



EDUC/PSYCH/SOC 430: Human Development in Culture

Course Syllabus

Spring Semester 2026

Instructor: Natascia Petringa, PhD

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: None

Class Meeting Days & Time: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 10:45am - 12:15pm

Office Hours: One hour before or after class. Please email the Professor to schedule an appointment.

Email:

Course Type: Course with a Service Learning component

Course Fee: USD\$5

Course Description

This course provides students with an overview of main approaches in human development. Students are introduced to psychological and anthropological theories about childhood and the role of culture. The course content reflects the fact that “culture” means different things to different people and is conceptualized at many different levels of organization, from the national and supra-national (e.g., Asian vs. Western) to home, family, and local community. The readings cover different areas within the psychological sciences, including developmental, educational, social, and cognitive psychology. Implications and limitations of such studies will be amply discussed in class. While learning about theories and methods, students will *use* contemporary research tools for analyzing scientific publications about childhood, learning, and human development.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- *Identify* the main approaches used by scholars for studying cognitive, learning and socio-emotional development;
- *Enhance* knowledge about concepts of human development with a lens on culture;
- *Identify* the methodologies used to study childhood, adolescence and early adult development;
- *Explore* the opportunities and challenges of cross-cultural psychology; and
- *Examine* human development through culturally diverse peer-reviewed literature sources.

Course Materials

Most **weekly readings** will come from:

Siegler, Robert S., Jenny Saffran, Elizabeth T. Gershoff, Nancy Eisenberg, and Campbell Leaper. 2019. *How Children Develop*. Worth Publishers.

A detailed list of all the indicated readings will be available. The course’s Moodle site is the primary location for readings and assignments.

Assessment

10%	Attendance
5%	One-to-one meeting with professor twice during the semester (2.5% each)
10%	Weekly quizzes on Moodle
5%	Weekly course journal entries on the readings (graded <u>twice</u> times during the semester)
10%	Service Learning Project
25%	Midterm exam
5%	Group activity
25%	Final exam
5%	End of semester Community Engagement Presentations

Grading

Students are reminded that it is their responsibility to note the dates of exams and other assignments. No alternative exam dates will be offered and professors are not required to give partial credit for any late work (they do so at their discretion: the Institute's default policy is no extensions and a zero for any work turned in late). Students who book travel when they have an exam or other assessment will have to change their plans or accept a zero. Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
B+	87% - 89%	Superior
B	83% - 86%	
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C	73% - 76%	
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	Low Pass
D	63% - 66%	
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

Please note: decimal numerals between 1-4 are rounded down while 5-9 are rounded up: e.g., expect 89.4 to be 89.0 while 89.5 to round up to 90.

Course Requirements

Assignments will follow an incremental approach simulating a scientific investigation. Using research platforms and scientific papers, you will play the role of a social scientist. Once you have identified a topic of interest, you will learn how to conduct a literature review, how to examine peer-review publications, and how to critically evaluate their differences and similarities. Grades for this course are based on the following criteria.

Attendance (10%)

Attendance is an essential part of this course. If you attend all the meetings, you will receive a full grade. There is no make-up offered for attendance.

One-to-One Meeting with Professor (5%)

Students are expected to sign up for two slots of 15-20 minutes for a one-to-one meeting during my office hours. The first one should be before the end of Week 6 and the second one before the end of Week 10. The rationale for this will be shared with the class. Getting to know your professor makes you more comfortable with that person and therefore more likely to ask for help. It might also help you to ask questions about the various assignments. In this course, 2.5% of your grade will be allocated to you for every time you visit me. This amounts to a total of 5% on your overall grade.

Weekly Quizzes on Moodle (10%)

Students will be assigned a short quiz (approx. 3-5 questions) every week on Moodle and it is not timed. These will be a combination of content, methodological, and technical questions. The content questions will help students zoom in on the most important ideas of the readings. The methodological questions will test skills that will pop up every week, like finding an author's argument, assessing sources etc. Whereas the technical questions will help students learn the class's policies and administrative procedures.

Weekly Course Journal Entries (5%)

Students will keep a Weekly Course Journal (written format preferred; digital is also possible) which they will use as a personal space to reflect on course material and ideas. At the end of each class, students will be given a question to answer in their course journal. Entries in your course journal will be graded twice (each worth 2.5%) throughout the semester, i.e., early in the semester (Week 5) and at the end of the course (Week 10).

