, and complex perspective in educational work with families (approx. 2 weeks).
5. Towards the grand finale: in-class presentations of the course results.

Objectives

The main objectives of the course concern promoting the ability to observe family relationships through the analysis of communication, interactions, and narratives. Furthermore, it aims to develop systemic reflexivity (the 4 Cs: curiosity, criticality, collaboration, and creativity) in relation to daily life situations, cultural products (picture books, films, novels...), and field research, with particular reference to working with families in transition.

Specifically, this course is designed to support the following learning outcomes:

1. Knowledge and understanding
Develop a critical and in-depth knowledge of systemic concepts and the specific language of this approach.
Recognize and understand the differences between various paradigms, disciplines, and approaches to the family, with reference to scientific sources.
Gain knowledge of the different contexts and services involved in educational and socio-educational work with families.

2. Applying knowledge and understanding
Apply learned concepts to the observation of families in specific situations.
Interpret educational and social situations in concrete contexts, connecting theory and practice.
Analyze communication processes between two or more people through the analytical lenses provided by the

course.
Design interventions aimed at the "Family Us" (Noi familiare) and the nurturing of bonds from a systemic-critical perspective.

3. Making judgments
Collaborate, express curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking.
Develop self-management, reflexivity, and self-awareness.
Service/Active Citizenship: practice participation, inclusion, and rights.
Position oneself in an active, autonomous, and responsible manner in relation to the observed situations.

4. Communication skills
Speak up and express oneself in the first person in a reflective manner.
Correctly use systemic language and academic communication conventions.
Present the insights and learning developed during the course in both written and oral forms.
Communicate in an appropriate and context-situated manner.
Develop language skills in analyzing sources in English or, alternatively, French or Spanish.

5. Learning skills
Research and select reliable information from accredited sources.
Develop critical thinking and the independent processing of ideas and concepts.
Work in teams and welcome multiple perspectives.
Argue one's positions with awareness and rigor.
Mindfully use digital applications and tools for research purposes.

Methodologies

The teaching language is italian. Use of the English language (or other languages) is encouraged for some tasks (e.g. reading a paper).
Part of the teaching is delivered online (16 hrs of 56) in asynchronous format, through short video lessons and weekly assignments to be submitted in the course repository. Of the remaining 40 hours, each lesson will present a short content delivery (theoretical explanation, conceptual framing) and an interactive part (dialogic exchanges, groupwork, exercises), with a distribution of approximately 30% of the teaching content-delivery, while 70% interactive.

Attending students are organized in groups that work as reflexive teams to co-design and discuss individual projects implemented in the field.
Each student will be required to develop a project and present its partial and final outcomes in the class, to receive a generative feed-back from the teachers and fellow students.
From the very first lesson, students are expected to adopt an active and reflexive attitude, keep a reflexive journal which will support the final exam paper, and collaborate with peers, overcoming inevitable differences — remembering that educational work is always collective in nature.
The required readings for the final exam must be studied from the start of the course, and used as tools for reflection, critical analysis, and knowledge integration.

Online and offline teaching materials

Readings, videolectures, and links will be uploaded in the e-learning platform of the course, as well as the record of lessons. Other materials will be provided by the students through field activities.

Programme and references

The programme has 40 hours of didactics in presence, 16 online, and the hours needed for exercises and individual study.
"Attending" students are those who upload their weekly tasks and attend classes. Those who do not want or cannot always 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. They can also perform the activities in a self-directed way.

Bibliography
Bibliography entails 2 mandatory books and 4-5 research papers (the latter have to add up at least to 90 pages), chosen during the course following the teacher's instructions. It is part of the competences to know the difference between a scientific and non-scientific text. Students who struggle in finding scientific papers can choose a third book from the list that will be suggested at the beginning of the course.

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 (4 or 5)
They are the outcome of the literature review done by the students in the first weeks. Only scientific texts are admitted (accredited sources, authors, peer-reviewed) and coherent with the course's framework. They may be in Italian, English, French or Spanish; they may be parts of larger publications (e.g. book chapters).

For students who are not fluent in Italian, the whole bibliography can be in English, French or Spanish, provided that books and papers are scientific publications; the list has to be negotiated as soon as possible with the teacher. 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. It is possible to analyse a cultural object (movie, series, website, novel...) or a professional or personal experience, paying attention to connect it explicitly to the ecosystemic and critical theory and methodology.
Advices: 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

No intermediate tests are planned.
The exam consists of an oral interview which can only be accessed after having delivered a reflective paper, i.e. a personal and well-argued text that answers the question: "What have I learned and how?" The paper is delivered within 10 days of the oral exam date, to give the teacher and her collaborators the opportunity to read it and respond with generative-formative feedback.

The content of the paper is an argued analysis of experience (of the course, of group work, of a specific activity, professional or personal: everything is fine, as long as there is a concrete, lived and observed experience). The analysis must include the concepts learned (always cite sources), the knowledge, skills and competences

developed, any difficulties encountered and how they were addressed.

Accepted languages for both the paper and the oral exam: Italian, English, French, Spanish.

