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# HISTORICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL INSIGHTS INTO EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION: COMBINING TRADITIONS WITH MODERN EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

*Abstract.*

This article explores the historical and pedagogical heritage of early childhood development and its integration with contemporary evidence-based early intervention programs. It begins by analyzing the foundational principles articulated by classical educators such as J. A. Comenius, J. H. Pestalozzi, F. Froebel and S. Rusova, who emphasized natural conformity, holistic development, the central role of play, and the importance of family and socio-cultural context. These principles are shown to remain highly relevant, serving as a theoretical framework for modern inclusive practices.

The study then examines a range of internationally recognized early intervention programs, including Early Head Start, Portage Model, Early Start Denver Model (ESDM), Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), Responsive Teaching, and NIDCAP. Each program is analyzed in terms of its target group, age range, core components, empirical evidence, and resource requirements. Special attention is given to how these programs operationalize classical pedagogical ideas within modern developmental and therapeutic contexts.

Mechanisms for integrating such programs into preschool education institutions are outlined, with emphasis on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), individualized development plans (IDP/IEP), multidisciplinary collaboration,

teacher training, and active family involvement. The article also identifies key challenges in implementation: the need for adequately trained specialists, sustainable funding for long-term interventions, cultural localization of imported models, and systematic evaluation of long-term outcomes across diverse social conditions.

The findings suggest that combining historical traditions with modern evidence-based programs creates a synergistic model of early childhood development. This model unites humanistic values with scientifically validated practices, offering a pathway toward systemic inclusive preschool education that ensures psychological safety, health preservation, and positive socialization. The article concludes by emphasizing the importance of adapting global best practices to national contexts and investing in long-term research and professional development to secure sustainable results.

***Keywords:*** historical-pedagogical heritage; early childhood development; early intervention programs; inclusive education; Universal Design for Learning (UDL); Individual Development Plan (IDP/IEP); multidisciplinary collaboration; psychological safety; socialization; evidence-based practices; program localization; long-term evaluation.

*Problem statement*. The issue of early childhood development and the implementation of early intervention programs is of strategic importance for Ukraine's modern education system and social policy. It is shaped by both historical pedagogical traditions and contemporary international trends, which are enshrined in regulatory documents. In particular, the provisions of the State Standard for Preschool Education (BKDO, 2021) [6] state that one of the objectives of preschool education is "…the formation of the child's personality; ensuring their comprehensive development and the acquisition of their own social experience" [13, p. 1264].

First, classical educators such as J. Comenius, J. Pestalozzi, F. Froebel, and S. Rusova formulated fundamental principles of natural development, holistic development, the leading role of play, and the importance of the family in upbringing. These ideas laid the foundation for modern concepts of inclusive education and early intervention. However, a contradiction arises: humanistic traditions are oriented toward values and personal development, whereas modern programs (ESDM, PCIT, NIDCAP) are often based on standardized protocols and neuropsychological research, which may reduce flexibility and individualization.

Second, scientific data (UNICEF, WHO, OECD) confirm the critical importance of the first years of life for cognitive, language, and social development. In Ukraine, this is enshrined in the Law "On Education" (2017) [1], the Concept for the Creation and Development of Early Intervention (2021) [3], and the provisions of the State Standard for Preschool Education (BKDO, 2021) [6].

At the same time, there is a contradiction between the need for long-term and comprehensive interventions and the limited resources of preschool education institutions, which often operate under financial and staffing shortages.

Third, international programs (Early Head Start, Portage, ESDM) have proven effectiveness and can serve as models for local systems. However, directly transferring them into the national context without adapting them to cultural traditions, the linguistic environment, and social realities leads to a contradiction between the universality of the models and the need to localize them. This is reflected in the Strategy for the Development of Inclusive Education (2024) [7], which emphasizes the need for cultural adaptation of programs.

Fourth, most programs show positive results in the short term (6–12 months), but there is a lack of longitudinal studies confirming the sustainability of these effects through school age and beyond. This creates a discrepancy between

immediate results and long-term effectiveness, which calls for systematic monitoring and national research.