Service Learning Project (10%)

Students will investigate the principles and psychological outcomes of the Italian and American education systems through theoretical and direct experience in the Italian classroom setting. Students will prepare and lead cultural-based English language activities in a primary school class. This will allow students to collect data on students' responses and interactions while teaching a language.

Midterm Exam (25%)

On Week 6, students will take an in-class midterm exam. A detailed prompt will be available on Moodle.

Group Activity (5%)

Students will work on an in-class group activity (2-3 students). The teacher will explain this in class. All students will receive the same grade.

Final Exam (25%)

On the Thursday of Week 13, the students will take an in-class final exam (60 minutes). A detailed prompt will be available on Moodle.

End of Semester Community Engagement Presentations (5%)

During Special Academic Events week (Week 13), the class will present a 15-minute summary of the project experience to the Umbra community during the Community Engagement Presentations at the end of the semester. Students will receive the guidelines and presentation order after the mid-semester break. Participation in this event is MANDATORY and an integral part of the community engagement grade.

Extension & Submitting Late Work

Work submitted after the deadline will receive a grade of zero, not partial credit. Each student is allowed one extension of 24 hours over the entire semester. This can be used for any assignment but the final project. Students need to email the instructor before the deadline and inform the instructor of their use of the extension. Any work submitted after the 24-hour extension will be marked zero. As for all policies, exceptions can be made by the Director for students with special accommodations or in case of medical emergencies, etc.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is expected and mandatory for classroom times and co-curricular activities. The first two absences per course due to illness will be considered excused "sick days" and do not require medical documentation. To receive additional excused absences due to illness, students are required to see a local physician or request a letter from an Institute-approved doctor documenting they should be excused from class for illness.

Unexcused absences will adversely affect a student's academic performance and will result in a reduction of the student's final course grade by 2% per absence up to a maximum of 10%. Excessive unexcused absences may result in a failing grade or disciplinary action. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of the number of absences or late arrivals for each course, and to ask the instructor when in doubt.

If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. Any work missed in class because of an excused absence may be made up within one week of the return to the class. Any work missed that was a quiz or other test must be made up outside of class time and will, in the interest of intellectual honesty, be a slightly different test than the one given in class.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important. Missing a mandatory field trip for a course, unless

for a very serious reason that is communicated to Umbra staff in a timely manner, will lower the students' grade by half a letter grade (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Legitimate reasons for an excused absence or tardiness include death in the immediate family, religious observances, illness or injury, local inclement weather, and medical appointments that cannot be rescheduled.

Absences relating to illness may be excused by the Director, but only if a medical certification is provided.

Students who request an approved absence to observe a religious holiday must submit a formal request to the Institute's Director within one week after the add/drop period when course schedules, including any field trips, are finalized. No exceptions will be made after this deadline.

Except in the case of medical emergencies, absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be made up. Furthermore, scheduled times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, oral presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason. Even if more sections of the same class are activated, students may only take exams during the scheduled times and dates for the section they are enrolled in.

Tardiness Policy

Students are expected to attend all classes punctually. Any student arriving up to 15 minutes late or leaving up to 15 minutes earlier than the scheduled class end time will be marked as tardy. Each incident of tardiness (late arrivals to or early departures from class) is 0.5% off the final grade. However, should a student arrive more than 15 minutes late or depart more than 15 minutes before the conclusion of the class, it will be recorded as an absence.

Students are also expected to remain in class during the time of instruction except for a reasonable amount of time to use the restroom. Students who leave class and do not return during the class session will receive an unexcused absence or late penalty.

Academic Integrity

All forms of cheating (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and plagiarism (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

Utilizing ChatGPT or other artificial intelligence (AI) tools for the generation of content submitted by a student as their own as part of any assignment for academic credit at the Institute constitutes a form of plagiarism.

Should the Institute become aware of a student's use of such platforms and services, the student will be subject to the same consequences and judicial proceedings as are in place for plagiarism (defined above).

Classroom Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate respect for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that cell phones must be set on silent mode before the beginning of each class. Computers and other electronic devices (for example, earbuds or smart watches) cannot be used during class lectures and discussions for anything other than note-taking, unless there has been a specific academic accommodation.

