

Pedagogy

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HUMANE PEDAGOGY MEETS MONTESSORI: A CONVERGENT FRAMEWORK FOR SEL IN THE EARLY YEARS

Summary. *The article presents a design-theoretic analysis of the HUM–MONT model, which integrates humane pedagogy and the Montessori method in the context of developing social and emotional competencies in early childhood. The study is conducted within humanistic and cognitive-developmental frameworks that combine evidence on mechanisms of self-regulation, emotional responsiveness, and the sensory organization of the educational environment. The theoretical foundations of humane pedagogy are rooted in the legacy of Shalva Amonashvili, whose method emphasizes the child's inner dignity, dialogical communication, and the educator's moral self-regulation. His principles of empathy-based learning and respect for individuality form the philosophical core of the HUM–MONT framework, linking humanistic values with the structured autonomy of Montessori practice. The work draws on a comparative synthesis of recent international studies focused on the development of executive functions, pedagogical empathy, and the effectiveness of professional development programs for early childhood educators in the field of social-emotional learning. Particular attention is given to substantiating HUM–MONT as a convergent model in which humane-oriented values are combined with the structural autonomy of the Montessori approach, forming a coherent system of micro-practices of emotional interaction. The article elaborates the principles of balancing the educator's emotional flexibility with environmental orderliness,*

ensuring the development of self-awareness, responsibility, and a stable emotional climate in the group. The novelty of the study lies in the formulation of HUM–MONT as a normative framework of pedagogical self-regulation that integrates the value-based and operational mechanisms of humane education. The article will be of interest to researchers and practitioners in early childhood pedagogy, developmental psychology, and social-emotional learning programs.

Key words: *humane pedagogy, Montessori, childhood, emotions, trust, development, educator.*

Introduction. Modern preschool education is evolving amid a rethinking of traditional models and a growing focus on children’s emotional well-being. Multilingual groups, dense environments, and digitalization demand more flexible and empathic interaction, oriented toward internal self-regulation. Standard SEL programs, based on external control, often fail to adapt to real group dynamics.

Recent research attempts to integrate humane pedagogy with Montessori principles. Gentaz et al. [3] and Lillard et al. [7] revealed intersections between sensory autonomy and empathic teaching, while fragmented SEL initiatives [8, 10] lacked a unified theoretical base. The systemic alignment of humanistic and structural principles therefore remains unresolved.

Humane pedagogy emphasizes trust, respect, and co-regulation: a calm voice, equal eye level, freedom of choice, and rituals of courtesy foster safety and belonging—core drivers of SEL growth. Montessori’s structured environment complements these values, cultivating attention, independence, and responsibility.

The concept of humane pedagogy originates from the works of Shalva Amonashvili, whose methodology emphasizes the child’s inner dignity, dialogical communication, and the educator’s moral self-regulation as the foundation of developmental interaction. Amonashvili’s humane school

demonstrates that empathy and trust are not supplementary techniques but the ontological basis of education—conditions through which learning itself becomes an act of co-creation between teacher and child. These ideas have directly influenced the HUM–MONT framework, positioning the educator’s emotional tone and ethical stance as key variables in early SEL formation.

Integrating both approaches enables a holistic model in which emotional responsiveness merges with cognitive structure, and the educator becomes a partner rather than a controller. Micro-interactions—daily rituals, calm tone, guided choices—form the foundation of self-regulation, empathy, and cooperation.

The study aims to develop the convergent HUM–MONT model, integrating humane pedagogy and Montessori principles into a unified framework for early social-emotional development. It hypothesizes that combining educator responsiveness with environmental structure strengthens SEL competencies, promoting stable growth in self-regulation, empathy, and responsibility.

Materials and Methods. The methodological foundation of the study is formed at the intersection of humane-oriented pedagogy, social-emotional learning (SEL) theory, and empirical approaches to early development based on Montessori pedagogy. The HUM–MONT model is developed as a result of an integrative review of scientific sources, uniting concepts of emotional regulation, child autonomy, and the sensory organization of the educational environment.