*Analysis of recent research and publications.* Finally, modern education strives to be inclusive, ensuring accessibility for children with diverse needs. However, standardized early intervention protocols may not take individual characteristics into account, which contradicts the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and the Individualized Education Program (IEP)/Individualized Educational Support (IES) system, as enshrined in the regulatory documents of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (MES of Ukraine).

Early childhood development is a critical area of pedagogy and psychology, as the first years of life lay the foundation for further learning, language development, and social-emotional development. Historical pedagogical traditions (J. Comenius, J. Pestalozzi, F. Froebel, S. Rusova) formulated the principles of natural development, holistic development, the leading role of play, and the importance of the family –principles that are now being integrated into inclusive models and early intervention programs.

The **purpose** of this work is to systematically combine historical achievements with modern, evidence-based early intervention programs, to demonstrate the mechanisms for their integration into preschool education settings, and to provide practical recommendations for implementation.

Sources include classic works (J. Comenius, J. Pestalozzi, F. Froebel, S. Rusova, and others), monographs, and review articles on inclusive pedagogy (M. Florian) [17], (L. Vigneron) [22], as well as empirical studies and reports on early intervention programs (EHS, Portage, ESDM, PCIT, NIDCAP, Responsive Teaching).

The following **methods** were used in this article:

- theoretical analysis of classical pedagogical sources and contemporary scientific literature;

- synthesis of the principles of historical approaches and contemporary interventions;

- review of evidence-based early intervention programs with an emphasis on practical components, target groups, and research findings;

- systematization of recommendations for preschool education institutions (hereinafter referred to as PEIs), taking into account the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and inclusive pedagogy.

*Presentation of the main material of the study*. An analysis of classical sources allows us to identify the following core principles:

- *Naturalness and gradual progression in learning.* J. Comenius's ideas about the systematic nature and accessibility of learning laid the foundation for organizing early educational experiences as a natural process (Comenius, 1657) [2].

- *Holistic development of "head, heart, and hand."* J. Pestalozzi emphasized that education must simultaneously develop intellect, moral qualities, and practical skills, which is especially important at an early age when a child learns about the world through action and emotion (J. Pestalozzi, 1801) [4].

- *The leading role of play.* F. Froebel viewed play as the primary means of a child's development; his play materials and methodologies became the first systematic tools for organizing a developmental environment (F. Froebel, 1837) [11].

- *The sociocultural context.* S. Rusova emphasized the need to take into account national cultural traditions and the role of the family in upbringing, which determines the content and forms of early development in a given society (S. Rusova, 1924) [8]. According to E. Erikson, "basic trust in the world" – a child's perception of the reliability of adults and emotional closeness to them –

begins to form from an early age. “Thus, provided the child receives proper upbringing, socially significant motives, social feelings, and relationships begin to dominate” [12, p. 125].

These principles remain relevant today: they provide guidelines for designing the environment, organizing activities, and interacting with families, particularly in inclusive groups within early childhood education settings.

In this context, it is useful to provide a brief description of contemporary evidence-based programs and methodologies, along with their practical characteristics:

- *Early Head Start (EHS).* Practical significance: integration of educational, medical, and social services; parent training as a component of the intervention [21].

- *Portage Model.* Practical significance: effectiveness in the home setting; enhancement of parental competence [20].

- *Early Start Denver Model (ESDM).* Effectiveness: a randomized controlled trial demonstrated improvements in speech, social interaction, and overall development with early implementation of ESDM [15].

- *Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT).* Effectiveness: Numerous clinical studies confirm a reduction in problem behaviors and an improvement in parental competence [18].

- *Responsive Teaching / Responsive Caregiving.* Effectiveness: randomized studies show a positive impact on early language development [19].

- *NIDCAP (Newborn Individualized Developmental Care and Assessment Program).* Effectiveness: studies demonstrate a positive impact on neurodevelopment and short-term medical outcomes [14].

- *Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT).* Effectiveness: an evidence-based method that has been shown to be highly effective in improving discipline,

reducing family stress, and strengthening the bond between children and their parents [16].