Laptop/Smartphone Policy

As an instructor and as a person, I am dependent on both my computer and my telephone. That said: An ever-increasing body of research shows that open laptops and telephones in the classroom create distraction (both visual and auditory) for those using them and those around them. You can type faster than you can write, and as a result you end up processing less when you're simply typing notes. For this reason, I have a physical notebook policy: I ask you to leave your computers in your bags and phones in your pockets and use a regular notebook. There are three exceptions: 1) if you have accommodations related to your vision; 2) if you make an office hours appointment with me to discuss the use of a computer; 3) if we have an in-class tutorial about online research tools.

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

Week 1 **(January 19-23, 2026)**

Introduction to Human Development

Meeting 1: *Welcome and introduction to the course*

Please check Moodle and do each weekly assignment **BEFORE** the weekly meeting. For example, Siegler, Robert S., Jenny Saffran, Elizabeth T. Gershoff, Nancy Eisenberg, and Campbell Leaper. 2019. *How Children Develop*. Worth Publishers. (Chapter 1, except Methods) will need to be done **BEFORE** our Meeting 2 class. This is how the syllabus works.

Meeting 2: *What is the study of human development?*

Reading:

Siegler, Robert S., Jenny Saffran, Elizabeth T. Gershoff, Nancy Eisenberg, and Campbell Leaper. 2019. *How Children Develop*. Worth Publishers. (Chapter 1, “An Introduction to Child Development,” pp. 1-22).

Service Learning Project - Project Presentation and Overview (Mr. Manuel Barbato and Ms. Margherita Garilli).

Assignment:

Weekly Moodle Quiz

WEEK 2 **(JANUARY 26-30, 2026)**

Biology and Human Behavior: Nature or Nurture?

Meeting 1: *The foundations of human behavior*

Reading:

Siegler, Robert S., Jenny Saffran, Elizabeth T. Gershoff, Nancy Eisenberg, and Campbell Leaper. 2019. *How Children Develop*. Worth Publishers (Chapter 3, “Biology and Behavior,” pp.78-95).

Meeting 2: *Human behavior: Nature or nurture?*

Readings:

Institute of Medicine (US) Forum on Neuroscience and Nervous System Disorders. From Molecules to Minds: Challenges for the 21st Century: Workshop Summary. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2008. Grand Challenge: Nature Versus Nurture: How Does the Interplay of Biology and Experience Shape Our Brains and Make Us Who We Are? Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK50991/>

Singh, Ilina. “Human development, nature and nurture: Working beyond the divide.” *BioSocieties* 7 (2012): 308-321. STOP reading at p. 315.

Assignment:

Weekly Moodle Quiz

WEEK 3
(FEBRUARY 2-6, 2026)

Cross-Cultural Psychology and Human Development

Meeting 1: *What is cross-cultural psychology? Why is it important?*

Reading:

Berry, John W. *Cross-cultural psychology: Research and applications*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.
(Chapter 1, "Introduction to Cross-Cultural Psychology," pp. 1-17; 16 pages)

Meeting 2: *Applications of cross-cultural psychology* (**Online class via Zoom. Students must log on from Umbra; not from off campus**)

Reading:

Shiraev, Eric B., and David A. Levy. *Cross-cultural psychology: Critical thinking and contemporary applications*. Routledge, 2020. (Chapter 1, "Understanding Cross-Cultural Psychology," pp. 3-35; 32 pages)

Assignment:

Weekly Moodle Quiz

WEEK 4
(FEBRUARY 9-13, 2026)

Child Development: Attachment as a Cross-Cultural Study

Meeting 1: *Child attachment theory*

Readings:

Siegler et al., *How Children Develop* (Chapter 11, "Attachment to Others and Development of the Self"), read from the beginning until the review questions of "Attachment Theory", pp. 389-401; 10 pages.

Siegler et al., 2019. *How Children Develop*, (Chapter 11, "Attachment to Others and Development of the Self"), read from "The Self" until the end of Chapter 11 Summary, pp. 401-421; 20 pages.

Meeting 2: *Examining child attachment through the lens of culture*

Readings:

Keller, Heidi. "Universality claim of attachment theory: Children's socioemotional development across cultures." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, no. 45 (2018): 11414-11419.

