A HISTORICAL APPROACH ON THE CONCEPT AND THE DOMAIN OF EARLY EDUCATION

Emil LAZĂR
Ph. D. Lecturer, University of Craiova, Faculty of Letters,
Department of Communication, Journalism and Education Science
lazaremile@gmail.com

Abstract

The empirical studies about the child`s psychological development appear under the form of biographical recordings of the children`s behaviour at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Thus, the researches about the child, childhood, preschool, early education go back in time and are organically connected with the didactic, pedagogical or psychological approaches of the human knowledge field. Referring to the knowing and the study of the child, there are two primary axes: the intellectual and the psycho-emotional development of the child.

Keywords: early education, preschool education, childhood, development stages

The first data referring to the concept and the domain of early education are descriptive and belong to pedagogy, (the Didactica magna treaty, 1627-1640, published in 1657, written by Jan Amos Comenius (1592-1670): pansofia, education will comply both with the child`s intimate nature and with the surrounding nature`s laws, "the metaphysical harmony" defined by G. G. Antonescu, the forming of the individual being (he advises the teacher to follow the gardener`s example, who takes care, schola materna or education done in the family), in which the first steps, the speech are learnt, the hygiene rules are internalized, an introduction into moral education is done, practicing with senses and the developing of intelligence appear, education will start early, before our mind gets corrupted, it will start from general to particular, from easy to difficult, so as nobody receives loads of information, everything will be taught intuitively. Starting with the example of gardening, Comenius considers that education should start in "the spring of life", as soon as possible in the life of the child, "the school from the mother's knees", then "the popular school", the child having to understand first the things and after that remembering them.

Through his study, "Some thoughts concerning Education" (1693), which helped the development of pedagogy between 18th and 19th century, John Locke (1632-1704) predicted the education into the family. He saw "The possible knowledge only through experience" ("Essay on human understanding", 1690). "All the ideas come through feelings or sensations", this statement revealing the sensory area and mental processes, realities which should be taken into consideration by educators.

BDD-V3115 © 2017 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:04:22 UTC)

The first one who recognize the importance of psychology in education is Jean-Jacques Rousseau, representative for the philosophical pedagogy, who, as a follower of the negative education, says that the role of the educator is to guard and protect the child from the extern influences which came from the society. Into his book, "Emile, or on education" (1762), with a preface and 5 chapters, prefigures education in correlation with the steps in child's development: "until the age of 2, the accent is on the care and the physical education, between the age of 2 and the age of 12, the accent is put on the senses education through the direct contact whit the environment, between the age of 12 and the age of 15, intellectual education counts the most, and since the age of 15 until the increase age, the accent is put on the moral education". Intuitive overlapping of psychology with pedagogy is resumed so: "Le petit d'homme n'est pas simplement un petit homme". The importance of the intervention of family in child's education is resumed so: "the child becomes for his parents, after the education he/she receives, reward or punishment".

The empirical studies about the child`s psychological development appear under the form of biographical recordings of the children`s behaviour at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. "A biographical sketch of an infant" represents one of the first famous biographies which was published in 1877 by Charles Darwin. This work of his is based on the direct observations on the development and the behaviour of his own son, his example being followed by many other researchers (J. Piaget and S. Freud). It starts, in that way, a period of narrative approach in the psychology's methodology referring to the child. It took 37 years to Charles Darwin to observe his own child and after these years to be able to offer relevant information, although they were naive and subjective, about the child's development and the complexity of the infant behaviour.

In the study of child's development, a normative approach is being promoted by Granville Stanley Hall (1844-1924), who concentrated his studies on measuring capacities and psychological features of the child, creating instruments for measuring (the survey as an instrument of psychological investigation).

Are due to Wiliam Thiery Preyer (1841-1897) studies of human development, premises of psychological development. He wrote "The soul of the child" (Die Seele des kindes, 1882), where he makes observations about the mental development of the infantil human.

The Austrian doctor Adolf Kussmaul (1822-1902) is the one who, as a pioneer of pediatrics, described for the first time the dyslexia – "word blindness". We assist to a unify of different sciences which have as main subject the child and his manifestations.

Starting with the 20th century, the child and his childhood are in the attention of psychologists and pedagogues: two French researchers, Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon, and, after a while Lewis Terman, researcher at Stanford

BDD-V3115 © 2017 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:04:22 UTC)

University in the United States of America, joined them and together boost the standardized measurement of children mental capacities through the first standardized test of IQ measurement.