A comparison of early intervention programs is presented in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, early intervention programs vary in their focus and resource requirements. The *Early Start Denver Model (ESDM)* has been shown to be highly effective for children with ASD but requires significant resources and qualified staff; The *Portage Model* is more flexible and resource-efficient in a home setting; *Early Head Start (EHS)* integrates educational and social services for families with low socioeconomic status (SES); *Responsive Teaching* is easily implemented in early childhood education settings, while the *Newborn Individualized Developmental Care and Assessment Program (NIDCAP)* requires specialized conditions in neonatology, as each child has their own sensory and behavioral rhythms that must be taken into account during care to minimize stress and support neurodevelopment.

In the context of historical pedagogical achievements, the *Newborn Individualized Developmental Care and Assessment Program (NIDCAP)* can be presented as an example of a modern program that develops the ideas of natural harmony (according to J. Comenius) and individualization (according to J. Pestalozzi), but at the level of medical care for the youngest children. This demonstrates how classical principles are transformed into highly specialized 21st-century practices.

This comparison allows us to justify the choice of programs based on context and available resources. By combining historical principles with modern programs, we can identify practical mechanisms for integrating them into the educational environment of preschool institutions:

- *Designing the environment according to the principles of UDL (Universal Design for Learning).* Flexible materials, sensory zones, and varied methods of presenting information and expressing knowledge [17].

Table 1

Comparison of Early Intervention Programs

| Program / Source | Short Description | Target Group | Age | Key Components | Resource Intensity | Applicability to Preschool Institutions (PI) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Early Head Start (EHS)** [21] | Comprehensive U.S. program for families with low socio-economic status (SES) | Children under 3 years, pregnant women | 0–3 years | Educational services, parental support, healthcare, social services | High: requires inter-agency coordination, funding, and integration of educational, medical, and social services | Limited: model is more oriented toward large-scale state programs than individual PI |
| **Portage Model** [20] | Home-based early learning program | Children with developmental delays | 0–5 years | Home visits, individualized plans, parent training | Medium: requires parent training and regular home visits | High: easily adaptable in PI through individualized plans and family collaboration |
| **Early Start Denver Model (ESDM)** [15] | Intervention for children with ASD, integrating ABA and developmental approaches | Children with autism | 12–48 months | Play-based interventions, parent training, individualized plans | High: requires qualified therapists, long sessions, and specialized training | Medium: can be integrated into PI if specialists and resources are available |
| **Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)** [16] | Therapy focused on parent-child interaction | Children with behavioral problems | 2–7 years | Parent training, supervision, behavioral work | Medium: requires specialists and supervision, but less resource-intensive than ESDM | High: suitable for PI as a form of parent work and behavioral correction |
| **Responsive Teaching** [19] | Approach emphasizing adult responsiveness | General population, children at risk of language delays | 0–3 years | Sensitive responsiveness, language stimulation | Low: requires only teacher training, easily integrated | High: optimal for PI, especially in group activities |
| **Newborn Individualized Developmental Care and Assessment Program (NIDCAP)** [14] | Individualized care for preterm infants | Preterm newborns | Neonatal period | Sensory adaptation of environment, individualized care | High: requires specialized neonatal conditions and significant resources | Low: practically not applicable in PI, oriented toward medical institutions |

*Prepared by the author using sources [14–16; 19–21].*

- *Individualized educational plans (IEP/IOR).* Developing individual development plans with the participation of a multidisciplinary team and parents (Portage, ESDM – Early Start Denver Model, or the Denver Early Intervention Model) [20].

- *Multidisciplinary support.* Coordination among teachers, psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and physical therapists; regular team meetings.

- *Teacher training.* Courses in inclusive education, supervision, co-teaching; development of responsive care skills [5; 9].

- *Family involvement.* Training parents in interaction techniques (PCIT, Portage), joint planning and monitoring [20].

- *Monitoring and assessment.* Formative assessment, portfolios, individual progress charts [10].

Consequently, the combination of historical pedagogical principles and modern evidence-based programs creates a practical model of early childhood development that combines humanistic values and scientific effectiveness.