Seon, Youngwoon. "Self-esteem as a mediator of parental attachment security and social anxiety." *Psychology in the Schools* 58, no. 8 (2021): 1545-1556.

Assignment:

Weekly Moodle Quiz

WEEK 5
(FEBRUARY 16-20, 2026)

Emotional Development in Children: Does Culture Play a Role?

Meeting 1: *Emotional development and regulation*

Reading:

Siegler et al., *How Children Develop* Chapter 10 ("Emotional Development"), pp. 352-368.

Meeting 2: *Does culture affect emotional development?*

Readings:

Aka, Başak Türküler. "Cultural dimensions of emotion regulation." *Psikiyatride Güncel Yaklaşımlar* 15, no. 3 (2023): 441-450.

Yang, Yang, and Qi Wang. "Culture in emotional development." *Handbook of Emotional Development* (2019): 569-593.

Assignments:

Weekly Moodle Quiz

First course journal submission.

WEEK 6: MIDTERM EXAM WEEK
(FEBRUARY 23-27, 2026)

Language Development and Cognition: Monolingualism or Bilingualism?

Meeting 1: *Language development and cognition*

Readings:

Bialystok, Ellen. "Bilingual education for young children: Review of the effects and consequences." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 21, no. 6 (2018): 666-679.

Bialystok, Ellen. "Bilingualism: Pathway to cognitive reserve." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 25, no. 5 (2021): 355-364.

Bialystok, Ellen. "Coordination of executive functions in monolingual and bilingual children." *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 110, no. 3 (2011): 461-468.

Assignment:

Second one-to-one meeting – last chance to get credit.

Meeting 2: *In-class midterm.* Students will be provided with a format of the exam (NOT a review sheet).

Mid-Semester Break: March 2-6, 2026

Week 7
(March 9-13, 2026)

Maria Montessori and Pedagogy

Meeting 1: *Maria Montessori: Background, principles and legacy*

Readings:

Moretti, E. (2021). *The Best Weapon for Peace: Maria Montessori, Education, and Children's Rights*. University of Wisconsin Press. ("Introduction," 14 pages).

O'Donnell, M. (2007). *Maria Montessori*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. (Part 4: "The Relevance of Montessori Education Today," pp. 114-137).

Meeting 2: **Visit to Montessori school (during class time). This will take entire class period.**

Assignment:

Weekly Moodle Quiz

WEEK 8
(MARCH 16-20, 2026)

The Reggio Emilia Approach

Meeting 1: *The Reggio Emilia approach: Background and principles*

Readings:

Hewett, Valarie Mercillott. "Examining the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education." *Early Childhood Education Journal* 29 (2001): 95-100.

New, Rebecca S. "Reggio Emilia as cultural activity theory in practice." *Theory into Practice* 46, no. 1 (2007): 5-13.

Meeting 2: *The Reggio Emilia approach: Its contribution to different kinds of thinking*

Fernández Santín, Mercè, and Maria Feliu Torruella. "Reggio Emilia: An essential tool to develop critical thinking in early childhood." *Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research* 6, no. 1 (2017): 50-56.

Assignment:

Weekly Moodle Quiz

WEEK 9
(MARCH 23-27, 2026)

Meeting 1: **Montessori pilot activity** with children in the Umbra library.

Meeting 2: **Prof Letizia Cinganotto (Guest speaker)** Date to be confirmed.

Week 10
(March 30-April 3, 2026)

Socio-Cultural Theories on Language, Culture and Human Development

Meeting 1: *Lev Vygotsky: Language and culture*

Reading:

Siegler et al., *How Children Develop* (Chapter 4, “The Theories of Cognitive Development,” pp. 140-148).
Read from “Core-Knowledge Theories” until the end of p. 148; 8 pages.

Meeting 2: *Socio-cultural approaches to human development*

Reading:

Hausfather, Samuel J. “Vygotsky and schooling: Creating a social context for learning.” *Action in Teacher Education* 18, no. 2 (1996): 1-10.

Assignments:

Weekly Moodle Quiz

Second Course Journal submission

Second one-to-one meeting – last chance to get credit.

