

# Integrating Inter- and Transdisciplinarity into University Education on Children’s Rights: Pedagogical Strategies and Outcomes

The **French-speaking Interdisciplinary Master's degree program in Children's Rights Studies** has been operational since 2008. The program is designed to adopt interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches, and every year, **it attracts between 20 and 60 students from diverse fields** such as educational sciences, law, political sciences, international relations, social sciences, teacher training, social work, psychology, and humanities. This approach to children's rights studies fosters academic collaboration and knowledge-sharing, **enabling students to address societal problems with a broader perspective**. The program's pedagogical methods encourage students to study children's rights from multiple perspectives while grounding them in children's rights studies. Some notable aspects of the program include an **evaluation approach based on projects**, the **formation of interdisciplinary groups**, and the **promotion of collaborative values**.

### 1<sup>st</sup> Fall semester (30 ECTS credits)

Child psychology and children's rights  
Sociology of childhood and children's rights  
Children and human rights  
**The inter- and transdisciplinary approach: theories and practices**  
**Methodology and ethics of research in children's rights**  
Family law and child protection  
Juvenile criminal law

**Spring semester (30 ECTS credits)**  
**Interdisciplinary Seminars**  
Participation  
International advocacy for children's rights  
Violence and abuse  
Children's rights, education and creativity  
Interdisciplinary project

**2<sup>nd</sup> Fall semester (30 ECTS credits)**  
Internship OR  
Individual study program  
Research paper

### Inter- and Transdisciplinary Approach: Theories and Practices

This course is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity in the context of children's rights. It involves **learning research methods, systemic approaches, and problem-solving skills**. Students collaborate in groups to explore thematic projects, such as children's rights in the face of climate change. The course covers topics such as the interdisciplinary analysis of children's rights and the epistemological principles of interdisciplinarity.

### Program's Content

Introduction to Interdisciplinarity: Discovery and Collaboration  
Interdisciplinarity: Representations, Motivation, Identity  
Interdisciplinarity and Children's Rights  
Illustrated Interdisciplinarity: Discovery of Former Students' Work  
Interdisciplinarity, Complexity and Systemic Thinking  
*Meetings Groups/Teachers*

### Methodology and Ethics of Research in Children's Rights Studies

This course is designed to complement the inter- and transdisciplinary course by focusing on the **methodological and ethical aspects of research related to children's rights studies**. It aims to assist students in creating a methodological framework and selecting appropriate research methods while emphasising the significance of ethics, especially in participatory research with children. The key competencies that students develop include comprehending the methodological challenges of interdisciplinary research and integrating ethical considerations into the research process.

### Program's Content

Introduction: Interdisciplinarity and Mixed Methods  
Qualitative Research Involving Children: Approaches, Methods, Tools  
Research with Children: Participation and Co-researchers  
Ethics of Research in Children's Rights  
*Meetings Groups/Teachers*  
  
Examination: Group Work Presentation

### Collaborative Group Projects

**Examples of themes addressed:** Paediatric palliative care – Cyberbullying – International adoption – Transidentity – Integration into the school system of migrant students – Mother-child – Anonymous sperm donations – Gender discrimination and playgrounds – Homeschooling – Right to leisure for unaccompanied minor asylum seekers

#### Example of working on defining concepts:

- The definition of international adoption **according to the Swiss Confederation**: "When a child who is habitually resident in one country (country of origin) has been brought to Switzerland, either after their adoption in the country of origin by spouses or a person habitually resident in Switzerland, or with a view to such adoption in the country of origin or in Switzerland."
- The **legal viewpoint** of international adoption: "International adoption is a subsidiary measure for the protection of the child that allows for providing a home to a child who until then had been deprived of adequate family support."
- The **psychological viewpoint** of international adoption: "An affiliative bond, a pact of recognition and disavowal."
- The **social viewpoint**: "Adoption refers to the process by which an individual or social group takes charge of a child and integrates them into a new culture, social class, and practices."



#### Interdisciplinary definition

International adoption encompasses a legal process of transferring parentage, underpinned by national and international laws. It requires adaptation to various cultures and the implementation of educational strategies. It affects the emotional development of the adopted child, often raising issues of identity.

### Individual Reflective Assignments

**The project helped me to appreciate the advantages of having a connected vision and the convenience of managing various disciplines and methods.** The flexibility and the ability to shift focus easily have been invaluable and have greatly assisted in comprehending a complex interdisciplinary subject like ours.

**Our group faced a challenge in acquiring interdisciplinarity.** We felt like we were going in circles and constantly taking steps back, which was frustrating. However, while writing this self-reflective report, I became aware of my **evolution in terms of my interdisciplinary identity** and I am now conscious of it. I feel better prepared to explore the many riches of interdisciplinarity in the future. I hope that the **collaboration involving commitment and communication** within my upcoming groups will be improved and more balanced.

Some individuals in the group were interested in focusing more on the legal aspect due to their academic background, while others believed that personal development was more important. **The meeting with the teachers proved to be invaluable** as they helped us refocus our goals and understand that individual perspectives should not limit our problem-solving approach. As a result, we collectively decided to restart our work and emphasized **the importance of teamwork to achieve success**.

We created several mind maps to identify the actual problem we were trying to solve. I also soon realized that interdisciplinary collaboration was not only a goal to be pursued right from the start but also **a valuable tool that led us to consider questions we may have overlooked if we had only focused on one discipline**.

### Students' Anonymous Evaluations

**"Continuous assessment is one of the strengths of this course.** I find it difficult to imagine a traditional exam for this subject. Group work allows us to implement the concept of interdisciplinarity concretely."

"The course is highly interesting and provides a different perspective than traditional teaching methods. **It encourages complex and diverse thinking**, which is unlike any other teaching I have received before."

**"Collaborating with others is a highly rewarding experience**, both on a personal and educational level (learning to cooperate, collaborate, etc.)."



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