The theoretical basis relies on the systematic mapping of modern SEL practices by Djamnezhad et al. [1], which revealed their fragmentation and methodological inconsistency. Eidsvåg et al. [2] introduced the concept of “sustainable care,” emphasizing empathy and trust as collective virtues. Gentaz et al. [3] demonstrated how Montessori sensory activity supports cognitive stability and emotional responsiveness, while Guerrero et al. [4] and Hosokawa et al. [5] confirmed that structured and targeted SEL interventions enhance attention, cooperation, and emotion regulation. Johnson et al. [6] showed the

global socialization potential of Montessori environments, and Lillard et al. [7] proved their long-term impact on emotional well-being and autonomy.

Of particular importance in the methodological construct is the training of educators and the development of their professional competence in the field of SEL. The study by Muir et al. [8] showed that systematic professional training contributes to educators' development of skills to support self-regulation and empathy in children. The work by Tuncdemir et al. [9] presented a play-based integration of SEL, allowing emotional learning to be combined with the natural activities of preschoolers.

The empirical basis for the model's quantitative parameters is the systematic review by Zinsser et al. [10], which includes an analysis of a professional development program for educators in SEL and the prevention of exclusionary discipline. These data were used to build the statistical block of the HUM–MONT Framework, reflecting the structural deficit of targeted practices and the need to shift the focus toward humane micro-interactions in the educational environment.

Results. The reconstruction of the HUM–MONT model was carried out based on a comparative analysis of humane-oriented pedagogical concepts and Montessori method practices. The analysis aimed to identify points of intersection where emotional responsiveness, autonomy, and the sensory organization of the environment form a unified mechanism for the development of the child's social-emotional competencies.

The methodological basis for the analysis was the idea that a child's emotional and moral development is formed not through direct instruction, but through a system of micro-interactions—gesture, tone, choice, sequence of actions. In the study by Eidsvåg et al. [2], humane pedagogy is viewed as a collective ethical practice of care, in which the educator acts not as a bearer of authority, but as a mediator of emotional experience. In the work by Gentaz et al. [3], it is shown that the structured sensory environment of Montessori enhances

these effects through rituals of courtesy, orderliness, and conscious action. The study by Johnson et al. [6] demonstrates that even in multilingual Montessori classrooms, stable patterns of empathic interaction are maintained, providing children with a sense of inclusion and safety. Finally, the work by Lillard et al. [7] confirms that long-term presence in such environments contributes to increased emotional well-being and social maturity in adulthood. Table 1 reflects the conceptual basis of HUM-MONT, linking humane pedagogy and the Montessori method with basic SEL competencies.

Table 1

Alignment of humane-oriented pedagogical principles and Montessori practices

Humane Pedagogy	Montessori Practice	SEL Competency (CASEL)	Hypothesized Mechanism
Respectful interaction, empathy	"Grace and Courtesy" lessons	Relationship skills	Co-modeling of behavioral norms
Emotional responsiveness of the educator	Calm tone, eye-level talk	Self-management	Co-regulation and anxiety reduction
Environment as mediator of upbringing	Sensory materials and order	Self-awareness	Focused observation and attention control
Responsibility through choice	Structured choice, self-paced tasks	Responsible decision-making	Formation of autonomy and intrinsic motivation

Source: compiled by the author based on sources: [2; 3; 6; 7]

The results of the analysis show that humane pedagogy sets the emotional-moral context, while the Montessori method provides for its operationalization through the organization of the environment and sequence of actions. "Grace and Courtesy" lessons create a space for the joint modeling of behavioral norms [3], while the use of a calm voice and "eye-level" communication contributes to the formation of self-regulation and a reduction in anxiety [7]. The sensory organization of the environment acts as a mediator in the development of self-

awareness, helping the child to become aware of internal states through external structures [6]. The practice of conscious choice forms responsibility and internal motivation, transforming emotional trust into stable behavioral autonomy. Consequently, HUM–MONT forms a holistic system where emotional empathy and structured autonomy act as mutually reinforcing components of early social-emotional development.