WEEK 11
(April 6-10, 2026)

NO CLASS ON THURSDAY DUE TO MPP/FSE CAPSTONE TRIPS

Final Activity at the **Montessori School** and **MPP/FSE Capstone trips**

Meeting 1: **Final Activity** at the **Montessori School**

Meeting 2: **No class due to MPP/FSE Capstone Trips**

Week 12
(April 13-17, 2026)

Cognitive (Intellectual) Development Theory

Meeting 1: *Howard Gardner: Theory of Multiple Intelligences and Five Minds*

Readings:

Gardner, Howard. “A multiplicity of intelligences.” *Scientific American* 9 (1998): 19-23.

Gardner, Howard. "The five minds for the future." *Schools*, 5 (2008): 17-24. (Read pp. 9-21 on PDF)

Optional reading:

Davis, Katie, Joanna Christodoulou, Scott Seider, and Howard Earl Gardner. "The theory of multiple intelligences." In R.J. Sternberg & S.B. Kaufman (Eds.), *Cambridge Handbook of Intelligence* (2011): 485-503.

Assignment:

Weekly Moodle Quiz

Community Engagement Presentation (preparation in class)

Meeting 2: Service Learning Project – Prepare and practice Community Engagement Final Presentation

**Week 13
(April 20-24, 2026)**

Final Exams, Community Engagement Presentations & Special Academic Events Week

Meeting 1: Final exam in class (*60 minutes*). Students will be provided with a format of the exam (NOT a review sheet).

Thursday, April 23: Community Engagement Presentations and Special Academic Events

EDUC/PSYCH/SOC 430: Human Development in Culture
Service Learning Project
Syllabus Appendix

What is service learning?

Service learning is a type of experiential education integrated into a course in which:

- students engage in an organized activity or project aimed to address a community need that is identified in collaboration with the community partner;
- students critically reflect on the link between the experience in the community, course content, and the learning goals; and
- there is reciprocal learning both by the students and by the community partners.

Students will need a certain degree of flexibility, creativity, and self-initiative in order to realize a service learning project. Organization and open communication in-class with the professor and student team members will be key to student success.

Service Learning Project Overview

Community Partner

Partner: Scuola Primaria Statale "Maria Montessori"

Project Description and Goals

Students will investigate the principles and psychological outcomes of the Italian and American education systems through theoretical and direct experience in the Italian classroom setting. Students will prepare and lead cultural-based English language activities in some classes at the elementary school "Maria Montessori". This will allow students to collect data on students' responses and interactions while teaching a language.

Organization, Expectations, and Roles

Students will choose their own team. An important amount of time will be dedicated to the service learning project's progress in class. Teams will be required to meet outside of class for four weeks for approximately 1-2 hours. Teams will be responsible for deciding how to divide the various tasks to ensure members contribute equally throughout the course of the project.

Construction of a Learning Object

Each team will collaborate to create a learning object ("a collection of content, practice, and assessments that are combined based on a single learning objective"), which will be shared with the elementary school teacher before the school visit for feedback.

The learning object should include:

- An introduction that answers the following questions:
 - Where did you get the idea?
 - What cultural aspects are you describing and why?
 - Who will this activity work with and how to adapt it?
- A lesson plan
- Materials used
- A demonstrating tutorial

Group Presentation

Each team will collaborate to create and present a final detailed presentation accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation. Each student will be expected to complete a Presentation Feedback Form and ask questions to the other teams presenting to promote a community of learning and support.

Guidelines:

- PowerPoint (spell-check!).
- 10 minutes.
- Each team member contributes to the preparation and delivery of the presentation.
- Rehearse presentation as a group for content, length, and transitions.

Community Engagement Final Presentations

During Special Academic Events Week, the class will present a 15-minute summary of the project experience to the Umbra community during the Community Engagement Presentations in Week 13. Students will receive the guidelines and presentation order after the mid-semester break.

All the presentations will have the same structure:

1. Present the partner
2. Present the project
3. Takeaways & challenges
4. A meaningful activity in line with the course topics (**optional**, it doesn't have to take more than five minutes)

Participation in this event is mandatory and an integral part of the community engagement grade.

Grading Rubric

The Service Learning project is worth a total of 15% of the final course grade, which will be divided into two categories:

1. Construction and execution of the learning project (10%)
2. Community Engagement Final Presentations (5%)