Édouard Claparède (1873-1940), swiss educator, occupied his career with infant psychology ("Experimental Pedagogy and the psychology of the child", 1905). Are due to him the research which lately became The Science of Education (the child's psychology, educational psychology, forming concepts, solving problems, thinking for the human organism). He published in 1927 a guidance paper "Comment diagnostiquer les aptitudes chez les écoliers", proving the necessity of discovering school skills for children for school and professional orientation. The theory of functional education, sustained by Édouard Claparède, was based on the functional psychology's principles, which, in his opinion, avoided to ask some philosophical questions ("What is the memory?") and looked to find a purpose for the psychic processes and how they can be developed. Édouard Claparède believed that functional education is the one which take as a base the needs of the child, his interest in achieving goals, this one being a natural incentive of the activity he wants to awake into the child. This perspective allows us to understand processes functionality which sustain the behaviour which we want to determine as educators. From a practical way of view, it shows us the value of a process in what regards achieving the planned goal.

Jean-Ovide Decroly (1871-192) was a Belgian psychologist who fought for a major change in education, based on a global approach of learning to read and write. He founded an Institution for Special Education for children, where he made research about child's psychology, introducing the concept of "normal children".

Decroly's pedagogy is based on the following fundaments:

- Globalization – the child learns on a global level,
- The child's superior interest – guide for education,
- The natural environment's importance which puts the child into a situation of discovery,
- The workshop-school or laboratory – classroom where the child lives and acts,
- Education should focus on child's interests. This pedagogy of interest is based on idea of fundamental necessity,
- Every human being has some basic needs which should be studied in school. Thus, educational institutions should be organized into 4 areas: food, fight for empires, defense from danger, social work and recreation,
- The concept of activity is fundamental, the proposed activities should request all the child's functions (sensitive, motor, intellectual and emotional).

BDD-V3115 © 2017 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:04:22 UTC)

In the same spirit of new education (the Congress took place in Callais, 1921), with Maria Montessori (1870-1952), in Italy, the first nurseries kindergartens make appearance (1907, "casa dei bambini" for normal children) where were applied her educational ideas, concretized into a real educational method - the Montessori method (The discovery of the child). Maria Montessori focused her attention and educational methods on intellectual retarded children, children who were born with mental deficiencies also known as idiots.

Basic principles:

- Self-education and application of the direct learned things, unmediated,
- Creating educational groups which cover 3 years old differences between the children, for example: 3 to 5 years old, 6 to 9 years old, 7 to 10 years old etc.,
- Encouraging the children to take decisions which they have to respect,
- "Montessori Method" encourage natural development of the very little children through learning by touching and free movement,
- Following the controlled liberty principle, Montessori schools inspire children to work in their normal rhythm, alone or in teams. The educators encourage the self-motivated, independent, active, open to peer-education children's development. The younger children enjoy the daily stimulation, as old models say, while the elder children learn to respect themselves in a warm atmosphere of acceptance and joy.

Some works as "The Child" (published in Romanian in 1933), "From childhood to youth" (1948), in which is presented in four different periods the psychological evolution from 0 to 18 years old, are important for the contributions in specialty literature of early education.

Arnold Lucius Gesell (1880-1961) was an American psychologist in pediatric who had interest intro physical and mental development of the really young children and normal children in order to observe and measure their behaviour using controlled ways. He used the concept of "domains" (motor abilities, adaptive behaviour, language development, personal and social abilities). These will be the experiential field's base of the preschool curriculum ("Infancy and human growth", 1928).

He developed technics for observing children in natural playing situation, without disturbing them, offering this way behaviour opportunities free from the interference effects of researchers. Gessel admitted the gene and food importance in child's development ("nature and nurture"). In his opinion, children pass through different stages intro a fixed sequence, in a certain period of time, depending on their human innate abilities.

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) studied the way of knowledge's development in the human organism. He carefully followed his 3 children, made a naturalistic research schedule, made experimental studies on intelligence development.

The base of his theory is the concept of knowable structure (physical or mental model of actions which highlights specific acts of intelligence and

BDD-V3115 © 2017 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:04:22 UTC)

correspond to some studies of child's development). According to Piaget's theory, there are 4 stages of development: sensory-motor, pre-operations, concrete operations and formal operations:

- in sensory-motor stage (0–2 years old) intelligence take the form of motor actions
- in pre-operations period (3–7 years old), the intelligence is intuitive
- during concrete operations stage (8–11 years old), the knowable structure is logical, but it depends on concrete references
- on the final stage of formal operations (12–15 years old), thinking will involve abstract notions.

