

Italian code: M-PSI/04 (old) – PSIC-02/A(new)

Credits: 6

Course: **COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL COGNITION PSYCHOLOGY**

Main language of instruction: Italian

Other language of instruction: English

### Head instructor

Professor Sergio MELOGNO – [sergio.melogno@unicusano.it](mailto:sergio.melogno@unicusano.it)

### Objectives:

The course illustrates aspects of cognitive development as related to Social Cognition. Specifically, it addresses some questions about typical and atypical development of Theory of Mind (ToM), and discusses the implications for assessment and interventions. The course aims to:

- Provide an introduction to Social Cognition and its relationships with general cognitive development.
- Illustrate profiles of ToM in neurodevelopmental disorders.
- Illustrate evaluation and treatment issues in ToM deficit.

### Contents:

- Cognitive development: past, present and future
- Social Cognition: definition and issues
- Theory of mind (ToM)
- Typical and atypical development of ToM
- Autism Spectrum Disorder and ToM
- ToM: assessment tools and practices
- ToM: intervention models

### Competencies:

#### **A. Knowledge and understanding:**

By the end of the course, the student will show the acquisition of the main models of cognitive development from Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development to

Neuroconstructivism, the Social Cognition construct, particularly Theory of Mind (ToM), the early manifestations of mind-reading (face processing, gaze processing, joint attention, action observation) and the social brain development in childhood and adolescence.

Finally, the student will also show the acquisition of various concepts related to ToM assessment and treatment in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

### **B. Applying knowledge and understanding:**

The study of ToM development aims to develop the ability to identify indicators of typical and atypical development, and understand assessment and intervention practices for children and adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

### **C. Making judgements:**

By the end of the course, the student will be able to evaluate the appropriateness of assessment and intervention practices in relation to specific case studies.

### **D. Communication skills:**

By the end of the course, the student will have acquired the scientific language needed to interact with other experts in the discipline.

### **E. Learning skills:**

Knowing ToM development and related clinical aspects will be useful in more advanced training in the area of Social Cognition.

### **Evaluation system and criteria:**

The exam is in **written form**, based on three open questions about the contents presented in the references mentioned below.

In addition, before the exam session, students will have the opportunity to complete the **e-tivity** assigned. The e-tivity will be evaluated with a score ranging from 0 to 3.

### **Bibliography and resources:**

The course includes textbooks in English, which the Erasmus student can study for the exam.

#### **1. Suggested readings are:**

**1.1 S. BARON-COHEN, H. TAGER-FLUSBERG, M. LOMBARDO (2013).** *Understanding Other Minds. Perspectives on developmental social neuroscience.* Oxford University Press.

(From the rear cover of the book)

*“In the 15 years since the last edition was prepared, the neuroimaging literature on 'theory of mind' has expanded significantly, revealing new brain regions and their role in regard to 'theory of mind'. Other major changes include developments in the study of infants and in the fields of hormones and genetics. Such studies have revealed evidence of both heritability (from twin studies), some molecular genetic associations, and a specific role for both sex steroid hormones (such as foetal testosterone) and neuropeptide hormones, such as oxytocin. The new edition brings together an international team of leading writers and researchers from psychology, psychiatry, neuroscience, and philosophy to present a state-of-the-art review of scientific research in this important field - one that will be essential for all those involved in the fields of developmental psychology and neuroscience, as well as psychiatrists and philosophers.”*

**1.2 K. ORDETX (2015).** *Teaching the Basics of Theory of Mind.* Jessica Kingsley Publisher.

(From the rear cover of the training)

*“Using principles from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dr. Kirstina Ordetx provides an evidence-based curriculum for teaching the basics of Theory of Mind (ToM) to children aged 5-9 with autism spectrum disorder or who have related social challenges. With substantial lesson plans, activity ideas, worksheets, cut-out-and-use flashcards, and reinforcement activities to be carried out at home, the curriculum includes comprehensive material for 12 sessions. It has been designed to enhance the development of ToM and enhance social understanding in children who demonstrate challenges with the pre-requisite skills, that lead to successful social relationships and situations. By encouraging a multi-sensory approach, this curriculum is the perfect resource for developing the critical and basic aspects of ToM in younger children”.*

### **1.3 Articles:**

- **Melogno S.,** Pinto M.A., Ruzza A., Scalisi G. **(2019).** Improving the ability to write persuasive texts in a boy with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Outcomes of an intervention. *Brain Sciences*, 10, 264; doi:10.3390/brainsci10050264
- **Melogno S.,** Pinto M.A., Trimarco B., Levi G. **(2022).** A Treatment to Enhance Social Reading Capabilities in a Gifted Child with Autism Spectrum Disorder. In Donmez S. (Ed.). *New Horizons in Medicine and Medical Research.* Chapter 8, 83-95. BP International: London. doi: 10.9734/bpi/nhmmr/v7/15761D

**2.** Other materials are also available in Italian.