An analysis of professional programs in the field of social-emotional learning revealed a pronounced imbalance between the stated mission of SEL and the actual structure of pedagogical training. The obtained results reflect the quantitative parameters of the programs studied and demonstrate systemic deficits in the content and accessibility of professional training. Table 2 shows that only a small fraction of PD programs demonstrate a real impact on the quality of SEL practices and a reduction in the use of exclusionary discipline.

Table 2

Quantitative characteristics of professional development (PD) programs in early childhood SEL

Indicator	Value
Total number of PD trainings	2 991
Mean relevance rating (1–5)	M = 2.85, SD = 0.98
Training with a rating of 3 (moderately relevant)	≈ 40 %
Trainings 4–5 (high relevance)	< 10 % (incl. 5 ≈ 3 %)
Mean duration	2.7 h
Language distribution	95 % Eng., 4.7 % Span., 0.27 % Pol.

Source: compiled by the author based on the source: [10]

Interpretation of the obtained data indicates a systemic disconnect between the content of PD programs and the goals of SEL. There is a trend of short, introductory courses predominating, oriented toward a formal acquaintance with

the concept of social-emotional learning, without a subsequent transition to practical implementation models [8]. Combined with the results from Hosokawa et al. [5], which show the need for sustained support for educators during the SEL implementation process, this indicates insufficient institutional support for continuous professional growth.

The analysis revealed a methodological gap between educator training and the requirements of humane pedagogy and the Montessori approach. Studies by Gentaz et al. [3] and Johnson et al. [6] demonstrate that SEL effectiveness increases when grounded in observation, sensory engagement, and emotional responsiveness, yet most current PD formats neglect these competencies. The dominance of English-language programs creates cultural-linguistic asymmetry, limiting knowledge transfer for educators in multilingual or inclusive settings [10] and contradicting the humane-learning principle that emotional and linguistic sensitivity underpin social inclusion. Therefore, the findings confirm the need to restructure professional development by integrating humanistic principles and Montessori sensory elements into a unified training platform that fosters emotional stability, empathy, and co-regulation in daily practice.

Discussion. An analysis of theoretical sources shows that humane pedagogy and the Montessori method form a common pedagogical logic based on respect for the child, structured freedom, and the emotional responsiveness of the environment. The works by Eidsvåg et al. [2] and Gentaz et al. [3] emphasize that the key condition for personality development at an early stage is the quality of the interpersonal interaction between the educator and the child, determined by the tone, pace, and nature of the communication. A comparison with data from Hosokawa et al. [5] and Guerrero et al. [4] shows that the teacher's emotional responsiveness and the predictability of the educational environment are directly linked to the formation of self-regulation and conscious attention in preschool age. These patterns formed the basis for constructing the HUM–MONT model, aimed at systematizing micro-practices that ensure the development of key SEL

competencies in the context of early learning. Table 3 presents the structural matrix of HUM–MONT, reflecting the relationship between the components of humane pedagogy, Montessori micro-practices, and social-emotional learning outcomes, as well as the contextual moderators influencing the model's successful implementation.