The main conclusions which come off from the stagiality's cognitive development theory proposed by him are:

- children have an active role in learning, exploring the world and experiencing. They play the role of "little scientists" starting with their first moths of life. Children do not do this thing in an aleatory mode, they build their knowledge by selecting from their experiences every element that matches with their psychological organization,
- children's way of thinking is, in terms of quality, different from the adult's one and the nature of these differences is changing from a period to another one; intellectual development is not only about offering a lot of information, always adding on their basic knowledge.

Unlike Jean Piaget, the Russian psychologist Lev Vîgotsky (1896-1934) considered that the particular environment where children are growing and their interactions with people more experienced are parts integrated from their cognitive development. This is, in essence, a social process which is formed from 3 parts: cultural, interpersonal and individual. Vîgotsky argued that the child's optimum level is achieved when he is working like a "help" with a person more experienced and the gap between what they know and what they can learn in guidance conditions has an important signification, being named "area of proximal development"- "the distance between the level of current development, as it is determined through independent solving and the level of potential development as it is determined through problem solving with the adult's guidance or in team with teammates more capable". Child's potential development thinking allows him to solve problems as a task only with other's help, in team. Between the two "developments" learning activities are conturing – area of proximal development.

The frame concept (introduced by David Wood and his colleagues) describes the guidance type and help offered by adults to children in order to solve problems. In that way, the type and quantity of help are adjusted to the child's performance level. The custodian's role is to fill the interval between the existent knowledge and the new task's abilities and requirement ("The preschooler will manage to learn only if the educator becomes his program").

BDD-V3115 © 2017 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:04:22 UTC)

A mental development's major characteristic is its stadiality. The age periods when the psycho-behavioral scene is relatively similar for all of the children were named development's stages, coming one after another.

In specialty literature, from the explanatory perspective, there are 3 child's mental development's criteria:

- the basic activity type: games, learning, the work which express the energetic and mental force's directing and structuring for gaining knowledge, the skill's and abilities functionality which have the trend of being part of the characteristics;
- the type of relationships that can be both objective and social; it express the progressive structure under the report of adaptation and social integration;
- the types of contradictions between the extern and subjective tasks (wishes, ideals, aspirations) as the contradictions between every category and the society's possibilities of fulfill them.

Another category of contradictions is relating to the opposition between the old and new psychic structures, between the personality's different parts and characteristics and between the conscious and unconscious. Speaking about knowing and studying the child, there are two basic axes: the child's intellectual development and the psycho-affective development.

Thus, concerning about child, childhood, preschool education, early education are old and with no doubt about the pedagogic and didactic or psychological approaches from the field of human knowledge.

Chronological, the approach of child's psychological development in different stages of development, the start of the early educational pedagogy, starts in the antenatal period, following developing's dynamic:

- the birth
- the first year of life
- the first childhood: from 1 to 3 years old
- the second childhood: from 3 to 6–7 years old
- the third childhood: from 6 to 10–12 years old.

Overview of mental development stages

THE STAGE	CRITERIA
0 – 1 year old: the stage of the baby	▪ The individual's basic activity: the organic needs satisfaction, ▪ The type of relationship: it is based on the unconditioned reflexes (defensive instinct, food instinct), which allow the child to adapt to the environment, ▪ The type of contradictions: total addiction for an adult.

BDD-V3115 © 2017 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:04:22 UTC)

1 – 3 years old: ante-preschool stage	▪ The basic activity: the manipulating of objects, but there is no conscious purpose, ▪ The type of relationship: it starts through the forming of the conditioned reflexes, ▪ The type of contradictions: the stage of addiction for an adult is decreasing; the capacity of speaking and the the capacity of independent moving are developing.
3 – 6/7 years old: the preschool stage	▪ The basic activity: the game; it is played with unanimous accepted rules, the child playing different characters and having to choose a suitable behaviour, ▪ The type of relationships: it makes social relationships, he becomes a person with a social statute; he has obligations: to wake up on an appointed time, to dress himself and to go to kindergarten, ▪ The type of contradictions: the stage of addiction is decreasing due to the formed self-conscious and the rised thinking's critical character.
6/7 – 10/11 years old: the little schooler's stage	▪ The basic activity: the imposed learning, conducted by another person, ▪ The type of relationships: the social relationships are extending so are the obligations and the rights, ▪ The type of contradictions: the stage of addictions is influenced by the forming of a self-concept about the surrounding reality.