Coherence Between Objectives and Assessment Method
The chosen exam format is coherent with the course objectives. Writing the reflective paper allows students to develop and demonstrate not only their personal interests and thoughts, but also their reflective capacity, their ability to connect theory and practice, and to build well-founded arguments. The oral exam offers an opportunity to interact with the teacher, demonstrating autonomy, critical understanding of the course content, and the ability to receive and rework formative feedback.

Assessment Criteria for the Reflective Paper
Coherently with the course objectives, the following elements are assessed:

- Acquired knowledge, skills, and competencies demonstrated in the text
- Linguistic accuracy (spelling, syntax, punctuation, vocabulary)
- Academic adequacy: argumentative style, correct citation, and complete bibliography
- Conceptual clarity and alignment with systemic theory (appropriate use of theoretical concepts and language)
- Relevance and thematic depth (all required readings must be critically discussed)
- Reflective and self-reflective abilities (ability to analyze one's own ideas, values, and biases)

Assessment Criteria for the Oral Exam
The same criteria as the written paper apply, with the following additions:

- Ability to receive and integrate the formative feedback received from the teacher (or collaborator)
- Ability to critically reflect on one's own limitations and ways to overcome them
- Ability to respond articulately to questions based on the course readings.

The thirtieths vote is based on the following rating scale:

1. Insufficient preparation on the main topics present in the course syllabus and bibliography; very limited and poorly autonomous argumentation, analysis and critical elaboration skills; insufficient ability to connect theory and practice and to identify relevant connections between the texts and themes of the course; expository competence and discipline-specific vocabulary incorrect.
2. Sufficient – More than sufficient (18-23) Generic and in some respects uncertain or incomplete preparation on various topics present in the course syllabus and bibliography; ability to argue, analyze and critically elaborate at times limited and not very autonomous; difficulty in connecting theory and practice and in identifying relevant connections between the texts and themes of the course; partially corrected expository and discipline-specific vocabulary skills.
3. Fair (24-27) Adequate preparation on the main topics present in the programme and in the course bibliography, but not very in-depth on some more specific themes; ability to argue, analyse and critically elaborate present, but not always punctual and autonomous; fair ability to connect theory and practice and to identify relevant connections between the texts and the course themes; expository competence and specific vocabulary of the discipline are mostly correct.
4. Good - Excellent (28-30/30L) Exhaustive and in-depth preparation on the topics present in the course syllabus and bibliography; ability to argue, analyze and develop complex and autonomous critical thinking; good/excellent ability to connect theory and practice and to identify relevant connections between the texts and themes of the course; good/excellent expository ability and mastery of the lexicon specific to the discipline.

Paper Submission Guidelines
Format: 8 numbered pages (excluding cover page and bibliography)
File type: Word (.doc or .docx), readable font, size 12, 1.5 line spacing, 2.5 cm margins on all sides
Essays that do not follow these guidelines may be rejected or (if too long) only read partially.

Essays sent by e-mail, late, or in draft format (e-learning platform) will not be considered.

Cover page must include: Degree program, course title and teacher, Academic year, Full name and student ID number, Title of the paper, Indication of whether the student is attending or non-attending, Optional image.
The text may include images, charts, literary or poetic excerpts, as long as it remains accurate and coherent.

Where to upload: in the “Assignment” folder on the e-learning platform

Deadline: strictly within 10 days before the oral exam

Communication Guidelines
Prefer the general course forum for any question that may be of general interest. Avoid emailing the teacher.
?? Warning. The university uses anti-plagiarism software: Copy-pasting from texts, the internet, or other students' work is prohibited, as well as using AI to write the essay. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and will be reported to the Board that monitors these bahaviours

How to Study for This Exam
Systemic theory can be counterintuitive and often challenges common sense. Superficial study is not effective: you will need to engage deeply with the texts, reflect on their meanings, take notes, and write during the course in order to develop your own personal and critical thinking. Avoid personal opinions and commonsense: use argument-based writing.
Don't worry if you find academic writing or personal reflection challenging: the course is also designed to help you develop these skills, and you will receive guidance on how to improve.

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

Mara Pirotta, pedagogista, consulente sistemica, tutor tirocini, docente incaricata (laboratori)

Davide Cino, PhD, ricercatore del Dipartimento, vice-presidente della Commissione d’esame
Silvia Luraschi, PhD, pedagogista, ricercatrice indipendente, insegnante metodo Feldenkrais e consulente sistemica
Valentina Calciano, pedagogista, coordinatrice Lab'O

Antonella Cuppari, PhD, psicologa, pedagogista, responsabile servizi per la disabilità
Andrea Di Martino, insegnante, collaboratore esterno
Marcella Lisi, pedagogista, coordinatrice "Signori bambini" servizio diurno per minori e famiglie
Sonia Mastroeni, laureata in Scienze Pedagogiche, collaboratrice esterna
Silvia Pinciroli, pedagogista, consulente sistemica, formatrice Lab'O, docente incaricata (laboratori)
Andrea Prandin, pedagogista, consulente, formatore e supervisore sistemico
Maddalena Rossi, insegnante, collaboratrice esterna
Federica Vergani, pedagogista, psicomotricista, consulente sistemica

Sustainable Development Goals

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