Historical ideas (play, natural development, family) are concretely implemented through programs with empirical support: ESDM integrates Friedrich Froebel's play-based methods into a therapeutic developmental approach; Portage and EHS expand on Johann Pestalozzi's ideas about the family's role in learning; NIDCAP adapts to the child's individual rhythms, which resonates with Jan Amos Comenius's principle of natural harmony. Table 2 presents information on the key challenges of implementing early intervention programs.

A detailed analysis of the key challenges (see Table 2) shows that the effective implementation of early intervention programs requires not only scientifically sound methodologies but also systematic support – in terms of human resources, funding, culture, and research. Only a comprehensive approach

will ensure sustainable results and the adaptation of programs to the realities of national education and social policy.

Table 2

Key Challenges in Implementing Early Intervention Programs

| Key Challenge | Problem | Challenge | Consequences | Solutions |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Human Resources** | Most early intervention programs (ESDM, PCIT, NIDCAP) require a multidisciplinary team – educators, psychologists, speech therapists, physiotherapists, social workers. | In many countries there is a shortage of specialists with appropriate training, especially in inclusive education and early iagnostics. | Without proper staff training, programs may be formally implemented but fail to achieve expected outcomes. | Establishing systems of training and retraining, supervision, international workshops, and integrating practices into teacher education curricula. |
| **Funding** | Long-term interventions (e.g., ESDM or NIDCAP) require significant financial resources – equipment, specialized materials, staff salaries. | Public and municipal institutions often lack funds for long-term programs, particularly during economic crises. | Limited funding leads to shortened program duration, reduced number of participants, or absence of systematic monitoring. | Securing grants, partnerships with NGOs, and integrating programs into national educational and social policies. |
| **Program Localization** | Most evidence-based models (EHS, Portage, ESDM) were developed in the U.S. or Western Europe and reflect those cultural and social contexts. | Direct transfer of programs into the national context may be ineffective due to differences in cultural traditions, language environment, and social expectations. | Programs may fail to account for the role of family, national educational standards, or specific forms of social interaction. | Adapting programs to local conditions, translation and cultural modification of materials, pilot projects with evaluation in specific communities. |

*Prepared by the author following a comprehensive review of current early intervention programs.*

Based on the above, specific practical recommendations can be formulated for professionals in early childhood education institutions:

1. Develop a phased plan for implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in early childhood education settings and programs.

2. Implement an Individual Development Plan (IDP)/Individual Educational Program (IEP) system with a multidisciplinary team.

3. Organize regular training modules for educators with supervision.

4. Involve parents in the program through home visits, training sessions, and joint sessions.

5. Implement a system of formative assessment and portfolios to monitor progress.

*Conclusions.* This study confirms that the historical and pedagogical legacy in the field of early childhood development remains the fundamental basis for contemporary educational and social practices. The principles of natural development, holistic development, the leading role of play, and the importance of the family – formulated by the classics of pedagogy (J. Comenius, J. Pestalozzi, F. Froebel, S. Rusova) – are being reinterpreted in contemporary early intervention programs.

An analysis of international models (Early Head Start, Portage, ESDM, PCIT, Responsive Teaching, NIDCAP) has shown that they combine the evidence base of neuropsychology and medicine with pedagogical approaches; however, their effectiveness in preschool settings depends on human resources, funding, cultural adaptation, and systematic monitoring of long-term outcomes. The identified contradictions – between humanistic values and standardized protocols, between the need for comprehensive interventions and limited resources, and between the universality of models and the national context – define the strategic directions for the development of the early intervention system.

The application of the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Individual Development Plans (IDP/IOP), multidisciplinary support, and active family involvement creates opportunities for the formation of a holistic model of inclusive preschool education. This model is capable of ensuring children's psychological well-being, health, and positive socialization in various social contexts, which aligns with the objectives set forth in the Law of Ukraine "On Education" (2017), the Concept for the Creation and Development of Early

Intervention (2021), and the Strategy for the Development of Inclusive Education (2024).

Thus, combining historical pedagogical traditions with modern, evidence-based early intervention practices is not only scientifically sound but also practically essential for the development of Ukraine's preschool education system. This opens up opportunities for creating adapted, resource-efficient, and long-term effective models that will ensure equal opportunities for all children and contribute to the formation of an inclusive society.

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