The European countries and others promote the concept of Early Childhood Education Care (ECEC). All of the European countries have a formal system of early childhood education care for the preschool children, organized by specialized centers. The organization of these services is different in the European countries.

The major benefits gained through Early Childhood Education Care (ECEC) started to be much more recognized at the social level, starting with the economical advantages for all the society and finishing with the improving of the school performance (The differences at European level into education and caring of preschool children, 2014). ECEC can help decreasing the future public costs for social assistance, health and even justice if it provides quality educational programs. Making a reliable base for the successful continuous learning process, quality ECEC provides individual benefits for all of the children, especially for the ones who come from social disadvantaged environment. ECEC presents a base for educational systems more equitable and performant.

In Romania, after the bias that for the first period of the child's life are enough the food and warm, in 2001 took place the administrative passing from the orders of the sanitary sector to the local public administration. This change

BDD-V3115 © 2017 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:04:22 UTC)

did not adjusted the organization and operation of the nurseries as services of care and education for little children.

The new National Education Law (1/2011) provides that, early education is the first stage of preparing for the formal education and it is addressed to the children from their birth until the age of six or seven years old, offering specific conditions for developing, depending on their individual evolution and their ages. According to the global Monitoring Report of education for all (2007), early education supports survival, growth, development and learning children from their birth until their entrance in the elementary school, including nutrition, health, hygiene, cognitive, social, physical and emotional development of children. Young ages are the base of children's personality and for their educational success it is required to be trained all of the social actors with influence on the children: family – institutions – community.

This new perspective on the period of early education, considering the evolution of the family and the woman's role into society and the new discoveries and theories on child's development, boosted another government speech regarding integrated services and leaded to an orientation of specialists concern to the following idea: the opportunity of taking care of the little child out of family, into specialized services, and the passing from the private family's care to the public services one named services of taking care and education out of family.

The new perspective regarding the family and the little child, like the important moments of the 1990 year in this area, which marked the politics of early development of the child, helped on shaping the basic principles of the United Nations Conventions on Children Right which highlights that the child's wellbeing and development are the result of a convergent approach, including health, education and child's protection.

References

Claparède, Édouard. 1973. *Educația funcțională*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.

Gesell, Arnold. 1993. *The First Five Years of Life*. Buccaneer Book.

Psychologie de l'enfant: 150 ans d' histoire, Sciences Humaines nr. 120, oct. 2001, p. 22-27.

Piaget, Jean, & Inhelder, Bärbel. 1971. *Psihologia copilului*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.

Stativă, Elena, & Anghelescu, Cornel (coord.) 2004. *Educație timpurie în România*. București: Editura Vanemonde.

Șchiopu, Ursula, & Verza, Emil. 1981. *Psihologia vârstelor*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.

Ștefan, Mircea. 2006. *Lexicon pedagogic*. București: Aramis Print.

Vîgotsky, Lev. 1978. Interaction between leatning and development. În Gauvain and Cole (eds.) *Readings of the development of children*. New-York: Scientific american Books.

BDD-V3115 © 2017 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:04:22 UTC)

Vrăsmaș, Ecaterina. 2014. *Educație timpurie*. București: Editura Arlequin.
***, Copiii romi se pregătesc pentru grădiniță! – Lecții învățate. Ghid de bune practici/ Organizația Salvați Copiii - București: Speed Promotion, 2011 ISBN 978-973-8942-97-4.
***, ECSCEC-EAEC. *Preschool Education in the European Union. Current thinking and provision*.
***, 2008, MECT, *Curriculum pentru educația copiilor cu vârsta cuprinsă între naștere și 6/7 ani*.
https://ro.wikipedia.org/
https://seminarpedagogie.wordpress.com/2014/04/07/emil-sau-despre-educatie-jean-jacques-rousseau/
www.academia.edu/5917444/, accessed April, 16, 2016.
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/key_data_en.php, accessed April, 27, 2016.
http://mini-apps.ro/pasii-copilariei/dezvoltarea-cognitiva-prescolari/

BDD-V3115 © 2017 Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 03:04:22 UTC)