Table 3

HUM–MONT Matrix: integration of practices and implementation conditions

Component	Micro-practice	SEL outcome	Contextual moderator
Emotional climate	Eye-level talk, warm tone	Emotion regulation	Group size
Cognitive organization	Sensorial order, daily routine	Attention control	Age heterogeneity
Social dynamics	Peer mentoring, mixed-age interaction	Social awareness, empathy	Multilingual environment
Ethical conduct	Grace and Courtesy sessions	Relationship skills	Family cultural norms

Source: compiled by the author based on sources [2; 3; 4; 7]

A systematic comparison of the data shows that each micro-practice in the HUM–MONT model functions as an operational mechanism for forming specific SEL competencies. The emotional tone and equal eye level reduce anxiety and foster self-regulation [5]; sensory order and structured routines enhance attention and shift control from external to internal [4]; mixed-age interaction and peer mentoring develop empathy and social responsibility [1]; and “Grace and Courtesy” practices form behavioral norms and respectful interaction [8]. Together, these mechanisms translate humane-pedagogical principles into measurable SEL outcomes.

The HUM–MONT model also draws philosophical continuity from Amonashvili’s humane pedagogy, where the educator’s inner culture and

spiritual tact are regarded as regulatory forces of the learning process. In this tradition, emotional contact, tone of voice, and moral coherence are treated as pedagogical tools no less significant than structure or didactic sequencing. Integrating these principles with Montessori’s environmental order transforms the classroom into a space of conscious care—where humane values are enacted through micro-practices rather than declarative instruction.

The HUM–MONT Matrix thus represents a system where humane values and Montessori routines jointly regulate emotional and cognitive development. Unlike traditional SEL programs based on discrete exercises, HUM–MONT views the environment as a continuous regulator integrating emotion, attention, and ethics. This aligns with the concept of the learning space as a mediator of socio-emotional growth, forming a testable framework for applied research in humane pedagogy and SEL.

The normative framework of HUM–MONT aligns pedagogical autonomy with structural order, defining rules for educator intervention, interaction rhythm, and response sequencing. This maintains group stability while preserving initiative. Gentaz et al. [3] confirmed that structured choice and gentle regulation improve self-control and attention, validating HUM–MONT’s practical logic.

Effective implementation depends on contextual moderators—group size and linguistic composition. Small groups allow continuous co-regulation, while multilingual settings require stronger procedural predictability. Zinsser et al. [10] demonstrated that stable rituals and visual communication aids reduce maladaptive behavior and build trust within groups. A core system element is professional-development training that heightens educators’ sensitivity to children’s behavioral micro-signals, enabling the operational enactment of SEL. Muir et al. [8] showed that structured training cycles enhance emotional support quality and observation skills.

The model’s theory of change assumes a transition from guided co-regulation to autonomous peer interactions. Initially, educators model emotional

responses; later, children reproduce them in peer relations, forming shared emotional-behavioral norms. Repetition of micro-practices generates a stable group climate, promoting the spontaneous transfer of SEL skills to real contexts [5].

Thus, the HUM–MONT framework is a dynamic system of pedagogical self-regulation, combining humane flexibility with Montessori discipline. Emotional responsiveness and structural predictability act as complementary mechanisms forming durable SEL patterns.

Conclusion. The study substantiates the conceptual and methodological foundations of integrating humane pedagogy and the Montessori method within the unified HUM–MONT model as a promising framework for early childhood SEL. The findings show that SEL competencies develop not through external control but through high-quality micro-interactions that build trust, predictability, and emotional stability. Humane pedagogy provides the value-emotional context, while the Montessori method supplies the structural-sensory basis for its realization.

The research identifies micro-practices—calm tone, eye-level contact, choice, and stable routines—as key mechanisms for self-regulation, empathy, and sustained motivation, enabling SEL growth without external pressure or rewards.

Analysis of professional-development programs revealed insufficient focus on humane-empathic and observational skills, confirming the need to integrate humanistic and Montessori-based sensory practices into educator training to enhance co-regulation and emotional responsiveness.

The resulting HUM–MONT normative framework unites emotional empathy and structured autonomy as mutually reinforcing components of pedagogy, forming an integrative ecosystem where humanity, order, and responsiveness jointly ensure early SEL development. Future research should empirically validate the model, pilot educator training programs, and design tools for assessing the quality of micro-interactions in humane-oriented environments.

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